

America's Sex Trafficked Children: A Study of the Victim-Trafficker Relationship from Victim's Responses

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Preface

When I moved to Houston 10 years ago, I was shocked to discover sex trafficking was a problem throughout the city. I learned from news reports that one in every four national victims travels through Houston at some point. Then, I was informed sex trafficking locations included cantinas, massage parlors, strip clubs, and brothels. Although I occasionally drove past these locations while commuting, I was not aware they were used for sex trafficking. Sometimes, news reports detailed accounts of men prosecuted for human trafficking. Although I listened to the news reports, I was confused how girls became involved in sex trafficking, and why they did not leave. Naively, I thought perhaps these women made a lot of money, or enjoyed sex industry work.

For several years, the local Houston news increased sex trafficking coverage, and I discovered that many children were sex trafficked. I am a mother of three children, and I was horrified that children were treated as sex slaves—especially in my community. This newfound knowledge increased my desire to learn more about sex trafficking. In 2012, I read Linda Smith's *Renting Lacy: A Story of America's Prostituted Children*. After reading this book, I became more educated about America's sex trafficked children, and I was angered and horrified.

Before I read this book, I thought the majority of American sex trafficked victims were of foreign nationalities. I was incredibly misinformed, and discovered the majority of United States sex trafficked victims were born in America. These sex trafficked children are brutally raped, bought, sold, physically beaten, emotionally abused, and forced to use drugs: they are American children who are sex slaves.

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While reading *Renting Lacy*, I recalled a scary childhood event, which occurred when I was six years old. When my grandmother was an apartment manager in San Antonio, Texas, several gunmen broke into her apartment and held a gun to her head, and demanded money. Then, my grandfather heard the commotion and hid me under a bed: he protected me from harm. Later, my grandfather told me he hid me because he was concerned the gunmen would take me: he protected me. Fortunately, my grandmother was not harmed, and the gunmen took the money, and left. However, the event was traumatic and scary. When I read Smith's book, I realized, these sex trafficked children, have no one to protect them, and that they endure daily terrifying, traumatic events. After reading Linda Smith's *Renting Lacy*, I realized that I could have been taken—at that moment, I decided I wanted to help sex trafficked children. For almost two years, I have volunteered to help Houston sex trafficked victims.

After reviewing the volunteering opportunities, I chose to volunteer in the Wings Program: this is a recovery and transition program for women convicted of prostitution held in Baker Jail located in downtown Houston. I went to Baker Jail weekly to help teach approximately 50 convicted trafficked or prostituted women recovery and transition skills, which included information to help them find employment, spiritual, and personal reflection. These women shared many physical and emotional trafficking abuse stories. The women had many lingering physical abuse scars: many were branded and many had missing teeth from physical abuse.

After volunteering at the jail, I next chose to volunteer in the Sparrows Program. As a volunteer in this program, I went with a group of women to Houston Asian massage parlors. We would visit twenty-five spas in one day: many of them were located in southwest Houston around the Chimney Rock area.

Typically, the spas look like old wooden buildings or are located in old strip centers. The signs advertise open 24 hours a day. In order to get into the spas, you have to ring a buzzer. Then, they check the cameras to see who is at the door. Usually, an older Asian woman unlocks the door after she checks the cameras. Most of the spas have ATM's located by the door for easy access to cash. The girls typically walk around in lingerie or bikinis, but they stay behind a locked door. We spoke to some girls who worked in the spas, and asked if they needed any help: the girls never accepted any assistance. Although they never asked for assistance, I felt that we were helping because we left the girls gift bags, which contained toiletry items and they knew someone was concerned for them.

Although I enjoyed my volunteer experience with adult sex trafficked women, I wanted to help sex trafficked children. Then, I discovered Freedom Place, which is a safe house for domestic minor sex trafficked victims. There are only five such facilities in the United States. This facility offers on-site medical, mental health, and education professionals. Girls spend approximately a year at this safe house in a recovery program.

I interviewed with the Freedom Place Director, and I was offered a volunteer position teaching a weekly class called Casey Living Skills. In October 2013, I began teaching a basic living skills class. These young girls did not learn basic living skills from parents because they were captives. In other words, they did not have a normal teenage life.

I began teaching seven rescued adolescent sex trafficked girls between the ages 16-18 years old independent living skills on a weekly schedule. I created binders for each girl, and they would insert the weekly lesson handouts I created in the binder. There were approximately 40 different topics in the independent living skills program. I created the notebooks with the intention that the girls could take the notebook, and use it as a reference tool when they left Freedom Place.

After teaching the class for several weeks, I understood the need for this program. Their traffickers provided, shelter, food, clothes, and necessities, and confiscated their money. For many years, these young girls were captives and never learned how to care for themselves. Therefore, they needed to learn basic skills, which would help them with independent living when they left Freedom Place. For example, many of the girls had never shopped for their own groceries. I taught them how to choose healthy foods and read food labels. I taught them basic home cleanliness, home safety, and home repair skills. I also taught them how to treat minor illnesses and injuries. In addition, these girls had very little knowledge about managing money, or finding employment: we spent a significant amount of time discussing very basic skills.

As a mother of three children, I believed these sex trafficked teenage girls had not developed living skills beyond an elementary school level. Although their living skills were delayed, the girls were very interested in them: they all wanted jobs, apartments, and cars.

During our weekly one-hour classes, they shared many personal stories about traumatic experiences when they were ‘in the life’. Even though the girls were in a beautiful safe house, and had many services, they were still suffering from the trauma they had experienced as sex trafficked victims.

On February 26, 2014, I attended Kathryn Griffin-Townsend’s nationally recognized non-profit program she started, “We’ve Been There Done That.” The program’s goal is to rehabilitate women who have lived through sex trafficking, prostitution, and associated drug addiction. A former cocaine addict and prostitute, Kathryn Griffin-Townsend credits rehabilitation programs with changing her life. For over a decade, “We’ve Been There Done That” has helped over 1,000 women in the Houston community, and has the highest success rate of former prostitutes not going back to the life. Kathryn Griffin-Townsend has also successfully pushed lawmakers to create special “prostitute courts” across Texas. These courts focus on rehabilitating rather than incarcerating sex workers. She has been on national news programs including Dr. Drew. Meetings are held at Houston Recovery Campus located in Houston’s fifth ward. At this program, I met adult women who were sex trafficked as minors. These women completed a Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Survey used in this study.

During Kathryn Griffin-Townsend’s meeting and my volunteer experiences with adult trafficking survivors at Baker Jail and sex trafficked minors at Freedom Place, I heard many personal accounts of horrific physical abuse, drug abuse, and emotional abuse. I understood the horrible reality—these girls and women are not there by choice. Unquestionably, their pimp held them captive, and an escape attempt would result in physical abuse or death—this is the harsh reality. During my undergraduate studies in Psychology, I learned about Stockholm Syndrome. The sex trafficked victim stories reminded me of Stockholm Syndrome, but more traumatic. I wanted to understand the victim—trafficker relationship: the victim was held captive similar to Stockholm Syndrome, but was also forced to have sex sometimes 10 times a day against her will, and often abused physically and emotionally.

Abstract

This capstone examines American sex trafficked children’s relationship with their trafficker. After a great deal of research, I found very little information about the victim—trafficker relationship from the domestic minor sex trafficking victim’s perspective. The DMST victim—trafficker relationship has seldom been studied. There are three primary reasons that few studies have been conducted on this topic 1) DMST is a new topic 2) most victims associate sex trafficking with shame, guilt, and trauma; therefore, they do not freely disclose their sex trafficking history 3) there are few circumstances where sex trafficked minors gather in groups, which limits the opportunity to question victims. I used Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs as a model to develop a Domestic Sex Trafficking Minor Survey. The results are based on twenty-nine adults who self-identified as victims of domestic minor sex trafficking and answered a Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Questionnaire. The following were the research questions: 1) What are a minors vulnerability factors? 2) How did the trafficker manipulate the victim? 3) Did the victim bond with the trafficker? The intention of this study is to provide a better understanding of domestic minor sex trafficking vulnerability risk factors and the victim’s bond with the trafficker, which may assist with identifying post-trafficking recovery needs.

