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The Litmus Initiative:
Enabling Teachers to Recognize Human Trafficking
Bethany Hansen
Western Michigan University, 2018

Introduction

Litmus paper plays a vital role in the research of scientists of many disciplines: exposing unseen changes to the acidity of substances. To the naked eye, a solution may appear unaltered, but the addition of a single drop of an acid or base, or the modification of a miniscule aspect of natural processes at play may produce vastly different results in a litmus test. It is litmus that provides consistency, constancy, and comparability in numerous studies. Without such a tool, dangerous change could go unnoticed until lasting damage had already been done.

Every day, hundreds of thousands of women and children are sold for sex (The Polaris Project, 2018). This modern day form of slavery, known as human sex trafficking, has escalated globally at an increasing rate, specifically since the rise of the internet. Although its existence in developing nations is widely publicized, it is not isolated to these locations; in the United States, it is estimated that 300,000 individuals are being sex trafficked, with half of those victims under the age of 18 (Lloyd, 2011). Children from every state, of every race, and of every socio-economic status are being used and abused, and in many cases, no one outside of their exploitation is aware. Alarming is not a word for this. Distressing. Tragic. Gruesome. Catastrophic. A destruction of human life, dignity, and worth before folded hands and unseeing eyes, spitting excuses of chaotic schedules and overwhelmed minds. Yet amidst the tumult of everyday life, there exists a group of professionals who are constant in the lives of children, able to recognize inconsistencies in a child's behavior, and afforded the opportunity to compare one day or week to the next: teachers. In a world that does not promote - and sometimes does not allow - prolonged and regular contact between teens and most discerning adults, school teachers interact with students five days every week, discuss weekend plans, and have more context than

anyone else to recognize changes in attitude, energy, or personality. Teachers are the litmus paper that can detect minor changes in a child's well-being early, allowing the chance to act before lasting damage is carried out. Correctly equipped, teachers could be a central force in changing the tide of modern day slavery in America.

An Overview of Domestic Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is defined by the U.S. Department of State in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, which states that human trafficking includes

(A) Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such has not attained 18 years of age; or (B) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, personage, debt bondage or slavery.

Two main categories of human trafficking are widely recognized: sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Although a great deal of labor trafficking is suspected to occur within the United States - especially in the fields of nannying, restaurant and hospitality business, agriculture, and construction - it is greatly underreported due to the fact that victims of labor trafficking do not need to interact with clients over the course of their abuse, and the trauma they suffer is generally less recognizable than that of sex trafficking victims (C. Anderson, personal communication, March 8, 2017). Therefore, current existing research and recommendations of best practices when dealing with victims and survivors of human trafficking are heavily weighted toward sex trafficking. Globally, sex trafficking is estimated to account for 56 percent of trafficking cases,

but in the recent national-level study of human trafficking cases, 83 percent of the 1,229 investigations were specific to sex trafficking (Palmiotto, 2015; Kotrla, 2010; Kyckelhahn, Beck, & Cohen, 2009). Due to the availability of information and the author's desire to provide individuals specifically within the education field with resources to positively identify and react to victims of human trafficking, this paper will focus on domestic minor sex trafficking.

Despite common misconception, victims of sex trafficking are not only women and children living in foreign countries or brought to the United States against their will. Trafficked individuals do not need to be forced across country or state lines in order to be considered victims of trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2000). Many are trafficked within their own country, state, and even community. Within the United States, the majority of cases occur on the northern East Coast, Californian coast, and in the Midwest (The Polaris Project, 2018). Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Toledo, and Columbus are all hosts of large trafficking communities and hubs for transient trafficking; as a result, smaller cities near and between these centers experience higher levels of sexual exploitation (National Human Trafficking Hotline, 2017). Most notably to this paper, Battle Creek, Grand Rapids, and Kalamazoo are among those impacted by the influence of proximity.

