

Fighting Youth Sex Trafficking- The Social Worker's Role

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This article discusses the importance of properly identifying and engaging with victims involved in sex trafficking. Specifically, the importance of adequate training for personnel working with affected youth. It also notes the different resources available to youth involved in sex trafficking and what can be done to safely support the victims. Findings indicate that teaming up as professionals in different areas of social service (community agencies, child welfare, hospitals, schools) can help bring awareness and knowledge about the topic. Also of note is a general lack of research and training, hindering full understanding of sex trafficking among youth. The article suggests red flags that social workers should be aware of and how to best approach them to successfully work with victims.

Information at a Glance

- Under federal law, sex trafficking involves the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person to perform commercial sex acts induced by force, fraud, or coercion.
- A "commercial sex act" does not have to involve an exchange of money but instead anything of value such as food, shelter, or drugs.
- Between 244,000 and 325,000 youths are at risk for sex trafficking in the United States.
- Between 1 and 2 million youths between the ages of 5 and 15 experience domestic sex slavery each year.

Proposed Program Solutions:

When youth are identified as a victims of sex trafficking, trained social workers capable of identifying risk factors are essential in building trust and rapport with the victim during intervention. Social workers must be careful not to impose their beliefs onto the victim, particularly if a victim is not ready to leave the situation. In such cases, social workers must collaborate with the victim to ensure safety first, then create a plan to safely leave the life when the victim is ready.

Furthermore, the researchers point out that sex trafficked youth should not be treated as children in abusive situations; this labeling may send them to a group home which does not typically provide the adequate safety and security tools needed to deter the victim from traffickers or from being re-recruited. Contacting the National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline (888-373-7888) for additional support is noted as an important step. The Delta Program and Born2Fly program, both based in Florida, each specialize in services and programs to address trauma experienced by trafficking victims. Both programs are suggested as a model for future program development.