ADDRESSING THE GROWING PROBLEM OF DOMESTIC SEX TRAFFICKING OF MINORS THROUGH PBIS

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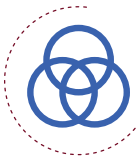
# Addressing the Growing Problem of Domestic Sex Trafficking of Minors through PBIS

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Introduction

The aim of this practice brief is to highlight the broader issue of domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) and suggest a framework for integrating school-based prevention and intervention strategies through Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). We provide a brief review of DMST and connections to PBIS; we then discuss how actions within the PBIS framework may help prevent DMST and provide assistance to student victims and their families.
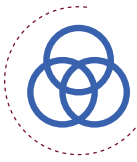
This brief was created as a complementary product to the U.S. Department of Education (ED), Office of Safe and Supportive Schools (OSSS) guide, titled *Human Trafficking in America's Schools: What Schools Can Do to Prevent, Respond, and Help Students to Recover from Human Trafficking* (2nd ed.; 2021). The OSSS Guide provides an overview of child sex and labor trafficking, discusses the context of child trafficking within a child abuse framework and highlights populations that are vulnerable to trafficking. Furthermore, it highlights schools' role in addressing trafficking through the lens of a three tiered prevention framework. In this proposed framework, education of staff, students, and families, and the role of written policies and protocols are identified as key areas of prevention, as well as the incorporation of community partnerships. This brief complements the OSSS Guide, emphasizing the use of the widely scaled PBIS framework (implemented in more than 27,000 schools in the U.S.) to increase awareness of DMST, train school staff on DMST, and implement strategies for early identification and support for potential student victims.
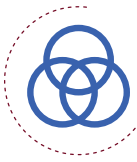
Overview of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking (DMST)

Children exploited for commercial sex are arguably some of the most at-risk students that schools serve. The commercial sexual exploitation of children occurs when a child is sexually abused for economic purposes (Kruger et al., 2016). In the United States (U.S.), a synonymous term for commercial sexual exploitation of children is domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST), a label given to any case in which a child (any person

under the age of 18) born in the U.S. is involved in a commercial sex act (Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2017; Kaplan & Kemp, 2015). According to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000), sex trafficking involves recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person under the age of 18 for sex (O'Brien, 2018). In 2013, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act was reauthorized in the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act (Public Law 113-4) to specifically include DMST in the legislation.

This policy emphasizes a new multidimensional perspective of the definition by (a) including specific language regarding commercial sex acts committed against individuals under the age of 18 and (b) incorporating individuals between 18-20 years old who were victimized while under the age of 18 (Roby & Vincent, 2017).

Youth are forced into DMST by various means. Pathways into trafficking are often categorized based on the relation of the trafficker to the victim. Some of the main types of DMST are pimp-controlled, familial and intimate partner-based, and gang involved (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2011a; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). For some children and youth, like runaway and homeless youth, engagement in commercial sex acts may even be a means for survival, also known as "survival sex," in order to enable them to meet their basic needs (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014). Overall, minors may engage or be forced to engage in any variety of transactional sex acts in exchange for food, money, shelter, love, or any other valued entity for the financial gain of the trafficker (Kaplan & Kemp, 2015; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2014; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021).

The long-term consequences of DMST include psychological traumatization, emotional and behavioral distress, and numerous physical health consequences (Kaplan & Kemp, 2015; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). More specifically, the effects of sex trafficking victimization have been linked to range of psychological diagnoses, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Depression, Anxiety, and Eating Disorders. Additionally, sex trafficking victimization has also been associated with negative outcomes such as, suicidal ideation and behavior, substance abuse, and social isolation, among others (Moore, 2018; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2020). In the U.S., approximately 150,000-300,000 children are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation each year (Kaplan & Kemp, 2015). Traffickers are often motivated by the potential for substantial profits (O'Brien, 2018). The sexual exploitation of children has become an enterprise that contributes to sex trafficking's $27.8 billion dollars gross profit in the U.S. each year (Tomes, 2013).
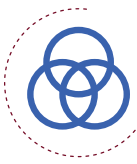
The Role of Schools in Addressing DMST

School personnel's interaction with students everyday puts them in a prime position to look for signs of abuse or neglect as well as common behaviors that accompany DMST such as depression, anxiety, anger, fear, and isolation from others (Kaplan & Kemp, 2015; Moore, 2018; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). School personnel continue to be the highest reporters of child abuse and neglect according to the most recent data published by the Department of Social Services (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services et al., 2020). These data further support the notion that school personnel and staff from collaborating agencies have the skills and willingness to be at the forefront of protecting children from DMST, as these staff are already trained to look for signs of distress in children, many of which overlap with those present in victims of human trafficking or those at-risk of victimization (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2011a; Weist et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021).

