

Human Trafficking: Dynamics of Exploitation of Youth

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*Material adapted from the National Judicial Institute on Domestic Child Sex Trafficking, a project by National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and Rights4Girls

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Learning Objectives

As a result of this training, you will be better able to:

- Define domestic child sex trafficking and describe the vulnerabilities that are disproportionately present in trafficked youth populations.
- Learn the recruitment and control methods used by traffickers.
- View the courtroom behavior of trafficked youth through a trauma lens and implement engagement strategies for working with such youth.
- Discuss the core components of healing from trauma for trafficked youth.

What are some of the controversial issues, myths, and misconceptions about domestic child sex trafficking?



DCST Myths and Misconceptions: Victims

- Children choose to enter the sex trade.
- It's not child abuse if the child consents.
- Some trafficking victims like to have sex or are promiscuous.
- This is not happening to American children/victims are foreign.
- Only girls are trafficked.
- Victims could escape if they wanted to.
- Victims will generally disclose exploitation.
- Victims self-identify as trafficked.
- Separating a child from one trafficker or exploiter means their healing is complete.

DCST Myths and Misconceptions: Dynamics

- All pimps are black males.
- There always has to be a pimp in order for a child to be trafficked.
- Victims make a lot of money in the sex trade.
- The commercial sex industry can be glamorous (i.e. or Pretty Woman or The Girlfriend Experience).
- Children who are trafficked are already recognized as victims.
- Teens make the choice to sell themselves. They should make better choices/have better sense.

DCST Myths and Misconceptions: Legality

- There needs to be a third-party exploiter to constitute trafficking.
- There needs to be movement to constitute trafficking.
- Children who are trafficked are recognized as victims.
- Trafficking involves physical force or restraint.
- People who buy sex with children or sell children are almost always caught and punished.
- The term “child prostitute” is a term that appropriately defines the issue.

What Is Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking is one of the fastest growing criminal enterprises in the world and is estimated to be a **\$32 billion** industry.

Human trafficking includes both sex trafficking and labor trafficking.

What Is Domestic Child Sex Trafficking?

- Domestic child sex trafficking (DCST) is the commercial sexual exploitation of American youth within the U.S.
- Under federal law, domestic child sex trafficking occurs any time a minor under the age of 18 is induced to perform a commercial sex act.
- Under federal law, “commercial sex act” is defined as sex exchanged “for anything of value”
 - Can therefore include sex in exchange for basic necessities, e.g. food, clothing, shelter, etc.

DCST is *not* limited to prostitution.

DCST includes many other forms of sexual exploitation such as:

- Strip clubs
- Child pornography
- Phone sex
- Erotic massage
- “Survival sex”

Common Terms for DCST



- Domestic child sex trafficking is sometimes also referred to as:
 - child or juvenile prostitution,
 - teen or underage “sex work”,
 - commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC),
 - domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST),
 - “survival sex”

Statistics

- In 2015, NHTRC received **1,435** reports of sex trafficking where victims were US citizens
 - **33.3%** of those calls involved children and **91.4%** were female
- **70%** of women involved in prostitution were introduced into the commercial sex industry before the age of 18
 - The most recent OJJDP-funded study notes the average age of entry at **15.8 years**

Gender

The **vast majority** of identified trafficking victims in the U.S. are women and girls...

- But boys are trafficked too, and under reporting is highly likely.
 - Often seen as willing participants or exploiters, not as victims
 - Males face powerful gender and social barriers to disclosure.
- LGBTQI and gender non-confirming youth are disproportionately affected by trafficking.

Race and Ethnicity

Victims of DCST are *disproportionately* girls of color.

- **52%** of all juvenile prostitution arrests are of African American children- more than any other racial group.
 - King County, WA: African Americans comprise **7%** of the population but represent **43%** of child trafficking victims.
 - LA County, CA: **92%** of girls in the juvenile justice system that were identified by probation as trafficking victims were African American but African Americans represent less than **9%** of the population of LA County.
- Native American and Latina girls also disproportionately affected.

What Puts a Child at High Risk for Sex Trafficking?



What Happened?

- Trauma
- Poverty
- Mental Illness
- Victimization
- Addiction
- Lack of Support



Risk Factors

- Childhood sexual abuse
- Family dysfunction
- Child welfare involvement
- Homelessness/runaway
- Poverty
- Exposure to domestic violence
- Substance abuse
- Mental illness
- Sexual orientation
- Developmental delay
- Learning disabilities
- Compromised education
- Promotion of sexual exploitation by family members or peers
- Lack of social support
- Gang involvement
- Isolation
- Emotional distress
- History of trauma



Runaway and Homeless Youth

- Estimated that 450,000 - 2.8 million children run away or are thrown out each year
- 1 in 3 runaways will be lured into prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home

This is child sex trafficking even if victims or the community refer to it as 'survival sex.'