The demographic of children being forced or tricked into sex trafficking is disturbingly unspecific. While there is approximately a 6:1 ratio of girls to boys being induced to enter the commercial sex industry, both male and female teens and children are at risk of being trafficked, especially those who belong to the LGBTQ community (Palmiotto, 2015; Wedgwood Christian Services, 2018). Cases have existed in communities of every race, religion, citizenship status, and socio-economic level. Statistics regarding the age at which these diverse individuals begin to

be exploited are grim. Based on the research of numerous studies, at least 70 percent - and some studies suggest more than 90 percent - of women in the commercial sex industry began their involvement before reaching 18 years of age (Hughes, 2007; Kotrla, 2010). Estimates of the average age at which children are lured into sex trafficking situations range from 11 to 14, and national statistics on survivors show that around 75 percent are between the ages of 12 and 24 when they first seek official aid (Kotrla, 2010; Grant, Trotter, & Lamberth, 2014). In an interview videotaped by Shared Hope International in 2009, a survivor of domestic minor sexual trafficking (DMST) revealed a portion of her experience:

We're all under 18. We're all the same age. There would be a few girls I knew who were in their 20s or whatever, but they were doing it since they were our age anyways. I did wait till 12, and these girls had been doing it since they were eight or nine and now they are like 23.

Based on these statistics, the story of many so-called "prostitutes" is far from the widespread narrative of glamorously promiscuous choices and intentionally destructive lifestyles that many adults, youth, and enforcement officials have heard for years. The vast majority do not freely choose to enter the commercial sex industry, but are instead thrust into it through exploitative experiences as a child. According to studies carried out by the U.S. Department of Justice, "at least 75 percent of those involved in formal prostitution are controlled by a pimp" (2007). In order to bring the sex trafficking of both minors and adults to a halt, it is imperative to investigate the modes by which victims fall into the hands of controlling figure: force, fraud, and coercion.

Force is rarely applied to trafficking victims in the way that is widely depicted in the media. While movies often show middle class teenagers being abducted by traffickers while at the mall with friends or walking home alone, fact dictates that only approximately three percent of victims are kidnapped (Hathaway, 2015; C. Anderson, personal communication, March 8, 2017). This does not, however, eliminate the threat of force. The United States Department of Health and Human Services states that force “pertains to the physical restraint or serious physical harm that traffickers use to obtain and maintain control” (2012). This often takes the form of rape, physical violence, intimidation, physical confinement, and restrictions of freedom (Williamson & Prior, 2009; Zimmerman et al., 2008). When employed by traffickers, often referred to as pimps, force serves to break the spirit of a victim (Chesnay, 2013). If these methods lose effectiveness, harsher control mechanisms are introduced, usually as a punishment for a victim’s lack of cooperation. For example, pimps may begin to rape or torture victims with greater frequency or severity if they do not comply with the trafficker’s demands (Whitaker and Hinterlong, 2008). It is important to note, however, that not every trafficked person experiences brutal physical abuse; many are subjected to exploitation first through fraud or coercion, as discussed below.

Fraud is most often found in labor trafficking situations, but appears in some sex trafficking scenarios as well. Any time that false promises are used to lure an individual into human trafficking, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services constitutes the operation as fraud (2012). In domestic cases, 35 percent of child victims have been sold by their families, usually with the promise of traffickers to impoverished parents that their children will be “safer, better cared for, and taught a useful skill or trade” (C. Anderson, personal communication,

March 8, 2017; Albanese, 2007). Once recruited, these victims either experience none of the promised benefits, or enter into debt bondage, with the promise of release as soon as their debts have been paid (Williamson et al., 2010). Debt bondage is virtually inescapable; although traffickers will say that they are merely charging for the services provided to victims - such as “training” or “education” - they will often enforce ridiculously high interest rates, withhold payment from victims, and add further costs of food, condoms, or transportation to the debt (International Labour Organization, 2005). This form of exploitation poses an especially high threat to runaway children. Runaway children make up 80 percent of trafficking victims, and it is estimated that within 48 hours of running away from home, 1 in 3 youth will be approached by a trafficker (Wedgwood Christian Services, 2018). The most common place for minors to be recruited in person is at a bus station, where many are lured by the offer of an immediate career - and a greatly needed source of income - modeling, waitressing, or working in a massage parlor (Batstone, 2007). Even more often, however, youth’s vulnerabilities are preyed upon through a mixture of psychological trickery and force known as coercion.

