

“To the Public, Nothing Was Wrong With Me”: Life Experiences of Minors and Youth in Texas at Risk for Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking

Briefing

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Study Background

- Two-year initiative funded by the Criminal Justice Division of the Office of the Governor
- Expands on the research team's findings from the 2015-2016 "Human Trafficking Mapping Project of Texas: The Initial Benchmark of Prevalence and Economic Impact for Texas", to:
 - ❑ Further understand the prevalence of youth sex trafficking in Texas.
 - ❑ Explore experiences of youth experiencing vulnerabilities that put them at greater risk for sex trafficking victimization.

Current Study Goal:

To describe child sex trafficking in three regions across Texas using empirically grounded qualitative and quantitative research methods.



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Research Questions

1. How do we understand the prevalence of youth sex trafficking in Texas?

- Primary data collection through interviews with youth that contributes to the understanding of the scope of the crime.

2. What does youth sex trafficking look like in Texas?

- Interviews with minors and young adults who are members of at-risk community segments.



Study Methods

- Qualitative and quantitative mixed-methods design
- Primary data collection efforts include in-person interviews with minors and youth (aged 13-27) from at-risk community segments
- Rates and Extent of Victimization Survey (REVS)
 - Primarily addresses RQ1
- Life Experiences Survey (LES)
 - Primarily addresses RQ2

REVS participants, n=466

REVS identified ST victims, n=71

LES participants, n=46

Four risk segments included in study:

- A history of emotional or sexual abuse
- A history of homelessness or were currently homeless
- A history of running away from home
- Involvement with the child welfare system or had been assigned a case worker from any agency and/or organization

An endorsement of any of these prior environmental circumstances indicates that the individual was at least minimally at risk for sex trafficking.

Forms of sex trafficking exploitation:

1. Sexual activity by force or pressure
2. Commercial sex by force
3. Commercial sex by force from partner
4. Survival sex
5. Coerced survival sex

Forms of other exploitation in a work situation:

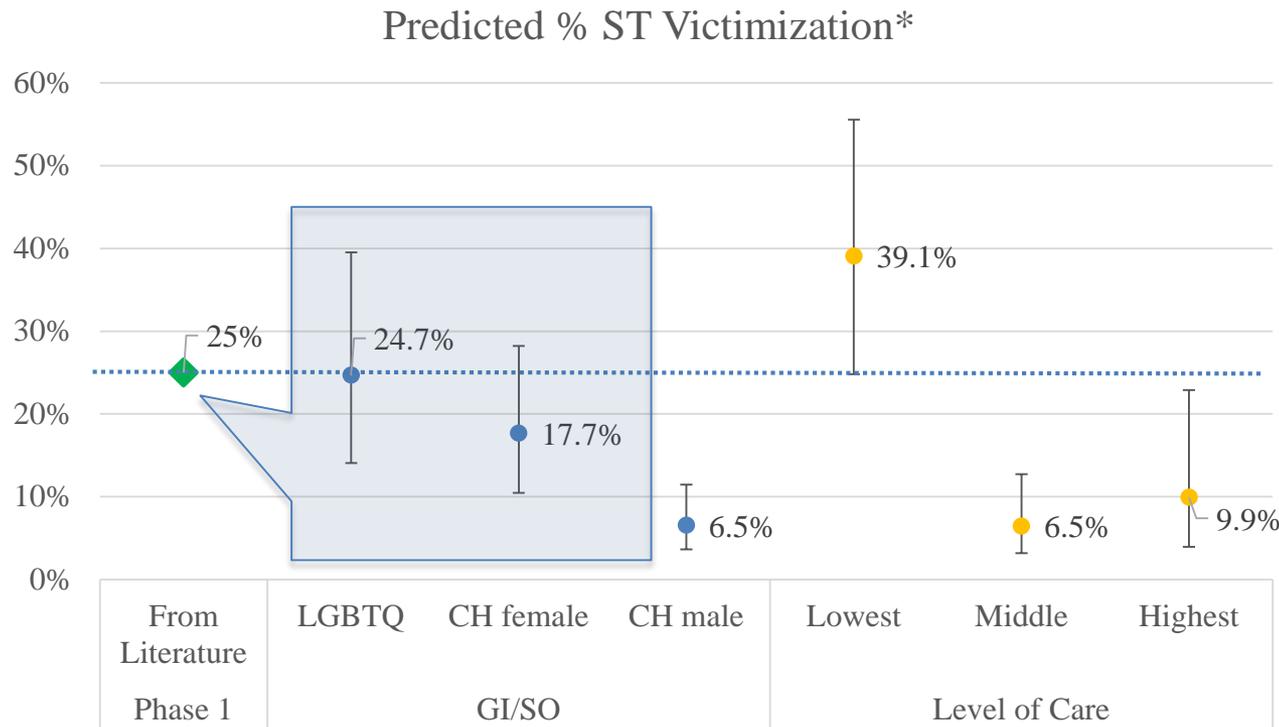
1. Unable to leave or talk
2. Wage theft
3. Physical abuse
4. Emotional abuse



