Intersection of Child Sex Trafficking & Sexual Abuse within African American Communities

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Objectives

- To assist providers and larger society in reshaping their perception of African American sex trafficking victims.
- To review the historical context and collateral implications of sexual abuse/trauma of African American individuals.
- To address the consequences of silencing sexual abuse.
- To highlight solutions in combatting sex trafficking and sexual abuse in African American communities.
Definition of Sex Trafficking

- Sex trafficking occurs when a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion if the victim is 18 years of age or older.

- Any minor who performs a commercial sex act is federally defined as a victim of sex trafficking, regardless of the use of force, fraud or coercion.

- The term “commercial sex act” is the giving or receiving of anything of value (money, drugs, shelter, food, clothes, etc.) to any person in exchange for a sex act.
Definition of Sexual Abuse

Any sexual activity with a child where consent is not or cannot be given. The sexually abusive acts may include penetration, creation of pornographic images, sexual touching, or non-contact acts such as exposure or voyeurism.

(Based on Berliner & Elliott, 2002)
Forms of Sex Trafficking/Exploitation

- Commercial sex acts may include prostitution, pornography and sexual performance.

Some forms of sex trafficking include:
- Pimp-controlled trafficking
- Gang-controlled trafficking
- Familial trafficking (trafficked by the family, generally for basic needs or drugs)
- “Survival sex” (minor engaging in commercial sex acts without the control of a pimp in order to meet his/her basic needs such as food or shelter).
In 2018 Cyber Tip Line (NCMEC) received more than 18.4 million reports, most of which were related to:

- Apparent Child Sexual Abuse Images
- Online enticement, including “Sextortion”
- Child Sex Trafficking
- Child Sexual Molestation
62% of Human Trafficking Suspects are African American

52% of All Juvenile “Prostitution” Arrests are African Americans

40% of Confirmed Sex Trafficking Victims are African Americans

Estimated 90% of Sex Trafficking Victims have a History of Sexual Abuse

(U.S. Department of Justice, 2012)
Scope of the Problem

- Over 18% of African American women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime. *This only accounts for those who report their abuse.

- For every 15 black women who are raped, only one reports her assault.

- 91% of black women are sexually assaulted by black men and 75% of those attacks are by men they know – family members, friends, trusted advisors, or neighbors.

(National Center for Victims of Crime, 2017)
Common Elements of Sex Trafficking and Sexual Abuse

- Relational trauma
- Developmental trauma
- Unequal power dynamics of perpetrator & victim
- Coercive elements (love, compliments, money, gifts)
- Secrecy
Oree’s Story
Historical Context

- Parallels between nation’s history of slavery and sex trafficking which is now deemed as modern day slavery.
  - Demographic of average buyer – Affluent and in some cases, highly regarded, Caucasian males.
- Mindset of being able to “buy a person” is deeply ingrained in the American psyche.
  - Victims are purchased with the intent to dehumanize, humiliate and/or harm these individuals.
- Mischaracterization of African-American individuals, particularly women.
  - Historical portrayal as “angry black woman,” aggressive jezebel, promiscuous, seductive, etc. Specifically, the jezebel characterized black women as hypersexual. In some regards this served to absolve white males of responsibility in the sexual abuse and rape of African-American women. Black women in such cases were said to be "askin' for it."
Historical Context

- Longstanding issue within African American communities of high rates of male unemployment, poverty, crime and violence.
  - Increases vulnerability for incidents of sexual abuse and trafficking.
- Racial injustices within legal and judicial systems.
  - Based on an Urban Institute study of identified traffickers – traffickers reported white women would earn the most money however trafficking a black woman would land the trafficker less jail time if caught.
  - Buyers (who are typically affluent and Caucasian men) will likely receive less jail time (if any) than the African American trafficker.
  - In some cases the African American trafficking victim is criminalized and re-victimized versus receiving appropriate counseling and protection from their abuser/trafficker.
Who is Saartjie “Sarah” Baartman?

Is the first known black female trafficking victim. She was a “Khoi-san” born woman from South Africa who was lured to Europe with promises of riches and fame. She was exploited by her traffickers whereas she was placed in a cage and on exhibit at a freak show due to her large buttocks and genitalia. Patrons could pay extra for private shows of which they were allowed to “touch” her. She was sold amongst traffickers and eventually landed with an animal exhibitor who produced a circus. Sarah was a part of the circus as her large body parts drew popularity. During this experience Sarah turned to drugs and alcohol and eventually was “prostituted” in exchange for money. She died in 1815. Following her death, her body parts were castrated, casted and placed on display in a Paris museum until 1974. Her remains were repatriated and officially buried in 2002.
Stereotypes within the AA Community

- “Fast” refers to the assumption of promiscuity based on appearance, attitude and/or demeanor.

- “Sassy” or “Bossy” places a negative connotation on being outspoken or vocal about personal ideas, feelings and/or thoughts.