Coercion is the broadest and most common means of engulfing victims in sexual exploitation. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, coercion is the use of “threats of physical harm or physical restraint against a person” (2012). While coercion can be carried out as physical violence against a victim, threats are often made against a victim’s family as consequences for noncompliance (Williamson & Prior, 2009). Coercion is a particularly strong weapon against runaway and homeless youth, who may be in a position to surrender sex acts as a “repayment” for the provision of food, shelter, or drugs (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). In these relationships between trafficker and victim, the trafficker

forged a false sense of closeness with the victim that was later distorted. In many of these cases, the switch from protector to pimp is premeditated and highly intentional. The forgery of false relationships as a form of coercion is common to the stories of the at least 65 percent of victims who entered trafficking situations by trickery, in a process known as grooming (C. Anderson, personal communication, March 8, 2017).

The process of grooming, or seasoning, young girls and boys refers to a trafficker's calculated attempt to become a part of a victim's life, gain their trust, and later, take control of them (Lloyd, 2011). In a publicly released book entitled *The Pimp Game Instructional Guide*, by renowned pimp Mickey Royal, readers are advised, "How to knock a bitch [break down a girl] and turn her into a ho [victim of sex trafficking]? It is an intricate process of psychological destruction and emotional construction" (Sharif, 1998). This progression of "psychological destruction" often begins at malls, arcades, and bus stops (Kotrla, 2010). It begins with friendship - or, more often, romantic interest - from an older man who offers his time, encouragement, and costly gifts to young girls whose vulnerabilities of homelessness, broken or fighting family dynamics, low self-esteem, or history of childhood sexual abuse make them especially susceptible (Albanese, 2007). In his book *Pimpology*, Pimpin' Ken explains,

Weakness is the best trait a person can find in someone they want to control. If you can't find a weakness, you have to create one. You have to tear someone's ego down to nothing before they will start looking to you for salvation. Then you have a chance to start building them back up, showing them that it's your program that takes them from darkness to hope. While you want them to feel good about themselves eventually, you

want them to feel that it's because of *you*. They begin to see you as their champion, their hero - even if the weakness you rescue them from is one you created. (Ivy, 2007)

The championing of traffickers by victims that Ken refers to is common among DMST victims, and is commonly known as trauma bonding (Kotrla, 2010). A trauma bond is similar to "Stockholm syndrome," and is defined by the United States Department of Health and Human Services as "a form of coercive control in which traffickers instill a sense of fear as well as gratitude for being allowed to live" (2012; Kotrla, 2010). These bonds frequently begin when a pimp presents himself as a reliable, trustworthy, and valuable individual - often the only affirming and secure relationship in a victim's life (O'Connor & Healy, 2006).

After trust is thoroughly established, the pimp will then create dependency by isolating his victim from family and friends, removing them from their previous lives (Kotrla, 2010). Mickey Royal writes, "after being chosen and invited into a ho's world, you begin to pull her away from that which she loves and most importantly, that which loves her. You have to kill her spirit until she feels it's worthless. She'll then give her soul to you in order to receive from you the love that she now needs" (Sharif, 1998). After a victim has become dependent upon his or her trafficker, exploitation begins, often without the victim realizing what is happening. Pimps posing as boyfriends may suggest victims dance, strip, or prostitute themselves "just this once" to pay bills, prove love, or make up for a wrongdoing (Lloyd, 2011). After the initial request, occurrences will not cease; rather, they will become more frequent, more demanding, and more violent in nature (Lloyd, 2011). Once a victim is normalized to performing commercial sex acts, a pimp no longer has the need to hide behind a screen of kindness. He can now require victims to subject themselves to brutal beatings and unattainable expectations solely because he has fully

