

5-2018

Early Interventions: Preventing at-risk youth from the path of Sexual Exploitation: A Systematic Review

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Recommended Citation

Farah, Rahma. (2018). Early Interventions: Preventing at-risk youth from the path of Sexual Exploitation: A Systematic Review. Retrieved from Sophia, the St. Catherine University repository website: https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers/847

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Early Interventions: Preventing at-risk youth from the path of Sexual Exploitation:
A Systematic Review

by

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MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, MN
In Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Social Work

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a semester to demonstrate facility with basic social work research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present their findings. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

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Abstract

Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is a hidden, complicated, and oppressive issue affecting children and adolescents on a transnational level. This systematic review examines factors that place at-risk youth for CSEC and early intervention strategies preventing at-risk youth from sexual exploitation and trafficking. The finding of this study determined that prevention would fall into the following categories: Psychoeducation, community awareness and education, developing comprehensive legislation, and reducing demand and supply. With the amount of at-risk youth for sexual exploitation and trafficking, it is imperative that practitioners, researchers or anyone working directly with youth understand this implication and relevancy of this issue. Education was a critical intervention to dissuade at-risk youth from sexual exploitation.

Keywords: domestic sex trafficking, sexual exploitation of children, at-risk youth; prevention combating sexual exploitation, adolescents.

Introduction and Purpose Statement

The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is an atrocious crime that occurs in the United States every day. CSEC is the sexual exploitation of children for financial and other economic gains (Duger, 2015). This crime ensues when individual(s) trade, buy or sell sexual acts with a child via force, fraud or coercion (McPhatter & el, 2013). According to Estes & Weiner (2001), CSEC is a domestic and international problem and very lucrative business. Commercial sex generates \$99 billion globally each year (Luscombe, 2014). For children who become victims of CSEC, the effects are devastating and the magnitude of physical and psychological consequences are unimaginable (Menaker & Franklin, 2013). Historically, commercial sexual exploitation of children and domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) has been considered an international problem. Until recently, it has become a social issue and academic research topic in the United States due to the growing number of youth involved and arrested for prostitution (Dugare, 2015; Estes & Weiner, 2001; Macias-Konstantopolus at al., 2015; & Menaker & Franklin, 2013). The U.S. Department of Justice, 2010, report evaluated the number arrest in the US between 1990 to 2010, estimated 1,040 juveniles under the age of 18 were arrested for prostitution and commercialized vices. The clandestine nature of this issue plays a major part in data collection. Children and youth who are at substantial risk of CSEC and DMST are homeless, throwaway, street youth, children in foster care systems, and LGBTQ youth because they are marginalized and vulnerable population (Gluck & Mathur, 2014, and Roswurm & Bolin, 2014). There is a critical need to research prevention and diversion programs to combat CSEC and DMST in the United States. The purpose of this systematic review is to examine available research on early interventions preventing at-risk youth from sexual exploitation and

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trafficking, and answer the following question: What are available early interventions to dissuade at-risk youth from the paths of sexual exploitation?

Literature Review

A global and national issue affecting children is sexual violence, and in recent years there has been increasing disquiet throughout the United States regarding the sexual exploitation and trafficking of American children (Estes & Weiner, 2001). Sexual exploitation and trafficking of children is a lucrative business that generates \$99 billion annually across the globe (Luscombe, 2014). In 2000, the US government passed the Trafficking Victim Protection Act (TVPA). In this legislation, domestic minor sex trafficking, which falls under the umbrella of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), defined by the TVPA as;

- A. The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act where such an act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act 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, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

This legislation was passed to address the sex trafficking of children within U.S. borders (domestic) due to the victims being U.S citizen or lawful permanent resident, and a minor.

Additionally, the commercial aspect of sexual exploitation is what separates sex trafficking from other sexual abuse crimes committed against children, such as molestation, rape, assault (Estes & Weiner, 2001 and TVPA, 2000). Therefore, the term commercial sex is a sexual act performed by a minor for an adult in exchange for money or other services of value. This exchange often is seen in cases of homeless youth who engage in survival sex. Traffickers and pimps exploit children through pornography, escort services, prostitution, stripping and exotic dancing (Estes & Weiner, 2001). Research, federal and state legislation has identified age being a critical factor,

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and under the TVPA there is no requirement to proof that fraud, force or coercion was used for a minor to be considered a victim (Estes & Weiner, 2001; Gluck & Mathur, 2014; Roswurm & Bolin, 2014 and TVPA, 2000).

Furthermore, the impacts of sexual exploitation are well documented in the available literature. Children involved in CSEC experience extreme physical, emotional, spiritual, sexual and psychological abuse. Children who are victimized experience long and short-term adverse consequences and trauma. “Youth have likely suffered psychological, emotional, verbal, spiritual, and sexual abuse, and has experienced or has been placed at risk for beatings, disfigurement, torture, and raped by their pimp or buyer” (Belin, 2015). Furthermore, exploited youth partake in destructive behaviors and commit suicide in higher rates (Belin, 2015 and Estes & Weiner, 2001). The California Child Welfare (2013) reported that youth die within seven years of being exploited due to their vulnerabilities of contracting HIV/AIDS or being murdered by an exploiter or buyer. With the list of documented harm, survivors of commercial sex are diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, major depressive disorders, and anxiety. Even after victims escape, they continue to experience adverse consequences and have difficulties adjusting to normalcy due extreme distrust of others, poor interpersonal boundaries and attachment, and damages to one's sense of self (Cole et al., 2016). A respondent driven sampling study conducted by Curtis et al., (2008) in New York, stated that recidivism is high among adults with history of prostitution. Furthermore, same can be speculated with youth who are commercial exploited, however, there limited empirical data to confirm or reject this speculation (Curtis et al., 2008).

