

# Strategic Alignment and Structured Decision-Making in Combating Human Trafficking: A Policy Analysis in Davao del Norte

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the strategic alignment and decision-making processes in combating human trafficking across the component cities of the Province of Davao del Norte: Panabo City, Tagum City, and the Island Garden City of Samal. Utilizing Bardach and Patashnik's (2020) Eightfold Path to Policy Analysis and a qualitative approach, the research draws from government reports, academic literature, and international sources. Thematic analysis highlights critical gaps between local and national anti-trafficking policies, revealing fragmented inter-agency coordination and inconsistent implementation across the three cities. Decision-making processes in these localities exhibit varying degrees of strategic alignment, with disparities in resource allocation, enforcement, and political will. Comparative analysis with Davao City, Cebu Province, and Singapore underscores the importance of robust data systems, multi-stakeholder engagement, and strategic governance in combating trafficking. The study concludes that disjointed governance structures and the absence of systematic decision-making frameworks hinder local efforts. It recommends improving inter-agency collaboration, investing in data infrastructure, and strengthening capacity-building to align local policies with national frameworks and enhance anti-trafficking initiatives.

**Keywords:** Human trafficking, strategic alignment, structured decision-making, policy analysis, inter-agency coordination, data-driven governance, anti-trafficking initiatives, local governance, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking remains a pervasive global issue, affecting millions of individuals through forced labor, sexual exploitation, and other forms of modern slavery. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), an estimated 27.6 million people globally were victims of trafficking in 2022, with women and children disproportionately affected (ILO, 2022). Traffickers exploit vulnerabilities arising from poverty, conflict, and weak governance structures, making it a complex human rights issue with far-reaching socio-economic implications (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2023).

The Philippines, due to its geographical location and socio-economic conditions, has been identified as both a source and destination country for human trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2023). The country's archipelagic nature, widespread poverty, and the presence of internal conflicts contribute to the prevalence of trafficking, particularly in rural and coastal regions. The *Global Slavery Index* (2023) ranks the Philippines among the top countries in Southeast Asia with significant trafficking challenges, despite strong legal frameworks. Republic Act No. 9208, or the "Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003," and its subsequent amendments under Republic Act No. 10364 ("Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2012") have strengthened the legal mechanisms for prevention, prosecution, and victim protection (Department of Justice, Philippines, 2023).

However, challenges persist at the national and sub-national levels. Nationally, there are gaps in the coordination between law enforcement and social services, leading to inefficiencies in addressing trafficking cases (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2022). Reports indicate that while the Philippines has made strides in legal reforms and international cooperation, enforcement and victim support services remain inconsistent (Asian Development Bank, 2022).

Locally, Davao del Norte, comprising Panabo City, Tagum City, and the Island Garden City of Samal, faces distinct challenges in addressing human trafficking. These cities function as economic hubs, transit points, and tourism centers, which can be exploited by traffickers. Local governance responses are critical in shaping anti-trafficking measures, yet discrepancies exist in implementation, inter-agency collaboration, and political prioritization. Examining these cities provides a broader understanding of how local political structures influence policy enforcement and the effectiveness of anti-trafficking efforts. Local reports from the Davao del Norte Provincial Anti-Trafficking Task Force (2023) highlight an increase in trafficking cases related to agricultural labor and online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC), particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated economic vulnerabilities.

Despite the enactment of Republic Act No. 9208, and subsequent amendments, local implementation gaps persist, particularly in aligning strategic policies with actionable decision-making at the community level (Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, 2022). A key issue lies in the disjointed efforts between local government units (LGUs), law enforcement, and civil society organizations, resulting in fragmented responses to trafficking cases. Furthermore, a lack of structured decision-making frameworks hinders the effective allocation of resources and coordination of anti-trafficking initiatives. According to a study by Flores and Santos (2023), there is a need for localized policy frameworks that integrate strategic alignment principles to enhance the responsiveness and effectiveness of anti-trafficking measures.

The theoretical foundation of this study is anchored on two key concepts: strategic alignment and structured decision-making, both of which are crucial in evaluating the effectiveness of anti-human trafficking policies at the local level.

Strategic alignment theory, originally conceptualized in organizational studies, emphasizes the synchronization of strategies, structures, and processes to achieve optimal effectiveness (Venkatraman, 1989). In the context of public administration, strategic alignment refers to the extent to which policy objectives, governance mechanisms, and implementation strategies are coordinated to achieve policy goals (Chan & Reich, 2007). This theory is particularly relevant in assessing how Davao del Norte's anti-trafficking policies align with national frameworks such as Republic Act No. 9208 (Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003) and Republic Act No. 10364 (Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2012).

