Recommended Framework for Screening & Assessment

Overview

The University of Texas estimates that there are approximately 79,000 children and youth in Texas who are survivors of sex trafficking;[1] however, only hundreds of these victims are actually identified across the state each year. In FY 2016, 21 allegations to CPS led to cases with a "Reason to Believe" disposition for sex trafficking, and 31 children and youth reported being sex trafficked while on runaway status. It is clear that a major gap exists in the initial identification of these children. Without proper identification, it is also unlikely that these victims are provided with the most appropriate services.

The Child Sex Trafficking Team (CSTT) set out to identify an instrument which could screen children at risk of sex trafficking statewide and across multiple sectors, including child protection, juvenile justice, education, healthcare, law enforcement, and runaway/homeless youth agencies. A uniform screening tool will help ensure that children are being consistently identified no matter which system or agency they encounter.

After analyzing numerous screening tools,[2] the CSTT and its evaluators at the Council of State Governments Justice Center identified the Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT) as the best suited instrument to meet the urgent needs in Texas. Consequently, the CSE-IT will be utilized by relevant OOG grantees and implemented within the CSTT Regional Models of Survivor Care. The Office of the Governor strongly encourages all agencies and organizations that may come into contact with child sex trafficking victims to seriously consider implementing the CSE-IT tool. All stakeholders are encouraged to also develop appropriate protocols for those children screened as "clear concern" or "possible concern," including further assessment and treatment.

Screening Tool Selection

In consultation with the Council of State Governments Justice Center and ground-level practitioners in juvenile justice, child protection, and youth serving agencies, several priorities were identified in selecting a screening tool. While no tool perfectly satisfied all of these priorities, and several tools had desirable qualities, the CSE-IT is currently in the best position to meet the needs of Texas victims of child sex trafficking.

- *Effective for Identifying Child Sex Trafficking*: The priority for a screening tool is not to confirm victimization but rather to quickly and effectively triage those youth who are at higher risk of trafficking and, therefore, in need of further assessment. Few screening tools (including the CSE-IT)[3] have been studied and validated, and research is lacking to know whether any tool can statistically predict whether a child is a survivor of sex trafficking. Several tools in the field place an emphasis on identifying labor trafficking, which is not a current charge of the CSTT. Other tools rely heavily on an outcry from the child, an undesirable structure due to the fact that these minors rarely self-identify as victims or make a disclosure. Many materials in circulation are actually in the form of interview guides, or do not include mechanisms to objectively score the indicators observed and information gathered. Consequently, determination of a child's risk for sex

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[1] N. Busch-Armendariz et al., Human Trafficking By the Numbers: The Initial Benchmark of Prevalence and Economic Impact for Texas, 2016.

[2] Instruments reviewed for potential use as an initial screener include:
- Allies Against Slavery Tier One Screener
- WestCoast Children's Clinic Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (CSE-IT)
- Covenant House Human Trafficking Interview and Assessment Measure (HTIAM)
- Florida Department of Children and Families Human Trafficking Screening Tool (HTST)
- Child Protective Services Special Investigations Suggested Screening Questions
- InterCSECt/Portland State University CSEC Screening Interview
- Polaris Comprehensive Human Trafficking Assessment
- Shared Hope Intervene
- Texas Juvenile Justice Department Sex Trafficking Screening
- Urban Institute Life Experiences Survey
- Vera Institute of Justice Trafficking Victim Identification Tool (TVIT)
- First Responder ID Tool for Santa Maria Juvenile Hall CSEC

[3] The Covenant House HTIAM, the Vera Institute of Justice TVIT, and the WestCoast Children's Clinic CSE-IT are all considered to be validated tools, and publication of research is pending with respect to validation of the Urban Institute Life Experiences Survey.

trafficking is largely subjective, potentially leading to inconsistencies in screening as well as the implementation of subsequent protocols and assessments.

- *Brief & Embeddable*: Screening tools which are time consuming or require additional interviews and procedures pose a significant barrier to implementation. The CSE-IT allows for the quick integration of data collected in the course of a regular intake process, effectively enabling implementation to be embedded into current procedures. The average time required to administer the CSE-IT tool is 5-10 minutes. Several instruments which are lengthier in application appear to be nearer in practice to an assessment – a necessary step, but one which should come after the initial screen. In addition, the CSE-IT tool is flexible regarding the amount of information needed to make a determination that a child is at heightened risk and should be assessed further. Screeners may mark "no information" on several indicators and still obtain a numerical score which indicates "no concern," "possible concern," or "clear concern."

- *Appropriate for Multiple Systems*: Identification of child sex trafficking needs to take place across an array of community segments, including children in the child protection system, youth in the juvenile justice system, children who have runaway or are homeless, and children in educational and medical settings. Uniform screening across systems is a promising practice for victim identification and creates a more conducive environment for evaluating the prevalence of child sex trafficking, the dynamics of trafficking across systems, and any progress made in identifying victims and eventually, victim services and even prevention efforts, in Texas. It is a priority for Texas to adopt a tool which is easily utilized across various systems, and the CSE-IT has been successfully piloted and used in multiple types of agencies.

- *Necessary and Appropriate Training:* Individuals responsible for screening should be adequately trained to utilize the screening tool and should be competent in utilizing a trauma informed approach to interactions with the youth. Many of the tools considered did not include training, while the CSE-IT tool is accompanied by a three hour training as well as a train the trainer for agencies at a reasonable cost. The OOG will be providing training and train the trainer opportunities for agencies adopting the tool at no cost.

Screening Tool Application
The OOG strongly encourages universal screening wherever possible in order to protect all children and simultaneously improve the quality of data on child sex trafficking in Texas. A universal approach is inclusive of all children in a population and removes the potential for disparate treatment as well as the risk of missing otherwise "low risk" youth. An agency with limited ability to implement a universal screening protocol may consider a selective screening program. Selective screening focuses on those children who are at a higher risk than the average child. While certain groups of children may be considered at a heightened risk for trafficking, the research is not yet at a stage where organizations can confidently rely on particular risk factors to target a selective screening. Consequently, selective screening should only be implemented when universal screening is impractical, and the protocols for triggering a selective screen must be carefully planned.

Protocols & Assessments
An initial screening for child sex trafficking is simply the first step toward identification and delivery of appropriate services. Each agency and organization utilizing a screening tool should also adopt protocols to outline the subsequent steps for those youth identified as potential victims. Such actions might include a mandatory report of abuse to law enforcement or CPS, a call to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, safety planning, continued monitoring, referral to appropriate services, and a thorough assessment. Although efforts are being made toward uniformity in screening, it is anticipated that the subsequent protocols and most appropriate in-depth assessment tools will vary by agency. For example, the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths-Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CANS-CSE) may be an appropriate assessment for some agencies while others may identify a different tool or in-depth interview guide. In areas of the state where the CSTT Regional Service Model has launched, protocols for responding to identified victims should be coordinated with those efforts in order to ensure that the needs of these survivors are comprehensively addressed.