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Abstract

Growing interest in preventing and addressing sex trafficking has led to an increase in the development and implementation of sex trafficking educational programming for youth. We conducted a nationwide scoping scan survey of U.S. programs focused on educating youth about sex trafficking to learn more about existing programs. Staff at 37 programs completed the survey and provided information on program development, content, structure, delivery, and evaluation. The majority of programs included youth and survivors in program development. Programs aimed to prevent and increase awareness of sex trafficking with trauma-informed content focused on trafficking dynamics, grooming, warning signs, and actions to take if trafficking is suspected. Slightly over half of the programs also addressed labor trafficking and other forms of violence. Programs targeted youth and teachers, but varied in terms of delivery setting, format, and duration. About two thirds of the programs had undergone some form of evaluation, most by program developers, implementers, or staff. Study findings highlight the current landscape of sex trafficking education programming in the U.S. Recommendations are provided for advancing practice and research, including determining the most efficacious program content and delivery. Empowering youth through education and prevention are key steps to creating safe and inclusive communities.

Keywords: Sex Trafficking; Prevention; Programs; Youth; Students; Education

**The State of Programs for Educating Youth about Sex Trafficking in the United States:
A Nationwide Scoping Scan Survey**

Youth under age 18 who have been involved in commercial sex acts are considered victims of sex trafficking, as these youth cannot provide legal consent to engage in the sex trade and/or sex work (Choi, 2015; Clawson et al., 2009; Gerassi, 2015; U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act, 2000, P.L. 106-386). Moreover, the United States (U.S.) recognizes sex trafficking of youth as a severe form of child maltreatment associated with long-term deleterious consequences (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017; Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017; Twill et al., 2010). As such, there has been growing interest in ending sex trafficking among youth through awareness, prevention, and intervention efforts (Choi, 2015; Rafferty, 2013). This interest has led to an increase in the development and implementation of programs for educating youth about sex trafficking in the U.S. (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2013; Rizo et al., 2019). Although there has been some compilation of information on these programs (Gerassi & Nichols, 2017; McDowell, 2017), there continues to be limited knowledge regarding the programs' development, content, structure, delivery, and evaluation. To help address these knowledge gaps, the current study conducted a nationwide scoping scan survey of existing programs focused on educating youth about sex trafficking.

Prevalence and Consequences of Sex Trafficking of Youth

The National Human Trafficking Hotline (Polaris, 2020) has documented that many youth in the U.S. experience sex trafficking. However, the exact prevalence of sex trafficking among youth remains unknown (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2020; Nemeth & Rizo, 2019; Stransky & Finkelhor, 2012). Although there have been laudable attempts to estimate the prevalence of this mostly hidden crime, many scholars have disputed the accuracy and reliability of existing

estimates, often concluding that they are inaccurate and sometimes even unsupported by data (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2020; Salisbury et al., 2015; Stransky & Finkelhor, 2012). However, we do know that sex trafficking of minors occurs across the U.S. and that youth who are victimized may not be readily identified (Clayton et al., 2013; Stransky & Finkelhor, 2012). Research also suggests that certain youth, including victims of child maltreatment and sexual abuse, runaway youth, and system-involved youth (e.g., child protective services and/or justice involved youth), are at greater risk of experiencing sex trafficking given vulnerabilities exploited by others (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; O'Brien et al., 2017; Reid & Piquero, 2016).

Sex trafficking of youth is associated with numerous negative consequences that often affect the victims' well-being and developmental trajectories (Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 2017). Youth who have experienced sex trafficking typically report physical and mental health concerns, such as injuries, sexually transmitted infections, chronic health problems, depression, and complex trauma (Hardy et al., 2013; Lederer & Wetzel, 2014). Sex trafficking victimization is also associated with poor academic achievement, challenges related to social skills, and substance abuse (Cole et al., 2016; Twill et al., 2010).

Educating Youth about Sex Trafficking

Numerous organizations have developed sex trafficking educational programming for youth. In response to the increase in such programming, educators and researchers have begun to develop recommendations for educating youth about sex trafficking. In particular, Gerrasi and Nichols (2017) provide a detailed description of recommendations regarding program development, content, and delivery. Recommendations highlight the importance of involving youth and survivors in program development and delivery. Content recommendations focus on the inclusion of information concerning different types of sex trafficking (e.g., familial

trafficking, survival sex), healthy and unhealthy relationships, strategies used by traffickers to recruit and manipulate youth, the gendered nature of violence, risk factors based on marginalization (e.g., race, citizenship, disability, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and having a lack of available institutional supports), resources for seeking support, and bystander strategies aimed at intervening to prevent or end sex trafficking. Gerrasi and Nichols (2017) also recommended that programming address feelings of self-worth by using a trauma-informed and empowerment approach that uses language and images that are non-sensationalistic and relatable. Moreover, these authors and others have recommended that those delivering content on sex trafficking are well-trained on the topic and have protocols in place for handling disclosure of trafficking or other forms of abuse (e.g., Chesworth et al., 2020).