Effective anti-trafficking efforts require a coherent alignment between national policies and local governance structures. Studies indicate that when strategic alignment is weak, gaps emerge in policy execution, leading to inefficiencies and inconsistencies in anti-trafficking initiatives (Flores & Santos, 2023). In analyzing the degree of strategic alignment between national mandates and LGU's localized responses, this study seeks to determine whether existing policies are effectively translated into actionable strategies at the community level.

Structured decision-making (SDM) is a systematic approach to policy evaluation that integrates analytical techniques, stakeholder inputs, and empirical evidence to improve decision outcomes (Keeney & Raiffa, 1993). The Eightfold Path to Policy Analysis by Bardach and Patashnik (2020) provides a structured framework for evaluating public policies by systematically defining problems, assembling evidence, constructing alternatives, and evaluating trade-offs.

SDM is critical in the fight against human trafficking as it ensures that policy decisions are data-driven, evidence-based, and systematically evaluated. Research shows that fragmented decision-making and ad-hoc policy responses contribute to inefficiencies in law enforcement coordination, victim protection, and resource allocation (Alampay & Hernandez, 2021). Hence, examining how structured decision-making principles are applied in Davao del Norte's anti-trafficking initiatives, this study aims to identify procedural strengths and gaps in local governance mechanisms.

The interplay between strategic alignment and structured decision-making provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the effectiveness of anti-human trafficking policies. Strategic alignment ensures that policy objectives at different levels of governance are cohesive and mutually reinforcing, while structured decision-making ensures that policy implementation is guided by systematic evaluation and empirical evidence.

The research directly aligns with several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2025. It contributes to SDG 5: Gender Equality (Target 5.2) by addressing violence against women and girls, emphasizing the disproportionate impact of trafficking, including online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC). The study promotes targeted policy interventions that protect vulnerable groups. Additionally, it supports SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth (Target 8.7) by contributing insights to eradicate forced labor and modern slavery, particularly in Province's agricultural and coastal sectors, and advocating for policies that safeguard workers' rights.

The research also advances SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities (Target 10.2) by highlighting how trafficking exploits marginalized populations and recommending inclusive policies to protect at-risk communities. In support of SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (Targets 16.2 and 16.3), the study emphasizes structured decision-making to enhance law enforcement responses and victim protection, while examining alignment between national laws (Republic Acts 9208 and 10364) and local strategies to promote justice. Lastly, the research fosters SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals (Target 17.17) by underscoring the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration, recommending stronger partnerships between local government units, civil society organizations, and international bodies.

While significant research has been conducted on human trafficking in the Philippines at the national level, there is limited literature focusing on localized policy responses and their effectiveness. Existing studies tend to emphasize national strategies or international collaborations but overlook the role of local governance structures in combating trafficking (Alampay & Hernandez, 2021). Furthermore, the application of structured decision-making frameworks, such as those integrating strategic alignment principles in anti-trafficking efforts, remains underexplored in the Philippine context. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing how strategic alignment and structured decision-making influence the effectiveness of anti-trafficking policies in the Province of Davao del Norte.

The objective of this study is to evaluate the strategic alignment of existing human trafficking policies with local governance frameworks, analyze the structured decision-making processes utilized by local authorities in combating human trafficking, and assess the effectiveness of integrated strategic and decision-making approaches in mitigating human trafficking cases. Hence, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: How are current anti-trafficking policies strategically aligned with local governance priorities in Davao del Norte? What structured decision-making processes are employed in addressing human trafficking at the local level? How do strategic alignment and structured decision-making impact the effectiveness of anti-trafficking initiatives in Davao del Norte?

This study holds significant academic, policy, and practical implications in addressing human trafficking through the lens of strategic alignment and structured decision-making. This research contributes to the academic discourse on policy analysis and governance by integrating Strategic Alignment Theory and Structured Decision-Making Frameworks in evaluating anti-human trafficking policies. While extensive literature exists on human trafficking, there is limited exploration of how localized governance structures can enhance policy effectiveness. Hence, the study offers a theoretical foundation for future research in public administration and policy analysis, particularly in the context of combating transnational crimes at the local level.

Furthermore, the study expands on network governance theory, demonstrating the role of multi-stakeholder coordination in ensuring effective policy implementation. It provides empirical validation of Bardach and Patashnik's Eightfold Path to Policy Analysis, reinforcing the necessity of systematic policy evaluation in addressing complex governance challenges.

