
Children's Perspectives on Human Sex Trafficking Prevention Education

Karla Badillo-Urquiola

University of Central Florida
Orlando, FL 32816, USA
kcurquiola10@knights.ucf.edu

Jan Edwards

Paving the Way Foundation
Orlando, FL 32806, USA
jan@ptwfoundation.com

Afsaneh Razi

University of Central Florida
Orlando, FL 32816, USA
afsaneh.razi@Knights.ucf.edu

Pamela Wisniewski

University of Central Florida
Orlando, FL 32816, USA
pamwis@ucf.edu

Author Keywords

Human sex trafficking; children; prevention education; non-profit organizations.

Permission to make digital or hard copies of part or all of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. Copyrights for third-party components of this work must be honored. For all other uses, contact the Owner/Author.

GROUP '20 Companion, January 6–8, 2020, Sanibel Island, FL, USA

© 2020 Copyright is held by the owner/author(s).

ACM ISBN 978-1-4503-6767-7/20/01.

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3323994.3369889>.

Abstract

About 40.3 million people across the world are victims to human trafficking. Approximately a quarter of them are children, averaging an age of 12 years old. To disrupt the cycle of human sex trafficking, non-profit organizations (NPO) provide educational training seminars to dispel common misconceptions and identify signs of human sex trafficking. In partnership with Paving the Way Foundation (PTW), one such NPO, we present evaluations from 159 children PTW's human sex trafficking prevention education program. We qualitatively analyzed a secondary data set of surveys to understand: 1) how this prevention education effects children's perception of their relationships, 2) how it effects the potential risk-taking behavior of children, and 3) who do children think should receive this human sex trafficking training. This research brings attention to the importance of educating children on human sex trafficking and empowering them to act against it.

CSS Concepts

- **Human-centered computing~Empirical studies in HCI**

Introduction

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), approximately 40.3 million people are victims to human trafficking globally [7]. About 1 in 4 are children, averaging 12 years old [7]. Florida is

Side Bar 1

Research Questions

RQ1: *How do children conceptualize human sex trafficking?*

RQ2: *How do children perceive the role of social media in human sex trafficking?*

RQ3: *Who do children think should receive this HST training?*

considered to be the 3rd largest contributor to this epidemic as there have been over 3,700 cases reported since 2007 [8]. To disrupt the cycle of human sex trafficking (HST), non-profit organizations (NPO) such as Paving the Way Foundation (PTW) provide educational programs to dispel common misconceptions. Researchers have extensively examined the impact and effectiveness of HST training and education for health professionals [2,4], providing valuable insights about how the cycle of abuse is overlooked or unintentionally perpetuated. While these studies help conceptualize patterns and potential solutions for HST, there are fewer studies analyzing the effects of HST prevention education on its most vulnerable victim, children. Previous research has also focused on investigating the effectiveness of prevention education for public health epidemics. Sex education is one of the most thoroughly covered topics of prevention education [1,3,6]. Comparative studies on the efficacy between abstinence versus comprehensive interventions have shown that comprehensive education is more effective in altering behavior and producing desired outcomes [1]. Researchers found some methods of preventive training can worsen circumstances producing widespread unwanted behavior as misguided practices become more commonly disseminated [3]. Our work attempts to address this by studying the effects and consequences of HST preventive education for children.

In accordance with prior research at GROUP that highlights the importance of partnering with organizations [5], we partnered with PTW to evaluate their anti sex trafficking training for children and answer the questions in side bar 1. We performed a qualitative analysis on 159 child survey responses collected by PTW after their training seminars. Based

on our results, we gained an initial understanding of children's perspectives on HST and HST education. Our research provides a foundation for investigating HST prevention education for children and disrupting the HST cycle.

Method

A total of 159 survey responses were collected anonymously and recorded by PTW. Participants were recruited from youth serving organizations, such as the Boys and Girls club and church youth groups. The ages of the children ranged between 11-17 years old. PTW provided a 1-4-hour educational training to teach children about human trafficking, grooming and recruitment tactics, and laws on human trafficking. The training began with a short award-winning short film, called "Trapped—in the Trade," followed by a group discussion focused on the question "What would you do?" At the end of the training, children were given a short survey with closed- and open-ended questions on what they learned. We conducted a content analysis on the students' survey responses and provide a descriptive overview in the following section.

Findings

We present our results by our research questions.

How do children conceptualize HST? (RQ1)

A total of 49 children answered the closed-ended question "what is human sex trafficking?" All the children identified HST as "people being taken advantage of or threatened to do something." Most children also identified "people being forced to do something they don't want to do" (94%), "people being held against their will" (88%), "people being used" (86%) as HST. However, less than half of the children

Side Bar 2

Children’s Conceptualization of HST

“Very important to remember the vulnerability of foreign people making sure to inform them as well.” – Church Youth Group

“It would be great to see how this would look for a boy since they’re 40% I wouldn’t know what to look for a male it doesn’t translate for me” – Church Youth Group

(45%) considered “being paid for something and not keeping the money” as HST. They frequently mentioned abstaining from activities as strategies for preventing HST. For example, many of the children mentioned “never go to partys [sic]” or “don’t trust people.” They also kept in mind the vulnerabilities of individuals as risks for HST (see side bar 2). One child even mentioned needing more guidance on how to identify HST in boys. They felt comfortable identifying the signs in females, but not males (see side bar 2). Overall, the children described HST negatively, using words like “scary,” “serious,” “disturbing,” “creepy.”