Despite such promising literature describing recommendations for programs focused on educating youth about sex trafficking, there is limited research describing and evaluating such programs and program components (Rizo et al., 2019). Several organizations, including the Georgia Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force and the Nest Foundation have taken steps to compile information about several of the most commonly known sex trafficking educational programs for youth (Gerassi & Nichols, 2017; McDowell, 2017). These efforts have yielded a broad overview of a handful of existing programs. However, to our knowledge, no study has aimed to examine systematically the characteristics of existing programs focused on educating youth about sex trafficking to, in turn, provide a comprehensive overview of the current landscape of programming.

Current Study

To address pressing knowledge needs, as well as to extend prior efforts to compile information about existing programs, this study conducted a scoping scan survey of U.S.

programs focused on educating youth about sex trafficking. The study surveyed staff from organizations that developed or disseminate a sex trafficking educational program. The overall goal was to acquire a general understanding of program development and practices. The specific research questions included: (1) How were sex trafficking educational programs for youth initially developed? (2) What content do they include? (3) What are the programs' structure and delivery methods (i.e., program goals, trauma-informed approach, target audience, delivery format, facilitation)? and (4) How have the programs been evaluated?

Methods

Our research team conducted a cross-sectional, nationwide scoping scan study using a study-developed survey to collect detailed information about the development, content, structure, delivery, and evaluation of existing programs for educating youth about sex trafficking in the U.S. The survey was disseminated nationwide to sex trafficking education programs identified as part of our study. The information provided was anonymized because there was a concern that some programs would be uncomfortable having program names linked to survey responses. All methods were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of our research team's university (#18-0389).

Study Sample

The survey target population included representatives from organizations across the U.S. that developed or were purveyors of programs for educating youth about sex trafficking. To be eligible for study inclusion, individuals had to meet the following criteria: (a) be a representative for an organization in the U.S. with a program that includes content on educating youth about sex trafficking; (b) be a fluent English speaker with basic English reading and writing skills; and (c) be 18 years of age or older.

No comprehensive list of programs existed at the time we conducted this study. Accordingly, we developed a comprehensive sampling frame of existing programs for educating youth about sex trafficking. We first invited members of our project's advisory group, which is comprised of local and national leaders in the anti-trafficking movement, to nominate any programs of which they were aware. Next, we reviewed websites of national organizations (i.e., anti-trafficking organizations, educational organizations, and youth-serving organizations) and invited nominations through national anti-trafficking listservs (e.g., HEAL network listserv).

We subsequently contacted all relevant programs to verify that the information we collected was accurate and to identify key representatives in the organization who would have relevant knowledge on program development, content, structure and delivery, and program evaluations. We used this information to create a list of the program representatives and their contact information. Our team reviewed, verified, and corrected program information as necessary throughout the process of sampling frame development and participant recruitment. Using all these methods, the study's initial sampling frame consisted of representatives from 62 U.S. organizations with programs that educate youth on sex trafficking.

Throughout survey administration, our team identified several non-operational e-mails, as well as some programs that were not focused on sex trafficking (e.g., the program addressed childhood sexual abuse but not sex trafficking). After removing potential participants for whom we did not have correct contact information and those who identified themselves as not appropriate for participation ($n = 13$), our final sampling frame consisted of 49 potential participants. A total of 37 of these 49 program representatives completed the survey for a response rate of 76%.

Recruitment and Survey Administration

Participant recruitment and survey administration occurred over a 14-week period, between November 2018 and February 2019. Survey participants were emailed an invitation to participate in a self-administered online Qualtrics survey. Non-responders were provided reminder emails and phone calls at several scheduled time points. All recruitment materials offered potential participants the ability to opt out of the study.

Survey Instrument

Survey development. The survey was developed and revised over several successive steps. An initial survey draft was created based on the study questions addressed in this paper, as well as the best practice recommendations for sex trafficking education and prevention programs (e.g., Gerassi & Nichols, 2017). Research team members reviewed the draft survey's wording, appropriateness, content areas, and specific questions. The survey was revised and transferred into Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool. A draft version of the web-based survey was pilot tested by the research team and three pilot testers who provided verbal and written feedback to enhance the survey. Pilot testers were not members of the sampling frame but had backgrounds and professional experiences similar to potential survey participants. After the survey was revised based on this feedback, the final version consisted of 5 logistical items (e.g., unique code number) and 32 substantive items, including both open and close-ended questions. The Appendix presents the 32 substantive items in the final survey instrument.

Survey content and structure. Content-related survey questions focused on: program development, program content, program structure and delivery, and program evaluation. More specifically, program development questions examined the extent to which survivors and youth were involved in the program development process. Program content questions asked about the main areas of focus in the program, as well as specific content (e.g., discussion of marginalized

groups, description of grooming techniques). Questions related to program structure and delivery focused on the program goals, the use of a trauma-informed approach, the program's target audience (e.g., youth, teachers, appropriateness for high-risk youth, youth age range), the delivery format (e.g., where program sessions are delivered, formats used, number and length of sessions), and facilitation (e.g., details on facilitators, support provided to facilitators). Lastly, program evaluation questions asked about prior program evaluations, including whether the program has been evaluated, the type of evaluation, and the evaluators.