Furthermore, youth involved in commercial sex are seen as a commodity not children; therefore, their bodies are turned into service transactions (Estes and Weiner, 2002). However,

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quantitative data on this population is limited, due to the furtive nature of commercial sexual exploitation. Nevertheless, the lack of quantitative data does not diminish the presence and severity of CSEC in the United States (Murphy et al., 2016). A widely cited study conducted by Estes & Weiner, 2001, a mixed method study, estimated that 300,000 children are at-risk of commercial sexual exploitations and 100, 000 children have been victims of exploitation in the United States. Additionally, an estimate of 105,000 children who have been substantiated to be victims of other forms of sexual abuse occurs yearly in the United States (Dugare, 2015; Estes & Weiner, 2002). As previously mentioned, age is a critical component of sexual exploitation of children. There was a rapport among researchers that the age of entry into CSEC is 11 to 14 years old (Curtis et al., 2008; Dugare, 2015; Estes & Weiner, 2001; Harper, E. A., 2013; Murphy et al., 2016; Jones and Roberts, 2015; National Runaway Safeline, 2016 and S. Varma et al., 2015). Researchers have speculated that children younger than 11 years old are initiated into commercial sex industry.

At-risk for victimization

All children are at risk for sexual exploitation. However, there are specific groups of youth who at higher risk of being exploited. The vulnerability is higher in the following population: youth with a history of abuse, homelessness, youth who identify as LGBTQ, youth in child welfare, foster care, and juvenile justice system (Dugare, 2015; Gluck & Mathur, 2014; Estes & Weiner, 2002 & Murphy et al., 2016). Available data suggest that homeless youth are at a higher risk for sexual exploitation because they do not have access to basic needs, lack financial resources and often are in unfamiliar environments to survive, which makes them vulnerable to predators (Dugare, 2015; Estes & Weiner, 2002; Gluck & Mathur, 2014 & Halcon & Lifson, 2004). A cross-sectional study conducted by Halcon & Lifson, 2004, reported that

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one in five homeless youth is a victim of sexual exploitation. Additionally, homeless youth are not a homogeneous group; they include runaways and throwaways. The circumstances of these youth leaving their homes include escaping an abusive home, not being wanted by families or there is a present of substance abuse by either the youth or the caregiver (Halcon & Lifson, 2004). Furthermore, LGBTQ youth are considered to be at high risk of becoming victims of sexual exploitation due to being over-represented among the homeless youth population and are isolated from their families and communities. Therefore, they are an easy target for predators (Dugare, 2015; Estes & Weiner, 2001 and National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2000). A three-month pilot screening study conducted by the Clark County Juvenile Court in Washington (2015), reported that confirmed victims of sexual exploitation had prior involvement with child protection and the juvenile justice system. Additionally, the study showed 40% of the participants were in involved in foster care, and 67% of the participants were also involved in the juvenile justice system for probation related charges before their identification as victims of sexual exploitation. In the Curtis et al., 2008, a 15 year old reported that she was “easily swayed by the pimp who approached her outside her group home.” Children in foster and group homes often feel despondent, isolated and alone, which makes them easy and vulnerable exploiters posing as “boyfriend” (Curtis et al., 2008). Additionally, youth who use and abuse substances are at high risk of being sexually exploited (Estes & Weiner, 2001 & National, R. C., & Institute, O. M., 2014). Substance use and abuse are interconnected in the sex trade industry, which makes it difficult for researchers to differentiate whether it is a cause or effect. However, adults in the sex industry has cited that substance was a point of entry into the commercial sex industry (National, R. C., & Institute, O. M., 2014). According to Estes & Weiner (2001) youth who are sexually exploited and trafficked abuse and use drugs higher rate and the drugs are supplied by

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the traffickers. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2016), exploiters target areas where vulnerable youth often congregate (hot spots), like foster care, group homes, shelter programs, shopping malls, schools; bus stations, local streets, and websites.

Risk factors

As previously discussed, traffickers target children with a specific background. Although, there isn't a standard profile of victims in the literature, there are identified risk factors associated with victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The National Academy of science, 2013, identified risk factors that are considered possible indicators of CSEC and increase the vulnerabilities of at-risk youth. Researchers used the ecological model, to understand the complexities and the interconnected impetuses that increase vulnerabilities of at-risk youth and traps victims in the cycle of exploitation. These risk factors are reflected on table 1. The National Academy of Science, 2013 and Estes & Weiner, 2001, cautioned readers that the presence of these risk factors may not necessarily contribute to exploitation, however, providers should conduct comprehensive assessment when working with at-risk youth who have one or more these risk factors. According to Estes & Weiner, 2001, homeless, runaway and throwaway youth are at higher risk of victimization because they engage in risky activities to meet their basic needs, such as, survival sex. One study referenced in the National Academy of Science, 2013, concluded that 47% out a sample size of 272 of the youth have been sexually exploited through survival sex. Additionally, homelessness is major predictor of youth involvement in commercial sex. Research suggest that these risk factors increase the risk of youth for sexual exploitation.

Table 1. Identified risk factor –Estes &Weiner, 2001 and National Academy of Science, 2013.

Level	Risk Factors
Individual (micro)	Mental health, previous history of maltreatment, homelessness, identifying as LGBTQ, early adversity and dysfunctional family dynamics
Community (mezzo)	Involvement in child welfare, juvenile justice and foster care system, high presence of gangs and prostitution in the community, peer pressure and lack of resources in the community
Societal (macro)	Lack of awareness, normalization (pimp culture) and over-sexualization of women and young girls, and economic disparities.