Chapter One

Introduction

In this chapter, I will identify this study’s purpose, explain the rationale for the study, and explain a psychosocial theory that helps understand the relationship between the domestic sex-trafficked minor and the trafficker.

Statement of the Problem

The United States abolished slavery in 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation and in 1865 under the Thirteenth Amendment. However, American slavery still exists—everyday children are bought, and sold against their will, and forced to have sex. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, sex trafficking is the fastest-growing organized crime, and the third-largest criminal enterprise in the world behind drugs and guns.¹

¹ FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, “Human Sex Trafficking,” accessed February 18, 2014, http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/law-enforcement-bulletin/march_2011/human_sex_trafficking.

However, there is one major difference drugs, and guns can only be sold once, but sex can be sold repeatedly. For this reason, selling sex is highly profitable.

Advocates, policymakers, and media focus has been on international human trafficking. As a result, the United States government has long provided shelter and services to international human trafficking victims. Conversely, domestic minor sex trafficked (DMST) victims—children who were born here and trafficked here have received minimal media coverage, and DMST victim services have been limited. The international and domestic sex trafficked victim media coverage disparity has created a false perception that most sex trafficked victims in America are born overseas. However, the majority of sex trafficked victims are born in the United States, and a large percentage of those victims are children.² Comparatively, approximately 50,000 international children are trafficked into the United States annually, and 100,000-300,000 American children are at risk for commercial sexual exploitation.³ The average age that an American girl is recruited into sex trafficking is 12-14 years old.⁴ In 2000, America passed legislation, which recognized child sex trafficking minors as victims instead of prostitutes.

The issue of child trafficking in the U.S. has been in a period of dynamic shift since the Trafficking Victims Protection Act was passed in 2000. The TVPA changed the central concept of trafficking from transportation to exploitation and reclassified child prostitution victims as child trafficking victims. Since the reauthorization in 2005, this legislation now extends services for sex trafficking victims to any minor under 18 years of age, including American citizens and legal permanent residents being sold for commercial sex in the U.S.⁵

Although the TVPA reclassified child prostitution victims as child trafficking victims, America continues to prosecute DMST victims for crimes other than prostitution and label them as juvenile delinquents. As a result, these victims have difficulty receiving psychological services. The TVPA act specifies these victims should be provided services; however, there are few services available to help these victims. Studying the victim's relationship with the trafficker may provide insight on how to address the domestic sex trafficked minor's recovery needs.

Purpose of the Study

This study will provide information about the victim—trafficker relationship from adult domestic sex trafficking survivors. This study will examine the domestic minor's vulnerability risk factors, how the trafficker manipulated the victim, and the victim—trafficker bond. The intention of this study is to provide a better understanding of domestic minor sex trafficking vulnerability risk factors and the victim's bond with the trafficker, which may assist with identifying post-trafficking recovery needs.

Rationale for the Study

After a great deal of research, I found very little information about the victim—trafficker relationship from the domestic minor sex trafficking victim's perspective. The DMST victim—trafficker relationship has seldom been studied. There are three primary reasons that few studies have been conducted on this topic 1) DMST is a new topic 2) most victims associate sex trafficking with shame, guilt, and trauma; therefore, they do not freely disclose their sex trafficking history 3) there are few circumstances where sex trafficked minors gather in groups, which limits the opportunity to question victims. This study provides information about the domestic minor sex trafficking victim's relationship with the trafficker through the DMST victim's point-of view. Examining the trafficker-victim relationship, may assist with identifying post-trafficking recovery needs.

Theoretical Framework

Stockholm Syndrome is a psychological behavior where hostages express empathy or sympathy toward their captors.

² Robert Sanborn, Dawn Lew, Mandi Sheridan Kimball, Todd Latiolais, Kavita Desai, and Keveney Avila, eds. *The Texas Safe House Movement: An Examination of Restorative Shelter Core Components and Recommendations*, Children at Risk, 7.

³ Sanborn, 14.

⁴ Linda A. Smith, Samantha Healy Vardaman, and Melissa A. Snow, *The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America's Prostituted Children*. Vancouver: Shared Hope International, 2009, 30.

⁵ *U.S. Mid-Term Review in the Commercial Exploitation of Children in America*, Shared Hope International, 2006, 10.

The term “Stockholm Syndrome” developed in 1973 when four bank employees, were held hostage for six days during a bank raid in Stockholm, Sweden. During their six days of captivity, the hostages developed an emotional bond with the hostage-takers. The hostages began to sympathize with the hostage-takers, and viewed the police as the enemy. As a result, the hostages attempted to protect the hostage-takers from the police.⁶

Similar to the Sweden bank hostages, many DMST victims are emotionally and/or physically held hostage, but they want to protect their trafficker from the police. Moreover, DMST victims are always sexually abused, and often physically, and emotionally abused. In addition, the trafficker frequently alternates love and/or care with violence, threats, and dehumanizing behavior.

Comparable to Stockholm Syndrome, trauma bonds are also psychological coping mechanisms that enable victims to survive. According to Dr. Patrick Carnes, an expert on trauma bonds, the victim may develop trauma bonds with the trafficker because of the dysfunctional, abusive relationship. A sex trafficked victim who is bonded with a trafficker has significant difficulty self-identifying as a victim, may return to their trafficker, and may protect the trafficker from law enforcement.⁷

Traffickers use Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs: physiological, safety-security, love, and belonging, and self-actualization to create trauma bonds. The trafficker seeks to satisfy a prospective sex trafficked victim’s needs. Then, threatens to take them away.

Research Questions

1. What are a minors vulnerability factors?
2. How did the trafficker manipulate the victim?
3. Did the victim bond with the trafficker?

Chapter Two

Introduction

In this chapter prior victim—trafficker relationship research will be reviewed. The traffickers’ use of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs to manipulate the victim and trauma bond research will be discussed.

Literature Review

A pyramid divided into five different levels often represents Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and each level addresses basic needs that all human beings have. The largest area—the bottom of the pyramid represents *physiological needs*: food and water. Many homeless youth have limited employment options: these children need food and shelter and use sex to survive. Homeless minors are individuals under the age of eighteen and lack parental, foster, or institutional care. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in the US Department of Justice’s 2002 study estimates American homeless and runaway youth at 1,682,900.⁸ According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, a third of runaways enter sex trafficking within 48 hours.⁹ A survey of 103 child sex trafficked victims completed by Clark County, Nevada Public Defenders Office-Juvenile Division, reported 13 years old as the average age a trafficked youth first ran away from home.¹⁰ The average runaway age of 13 coincides with the average sex trafficked minor age.

⁶ Fair Observer, “Stockholm Syndrome and Sex Trafficking: Why Don’t They Do Something?,” accessed March 2, 2014, <http://www.fairobserver.com/article/stockholm-syndrome-sex-trafficking-why-dont-they-do-something>.

⁷ Linda A. Smith, Samantha Healy Vardaman, and Melissa A. Snow, *The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America’s Prostituted Children*. Vancouver: Shared Hope International, 2009, 43.

⁸ National Coalition for the Homeless, “Factsheet,” accessed March 18, 2014, <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/youth.html>.

⁹ Robert Sanborn, Dawn Lew, Mandi Sheridan Kimball, Todd Latiolais, Kavita Desai, and Keveney Avila, eds. *The Texas Safe House Movement: An Examination of Restorative Shelter Core Components and Recommendations*, Children at Risk, 2010, 17.

¹⁰ Linda A. Smith, Samantha Healy Vardaman, and Melissa A. Snow, *The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America’s Prostituted Children*. Vancouver: Shared Hope International, 2009, 33.

In addition to runaways, foster care children are vulnerable to become sex trafficked victims. Foster care is supposed to be short-term care until the child is reunited with the biological family or is adopted by a loving family. However, many children are never reunited with their families or adopted. Currently, there are over 400,000 foster children in the United States.¹¹ In a San Francisco study of 149 DMST sex victims, 55 percent were foster care children from group homes, and 82 percent of those children ran away from their foster home multiple times.¹² Traffickers target group homes, and foster care homes because of the concentration of vulnerable youth.