convinced his victim that he alone holds the affection, care, or attention that she desires. Many victims past the grooming stage and under complete control of their pimp are subjected to conditions that Amnesty International's *Biderman's Chart of Coercion* cites as commonly being used against political prisoners: "isolation, induced debility, exhaustion, threats, degradation, enforcing of trivial demands, and the granting of occasional indulgences" (Flores, 2010). Social worker, advocate, and trafficking survivor Rachel Lloyd, in her experience working with trafficking victims, has brought this list to her clients, who found similarities in their own stories: " 'Oh, you mean like not letting you talk to anyone outside of the life [pimps, victims, and clients], ' Making you do dumb shit, little shit, just to see if you'll obey?'" (Lloyd, 2011). A trafficker's acts of force, fraud, and coercion may not be interpreted as such by those he trafficks because their trauma bond has grown so strong, they will defend him to themselves and to others. Often, a victim of trafficking introduced to their life of exploitation through coercion will not recognize that they are being abused, and will not respond positively to an outsider attempting to "rescue" him or her from the situation (Lloyd, 2011).

The psychological effect that the coercion of the grooming process has on victims of any age is extensive and difficult to reverse; in children and adolescents, the damage is even more devastating. As mentioned above, almost all victims of human trafficking have been sexually abused prior to their commercial exploitation. Mary Frances Bowley, a specialist working with trafficking survivors, notes that "the damage from just one incident [of sexual trauma] is life-altering. Emotionally, girls are arrested in their development and make choices based on their emotional age at the time of the abuse. [...]Socially, the concept of a healthy relationship becomes distorted and dysfunctional" (Bowley, 2012). Almost without exception, victims enter

trafficking situations with emotional and psychological vulnerabilities beyond what the average person experiences. After being subjected to the psychological torture of coercion by traffickers, in addition to the traumas of their past, victims have a propensity to either blame themselves or believe that nothing is amiss. In a Kansas court trial relating to the sex trafficking of a 15-year-old girl, the jury found the pimp guilty and sentenced him to 640 months after examining the girl's text messages (all sent by her pimp) and questioning her about her experience; meanwhile, the victim repeatedly claimed that she was a "businesswoman," and that the pimp's only offence was having sex with her (Palmiotto, 2015). Lloyd spoke with girls who told her that beatings they were subjected to were "just discipline," "not bad," and "only because he [the trafficker] loved me so much" (Lloyd, 2011). The experiences faced by victims of trafficking serve to redefine their sense of "normal" in a way that is difficult to escape, largely because rejecting these abusive routines would mean losing the identity they had built for themselves (Bowley, 2012). In Bowley's experience, the process of a victim shedding the lies that she chose that life and was loved by her pimp can be one of the most traumatic parts of recovery. She writes,

You learn that your former identity is void of true value. You realize that you were never truly loved but only used as a replaceable commodity. And possibly the hardest realization to accept, you now see that you did not engage in exploitation out of free will as you perhaps convinced yourself, but out of desperation, lack of options, manipulation, force, or as a result of deep wounds or unmet hunger for love and acceptance.

Once these emotions begin to wash over a victim, it is common for him or her to feel ashamed of what happened, guilty for allowing themselves to be preyed upon by a trafficker, and stigmatized

by commercial sex acts they have performed (Zimmerman, C., & Pocock, N., 2013). In light of this reality, it is understandable that many victims who are offered an opportunity to escape either turn it down, or return to their trafficker not long after leaving (Lloyd, 2011).

The issue of human trafficking, even when narrowed to include only Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking, is more vast and multifaceted than anyone would like to believe. Children and teens are being tricked and sold into pornography, strip clubs, and street trafficking, both in online and in-person venues. The United States currently maintains a “culture of tolerance,” one that “supports flourishing sex trafficking markets” (Kotrla, 2010). This is especially visible in the movement towards freedom for sex workers as an issue of women’s rights, as well as the rising popularity of websites such as Seeking Arrangement, wherein young women can seek out “sugar baby” relationships with rich older men, known as “sugar daddies.” At the time of writing, this website was beginning to come under intense fire for enabling prostitution, with many victims of assault coming forward to say that they had been abused after participating in a date that had no consensual agreement of sexual interaction, and numerous accounts exposed where women were auctioning off their virginity - the cause of which, whether nominal or forced by a trafficker, was yet unknown (Manning, 2018). The culture of normalcy surrounding the use of women as sexual objects does not have any redeeming qualities. In order for true change to happen, in order for children to be protected from a society that will abuse them not only in its shadows, but also anywhere that common passersby can claim ignorance, this culture must be defeated. Change on a social and legal level must occur. These changes are difficult yet achievable, but also outside of the scope of this paper. Until change is rendered, society must learn to stand and fight by