Response options for most questions were close-ended, categorical, multiple-choice response options. Some of the multiple-choice options included an "other" response category, and for these responses, participants were asked to specify or provide more detail using an open-ended response. In addition, there were a few standalone open-ended questions that allowed participants to respond in lengthy descriptions (e.g., What were the learning objectives for the program as a whole? Is there anything else you would like to share about the program?).

Data Analysis

For close-ended questions, all statistical analyses were performed using R (R Core Team, 2017). We computed descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations. For open-ended questions, which consisted of few and brief responses, the first two authors used a content analysis approach to independently code manifest data and thus reduce the data to a set of representative codes for each question (Crowe et al. 2015; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The two members demonstrated 81% agreement and met to discuss and resolve the remaining discrepancies based on consensus. As appropriate, counts were generated for the emergent codes.

Results

Sex Trafficking Program Development

Table 1 highlights findings related to program development. Most survey participants (74%, $n = 25$) reported that youth were involved in their sex trafficking program development process. Of these, 24 survey participants provided greater detail regarding the variety of ways in which youth were involved in program development, including reviewing materials and providing feedback (58%, $n = 14$), pilot testing the program (33%, $n = 8$), using real-life stories of youth as the basis for the program (8%, $n = 2$), and having youth on staff (8%, $n = 2$).

The majority of participants (70%, $n = 23$) reported that survivors were also involved in the program development process. Survivors contributed to these 23 programs in a variety of ways, including reviewing the curriculum (70%, $n = 16$), contributing survivor stories (65%, $n = 15$), participating in curriculum creation (39%, $n = 9$), and serving on an advisory board (30%, $n = 7$). Another 30% of survey participants ($n = 7$) reported that survivors participated in other ways (e.g., sharing information to inform the program materials, being hired as staff, and contributing to a documentary used by the program). Three percent of survey participants ($n = 1$) reported that their materials were vetted by the National Survivor Network.

[Insert Table 1 about Here]

Sex Trafficking Program Content

Sex trafficking content. Table 2 presents findings regarding program content. All survey participants reported that their program focused on sex trafficking. In addition, 62% of survey participants ($n = 23$) reported their program included content on labor trafficking, and 16% ($n = 6$) reported addressing additional forms of trafficking (e.g., bonded labor, child soldiers, forced marriage, involuntary domestic servitude, organ trafficking).

Survey participants reported that their programs included numerous topics related to sex trafficking, including: trafficking dynamics (97%, $n = 35$), grooming techniques (94%, $n = 34$), what to do if trafficking is suspected (92%, $n = 33$), early warning signs of trafficking (92%, $n = 33$), definitions of trafficking (89%, $n = 32$), risks for exploitation (83%, $n = 30$), online safety (81%, $n = 29$), healthy versus unhealthy relationships (78%, $n = 28$), consequences of trafficking for victims (78%, $n = 28$), available community resources and services (75%, $n = 27$), building empowerment (72%, $n = 26$), personal safety and safety planning (67%, $n = 24$), building self-esteem (58%, $n = 21$), and self-discovery (56%, $n = 20$). Fourteen participants (39%) reported that their programs included other content, of which nine elaborated that such content included information regarding barriers to service access ($n = 1$); being an ally ($n = 2$); bystander intervention ($n = 2$); drivers of trafficking ($n = 1$); gang trafficking tactics ($n = 1$); global, domestic, regional, and local issues ($n = 1$); methods for reporting abuse ($n = 1$); principles of feminist theory (e.g., personal responsibility, privilege, male role in perpetrating violence; $n = 2$); the relationship between commercial sex industry and trafficking ($n = 1$); and trauma-related topics ($n = 1$).

Programs varied on whether the content included discussions of marginalization in relation to sex trafficking. Marginalized groups discussed by the programs included youth (79%, $n = 26$), women (79%, $n = 26$), lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer individuals (67%, $n = 22$), transgender or gender non-conforming (64%, $n=21$), poor or working-class people (61%, $n = 20$), immigrants (58%, $n = 19$), people of color (55%, $n = 18$), people with disabilities (55%, $n = 18$) and other groups (27%, $n = 9$; e.g., youth in or aging out of the foster care system, runaway youth, homeless youth, justice-involved youth, and youth directly or indirectly exposed to violence).

[Insert Table 2 about Here]

Content on additional types of violence. In addition to content on trafficking, participants reported program content on other types of violence. Survey participants reported providing information on dating violence (59%, $n = 20$), sexual violence (59%, $n = 20$), child abuse (56%, $n = 19$), and other types of violence (27%, $n = 9$; i.e., bullying, stalking, systemic abuse, and the dynamics and overlap of all types of violence). However, 18% of survey participants ($n = 6$) reported that their program does not address other types of violence aside from trafficking.

Program Structure and Delivery

Findings related to program structure and delivery are presented in Tables 3 and 4. Table 3 presents findings regarding program goals, trauma-informed approach, and target audience, whereas Table 4 highlights findings related to delivery format and facilitation.

Program goals. Survey participants reported a variety of program goals, including to prevent trafficking (97%, $n = 34$), to increase awareness (94%, $n = 33$), to prepare youth to help their peers (86%, $n = 30$), to increase knowledge about existing community resources (86%, $n = 30$) and to identify at-risk or trafficked youth (60%, $n = 21$). Some participants (31%, $n = 11$) reported additional program goals, such as to increase social responsibility and engagement among youth; to strengthen protective factors; to help youth understand unhealthy relationships, marginalization, and the dynamics around gender-based violence; to provide training, consultation, and support for professionals; and to teach youth and adult caregivers how to identify and support at-risk or trafficked youth.