The second level of the pyramid is the *safety and security need*. Frequently, the minor victim has established a relationship with the trafficker before becoming a victim. In this relationship, the minor feels safe and secure. Often, the trafficker pretends to be a boyfriend and develops an intimate relationship with the victim: this is referred to as the “lover-boy tactic.”¹³ Essentially, the victim feels secure with the older boyfriend and leaves her home. Then, the trafficker cuts off all communication with family and friends.

Although minors should feel safe and secure with their family, familial trafficking is a significant problem in the United States. According to a study in Las Vegas, Nevada, family members were responsible for sex trafficking approximately 30 percent of domestic minors.¹⁴

The third pyramid level is *loving/belonging need*: children usually have this need fulfilled by family and friends; however, most DMST victims are not having this need met. In order to fulfill this need, the trafficker offers love and strives to replace the child’s family. Often, the victim calls the trafficker “daddy,” is given a new name, and the victim is tattooed with the traffickers’ name.

The fourth pyramid level is the *esteem needs*—achievements and accomplished tasks usually fulfill the fourth level needs. An anonymous pimp explains how to apply Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs to manipulate a sex trafficked victim in R.J. Martin’s *Hos, Hookers, Call Girls, and Rent Boys*: he describes how a pimp can fulfill the fourth-level pyramid need:

Everybody wants to feel good about themselves and that is a hard thing for prostitutes to do. They need to feel respected—it is not as pressing need for food, water, warmth or love, but it is the kind of thing that can ruin a person’s life if they don’t get it. That is why so many sex workers are addicted to drugs. They feel bad about themselves so they shoot heroine to forget it. A lot of them were abused as children—most of them—and they have been feeling bad for a long time. You as a pimp, will understand the pathway that brought her into this life and you will show her understanding and sympathy.¹⁵

Self-actualization is the top pyramid level—the need to be all that you can be. This is the hardest level for the trafficker because the trafficker needs to provide a future for the victim—a way out. The trafficker explains that the work is temporary: she will be able to quit because there is an insurance settlement, money inheritance, or rapper career. Martin explains if the second and third levels needs are met while you are trying to find a way at the fifth level—the victim will be devoted. At this level, the trafficker is elevated and the victim will assist with expanding the traffickers business.¹⁶

What are Trauma Bonds?

A trauma bond is an intense emotional attachment that develops between the victim and trafficker. According to an expert on trauma bonds, Dr. Patrick Carnes, the victim develops trauma bonds as a survival mechanism during abusive or exploitive relationships.

¹¹ CAS Research and Education, “Factsheet,” accessed March 2, 2014, http://www.casre.org/our_children/fcht/.

¹² Ellen Wright Clayton, Richard D. Krugman, and Patti Simon, eds. *Confronting Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States*, Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, Washington D.C.: National Academies Press, 2013, 88.

¹³ Linda A. Smith, Samantha Healy Vardaman, and Melissa A. Snow, *The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America’s Prostituted Children*. Vancouver: Shared Hope International, 2009, 35.

¹⁴ Smith, 32.

¹⁵ David Henry Sterry, and R.J. Martin, Jr., eds. *Hos, Hookers, Call Girls, and Rent Boys: Professionals Writing on Life, Love, Money, and Sex*. (Berkley: Soft Skull West, 2009), 29.

¹⁶ Ibid, 30.

First, the victim develops a belief that they have chosen to be with their trafficker, and have chosen to be a prostitute. In other words, they fail to self-identify as a victim. This coping mechanism helps the victim feel in control.

Second, the victim becomes very loyal to their trafficker, and refuses to disclose information about trafficking experiences. In addition, the victim's loyalty to the trafficker may cause the victim to leave a safe environment and return to the trafficker. The victim's failure to self-identify as a victim and loyalty to the trafficker are major hurdles in the rescue and restoration process. Trauma bonds develop because of biological and psychological reasons.¹⁷

Biology of Trauma Bonds

A sex trafficked youth's neurological system is disrupted and does not return to a natural equilibrium state, which creates a constant state of arousal: violence and abuse causes this disruption. The two primary psychological states that a sex trafficked minor may experience are:

1. Hyper-arousal-Symptoms can include anger, panic and phobias, irritability, hyperactivity, frequent crying and temper tantrums, nightmares and night terrors, regressive behavior, increase in clinging behavior and running away.
2. Hypo-arousal-Responses can include daydreaming, inability to bond with others, inattention, forgetfulness, shyness. Physical symptoms can include: eyes widen, pale skin, complaints of being cold, flat affect.¹⁸

Psychology of Trauma Bonds

Prolonged trauma at an early age can have significant effects on psychological functioning above and beyond Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms. Domestic sex trafficked minors experience prolonged trauma at an early age and may experience Disorders of Extreme Stress Not Otherwise Specified (DESNOS), which creates more significant biological and cognitive impairments than PTSD, which include self-aggression, aggression with others, somatization, and dissociative symptoms.

DMST victims are often runaways or come from dysfunctional families, and the trafficker offers a replacement family. The trafficker often renames the child, brands them with a name or tattoo, and requires the child to call him daddy: this creates a loss of identity for the child. Often, the terms "brainwashed" or "programmed" are used to describe sex trafficked survivors. The trafficker uses verbal manipulation, drugs, alcohol, money, and physical violence to make the child emotionally dependent. The victim's emotional and financial dependency creates an environment where the victim is too scared to leave the trafficker, and develops an intense sense of belonging with the trafficker.¹⁹

Summary

This chapter reviews literature, which explains how traffickers use Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a tool to manipulate the victim. The trafficker's manipulation of the victim creates trauma bonds. Dr. Patrick Carnes who is a trauma bond experts' literature was reviewed.

Chapter Three

Introduction

In this chapter, the research process, the study participant questions, the data collection and analysis are explained. Study terms are also defined.

Methodology

Following the purpose of this study, information gathered was intended to understand a minor's sex trafficking vulnerability risk factors, how the trafficker manipulated the victim, and did the victim bond with the trafficker.

¹⁷ Linda A. Smith, Samantha Healy Vardaman, and Melissa A. Snow, *The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America's Prostituted Children*. Vancouver: Shared Hope International, 2009, 43.

¹⁸ Smith, 43.

¹⁹ Linda A. Smith, Samantha Healy Vardaman, and Melissa A. Snow, *The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America's Prostituted Children*. Vancouver: Shared Hope International, 2009, 44.

The target sample size was 25-30 participants. Although this was a small number, the goal was to collect accurate beneficial information for a qualitative not quantitative study. I aimed to obtain adult participants who self-identified as American citizens who were sex trafficked as minors. Data collection began with participants at Houston Recovery Campus' during Kathryn Griffin-Townsend's "We've Been There Done That" recovery program.

Data collection was based on a handed-out questionnaire with 40 questions. There were 36 multiple-choice questions and 4 fill in the blank questions. Cheryl Briggs who is a domestic minor sex trafficking survivor assisted with refining the survey question wording from a survivor's perspective. These questionnaires were created with the online program—Survey Monkey. Hand-written responses were inputted into survey monkey to record data, and analyze responses. Graphs were created in Word. I used Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and primary research questions to develop DMST Survey Questions (Appendix A), and the Minor Sex Trafficking survey questionnaire (see Appendix B).

Measurement of Variables

For the purpose of this research, the following terms will be defined as follows:

Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking (DMST): the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person who is a US citizen or lawful permanent resident who is under the age of 18 for the purpose of a commercial sex act. Coercion, force, or fraud does not need to be proven.

Stockholm Syndrome: a victim's psychological behavior which over-time becomes sympathetic to his/her captor(s).

Survival sex: when a person exchanges sex for something he/she perceives as necessary to survive, e.g., food, shelter, clothing. The person does not view this as prostitution but rather as a necessary measure to stay alive.

Trauma bond: a victim's unhealthy attachment to their trafficker.

Trauma informed care: treatment, which recognizes the role that trauma has played in the victims' life.

Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000: the first federal legal response to the trafficking of persons.

Victims: girls under 18 years old who are sex trafficked victims as defined by the TVPA.

Chapter Four

Introduction

The following results are based on twenty-nine adults who self-identified as victims of domestic minor sex trafficking and answered a Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Questionnaire (Appendix B). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was used as a model to create the questions in the questionnaire (Appendix A). All questionnaires were anonymous to protect the victims' confidentiality. The following were the research questions: 1) What are a minors vulnerability factors? 2) How did the trafficker manipulate the victim? 3) Did the victim bond with the trafficker?