Key Findings at a Glance

Rates and Extent of Victimization Survey (REVS) (n=466)

- Expected prevalence rates for LGBTQ and women match previous research
- Prevalence among men and by level of care extend our understanding of ST



* Expected marginal percentage from logistic regression model

Lowest Level of Care

Organizations that provide short-term assistance for basic needs or social resources with little to no oversight of a service plan.

Middle Level of Care

Organizations that provide some sort of assistance or case management and multiple touch points with clients.

Highest Level of Care

Residential or lock-down facility that have protocols to monitor a client's adherence to a service plan and offer long term services.



Key Findings at a Glance

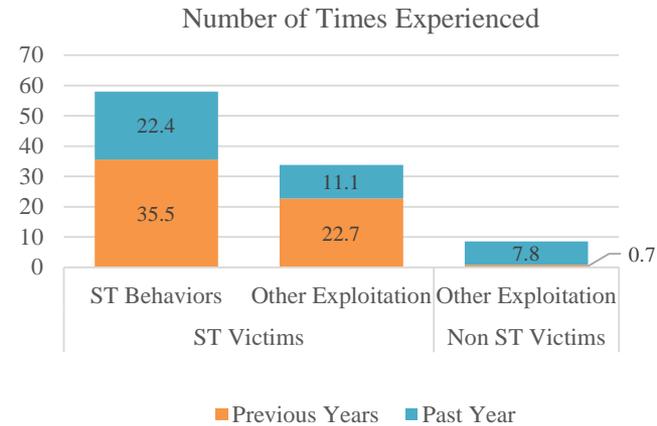
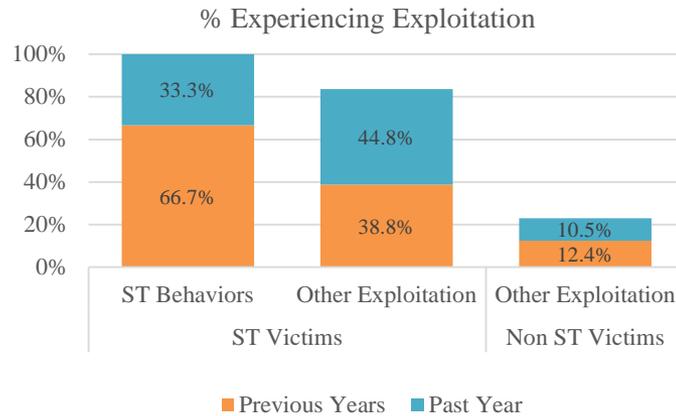
Rates and Extent of Victimization Survey (REVS)

- Expected prevalence rates for at-risk LGBTQ and women match previous research.
 - Among at-risk participants, 25% of LGBTQ and 18% of cisgender heterosexual females were victims of sex trafficking.
- Estimated prevalence rates among men and by level of care extend our understanding of sex trafficking.
 - Approximately 7% of at-risk cisgender heterosexual males were victims of sex trafficking.
 - Participants recruited from drop-in centers or services with low levels of care had a lifetime prevalence of sex trafficking of 39.1% compared to 6.5% among those recruited from mid-level services and 9.9% of participants recruited from high levels of care such as residential services or lock-down facilities.

