

Juvenile Justice Vision 20/20 Training Event
Law Enforcement and Human Trafficking
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Human trafficking is difficult to address from a law enforcement perspective due to the challenges identifying victims, working with victims, and investigating a human trafficking case. Innocence Lost is a national initiative with the Department of Justice and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that targets enterprises which exploit domestic children through prostitution. Within Michigan, SEMCAC, a federally funded task force, was established to investigate the exploitation of children by means of prostitution in Southeast Michigan. Just in 2014 alone, 59 arrests were made, and 42 juvenile victims were recovered by SEMCAC.

Federal Law defines domestic minor sex trafficking as occurring “when a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident who has not attained 18 years of age is engaged in a commercial sex act”. A commercial sex act “means any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person. This includes prostitution, exotic dancing/stripping, and pornography”. Sex trafficking has become a significant problem and is currently the second fastest growing enterprise. Money is easily made in the industry because people can be bought and sold repeatedly. In fact, quotas are often \$500 a night. If a victim is prostituting seven days a week for a year, that is approximately \$182,000 per year.

There are many red flags indicative of a person being exploited through sex trafficking. These include numerous hotel keys, false ID’s, large amounts of money, being a frequent runaway, inconsistencies in stories, tattoos/brandings, black eyes, cell phones that are not in parents’ names, teens with much older males, and restricted communication. Victims can be of any gender, socio-economic class, race, age, and religion, but the more vulnerable a child is, the more likely they are to be victimized. These vulnerable populations include the homeless, runaways, and “throwaway” youth as well as youth within the foster care system. These youth are often recruited through social media, escort websites, friends and family, and pimps who act as boyfriends to gain the trust of their victims. The average age of a child victim is 16 and the life expectancy of these youth is only seven years after they enter “the life”. They are likely subjugated to severe beatings and given drugs as a tactic to keep them involved.

It is very difficult to identify victims of minor sex trafficking because they are being physically and psychologically controlled, are trained to tell lies, move frequently, obtain fake IDs, and can use technology to disguise their real age. Despite these challenges, it is important for anyone in a “helping” field to recognize the physical and psychological signs of human trafficking. These physical signs include broken bones, excessive bruising, bite marks, bug bites, reproductive health problems, malnutrition, alcohol and drug use, and traumatic brain injuries. Physiological signs of human trafficking are post-traumatic stress disorder, somatic complaints, extreme

anxiety, personality disorders, eating disorders, inability to trust, self-destructive behaviors, profound shame and guilt, and a sense of despair and hopelessness. These victims have immediate needs that can be addressed by service providers. These needs include safety, temporary shelter, permanent housing, basic needs (clothing, food, medical care), legal guardianship, counseling, substance abuse treatment, transportation, and life skills training.

Law enforcement officers must also be able to identify and recognize pimps as they are the individuals using power to control their victims. There are three primary recruitment techniques that pimps use. The first is “finesse pimping” where the pimp “manipulates young girls into situations where they seemingly make their own decisions to enter, sell sexual services, and give their money to a trafficker”. “Bait and switch” pimping involves “presenting attractive opportunities as bait in order to gain the attention and build trust or hope in a victim, only to switch the situation for the economic gain of the trafficker”. Finally, “Guerilla pimping” occurs when “a trafficker approaches and forces the victim to work through the use of threat, physical violence, and intimidation”.

It is also important for law enforcement to understand how sex trafficking has transformed over time. Women used to work on “the track” where they are not bought online. Knowing the different websites where victims are bought and sold is crucial for law enforcement to be able to track down and rescue the victims while arresting the pimps. Juvenile sex trafficking is challenging for law enforcement to address due to its hidden and unseen nature, but being able to identify the signs of this horrible enterprise has helped law enforcement effectively arrest many pimps and save many victims.