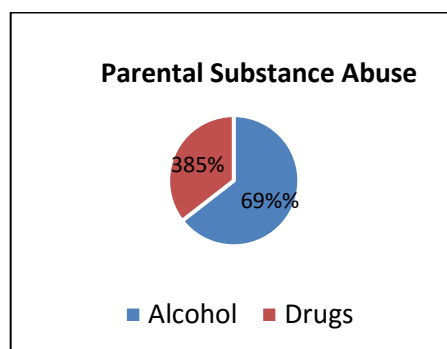
The results were inputted into Survey Monkey. Participant responses were analyzed to identify similarities and differences. The charts were created in Word. The results are as follows:

Research Results

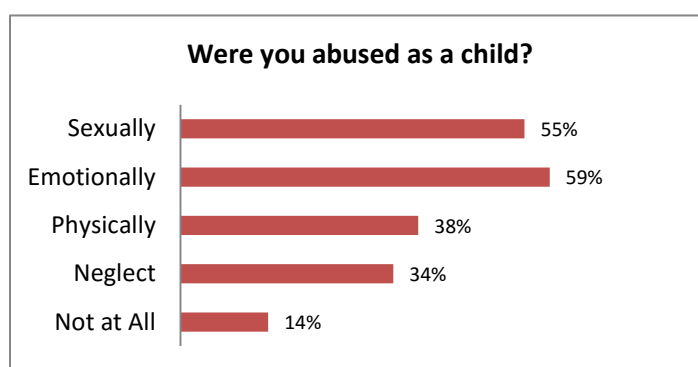
Respondent's ages ranged from 22-57. The respondents' average age was 30, and the average age entered into sex trafficking was 13. The respondents' sex trafficking time averaged six years. The majority of respondents described their parents' average annual income as middle-class (barely making ends meet).

What are a minors vulnerability factors?

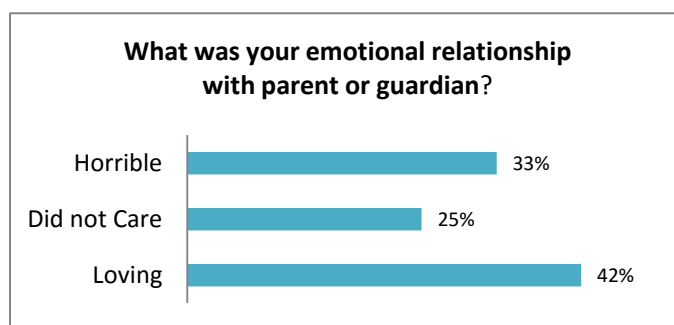
Children who are raised in an unhealthy environment, may perceive abuse as normal. An identified vulnerability risk factor was parental substance abuse: 69% abused alcohol, and 38% abused drugs. Only 20% of the parents did not abuse alcohol or drugs.



In addition to parental substance abuse, childhood abuse was reported by 86% of respondents. The following graph reported specific parental abuse experienced as children:

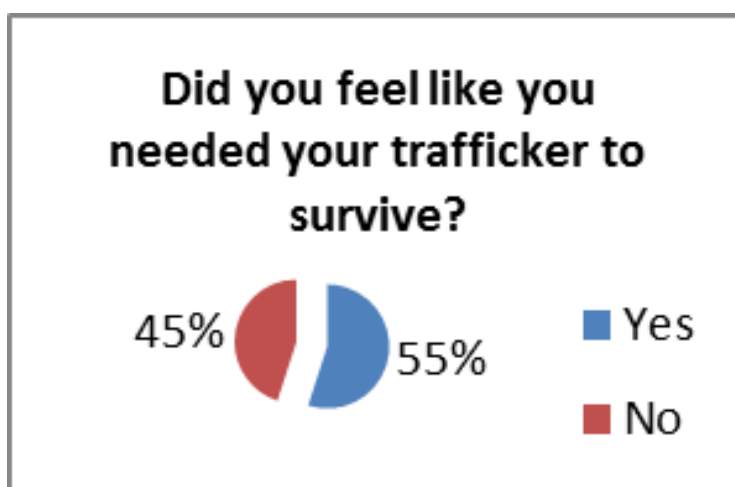
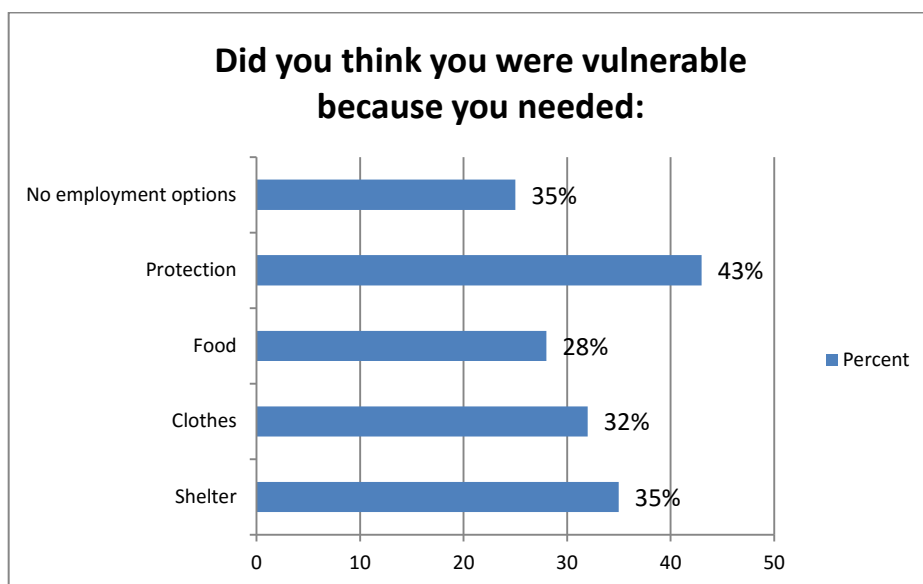


The dysfunctional emotional relationship with the parent may also be a vulnerability risk- 58% reported that their parents' relationship was horrible, or they did not care about them.

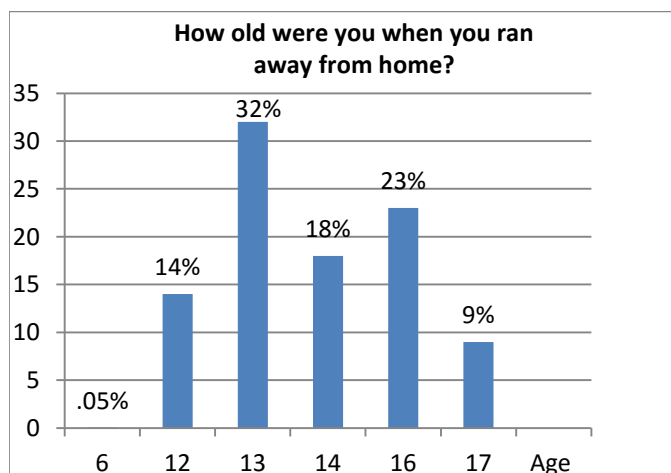
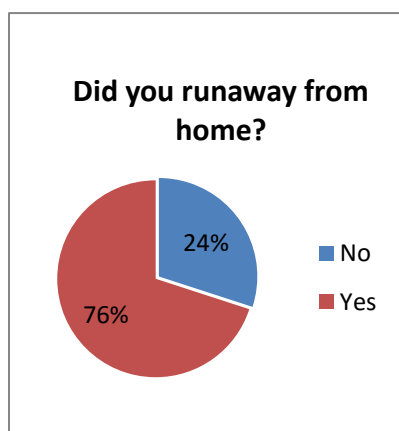


How did the trafficker manipulate the victim?

