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Barriers to Identifying Trafficked Youth in the Vermont Healthcare Setting

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University of Vermont College of Medicine; Give Way to Freedom; Fletcher Allen Health Care

Introduction

- Human trafficking is a compelling public health issue affecting victims’ physical and psychological health.
- Victims are at increased risk of acute and chronic health problems.
- Little data is known about domestic human trafficking, but it is estimated that between 244,000 and 325,000 Vermont at-risk youth are at risk for sexual exploitation.
- Studies show 1 out of 3 teens are lured toward prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home and the average age of entry into prostitution is 12-14.
- Victims of human trafficking often share common characteristics: few opportunities for education, little family support, history of physical and/or sexual abuse, and coming from areas of high poverty and crime.
- Anyone can be a victim of human trafficking, the key is vulnerability.
- The legal definition of human trafficking in the US is, anyone who is forced or induced to work against their will.
- The sex of the victim identified barriers affecting victims’ physical and psychological health.

Objectives

- To identify the barriers to Vermont at-risk youth in accessing healthcare services and disclosing victimization.
- To identify the barriers to providers in identifying Vermont at-risk youth as potential trafficking victims.

Methods

- Reviewed research on prevalence and practices of human trafficking in VT, the US, and the world.
- Evaluated the screening tools available to healthcare providers to identify victims of human trafficking and the protocols for identifying and supporting victims.

Results

Health Provider Survey Results

- 104 providers were surveyed and 98 youth surveys were compiled and analyzed using SPSS.
- Referral system included victim support organizations, law enforcement, and county social service agencies.
- 49% of healthcare providers reported being aware of human trafficking as a potential issue for at-risk youth in Vermont.
- Of those healthcare providers who indicated treating youth victims of trafficking, 52% described these victims as under 18 years of age and 80% being female.
- 19.2% of providers interview youth patients alone less than half of the time.
- Providers identified the characteristics they identified were STIs, inappropriate clothing, and inappropriate cell phone use.
- 19.1% of providers indicated seeing between 1-5 potentially trafficked youth. The top characteristics they identified were STIs, inappropriate clothing, and inappropriate cell phone use.
- 22% of physicians interview youth patients alone less than half of the time.
- 100% of Family Medicine, 91% of Pediatric, 52% of Emergency Medicine, 38% of OB/GYN, and 35% of other specialties.

Youth Survey Results

- 28-30% of youth who had been in foster care described being forced to have sex for something as compared to 2% and 10% respectively of youth not having been in foster care.
- Youth who were hurt when being forced to do something, 69% did not go to the doctor. Only 11% youth who were hurt for other reasons did not go to the doctor.
- Youth who were hurt when being forced to do something and/or having to engage in sexual activity reported being hurt in the following ways: bruises (80%), sadness (73%), pain (60%), pregnancy (20%), STD (7%), and a broken bone (5%).

Conclusions

- Increased awareness regarding human trafficking in Vermont is needed.
- Healthcare providers desire more education, training, and referral information.
- Vermont youth participate in activities suggestive of human trafficking.
- Vermont youth who were injured as a result of survival sex and/or being forced to have sex and use/ sell drugs indicated the following barriers to care:
  - Being scared, being told not to go by someone else, lack of transportation (22%), and no money (11%)

Discussion & Analysis

- Healthcare provider data largely came from Chittenden County. There are a wide variety of specialties represented.
- Only 49% of healthcare providers reported being aware of human trafficking as a potential issue for at-risk youth in Vermont.
- Of those healthcare providers who indicated treating youth victims of trafficking, 52% described these victims as under 18 years of age and 80% being female.
- 19.2% of providers interview youth patients alone less than half of the time.
- Only 49% of healthcare providers reported being aware of human trafficking as a potential issue for at-risk youth in Vermont.

Literature Review

- Reviewed research on prevalence and practices of human trafficking in VT, the US, and the world.
- Evaluated the screening tools available to healthcare providers to identify victims of human trafficking and the protocols for identifying and supporting victims.

Answering the Question

- Assured safe and equitable standards in conducting our research among our survey participants, following IRB protocol.
- Anonymously surveyed at-risk youth ages 12-23 on their experiences with characteristics indicating trafficking and the healthcare system with a multiple choice and free response survey. In Chittenden, Windham, Caledonia and Windsor counties. One youth surveyed was 24 years old.
- Anonymously surveyed a broad spectrum of healthcare providers across the state, evaluating their awareness of the issue and their ability to identify victims of trafficking with a multiple choice and free response survey.

Data Analysis

- Responses from 104 healthcare provider surveys and 98 youth surveys were compiled and analyzed using SPSS.
- Conclusions and recommendations will be made to VT’s Human Trafficking Taskforce.

References