Key Findings at a Glance

Rates and Extent of Victimization Survey (REVS)

- ST victims endure ST exploitation over time, beginning on average, at around 15
- ST victims also endure other forms of exploitation during their ST victimization



Key Findings at a Glance

Rates and Extent of Victimization Survey (REVS)

- After their first experience of exploitation, victims of child sex trafficking spend about 35% of their lives in circumstances of exploitation.
 - About 33% of victims of sex trafficking in this study were victimized in the past year.
- Of those who have experienced sex trafficking victimization, 83% have also experienced some other form of exploitation.
 - About 45% of those who experienced other forms of exploitation, experienced those situations in the past year.
 - Just under a quarter (22.9%) of vulnerable youth in the study who were not sex trafficking victims endured some form of violence or exploitation, like wage theft or non-sexual abuse.
- The average age of first sex trafficking victimization among study participants was about 15 years old.



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Key Findings at a Glance

Rates and Extent of Victimization Survey (REVS)

- Economic necessity appears to be a primary driver of and vulnerability for entrance into commercial sexual exploitation.
 - Around 73% of individuals who had experienced sex trafficking also engaged in un-coerced survival sex at some point during their lives.
 - About half of individuals who experienced sex trafficking had been forced to participate in commercial sex by a romantic partner.



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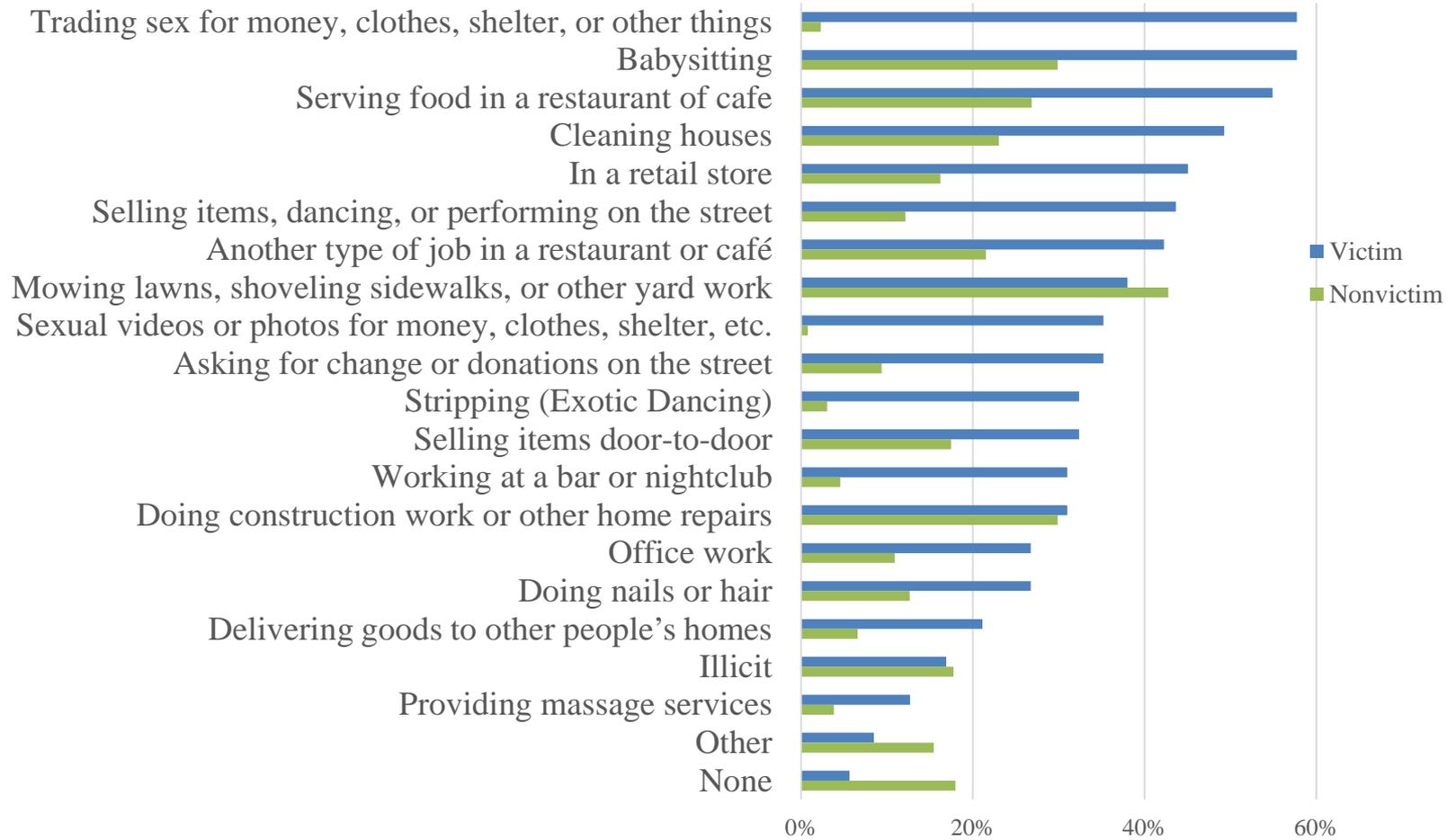
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Key Findings at a Glance