Recruitment and Entrapment process

As aforementioned, exploiters/traffickers target youth who are vulnerable. Traffickers use manipulation and false hope of love, care and affection to recruit victims (Estes & Weiner, 2001 & Flores, 2015). Youth are recruited into the sex industry by the via; peer networks, directly by the trafficker either in person or online, familial entry; seduction, befriending, false promise of better life, or by abduction (California Child Welfare Council, 2013; Dugare, 2015; Estes & Weiner, 2001; Harper, 2013 & Murphy et al, 2016). The grooming process is prolonged, and the traffickers and exploiters shower their victims with false love and affection, and initially meet their basic needs before coercing (Estes & Weiner, 2001). When the victim becomes emotionally invested in the relationship, the trafficker will make settle and small demands to test the loyalty of the victim(s) (Simmons, 2014). Once trust, bond, and dependency is developed; “Traffickers attempt to control their victims through the use of force, fraud, or coercion and through techniques such as confinement, beating, rape, confiscation of documents, debt bondage, false offers of employment, and threats of harm to the victim or the victim’s family” (Simmons, 2014). As aforementioned, exploiters target areas where vulnerable youth

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congregate (shelters, group homes, malls, treatment facilities, etc.). Exploiters use this tactic because they understand youth vulnerabilities and quarry on those with lack of self-esteem, insecure attachment and support. Which why they provide secure attachment, support and sense of belonging in the beginning stages to lure their victims in. (Estes & Weiner, 2001; Harper, E. A., 2013; Murphy et al., 2016 & Simmons, 2014). Furthermore, technology is another method used for grooming and coercing perspective victims. Exploiters connect with youth through social media (Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat), build a relationship with them, then ask for nude photos to blackmail and entrap victims (Simmons, 2014). Research suggest that lack of support and awareness of this issues is another factor that keeps victims trapped and make perspective victims easy prey. One recruitment tactics that was not addressed by researchers, except the Curtis et al., 2008, was strangers initiated and being “propositioned by men on the street who asked to perform a variety of fetishized sex act.” In the aforementioned study, many of the youth (n=16) reported the reason for being so receptive to the propositions was because of the circumstance they were in, homeless being a prime example; the youth willing to do anything a shelter during the winter season (Curtis et al., 2008, p. 49).

Interventions

There has been increasing attention on the commercial sexual exploitation of children in the United States. Federal and state legislation to protect, prosecute, and prevent sexual exploitation of children has passed. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA-P.L.106-386) is a federal law that addresses and define sexual exploitation of minors. Under the TVPA, minors are victims rather than perpetrators, regardless of the presences of fraud, coercion, and force. Initially, the TVPA focused on victims trafficked into the U.S and not until the reauthorization of 2013 that domestic minor sex trafficking was explicitly addressed.

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Furthermore, many states have adopted the Safe Harbor laws of 2001. The Safe harbor laws were created by states to address inconsistencies in the treatment of children and ensuring that identified victims received and have access to adequate services. There were discrepancies between the federal and state laws regarding prosecution. Under the federal law, anyone under eighteen are considered victims of commercial sex. However, state laws prosecuted adult who engaged in sex with minors under the statutory rape laws. However, these laws were not being applied to adults who purchased sex from minors. Therefore, the safer harbor laws were developed to allied federal and state laws. The safe harbor laws contain two components; (1) legal protection and (2) provision of services. The first component provides immunity from prosecution (decriminalization), which means identified victims of sexual exploitation will receive services rather than being criminalized. The service component focused on providing services such as medical, education, housing assistance and psychological treatment to survivors. States have the option of choosing one or both components. Currently, thirty-four states have passed the safe harbor laws. Locally, Minnesota has added the No Wrong Door to its safe harbor laws. The No Wrong Door is a multidisciplinary and compressive approach to addressing the sexual exploitation of children across Minnesota. Under the safe harbor law, Minnesota developed regional navigators and training programs. There are eight regional navigators and they are responsible for identifying victims and connecting them with adequate resources, and “serving as regional experts for communities” (MN Department of Health, 2016). Additionally, MN developed protocol development and training model that is multidisciplinary to identify sexually exploited youth. Furthermore, the protocol trains service providers across Minnesota. Law enforcement and criminal justice agencies play a vital role in identifying and intervening to

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commercial sex. There has been increasing awareness and training among these agencies to better service this population. In addition, awareness among the general population is increasing.

Gap in Literature

Although intervention and identification of victims are increasing, there is still a gap in the literature. Interest in this topic is growing among service providers and policymakers, however, there is lack of evidence-based research regarding program evaluation and prevention. Also, there is minimal empirical research on effective prevention practices to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children. More empirical research is needed to understand and prevent this issue early on.

Summary

Commercial sexual exploitation of children is a prevalent issue that affects individuals as well as the fabric of every community. Different factors were identified that make youth vulnerable and place them at a higher risk of being sexually exploited. Youth who are involved in the social services or juvenile justices system are at higher risk of being exploited. Additionally, children with a history of trauma like emotional, physical and sexual abuse are at risk for exploitation. Exploiters specifically target these youth through different means because they understand their vulnerability. Runaways, homeless, LGBTQ and youth in the systems lack emotional and financial support, which makes them at risk for sexual exploitation. Exploiters have created a formula for targeting their victims. The research has identified various venues they use to trick their victims. Age and the aforementioned factors and methods make these youth an easy prey to exploit. There are federal and state laws created to protect and prevent the commercial exploitation of children across the US. More research on prevention is needed to combat the sexual exploitation of children in this country.

Conceptual Framework

In Social Work, it is imperative to have a conceptual framework when conducting research because one cannot separate theory from practice or concepts from application. For this systemic review, the Ecological framework was used to organize and provide structure for analyzing the complexity of combating commercial sexual exploitation of children; specifically those who are at-risk of being exploited. The ecological model focuses on the complex transactions between the relationship among people and their environment (Forte, 2007). To understand how these continuous interactions interplay, the ecological model uses three levels: the micro, mezzo and macro level.

