Lessons learned in gathering information from sexually exploited youth

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Assessing exploitation experiences of girls and boys seen at a Child Advocacy Center

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The primary aim of this study was to describe the abuse experiences of sexually exploited runaway adolescents seen at a Child Advocacy Center (N = 62). We also sought to identify risk behaviors, attributes of resiliency, laboratory results for sexually transmitted infection (STI) screens, and genital injuries from colposcopic exams. We used retrospective mixed-methods with in-depth forensic interviews, together with self-report survey responses, physical exams and chart data. Forensic interviews were analyzed using interpretive description analytical methods along domains of experience and meaning of sexual exploitation events. Univariate descriptive statistics characterized trauma responses and health risks. The first sexual exploitation events for many victims occurred as part of seemingly random encounters with procurers. Older adolescent or adult women recruited some youth working for a pimp. However, half the youth did not report a trafficker involved in setting up their exchange of sex for money, substances, or other types of consideration. 78% scored positive on the UCLA PTSD tool; 57% reported DSM IV criteria for problem substance use; 71% reported cutting behaviors, 75% suicidal ideation, and 50% had attempted suicide. Contrary to common depictions, youth may be solicited relatively quickly as runaways, yet exploitation is not always linked to having a pimp. Avoidant coping does not appear effective, as most patients exhibited significant symptoms of trauma. Awareness of variations in youth’s sexual exploitation experiences may help researchers and clinicians understand potential differences in sequelae, design effective treatment plans, and develop community prevention programs.

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“Assessing exploitation experiences of girls and boys seen at a Child Advocacy Center”

• Primary aim – Describe the abuse experiences of sexually exploited runaway adolescents seen at a CAC (n=62).

• Purpose:
  • Identify risk behaviors
  • Identify attributes of resiliency
  • Assess health through STI screening and genital exams
  • Evaluate the usefulness of traditional forensic interview questions in this population

• Type – mixed methods retrospective review
  • In-depth forensic interviews
  • Physical exam findings
  • Chart data
  • Self report survey responses
Midwest Children’s Resource Center

- Provide comprehensive health assessments and psychological assessments
- 1,100 children each year
- 1st Hospital Based Child Advocacy Center
- Other program efforts
  - Runaway Intervention Program
  - First Steps Program
  - Midwest Regional Child Advocacy Center
Child Sexual Exploitation

True or False?

• Average age at onset = 13 years
• MN has been a leader in responding
• Is a bad thing but doesn’t happen much in MN
• Is a new trend starting maybe 10 years ago
• Average amount of time in “the life” is 18 – 24 months
• Youth can easily fit into already existing protocols for responding to sexual abuse/sexual assault
• Easy to identify as youth are already missing school, living on the streets, come from poverty stricken homes and are system kids
Costs associated with sex trafficking
Study population

• Teens who were referred for a *High Risk Teen Assessment* at MCRC
  – Self assessment questionnaires (health behaviors, risk behaviors, relationship scales, and measures of trauma and substance use).
  – Reviewed transcripts from digitally recorded forensic interview
  – Reviewed chart data from *Comprehensive Health Assessment* completed by specially trained Providers.

• Inclusion criteria:
  – Seen at MCRC for High Risk Teen Assessment between 2006 – 2013 (n=62)
  – Ages = 12-17 years old

• Analysis
  – Mixed-methods design
  – Used Interpretive Description analytical method. Allows for triangulation of data in qualitative research studies.
Definitions

Sexual Exploitation - the exchange of sex for some type of consideration, including but not limited to: money, housing, food, clothes, transportation or a mobile phone.
Sections from Comprehensive Health Assessment for Today’s discussion

- Self assessment
  - Findings from self assessment questionnaires

- Forensic interview

- Physical exam findings

- Recommendations
SELF ASSESSMENT
Results

• Youth demographics:
  – More female (55) than males (7). Males older.
  – More than half lived at home with at least one parent but nearly 1/3 reported being homeless.
  – 1 in 4 reported living with a pimp
  – 3 youth (1.7%) were incarcerated for a reason other than sexual exploitation.
Medical Chart Data

• Exams – 86% females and 57% males
  • No acute injuries (4 had exam within 72 hours)
  • 20% hymenal transection

• Sexual partners
  • Both genders – males 100%, 44% females

• Sexually transmitted infections
  • 37% positive for Chlamydia trachomatis (29% males, 39% females)
  • 1 male tested HIV - positive
More Medical Chart Data

• Emotional health
  • Many reported self harm in past year
    – Girls (74%) more than boys (57%)
  • Suicidal ideation rates high
    – 71% boys, 76% girls
  • About half had a suicide attempt in past year
  • Met DSM IV criteria for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (78%)
    – Males = 100%
    – Females = 76%
  • Met DSM IV criteria for Problem Substance Use
    – Males = 100%
    – Females = 46%
• Self reported running away in past year
  – Males = 86% with 57% more than 10 times
  – Females = 89% with 21% more than 10 times
FORENSIC INTERVIEW
Questions by areas typically covered during a Forensic Interview

Introduction of the topic

– *Tell me about what happened that very first day.*
– *Tell me about the first time that happened. Were you given any instructions? How did you know what to do?*
– *How long have you been away from home? What made you leave?*
– *How were you found?*
More questions

Elicit a free narrative

- How did it start? AND How did it stop?
- What was he/she like when you first met him/her?
- What does he know about you?
  • What do you know about him?
    - Is he married...have children...where lives...kind of job?
- Did you ever have to do anything against your will?
- Did anyone take pictures of you?
  • What were they used for? Do you know where they are now?
- Has anyone ever offered or wanted to post an ad for you? If yes, where posted? Phone numbers used? What did ad say? Who was contacted?
Elicit a free narrative continued...