recognizing the signs of domestic minor sex trafficking and the elements that may leave youth especially susceptible to harm.

Risk Factors and Signs of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking in Diverse Communities

While the faces of trafficked individuals vary widely, certain characteristics are shared among the majority of victims. In between 80 and 95 percent of DMST cases, victims have been sexually abused by family members or close friends prior to forging a relationship with their trafficker (Nolot & Dickey, 2011; Wedgwood Christian Services, 2018). Many are runaways, homeless, or enrolled in the foster care system, perhaps as a result of past abuse, or perhaps unrelated to it (Palmiotto, 2015). Children living in poverty, identifying with the LGBTQ community, or raised in families who abuse drugs and alcohol are at a heightened risk as well (Wedgwood Christian Services, 2018). However, trafficking within wealthy communities is a distinct reality. In the case of Theresa Flores, author and survivor of sex trafficking, she grew up in a high-class suburb of Detroit, Michigan, and was violently trafficked by members of Chaldean gangs whom she met within her neighborhood and high school classes (Flores, 2010). Recent research has suggested that gang-specific trafficking is most common within Latino communities, where victims may be exploited only within the gang itself, thus limiting contact with outsiders and making such abuse more difficult to track and convict (P. Herbert, personal communication, March 10, 2017).

The risk factor of homelessness is especially threatening, but fortunately, it is also relatively easy to spot. According to Barshay's 2014 study, around 1,258,182 students in the United States are homeless, and 75 percent of those are living "doubled-up," meaning that they

are cohabitating with family members or friends. It is imperative that teachers recognize that a student living in a house alongside another family as opposed to a shelter, car, campground, or motel qualifies just as much as “homeless,” and is in fact faced with additional hardships and fewer opportunities for aid when compared to many homeless students in other living situations (Dill, 2015). Students who are living doubled-up may present telltale signs such as “references to crowded conditions, panic attacks in class, chronic hunger or food-hoarding behaviors, sleep deprivation, unkempt clothes, inadequate personal hygiene, and unmet medical or psychological needs” (Dill, 2015). By identifying - even unofficially - children who are homeless, teachers may have a heightened sense of awareness to any signs of trafficking that may present.

The signs of sex trafficking are usually not sudden and severe. Just as a pimp spends time in the grooming process before taking complete control over his victim, a victim does not often present as happy one day and highly distressed the next. A victim of DMST is, however, often groomed while attending school (Smith, 2009). An observant teacher may be able to recognize changes in students within their classroom. Early signs of grooming or heightened susceptibility to trafficking could include

- A new set of friends, particularly older ones who are unfriendly and distant to adults
- New cell phone, expensive jewelry, or other items their family could not afford
- Dropping out of activities they used to enjoy
- A boyfriend who is noticeably older
- Sudden changes in behavior
- Sudden drop in grades (Flores, 2010)

Any of these signs could be indicative of a different struggle, but should not be overlooked. An adult with a personal relationship to the student should seek to come alongside the student if any of these indicators occur. By providing an opportunity for youth to discuss the situation with a trusted adult, specifically one who knows the signs and traps of sex trafficking, early intervention may be possible. Even if the issue is not uncovered at this time, connecting with an adult about the topic may hold the potential to provide victims with what they perceive as an avenue for aid and escape later on. As the trafficking relationship progresses, additional signs may present:

- Indications of being controlled, especially by an adult who is not a parent
- Bruises on the body, or abrasions around the wrists, ankles, or neck
- Frequent, unexplained body soreness
- Inability to go to another place without someone's permission
- Fear
- Onset of depression or anxiety
- Submissive or tense behavior with avoidant eye contact
- Dissociation from self, sometimes presenting similarly to multiple personality disorder
- Frequent, unexplained absences from school
- Frequent truancy
- Being found in public without identification or money
- Chronically running away from home
- Frequent references to travel in other cities, but doesn't know specifics about the location
- Coached or rehearsed responses to questions
- Hunger and malnourishment

- Inappropriate clothing based on weather conditions or surroundings
- Signs of drug addiction
- Signs of drug injections on the inner thighs, between the fingers, or between the toes
- Self-mutilation
- References to sexual situations that are beyond age-specific norm
- References to terminology of the commercial sex industry (see appendix)
- Steady flow of males in and out of a residence, or males monitoring females who come in and out
- Residences with locks on the outsides of doors (Flores, 2010; Batstone, 2007; Polaris, 2018; Litam, 2017)

Identification of these signs, especially in conjunction with each other, should not be taken lightly. Teachers recognizing these signs, or even suspecting that something might be amiss with a student, should take immediate action.

A Teacher's Reaction to Concerns of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking

A teacher's role in responding to concerns of DMST is largely dictated by the United States Department of Education, which recommends the following steps:

- In the case of an immediate emergency, call your local police department or emergency access number (911)
- Call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) at 1-888-3737-888 to: GET HELP and connect with a service provider in your area;

REPORT A TIP with information on potential human trafficking activity; or

LEARN MORE by requesting training, technical assistance, or resources.

- The NHTRC is a national, toll-free hotline available to answer calls from anywhere in the country, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The NHTRC is not a law enforcement or immigration authority and is operated by a nongovernmental organization funded by the Federal government.
- To report sexually exploited or abused minors, you can call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's (NCMEC) hotline at 1-800-THE-LOST, or report incidents at <http://www.cybertipline.org>.
- To report suspected instances of trafficking or worker exploitation, you can call the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Homeland Security Investigations Tip-line at 1-866- DHS-2-ICE (1-866-347-2423). You can also report online at <http://www.ice.gov/exec/forms/hsi-tips/tips.asp>.
- Suspected incidences can also be reported to the FBI Field Office nearest you at <http://www.fbi.gov/contact/fo/fo.htm>, or you can contact the Department of Justice's Trafficking in Persons and Worker Exploitation Task Force Complaint Line at 1-888-428-7581 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013)

Teachers should also alert school counselors or social workers to any concerns they may have about individual students. Even in the case that the cause for concern is determined to be unrelated to human trafficking, no information shared with professionals in the field of student health is wasted. Unlike direct accusations of sexual abuse, concerns do not need to be immediately reported. If a teacher is not confident enough in suspicions to discuss them with a

counselor or social worker, he or she is recommended to first call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (number listed above) to consult a trained hotline responder.

While teachers have a responsibility to report concerns, they also have a unique opportunity to relate to students. One repercussion of trafficking that significantly hinders victims' ability to seek help and heal from trauma is the inability to trust others (Zimmerman & Pocock, 2013). A girl at Wellspring Living, a center for survivors of human trafficking, eloquently explained to her counselor, "I'm only asking for a consistent, authentic, and intentional relationship, along with time to prove that your life is what it seems and your intentions are pure. I need those things to be congruent, and you can't show me that overnight" (Bowley, 2012). A counselor may need time to develop this trusting relationship, but a teacher who sees students on a daily basis and has intentionally engaged with each one over time has a distinct advantage. Although a student reporting trafficking should be encouraged to immediately confide in a school counselor, social worker, or the police, teachers are likely to be the first ones to hear such confessions. In order to be helpful and compassionate first responders, teachers should keep the following information in mind.