These levels represent different layers of bi-directional transactions between the two variables (the individual and the environment) and how they accommodate and complement each other (Forte, 2007). These reciprocal interactions between the child and environment is defined by proximal process, which states the relationship a child has with their environment are bi-directional. In this process the child interacts with symbols and objects in the immediate setting which creates a context (Forte, 2007). The micro level consists of interpersonal relationships and the direct contact the child has (Forte, 2007, p.136). The structure in the micro level include family, school, daycare, and peer relations (immediate settings). At this level, bi-directional influences have great impact on the child's development.

According to Forte, the mezzo level is a "system of relationships between two or more immediate settings" (p. 136). These settings are the relationship between family and the school, family and neighborhood, and family and their support systems (Forte, 2007). How these immediate relationships interact will have an effect on how the child grows, if the interactions

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are nurturing in these relationships then the settings will have a positive impact on the child's overall development.

The third level of this model involves the macro level. This refers to the “consistencies or “generalized patterns” that exist at the level of culture and ideology, including values, laws and customs (Forte, 2007, p.137). These broad cultural and social factors influence the other ecosystems. For example, economic disruption and cultural characteristics can shape development.

The ecological model demonstrates the complexity and interconnected forces that makes at-risk youth extremely vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation. According to the model, early interventions and preventions practices are needed at each level. Additionally, evaluating and considering the risk factors can be great deterrents in decreasing at-risk youth vulnerabilities to commercial sexual exploitation. These levels of the ecological framework was used as a base in developing the abstraction sheet.

Methodology

Research Design

A systematic review was used as the design method for this study. According to Holly, Salmond, & Saimbert (2017), systematic review is a comprehensive overview of studies and the word systematic refers to “order and planning” (P. 19). This particular research method aims to evaluate, identify and summarize findings that are relevant to the chosen topic and question. Systematic review has a protocol that guides the researchers and serves as a blueprint on how the review is carried out. The purpose of this systematic review is to identify available recommendation and early interventions designed to prevent at-risk youth from victimization. A systematic review is currently the best method due to gap in research regarding this topic.

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Existing research on the commercial sexual exploitation of children was reviewed. The data collected was used to answer the following question: What are available early interventions to dissuade at-risk youth from the paths of sexual exploitation?

Search Strategy

The researcher searched different online databases in order to gather existing research on this topic. The following search engines were used: SocINDEX, PsycINFO, Scopus, Social Work Abstract, Family Studies Abstracts, Academic Search Premier, dissertation abstracts, and Child Development and Adolescent Studies. Additionally, articles were also requested through the Interlibrary Loan System when they were not available in the databases. Articles were gathered using specific search terms. The terms that were searched concurrently were “human trafficking”, “trafficking,” “sex crimes,” “exploitation” “youth,” “adolescents,” and “prevention.” Several combinations of these terms were to collect available data. This is reflected in Table 1.

Table 1.

Combination Terms used During Data Collection

Human Trafficking	Youth	Prevention
Sex Crimes	Adolescents or Youth	Prevention or Treatment programs
Exploitation	Adolescent	Prevention
Trafficking	Adolescent	Prevention
Adolescents	Trafficking	Prevention

Selection Criteria

This research included peer-reviewed journals, research-based articles, organizational and agency articles. Additionally, Dissertation and thesis papers were also included in this study. Furthermore, a search for both sensitivity and specificity was conducted. A sensitivity search

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using broad range terms initially used then specificity search was used to narrow the focus of the research in order to generate high percentage of pertinent articles.

Inclusion. This study specifically focused on commercial sexual exploitation in the United States. The set criteria for inclusion for the articles in this review was that they have recommendations for prevention at-risk youth from sexual exploitation. Additionally, there were no limited number requirement of participants or whether studies had control or experiment groups, because the focus of this review was to collect strategies and identified prevention methods available to combat at-risk youth from victimization.

Exclusion. Articles pertaining to adults or internationally focused were excluded in this study. Selected articles were also limited to those written in English and conducted in the United States. Articles that did not include prevention or recommendation strategies were also excluded.

Data Collection Process

Through the abstraction process, 533 articles were collected and only eleven articles met the selection criteria. Majority of the articles were ruled out included lack of prevention strategies and only reviewed the topic. The data collection process is summarized in Figure 1.