Trauma-informed approach. The majority of participants reported their programs incorporate principles of trauma-informed care, including creating positive relationships (94%, n

= 30), fostering empowerment and voice (94%, $n = 30$), creating a safe space (69%, $n = 22$), providing messaging that healing is possible (69%, $n = 22$), helping youth to understand trauma effects (56%, $n = 18$), considering cultural competency (53%, $n = 17$), and supporting autonomy (47%, $n = 15$).

Target audience. All survey participants identified youth as the target audience for their program. About half of participants (50%, $n = 18$) reported their target audience also included teachers, and 44% ($n = 16$) reported additional audiences (i.e., volunteers, community stakeholders, caregivers and other relatives, and medical and mental health professionals).

Survey participants reported serving a variety of youth. About 82% of participants ($n = 28$) reported serving all youth. Particular types of youth served by some of the programs included youth at-risk for trafficking (47%, $n = 16$), youth who have exhibited warning signs (35%, $n = 12$), student leaders (35%, $n = 12$), and youth who have been trafficked (27%, $n = 9$). About 21% of survey participants ($n = 7$) noted that their program served other specific categories of youth such as boys, girls, youth in middle schools, and youth in high schools.

Most survey participants reported that their program could be appropriate and relevant for different types of youth who may be at greater risk of experiencing sex trafficking, including youth in foster care (88%, $n = 28$), youth in alternative schools (88%, $n = 28$), youth in group homes (84%, $n = 27$), and youth in juvenile justice facilities (78%, $n = 25$). About 16% of survey participants ($n = 5$) reported being uncertain about whether their program would be relevant for any of these groups, and only 3% ($n = 1$) reported that their program would not be relevant for youth at greater risk of experiencing trafficking.

Participants reported their programs served youth of varying ages. The ages of youth served by these programs ranged from 6 to 19+ years of age, with the most commonly reported

ages ranging between 13 to 18 years of age (78% to 91%, $n = 25-29$).

[Insert Tables 3 and 4 about Here]

Delivery format. Survey participants reported using a variety of different formats to educate youth about trafficking. The majority reported use of class or lecture sessions (86%, $n = 30$), followed by the use of small groups (69%, $n = 24$), videos (63%, $n = 22$), auditoriums or large assembly presentations (37%, $n = 13$), leaflets, brochures or books (37%, $n = 13$), posters (23%, $n = 8$), online readings or activities (20%, $n = 7$), and computer or internet-based trainings (17%, $n = 6$). About 29% of survey participants ($n = 10$) reported using other types of activities and formats, including art-based formats (e.g., art exhibit, drama), interactive activities, one-to-one discussions, peer-to-peer trainings with adult support, and multiple formats (e.g., collaborative learning labs, reflection and application, experiential activities).

Participants reported that their programs are delivered in a wide range of settings. Approximately 85% ($n = 28$) reported delivering programs in school classroom settings, 70% ($n = 23$) in after-school programs, 67% ($n = 22$) in youth groups, 64% ($n = 21$) in high-risk youth settings (e.g., alternative schools, juvenile justice centers), 64% ($n = 21$) in school-wide trainings, 58% ($n = 19$) in faith-based programs, 55% ($n = 18$) in student leader programs, 33% ($n = 11$) in foster care, 21% ($n = 7$) in summer camps, and 12% ($n = 4$) in other types of setting (i.e., residency rehabilitation programs, family events).

Of the 17 participants who reported a set number of sessions using one of the available response options, the number of sessions ranged from 1 to 6 sessions, with the most common number of sessions being five (22%, $n = 7$). Of the 14 participants (44%) who selected “other” as the response option to this question, 11 reported that their program did not have a set number of sessions because the number varied based on the circumstances (e.g., availability, preferred

focus, whether caregivers should be involved, how quickly modules are completed) and three reported a discrete number of sessions (i.e., 7, 10, 30).

The length of sessions also varied, ranging from less than 45 minutes to 2–3 hours. The most common session length was between 45–59 minutes (24%, $n = 18$). Some survey participants (18%, $n = 6$) reported not having a set session length because the duration was based on circumstances such as the preferred length, the structure of school periods, and whether or not they engage in optional learning labs.

Facilitation. Approximately 71% of survey participants ($n = 25$) reported that their program could be delivered in person by a member of their organization. Additional potential facilitators included teachers and school personnel (49%, $n = 17$), youth (14%, $n = 5$), and others (40%, $n = 14$, e.g., trained members of the community, people with special insight, and certified facilitators). Notably, over two-thirds of survey participants (70%, $n = 23$) reported that survivors are often involved in the delivery of their programs.