Rates and Extent of Victimization Survey (REVS)

Work Experience by ST Victimization

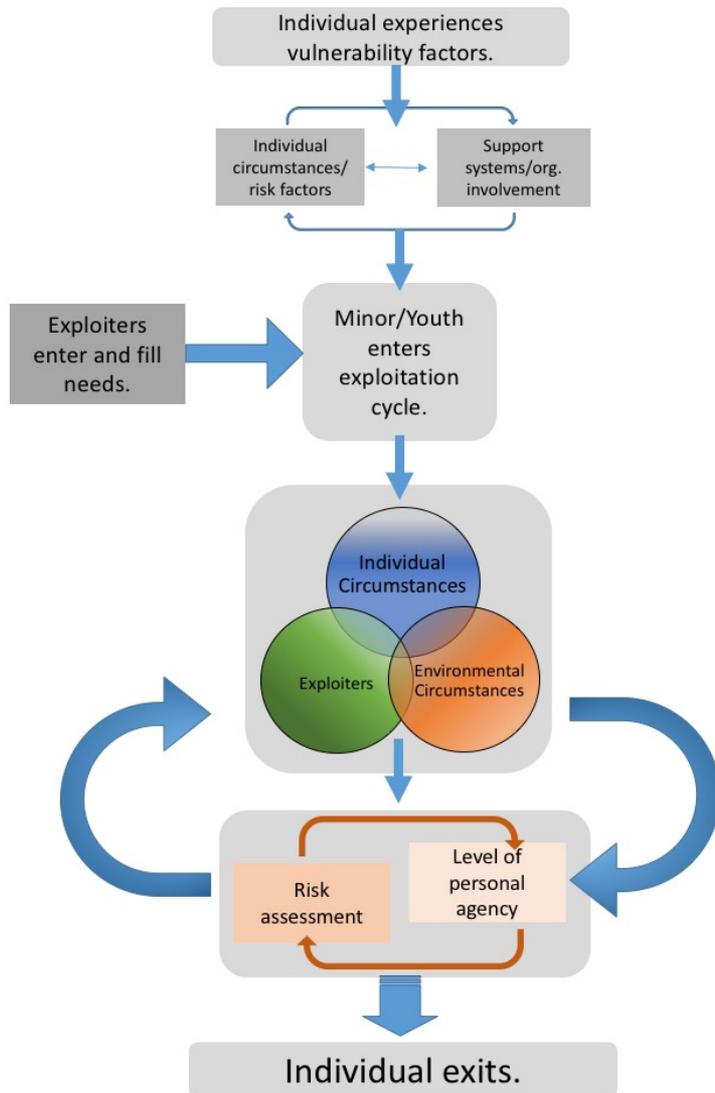


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Concept Map: Life Cycle of Exploitation



Data collected validate the utility of looking at ST as having two phases of complex interactions that a minor or youth may face:

- Phase 1: Entrance and experience with sex trafficking.
- Phase 2: Exit and future goals from sex trafficking experiences.

The first phase of the map, **Entrance and Experience**, explores *individual circumstances*, formal and informal *environmental circumstances*, and *exploiters*.

The second phase of the map, **Exit and Future Goals**, details the decision-making process individuals engage in, based on their personal *risk assessment* and differing *level of personal agency* that participants felt throughout their exploitative experiences.

Concept Map: Entrance and Experience



Individual Circumstances

The environmental conditions that place the individual at risk for being trafficked.

What environment factors put this individual at risk for trafficking?