Focus on LGBTQI

LGBTQI youth are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and sexual exploitation

- 1 in 4 LGBTQI youth will be forced out of their home
- LGBTQI youth are believed to be approximately 40% of youth runaways or homeless youth
- Estimates of 40-50% of boys exploited through prostitution were thrown out of their homes because of sexual identity
- Gay and transgender victims are over-represented as a proportion of sexually exploited boys
- In a 3-city study of 300 homeless youth, 24% of females reported being victims of sex trafficking

“Being in foster care was the perfect training for commercial sexual exploitation. I was used to being moved without warning, without any say, not knowing where I was going or whether I was allowed to pack my clothes. After years in foster care, I didn’t think anyone would want to take care of me unless they were paid. So, when my pimp expected me to make money to support ‘the family,’ it made sense to me.”



Child Welfare Involvement

- The majority of trafficked youth in the United States are child-welfare involved - **anywhere from 55-97%**
- Any amount of out-of-home placement **doubles** the chance of a girl engaging in offending behavior
- Recruitment while in care, congregate care, and group homes is common



Stress, Trauma, and Trafficking

- Those who are at-risk of and/or who have been subjected to DCST have typically had a series of stressful or traumatic events that have occurred across their life span.
- Stress and trauma serve as a **risk factor for**, as well as **consequence of**, DCST.

Who Are the Traffickers?

- No single profile of traffickers
- Most traffickers are male with diverse ages and ethnicities
- Traffickers and victims tend to share the same national, ethnic, or cultural background
- The trafficker can sometimes be the victim's intimate partner/family member (i.e. familial pimping)
 - 25% of DCST victims were trafficked by family members

Methods of Recruitment

- Force
 - Brute force (e.g., kidnapping, enslavement) is unusual as a *recruiting* tactic but common as *coercive* tactic
 - Force, threats and sexual abuse common as coercive tactic.
- Purposeful manipulation and “grooming”
 - Most common and highly efficient
 - Pimp focuses on girls whose behavior indicates vulnerability and a high likelihood of successful recruitment

Grooming or Boyfriending

- Most victims are “groomed” by pimps who act as boyfriends or friends at first
- They attempt to learn everything about the prospective victim, in order to build a sense of trust and reliance and create false promises of fulfilling hopes and dreams
- He or she may offer the child expensive gifts, money, drugs, alcohol, or initiate a romantic relationship
- After gaining complete trust, the pimp will isolate the victim and start the cycle of abuse that will continue until the victim is identified and rescued



Emotional and Physical Violence



- Isolating victim from social supports
- Cycles of affection, or withholding affection
- Sexual violence
- Threats of violence against family and friends
- IPV-like rule schemas
- Shaming and humiliating
 - Threatening to reveal victim's activities
 - "Outing" sexual orientation
- Branding, scarification, denial of food or hygiene
- Physical violence is used strategically to assert and maintain control

Trauma Bonds

He's not my abuser, he's my boyfriend.

- Traumatic Bonding: dysfunctional attachment to exploiter occurring in the context of abuse.
- Trauma bonds: survival mechanism that is born of fear and oppression.