Further, survey participants reported providing a variety of resources to program facilitators to support them in delivering the program. Participants reported that their programs offer in-person trainings (94%, $n = 33$); written resources (94%, $n = 33$; i.e., manuals, lesson plans); online readings, activities, and resources (66%, $n = 23$); ongoing technical assistance (60%, $n = 21$); ongoing supervision (60%, $n = 21$); online trainings (31%, $n = 11$); and other types of resources (26%, $n = 9$, e.g., ongoing support and physical materials such as handouts and PowerPoint presentations). Only 3% of survey participants ($n = 1$) reported not providing any resources for individuals delivering their programs. The majority of survey participants reported that they include protocols for facilitators on how to respond to trafficking disclosures

(85%, $n = 29$) as well as protocols to teach youth how to respond to trafficking disclosures by their peers (91%, $n = 30$).

Program Evaluation

Table 5 shows about two-thirds of the 34 survey participants (65%, $n = 22$) reported that their program has been evaluated. Of the 22 evaluated programs, 64% ($n = 14$) had undergone both a process and an outcome evaluation, 18% ($n = 4$) had been evaluated by only process evaluations, and another 18% ($n = 4$) by only outcome evaluations.

Survey participants whose programs have been evaluated reported a variety of different program evaluators. Approximately 73% ($n = 16$) of programs were evaluated by program implementers, 64% ($n = 14$) were evaluated by program authors, 59% ($n = 13$) were evaluated by program staff, 46% ($n = 10$) were evaluated by researchers, and 41% ($n = 9$) were evaluated by another party (i.e., schools, community stakeholders, a task force, teachers, students, local graduate program, grant funders).

[Insert Table 5 about Here]

Discussion

Despite the increased interest in developing and implementing programs focused on educating youth about sex trafficking, there have been limited efforts to comprehensively identify and systematically compile information about these programs. The current study begins to address this pressing gap by surveying existing sex trafficking programs for youth in the United States. We identified 49 programs in the United States focused on educating youth about sex trafficking, of which 37 had representatives who completed our survey. Importantly, the effort to develop these programs is laudable, particularly given that many of these programs were developed by community-based providers with limited resources. Such practice-based,

grassroots efforts have played a critical role in moving the field of sex trafficking education forward. Survey findings highlight the state of field in terms of development, content, structure and delivery, and evaluation of sex trafficking educational programs for youth. In the following sections we summarize key findings in these areas to help guide future practice and program development, as well as provide recommendations for future research.

Sex Trafficking Program Development

The majority of participants shared that youth and survivors were actively involved in the development of their curriculum. This finding is consistent with growing recognition of the importance of ensuring programs are survivor- and youth-centered by meaningfully involving survivors and youth in program development (Bulanda & Johnson, 2016; Gerassi & Nichols, 2017). Moreover, this finding aligns with a call for more survivor inclusion in efforts to prevent and address human trafficking (Lockyer, 2020). Notably, survivor and youth involvement mostly consisted of reviewing and providing feedback on program materials. Although such feedback can help enhance appropriateness and relevance, programs might also benefit from increased collaboration with survivors and youth in the creation of program content and materials. For example, survivors and youth might participate in the actual program development and/or actively be involved with an advisory board overseeing program development and implementation.

Sex Trafficking Program Content

Findings highlight a great deal of consistency across programs in terms of many recommended topics for educating youth about sex trafficking, including trafficking dynamics, grooming tactics, warning signs, what to do if trafficking is expected, online safety, healthy vs. unhealthy relationships, and available resources (Gerassi & Nichols, 2017; Rizo et al., 2019). However, there were notable differences across programs in terms of some sex trafficking topics,

as well as content on marginalization and other forms of violence. For example, few programs covered content on methods for reporting abuse, bystander strategies, and barriers to service provision. Marginalization in relation to sex trafficking was also covered in varied ways across the programs; whereas many programs discussed how sex trafficking was related to marginalization based on age, gender, and sexual orientation, fewer programs included content on marginalization based on race/ethnicity or disability. Such findings are concerning given research suggesting greater risk of sex trafficking among youth of color and those with a disability (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2020; Franchino-Olsen, 2021). Further, despite the overlap between different forms of violence, only slightly over half of the programs included content of domestic violence, sexual violence, or child abuse. Scholars have stressed the need for holistic programs focused on preventing and educating youth about different forms of violence (Foshee et al., 2016; Hamby & Grych, 2013; Watkins et al., 2014). Such an approach addresses the overlap between experiencing multiple forms of violence, shared risk factors across different forms of violence, and logistical constraints regarding reaching youth with multiple programs.

Program Structure and Delivery

Trauma-informed approach. Relatedly, youth in general can experience a variety of adverse events, ranging from mildly to extremely stressful (Flaherty et al., 2013; Manyema et al., 2018). Such events may include violence exposure and victimization and result in complex trauma (McLaughlin et al., 2013). Given the prevalence of youth trauma and likelihood of being triggered by discussions of violence (Martin et al., 2017), it is important that sex trafficking educational programs for youth be grounded in trauma-informed principles (Gerassi & Nichols, 2017; Pierce, 2012). Approaching trafficking education in a trauma-informed manner can help ensure youth are not harmed or re-traumatized, and can also create a space for healing (Bulanda & Johnson, 2016; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA],

2014). Therefore, it is notable that many trauma-informed principles were incorporated across the majority of programs. The most commonly reported principles were creating positive relationships and fostering empowerment and voice, followed by creating a safe space, and providing messaging that healing is possible. Several principles were reported by only about half of the participants, including helping youth to understand trauma effects, considering cultural competency, and supporting autonomy. Future research is needed to determine barriers and strategies for incorporating principles related to understanding trauma, cultural competency and autonomy.