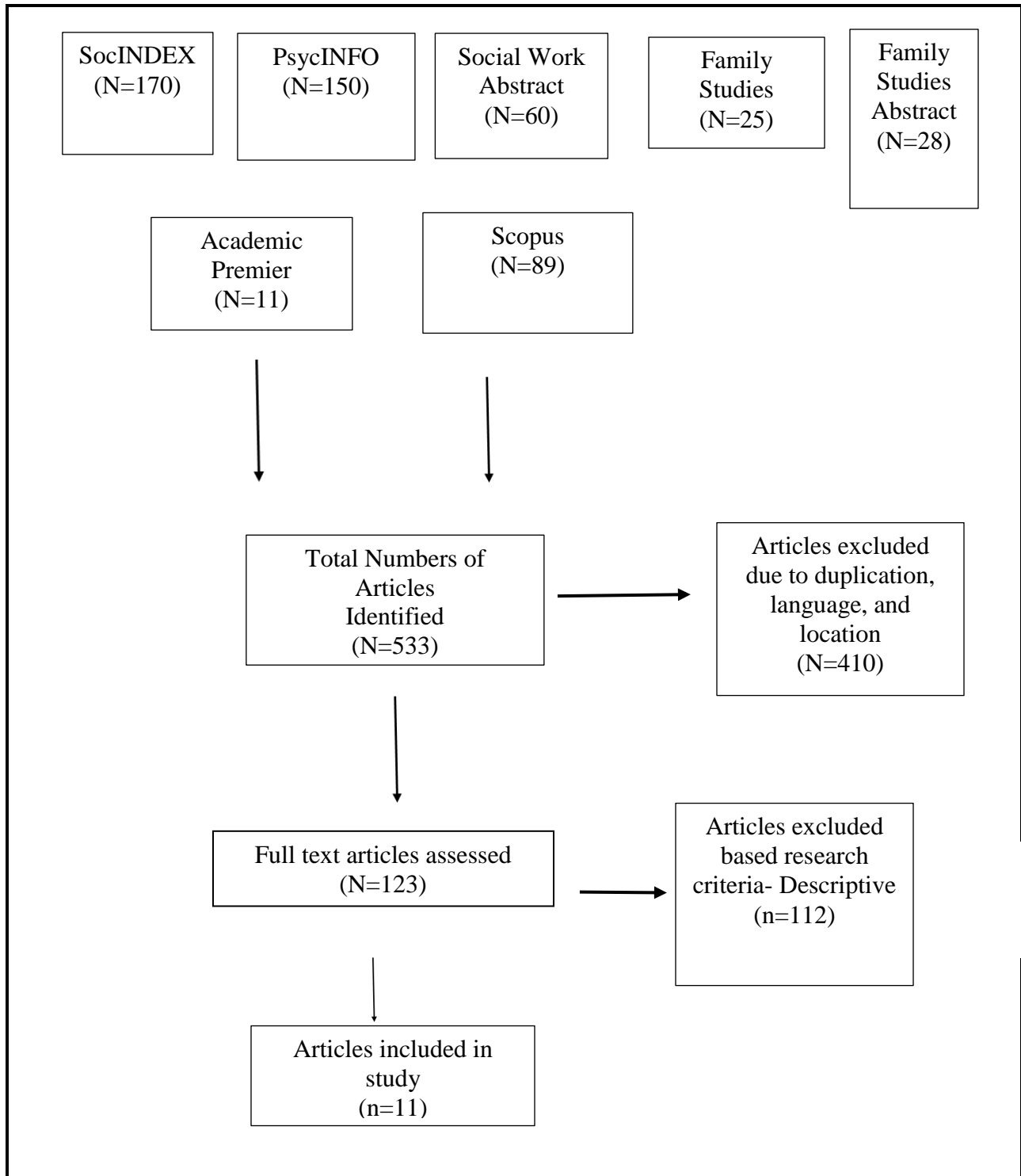


Figure 1. Flow Chart of Data Collection Process

Findings

From the research collected, eleven articles were included in this study. The ecological system was used to categorize major themes with subthemes that emerged from the study. The following overarching interventions and prevention strategies were identified in the research: psycho-education, reducing demand and policy. The list of articles used for the review are listed at the end of this paper (see appendix A).

Micro Level Interventions

In the studies reviewed, 36% (4 out of 11) of the articles discussed several micro level interventions that address key interpositions to prevent at-risk youth from sexual exploitation. The themes that emerged from the articles are; psychoeducation groups, teaching interpersonal relationships, providing at-risk youth support and educating youth about commercial sexual exploitation.

An early intervention such as providing support was identified as a key factor in reducing the vulnerability of youth who are at-risk of being sexually exploited. In the article Kruger et al., 2013, a qualitative study based on middle school girls who participated in 3 school terms prevention intervention program. The group consisted of 33 African American participants with an average age of 11 years. The participants were identified as at-risk youth due to living in a demographic area with high prevalence of CSEC and interpersonal violence. The study identified four themes that emerged from the discussion group; participants expressed having difficulty forming trust, familiarity with prostitution, peer related aggression, and participant's perception seeing sexuality as commodity made them more vulnerable to exploitation. The study concluded that support and early intervention were key variables that can mitigate victimization.

Interpersonal relationship provides youth a set of skills that can help them from being victimized. In the article O'Brian, 2017, a mixed method (qualitative and quantitative) study with

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33 participants ranging ages from 28 to 62 years were interviewed in a private space. The demographic of the participants consisted of 20 service provider with background experience in human trafficking and 13 DMST survivors. The study concluded that, “Interpersonal relationship was universally found to be an important factor in keeping children who were at risk for DMST victimization from being victimized” (O’Brian, 2017, pg. 103). Vulnerability for at-risk youth can be reduced when youth are exposed to early positive interpersonal relationships with a caregiver or supportive adults. Additionally, the study revealed that survivor participants identified having early knowledge and understanding the “warning signs” and “red flags” of unhealthy or exploitative relationships being a protective factor that can dissuade at-risk from victimization and help those subjugated to exit the life early. Additionally, positive interpersonal relationships can foster resiliency and empowering at-risk youth.

Education is an important element that can reduce the risk of victimization for vulnerable youth. Murphy et al., 2016, a qualitative assessment of a website that focused on educating at-risk youth about Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) and the gradual process of victimization. The authors created a website containing comprehensive CSEC content presented by survivors. The study comprised of 48 adolescents, ages ranging from 14 to 18 years. The participants were identified by service providers as at-risk youth for sexual exploitation. The participant were given a pre and post-test to measure their understanding, awareness and attitude regarding CSEC. The study concluded that participant awareness of CSEC increased. In the post-test, 97% of the youth indicated the presented video was effective tool to educate young people about sexual exploitation. Another type of education that can be used to reduce sexual exploitation is psychoeducation. In the article Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014, conducted exploratory study to examine what factors put youth at-risk for DMST and stimulating protective

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factors through a 10- psychoeducation group to counteract risk factors that make youth vulnerable to exploitation. The sample for the study consisted of 23 youth between the ages of 14 and 21, and used purposeful convenience sampling to select participants. This study was in the preliminary phases in a larger study conducted to create a DMST Risk and Resiliency Assessment. A Lotus curriculum was created and facilitated by diverse practitioners. The curriculum consisted of recognition of healthy vs none healthy relationships, awareness, building healthy relationships, self-discovery, planning for the future and holistic health. The study concluded 82% of participants were able to identify signs of healthy vs unhealthy relationships and 71% learned the importance of setting boundaries within relationships. Also, 12% of participants were able to identify being in unhealthy relationship and as a result left. Additionally, 24% of participants reported that they stopped exchanging sex to basic needs (food, money, and shelter). Another significant outcome of this study was participants felt safe to explore their belief and values regarding healthy relationships with individuals in their lives, but also with themselves. In this study, participants were given an opportunity to be exposed to thinking and talking about unhealthy situations through psychoeducation. Psychoeducation helped un-normalized youth responses to negative relationships and reinforced positive cognition and sense empowerment.