First and foremost, it is important to remember that "young people may not speak out about the abuse that is happening because they have developed various coping mechanisms, including 'shutting off' emotionally or compartmentalising the pain attached to past traumatic experiences" (Pearce, Hynes, & Bovarnick, 2013). Thus, if a student brings concerns to or is willing to respond to concerns brought up by a teacher, the occasion is wildly significant. As a teacher listens, he or she should keep a careful check on facial expressions and reactions. While the most natural response is horror and concern, these expressions have a great potential to be

misinterpreted as disgust, and may cause a child to experience guilt, shame, alienation, and ultimately, emotional shutdown (C. Anderson, personal communication, March 8, 2017). Adults should be prepared for a wide variety of reactions on the child's part. Victims may be angry, fearful, frustrated, repetitive, accusatory, irrational, and tangential, or they may appear to be without emotion and have a flat affect (Zimmerman & Pocock, 2013; Office for Victim Assistance, 2017).

As a teacher is discussing possible trafficking situations with a student, he or she should keep in mind that their conversation may constitute the closest thing to a safe environment as the child can imagine. Therefore, within that conversation, the teacher should do their best to serve as an advocate, nonthreatening interviewer, and counselor. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, in a guide put out to instruct agents interviewing adolescent victims of trafficking-related crime, recommends, "To receive the most accurate statements from the teen, it is imperative that the interviewer use as many open-ended questions as possible, allowing the teen to provide narrative statements in response. To avoid the risk of 'shutting the teen down,' the interviewer should not interrupt a teen's narrative" (Finnegan, 2017). Following these suggestions may not only make teachers better listeners for victims, but also more able to support the student later on in the long process of recovery and legal justice that may be yet to come. Teachers should recognize that students will almost certainly not identify as victims of trafficking, nor will they call their oppressor a pimp or trafficker (Chesnay, 2013). As the FBI mentions in its guide, "Challenging the perceptions of a compliant teen in an interview can be unproductive. If a compliant teen tells the interviewer that she is in love with her 'boyfriend' and is not a victim, it is better to ask the teen to tell you about being in love with her boyfriend instead of challenging her perception of

the relationship. If the interviewer tries to convince the teen that she IS a victim under the law, the teen may become defensive” (Finnegan, 2017). A method of discussion suggested by licensed psychologist Stacey Litam may allow victims more space to express their experiences in a safe, nonjudgmental and accepting environment:

Counselors should work collaboratively with clients to identify salient issues and validate their experiences to promote recognition and exploration on the effects of trafficking.

Counselors may use statements such as, *[...]Some people care so much about their partners that they feel obligated to prove their love and begin doing things they are not really comfortable with. I am curious whether this has been your experience as well?’*

Above all else, the role of a compassionate teacher opening the door to discussion about trauma and abuse is to help establish safety. Physical and legal safety are best achieved by working with legal personnel such as police, but teachers may help a victim begin to re-establish their own sense of safety by expressing “awareness of personal boundaries and respect for their human dignity” (Yakushko, 2009). By providing an opportunity to breach this impossible topic in a setting that is safe, calm, compassionate, and productive, teachers may begin to play the much-needed role of “advocate” in the life of a teen whose security has been robbed from them.

Resources Available for Victims of Human Trafficking

The role of “advocate” does not end when a child leaves their first conversation with a trustworthy teacher, nor does it cease to become necessary when incidents are reported to school or legal officials. Because many communities are unaware of the realities of human trafficking and resources available to aid victims, it can be highly valuable for teachers to be knowledgeable

about options for help. In the case that a student has worries about going to a school official, a teacher may also suggest alternatives.

One qualm that victims of trafficking may have relates to legal status. A student who is undocumented may fear serious repercussions, such as the deportation of themselves or their family, should they go to police. At present, many cities throughout the Midwest have adopted the status of “sanctuary city,” meaning that they will not report undocumented persons to Immigrations and Custom Enforcement. In areas that do not have such protections, teachers may be able to assist student victims of trafficking by suggesting the possibility of a T visa, a program for trafficking victims; U visa, a program for crime victims who have been hurt and are working with law enforcement officials; or S visa, a program for people helping in criminal investigations (U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2017). Many of these visa programs can lead to non-immigrant status, and recipients under 21 may be able to give status to parents and siblings as well (Zimmerman & Pocock, 2013).