Program targets. The majority of programs targeted all youth. Although less than half reported specifically targeting youth who were either at-risk of trafficking or had experience trafficking, most participants reported their program would be appropriate for youth with known risk factors (e.g., youth in foster care, alternative schools, group homes, or juvenile justice facilities; Franchino-Olsen, 2021). In addition, findings indicated that programs served youth ranging in age from 6 to over 19 years old, with the majority focused on reaching youth between the ages of 13 and 18 years old. Given the importance of timing the delivery of violence education when it could be most helpful in preventing victimization and perpetration (Nation et al., 2003), it is critical to consider whether existing programs are appropriately timed. Growing research suggests that many youth who experience trafficking are quite young when first trafficked (e.g., 10 to 17 years old; Clayton et al., 2013; Hammond & McGlone, 2014). Although, notably, some programs do target youth well before adolescence, most programs reported serving older youth. Importantly, barriers related to parental and administrative concerns about the developmental appropriateness of topics concerning sex often pose challenges to reaching younger youth with education on sex trafficking (Moilanen, 2016).

Program format and setting. The programs were delivered in various settings and formats; however, the most common delivery was in schools through class or lecture sessions.

Program dosage. It is important that violence education programs have sufficient dosage (i.e., enough of the intervention) to produce sustained effects on key outcomes (Nation et al., 2003; Koker et al., 2014). Dosage can be indicated by the quality and quantity of contact hours (e.g., session length, number of sessions, spacing of sessions, program duration) and can depend on the needs of program participants (Nation et al., 2003). Slightly over half of the programs reported a set number of sessions ranging from 1 to 6 sessions. Programs typically consisted of 5 sessions, each lasting about 45 minutes to 1 hour in duration. However, just under half of the programs reported varying the number of sessions based on given circumstances, highlighting how programs are attempting to tailor program delivery based on logistical demands and constraints.

Program facilitators. Although the majority of participants shared their program is often delivered by a member of their organization, other facilitators included survivors, teachers and school personnel, youth, and community members. It is promising that numerous types of training and supportive resources are offered to facilitators given that a thorough understanding of sex trafficking is crucial to ensuring that facilitators can properly respond to critical questions that may arise (Gerassi & Nichols, 2017; Nation et al., 2003). However, it is important to note that we do not know the extent to which facilitators are trained or whether the provided training is effective in improving facilitators' ability to educate youth about sex trafficking and respond to signs of distress.

Program protocols. In addition to training and supportive resources, most survey participants reported that their programs also include protocols on responding to trafficking

disclosures. Educating youth about sex trafficking may increase the likelihood that youth recognize their experiences as trafficking and disclose the incident to the program facilitator or another trusted adult; thus, highlighting the need for program facilitators to have protocols for handling such disclosures (Gerassi & Nichols, 2017). Reporting sex trafficking disclosures to child protection services and law enforcement can be a complicated process with laws and policies varying based on state jurisdiction (English, 2017). Moreover, the complexity and nuance of handling disclosures and making reports may be exacerbated for mandated reporters concerned about whether their local child protection services agency is prepared to address sex trafficking (Hartinger-Saunders, et al., 2017) as well as those who have not been trained to make such reports. Protocols with guidance on federal and state policies as well as the steps needed to establish relationships with relevant community agencies and report sex trafficking to the appropriate authorities may be particularly important for professionals not trained or comfortable in making reports to child protection services or law enforcement (Chesworth et al., 2020). In addition, such protocols could highlight additional supports and services that would be helpful to mobilize in response to disclosures of sex trafficking (e.g., local anti-trafficking organization, mental health services).

Program Evaluation

Approximately two-thirds of the programs we surveyed had been evaluated, the majority of which were evaluated by either program developers, staff, or facilitators. Notably, despite findings suggesting that many of the programs had undergone some form of evaluation, there are few published studies evaluating sex trafficking educational programs for youth (Murphy et al., 2016; Pierce, 2012; Rothman et al., 2019; Rothman et al., 2020). Without evaluation findings being widely available in the scientific literature or elsewhere, it is challenging for community members and organizations to determine which program might be most promising given the

setting and the youth they serve. A clear need exists for the implementation and dissemination of rigorous and funded research conducted by external evaluators on sex trafficking educational programs to show what program content, structure, and delivery are most effective. However, it is important to recognize challenges to program evaluation, including constraints related to funding, time, and expertise. These barriers highlight implications for policymakers and funders regarding the need for funding mechanisms to support evaluation and research on sex trafficking educational programs. Moreover, given the practice-based and grassroots nature of most program development to-date, such funding and policy attention should especially emphasize community-based and community-engaged research.