A Potential Role for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

In order to address a multi-systemic issue such as DMST, that operates at individual, family, school, community and broader levels, a systems-level approach is necessary (Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Safe and

Supportive Schools, 2021). Because the average age of recruitment for DMST is between the ages of 12 and 14, schools can play a critical role in the fight to end DMST. Schools are the largest youth-serving system and serve as lead agencies in communities. Therefore, schools are uniquely positioned to spearhead prevention efforts, aid in the identification of risk factors, and implement intervention for DMST related issues on a broader level (Moore, 2018). In order to better engage schools in this urgent and large-scale endeavor, it is important to utilize an evidence-based, well-established framework that is already being implemented broadly and promotes collaboration between schools and other youth-serving systems. Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based framework being implemented in more than 27,000 schools across the U.S. (Chitiyo & May, 2018; McDaniel et al., 2018; Pas et al., 2019; Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). PBIS can be utilized to increase systematic attention to the major societal problem of DMST.

PBIS is a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) that emphasizes explicit teaching of prosocial skills and behavioral expectations. This three-tiered approach is designed for universal, targeted, and intensive levels of intervention (Chitiyo & May, 2018; McDaniel et al., 2018; Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). The PBIS framework supports the social-emotional-behavioral needs of all students, including those with internalzing concerns like anxiety, depression, or
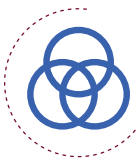
having experiences a traumatic event that is negatively impacting school performance (Weist et al., 2018). In the PBIS framework, interdisciplinary teams review student data (e.g., attendance, discipline, grades, results of systematic screening) in an effort to provide interventions matched to student needs. The data being collected by schools implementing PBIS align with risk factors and indicators that could serve as the first line of defense in the fight against DSMT in schools. At an aggregate level, these data also can be used by district and community leaders to determine what evidence-based practices are needed across the continuum of supports.

The literature documenting the positive effects of well-implemented PBIS continues to grow, with positive outcomes including improved consistency of behavior management, improved school climate, decreased discipline referrals, improved student behavior and attendance, enhanced perceptions of safety by students and staff, and improved academic achievement (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Evanovich & Scott, 2016; Kimball et al., 2017; McDaniel et al., 2018). PBIS can be an advantageous evidence-based framework for schools to address DMST for several reasons. First, disclosure and help-seeking behaviors for vulnerable or victimized students may be more easily facilitated by the safe and supportive school climates promoted by PBIS. Second, the development of positive social-emotional-behavioral skills embedded in the PBIS framework could help to reduce the risk of exploitation for students (Harper et al., 2019). Third, the use of school and community data can inform

teams of students who may be at risk or victims of DMST. Finally, the benefits of PBIS have been documented to extend to other youth settings, such as juvenile justice facilities (Kimball et al., 2017).

PBIS and Vulnerable Students

By leveraging the PBIS framework to support vulnerable populations, such as students at risk for DMST, educators can effectively create safe, consistent, and positive school environments for all students (Bradshaw et al., 2008). Further, at each of the three tiers of the MTSS, PBIS offers advantages for preventing and addressing DMST. For example, within Tier 1 efforts, PBIS schools would be able to provide broad training on DMST, with strategies for schools, families and students to reduce the likelihood of victimization. Strong MTSS teams, utilizing data for decision making, emphasizing observation of students in key contexts, and implementing strategies matched to student needs would also facilitate the identification of students at risk for or already involved in DMST. These data would in turn, facilitate effective Tier 2 (targeted intervention) and Tier 3 (intensive intervention) programs as well as assuring student safety by involving other systems such as law enforcement. Please note, our literature review for this brief did not find any articles on use of the PBIS framework to address the problem of DMST. However, given the literature we reviewed above, there is reason to believe that using the PBIS framework to address this critical problem in society is likely to escalate positive change.
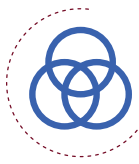
DMST within the PBIS Framework

