



Trafficking: Trauma & Trauma-Informed Collaboration & Advocacy

Chic Dabby, Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence
January 2018



Acknowledgements:

Thank you to all the survivors who, by speaking out and by serving as advocates & experts, teach us what we know and what we need to learn about trafficking

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Trauma is Contained in the Very Definition of Trafficking

Physical, Psychological, Economic Traumas Caused By:

- **Actions:** Recruitment, harboring, provision, receipt, transportation and/or obtaining of individuals
- **Means:** Using force or threats, coercion, abduction, fraud and/or systems of indebtedness or debt bondage
- **Purposes** can include:
 - Forced labor in domestic, industrial, agricultural, fishing, mining, construction, extraction sectors
 - Sexual exploitation includes street prostitution, escort services, pornography, internet-aided prostitution, strip clubs, massage parlors, peep shows
 - Organ removal/harvesting
 - Fraudulent adoption
 - Involuntary servitude, including servile marriages
 - Forced drug smuggling/being used as drug mules

Definition: Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking (DMST)

Definition

- Commercial sexual abuse and exploitation of minors through buying, trading or selling their sexual services
- A commercial sex act refers to anything of value – money, drugs, food, shelter, rent, higher status in a gang – exchanged for sex.

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Definition: Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

CSEC refers to a range of crimes including:

- Recruiting enticing, harboring, transporting, providing, obtaining, and/or maintaining (acts that constitute trafficking) a minor for the purpose of sexual exploitation;
- Exploiting a minor through prostitution;
- Exploiting a minor through survival sex;
- Pornography: minor is sold/rented/provided something of value to perform sex acts on camera;
- Exploiting a minor through sex tourism, mail order bride trade, and early marriage; and
- Exploiting a minor by having her/him perform in sexual venues (e.g., strip clubs, peep shows).

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Traffickers: Who Are They?

Organized crime syndicates: international/local

- Street gangs, drug cartels
- Syndicates with diversified portfolios who traffic humans, drugs and guns

Independently owned businesses

Large, third-party labor recruiters

- Contractors/agents providing labor for food, agriculture, construction, janitorial services

Community and family members

- From the victim's own community
- Related through immediate or extended family ties
- With greater social or political status in their home country than their victims
- "Mom-and-pop" or extended family operations

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Who are DMST | CSEC Traffickers?

- **Pimp-controlled:** targeted recruitment, grooming, turning out
- **Family-controlled:** incest, sexual abuse, trading, buying and selling
- **Intimate partner-controlled:** can include or look like domestic violence
- **Gang-controlled:** can include recruitment by girls, blackmail, threats, violence
- **Crime syndicate-controlled:** high levels of debt, traffickers with diversified portfolios
- Victims who may have aged out and become 'management'

Facilitators / Enablers assist trafficking operations

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Traffickers Use...

Violence: Physical, sexual, threats to victim & her/his family members, forced to witness or use violence against others in pimps 'stable'

Poverty: Debts owed to trafficker, daily quota from prostituted children/adults

Coercion: Substance use, criminal acts

Vulnerability:

- If they want *love*, give them *love* and become their *boyfriend*
- If they need a place to *live*, give them *shelter*
- If they are *lonely*, become their *friend*
- If they don't have a loving *father*, become their *protector*
- If they are *poor* or *have low self-esteem*, sell them a *dream* and offer a life of *status*



Identifying Survivors

Who is Victimized?

- Children, teens, youth
- Adults
- Native women and girls
- U.S. and foreign born individuals
- Refugees, asylees, immigrants – some may have limited English proficiency (LEP)
- LGBTQ youth
- Homeless youth | Unaccompanied minors
- People with disabilities

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When I first started speaking publicly about my experience, I felt pressured to tell audiences that I was scared in order to satisfy their confusion about my compliance with the trafficker's demands.

But the truth is...I wasn't scared.

I felt stupid, duped, and disappointed, even sad and apprehensive; but I was not cowering in a corner as many images of sex trafficking convey.

Walking Prey: How America's Youth are Vulnerable to Sex Slavery
Holly Austin Smith

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Identifying DMST Survivors...