Mezzo Level Intervention

A community response is another strategy in reducing the vulnerability of children and ultimately contributing to the prevention of sexual exploitation. Community interventions and collaboration among service providers in addressing, identifying and public awareness of sexual exploitation can reduce the vulnerability of at-risk youth. The studies reviewed, 27% (3 out of 11) articles addressed mezzo level interventions. There were three emerging themes that came

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from the following four articles. The themes are; identification of at risk youth, public awareness of the social issue and more collaboration between service providers.

There are many children that are affected by sexual exploitation and many of those children are not properly identified in the system. Therefore many children fall through the cracks and they do not receive the proper resources and services. In a study done by Brackin, 2014, a descriptive journal article analyzing the increasing number of Kansas youth entering the sexual exploitation industry, concluded that multi-disciplinary and community collaboration is needed to identify the factors that place youth at-risk for sexual exploitation. The authors recommended creating a system that can identify at-risk youth and increasing the public's ability to identify and report incidents.

Sexual Exploitation is a social issue that has been increasing and affecting many. The lack of public awareness in society increases the risk of youth that are vulnerable to exploitation. In a study done by Estes & Weiner, 2001, a 3 year investigative study recommended national campaigns and community participation as an effective intervention in combating sexual exploitation of children. Increase in bipartisan efforts are needed to coordinate a wide systematic change using multipronged approach. Countryman-Roswurm & Brackin, 2014 and Estes & Weiner, 2001 both identified integrating anti-trafficking awareness into local law enforcement practices as a key element in making progress towards protecting and preventing victims.

In the current society that we live in today, interdisciplinary teams and service providers has become essential in providing excellent care. However, there is a lack of collaboration among service providers when it comes to the topic of sexual exploitation. The U. S. Department of Justice, 2016 released a national strategy for child exploitation prevention and interdiction. One of the recommended strategies identified was service providers (law enforcement, social

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workers, foster care and school personnel) playing important role in the prevention of sexual exploitation and recovery process because they closely provided services to these victims. The report purposed to the Interdiction for the Protection of Children program created by Texas Department of Public Safety. The goal of the program is educate and provide the necessary tools law enforcement need to identify missing or exploited children, as well as at-risk children. Furthermore, the reported recommended promoting collaboration among professional in identifying at-risk youth for sexual exploitation. Additionally, the reported concluded that schools can play a major role in preventing, identifying and educating children about sexual exploitation.

Macro Level Prevention

The research discussed the importance of responding to commercial sexual exploitation at a national and state level by establishing a legislative framework that will protect and promote safe environment for all children. One of the necessary steps to creating a safe environment is to reduce and ultimately eliminate demand through policy. Of the studies reviewed, 45% (5 out of 11) of the articles focused comprehensive policy being prevention tool.

The development of comprehensive policy was a key recommendations made in the efforts of preventing sexual exploitation. A study conducted by Todres, 2010 a descriptive article analyzing current policy. The article analyzed current policies created to combat sexual exploitation and suggested developing comprehensive prevention-oriented strategy to fully combat sexual exploitation of children. One suggestion made was intervention efforts should “move upstream” to prevent harm from occurring in the first place. The comprehensive prevention strategy contains the following five components; (1) Early identification of vulnerability through research and data collection, (2) program design focus on reorienting state

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approaches to prevention by including marginalized group, especially youth into the prevention process; (3) the dominant principle to guide state response, (4) coordination among stakeholders, and (5) Interrelationship among rights. These five component focus on using systematic data collection to understand the vulnerabilities that places youth at-risk for exploitation and to mitigate effectively. Additional, the U. S. Department of Justice, 2016, Countryman-Roswurm & Brackin, 2014 addressed policy being key factor to preventing sexual exploitation of children.

Sexual exploitation is a complex issue with different causes, however, one factors that keeps this industry thriving is demand. A descriptive article written by Barnitz, 2001; Countryman-Roswurm & Brackin, 2014; Estes & Weiner, 2001 and U. S. Department of Justice, 2016, discussed reducing demand should be one of the main focus of national and local response to preventing sexual exploitation of children. The authors discussed strategies that can potentially deter buyer. For example, increasing penalties for buyers and mandatory “Johns’ School” for those convicted of buying sex by educating and rehabilitating them as preventative measure.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify prevention interventions that would dissuade at-risk from sexual exploitation. The finding in this study showed that comprehensive intervention at individual, community, and social level is needed to mitigate at-risk youth from victimization.

Micro Level

As outlined in the literature review, children subjugated into exploitation experience variety of long term affects and challenges, such as mental health, substance abuse and instability. The clandestine nature of this issue presents challenges for researchers and service providers. The findings show early interventions programs are needed to dissuade at-risk youth

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from sexual exploitation. Results of this review suggest that prevention initiatives were effective when the content was developmentally appropriate and presented by survivors of sexual exploitation. In the micro level interventions, psychoeducation, interpersonal relationships and awareness were key factors that can decrease youth vulnerability to sexual exploitation. The exploratory study conducted by Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014, showed the effectiveness of providing at-risk youth psychoeducation programs. Participants learned protective skills as such being aware of unhealthy relationships and making healthy decisions. Furthermore, when at-risk youth are provided with safe and encouraging environment, they are able to develop protective factors against exploitation (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014 & O'Brian, 2107). Additionally, education is important element that can prevent at-risk youth from sexual exploitation. Exploited youth are not aware of and do not identify themselves as victims of sexual exploitation, therefore, engaging and educating youth early on is a protective factor against victimization (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014 ;Murphy et al., 2016 & O'Brian, 2107).