Development of Standard Policies and Procedures

Before incorporating any DMST-based practices into a PBIS framework, it is imperative that schools develop standardized policies and protocols for responding to youth who have experienced or are at-risk of experiencing commercial sexual exploitation. It is also advisable that schools build and/or strengthen partnerships with other community members, such as service providers, local and federal law enforcement, local school boards, human trafficking task forces and coalitions, child welfare agencies, juvenile justice agencies, runaway and homeless youth providers, and others (Littrell, 2015; National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2015; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). This cross-system coordination will allow for schools to have a better understand of DMST in their communities and help to coordinate preventative measures as well as treatment and wrap-around services for youths as an important part of the school's protocol and response to trafficking (Littrell, 2015).

A well-developed school policy and associated procedures around DMST should include the following components: educating staff on risk factors and indicators of sex trafficking, educating parents and students about the risks of sex trafficking, and establishing a clear protocol for identifying possible victims or a swift and appropriate response to disclosure from a suspected victim (Littrell, 2015; National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2011a; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Safe and

Supportive Schools, 2021). It is also advisable that a few specific school personnel are in a designated role to deal with DMST related issues in the school and enact further portions of the protocol, such as screening (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2011b, 2015; Tidball & Rajaram, 2017; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). Because of the nature of the screening and assessment process, it is preferable that designated DMST-focused staff person(s) at the school have skills in psychological or emotional disturbance assessment. Staff members such as school psychologists, social workers and other may fill this skill competency. The National Human Trafficking Resource Center provides the following questions for schools to consider when building their human trafficking protocol (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2015):

- What are the state laws on human trafficking in my state?

- Is there already another related protocol with parallel reporting steps?

- What are the mandatory reporting obligations for various staff in my school?

- Who is best positioned to be a lead point of contact on human trafficking in my school?

- Would a school-based or district-based protocol be most successful in my area?

- What resources and referrals are available in my area for potential trafficking victims?

- What is my school's relationship with local and federal law enforcement?

- What do I tell the student's parents?

Please note, no protocol should serve as a substitute for mandated reporting requirements. In addition to following mandated reporting procedures, it also possible to call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline (1-888-3737-888) 24-hours-a-day/7-days-a-week to ask for additional information regarding locating local victims' services and to get help in assessing a situation. In the PBIS framework, DMST can be encapsulated by the **3 R's of DMST in schools**:

1. **Risk** factors should be broadly understood.

2. **Recognize** risk factors or indicators of trafficking.

3. **Report** to appropriate school personnel.

Following these steps will ensure that school personnel are on the forefront of preventing and intervening in DMST for students at their schools.
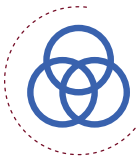
Tier 1—Awareness and Prevention

Professional development and ongoing coaching are core features of the successful implementation of PBIS in the first tier of the MTSS. Given the estimated high prevalence of DMST in all communities, providing all school staff with training on this topic is a strong preliminary way to proactively address this growing concern (Harper et al., 2019; Littrell, 2015). DMST has been called child or teen prostitution in the past (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014). Often times, school personnel are unaware that the law now formally recognizes an inability to consent to prostitution for children under the age of 18 (Tomes, 2013). Therefore, children exploited in any form of prostitution are likely trafficking victims, and there is

a danger of stigmatization that depicts them as being willfully involved (Moore, 2018). The literature shows that beliefs influence a decision particularly with regard to reporting behaviors. This is especially important for school personnel who are often on the frontlines of identifying child maltreatment. For example, some data show that if school personnel see an adolescent female as an adult who chose to enter a life of prostitution, then they are less likely to report, compared to if they viewed her as victim of repeated abuse and trauma (Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2017).The importance of destigmatization and awareness of the realities of DMST can help to prevent this misidentification and the overlooking of youth who are in-need.

