



Juvenile female sex traffickers

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ABSTRACT

The article provides a conceptual framework of the juvenile female sex trafficker. The discussion is extrapolated from a variety of data points and sources including: studies of sex trafficking victims and juvenile sexual offenders (males and females), and a large cross-validated normative sample ($N = 1056$) of *MEGA*², a risk assessment tool for sexually abusive youth (Miccio-Fonseca, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2016).

1. Introduction

A disturbing trend seen by law enforcement is female sex traffickers (adults and juveniles) (Kiensat, Lakner, & Neulet, 2014). Sex trafficking and commercial sex manifest in a wide variety of forms (i.e., prostitution, pornography, brothels, mail order brides, sex tourism [child and adult]). The broad research literature has not yet described, nor even identified this type of sexually abusive youth. Obtainable information comes from limited study on juvenile sex traffickers, crime reports, and organizations that specifically monitor human trafficking.

Global Rescue Relief (2016) reported the total annual revenue for trafficking in people was USD \$32 billion, and about 5.5 million children are estimated to be victims of forced labor including sexual exploitation. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) (2016) informed that 1 out of 6 runaways reported to them were likely victims of child sex trafficking. The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005) emphasized the need for a uniform way to handle the growing problem of sex trafficking and the increasing numbers of victims of all genders (adults and children) in its wake. According to United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (2008), the arrest and conviction of sex traffickers is infrequent for various reasons; however, a primary reason is that victims fear reprisal from their perpetrators and are generally reluctant to come forward.

Although rescued victims of sex trafficking are from different parts of the globe, they provide an unusually consistent description of sex traffickers (who are generally adult males). Since sex trafficking occurs in different parts of the globe cultural aspects must be considered.

Cultural variables influence the comportment and methods of recruiting, transporting, surveilling, and controlling victims. For example, Nigerian victims are only connected to the madams until their debt is paid off, whereas victims from Albania are generally forced to sell their bodies for a lifetime. Victims, regardless of gender (males, females, and transgender), portray their perpetrators (usually adult men and women) as blatantly physically assaultive, and/or sexually abusive and assaultive, often drugging victims (Kiensat et al., 2014; Polaris Project, 2015). Although the female perpetrators are described to be less willing to use violence, they tend to implement and emulate the same methods of control (i.e., threaten, discipline, punish) as the males. Youth involved in sex trafficking learn “the trade” from observing those who are older and seasoned, also likely emulating these behaviors. Perpetrators are described having little empathy or compassion, exhibiting extreme levels of violent behaviors and cruelty. Victims consistently report feeling tremendous fear, trapped, imprisoned and no escaping (Adepoju, 2005; Bales, 1999; Bales & Lize, 2005; Bales & Trodd, 2008; Zimmerman et al., 2006).

The business world of human trafficking is a complex web, composed of activities and systems that are either highly organized and/or loosely connected or structured, depending on where the activity of human trafficking is taking place. This operation can be local, or statewide, extending across state lines, thus countrywide, even worldwide. Some human trafficking systems are functioning singularly independent, less developed and sophisticated (United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, 2008).

The roles of sexually abusive youth if involved in human sex trafficking are likely to be of a “lower tier level” of function regarding the

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overall organizational structure (United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, 2008). Nevertheless, their roles are important, in sustaining and supporting the lifestyle of sex trafficking (e.g., the recruitment of same age victims). Engaging in the business of human sex trafficking, forcing others into prostitution, evidences a significant lack of empathy, compassion and kindness. It shows evidence of grave degrees of intimacy deficits likely existing in different areas in their lives, (i.e., home, school, employment, family, neighbors) (Miccio-Fonseca, 2014, 2017, in press). Such a profound degree of intimacy deficits suggests the professional is working with a different kind of sex offender, the juvenile human sex trafficker.

Miccio-Fonseca and Rasmussen (2009, 2014) established a nomenclature supported by empirical data from the validation studies of the risk assessment tool, *MEGA*² (Miccio-Fonseca, 2009, 2010, 2013) that may be applicable to juvenile sex traffickers. The nomenclature focuses on those rare offenders (i.e., *sexually violent* and *sexually violent and predatory* youth) that utilize extreme coercion (e.g., threats of lethal consequences and/or use of weapons). *Predatory* refers to youth (males and females) who target (sometimes at random) victims who are strangers and/or of casual acquaintance, and establish a relationship for the primary purpose of carrying out sexually abusive dynamics of manipulation and coercion (Miccio-Fonseca, 2009; Miccio-Fonseca & Rasmussen, 2009, 2014).

As the phenomena of juvenile human sex traffickers becomes pronounced, and identified in the society, professionals who work with sexually abusive youth will eventually find themselves working with these perpetrators. They will seek the scientific research for guidance regarding assessment and treatment. However, there are sparse empirical data about adolescent male sex traffickers, and little to no information for juvenile female sex traffickers. Much of what is available is annotated information from victims' reports, sex crime reports, research findings on sexually abusive youth, and agencies providing resources for sexual abuse victims.

The purpose of this article is to provide a conceptual framework of the juvenile female sex trafficker. The discussion is extrapolated from a variety of data points and sources including: studies of sex trafficking victims and juvenile sexual offenders (males and females), and a large cross-validated normative sample ($N = 1056$) in a risk assessment study of sexually abusive youth (Miccio-Fonseca, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2016).