Environmental Circumstances

The formal and informal systems that meet the individual's needs based on their circumstance.

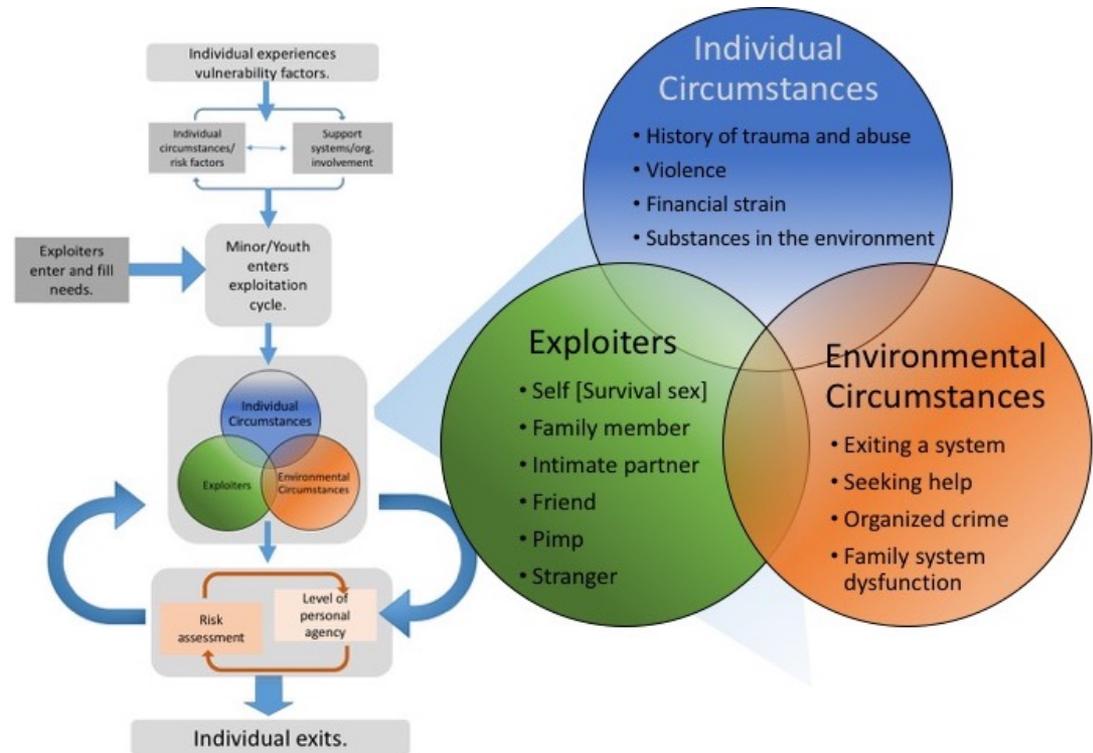
What gaps in support systems make an individual at risk for trafficking?



Exploiters

Individuals that use the gaps in service and unmet need to recruit individuals into exploitation through the use of force, fraud, and coercion.

How did the entrance into trafficking occur?