Future Research Recommendations

In addition to the need for increased program evaluation, the study findings also point to additional recommendations for future research. Concerning program content, research could valuably investigate how different program topics and emphases relate to key program outcomes (e.g., increase in knowledge and skills, decrease in violence victimization and perpetration) among program participants. Concerning program targeting, many survey participants reported that their program could be appropriate for reaching groups disproportionately impacted by sex trafficking (Anderson et al., 2014; Gerassi & Nichols, 2017; Pierce, 2012). However, it is difficult to know if these programs are in fact appropriate for at-risk youth without knowing whether they were adapted for or evaluated with different groups of vulnerable youth. Given the fact that the survey findings showed wide variation in the number and length of sessions, as well as potential practical constraints to delivering lengthy programs, future research is needed to determine the dosage of sex trafficking education required to produce meaningful outcomes. In addition, research is needed to determine whether certain facilitators (e.g., based on their

background or training) are more effective than others in educating youth about trafficking.

Future research is also needed to determine the feasibility, appropriateness, and effectiveness of program protocols for handling disclosures.

Limitations

Findings should be considered in light of study limitations. We did not review program curricula, manuals, or other program materials and instead relied on self-reports from program representatives. Program materials are often proprietary, which limits our ability to corroborate or augment the self-report data. If feasible to request and gather program materials, future research could valuably include a document review and content analyses of available programs. A related limitation is that our survey did not capture all relevant information about the programs. For example, we did not ask about whether the programs were gender-specific or gender-inclusive, and we only included a few questions related to program evaluation. Moreover, although we asked whether the programs had been evaluated, the data provided did not allow us to assess the rigor of those evaluations. Another limitation is the possibility that we did not identify all existing programs. Despite our thorough efforts to identify programs, program information may not have been readily available on the internet, and smaller or newer programs may not have been established enough to be known by experts in the field. Notably, a high percentage of the identified programs had a representative complete our survey.

Conclusion

This study offers a scoping scan of programs across the United States that educate youth about sex trafficking. It is the first study to systematically gather and summarize information on program development, content, structure, delivery, and evaluation to determine the state of the field in terms of available programming. Findings suggest general consistency across programs

in terms of involving survivors and youth in program development, incorporating many trauma-informed care principles, covering key sex trafficking content, offering training and support resources to facilitators, and including protocols for responding to sex trafficking. However, programs varied in several ways, particularly related to their structure, delivery, and evaluation. Moreover, given the pressing need to educate youth about trafficking, as well as prevent its occurrence, future research is needed to determine the efficacy and effectiveness of sex trafficking educational programming and examine differences based on content, structure, and delivery. Hopefully, findings from this study can help guide and inform such future evaluation efforts.

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Table 1. *Percentage and Number of Sex Trafficking Programs in which Youth and/or Survivors were Included in Program Development*

	n	% (n)
Youth involved in program development	34	73.5 (25)
Youth involvement categories ^a	24	
Reviewed materials and provided feedback		58.3 (14)
Program was pilot tested with youth		33.3 (8)
Used real-life stories of youth		8.3 (2)
Youth are on staff		8.3 (2)
Survivors involved in program development	33	69.7 (23)
Survivor involvement categories ^a	23	
Curriculum review		69.6 (16)
Survivor stories		65.2 (15)
Curriculum creation		39.1 (9)
Advisory board		30.4 (7)
Other		30.4 (7)
Vetted by National Survivor Network ^a	33	3.0 (1)
Yes		3.0 (1)
Unsure		30.3 (10)
No		66.7 (22)

^a Percentages exceed 100% because survey participants could select multiple responses.

Table 2. *Percentage and Number of Sex Trafficking Programs with Specific Types of Program Content*

	n	% (n)
Type of trafficking addressed ^a	37	
Sex trafficking		100.0 (37)
Labor trafficking		62.2 (23)
Other		16.2 (6)
Primary topics ^a	36	
Dynamics of trafficking		97.2 (35)
Grooming techniques used by traffickers to recruit victims		94.4 (34)
What to do if you suspect trafficking		91.7 (33)
Early warning signs of trafficking		91.7 (33)
Definitions of trafficking		88.9 (32)
Risks for exploitation		83.3 (30)
Online safety		80.6 (29)
Healthy versus unhealthy relationships		77.8 (28)
Consequences of trafficking for victims		77.8 (28)
Available community resources and services		75.0 (27)
Building empowerment		72.2 (26)
Personal safety/safety planning		66.7 (24)
Building self-esteem		58.3 (21)
Self-discovery		55.6 (20)
Other		38.9 (14)
Content discusses specific grooming tactics ^a	35	
Flattering or romancing youth		97.1 (34)
Building trust		97.1 (34)
Isolating youth from other forms of support		94.3 (33)
Intimidation		91.4 (32)
Glamorizing sex work		71.4 (25)
Disorienting youth by moving them to unfamiliar places		68.6 (24)
Content discusses marginalized groups ^a	33	
Youth		78.7 (26)
Women		78.7 (26)
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Queer people		66.7 (22)
Transgender or gender non-conforming		63.6 (21)
Poor or working-class people		60.6 (20)
Immigrants		57.6 (19)
People of color		54.5 (18)
People with disabilities		54.5 (18)
Other		27.3 (9)
Does not discuss marginalization		3.0 (1)
Content discusses other types of violence ^a	34	
Dating violence		58.8 (20)
Sexual violence		58.8 (20)
Child abuse		55.9 (19)
Other violence (e.g., bullying)		26.5 (9)
Content does not include any other type of violence		17.6 (6)

^a Percentages exceed 100% because survey participants could select multiple responses.