- Tell me when you realized that it was something different than what you thought.
- Was there anything that happened to you that was physically violent?
- Did you witness any physical violence?
- Where were you when this happened?
  - What was the hotel/house/car/building like?
- How did you feel when you were brought to a hotel?
- What was the scariest thing that happened to you while you were gone?
More questions

Question and clarify

– Did you notice anything about your body?
– Did you notice anything when you went to the bathroom the next time?
– Did he ever want you to do something with his friends?
– What was the weirdest thing someone has asked you to do or asked to do to you?
– How do you keep track of them?
– Did you ever have to have sex with more than one person at a time? Anytime you had to watch or were watched?
– How did you decide how much to charge?
Final questions

Closing
– What do you want to do from here?

Other considerations regarding questions
– How did that make you feel?
– When teens ask, “Why do you need to know that?”
WHAT WE LEARNED DURING THE FORENSIC INTERVIEW...
Experiences

• Types:
  – Exploitation often started after running away
  – Experiences escalated into three main types of exploitation
    • “Small” transactions – faceless, nameless purchasers
    • Exploitation by pimp/trafficker
    • Self-managed without a pimp
Recruitment

- Older teens (usually girls)
- Family members
- Older men...and sometimes a female partner

- Male pimps with direct contact with youth during recruitment were considered... *boyfriends*.

- These victims identified what their family members did as wrong; it was described as unwanted, and the recruitment and resulting exploitation was an unanticipated, startling event.
Exploitation without a pimp/trafficker

- Seven girls and six of the seven boys viewed their experience as beneficial.
- Used Internet sites (Back Pages, Craigslist, Facebook or Live Links).
- “Fast and easy way to make money.”
- A charismatic girl described herself as “good at this”.
- Saw contact as consensual and that it was a choice.
One girl without a pimp stated

“Don’t make this so bad. It is what I want to do. No one is forcing me. I work for myself. This means I am smart. You can arrest me today but I am just going to do this again. I don’t want your pity or your help.”

Another girl stated

“I can make $2,000 a day. This is more money than my mom makes in a week.”
Characteristics between those with and without a pimp/trafficker

• Youth with a pimp were 6 times more likely to report suicidal thoughts in the past year. (93%)

• Youth with a pimp had much lower rates of self-harming behaviors. (53% with vs 79% without)

• Youth with a pimp had lower rates of problem substance use. (25% with vs 65% without)

• Truancy and running away from home similar.
Adverse Childhood Experiences

- **Childhood abuse**
  - Emotional
  - Physical
  - Sexual

- **Neglect**
  - Emotional
  - Physical

- **Growing up in a seriously dysfunctional household as evidenced by:**
  - Witnessing domestic violence
  - Alcohol or other substance abuse in the home
  - Mentally ill or suicidal household members
  - Parental marital discord (as evidenced by separation or divorce)
  - Crime in the home (as evidenced by having a household member imprisoned)
ABUSE
- Physical
- Emotional
- Sexual

NEGLECT
- Physical
- Emotional

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION
- Mental Illness
- Mother treated violently
- Divorce
- Substance Abuse
- Incarcerated Relative
Adverse Childhood Experiences

Figure A.-Conceptual Framework for the ACE Study

- Death
- Early Death
- Disease, Disability and Social Problems
- Adoption of Health-risk Behaviors
- Social, Emotional, & Cognitive Impairment
- Adverse Childhood Experiences

Scientific gaps
What’s the big deal with ACEs?

- How common?
- Impact on development
- Impact on life
- Co-morbidity

- *Can we use ACEs score to assess risk? YES!*
- *Okay, so how do we do that again?*
Resources

• http://www.health.state.mn.us/injury/topic/safeharbor/
• http://www.wfmn.org/
• http://www.childrensmn.org/services/midwest-childrens-resource-center
• http://nationalchildrensalliance.org/
• http://www.missingkids.com/home
Midwest Children’s Resource Center
Child abuse and neglect

We’re here to help with the unexpected

Abuse is a serious and painful experience that no child should have to endure. But, when a child is affected by abuse, Midwest Children's Resource Center (MCRC) is here to provide the specialized care kids need to heal.

MCRC is a child advocacy center (CAC) and clinic within Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota. We offer medical evaluations and case management in alleged child abuse cases, serious neglect and witness to violence.
Runaway Intervention Program

Help Yourself
Don't give up!
Without this......
I wouldn't have today to live
A life saving/changing experience.
A Second Home
Helpful, Not Alone
Julie Pape Blabolil, CNP
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