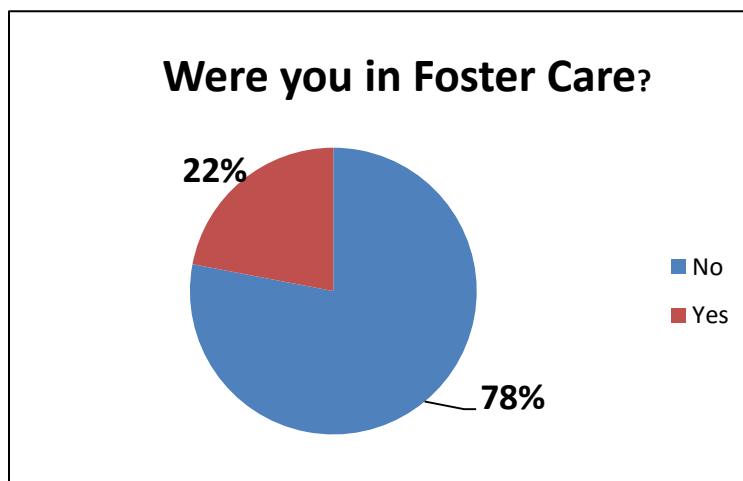
According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the first need is *physiological—the need for food and shelter*: sex trafficked respondents reported that food and shelter combined were 63% of sex trafficking vulnerability factors. The trafficker provides shelter and food and fulfills this need; therefore, homeless youth are easy sex trafficking targets. In addition, 55% of respondents felt they needed the trafficker to survive.



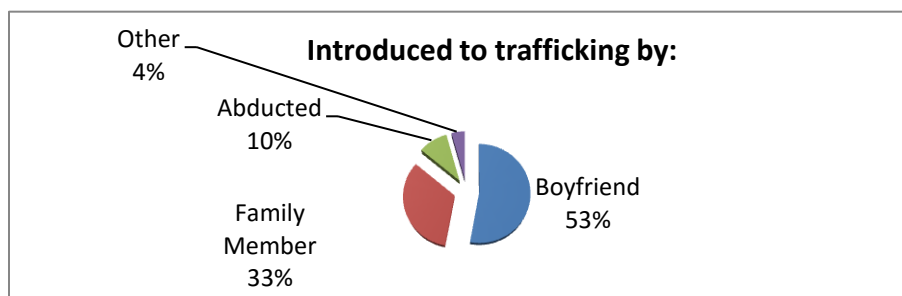
Over 76% sex trafficked respondents ran away from home. According to Shared Hope International, the average age an American child is sex trafficked is 12-13, which coincides with this study. In this study, 64% of the runaways ran away between 12-14 years old and the average age entered into sex trafficking was 13.



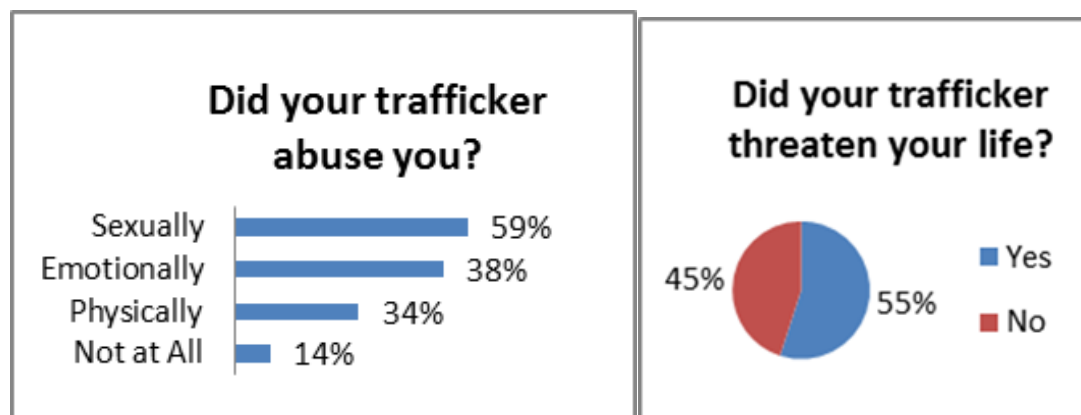
Traffickers target foster care group homes, and children in foster homes because they are minors who are seeking safety, and security. 22% of the respondents were in foster care when they became sex trafficked victims. Runaway and foster children have similar vulnerability risk factors, which make them easy sex trafficking prey.



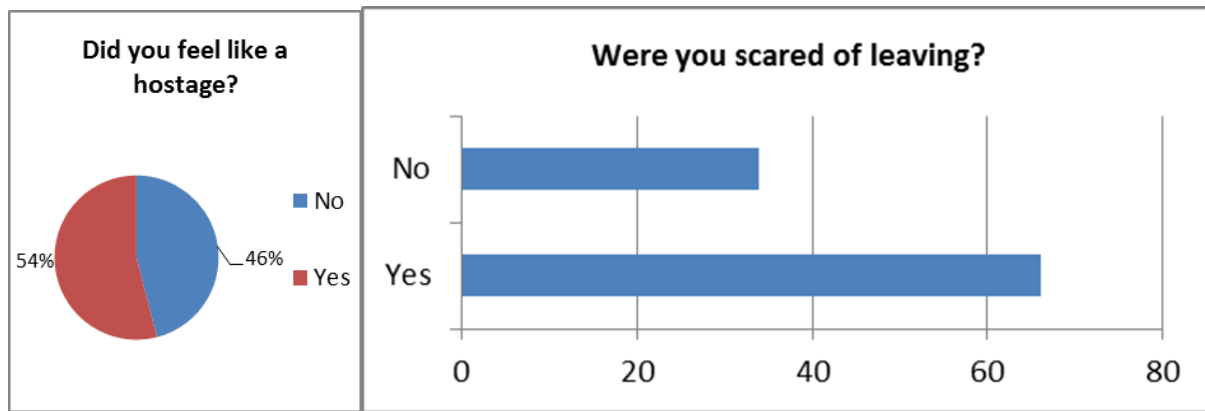
The second pyramid level is the *safety and security need*. All children seek to have this need fulfilled, and many youth are seeking someone they trust. In this study, over 86% of minors were trafficked by someone they knew, a boyfriend or family member. The victim felt safe and secure with the trafficker prior to entering trafficking.



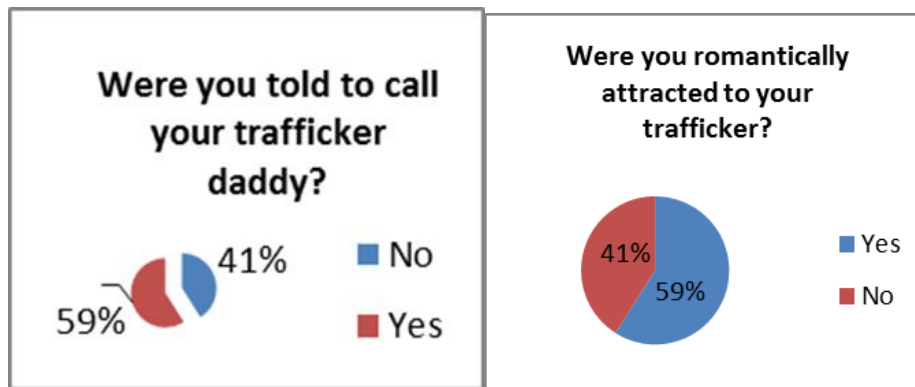
The victim's relationship with the boyfriend or family member changes when they become a trafficking victim. 86% of respondents reported sexual, emotional or physical abuse by their trafficker. The trafficker alternates love with abuse and creates a constant state of safety and security confusion for the victim. 55% of respondents reported that their life was threatened.



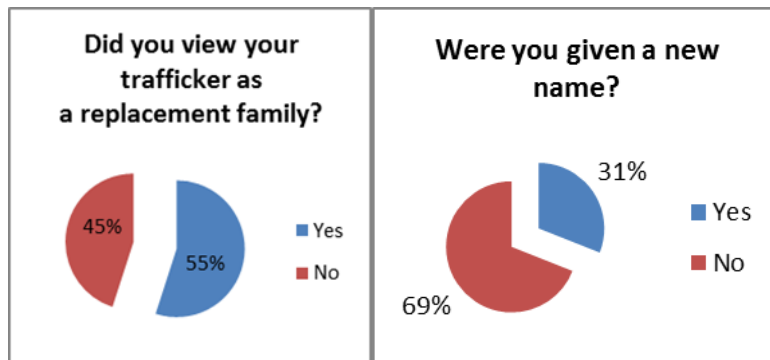
54% of the victims felt like a hostage, and over 60% were scared of leaving.