The study provides empirical evidence on the gaps and inefficiencies in local anti-trafficking governance, offering data-driven insights for policymakers, local government units (LGUs), law enforcement agencies, and civil society organizations (CSOs). Through the identification of structural weaknesses in inter-agency coordination, decision-making processes, and data utilization, the study informs targeted policy improvements that align national frameworks with local realities.

Findings from this research can be instrumental in refining the implementation of Republic Act No. 9208 (Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003) and Republic Act No. 10364 (Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of

2012) by highlighting localized enforcement challenges. It also serves as a benchmark for comparative policy analysis, assisting national agencies in formulating strategies that enhance responsiveness at subnational levels.

The study integrates strategic alignment theory and structured decision-making frameworks to propose actionable recommendations that support the achievement of SDGs 5, 8, 10, 16, and 17. Its findings contribute both to academic discourse and practical policy reforms aimed at combating human trafficking and promoting sustainable development in Davao del Norte City.

This study benefits stakeholders actively engaged in combating human trafficking in Davao del Norte and similar localities. The insights generated from this research can guide: Local policymakers in designing governance structures that foster cohesive collaboration between law enforcement, social welfare agencies, and civil society groups. Law enforcement agencies in improving structured decision-making frameworks that enhance data-driven case management, victim protection, and resource allocation. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and advocacy groups in understanding the barriers to effective community-based anti-trafficking interventions, thereby improving their outreach programs. International organizations and funding agencies in determining capacity-building priorities for local anti-trafficking task forces, ensuring alignment with global best practices.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employs a qualitative policy analysis design, focusing on how strategic alignment and structured decision-making influence the effectiveness of anti-trafficking initiatives. The qualitative approach is well-suited to explore the complexities of governance processes and policy implementation at the local level (Creswell & Poth, 2021). The Eightfold Path to Policy Analysis framework (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020) will guide the systematic evaluation of policies. a widely recognized framework that offers a structured approach to evaluating public policies. This framework's systematic steps such as defining the problem, assembling evidence, constructing alternatives, and evaluating outcomes which enable a nuanced exploration of policy effectiveness in combating human trafficking at the local level.

Moreover, the study used the secondary data which were collected from various credible sources, including: Government reports from the Philippine Department of Justice and Philippine National Police; Publications from international organizations like UNODC and IOM; Academic articles accessed through Google Scholar and university databases; and Local news reports and case studies relevant to Davao del Norte.

A structured coding scheme was developed for analyzing policy documents, government reports, and academic literature related to anti-trafficking initiatives. The coding protocol ensures content validity by aligning the codes with established theoretical constructs in policy analysis and human trafficking governance (Bowen, 2022). Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022), was utilized to identify patterns and themes across the collected secondary data. To enhance construct validity, themes were cross-referenced with existing literature and policy frameworks. Inter-coder reliability was maintained by having multiple researchers independently code a subset of the data, followed by consensus discussions to resolve discrepancies.

The study adopted a Comparative Policy Analysis Matrices. These matrices were employed to systematically compare anti-trafficking policies from different regions with similar socio-economic contexts. This approach enhances external validity by situating province's policy framework within broader regional and global contexts (Gallagher & Ezeilo, 2023). In enhancing credibility and validity, the study used triangulation by comparing data from various secondary sources, including government reports, academic literature, and international organization publications (Flick, 2022). This approach mitigated biases and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the policy landscape.

The study incorporated tools like the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist to assess the quality and relevance of the secondary data sources used (CASP, 2022). This helped in selecting high-quality, reliable sources and minimizing the inclusion of biased or outdated information. Construct Validity was ensured by clearly defining concepts and using established theoretical frameworks for policy analysis. Internal Validity was strengthened through source triangulation and the cross-verification of data from multiple credible sources.



To further enhance the robustness of the study, the research instrument underwent a rigorous validation process by expert validators. Subject matter experts in public administration, policy analysis, and research methodology critically evaluated the tool for its content relevance, clarity, and appropriateness. Their feedback was systematically integrated to refine the assessment criteria, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives and theoretical underpinnings. Additionally, the validation process incorporated expert consensus through a Delphi method, where iterative rounds of review allowed for the convergence of expert opinions on the tool's applicability and effectiveness. Reliability was maintained through the consistent application of coding frameworks and document analysis procedures. Inter-coder reliability checks further ensured consistency in thematic identification.

The collected data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify key patterns, strategies, and gaps in the current policy framework. Thematic analysis allows for a detailed examination of recurring themes across various data sources, providing insights into the systemic issues affecting anti-trafficking efforts (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Additionally, comparative policy analysis was conducted by examining best practices from other regions or countries with similar socio-economic contexts, particularly focusing on Southeast Asian nations with effective anti-trafficking frameworks (Gallagher & Ezeilo, 2023). The findings were synthesized to provide a comprehensive overview of the strategic alignment and decision-making processes in Davao del Norte's anti-trafficking initiatives, ensuring that conclusions were grounded in robust, evidence-based comparisons.