How do children perceive the role of social media in HST? (RQ2)

Children displayed awareness of online recruitment tactics, such as recruiters trying to quickly ask where the child attends school, schedule a meeting, or talk about personal topics (e.g., family). While most believed these threats warrant adult supervision of social media, there were a few teens who felt parents should not monitor because their life is private and not their parent’s business. Most of the children considered real friends on social media to be individuals they know, family, or “people from school.” Essentially, people they have met in real life.

Who do children believe should receive HST preventative education? (RQ3)

A total of 80 children answered the question “who else would you recommend this training be given to?” Figure 1 provides a summary of the children’s answers. The majority (88%) recommended this training be given at middle schools and high schools for students, teachers, and staff (e.g., nurses or counselors). Some children (40%) also included colleges. The second most

common recommendation was for parents (69%). This included both biological and foster parents. There was one child who wanted their entire family to receive the training. Children (65%) also recommended that law enforcement, such as police officers and the FBI, receive HST preventative training. A little over half (59%) also recommended having this training for churches, specifically youth groups. Other individuals and organizations included medical professionals (42%), airlines (25%), and sporting events (5%). Some children (18%) found the training to be important and effective that they recommended providing this training “everywhere and anywhere” it was possible.

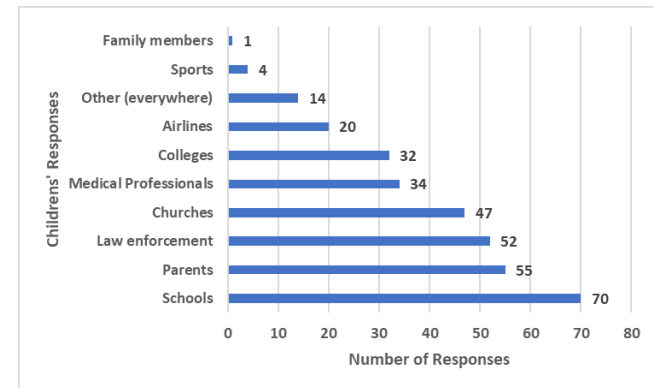


Figure 1. Children's perceptions on who should receive HST preventative education

Discussion and Future Research

Based on our exploratory research, most children could correctly answer what sex trafficking was. Youth were able to conceptualize the importance of understanding human sex trafficking and protecting others. Children mostly considered real friends on social media to be

their school friends, family, and people they know offline. Therefore, they highly rated someone asking them where they go to school or asking to meet them in person as recruitment strategies for HST. The children believed learning about the signs and common recruitment strategies of HST is important and should be shared with others. However, they also expressed more abstinence focused mentalities, such as “never drink again” or “don’t have friends.” The HST training they received was not 'abstinence' training, therefore these conclusions are those of the children. While abstinence training is a commonly adopted strategy for reducing risks, it has also been shown to be less effective than comprehensive education [3]. We believe anti sex trafficking trainings should focus less on abstinence strategies and more on holistic, comprehensive methods. In the future, we plan to conduct a longitudinal study to investigate the possible long-term impacts of comprehensive anti sex trafficking education on children. Our research provides an initial step to initiating conversations and dialogue concerning HST preventative education. We believe that by empowering children with clear actions we can disrupt the cycle of child exploitation and help save a life.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by Paving the Way Foundation and funded in part by the William T. Grant Foundation (#1067525). Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of our sponsors.

References

- [1] Douglas B. Kirby. 2008. The impact of abstinence and comprehensive sex and STD/HIV education programs on adolescent sexual behavior. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* 5, 3: 18.
- [2] Ligia Kiss, Nicola S Pocock, Varaporn Naisangansri, et al. 2015. Health of men, women, and children in post-trafficking services in Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam: an observational cross-sectional study. *The Lancet Global Health* 3, 3: e154–e161.
- [3] Pamela K. Kohler, Lisa E. Manhart, and William E. Lafferty. 2008. Abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education and the initiation of sexual activity and teen pregnancy. *The Journal of Adolescent Health: Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine* 42, 4: 344–351.
- [4] Laura J. Lederer and Christopher A. Wetzel. 2014. The Health Consequences of Sex Trafficking and Their Implications for Identifying Victims in Healthcare Facilities. *Annals of Health Law* 23: 61.
- [5] Michelle Partogi and Nassim JafariNaimi. 2016. Fostering Organizational Change through Co-Designing Collaborative Media. ACM, 441–444.
- [6] Kathrin F. Stanger-Hall and David W. Hall. 2011. Abstinence-Only Education and Teen Pregnancy Rates: Why We Need Comprehensive Sex Education in the U.S. *PLoS ONE* 6, 10.
- [7] Forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking (Forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking). Retrieved October 2, 2019 from <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>.
- [8] Florida. *National Human Trafficking Hotline*. Retrieved October 2, 2019 from <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/state/florida>.