The third pyramid level is the *loving/belonging need*: a child's family and friends usually fulfill this need. However, most sex trafficked American children are not having this need met, and the traffickers offer to fulfill this need is powerful. DMST victims are looking for love or a replacement family. The majority of victims were romantically attracted to their trafficker. Sex trafficking offers a perverse reflection of the family unit. Over 59% were told to call their trafficker "daddy" and 59% were romantically attracted to their trafficker.



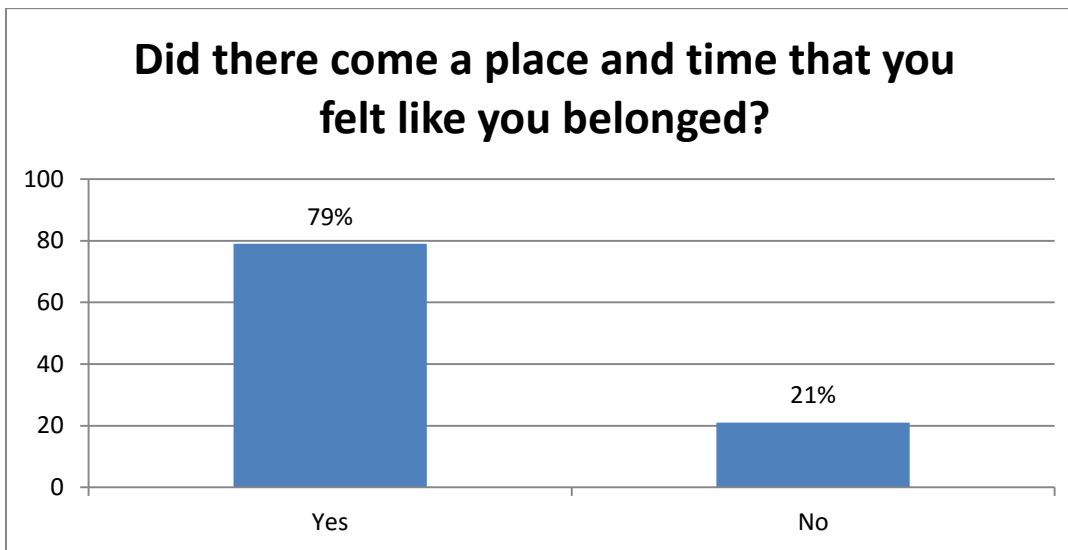
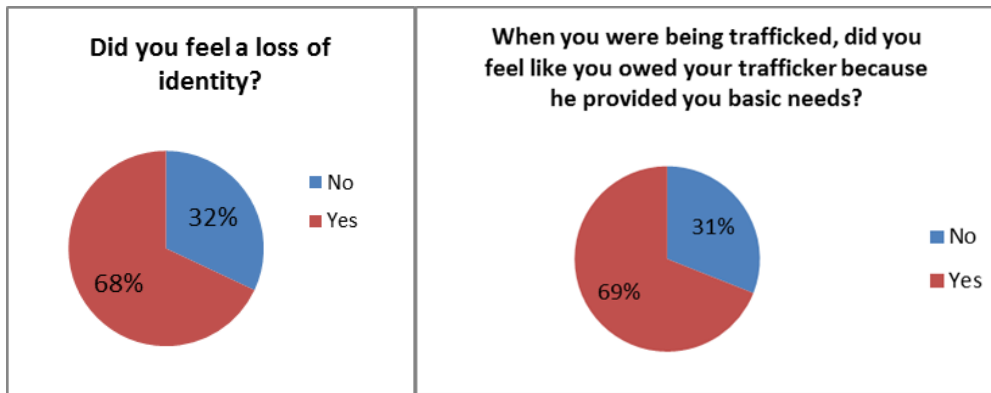
55% viewed their trafficker as a replacement family, and 31% of victims were given a new name.



The fourth pyramid level is *self-esteem needs*—achievements and accomplished tasks fulfill this need. Many teenagers are seeking to have self-esteem needs satisfied: the trafficker fulfills this need with love, clothing, jewelry, flattery, drugs, and alcohol. The trafficker uses love to attract the child and abuse to manipulate the child. 78% of respondents admitted to abusing alcohol or drugs: the drugs included marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy, crack, methamphetamines, and heroine. Four did not answer the question, and three replied N/A.

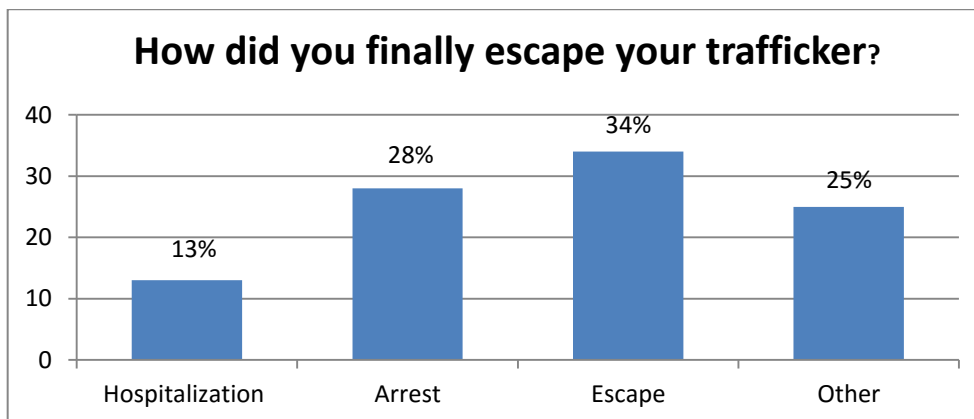
Did the victim bond with the trafficker?

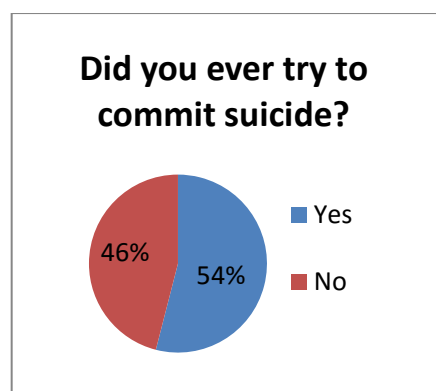
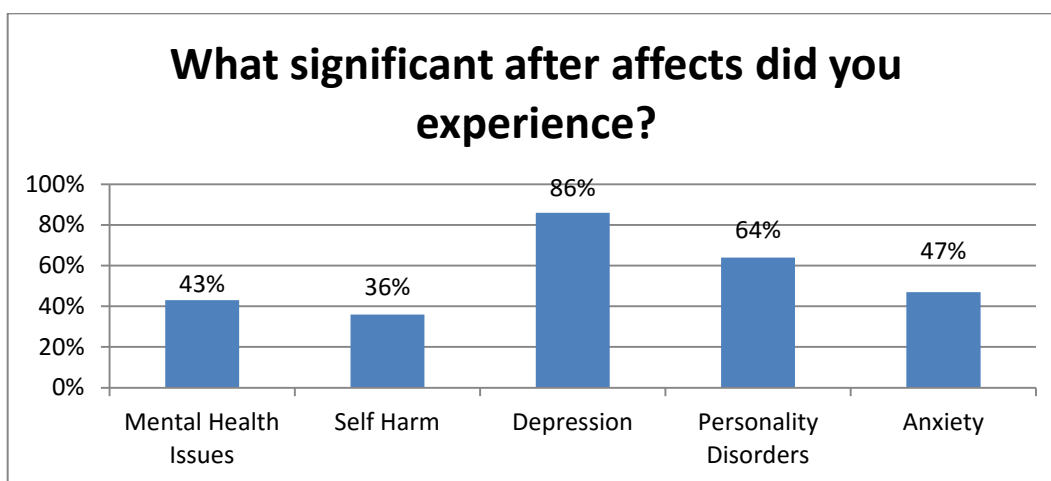
The fifth pyramid level is the self-actualization need, which meets inner potential needs: the trafficker often offers identity, money, and sense of belonging to fulfill this need. Over 68% of DMST victims felt a loss of identity, 69% felt they owed the trafficker because he provided basic needs, and 79% felt like they belonged.