Mezzo Level:

At the mezzo level, community participation was a key factor against sexual exploitation. The reviewed articles suggested that service providers are vital stakeholders because they have access to at-risk youth through service provision (Brackin, 2014). At-risk youth come in contact with school personnel, law enforcement, health care professionals, juvenile justice and the foster care systems. The U.S. Department of Justice, 2016 study suggest that utilizing schools is a major prevention strategy. Schools already have an evidence based preventative programs that are targeted towards at-risk youth for different issues, which is why this setting will have a significant impact on reducing the victimization of at-risk youth (Estes & Weiner, 2001 & U.S. Department of Justice, 2016). Due to the school personnel daily interactions with youth, they are

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in a position to build positive relationships with them and intervene early on (Barnitz, 2001 & Kruger et al, 2013). The reviewed studies also suggested community collaboration among service providers is needed to prevent at-risk youth from exploitation. Furthermore, community involvement was important in breaking the silence, protecting young people and eliminating the clandestine nature of sexual exploitation.

Macro Level

The review studies suggested that a comprehensive legislation response was imperative in combating sexual exploitation of children. Todress, 2010, made recommendation to the different component an effective legislation policy should contain; 1) Early identification of vulnerability through research and data collection, (2) program design focus on reorienting state approaches to prevention by including marginalized group, especially youth into the prevention process; (3) the dominant principle to guide state response, (4) coordination among stakeholders, and (5) Interrelationship among rights. Additionally, Todres, 2010, focused the importance of inclusion of marginalized groups into the discussion and policy process. “Devalued conceptions of marginalized populations have facilitated their exploitation” (Todres, 2010, p. 23). Policy plays an important part in addressing and preventing social issues through the allocation of services and resources, therefore, engaging communities to part of the prevention strategies is key element. The demand for sex with children is astonishingly high. Furthermore, research in the macro level finding revealed that comprehensive plan designed to prevention the sexual exploitation of children focuses on eliminating demand (Barnitz, 2001; Countryman-Roswurm & Brackin, 2014; Estes & Weiner, 2001; Todres, 2016 and U. S. Department of Justice, 2016).

Recommendations

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What sexual exploitation is and its consequences are well documented in the literature, however, there are minimal data on the number of youth who are victimized or at-risk of being exploited. Majority of the search reviewed focused on girls and the sexual exploitation of boys seemed to be overlooked. This researcher recommends comprehensive systematic data collection in order to create an effective prevention strategies. In the current available research, there are diminutive data regarding preventing at-risk youth from victimization. Review studies listed the risk factors that make youth vulnerable to exploitation, however, there are no empirical evidence available that supports this correlation. Conversely, this researcher recommends further research is needed to gain understanding of the correlation between risk factors and entry into commercial sexual exploitation of children. As well as ways to remedy the vulnerabilities the risk factor create and developing prevention strategies. Additionally, the glamorization of pimp culture contributed to the normalization and objectification of women, especially women of color for this type of exploitation. In the mezzo and macro level interventions, community and societal awareness initiatives should include educating boys and males about gender base violence. Moreover, this researcher recommends the creation of educational curriculum to foster parents so they can be part of the prevention plan. Additionally, the researcher recommends conversation and education about commercial sex should begin in middle school. As previously mentioned, schools already have prevention curriculum about bullying in place. Incorporating age appropriate CSEC educational materials is an effective approach to educate at-risk youth early on. Also, might be a method of identifying at-risk youth and victims early on.

Limitation

One of the most challenging aspect of this study was the lack of empirical data pertaining to program effectiveness. There were different descriptive journal articles that gave an overview

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of CSEC. There is an apparent gap in the research. The Estes & Weiner (2001) is widely used study in the literature due to their quantitative data, however, data provided is based on estimates. Researchers find it difficult to sample this client population due to the clandestine nature of this issue. More comprehensive research is needed. This researcher recommends collaborating with survivors and outreach workers to connect with at-risk youth. Also increasing awareness, so the nature of sexual exploitation is no longer clandestine.

Implications for Social Work Practice

CSEC is crime against humanity. Every day a young child's body is used as a commodity to make money to please adults. These children lose the opportunity to grow up. This research provided a brief look at preventing at-risk youth from sexual exploitation and trafficking, and the need to furthermore address this issue. Social worker who work in the field can be great asset in combating CSEC because they work with this particular population. Any social worker in any of the following setting need to be aware of CSEC: child protection, foster care, juvenile justice system, shelters, residential setting, hospitals, group home, street-outreach, or probation. Social worker can intervene in a micro (direct practice), mezzo (community) and macro (policy). At this point research on preventing at-risk youth from sexual exploitation and trafficking is limited thus providing the opportunity to further this research this topic. Additionally, this research also revealed information useful to social workers working with vulnerable youth in different setting. Practice implication that ascended from this research include the importance of education and awareness, youth participation, policy, and community involvement in combating CSEC. Macro level implication within this research included the need for comprehensive prevention plan and programs. The research was clear about different needs and risks vulnerable youth have. Additionally, this research identified youth who are in the system are at-risk for sexual

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exploitation and trafficking. Social workers who work in these systems and with these youth can play a vital role in the implementation of prevention strategies. One of the Social Work Code of Ethics is competence. Social workers need to educate themselves on this issue, so they can better serve their clients and partake in the prevention process.