- Curvy or shapely black girls are often targets for hypersexual statements, comments and/or assumptions.

- Pimp or Pimping is often used as a term of status or acknowledgement.
**Stereotypes within the AA Community**

- “Adultification” - is a process by which children or adolescents take on adult-like family roles and provide instrumental and emotional support for their families.
  - More prevalent amongst AA youth living in poverty.
  - Perceived to need less nurturance, protection, support and comfort
  - Increases vulnerability to incidents of sexual abuse and gateway to sex trafficking
  - AA youth are viewed as adults in comparison to their non black counterparts
    - By legal system both as a victim and/or defendant.
  - Juror - R. Kelly Case
Influence of Media on Self Esteem of AA Youth

- Music Industry
  - R. Kelly
  - Big Pimpin’ - Jay Z
  - PIMP – 50 Cent
  - Video Vixens
- Glamourize Stripping
  - Cardi B
  - Nicki Minaj
- Colorism
DePaul University Study
Victim to Victimizers

DePaul University Study (2010) – From Victims to Victimizers

- Interviewed 25 Ex-Pimps in Chicago.

- Nearly a third reported they entered commercial sex industry because they grew up around it. Exposure to sex trade – normalized the industry as an achievable means to earn a living.

- A majority of the pimps interviewed noted that white women were more profitable and easier to “manage” yet were more risky regarding prosecution/sentencing should the pimp be arrested.
DePaul University Study
Victim toVictimizers

Racial and Ethnic Breakdown

Gender

Black White

Male Female
DePaul University Study
Victim to Victorizers

- Drugs and Alcohol in Home
- Neighborhood Members Involved in Prostitution
- Family Members Involved in Prostitution
- Domestic Violence in Home
- Childhood Sexual Assault
- Physical Abuse While Growing Up

Household Characteristics
DePaul University Study
Victim to Victimizer

- 68% of victims sold sex prior to pimping.

Average Age Onset of Selling Sex:
Sample – 15.4
Women – 14.4
Men - 16
Silencing and Secrecy of Sexual Abuse in AA Culture

- Collectivist Culture
  - Systemic Oppression
  - Intergenerational Transmission of Abuse
  - Personal Culpability
- Higher Instances of Punishment or Remediation vs Receipt of Treatment
- Negative Reactions by Professionals, Family and/or Friends
  - Victim Blaming
  - Obstacles to Disclosure
- Religious Implications
Sexual Abuse/Sex Trafficking Persists

- System Perceptions
- Societal Apathy
- Perceptions of Choice
- Economics
- Polyvictimization
- Trauma Bond
Anonymous Victim

“I wasn’t “fast” or “seeking attention”…I was a literal child. There was literally NO WAY in hell my 14 y/o brain would’ve had the capacity to understand sex/sexuality the way a 25 y/o MAN did. HE KNEW he was wrong. I THOUGHT I was in love. In that sense I feel like everyone around me failed me…I blame no one but him but I often times imagine how different my early sexual encounters would’ve been if sex wasn’t taught to little girls so incorrectly. They tell us “sex is something people who love each other do” and leave it at that. WTF is that disgrace of a lie all about anyway? It leaves little girls thinking “we’re having sex, he loves me.” Imagine if sex was taught the right way. As nature. As something we do for pleasure and to procreate and you will NOT love every person you have sex with but you SHOULD respect them and vice versa…”
Anonymous Victim

“…and that an adult having sex with a child is NOT respecting you. Period. That simple explanation would’ve prevented that entire relationship. PERIOD. I wasn’t an idiot, I was miseducated. Imagine if masturbation was normalized for little girls the same way it is for little boys. Little boys turn 10 and suddenly they can lock their doors, surf the web, stay in their room all day without judgement. Little girls turn 10, that period drops and mama starts talking about they’re “a woman now.” While simultaneously getting no privacy and being told to no longer play with boys. Like Mama, what?! Give little girls the knowledge and freedom to own their sexuality FIRST and they wouldn’t be so quick to give it away or have it stolen.”

~ Anonymous
Reframing the Discussion

- What is Sex?
- What is Rape? What does Rape mean?
- The Meaning of Love and Sex
- Empowering Youth Voice/Importance of Consent
- Root Causes of Atypical Behaviors
Possible Solutions/Remedies

► Accountability – Bring attention to/hold accountable the individual(s) (perpetrators) of sex trafficking and sexual abuse.

► Increase awareness and education regarding sex trafficking and sexual abuse within the AA community.

► Move beyond the feelings of shame and embarrassment regarding sex trafficking, sexual abuse, sexual violence.

► Dismantle the support of the sex trade industry at all levels.

► Confront/address the biases that are rooted in helping systems.

► Providers/Professionals need to confront/address/resolve personal traumas.
Tika’s Story

“…I REALIZED I WAS A VICTIM
...THEN I BECAME A SURVIVOR
...AND NOW I AM A WARRIOR.”
Question & Answer
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