RISK FACTORS AND POSSIBLE INDICATORS

In order to have a better understanding of the appropriate intervention and prevention approaches when considering DMST involvement for youth, it is important that schools have a clear picture of the associated risk factors and possible identifiers. Youth who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), foster care system involvement, are of low socioeconomic status, or are poor academic performers are at an increased risk of human trafficking victimization compared to their counterparts who are not contending with these circumstances (Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). For youth who have already been victimized, indicators of this victimization may possibly appear in the form of changes in their physical appearance, fluctuations in school attendance and participation, drastic changes in

Risk Factors	Possible Indicators
• Past sexual, physical, or emotional abuse • Previous traumatic experiences or exhibits symptoms of trauma • An abusive, neglectful or unstable home environment • Poverty and/or lack of stability in having basic needs met: food, shelter, clothing, and sleep • History of homelessness or running away • Poor self-image, self-esteem or increased sensitivity to peer ridicule • Isolation from peers and/or lack of social support • History of truancy, delinquency, and/or criminal activity • Developmental and/or learning disabilities • Lack of school engagement • Gang affiliation • Language barrier • Undocumented immigration status	• Physical trauma (bruises, scars, etc.) • Emotional trauma and/or sudden behavioral changes (depression, anxiety, fearfulness, hyperarousal etc.) • Malnourishment and inappropriate dress (based on surroundings) • Frequent episodes of running away • Inconsistent ability to attend school, pay attention in school, and/or complete coursework • Presence of a noticeably older and/or controlling "boyfriend"/ "girlfriend" • Inability to bond with others or overly attached behavior • Tattoos displaying the name of a trafficker (i.e. "daddy") • Signs of drug addiction • Rehearsed responses to questioning • Promiscuity and overly sexual references beyond age-specific norms

temperament, signs of physical trauma, and references to a "boyfriend' or "girlfriend" who is controlling. Some additional identifiers include unexplainable income or money sources, new tattoos or branding marks, various gifts with unexplained origins, the use of substances, traveling with older men, and testing positive for sexually-transmitted infections (STIs; (Kaplan & Kemp, 2015; Moore, 2018). The awareness of risk factors (listed below) is the first step in the implementation of prevention of DMST in youth as the increased vulnerability of these youth puts them at a higher risk for human trafficking involvement. Furthermore, for youth who may already be victimized, these and other identifiers (listed below), could be used to flag students who may require additional follow-up or Tier 2 and 3 intervention (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2011a; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2014; U.S. Department of Homeland Security & U.S. Department of Education, 2014; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021).

STANDARD TERMINOLOGY

It is often found that terms such as 'sex trafficking', 'commercial sexual exploitation of children', and 'DMST', are unclear and/or unfamiliar to most people. However, in order to adequately address an issue, it is important for problem definitions to be clear (Chitiyo & May, 2018). This type of training would also help expand knowledge and reduce stigma associated with this issue as staff would better understand the risk factors, potential signs of exploitation, and common help-seeking behaviors of survivors. With regard to the perceptions of adults and the general population,
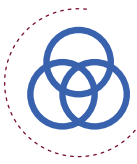
one study showed that some people view DMST as an act that could be consensual (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014), and another study indicated that more than more than half (57.2%) of respondents believe adolescent females choose to prostitute themselves (Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2017). In order to increase awareness and improve the ability of educators and school administrators in identifying trafficking victims, it would be imperative for all personnel to confront any prior false beliefs of staff and students in order to create a positive school climate and culture that recognizes the danger of DMST and the experiences of victims (Harper et al., 2019).

RECRUITMENT TECHNIQUES

Both Internet-facilitated and non-Internet-based recruitment techniques are common among traffickers. The role of the Internet and widespread access across populations and age groups has contributed to the escalation of DMST for a variety of reasons (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2014). It also often promotes unhealthy relationships between children and adults via easy accessibility to private chat rooms and online dating sites (O'Brien, 2018). Additional known and potential recruitment methods, used in tandem or in isolation, are provided below (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2011a; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2014).

- Appealing to promises of a better life

- Angling to fulfill a relationship that is lacking or vulnerable in a youth's life, often by means of false love or feigned affection

- Meeting youth's basic needs, such as food, shelter, clothing, and providing employment

- Using peers or other victims to recruit the youth

- Utilizing manipulations of: "sense of duty" to help provide for others (such as family members), shame, or guilt

- Exploiting financial need or debts

- Enticement through internet chat rooms, profiles, and popular social networking sites

- Using violence, threats, and force
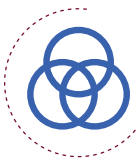
Tier 1 Recommendations

1. Conduct school-wide awareness campaigns for all staff, students, and parents.

2. Teach all students healthy decision-making practices, in regard to Internet usage, healthy boundaries and communication, and any other areas that may be relevant to common DMST recruitment techniques.

3. Implement interventions that increase positive relationships with at-risk youth and continue to promote positive school climate while monitoring the youth's wellbeing.