Given the sensitive nature of the topic, the study ensured the ethical use of secondary data by adhering to proper citation practices and sourcing information from reputable, peer-reviewed, and publicly available documents. Data were collected exclusively from credible sources such as government reports, academic journals, and international organization publications to maintain the integrity and accuracy of the analysis (Resnik, 2021). Furthermore, the study complied with guidelines for ethical secondary data analysis, ensuring no manipulation or misrepresentation of data (Bishop & Kuula-Luumi, 2019).

No primary data involving human subjects were collected, thus minimizing ethical risks associated with privacy and consent. However, the study acknowledged the potential sensitivity of case-specific information found in secondary sources. To mitigate any risk of harm, all personally identifiable information (PII) present in the reviewed materials was either anonymized or excluded from the analysis where necessary, aligning with ethical standards for confidentiality and data protection (Zook et al., 2017). This approach reflects a commitment to responsible scholarship and the protection of vulnerable populations indirectly represented in the data.

## RESULT

### Strategic Alignment of Anti-Trafficking Policies

The analysis of secondary data revealed several patterns regarding the strategic alignment of anti-trafficking policies in Davao del Norte. Policies are generally aligned with national frameworks, particularly the Republic Act No. 9208 and Republic Act No. 10364, which emphasize prevention, protection, and prosecution. However, discrepancies exist in localized implementation, with some gaps in coordination between Local Government Units (LGUs) and law enforcement agencies.

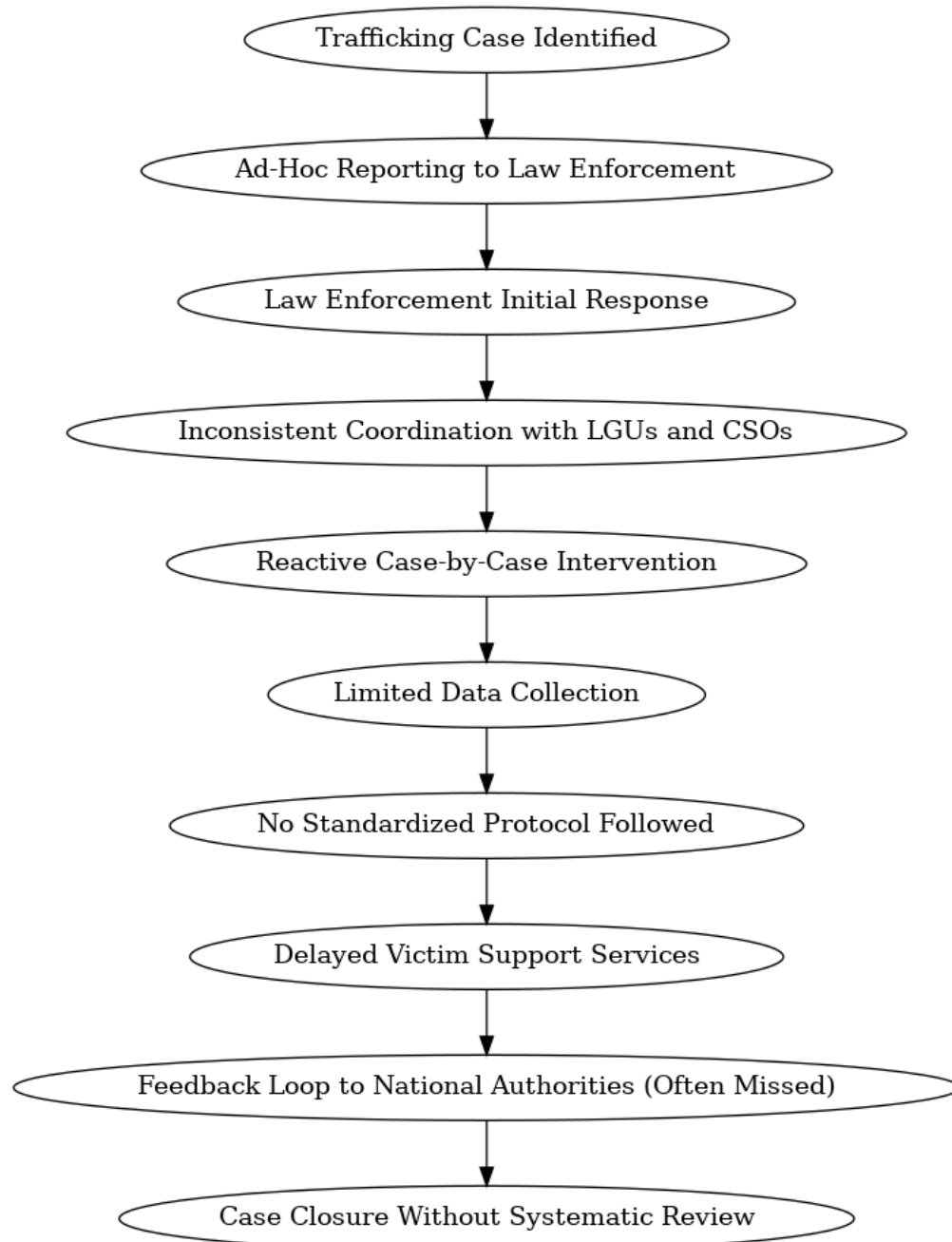
Table 1: Strategic Alignment of Anti-Trafficking Policies in Davao del Norte (Adapted from Flores & Santos, 2023)