Exiting & Post-trafficking

According to respondents, 34% escaped their traffickers, 28% were arrested, and 13% were hospitalized. All respondents reported after-affects from trafficking: 86% reported depression, and 64% reported personality disorders, and 54% had tried to commit suicide at least once.





Conclusion

American slavery still exists—annually over 100,000 children are bought, and sold against their will, and forced to have sex. American modern day slavery is Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking. Most DMST victims experience extreme trauma, which includes emotional, physical and sexual abuse. Trauma effects on children and adolescents are extremely profound, and the average age that a trafficker recruits a girl into sexual exploitation is 12-14 years old.

Previous trauma research focused on Stockholm's Syndrome, a psychological response where hostages become attached to their captor and later come to their defense. Similarly, Dr. Patrick Carnes who is recognized as a trauma bond expert focus has been traumatic bonding—an intense emotional attachment that the victim develops during abusive or exploitive relationships. Many sex trafficked American children develop a bond to their trafficker, which occurs while they are being emotionally, physically, and sexually abused. The bond the victim develops with the trafficker affects DMST survivors physically, psychologically, and cognitively, and these effects create many obstacles to providing post-trafficking psychological services.

In order to improve post-trafficking victim care, the victim—trafficker relationship needs to be studied from the victim's perspective. The DMST victim—trafficker relationship is difficult to study. There are three primary reasons that few studies have been conducted on this topic 1) DMST is a new topic 2) most victims associate sex trafficking with shame, guilt, and trauma; therefore, they do not freely disclose their sex trafficking history 3) there are few circumstances where sex trafficked minors gather in groups, which limits the opportunity to question victims.

This study provided information about minor sex trafficking vulnerability risk factors and the victim—trafficker relationship. I used Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Appendix A) to create the questionnaires and identify how the trafficker manipulates a prospective sex trafficked victim using basic needs: physiological, safety-security, love, and belonging.

Twenty-nine adult sex trafficking victims who were trafficked as minors answered a Domestic Sex Trafficked Minor Questionnaire (Appendix B), which I created. These respondents were victims who were attending Kathryn Griffin-Townsend's "We've Been There Done That" program located at Houston Recovery Campus in Houston's Fifth Ward. The following were the primary research questions: 1) What are a minors vulnerability factors? 2) How did the trafficker manipulate the victim? 3) Did the victim bond with the trafficker? I have provided the results of this study in a Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Chart (Appendix C).

What are a minors vulnerability factors?

Many of the sex trafficking vulnerability factors found in this study coincide with national studies. For example, the average age entered into trafficking in this study was 13, the majority of the sex trafficked minors' parents abused alcohol, or drugs, and the majority of these victims were abused as children.

Although 76% of the victims ran away from home, 42% of the victims reported their emotional relationship with their parent or guardian as loving. However, 53% of the victims were introduced to trafficking by a boyfriend, which may explain why some victims ran away from loving families. Even though 42% reported the relationship with the parent as loving, 86% of the respondents were abused in the home. In other words, even though the overwhelming majority of these victims were abused many still reported their relationship with their parent as loving. I believe the parent's love alternated with abuse causes a dysfunctional relationship for the child and the child may develop a trauma bond with the parent: the child may perceive this dysfunctional relationship as normal, which may predispose a child to becoming a sex trafficked victim.

How did the trafficker manipulate the victim?

Because the average age of entry was 13 for these victims, they were not able to obtain legal employment. These victims were not able to legally, financially provide food or shelter; therefore, these victims used sex to survive. The majority of the victims were romantically attracted to their trafficker, and abused by their trafficker. The trafficker alternates love and abuse to manipulate the victim. Because of this manipulation, the majority of the victims in this study were scared to leave the abusive relationship. The trafficker also attempts to create a replacement family for the victim, and the majority of victims referred to their trafficker as "daddy." Additionally, the trafficker uses drugs and alcohol to manipulate the victim.

Did the victim bond with the trafficker?

The majority of the victims felt a loss of identity, felt that they owed their trafficker because he provided their basic needs, and felt that they belonged with the trafficker: these are all indications that the majority of the victims in this study experienced traumatic bonding with the trafficker, which is a dysfunctional attachment. This dysfunctional attachment caused all of the victims to experience significant psychological after effects: the majority tried to commit suicide, and many attempted to commit suicide multiple times. Domestic minors' sex trafficked victims' traumatic bond with the trafficker is not completely understood and more research is needed.

Prevention Recommendations

Two fill-in the blank questions were asked on the questionnaire concerning prevention. Question 39 was, "What advice would you give a minor child to help them from becoming a victim?" Some of the victims suggestions were as follows: trust no one, do not date older men, tell someone, stay away from grown men, call the police, stay connected to church, and be careful who you hang out with. Question 40 was, "What advice would you give parents to help protect their children from becoming trafficked victims?" Some of the victims suggestions were as follows: watch your children, stay involved with your children, know where they are, give them the love that they need, pay attention, show them love so they will trust you, do not let them have older men friends, believe your children, talk to them, monitor their internet, and do not trust relatives.

I believe that the victims in this study offered important domestic minor sex trafficking prevention suggestions. In addition to their suggestions, I feel strongly that there should be a Public Service Announcement campaign for DMST, which would warn children about sex trafficking: this program would be similar to Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) or Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). The program could be entitled Parents Against Sex Trafficking (PAST). At this time, Shared Hope International offers "Chosen—Youth Sex Trafficking Prevention Kit," which consists of a DVD, discussion questions, power point presentations, trafficking terminology guide, suggested resources, leaders guide, and action ideas. The information in this "Chosen" package is intended for middle school and high school: this should be used to increase sex trafficking prevention strategies in public schools.

In addition, I would like to see an elementary school-aged sex trafficking prevention DVD created. Because twelve to thirteen years old is the average sex trafficking age, children need to be educated on this topic, prior to this age. I believe educating elementary school-aged children would be an important awareness and prevention strategy.

Additionally, I believe that parents should have tracking services on their children's cell phones. Not only would these services provide information for the parent if the child was missing, but these services may also assist the parent with notifying the child's location if the child is not being honest about their location, which may increase the parents awareness if the child is socializing with a potentially dangerous person. I also believe parents should carefully monitor their children's computers, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts. I realize some parents might find these suggestions extreme or invasive. However, after personally speaking to these victims, I realize that any child is vulnerable to sex trafficking. Many parents believe that it cannot happen to their child, but the reality is that this can happen to any child. Children need to be protected, and parents' need to protect their children.

Concluding Remarks

I have been volunteering to help with sex trafficked minors for almost two years. Not only has this experience been rewarding but it has also been emotionally draining. The horrific accounts of abuse are repulsive. I am disgusted that over 100,000 children are sex trafficked annually in this country. Sadly, the majority of sex trafficked children are lured into sex trafficking when they are only 13 years old, and trafficked by adults who they trust: boyfriends or family members. I have talked with and worked with rescued teenage victims, and adults who were victims as children, and from what I have seen, all victims are scarred: emotionally and physically. I have included many charts, and percentages to help understand how the trafficker manipulates the victim and creates trauma bonds, but behind each one of these percentages is a real child who was a real victim. For this reason, I have included two personal accounts of victims stories (Appendix D & E).