Entrance and Experience

Example: Participant 1

Demographics

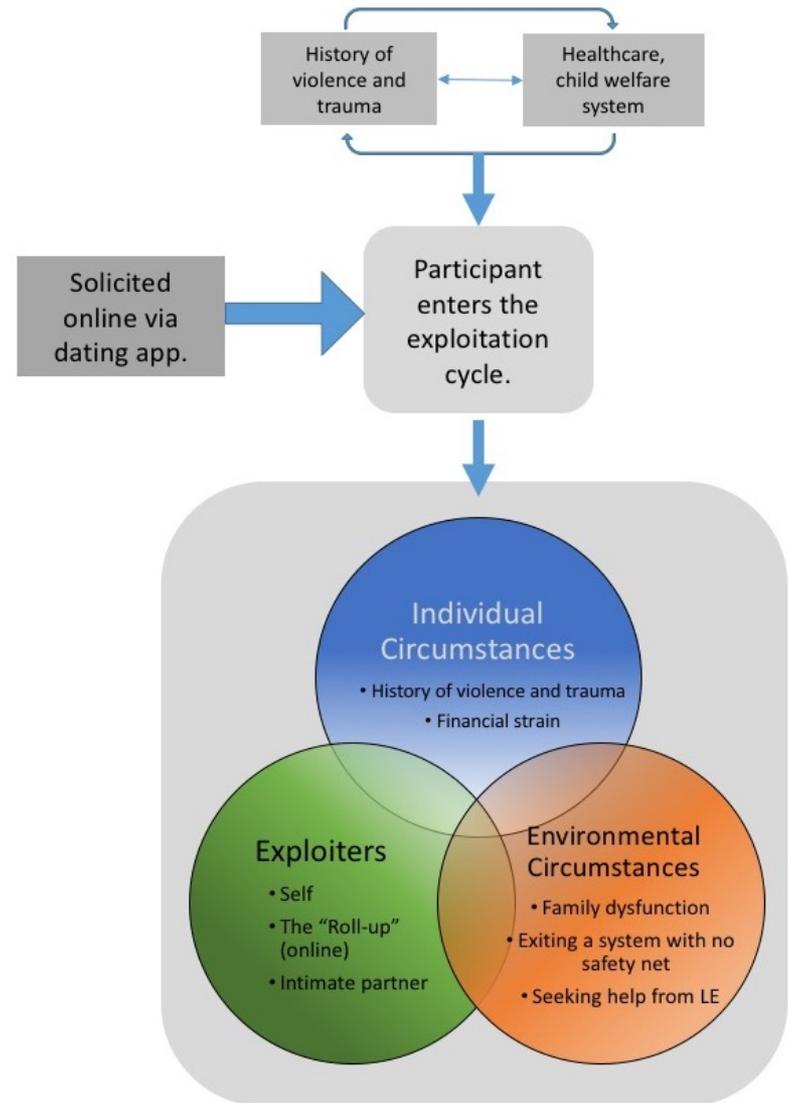
Participant 1 is a 23 year old, transgender female from Houston. Her first sex trafficking victimization occurred at 16 years old. She was in the foster care system for two years as a minor.

Entrance

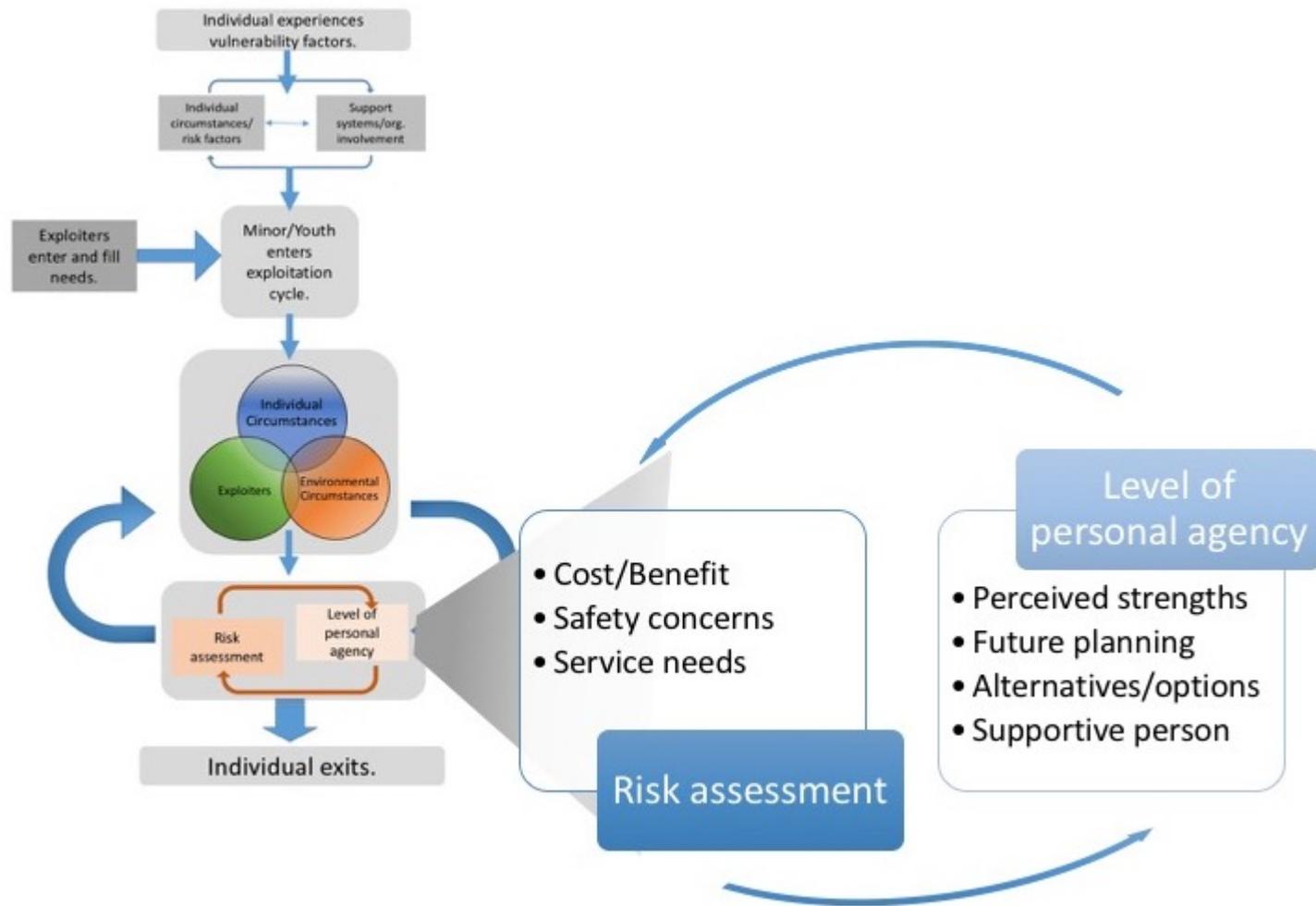
When this participant first experienced sex trafficking victimization, she was on an online dating website. A man messaged her on the site and asked the participant “what he could do to get with [her].” The participant went to his house and he paid her to have sex with him. She began to see that individual regularly and started to exchange sex for money with other individuals from that site as well.