2. Literature review

A literature search of academic databases (i.e., PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, MEDLINE, Academic Search Premier, Criminal Justice Abstracts), did not find any articles focused specifically on the juvenile female sex trafficker. There is a significant body of research on sexually abusive youth and juvenile sex offenders, most of which compares male adolescents adjudicated for sexual offending with those adjudicated for nonsexual offending (Burton, 2008; Caldwell, 2016; Seto & Lalumière, 2010; van Wijk, Bullens, Maly, & Vermeiren, 2007; van Wijk et al., 2005). Youth engaged in sex trafficking be they male or female, are atypical anomalies among sexually abusive youth (Miccio-Fonseca, 2017). The term *Sexually Abusive Youth* applies to males, females, transgender, adolescents, children under 12, and youth with low intellectual functioning. Sexually abusive youth are a particularly small segment of the population of youth (age 19 and under) who are very heterogeneous, manifesting offensive coarse sexual improprieties and/or engaging in sexually abusive behaviors (Miccio-Fonseca, 2010). Coarse sexual improprieties¹ and sexually abusive behaviors of these

youth fall along a continuum of *Severity of Coercion* ranging from low, moderate, high, to very high risk levels that can reach (in very rare cases) a lethal level. This continuum applies to sexually abusive youth who are either adjudicated² or non-adjudicated. Youth who are sex traffickers are at the far end of this continuum, that is, sexually violent and predatory (Miccio-Fonseca & Rasmussen, 2009, 2014).

Schauer and Wheaton (2006) point out in their literature review that the area of study of human trafficking is early in development. Many terms are yet to be defined in all their different dimensions, both in the social sciences and in state, federal, and international laws (i.e., human labor trafficking, human sex trafficking, human smuggling, prostitution, etc.). In general, however, human trafficking is modern-day slavery. A trafficker uses force, fraud, deception, or coercion to control another individual primarily for purposes of engaging in commercial sex acts or soliciting labor or services against his/her will.

Naramore, Bright, Epps, and Hardt (2015) reported a study on 102 “offending youth who were arrested for trading sex” (p.1) The great majority (84.3%) of the 102 youth in the “sex trafficked cohort” were females, almost three quarters (72.5%) had committed only prostitution type offenses; 83.8% of these were females. Only 16 youth (15%), (majority females) were charged with offenses that could have included “crimes more consistent with criminal activity (e.g., visiting a sex worker, pimping out another youth) than victimization (e.g., being forced into sexual activity by a pimp)” (p. 11). A closer examination of Naramore's study reveals that the sample who “traded sex” consisted of young women (one third of whom are < 16 years old) (p. 5) entering into prostitution. The study did not identify sex trafficked women who transitioned into a collaborative role to assist the juvenile sex trafficker by bringing other women into a lifestyle of prostitution; yet these women exist and play an important role in the world of sex trafficking (Kiensat et al., 2014).

Carpenter and Gates (2015) reported the average age for victims (mostly females) of entry into sex trafficking is 14 to 15 years of age. They found homeless youth (55%), and youth in the foster care system (28%) were susceptible to fall victims of sex trafficking. Places targeted for recruiting vulnerable victims included: hangout places near high schools and middle schools; bus stops, trolley stations, tattoo parlors, house parties, churches, and malls. Social media is another place for recruitment. Carpenter and Gates reported the trafficking of humans connected to gangs; 85% of the pimps/sex traffickers' facilitators interviewed were gang involved.

2.1. Consistency in description of perpetrators' and lingo

There is consistency in the description of the perpetrators' behaviors and actions (i.e., excessively physically assaultive, sexually abusive and assaultive). Carpenter and Gates' (2015) study reported that female recruiters and pimp/sex trafficking facilitators were a significant and growing feature of the underground sex economy. Broad (2015) reported women involved in sex trafficking have subservient roles, frequently involved in intimate relationships with male traffickers.

Sex trafficking is a worldwide culturally influenced multi-dimensional business. Within the world of sex trafficking it has its own culture and terms. Examples of the “lingo” used (in USA terms) include: “working”, performing sexual acts for money; “branded”, a tattoo on a victim signifying ownership by trafficker or pimp; “lot lizard”, a derogatory term for women and children at truck stops (Human Trafficking Trafficking-Squarespace (n.d.)). The term “bitch” is versatile, with various meanings, sometimes referring to prostituted persons who violate the pimp's commands, but not under the control of a pimp (also referred to as “*renegade*”). Such individuals are usually under consistent threats of violence. On the other hand, women may be a “*bottom bitch*”, selected

¹ Coarse sexual improprieties; they manifest an unsophisticated awareness of psycho-sexual conditions, environments, or social situations, engaging in sexual behaviors that are crude, indecent, and outside the societal norms of propriety (e.g., crude sexual gestures, and language such as sexually suggestive comments, mooning, looking up skirts, a young child rubbing his or her genitals in public or trying to grab another's genitals, a child looking over a stall in a public restroom (Miccio-Fonseca, 2010, pp. 735–736).

² Adjudicated refers to the legal process of being arrested, charged, convicted, and sentenced for a sex crime.

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