

INTERSECTIONS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEX TRAFFICKING

Research Overview: Community Roundtable Presentation 2018

Research Questions

What are the intersections of sexual violence, domestic violence (both intimate partner and family) with sex trafficking?

How are these issues related to sex trafficking?

What are potential opportunities for primary prevention?

Research Methods

- Secondary data analysis of key stakeholder interviews (N=176) from two recent UROC projects (Mapping the Market and Mapping the Demand); data collected 2013-2016
- Interviewees were systems professionals such as victim advocates, youth workers, health professionals, law enforcement, prosecutors, and more.
- Thematic analysis using NVivo software with a grounded theory approach
- Limitations: not a prevalence study; not quantifiable; more data on youth and metro area

Findings

The findings presented here explore the intersections of sex trafficking with other forms of crimes against people: namely, sexual violence and domestic violence (including intimate partners and families). We know that trafficking is broader than just these intersections, as traffickers also include employers, acquaintances, peers, and more. In addition, people involved in selling/trading sex who are not trafficked also experience these and other harms. These findings help to elucidate some gaps in our understanding about how trafficking is interconnected with other forms of trauma. This information may impact identification of trafficking, as well as serving the needs of survivors. Finally, we hope that this information can spur collaboration and coalition-building across sectors to address primary prevention.

Primary Prevention: The Three Siblings Story

A prevention parable tells the story of three siblings who were taking a walk along a river. As they turned a corner, they saw people drowning in the river. One sibling rushed into the water and started bringing people one by one to shore. The second sibling jumped into the river and coached a group of individuals on how to keep afloat. The third sibling ran upstream to see why so many people were falling into the river. The third sibling saw a broken bridge and a dangerous river crossing. This sibling worked to repair the bridge to stop people from falling in.

We need all three siblings. If we only respond to emergencies, we never address the root causes of the problem. If we only address the root causes, we are missing the emergencies that are currently happening. All the siblings must work together, simultaneously. This applies to our work in addressing sexual violence, domestic violence, and sex trafficking.



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Survival Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking

We found three themes related to the contexts and circumstances surrounding survival sex:

- 1) Trading sex in acute crisis
- 2) Selling sex as supplemental income
- 3) Children exploited in survival sex situation (also see “Family-based trafficking”)

Survival sex trading is trading sex for basic needs, such as rent, food, and a place to sleep.

The CDC defines “economic coercion” (i.e. bartering of goods, shelter, or basic needs for sexual activity) as a tactic for perpetrating sexual violence.

Data suggests that **survival sex is a precursor to and risk factor for becoming trafficked for sex**. We found that this may be due to internalization or normalization of trauma related to trading sex to survive, the environmental proximity to traffickers and sex buyers seeking to recruit these individuals, and a combination of the two. **Poverty is the bedrock for survival sex trading. It is important to recognize that for some survival sex trading may be a survival tactic and a source of resilience. What are upstream solutions to preventing survival sex?**

Intimate Partner Trafficking

Past research has pointed to the role of “boyfriends” as “pimps” and traffickers. Yet there is still little known about the intersections of intimate partner violence and sex trafficking. This research looked at stakeholders’ descriptions of the relationships between traffickers and victims. We found that stakeholders frequently worked with victims who did not identify the person exploiting them as a trafficker or “pimp;” rather, a boyfriend, significant other, spouse, or dating partner. We found two different trajectories for these intimate-partner trafficking situations:

- 1) Intimacy used for purposes of trafficking: data strongly suggests this is common with minors and youth.
- 2) Trafficking used as a means of profiteering and control in abusive intimate partnerships

In addition, our data found that **coercive control** is a major control tactic in intimate partner trafficking. This includes monitoring and control of social media, personal documents, finances, number of sexual partners and reproduction, and more. **Our data suggests that intimate partner trafficking may constitute a large majority of all sex trafficking cases. What are upstream solutions that build off the successes of the domestic violence movement that we can apply to trafficking?**

Family-based Trafficking

Family-based trafficking may be the least understood type of sex trafficking. We define “family-based trafficking” as a trafficking situation where the traffickers are family members to the victim. Stakeholders most commonly described these situations as occurring between parents and children, or close extended family (e.g. uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents). We identified three themes related to family-based trafficking:

- 1) **Children exploited in survival circumstances:** families living in poverty, faced with dire circumstances, struggling with drug addictions
- 2) **Commercial sex as part of the “family business”:** parents are involved in selling sex and children are groomed into the business – “pimps” are groomed as well
- 3) **Intergenerational trauma and normalization:** exposure to selling sex at a young age, normalized; or part of family’s narrative “this is what we do.”

Family-based trafficking actively disrupts a youth’s most basic support network: the family. How can we move upstream to better support families and young people?

Urban Research and Outreach Engagement Center (UROC) and Minnesota Department of Health’s Sexual Violence Prevention Program