Additional services for victims of trafficking are available nationwide. While there are often few local resources for human trafficking victims, organizations such as the YWCA, Polaris, Shared Hope International, and the National Human Trafficking Resource Center are invested in locating or providing services for victims and survivors. Safe houses to rehabilitate victims are being opened, slowly but surely, throughout the United States - at the time of writing, the Kalamazoo YWCA had just opened Southwest Michigan’s first and only safehouse for survivors of human trafficking (YWCA Kalamazoo, 2018). Unfortunately, while human trafficking is now classified as an “pandemic,” this injustice has only been openly and accurately discussed for the past decade (Chesnay, 2013). Despite its prevalence and pressing need to be

researched and addressed, the United States government spends more in three months on combating drug trafficking than it will spend, at its current rate of expenditure, in ten years on programs for domestic victims of human trafficking (Executive Office of the President of the United States, 2017; Office on Trafficking in Persons, 2018). Funding for these programs only began in 2014 (Office on Trafficking in Persons, 2018). There is an urgent need nationwide for advocates of policy meant to support victims of human trafficking, citizens willing to raise awareness, and professionals invested in creating services to aid survivors.

Conclusion

William Wilberforce, remembered for his leadership of the movement to stop slave trade in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, famously told his audiences, “you may choose to look the other way, but you can never again say that you did not know.” Such is the charge for teachers. May the individuals who know this nation’s youth better than anyone else choose not to look away from this tragedy, but instead take an active and central role in ending it. Such action is not easy. It is time consuming, heart wrenching, and many times, seemingly fruitless. The path to justice is long and twisted, and it is not the responsibility of the teacher to navigate this path. It is not their responsibility, but it is their prerogative. In light of the atrocities being committed against youth in this nation’s classrooms - not only overseas, not only in slums, but in our own backyards - there is no logical option but to fight back, and there is no compassionate option but to fight back with ferocity, using every weapon and resource we are afforded. One of our greatest assets is the presence of informed and prepared teachers who are willing to selflessly give of

their time and emotion in order to protect their students. May this weapon no longer be squandered by ignorance, fear, or apathy, but strengthened and enabled by knowledge.

Appendix

Terms Used by Traffickers and Trafficking Victims in the Commercial Sex Industry:

The Blade - a larger scale of “the track;” a sequence of city stops connected by highways that is frequently followed by various traffickers in order to seek the most revenue from selling victims

Bottom - or “bottom girl;” the victim of a trafficker who has the most power over other victims, often because s/he makes the most money, is the most loyal to the trafficker, or has been around for the longest. The “bottom” will often take on the role of collecting money from other victims and punishing them for offenses, but if the “bottom” commits an offense, his/her punishment is more violent.

Daddy - a term that traffickers will insist their victims call them

Driver/Security Guard - most frequently used in the context of escort services; a facade for a trafficker or assistant to the trafficker to pose as protection, while truly ensuring that the victim cooperates

Family - the trafficker and all victims under his control

The Game - related to “the life;” it is believed by a large portion of traffickers that all people are destined to either take advantage of others or be taken advantage of, and according to their world view, everyone is playing “the game.” Victims may be encouraged to “quit the game,” “leave the life,” or seek freedom from the physical and psychological grip of their oppressors.

Ho - female victim of sex trafficking

John - a client of a commercial sex act

The Life - the network of traffickers, victims, and clients

Out of Pocket - a girl who is disobeying or disrespecting her trafficker

Pimp - trafficker

Pimps Up, Hoes Down - a saying meant to degrade victims of trafficking, meaning that traffickers will walk on the sidewalk, while victims will walk in the street

Stable - all of a trafficker's victims; his "collection" of girls

The Square World - or "squares;" family and friends of victims; anyone not within the circle of exploitation

The Track - usual path of streets that a victim will walk while soliciting sex; traffickers often do not permit each other to send victims on the same "track" so that business is not affected

Trick - "turning a trick" or "playing a trick;" an engagement with a client where sex is traded for money

Wife-in-law - other trafficking victims exploited by the same trafficker

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