Beneath the Surface: Attachment and Trauma's Relationship to Human Trafficking

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What will we discuss?

- Childhood adversities and their risks
- Trauma bonding and its connection to attachment
- What can we do?

Definitions

- **Sex trafficking** – the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act (TVPA 2000)
- **Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC)** – crimes of a sexual nature committed against juvenile victims for financial or other economic reasons (OJJDP)
- **Domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST)** - the commercial sexual exploitation of American children within U.S. borders
- **Safe Harbor laws** – law designed to reclassify youth as victims and ensure access to services and legal protections
Risk factors

Social & Legal Policies
• Local, state & federal laws
• TVPA 2000

Institutions & Systems of Care
• Juvenile Justice
• Child Welfare
• Community Clinics
• Homeless shelters
• Residential facilities & group homes

Neighborhood & Community
• Low income/poverty
• High crime, gangs
• Exploitation normalized or glamorized
• Pre-existing sex industry

Family Dynamics
• Familial instability
• Decreased parental supervision
• Abandonment
• History of intergenerational exploitation

Individual
• Abuse
• Neglect
• LGBTQ
• Homeless/runaway
• Disability
• Lack of social/family supports
• Juvenile justice or child welfare involvement
• Substance use

Primary risk factors

• Youth of color
• Youth aging out of the system
• Youth forced to leave home without safe alternative housing
• Runaways

Abuse and neglect

• Emotional abuse
• Physical abuse
• Sexual abuse **
• Neglect
• Family violence

**Sexual abuse – the strongest predictor for future victimization
Sexual abuse

- Poor knowledge of healthy sexuality and consent
- Exchanging sex for love and affection is normalized
- More likely to be using substances to cope with abuse
- May be engaging in high-risk sexual behavior

Complex trauma impacts:

- Attachment/social relationships
- Emotional/mood regulation
- Behavioral regulation
- Dissociation
- Cognitive development
- Biology
- Sense of self

Attachment – what we know

Attachment is crucial for developing children and adults who:

- Are confident and secure
- Go on to have healthy relationships and trust others
- Are better able to manage life’s stressors and other traumatic events
What’s missing is the key

- Psychological and physiological needs not met
- Seeking sense of belonging, approval
- Boundaries
- Trust

Pathways to entry

- Peer networks
- Internet enticement
- Sex traffickers
- Abduction/force
- Familial

Strategizing and grooming

- Romance
- Building trust and dependence
- Normalizing/glamorizing sex
- Engaging victims in criminal activity
- Isolation from supports
- Disorienting/luring/creating addiction to substances
What is trauma bonding?

- Conditions necessary for trauma bonding to occur:
  - Abusive control dynamics
  - Severe power imbalance
  - Intermittent abuse that alternates with positive or neutral interactions

- Abusers use:
  - Young age of victims
  - Victim’s trauma/neglect history
  - Promise of love, protection, independence
  - Increased dependency on abuser

Becoming entangled and the loss of self

- Shame and blackmail
- Obligation
- Making complicit in a crime
- Intimidation
- Providing hope, connection, family

Maintaining their control

- Abuser is seen as a romantic companion
- Abuser creates a false sense of empowerment
- Pregnancies/children
- Mistrust of other members/“family”
- Loss of self
**Intervention**

- Consistency
- Contact with caring, attentive adults
- Protective environments
- Education for youth and caregivers

**Missed opportunities**

- Juvenile justice system
- Medical professionals
- Group homes
- School employees

**Challenges to care**

Dynamics of the relationship

- Lack of understanding/awareness of being exploited
- Desire to protect abuser
- Fear of retribution from trafficker if youth leaves, cooperates with law enforcement
Challenges to care

Individual dynamics

- Distrust of social services, law enforcement and other agencies
- Shame and stigma
- Victim’s confusion over their own involvement
- Too much too fast – build trust and safety first
- Defining the youth’s experience for them

The approach

Multi-layered systemic intervention

- Mental health
- Physical health/medical
- Social supports
- Legal supports
- Vocational/educational

Trauma-informed care – why is it necessary?

- Recognizes symptoms of trauma
- Understands the impact of past trauma on a person’s life and coping abilities
- Incorporates this understanding into practices to EMPOWER and avoid re-traumatization
Key principles to trauma-informed care

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and transparency
3. Peer support
4. Collaboration and mutuality
5. Empowerment, voice, and choice
6. Cultural, historical and gender issues

Trauma-informed Services
- Appropriate for all settings of care in which trauma may be present

Trauma-specific Services
- Designed to treat specific symptom of abuse in specialty treatment programs

Trauma-informed Care
- A framework for addressing trauma and implementing treatment/services

Alternatives to traditional therapies

- Holistic approaches
- Self-regulation
- Spiritual activities
- Art therapy
Prevention

- Cameras in high target areas
- Training to increase awareness of the risk and common entrapment strategies
- Education for youth
- Self-screening opportunities

Resources

- Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline
  www.traffickingresourcecenter.org 1.888.373.7888
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
  www.cybertipline.com 1.800.THE.LOST
- Polaris Project – www.polarisproject.org
- Shared Hope International – https://sharedhope.org/

References

Questions?
Thank you!

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