Understanding Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking in a Local Context

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Houston Rescue and Restore Coalition: Who We Are and What We Do

• Houston Rescue and Restore Coalition is a dedicated coalition of Houston-area non-profits, faith based groups, government agencies and others whose mission is confronting modern-day slavery by educating the public, training professionals and empowering the community to take action.

• What we do:
  • Community Outreach: Media Campaign, Community Awareness, Volunteer Program
  • Training for Front Line Professionals (law enforcement, service providers, health care, CPS, educators, etc.)
  • Prevention Program
Sex Trafficking

• Sex Trafficking: “The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person forced to perform such an act is under the age of 18 years.”

• Commercial Sex Act: The term “commercial sex act” means any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person.
  
  • Spas
  • Adult modeling studios
  • Strip clubs
  • Residential brothels
  • Truck stops
  • Sex tourism
Understanding DMST

• The Making of a Girl
Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking

• Most domestic victims rescued to date are children (females, aged 13-17) exploited in the commercial sex industry
  • Estimates of 1.7 million runaway/throwaway episodes happen every year and 1 out of 3 teens on the street will be lured into prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home. (National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Throwaway Children)
  • Occurs when anything of value (drugs, money, higher status in a gang, etc.) is exchanged for a minor’s sexual services.
  • Includes, but is not limited to:
    • Prostitution by a trafficker/pimp.
    • Prostitution by a family member or significant other.
    • Street prostitution, Internet-aided prostitution.
    • Stripping, erotic or nude massage, phone sex lines, private parties.

• Compensation for these acts most often goes to an intermediary/pimp.
  • If youth accepts compensation, it is not consent, but a vulnerability being exploited, “survival sex.”
Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking

• Most overlooked form of child sexual abuse
• Most difficult form of child sexual abuse to investigate
• Most under investigated
• National problem
Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking

- Estimates of 200,000-300,000 children are at risk for trafficking every year in the U.S. (Estes & Weiner, 2001)

- The average entry age into prostitution is age 12-14. (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children)

- Most often involves young women between the ages of 13 and 17 controlled by a pimp

- If you are involved in prostitution, you are said to be “in the game”

- Pimps recruit most commonly through seduction and coercion
First Step - Language

• Two parts:
  – Understanding the language of sex trafficking
  – Addressing inherent biases in our language

• To address the issue, we have to understand the stereotypes and prejudices that come with this topic

• We have to take the opportunity to reframe the debate whenever it presents itself
Activity

Language and Sensitivity
Activity: Language and Sensitivity

Group Questions:

• What first comes to mind when you hear these terms?
• What ideas/images/concepts are communicated through these terms?
• How do these terms impact how youth are seen and treated?

Adapted from 2011 Training Manual on the CSEC by Girls Educational & Mentoring Services (GEMS)
Prostitute
Making Money
Enjoys It
Earning a Living
Criminal
Slut
Bad Kid
Easy
Ho
Delinquent
Choice
Commercially Sexually Exploited Child (CSEC)
Manipulated

Exploited

Child Abuse

Vulnerable

Needs Assistance

Victim

Used

Forced

Unable To

Sexually Abused

Choose
Second Step: Purpose

• What is your purpose in wanting to understand DMST in your area?
  – Take 5 minutes and write down the top three questions you think you or your community need answered in regards to this issue.
Third Step: Educating Yourself

• What is already being done about this issue in your area?
• Who is working on it? Who could work on it?
• Where do your legislators stand on the issue?
  – Support of the TVPA?
• What “type” of city would you be – source, destination or transit?
• Why your city – what would make your city vulnerable or attractive to trafficking?
Understanding Your Area

• What resources already exist for addressing child abuse?
• What is your state’s mandatory reporting policy?
• Who investigates child abuse? What is their policy on trafficking?
• Who is most likely to come into contact with a potential victim? Do they know how to identify that victim as such?
• How are your law enforcement trained on the issue? Are they?
• How are victims usually dealt with?
Don’t Reinvent the Wheel!