Experience

The participant had a boyfriend when she first started to engage in commercial sex, and he noticed that she was making more money. When she told him what she was doing for the money, “he started being [her] bodyguard and holding [her] money, and it built up” from there to him becoming her pimp. During the interview, she mentioned a previous history of sexual abuse and felt that it was one of the causes behind her engagement in commercial sex. She also mentioned that some of her family members have money, but that she was cut off from them when she came out as gay and then as transgender.



Concept Map: Exit and Future Goals



Exit and Future Goals

Example: Participant 1

Risk Assessment

When considering the risks involved in engaging in commercial sex, this participant was most concerned about getting a disease, including HIV. However, financial strain kept her in “the life.” She had a criminal record, which made it hard to get a job that paid as well as commercial sex. She did reach out to law enforcement for help once after she was chased around a hotel room by a client holding a gun, but law enforcement did not ask her if she had been trafficked.

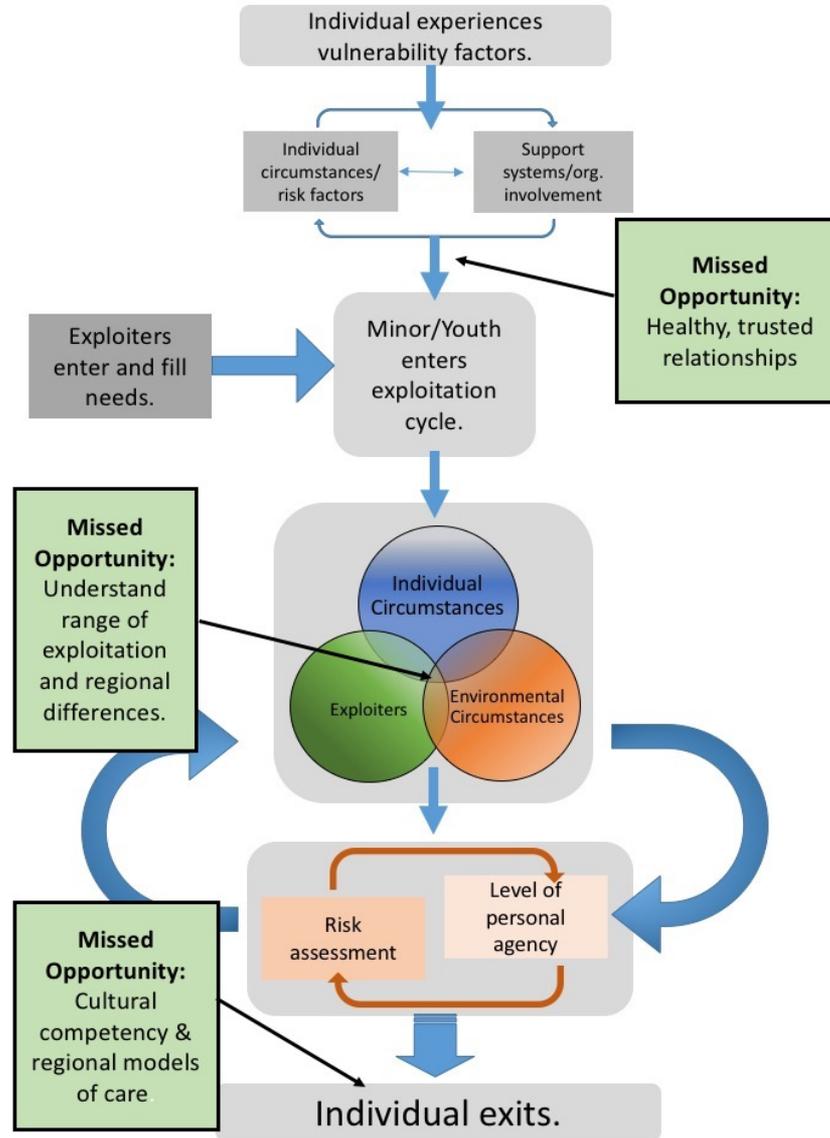
Level of Personal Agency

She remained “in the life,” knowing that she did not have any other options or alternatives. Once a service provider helped her get her record expunged, she was able to think about different options. She did leave “the life” but returned; she was unsure of how many times. She knows that her family is not supportive of her as a transgender individual. She feels like they could help her, but choose not to. However, she does have plans for the future, including opening up a shelter for other youth who are transgender, or owning a boutique and salon. She is going to school to become a lawyer as well.

This participant was still involved in commercial sex at the time of the interview. She had trouble answering when we asked her about her own internal strengths that helped her get through life.



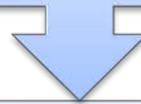
Discussion: Missed Opportunities



Recommendations

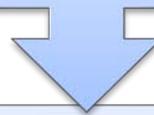
Prevention

Healthy relationship education for youth who have vulnerabilities associated with sex trafficking; training on trusted relationships for professionals in the field.



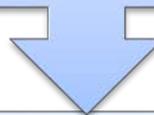
Early Intervention

Inclusion of family in prevention and early intervention services; implement Family Navigator Model in service provision across the state.



Intervention

Cultural competency training for service providers and anyone who might come into contact with youth who have been exploited; implement regional models of care.



Overall

Continued training on range of exploitation and risk factors for community-based service professionals to close gaps in knowledge and service provision across the state.



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Recommendations

- **Healthy relationship education** for youth who experience risk factors associated with exploitation and **training** for anti-trafficking stakeholders are both key to prevention of exploitation. High-fidelity wraparound service models that focuses on assisting the client and their family in linking to an array of services are key to early intervention, successful exit, and a break in the cyclical nature of exit and reentrance that is often reported in the field.
- **Cultural competence and regionally based models of care** are key to long-term, healthy, and trauma-informed recovery from trafficking. Models of care should be tailored to each region based on survivors, community members, and service providers' self-identified needs and assessment of what will and will not work in their region.
- **Child sex trafficking training for community-based service professionals** is an extension and emphasis of training that is already available in the field, but should be broadened beyond identifying and reporting human trafficking to understanding the individual circumstances that can put youth at risk of exploitation and how to offer the variety of services that youth need. Prioritizing and meeting these needs helps to identify trajectories into or out of exploitation and might be just as immediate of a need in the eyes of the youth as the exploitation itself.

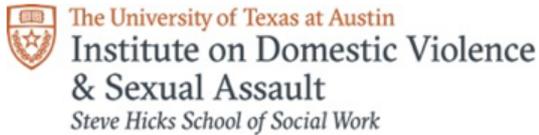


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<http://sites.utexas.edu/idvsa/files/2019/03/CSTT-HT-Final-Report-3.26.19.pdf>



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Final Report

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