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Shining Light on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Toolkit to Build Understanding

Developed by: *Wichita State University Center for Combating Human Trafficking* // In Partnership With: *MANY*

TOPIC: Male Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

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In Partnership With: *MANY*

Wichita State University Center for Combating Human Trafficking (combatinghumantrafficking.org) // MANY (www.many.net.org)

Male Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

This resource is one of several topics addressed in the [Shining Light on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Toolkit to Build Understanding](#). The toolkit is designed to be a resource for multidisciplinary professionals, policy makers, volunteers, faith communities, and others involved in anti-trafficking work. While the information provided on each topic is in no way exhaustive, you will find additional resources to facilitate further study.

Each topic is addressed in three sections. First, the “**what?**” – what we know about the topic which includes a review of what we know from both research and the field. “**So what?**” addresses what this means – the reason this information is important to understand and how it will enhance our response to trafficking. “**Now what?**” considers the implications of this information in practice - how the information can be used to enhance our response to human trafficking. This includes specific implications for mentoring relationships, when applicable.

What?

In the anti-trafficking movement, male victims are often overlooked and underserved. While there are a number of similarities between male and female survivors, there are some key differences to keep in mind when working with males. Western culture teaches that males should be strong, dominant, and reliant only on themselves. Society also depicts males as sexual beings who desire and pursue sex (*Friedman, 2013*). As a result of these cultural stereotypes, males are often unwilling to admit they have been victimized and seek out services (*Jones, 2010; Lillywhite & Skidmore, 2006*). Additionally, it can be difficult for practitioners to identify sexual exploitation in males because it manifests differently and is traditionally seen as a female issue (*Friedman, 2013; Lillywhite & Skidmore, 2006*). It is important that service providers across the continuum of care understand and acknowledge that males can be victims of commercial exploitation.

- **While exact numbers are difficult to come by, several studies note that roughly half of commercially sexually exploited youth are males** (*Estes, 2001*).
- **Males victims of sexual violence and human trafficking have limited resources.** A 2013 national survey found that only 2 out of 37 residential programs provided services to boys. Only 28 out of 682 residential beds (about 5%) were available to boys (*Reichert & Sylwestrzak*).
- **When discussing human trafficking, boys are either seen as willing participants or exploiters, rarely as victims** (*Friedman, 2013*).
- **Male victims of commercial sexual exploitation have very comparable risk factors to female victims including: a history of sexual abuse, violence in the home, substance abuse, running away, and homelessness** (*Friedman, 2013; Lillywhite & Skidmore, 2006*).
- **Boys are unlikely to have a traditional pimp. They are more likely to have been recruited by friends or peers** (*Friedman, 2013*). This makes it harder for social service agencies and authorities to identify boys as victims and increases the difficulty in proving trafficking has occurred.
- **Sexual orientation is unfairly given much more emphasis when referring to male survivors.** Boys who identify as gay are falsely accused of being willful participants. There is also a stigma that all male trafficking survivors identify as gay, which prevents heterosexual survivors from speaking out (*Friedman, 2013*).

Mentoring Relationships in Male CSEC Survivors

- **Positive relationships, perhaps with a mentor, often lead to “turning points” in men who have experienced sexual trauma** (*Easton, Leone-Sheehan, & Sophis, 2015*).

What? (cont.)

- **Boys connect and learn better through action or recreational based interactions, rather than verbal** (*Harwly & Reicher, 2009*). When a mentor engages a male mentee in action-based activities, it can help the mentee positively respond to more emotional support later (*Larose, S., Savoie, J., DeWit, D., Lipman, E., & Dubois, 2015*).
- **Mentoring relationships can provide boys with “a role model for less conventional image of masculinity in which it is acceptable to express emotions, reveal vulnerabilities, and receive support”** (*Garraway & Pistrang, 2010, p. 726*).

So What?

