

# Retention Rates of Sex Trafficked and At-risk Youth in a Rehabilitation Center



Aliya Khan, University of Arizona College of Medicine, Phoenix

Aliya Khan, BS<sup>1</sup>, Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, MSW, PhD<sup>2</sup>, Samantha Calvin MHI, MBA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Arizona College of Medicine Phoenix <sup>2</sup> Arizona State University School of Social Work

## Abstract

Sex trafficking is a prevalent criminal enterprise in the world. The United States has the second largest sex trafficking market in the world. There are rehabilitation facilities and interventions that exist for children and young people who experience commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC). However, there remains limited information on the most effective interventions for these young people. The study aims to report on the at-risk and sex trafficked youth in a facility in Arizona, retention, as well as risk factors that differentiate these two cohorts. By comparing 69 sex trafficked youth to 70 at-risk youth, we can further delineate how prior sexual abuse, emotional abuse and substance abuse affects rates of retention. Findings indicate that CSEC girls were more likely to run away. There was a statistically significant difference between the CSEC and non-CSEC girls with regards to substance abuse and sexual abuse. The two groups did not differ significantly in terms of emotional abuse.

## Introduction

Sex trafficking is a profitable criminal enterprise around the world and is just second to the drug trade. The *Federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000* defines sex trafficking as “a commercial sex act induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induce to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age”. Risk factors that are seen with this demographic include running away from home, parental substance abuse, childhood sexual, physical abuse, being homeless and using drugs. Interventions for sex trafficked girls exist; yet much remains unknown regarding the most effective way to rehabilitate these children. The aim of this study is to determine if sex trafficked girls have lower retention rates in rehabilitation facilities and if prior substance abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse impact outcomes of retention rates of sex trafficked victims versus non-sex trafficked girls.

## Materials and Methods

139 girls aged 11 to 17 were recruited from this residential center in the Southwestern United States for victims of sexual trauma between January 2012 to December 2014.

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The group home is a facility for CSEC and high-risk girls. Recruitment was conducted in-person by study team staff on location. The participants were given an intake form by the rehabilitation facility.

The intake form included age of admission and questions about life history and family relationships, substance use, emotional abuse and prior sexual abuse. Other questions on the intake form included race, delinquency, witnessing domestic abuse at home and any diagnosis of mental illness. Participants also answered questions regarding whether they exchanged sex for money, drugs, protection, or a place to stay.

The questions about emotional abuse are adapted from Parental Psychological Maltreatment Scale. The emotional abuse scale includes questions including how often did the following occur in a year; a parent, stepparent, foster parent or adult in charge of you 1) yelled at you, 2) insulted you, 3) criticized you, 4) tried to make you feel guilty, 5) ridiculed or humiliated you, 5) embarrassed you in front of others, or 6) made you feel like you were a bad person. The scale (never, rarely, sometimes, often and always) was found “to have strong internal consistency”.

This was cross-referenced with the discharge information of each participant. The discharge information outlined whether a participant AWOLed or completed their stay and were safely discharged.

Descriptive analysis was used to identify incidence and prevalence of experiences within the sample.

Chi square analysis was also used to delineate the four target risk factors between the CSEC and CSEC participants. Quantitative data was analyzed with IBM SPSS Statistics Software Version.

## Results

Race	
Caucasian	29.5%
Hispanic	24.0%
African American	21.9%
Native American	4.1%
Asian	0.7%
Mixed Race	15.8%
Missing race information	2.7%

## Results

CSEC vs non-CSEC participants	
CSEC	69 participants
Non- CSEC	70 participants

Discharge	
Runaways	53.4%
Safe Placement	41.8%
Unknown	2.7%

### Retention Rates:

78 participants from the sample were runaways with a total of 53.4%, 61 participants had successful safe placement, with 41.8% of the total sample. 4 participants discharges were not recorded, which was 2.7% of the population

The analysis shows that CSEC girls are more likely to runaway when compared to their non-CSEC cohort.

### Substance Abuse:

14.4% did not report using drugs and alcohol, while 59.6% reported using drugs and alcohol of the total sample. 26% of the data was missing for the drugs and alcohol question.

Participants who are victims of sex trafficking have higher rates of drug and alcohol abuse ( $p=0.000$ , Pearson chi-square value=13.316, Cramer's  $V=0.351$ , and Pearson's  $R=0.351$ ).

### Emotional Abuse:

50.7% did not report any emotional abuse, 20.5% reported emotional abuse and 28.8% of the sample did not complete this section.

These values were shown to not have a significant correlation between emotional abuse and sex trafficked girls ( $p=0.803$ , Pearson chi-square value= 0.062, Cramer's  $V=0.025$ , Pearson's  $R=-0.025$ ).

### Sexual Abuse:

69 girls were identified as CSEC and 70 girls were not.

There was a statistically significant correlation between sexual abuse and CSEC ( $p=0.026$ , Pearson chi-square 4.966, Cramer's  $V=0.220$ , Pearson's  $R=0.220$ ).

## Discussion and Conclusions

CSEC girls were shown to more likely to runaway from the facility when compared to the non-CSEC girls. Our study did not include questions about how participants in the group home perceived their stay in the group home or perspective on the staff and professionals. The study was also unable to identify why girls runaway from the facility.

This is one of the few studies that compare risk factors or CSEC girls to non-CSEC girls in a residential care facility. While there are clear similarities in the groups, including exposure to adverse experiences such as emotional abuse, sexual abuse and substance abuse; the CSEC girls in this study showed higher rates of sexual abuse and substance abuse.

Limitations of this study include the inability to survey the girls on their views, suggestions, and expectations of the group home. Additionally, we did not have full participation of the subjects when analyzing the various risk factors, such as emotional abuse, substance abuse, and sexual abuse. We primarily focused on quantitative data, and when such a complex population group and problem is posed, qualitative data can provide more meaningful data.

With the CSEC girls running away more often, it is imperative to rethink the structure and execution of group homes for these girls, and explore non-traditional structures to better suit these girls' needs. Our population focused on girls aged 11 to 18, and further research needs to be done to include males and transgender youth.

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