Policy Level	Key Features	Observed Gaps
National (RA 9208/10364)	- Comprehensive legal framework	- Consistency in local enforcement
Regional (Davao Region)	- Coordination of multi-agency efforts	- Limited resource allocation at city level
Local (Davao del Norte)	- Implementation of provincial directives	- Fragmented inter-agency communication

## Structured Decision-Making Processes

The thematic analysis revealed that the structured decision-making processes employed in Davao del Norte's anti-trafficking initiatives are characterized by several key patterns, highlighting both procedural strengths and critical gaps. First, reactive response mechanisms dominate the local approach to human trafficking cases.

Figure 1: Decision-Making Process Flow in Davao del Norte (Figure created by the author based on data from UNODC, 2023 and Flores & Santos, 2023)



These mechanisms are largely case-by-case responses, where interventions are made in direct reaction to specific incidents without the guidance of standardized protocols. This reactive stance results in inconsistent outcomes, as each case is handled based on immediate circumstances rather than a cohesive, pre-defined strategy. Secondly, the analysis identified a prevalence of ad-hoc coordination among key stakeholders, including law enforcement agencies, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and various civil society organizations (CSOs). This irregular collaboration leads to fragmented efforts, as the absence of formalized coordination frameworks hinders the ability of these entities to work together effectively. Without clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and communication channels, the collective response to trafficking cases remains disjointed and inefficient.

Lastly, there is a limited use of data-driven approaches in the decision-making processes. The lack of systematic data collection and analysis prevents local authorities from making informed, evidence-based decisions. This deficiency not only impacts the ability to identify trends and patterns in trafficking activities but also undermines the evaluation of existing policies and the development of proactive strategies. The absence of a robust data infrastructure thus contributes to the overall inefficiency and ineffectiveness of Davao del Norte's anti-trafficking initiatives.

### Barriers and Enablers to Effective Policy Implementation

Key barriers and enablers to policy implementation were identified through comparative policy analysis:

Table 2: Barriers and Enablers in Anti-Trafficking Policy Implementation (Based on UNODC, 2023)

Barriers	Enablers
Fragmented inter-agency coordination	Strong legal frameworks (RA 9208, 10364)
Inadequate funding and resources	Active engagement from CSOs and NGOs
Limited training for local officials	Regional anti-trafficking task forces
Lack of data collection infrastructure	International support and partnerships

### Themes and Patterns Identified

Table 3: Identified Themes and Patterns in Anti-Trafficking Policy Implementation (Derived from Asian Development Bank, 2022)

Themes	Patterns
Disjointed Local Implementation	- Fragmented coordination between local stakeholders leads to inconsistent policy enforcement.
Resource Constraints	- Limited funding and human resources hinder comprehensive anti-trafficking measures.
Community and Civil Society Engagement	- While CSOs are active, their efforts are often isolated and not fully integrated into government strategies.
Gaps in Data-Driven Decision-Making	- A lack of reliable data collection hampers the ability to make informed decisions and track the effectiveness of policies.

### Comparative Insights from Other Regions

The comparative policy analysis conducted in this study highlighted valuable insights from other regions with similar socio-economic contexts, offering lessons that could enhance Davao del Norte's anti-trafficking efforts. In Davao City, for instance, stronger coordination mechanisms between local government units (LGUs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) have been established, supported by consistent funding streams dedicated to anti-trafficking initiatives. This integrated approach facilitates efficient resource allocation and enables a more cohesive response to trafficking cases, demonstrating the benefits of institutionalized partnerships and sustained financial support.