Tier 1 Implementation Challenges

Address stigma associated with DMST and potential implicit bias or blame and shame associated with youth who are at risk or victims of DMST through timely receipt of updated knowledge and understanding of awareness efforts.
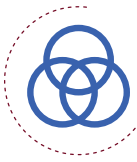
Tier 2—Assessment, Identification, and Targeted Intervention

Tier 2 of the PBIS framework identifies students who are at-risk, within a specific targeted group or

presenting early signs of problems and matches them with appropriate supportive interventions (Chitiyo & May, 2018; Evanovich & Scott, 2016; McDaniel et al., 2018). In the U.S., 244,000 to 325,000 children are at-risk of DMST each year (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014). At the Tier 2 level, school teams assess and identify students at-risk for human trafficking or currently being victimized by human trafficking. The assessment component of this stage includes both formal and informal assessments. The efficacy of informal assessments (e.g., knowing all the risk factors and/or indicators for initial identification of an at-risk youth or current victim) hinges upon personally connecting with youth and building a strong relationship foundation for subsequent supportive efforts. At Tier 2, schools develop a continuum of interventions that match the targeted needs of students, often in small group intervention (McDaniel et al., 2018). One such strategy is building interpersonal relationships through an intervention such as "Check-In, Check-Out" (Hawken & Horner, 2003; March & Horner, 2002). Interventions that involve interpersonal relationships with extrafamilial adults such as coaches, teachers, and school administrators may be particularly helpful for at-risk students or those showing early signs of problems (Murphey et al., 2013). In addition, using evidence-based, small group interventions that address anxiety, depression, or the impact of trauma on those students identified as at risk for DMST.

Formal assessments, such as written questionnaires, may be used to identify a student who may be at-risk for trafficking by assessing risk factors, potential trauma experience, or directly assessing commercial sexual exploitation. This staged approach is beneficial in that it can provide school personnel, or the designated human trafficking support staff member(s), with the ability to assess youth who may be at many levels of potential victimization, which include at-risk/potential victim, suspected victim, confirmed victim. As previously mentioned, it is advisable that the designated DMST focused staff person have skills in psychological or emotional disturbance assessment due to the nuanced nature of this victimization and its effects on individuals. The designated school staff member would administer an assessment, often in paper and pencil form, to the student during a time that is not disruptive to their school work, in a private space, and after assessing for the student's immediate safety while at school. The assessment process can be triggering for some students and it is important that the designated staff person is equipped to help the student should they become distraught. Many assessments include scoring information and it is helpful to score the assessment immediately after the student fills it out while they are still in the room to ensure any immediate steps can be taken for the student's safety. Furthermore, it is important that the staff member is preapred to quickly move to Tier 3 recommendations if the assessment highlights a likelihood of trafficking.

Assessments aimed at capturing at-risk status would screen youth for posttraumatic symptomology or previous traumatic experiences, which often create significant vulnerabilities for youth and align with the previously reviewed risk factors. Some assessments in this category include: Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children, or the Trauma Symptom Checklist for Young Children (Briere, 1998), the Trauma Symptom Inventory (Briere, 2011), and the UCLA PTSD Reaction Index (Pynoos & Steinberg, 2014). Alternatively, assessments aimed at capturing suspected or confirmed victimization are more targeted at asking human and sex trafficking specific questions. Some assessments in this category include: the Trafficking Victim Identification Tool (includes broader screening for all forms of trafficking) and the Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool (specific to commercial sex trafficking; Westcoast Children's Clinic, 2017). Please note these lists are not exhaustive, however, it is important that the formal assessment tool chosen has appropriate psychometric properties.

Tier 2 Recommendations

1. Utilizing both informal and formal assessments to assess youth's status with regard to DMST involvement.

2. Triage cases to school-based designated staff member for DMST related challenges or follow school's standard protocols regarding prevention or intervention efforts.