- ✓ Dress: not appropriate to age, event, weather
- ✓ Locations: hotels, truck stops, events, casinos
- ✓ Money: Pimp is handling money; survivors are using gift cards instead of money
- ✓ Living conditions: don't know their address; move around a lot; live in motels, cars; live with 'Daddy', 'boyfriend', other girls in stable
- ✓ Daily life: Victims don't know city, school, street names (may know mall); are hungry; very limited use of phone, few contacts
- ✓ Health problems: malnourished; STIs; substance use; infections or burns from being branded; months without periods
- ✓ Dynamics of control may be subtle or overt

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Identifying DMST Survivors...

In family-controlled trafficking,

- ✓ Sexual abuse is normalized early in a girl's life
- ✓ Victim isn't homeless: moves amongst homes of relatives, friends of family – her abuse & isolation aren't apparent
- ✓ Family traffickers invoke competition between siblings (Elisabeth Corey, Beating Trauma)
- ✓ Parents may be using/abusing drugs
- ✓ Victim might claim they are "home schooled"
- ✓ Familial trafficker may be well-known in the community

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Identifying LGBTQ Youth Survivors:

Are LGBTQ youth surviving or being exploited?

- ✓ Youth may be living with 'chosen family' in shared home: there may or may not be a trafficker controlling them
- ✓ Looking for ways to obtain/pay for transition drugs
- ✓ Contributing frequently, even daily to household expenses
- ✓ Health problems: high-risk for HIV infection, may be showing up regularly to get tested
- ✓ Dynamics of control are generally subtle

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Identifying Labor Trafficking Victims...

- ✓ Locations: family or 'mom-and-pop' businesses/restaurants, farms, factories, construction, oil/gas extraction
- ✓ Money: Carry high debt, can't seem to pay it off; pay high prices for *everything* (even their tools)
- ✓ Living conditions: migrant camps, very crowded quarters, sleeping in shifts
- ✓ Health problems: due to prolonged exposure/lack of protective clothing to chemicals/pesticides; untreated industrial or farm injuries; exhaustion
- ✓ Dynamics of control: multiple layers of traffickers, victims deal w/those on the lowest rung or w/family member who is their boss

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Identifying Locations | Events

Some locations can include sex and labor trafficking

- ✓ Hotels, casinos, casino parking lots
- ✓ Truck stops along major freeway corridors
- ✓ Urban areas e.g., construction sites
- ✓ Rural areas/farms, 'housing' for migrant labor
- ✓ Tribal lands, Native reservations
- ✓ Ships, ports
- ✓ 'Man camps' in oil and gas extraction industries
- ✓ Major events: State fairs, sporting events, gun expos, annual rallies e.g., motorcycles @ Sturgis
- ✓ Backpage.com
- ✓ Strip clubs, peep shows, streets

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Cautions!

- ✓ Screening, intake and assessment are separate steps and do not all need to be accomplished at the first encounter.
- ✓ We need to be careful not to get so granular on type of trafficking and its details that we end up forcing disclosure.
- ✓ Screening serves the purpose of identifying the services needed e.g., housing/shelter, and making appropriate referrals.
- ✓ Such an approach can avoid re-traumatization.

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1. Understanding Root Causes: Sex Trafficking

Exploitation of vulnerability, poverty: Abuse, neglect, poverty can increase vulnerability to predation

Male demands for commodified sex: HT relies on

- Extent of male demand
- Trends amongst buyers e.g., paying higher prices for sex with younger girls

Predation, Impunity: Nexus of (mostly) male predatory behavior and impunity is seen as normal masculinity

Money: organized crime, pimps find it lucrative w/ fewer penalties and losses than drugs and arms trafficking.