Trauma, Court Behavior, and Engaging with Trafficked Youth

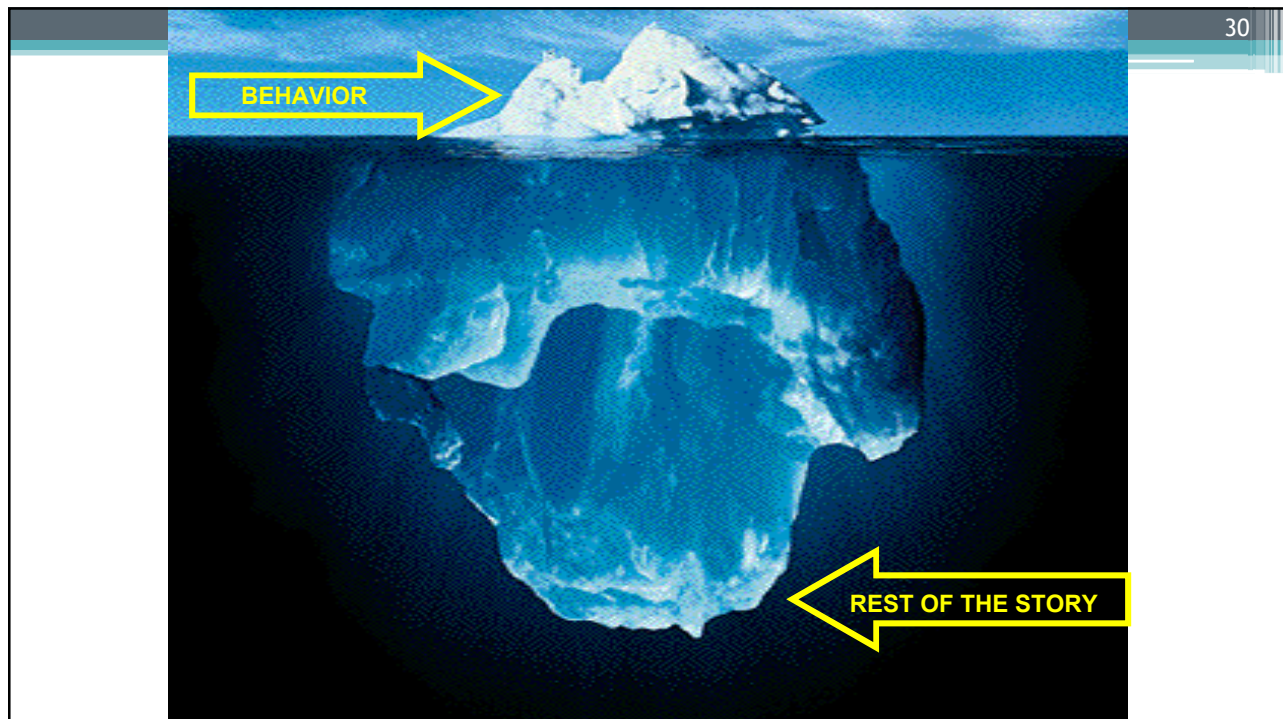
Traumatic Experiences in DCST

- Verbal and Emotional Abuse
- Physical Violence
- Sexual Violence
- Psychological abuse from captivity and fear of reprisal if escape is contemplated
- Family or community violence

Can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other serious mental and physical effects

Common Post-Traumatic Symptoms in Trafficking Victims

- Difficulties controlling emotions\impulse control
- Sudden outbursts of anger or self-mutilation
- Difficulty concentrating (*i.e., child isn't motivated to complete schoolwork, is lazy or apathetic*)
- Suicidal behaviors
- Alterations in consciousness/dissociation
- Self-medication/coping mechanisms (*Child uses alcohol or drugs, or is always high*)
- Increased risk taking



Understanding Trauma and Court Behavior

- Trauma can affect all aspects of behavior, from decision-making to communication to focus.
- Behavioral responses to trauma often resemble the common delinquent behaviors seen in youth referred to the justice system.
- Minimization, denial, and memory loss (all symptoms of trauma) can make it extremely difficult to elicit consistent information.
- Assessing for trauma is a necessary component of engagement and service provision.

Remember:

- Adolescents are less able to control impulses or resist triggers
- If an outburst happens, address it with other minors who may have seen/heard commotion
- Behavior has meaning - look to see what the behavior is communicating

Tips for Engagement

- Shift your perspective from “What is wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?”
- Be real and be upfront
- Avoid sarcasm or put downs of anyone
- Be consistent and transparent
- Go slowly; respect the process of building relationships
- Use youth-friendly language and mirror (appropriate) language used by youth when asking questions about the youth’s story.

Tips for Engagement (Continued)

- Be impeccable with your words
- Expect testing
- Accept that you don’t have the “whole story” and probably never will. Ever.
- Celebrate the small successes, all of them!



Never:

- NEVER accuse, ask, or suggest that youth is engaging in prostitution directly or indirectly.
 - *Ex: I want you to talk to someone who can get you out of prostituting/the life.*
- NEVER ask questions that will shame the youth and don't let anyone else, including parents, shame her/him
 - *Ex: What were you thinking? I just can't believe you did that?*

Questions to Ask



- Are you safe?
- When you were on the street did you see any dangerous situation or any bad things happen?
- Did anything bad happen to you?
- I'd like to refer you to an advocate, someone who is there just for you. The advocate does not report to the court or probation, and whether you engage with her/him is up to you.

The Path to Healing

“Healing is a messy, complicated process that’s rarely linear. Girls need intense amounts of support, love, and patience.”

Rachel Lloyd, Founder and President Girls Educational & Mentoring Services (GEMS)



Leaving and Healing

- Even with all services in place, it might not be enough to break trauma bonds on the first try.
- Leaving takes time; girls often need to try **multiple times** without having someone give up on them.
- Successful escape involves a recognition that the needs of the victim can be satisfied elsewhere.
- What makes the most difference is whether victim believes she has options, resources, somewhere to go, and support.

Core Conditions for Healing

- Need safety, self-determination, and social connection
 - What will make the youth feel safe? Is there a safety plan that can be implemented?
 - Help return self-determination by involving the youth in the decision making process whenever possible.
 - What social connections are available to the youth? Family? Friends? Mentor? School?

Focus on Resiliency

- Use strength-based service models.
- Focus on resilience factors and existing skills while teaching new, more adaptive skills
- Involve survivors in program design, implementation, and evaluation.
- Victims *can* make progress if you show them that they have support and there are adults they can trust.
 - An important characteristic of resilient children is having at least one significant adult in their lives.

Defining Success



- The goal is to have the youth display some level of age-appropriate development by:
 - Meeting employment goals
 - Meeting educational goals
 - Successful transition into independent living or young adulthood
- Most progress is not linear in nature

Thank you! Contact Us

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