Similarly, Cebu Province has implemented comprehensive data collection systems that play a pivotal role in informing decision-making processes. These systems allow for the continuous monitoring of trafficking patterns, enabling local authorities to proactively address emerging trends. The use of robust data infrastructures in Cebu has significantly improved the evaluation of policy effectiveness and the strategic planning of anti-trafficking measures.

In the broader Southeast Asian context, Singapore serves as a model for leveraging technology and data analytics to combat human trafficking. The country employs advanced tools to identify trafficking patterns, optimize resource allocation, and enhance inter-agency coordination. Singapore's proactive, technology-driven approach underscores the importance of innovation and data-driven strategies in tackling complex governance issues like human trafficking.

These comparative insights reveal that strategic coordination, consistent funding, robust data systems, and technological integration are key components of effective anti-trafficking policies. Hence, adapting these best practices, Davao del Norte can strengthen its own policy framework, fostering more responsive and sustainable anti-trafficking initiatives.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to evaluate the strategic alignment of existing human trafficking policies with local governance frameworks, analyze the structured decision-making processes utilized by local authorities, and assess the effectiveness of integrated strategic and decision-making approaches in mitigating human trafficking cases in Davao del Norte. The findings of this research are discussed below in relation to the research objectives and questions.

### Strategic Alignment of Anti-Trafficking Policies with Local Governance Frameworks

The results revealed that while Davao del Norte's anti-trafficking policies are generally aligned with national frameworks such as Republic Act No. 9208 and Republic Act No. 10364, gaps in local implementation persist. This finding aligns with the work of Flores and Santos (2023), who noted that strategic misalignments often arise due to insufficient inter-agency coordination and limited local resource allocation. The fragmented communication between local government units (LGUs), law enforcement, and civil society organizations (CSOs) reflects a lack of cohesive governance, which impedes effective policy enforcement.

The comparison with regions like Davao City highlights how strategic alignment, coupled with consistent funding and institutional partnerships, can lead to more effective anti-trafficking measures. This suggests that Davao del Norte could benefit from adopting similar collaborative frameworks, emphasizing multi-stakeholder involvement and resource-sharing mechanisms. The implications of these findings underscore the necessity for localized policy adaptations that not only mirror national frameworks but also address unique socio-economic conditions and vulnerabilities at the community level.

### Structured Decision-Making Processes in Addressing Human Trafficking

The study identified that Davao del Norte's anti-trafficking initiatives are characterized by reactive response mechanisms, ad-hoc coordination, and a limited use of data-driven approaches. These findings are consistent with previous research by Alampay and Hernandez (2021), who highlighted the challenges of fragmented decision-making in local governance settings. The lack of standardized protocols and formalized decision-making frameworks hampers the ability to respond effectively and consistently to trafficking cases.

In contrast, regions like Cebu Province and Singapore demonstrate how structured decision-making processes, supported by robust data collection systems and technological integration, can enhance the responsiveness and efficiency of anti-trafficking efforts. The absence of systematic data collection in Davao del Norte not only limits the ability to identify trafficking patterns but also undermines policy evaluation and strategic planning. These findings suggest that investing in data infrastructure and capacity-building for local officials could significantly improve decision-making processes and outcomes.

### Impact of Strategic Alignment and Structured Decision-Making on Anti-Trafficking Effectiveness

The combined effects of strategic misalignment and fragmented decision-making have resulted in inconsistent anti-trafficking outcomes in Davao del Norte. The study's findings indicate that without cohesive policy alignment and structured governance processes, efforts to combat human trafficking remain inefficient and



unsustainable. This aligns with the theoretical framework proposed by Bardach and Patashnik (2020), emphasizing the importance of systematic policy analysis and decision-making in addressing complex governance issues.

The comparative insights from regions with more effective anti-trafficking frameworks highlight the potential benefits of integrating strategic alignment principles with structured decision-making processes. For Davao del Norte, adopting these best practices could lead to improved policy coherence, enhanced inter-agency coordination, and more sustainable anti-trafficking initiatives.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the strategic alignment and structured decision-making processes in combating human trafficking in Davao del Norte, utilizing a qualitative policy analysis framework guided by Bardach and Patashnik's (2020) Eightfold Path to Policy Analysis. The findings revealed critical gaps in the strategic alignment of local anti-trafficking policies with national frameworks, highlighting fragmented inter-agency coordination and inconsistent policy enforcement at the local level. While national legislation, such as Republic Act No. 9208 and its amendments, provides a robust legal foundation, the disjointed efforts between local government units (LGUs), law enforcement agencies, and civil society organizations (CSOs) impede the effective implementation of these policies.