Table 3. *Percentage and Number of Sex Trafficking Programs with Various Types of Program Structure and Delivery – Goals, Trauma-informed Approach, and Target Audience*

	n	% (n)
Overall program goals ^a	35	
Prevent trafficking		97.1 (34)
Increase awareness		94.3 (33)
Help youth to help their peers		85.7 (30)
Increase knowledge about existing community resources		85.7 (30)
Identify at-risk or trafficked youth		60.0 (21)
Other		31.4 (11)
Trauma-informed approach ^a	32	
Creating positive relationships		93.8 (30)
Empowerment and voice		93.8 (30)
Creating a safe space		68.8 (22)
Messaging that healing is possible		68.8 (22)
Understanding trauma effects		56.2 (18)
Cultural competency		53.1 (17)
Supporting autonomy		46.9 (15)
Target audience ^a	36	
Youth		100.0 (36)
Teachers		50.0 (18)
Other		44.4 (16)
Types of youth targeted by programs ^a	34	
All youth		82.4 (28)
Youth at-risk of trafficking		47.1 (16)
Youth with warning signs		35.3 (12)
Youth who are student leaders		35.3 (12)
Trafficked youth		26.5 (9)
Other		20.6 (7)
Program appropriateness for high-risk youth ^a	32	
Youth in foster care		87.5 (28)
Youth in alternative schools		87.5 (28)
Youth in group homes		84.4 (27)
Youth in juvenile justice centers		78.1 (25)
Uncertain		15.6 (5)
Not appropriate		3.1 (1)
Ages of youth served ^a	32	
6-year olds		3.1 (1)
7-year olds		3.1 (1)
8-year olds		12.5 (4)
9-year olds		12.5 (4)
10-year olds		15.6 (5)
11-year olds		28.1 (9)
12-year olds		62.5 (20)
13-year olds		81.2 (26)
14-year olds		90.6 (29)
15-year olds		87.5 (28)
16-year olds		81.2 (26)
17-year olds		84.4 (27)
18-year olds		78.1 (25)
19-year olds+		43.8 (14)

^a Percentages exceed 100% because survey participants could select multiple responses.

Table 4. *Percentage and Number of Sex Trafficking Programs with Various Types of Program Structure and Delivery – Program Format and Facilitation*

	n	% (n)
Program format ^a	35	
Class/lecture session		85.7 (30)
Small groups		68.6 (24)
Videos		62.9 (22)
Auditorium/Assembly		37.1 (13)
Leaflets/books/brochures		37.1 (13)
Other		28.6 (10)
Posters		22.9 (8)
Online readings/activities		20.0 (7)
Internet/computer training		17.1 (6)
Program setting ^a	33	
Classroom setting in schools		84.8 (28)
After-school program		69.7 (23)
Youth group		66.7 (22)
Settings with high-risk youth		63.6 (21)
In-school training		63.6 (21)
Faith-based program		57.6 (19)
Student leader program		54.5 (18)
Foster care		33.3 (11)
Summer camp		21.2 (7)
Other		12.1 (4)
Number of sessions	32	
One		12.5 (4)
Two		6.2 (2)
Three		3.1 (1)
Four		3.1 (1)
Five		21.9 (7)
Six		6.2 (2)
Not applicable		3.1 (1)
Other		43.8 (14)
Length of sessions	33	
<45 minutes		9.1 (3)
45–59 minutes		24.2 (18)
60–74 minutes		6.1 (2)
75–89 minutes		0.0 (0)
90–120 minutes		6.1 (2)
2–3 hours		6.1 (2)
Other		18.2 (6)
Program facilitator ^a	35	
Member of organization		71.4 (25)
Teacher/school personnel		48.6 (17)
Other		40.0 (14)
Youth		14.3 (5)
Survivor involvement in program delivery	33	69.7 (23)
Resources for facilitators ^a	35	
In-person training		94.3 (33)
Written resources		94.3 (33)
Online readings/activities/resources		65.7 (23)
Ongoing technical assistance		60.0 (21)
Ongoing supervision		60.0 (21)
Online training		31.4 (11)
Other		25.7 (9)

None		2.9 (1)
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Use of protocols ^a		
Protocol for facilitator response to disclosures	34	85.3 (29)
Protocol to teach youth to response to disclosures	33	90.9 (30)
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^a Percentages exceed 100% because survey participants could select multiple responses.

Table 5. *Percentage and Number of Sex Trafficking Programs with a Program Evaluation*

	n	% (n)
Program has been evaluated	34	
Yes		64.7 (22)
Unsure		20.6 (7)
No		14.7 (5)
Type of evaluation	22	
Both process and outcome evaluation		63.6 (14)
Process evaluation		18.2 (4)
Outcome evaluation		18.2 (4)
Type of evaluators ^a	22	
Program implementers		72.7 (16)
Program authors		63.6 (14)
Program staff		59.1 (13)
Researchers		45.5 (10)
Other		41.0 (9)

^a Percentages exceed 100% because survey participants could select multiple responses.