3. Install evidence-based interventions within a continuum that match the presenting problems of students impacted by DMST.
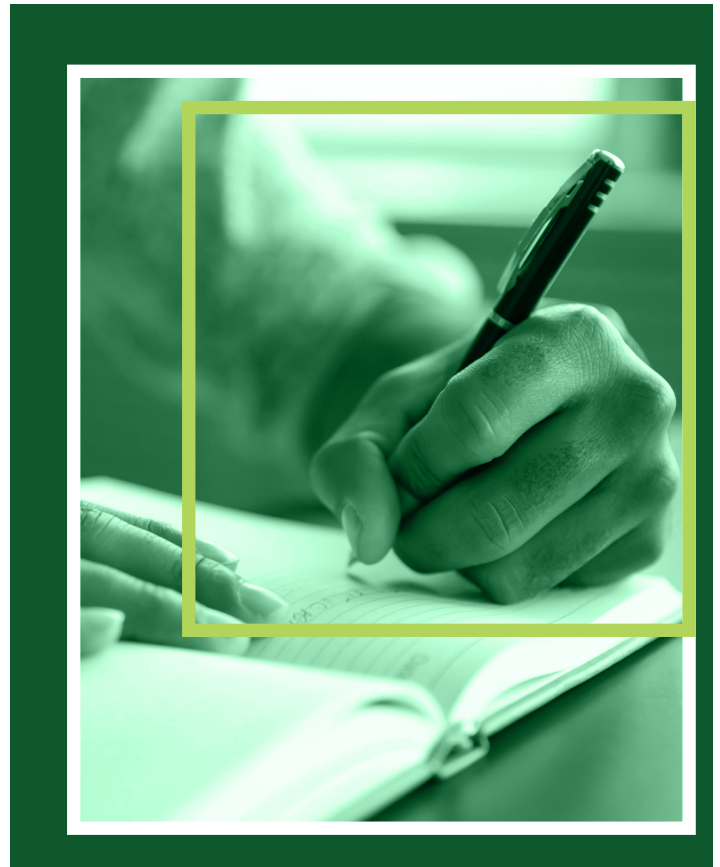
Tier 2 Implementation Challenges

Clear identification of a student who may be showing indicators of DMST may be challenging related to the student's sense of shame or fear, the stigma around forced prostitution, the control the trafficker has over the student, and the student's lack of understanding of their own victimization and subsequent lack of engagement in help seeking behaviors.This may also affect their willingness to respond to the screening tool. The importance of a positive school environment and rapport with the student are paramount when aiming to overcome this challenge.
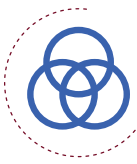
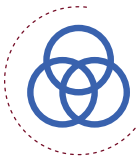## Tier 3—Intensive Intervention and Reporting

Tier 3 is designed to address a small portion of students who have intensive needs that require an individualized response. These interventions are primarily selected to match the individual student's presenting problems (Chitiyo & May, 2018; Evanovich & Scott, 2016). In the context of DMST intervention, a youth who is identified as likely being victimized by human trafficking should be reported immediately to child welfare services per your state's mandated reporting requirements. However, it is extremely important for the safety of the student that a multi-step process is utilized. First, a safety check should be conducted to ensure the youth is safe while speaking with a school staff member or designated human trafficking support personnel. It is beneficial to find a safe space to speak with the student privately and immediately to assess if they are safe in school as well as understanding their safety concerns out of school (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2011b). This type of assessment should be done with caution and following the student's lead in terms of their comfort and willingness to disclose. It is important that the student does not feel forced into responding. Following this initial safety assessment, other dimensions that could be assessed include: If anyone is watching, listening, calling, or texting them, if the trafficker is present or nearby, if the trafficker knows where the student attends school or lives, the repercussions if the student tries to leave the trafficker, do the student's parents or guardians know about the situation or could they be involved (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2011b). If the danger is assessed to be immediate or urgent, school personnel should call 911 or local law enforcement in addition to making a report to child welfare services.

Some youth may return to the school setting as survivors of trafficking and these youth may often require additional mental health services in order to cope with and/or process the traumatic experiences of DMST. It is advisable that these youth are connected with community mental health providers, ideally working in the school in conjunction with MTSS teams (Barrett et al., 2013) in order to provider greater depth in services that also connect to other supports for the student at Tier 1 and 2. Schools can also provide wrap-around services to support these youth (and their families, if applicable) in receiving remedial services, regular check-ins with mental health personnel, or further services that may be needed.

Tier 3 Recommendations

1. Report suspected DMST to the local child welfare services as a part of mandated reporting duties, as indicated earlier in this brief

2. Call the National Human Trafficking Hotline for information about resources and additional next steps that can be taken locally.

3. Provide school mental health intervention integrated with the school's MTSS, and provide additional supportive care to students in relation to coursework, possible health needs, wraparound supports, and assistance to family members.