Furthermore, the study identified that structured decision-making processes in Davao del Norte are predominantly characterized by reactive response mechanisms, ad-hoc coordination, and a limited use of data-driven approaches. The absence of standardized protocols and systematic data collection undermines the city's ability to respond proactively to trafficking cases and hinders the evaluation of existing policies. This fragmented approach contrasts with best practices observed in regions like Davao City, Cebu Province, and Singapore, where strategic alignment, robust data systems, and multi-stakeholder engagement contribute to more effective anti-trafficking initiatives.

The broader implications of these findings underscore the need for enhanced inter-agency coordination, investment in data infrastructure, and capacity-building for local officials to improve governance processes. Strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships and adopting data-driven decision-making frameworks are essential for creating a cohesive and sustainable response to human trafficking. Additionally, the study contributes to the theoretical understanding of local governance dynamics and policy implementation, highlighting the importance of strategic alignment and structured decision-making in addressing complex transnational issues like human trafficking.

Thus, while Davao del Norte has made efforts to align its anti-trafficking initiatives with national policies, significant challenges remain in ensuring effective implementation and coordination at the local level. In addressing these gaps and incorporating best practices from other regions, Davao del Norte can enhance its governance framework and contribute meaningfully to the broader fight against human trafficking in the Philippines.

## Implications of the Results

The findings of this study carry significant theoretical and empirical implications, offering insights that contribute to both academic discourse and practical policy interventions. The study reinforces and extends existing frameworks on policy analysis and governance, particularly Bardach and Patashnik's (2020) Eightfold Path to Policy Analysis, by illustrating how strategic alignment and structured decision-making processes influence policy effectiveness in a localized context. The findings validate the theory that systematic, evidence-based decision-making is crucial in addressing complex governance challenges like human trafficking.

Additionally, the study contributes to the literature on local governance and public administration by highlighting the critical role of inter-agency coordination and stakeholder engagement in the successful implementation of national policies at the local level. The observed gaps in Davao del Norte's policy alignment and decision-making processes align with institutional theory, which posits that organizational effectiveness is contingent

upon the degree of alignment between institutional structures and their operational environments (Scott, 2014).

Moreover, the study offers new insights into network governance theory, emphasizing the importance of collaborative networks among local government units (LGUs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and international bodies. The lack of structured collaboration in Davao del Norte highlights the theoretical proposition that fragmented networks hinder policy coherence and effectiveness (Provan & Kenis, 2008). These theoretical contributions underscore the need for further exploration of localized governance models in combating transnational issues like human trafficking.

Empirically, the study provides actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners engaged in anti-trafficking efforts. First, the findings highlight the urgent need for enhanced inter-agency coordination at the local level. The fragmented communication and inconsistent collaboration between law enforcement, social services, and CSOs in Davao del Norte undermine the implementation of national anti-trafficking laws, such as Republic Act No. 9208 and Republic Act No. 10364. Strengthening these inter-agency networks can lead to more cohesive and effective responses to trafficking cases.

Second, the study underscores the importance of data-driven decision-making in combating human trafficking. The lack of systematic data collection and analysis in Davao del Norte limits the ability to identify trafficking patterns, evaluate policy effectiveness, and allocate resources efficiently. Investments in data infrastructure and capacity-building for local officials are critical to improving governance processes. The success of regions like Cebu Province and Singapore in leveraging technology and data analytics demonstrates the potential benefits of adopting similar approaches in Davao del Norte.

Finally, the study emphasizes the role of multi-stakeholder engagement in enhancing the effectiveness of anti-trafficking initiatives. Stronger partnerships between LGUs, CSOs, and international organizations can create a more integrated and sustainable response to human trafficking. The findings suggest that fostering collaborative networks and institutionalizing stakeholder participation are essential for addressing the complex, multi-dimensional nature of human trafficking. These theoretical and empirical implications not only advance the academic understanding of policy implementation and governance but also provide practical recommendations for improving anti-trafficking efforts in Davao del Norte and similar contexts.

### **Implications for Future Research**

In exploring more based on the findings of this study, future researchers should consider the incorporation of primary data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations with key stakeholders involved in anti-trafficking efforts. These stakeholders may include local government officials, law enforcement personnel, civil society organizations (CSOs), survivors of trafficking, and community leaders. Gathering firsthand insights from these actors would provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the local governance dynamics and decision-making processes that influence the effectiveness of anti-trafficking initiatives. This approach would also allow researchers to capture context-specific challenges and successes that secondary data may overlook, offering a richer, more detailed perspective on policy implementation.