Conclusion

The purpose of this systematic review was to examine available research on preventing at-risk youth from sexual exploitation and trafficking, and answer the following question: What are available early interventions to dissuade at-risk youth from the paths of sexual exploitation? As far as the researcher is aware, this is the first systematic review specifically focusing on preventing at-risk children from exploitation. The themes that emerged from the review were early interventions strategies such as psychoeducation, public awareness, community participation, service provider collaboration, comprehensive policy and reducing demand through education. Another consistent emerging theme throughout the research process was the gap in literature and lack of empirical data. These findings contribute to our awareness and knowledge of deterring at-risk youth from the sexual exploitation and trafficking. Findings concluded that education, public awareness and eliminating demand are important factors in preventing at-risk youth from exploitation. One of the survivors in the O'Brien (2017) study speaks to the importance of education and increased awareness. She stated that, "If I had early knowledge and understanding of the warning signs and red flags I would never have been exploited" (p. 103).

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Appendix A

Articles Summaries

Author and Title	Design	Themes
<p>O'Brien (2017). Risk Factors, protective factors, and identification practices for system-involved domestic minor sex trafficking survivors.</p>	<p>Mixed design; qualitative and quantitative data collected from 20 services provide and 13 survivor of DMST through interviews. The researcher created 10-item survey to collect demographic data from participants. Open coding was used to categorize. The participant's age ranged from 28 to 69.</p>	<p>Major theme that was apparent in the article was teaching at-risk youth healthy interpersonal relationship early on reduces their risk of victimization. Survivors and service providers were in synced about early negative caregiver relationships being a major contributor for DMST victimization.</p>
<p>Summary: The author used risk and resiliency framework to guide this mixed method research. There was total of 23 participants involved in this study. Participants were from a different background. Furthermore, 84.6% of the survivor participants indicated being involved in the child welfare system and recruited into DMST via peer network. The findings of this research contextualized the role of interpersonal relationships in DMST victims/survivors. Interpersonal relationships play major factor into the entry and exiting DMST. The following three themes emerged from this study: (1) interpersonal relationships can foster resiliency, (2) interpersonal relationship can be risk factors, and (3) interpersonal relationships can be protective factors. The research did have recommendation but eluded that child welfare and juvenile justice system can foster positive interpersonal relationship and mitigate the risk of victimization (pg. 101). Additionally, educating and providing training about DMST to service provider is the key to mitigating at-risk and victims from exploitation.</p>		
<p>Kruger et al (2013). Sexualized and dangerous relationships: Listening to the voices of low-income african american girls placed at risk for sexual exploitation.</p>	<p>Qualitative Study</p>	<p>Four themes emerged from this study. These themes were: participants had difficulties forming relationships, present of peer aggression, participants had familiarity with adult prostitution and</p>
<p>Summary: The rationale for the study was to create a systematic description of participants and to address the needs of AA girls in urban schools affected by CSEC. 92% of the participants were identified being economically disadvantage. The researchers use the Socioeconomic Mapping & Resources Topography (SMART) system and Community Disadvantage Index (CDI) to select sites. Both system determined the school site is high risk for CSEC due to increase arrest of adult and juvenile prostitution. This was a prevention intervention curriculum program based. The program lasted for 3 terms. As aforementioned four integrative themes emerged from this study, identified community violence being a CSEC factor. Having</p>		

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positive relationships. This is only study found that specifically address at-risk youth for sexual exploitation.		
Murphy et al., 2016. Development and pilot test of a commercial sexual exploitation prevention tool	Mixed Design-Qualitative and Quantitative. 48 youth participated in the study.	Early intervention prevention through education and awareness
Summary: The purpose of this study was educate youth about CSEC. The researcher created a website that contained a compressive and age-appropriate information regarding CSEC. The participants received pre and post-test. Survivors of CSEC were used to create the material. Participants had positive reaction the website.		
Estes &Weiner (2001). The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.	Survey Data (first-generation) Stratified random sampling. Also Several Likert-type scales were used. Comprehensive Study	Policy Awareness
Summary: This is one of the most cited article on this topic. The research took place in US, Canada and Mexico, a very comprehensive study. The major factors contributing to the sexual exploitation of children were identified in this study.		
Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Assessing and Reducing risks. Roswurn & Bolin (2014).	Exploratory study Lotus Psychoeducation group consisting of 10 sessions. Questionnaire	Psychoeducation as an early intervention.
Summary: This article was exploratory lotus study that focused on psychoeducation group consisting 10 sessions questionnaire. The participants were identified ask at-risk youth and possible victims of csec. The resiliency program was effective in providing protective factors to participants. Participants were able to differentiate healthy vs unhealthy relationships. Some participants even left abusive relationships.		
Confronting Sexual Exploitation of Children. National & Institute (2014)	Literature Review	Risk factors
Summary: Comprehensive literature review sexual exploitation of children. The researcher used the ecological model to describe how risk factors. The article also discusses intervention and breaks it down way service providers can be an asset. The article was also descriptive in explaining the issue.		

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Brackin (2014)	Descriptive	Policy
Summary: a descriptive article that focused on policy, specifically Kansas’s currently policies regarding combating sexual exploitation of children. The article intensely discussed the importance of multi-disciplinary and community collaboration to prevention sexual exploitation of Kansas children.		

U. S. Department of Justice, (2016). National Strategy	National Strategy	Collaboration among service provider, training.
Summary: The national strategy of 2016 discussed engaging, training, and promoting collaboration among service providers.		

Barnitz (2001).Effectively Responding to the CSEC: A Comprehensive Approach to Prevention, Protection, and Reintegration Services.	Descriptive -Subject were not involved	Mezzo and Macro-policy interventions
Summary: The article was descriptive and concluded there needs a coordination of local and global response to combat this destructive form of abuse. Gave outline of current efforts in the US.		

Todress (2010). Taking prevention seriously.	Descriptive	Policy
Summary: The article outlined comprehensive strategies to combating sexual exploitation using policy. The author argues that in order for prevention programs to be effective, the government has to “orient its approach properly.” The government need to prioritize; the author recommended research and incorporating communities who are affecting using a comprehensive and systematic approach.		