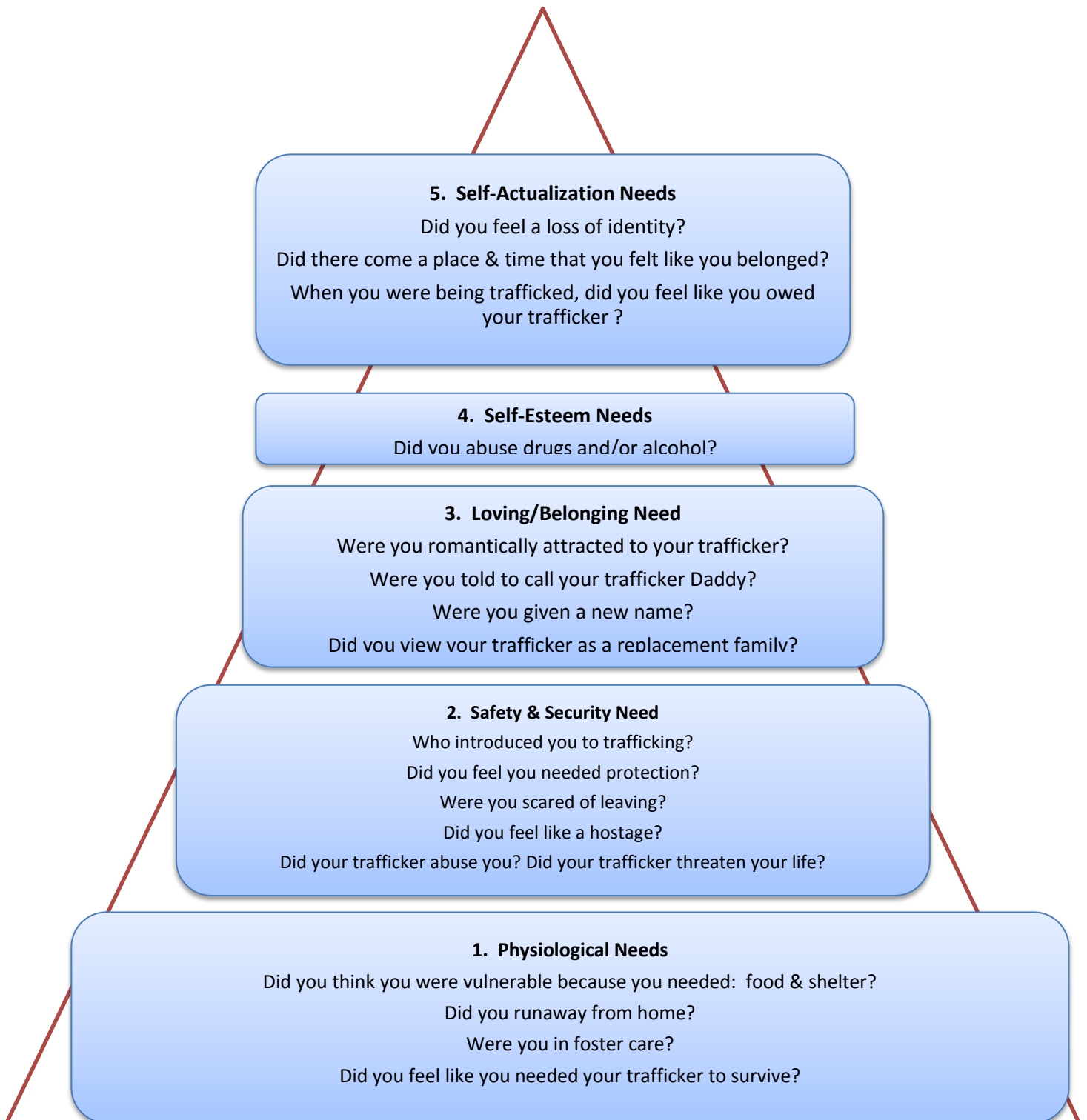
The majority of these children have experienced traumatic bonding with their traffickers, and these victims need trauma-informed psychological care to help them with post-trafficking recovery: this trauma-informed care should be provided in a safe house for rescued minors. However, because there are few safe houses, most sex trafficked victims are placed in Juvenile Detention Centers, which do not provide the trauma-informed care victims need. These children should be treated as victims—not criminals, and provided post-trafficking trauma-informed care. Additional research victim–trafficker relationship studies should be conducted from victim responses to understand post-trafficking recovery needs.

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APPENDIX A

DMST VICTIM SURVEY RESPONSES



APPENDIX B. Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Survey

1. How old are you?

2. How old were you when you were trafficked as a minor?

3. How many years were you trafficked?

4. Did your parents abuse:

- ☐ **Drugs**
- ☐ **Alcohol**
- ☐ **None**

5. Were you abused as a child?

- ☐ **Sexually**
- ☐ **Emotionally**
- ☐ **Physically**
- ☐ **Neglect**
- ☐ **Not at all**
- ☐ **Other (please specify)**

6. Were you in Foster care as a child?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**

7. How would you describe your parents annual income?

- ☐ **Homeless**
- ☐ **Poverty-struggling for food**
- ☐ **Poor-barely making ends meet**
- ☐ **Middle-Class making basic needs met**
- ☐ **Above Middle-Class Basic Needs plus wants**
- ☐ **Wealthy-Unlimited Resources**

8. Did you see other victims being trafficked?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**
- ☐ **If yes, what was the average age?**

9. How would you describe your emotional relationship with your parent(s) or guardian?

- ☐ **Loving**
- ☐ **Did not care**
- ☐ **Horrible**

10. Did you run away from home?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**

11. If you ran away from home, how old were you?

- ☐ **10**
- ☐ **11**
- ☐ **12**
- ☐ **13**
- ☐ **14**
- ☐ **15**
- ☐ **16**
- ☐ **17**
- ☐ **Other (please specify)**

12. How did you become a victim of human trafficking?

- ☐ **Boyfriend**
- ☐ **Family member**
- ☐ **Internet**
- ☐ **Abducted/Stranger**
- ☐ **Other (please specify)**

13. While you were being trafficked, did you encounter other trafficking victims?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**
- ☐ **If so, how old do you think they were?**

14. Did you think you were vulnerable because you needed:

- ☐ **Shelter**
- ☐ **Clothes**
- ☐ **Food**
- ☐ **Protection**
- ☐ **No employment options**
- ☐ **Other (please specify)**

15. Did your trafficker(s) abuse you?

- ☐ **Physically**
- ☐ **Psychologically**
- ☐ **Emotionally**
- ☐ **Sexually**
- ☐ **Not at all**

16. Were you scared of leaving?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**

17. Did your trafficker threaten your life?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**

18. Were you romantically attracted to your trafficker?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**

19. If you were not romantically involved with your trafficker, did you feel bonded to him or her?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**

20. Did you feel like you needed your trafficker to survive?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**

21. Did you feel there came a place and time when you were trafficked that you felt like you belonged?

- ☐ **No**
- ☐ **Yes**

22. When you were being trafficked, did you feel like you owed your trafficker because he provided you basic needs?

- ☐ **No**
- ☐ **Yes**

23. Did your trafficker threaten your family?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**

24. Did you feel like a hostage?

- ☐ **No**
- ☐ **Yes**

25. Did you view your trafficker as a replacement family?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**

26. Were you told to call your trafficker "daddy"?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**

27. Did you feel a loss of identity?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**

28. Were you given a new name?

- ☐ **No**
- ☐ **Yes**

29. Were you branded or tattooed by your traffickers?

- ☐ **No**
- ☐ **Yes**

30. In the beginning, did you feel that you needed to protect your trafficker from law enforcement?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**

31. Were you forced to use drugs?

- ☐ **No**
- ☐ **Yes**

32. While in trafficking, did you use drugs? If yes, what type?

- ☐ **Marijuana**
- ☐ **Cocaine**
- ☐ **Ecstasy**
- ☐ **Crack**
- ☐ **Alcohol**
- ☐ **Methamphetamines**
- ☐ **Heroin**
- ☐ **Please list others,**

33. Did you ever try to commit suicide?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**
- ☐ **If yes, how many times?**

34. How did you finally escape your trafficker?

- ☐ **Arrest**
- ☐ **Hospitalization**
- ☐ **Other (please specify)**

35. Did you feel connected to your trafficker after you left?

- ☐ **No**
- ☐ **Yes**

36. When you left your trafficker, did you go back to him?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**
- ☐ **If yes, Why?**

37. What significant after affects did you experience?

- ☐ **Mental health issues**
- ☐ **Self harm -Depression**
- ☐ **Anxiety**
- ☐ **Personality Disorders**
- ☐ **Other (please specify)**

38. When you were a child, who did you live with?

- ☐ **Mom**
- ☐ **Dad**
- ☐ **Mom & Dad**
- ☐ **Grandparent(s) Other (please specify)**

39. What advice would you give a minor child to help them from becoming a victim?

40. What advice would you give parents to help protect their children from becoming trafficked victims?

APPENDIX C

DMST VICTIM SURVEY RESPONSES