Gender oppression: Culture of gender violence, sexism and devaluation normalizes objectifying female bodies; abusing women/girls & their vulnerability

Lifetime Spiral of Gender Violence



Lifetime Spiral of Gender Violence

ROOT CAUSES: TRAUMA & GBV EXPOSURE

Lifetime Spiral Illustrates:

- 1. Historical nature of gender-based violence and that sexism and misogyny are foundational, violence isn't accidental**
- 2. Types of abuses girls and women are vulnerable to, or experience at different stages**
- 3. Range of perpetrators are located across lifecycle**

2. TRAUMA RELATED TO HELP-SEEKING: Past Experiences Influence Current Attempts

Exposure to multiple types of abuses and abusers	→	Shrinks the pool of potential helpers; deepens internalized devaluation
Societal oppressions e.g., criminalizing prostituted women	→	Diminishes access; increases barriers to services
Negative actions and attitudes of helpers	→	Colors the ability to trust others and/or one's own judgment; increases danger
Victim-blaming; minimizing impact "not that bad"	→	Diminishes credibility; overlooks impacts of coercion

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Trauma & Help-seeking , cont.

Interconnected Histories of Abuse and Help-Seeking: By the time we encounter survivors, they already have...

- Negative & positive histories of help-seeking
- Histories of physical and/or sexual abuses and neglect that can start early in the lifecourse
- Experienced multiple types of victimization and victim-blaming from various abusers
- Endured repeated victimization on a daily basis
- Dangers and threats of violence from traffickers, buyers, employers, others in the life, etc.

In some situations, doing nothing can be self-protective

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It is important for anyone working with victims of commercial sexual exploitation to realize that this population is usually very reluctant to reveal anything personal or sincere to adults, especially in professional positions. ...Many victims have been in circumstances where adults have consistently let them down. But victims ... are especially unlikely to share prior sexual activity.

Walking Prey, Holly Austin Smith

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3. TYPES OF TRAUMA

1. PTSD: Linked to catastrophic events
2. Chronic trauma: Repetitive, prolonged
3. Historical trauma: Resulting from historical oppression, intergenerational trauma
4. Insidious trauma: gradual, subtle, “death by a 1,000 paper-cuts”, daily micro-aggressions
5. Community, cultural and systems inflicted trauma
6. Triple trauma for refugees due to (a) home country conditions (b) journey/transit (c) resettlement conditions
7. Vicarious or secondary trauma affects:
 - Staff
 - Other victims/survivors in programs
 - Children, family members, friends

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4. SOURCES OF TRAUMA FOR TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS

- Sexual abuse over the lifecourse, which can start early
- Debt: Unpaid debt putting self or others in danger
- Repeated rapes by buyers
- Physical violence by traffickers, pimp, 'bottom b----'
- Being under-nourished, cold, disoriented, sleep-deprived
- Seeing tattoos daily: a reminder of who owns/uses you
- Being in constant state of upheaval means constant control, means constant trauma: keeps victims in fight-flight-freeze mode (Elisabeth Corey, Beating Trauma)
- Trauma can differ given types of controllers:
 1. **Pimp-controlled**
 2. **Family-controlled**
 3. **Intimate partner-controlled**
 4. **Gang-controlled**
 5. **Crime syndicate-controlled**

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Caution! *"She's not responding like a typical victim"*

Which of these might be survival strategies?

- Fight or flight: but freeze is most common
- Attachment to abuser: Some DMST survivors call pimps "daddy"
- Protecting pimp/family = silence can be self-protective
- Denying, retracting statements = have control over process
- Overlooking injuries = ignorance, shame about one's body
- Not disclosing history = negative help-seeking experiences
- Angry @ helper/advocate = safer than anger at abuser

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5. TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE | APPROACH

- Trauma-informed approach is about asking:
 - “What happened to you?”
 - **Not** “What’s wrong with you?”
- Having a basic knowledge of trauma and its impact
- Understanding survivors’ trauma triggers to minimize re-traumatization
- Providing information about trauma to survivors
- Supporting emotional safety for survivors by helping them
 - Manage feelings
 - Feel in control of situations
 - Give input on program services
- Recognizing providers’ triggers, creating emotional safety

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Points of Contact

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Endangerment Considerations

Endangerment Levels are Affected by:

- Complexity of case
- Stage at which survivors escape; number of survivors in group
- Stage of the investigation
- Breaks in confidentiality, especially w/multiple systems involvement
- Type of traffickers controlling the operation; e.g., gang- and crime-controlled trafficking can be more dangerous and violent
- Lack of coordination between providers
- Extent of the debt victim owes to traffickers
- Procedures, including safety planning, traditionally applied in foster/group home, or DV or runaway homeless youth shelters – that have not been designed for trafficked individuals
- Former victims who have become middle management and/or traffickers and are not properly identified as such

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Points of Contact

(1) Raids | Sting Operations

Considerations

- Raids traumatize victims given potential jail time, increased suicide risks, desire to repatriate immediately, cut off from earnings to pay off debt
- Identifying victims may be difficult
 - Most are coached to lie and not tell the truth
 - Some are former victims who have become middle management and/or traffickers
 - Some have broken the last act of trafficking and have willingly returned to sex work, not as victims
- Problems housing large group of victims at short notice; or co-locating them given collusion of facts, power dynamics

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Points of Contact (1) Raids, cont.

Recommendations for Advocates & Law Enforcement

- Develop protocol for coordinated response to go into effect after a raid to meet victim needs and separate out traffickers
- Have interpreters for police interviews and bilingual advocates for victim services

Being trauma-informed:

Raids are traumatic leading to potential jail time, homelessness, depression

- Provide emotional safety, e.g., make appropriate clothing available
- Understand trauma sources e.g., debt, separation from pimp, danger
- Identify triggers speaking to police, being in confined spaces, negative help-seeking experiences from systems or cops in home countries

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Points of Contact: (2) Arrest

Considerations

- Trafficked individuals do get arrested so it takes time and astute questioning for police officers to determine that they are victims, not criminals.
- Some who appear as victims may in fact be traffickers

Recommendations for Advocates & Law Enforcement

- Sort out carefully who the victims are; advocate for them to be recognized as such by police, other govt. agencies
- If a program encourages unidentified victims to come forward, coordinate strategy with police department
- Allow for discretionary referral to juvenile justice for all minor sex and labor trafficking cases
- Trafficked victims should not be considered criminals based on the illegal nature of their work (e.g. selling drugs), or on their immigration status

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Points of Contact: (2) Arrest, cont.

Trafficked individuals are victims, not criminals, they must be interviewed, not interrogated, at arrest. *"No one talked to me like I was a real person outside a criminal case" **

Being trauma-informed

- Help victims feel in control: Provide clear information about procedures, choices victims have, impact of their decisions on next steps, using language minors and others with limited English or education level can understand
- Help victims manage feelings: Offering respect and compassion can allay victims' mistrust, fears; understand their loyalty to traffickers and anticipated 'rescue'
- Identify trauma triggers/sources: previous arrests, being interrogated, endangering others who were not arrested

**Walking Prey* by Holly Austin Smith

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Points of Contact: (3) Investigation & Legal Representation

Considerations

- Lawyers sent by traffickers will claim to represent victims but in fact protect traffickers' interests
- Systems and procedures will be frightening, confusing, may not seem victim-centered

Recommendations for Attorneys & Advocates

- Assess for conflicts of interest in group cases to ensure traffickers/mid-managers are not inadvertently represented
- Investigation process Prepare victim about questioning and testifying procedures - who the players are, the offices they represent, their roles in investigation and prosecution of case, who can and cannot be present with the victim

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Points of Contact: (3) Investigation, cont.

Being trauma-informed

- Identify sources of trauma: Conflicted feelings of hostility, fear, loyalty to trafficker get labelled as 'uncooperative'
- Minimize re-traumatization caused by recounting stories, details repeatedly; facing traffickers lawyers; feeling humiliated by information in medical, mental health, other service systems' files
- Provide info about trauma triggers: Explain how being challenged on inconsistencies during investigation can trigger memories of trafficker and feeling stupid, worthless

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Points of Contact: (4) Shelter

Considerations

- Many federal agencies are involved → confusion, chaos, shelter location isn't confidential
- Detailed case info may be unknown to shelter staff because of investigation process → non-disclosure causes tension w/other residents; staff conflicts
- Trafficked residents don't participate in shelter activities or programs → resentment at 'special' treatment

Recommendations for Shelter & Systems Staff

- Assign lead advocate to coordinate with federal agencies who may have access to &/or know shelter's location
- Provide services that will help w/post-investigation integration and can be learnt at shelter -basic life skills, ESL

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Points of Contact: (4) Shelter, cont.