• Often just a matter of training
• Understand what agencies are already working with the victims, just maybe misclassified
  – FBI Innocence Lost Task Forces: 47 across the country dedicated solely to investigating and prosecuting domestic minor sex trafficking. One in your area?
  – Any other task forces? There are three federally funded task forces in the US – Chicago, Orange County, Houston
  – Any other law enforcement task forces?
  – Coalitions? Other agencies or organizations?
Field Assessment

• Questions we wanted answered:
  – Do the agencies most likely to come into contact with a potential victim understand what trafficking is?
  – What is the size of the problem we are facing in Houston?
  – What is the reality v. the sensationalized version of trafficking in Houston?
  – Houston covers 11 counties, how is each area different or the same?
  – How are our victims normally treated?
  – What improvements can we make?
  – What are we already doing well?
Problems We Had to Address

• Yours will be unique, but problems we had to first take into account:
  – Definition of trafficking is different on a state v. federal level
  – Legislature only meets every other year
  – Misunderstanding of DMST response on a governmental level
    • David Newell’s (Asst DA) article: “Tricks are for kids! How in the Matter of B.W. exempted 13-year-olds from the prostitution statute.”
  – Age of “minority” is different with each agency
    • 18 federally
    • Age of consent in Texas is 17
    • Minors cannot be arrested for prostitution IF they are under 14 in Texas (14-17 still can be) because of the age of marriage law
    • Some agencies serve under 18, one only serves 18-21, some a mixture of both
RFA Process

• Tool developed by Shared Hope International, “Rapid Field Assessment”
• 7 different interviews created based on the TVPA
  – Addresses the Prevention, Prosecution, and Protection of victims
• Representatives of each of these areas are to be interviewed in person: Law enforcement, prosecutors, defense attorneys, juvenile court judges, juvenile detention facilities, Child Protective Services, and NGOs/Social service providers
RFA Process

• Each interview lasted about an hour and includes a request for statistics from the agency that the person represents
• Interviews are coupled with extensive desk research of media reports and any other documentation available about the issue
• Also distributed a Youth Survey anonymously at different agencies (not part of original RFA)
• IRB certified and includes a consent form, etc. to fulfill those requirements
• Recommendations made based on research
Outcomes

Published in late 2011
Available for free on our website: www.houstonrr.org
Made available to our local task force to inform further developments
Findings

• Most difficult interview to obtain: Child Protective Services
• Each agency uses different terms for the same situation – child prostitution, child sexual abuse, child exploitation, etc.
• Most agencies wanted to respond better but did not know how, did not have funding, or did not see the relevancy to what they do
• Many agencies said that they had never seen trafficking in their population but the Youth Surveys (or agency statistics) proved otherwise
Findings, cont’d

• Statistics on “trafficking victims” very hard to find as NO ONE tracked them specifically, but easy to determine that MANY are at risk
• Many wanted to respond, but didn’t think there was anything they could do or that the community had any resources
• Each agency needed something different, but all thought the “answer” would be a shelter for victims
• Many LEAs admitted they would do more if they thought the public wanted them to
• Most focused solely on post victimization identification, no one on prevention and very little on demand
Published Key Findings of Our RFA

- Victims are frequently misidentified
- Training and awareness remains low
- Funding is limited
- Community awareness remains low
- DMST victims often treated as delinquents
- Extreme lack of communication within and between organizations
- Number of victims is low compared to those at risk
- No real prevention strategies in place
- GHMA is unique and diverse
- Recognized lack of dedicated services though those services that do exist are underutilized
- Arrests and prosecutions of pimps and johns and facilitators is very limited if at all
Recommendations

• Further research and training
• Prosecution of pimps/traffickers
• Prosecution of johns/facilitators
• Create a tracking system of victims and traffickers and share among agencies
• Public awareness
• Prevention work
• Include boys in the discussion
Developments since then

• HPD and HCSO have mandated training for all officers
  – TX legislature mandated training only for new officers and those seeking promotion
• HRRC implemented a prevention program that has already reached over 300 youth in less than a year
• First shelter for DMST victims in Texas opened in north Houston in April of 2012
  – Capacity for 30 victims, only serving 8
• Houston mayor created a subcommittee to study human trafficking in the Houston area
• New coalition founded in Galveston
  – Training for all DAs already conducted
• Public awareness continued and growing!
  – 6th annual Human Trafficking Awareness Month
Recommendations

• Don’t have to use the same tool we did – you can create your own
• Include boys
  – The RFA was designed to discuss females, thankfully many individuals openly brought up the male population, but the conversation always veered toward females
• What about labor trafficking?
What are Your Goals?

• Your goals should shape your questions
• Policy changes?
  – Mandatory training
  – Mandatory reporting
• Community awareness?
• Develop service provision?
  – Or utilize what you already have?
• Open lines of communication?
For More Information

• For more information about Shared Hope International’s RFA, visit: www.sharedhope.org

• To connect with HRRC, visit www.houstonrr.org or email: kendra@houstonrr.org
QUESTIONS?