Moreover, comparative studies involving multiple cities or regions within the Philippines, or even across Southeast Asia, could offer deeper insights into the factors influencing the effectiveness of anti-trafficking policies in diverse socio-economic and political contexts. In examining best practices and lessons learned from different jurisdictions, researchers can identify common themes and unique strategies that contribute to successful anti-trafficking efforts. For instance, comparing the policy frameworks and governance models of urban centers like Davao City or Cebu Province with those of smaller municipalities like Davao del Norte could illuminate the scalability and transferability of certain interventions. This comparative approach would enhance the external validity of findings and provide a broader foundation for evidence-based policy recommendations.

Additionally, future research should explore the role of technology and data analytics in enhancing anti-trafficking efforts within the Philippine context. As highlighted in this study, the limited use of data-driven decision-making in Davao del Norte hampers the ability to track trafficking patterns, evaluate policy

effectiveness, and allocate resources efficiently. Investigating how digital tools, such as geospatial mapping, predictive analytics, and real-time data monitoring systems, can be leveraged to improve anti-trafficking responses would contribute valuable knowledge to the field. Furthermore, examining the ethical considerations and privacy concerns associated with the use of technology in anti-trafficking initiatives would provide a balanced perspective on the benefits and potential risks of these innovations.

Finally, there is a need for research that delves into the socio-cultural factors that influence the vulnerability to trafficking and the community's role in prevention and intervention efforts. Understanding how cultural norms, gender dynamics, and economic pressures shape both the risks and responses to human trafficking can inform more contextually appropriate and culturally sensitive policy interventions. This line of inquiry would not only enhance the theoretical understanding of trafficking dynamics but also support the development of tailored strategies that resonate with local communities.

### Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by its exclusive reliance on secondary data, which may not fully capture the nuances of local governance processes and stakeholder dynamics. The absence of primary data collection (e.g., interviews with key stakeholders) restricts the depth of insights into the lived experiences of those directly involved in anti-trafficking efforts. Additionally, the study's focus on Davao del Norte limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different socio-economic and political contexts.

### Points for Practitioners

This study distills key takeaways to provide actionable insights for practitioners engaged in anti-trafficking efforts. It highlights the need for structured inter-agency coordination, data-driven decision-making, and capacity-building programs to enhance policy implementation. The study emphasizes the importance of institutionalizing structured decision-making frameworks, securing sustainable funding through multi-stakeholder engagement, and aligning local policies with national and international standards.

- **Enhancing Inter-Agency Coordination:** Effective anti-trafficking initiatives require structured collaboration between local government units (LGUs), law enforcement, and civil society organizations (CSOs). The study highlights fragmented inter-agency coordination as a key barrier to successful policy implementation. Practitioners should advocate for the establishment of formalized coordination mechanisms, such as multi-sectoral task forces with clear mandates, roles, and communication protocols.
- **Investing in Data-Driven Decision-Making:** The research underscores the lack of systematic data collection as a significant limitation in Davao del Norte's anti-trafficking efforts. Practitioners should push for the development of a centralized data management system that enables real-time tracking of human trafficking cases, informs policy adjustments, and strengthens evidence-based decision-making. Lessons from Cebu Province and Singapore demonstrate the value of leveraging technology and analytics to enhance governance outcomes. The study finds that decision-making in Davao del Norte's anti-trafficking initiatives is largely reactive and ad hoc. Practitioners should integrate structured decision-making approaches, such as Bardach and Patashnik's Eightfold Path, to ensure a systematic evaluation of policy options, risk assessments, and long-term planning. Standardized protocols should replace case-by-case responses to improve policy consistency and impact.
- **Strengthening Capacity-Building Programs:** Inadequate training among local officials has been identified as a constraint in effectively implementing anti-trafficking laws. Practitioners should support continuous capacity-building initiatives, including specialized training on victim identification, legal procedures, and trauma-informed interventions for front-line responders. Partnerships with national and international agencies can facilitate knowledge transfer and enhance local expertise.
- **Promoting Multi-Stakeholder Engagement and Resource Mobilization:** Effective anti-trafficking efforts require sustainable funding and resource allocation. The research identifies financial constraints as a recurring issue in policy implementation. Practitioners should explore diverse funding sources,

including public-private partnerships, grants from international organizations, and dedicated budget allocations to support victim services, law enforcement operations, and prevention campaigns.

- **Aligning Local Policies with National and International Standards:** The study reveals gaps between national anti-trafficking frameworks and local enforcement. Practitioners should ensure that local ordinances and protocols are fully aligned with Republic Act No. 9208 and Republic Act No. 10364, while also integrating global best practices. Benchmarking with regions like Davao City and international models such as Singapore's governance approach can guide policy enhancements.

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