Recommendations, cont.

- Safety in Runaway Homeless Youth (RHY) or DV shelters depends on whether resident is in pimp-, gang-, family-, crime-, or transgender-controlled trafficking situation
- Develop collaborative safety plan with other agencies in case shelter location and victim safety are compromised

Being trauma-informed:

- Minimize re-traumatization triggers due to being in environment with other women victims; where movements are curtailed and shelter rules enforced;
- Build emotional safety: Victims will feel isolated in DV shelter, not identify with domestic violence survivors, mistrust other trafficked women housed with them.
- Understand trauma caused when victim and perpetrator boundaries are blurred – trafficked youth may be forced, or even consent, to use violence or recruit others for their pimp

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Points of Contact: (5) Healthcare System

Health & Mental Health Issues

Chronic or Acute Untreated Symptoms/Problems:

- Hunger, dehydration, malnutrition, poor food security;
- Exhaustion from working long hours (18-20 hours);
- Sleep deprivation from living on streets, homelessness;
- Drug poisoning, anal tears (for drug mule victims)
- Rape, CSA, by buyers, pimps, traffickers;
- Multiple pregnancies, multiple abortions;
- HIV/AIDS, STIs and STDs in sex workers; day laborers; untreated children from infected mothers;
- Gynecological: pregnancy, pregnancy-related, lack of periods due to repeated Depo Provera use, forced abortions, lack of access to contraception, traumatic fistulas;
- Dental problems

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(5) Health & Mental health, cont.

Health & Mental Health (cont.)

- Depression, anxiety, isolation, suicidality, cutting
- Fight, Flight, Freeze; exaggerated startle response
- Substance abuse due to: coercion by traffickers/pimps; payment in drugs, not cash; self-medication
- Branding (by pimps) i.e., using a branding iron;
- Urinary Tract Infections due to lack of toilets for agricultural/industrial workers; or sexual abuse
- Injuries – multiple, repeated, from attacks by buyers, pimps, employers, gang, other girls in pimp's 'stable'.

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(5) Health: Medical Records

Considerations

- Medical or psychological tests and evaluations may be ordered by Federal Prosecutor, others, to establish sexual abuse, psychological harm, pregnancy, etc.
- Confidentiality: who has access to medical/therapy files- trafficker lawyers, pimp, trafficked minor's parents?
- Consent, treatment decisions

Recommendations for Providers & Advocates

- Determine who owns, receives and has access to reports/results, *especially for minors*
- Ensure victims, especially minors & non-English speakers, understand consent, especially for treatment
- Have a trained medical interpreter at all appointments and follow-up conversations

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(5) Health & Mental health, cont.

Being Trauma-Informed

- Healthcare providers, untrained in screening for trafficking, may misdiagnose presenting problems.
E.g.:
 - Malnutrition ≠ eating disorder, but food insecurity
 - Drug poisoning ≠ substance abuse, but being used as a drug mule
 - Multiple pregnancies, multiple abortions, HIV/AIDS, STIs and STDs ≠ ignorance of safe sex or high-risk behavior, but reproductive coercion and assault
 - Repeated Depo Provera use ≠ teen who can't be bothered with her periods, but prostituted teen
 - Labelling sexual exploitation as 'dating violence'

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Resources, Training & Technical Assistance

[Webpage on Trafficking](#)

[Trauma-Informed Trafficking Technical Assistance Brief \(2017\)](#)

[Trafficking Resources List \(2017\)](#)

[Intersections of Trafficking, Domestic Violence, & Sexual Assault \(2016\)](#)



Funding for this document was made available through the US Department of Health and Human Services, Grant #90EV0430. The viewpoints contained in this document are solely the responsibility of the author(s) and do not represent the official views or policies of the department and do not in any way constitute an endorsement by the Department of Health and Human Services.

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