- **A large number of victims in need of holistic services are excluded when we focus exclusively on the exploitation of females** (*Jones, 2010*).
- **The low number of beds and services available to males highlights the gap in services for this population and demonstrates the desperate need to reach male victims.** The anti-trafficking movement will not be successful if we do not attend to the needs of all victims.
- **Boys are often seen as perpetrators instead of victims** (*Friedman, 2013*). This creates barriers to service delivery. Continuing to see boys solely as perpetrators hurts the efforts of the anti-trafficking movement.
- **The inaccurate belief that boys are stronger and therefore have more agency to leave situations of abuse and exploitation affects service providers’ abilities to respond to males** (*Friedman, 2013 & Gummow, 2013*). This only exacerbates a gender bias in which boys are less likely to share and come forward about abuse, exploitation, and trafficking.
- **Research shows that males and females share risk factors for sexual exploitation** (*Friedman, 2013; Lillywhite & Skidmore, 2006*), however, gender stereotypes make it easy to overlook these risk factors in male victims.
- **Because situations of sexual exploitation may look different when a male victim is involved, service providers may not ask the right questions and fail to identify situations of trafficking.**
- **The stigma about sexual orientation within male victims prevents them from speaking out or reporting** (*Friedman, 2013*). This highlights the importance of providers creating safe and nonjudgmental spaces for all victims.

“The stigma about sexual orientation within male victims prevents them from speaking out or reporting.”

So What? (cont.)

Mentoring

- Mentoring relationships have been shown to aid in the healing process of men who have experienced sexual trauma (Easton, Leone-Sheehan, & Sophis, 2015).
- Understanding how many boys connect to mentors (i.e. through activity vs talking) is helpful in ensuring that boys feel comfortable in the relationship.
- Male mentors can speak to messages of false masculinity and other gender stereotypes, ultimately creating a safe space for mentees to explore these ideas (Garraway & Pistrang, 2010).

Now What?

General Practice Implications

- Like females, the abuse and exploitation a male victim endures results in serious biological, psychological, and spiritual trauma that requires a complex and individualized treatment response (Friedman, 2013; Jones, 2010). Provide male victims of sexual exploitation access to long-term prosperity and support services including: job training, education, safe housing (from emergency to long term), and mental health services and substance abuse treatment.

Individuals

- Ensure you are understanding and nonjudgmental in service delivery to create a safe environment for all clients, including male survivors of sexual exploitation.

Service Providers

- Provide training for staff on male victims of trafficking. Discuss stereotypes and biases that exist specific to males in trafficking.

Community

- Ensure that the community is well educated on human trafficking. Do not limit education to the experiences of female victims/survivors.

Mentoring Practice Implications

Individuals

- Mentors for male CSEC victims need to be understanding and non-judgmental to create safe relationships. Mentors must be sensitive to the shame and guilt that male survivors of sexual violence often experience (Gum-mow, 2013 & Easton et al., 2015).
- Mentors should choose activities that will appeal to their male mentee. Specifically, many males respond best when (Hawly & Reicher, 2009):
 - collaboration/competition is involved,
 - physical activity is present, (cont.)

Now What? (cont.)

- hands-on activities are involved (practical, problem solving, or creating a product), or
- they are given responsibility to teach/share.

- **Even after a trusting relationship is formed, rather than opening up through conversation alone, males will find it easier to talk while they are busy.** If a mentor is sensing their mentee is struggling with something and has yet to open up, take some time to do something active (preferably a mild activity that the mentee enjoys doing). This offers a more comfortable space for the mentee to talk about what's going on.

Service Providers

- **Ensure that staff and mentors have had training about human trafficking and specifically male victims.**
- **Recruit and engage male mentors in order to best meet the needs of male victims.**

Community

- **Educate partners and community about the needs for male victims of trafficking through partner meetings, social media, and the internet.**

Resources

- [And Boys Too: ECPAT Discussion Paper About the Lack of the Lack of Recognition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Boys in the United States](#)
- [Mentoring for Youth with a Backgrounds of Involvement in Commercial Sex Activity](#)
- [1 in 6 #MenToo: Information About Male Sexual Trauma](#)
- [Support for Male Survivors of Sexual Violence](#)
- [OCVTTAC: Information about Male Survivors of Human Trafficking](#)



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