Tier 3 Implementation Challenges

1. It is extremely important that student safety is first taken into account prior to beginning any trafficking assessments, identification, or reporting. There are potential risks for a youth whose trafficker is alerted to others' awareness of the trafficking situation.

2. Trafficking can occur even in school settings, so it is important a safe and private place is found for the youth to meet with a school staff member or designated DMST personnel.

Conclusion

The PBIS framework is used to create safe, predictable, positive and nurturing environments for all students. This framework may also be used to assist survivors in building their resiliency and prevent many more from ever becoming victimized by sex trafficking. Schools are on the forefront of child abuse and neglect cases and helping to advocate for student safety and long-term success. Because students spend a large portion of their day at school, identification and prevention of domestic minor sex trafficking could be incorporated

Example of an Educator-led Identification and Intervention using PBIS

Note: The following example was adapted from the Texas Human Trafficking Task Force "Guide for Educators" and the National Human Trafficking Resource Center's "Educators and Human Trafficking: In-Depth Review"

A middle school teacher overhead some students in her class talking about a classmate, Lana who was recently offered an opportunity to make extra money modeling. She heard them say she had been offered this opportunity by an alumni of their high school and she already started making money. The teacher thought this additional income may explain Lana's recent drastic change in appearance and new flashy clothes and accessories. Furthermore, Lana's school attendance had also dropped off and her completion of school work had been waning. The teacher, using the request for assistance process, notified the school counselor. The school counselor, with support from school administrators followed up with Lana's friends to inquire about what had been overheard. The friends told the counselor they didn't like the alumni because he was much older and was calling himself Lana's boyfriend. They also noted that they hardly saw Lana anymore because he picked her up from school and often dropped her off. They shared that they were worried because she was doing a different kind of modeling than they thought, but would not go into any more detail. The counselor thanked them for expressing worry about their friend. She became concerned as a lot of the information the girls were providing was aligned with red flags for sex trafficking she learned about in the staff yearly training. She reached out to the school psychologist, the school's designated DMST staff person, who agreed that these were concerning signs. The school psychologist met with Lana and found out through an assessment and some follow up questioning that she was being forced to take sexually explicit photographs by this older alumni that were being posted online for profit. The psychologist immediately reported this to the local child welfare services per state law and called the National Human Trafficking Hotline for additional information and local resources around next steps.

into school policies, curricula, and supportive programs in order to ensure all staff, students, and parents are aware of the dangers and empowered to help to report suspected cases. After learning about DMST in their school settings, staff and students can aim to take on the responsibility of sharing the information with their peers in the school, across the school district, and with collaborating community agencies and partners (Bounds et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). One positive outcome of these efforts may be an increase in reported sex trafficking. This may seem counterintuitive, but because DMST is a hidden crime, higher reporting rates indicate that prevention and intervention efforts are working. It is important that light is brought onto the darkness and survivors are identified and given the direct help they need. While resiliency is vital for survival, resiliency is not static (O'Brien, 2018).

Additional Resources

Human Trafficking in America's Schools: What Schools Can Do to Prevent, Respond, and Help Students to Recover from Human Trafficking (2nd ed.; 2021) | U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools: https://www2.ed.gov/documents/human-trafficking/human-trafficking-americas-schools.pdf.

Educators and Human Trafficking: In-Depth Review (2011) | Polaris Project: https://humantraffickinghotline.org/resources/human-trafficking-depth-review-educators

Introduction to Human Trafficking: A Guide for Texas Education Professionals (2014) | Texas Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force: https://humantraffickinghotline.org/resources/introduction-human-trafficking-guide-texas-education-professionals

Schools and Anti-Trafficking Awareness: Education/Training Key Influencers & Students (2017) | Tidball, S. & Rajarm, S.S.: https://www.unmc.edu/publichealth/departments/healthpromotion/facultyandstaff/01-Trafficking-Report-final.pdf
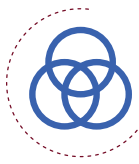
National Educators to Stop Trafficking (NEST) | An organization that aims to incorporate human trafficking prevention education in every school and youth organization in the United States. Includes guidance on curriculums, protocols, and other resources. http://nesteducators.org/
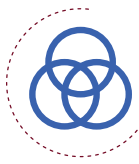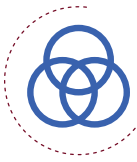
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