

THE LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF MADERA COUNTY CHILD  
WELFARE WORKERS ON COMMERICALLY SEXUALLY  
EXPLOITED CHILDREN

Executive Summary

by  
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ABSTRACT

## THE LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF MADERA COUNTY CHILD WELFARE WORKERS ON COMMERICALLY SEXUALLY EXPLOITED CHILDREN

The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is a domestic problem that is estimated to affect 100,000 United States children each year (Walker, 2013). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2013) states the commercial sexual exploitation of children involves sexual crimes committed against children and juvenile victims for financial or other economic reasons. Commercially sexually exploited children often include children who are neglected or abused, in foster care, runaways, substance abusers, and homeless. Due to the hidden nature of this crime, data regarding sexual exploitation is extremely limited. Furthermore, limited data from child welfare agencies suggest that social workers may lack training and knowledge regarding this matter. In this quantitative, descriptive study, a questionnaire was distributed to 26 Madera County Child Welfare social workers to assess their knowledge and awareness about CSEC. Findings suggest that Madera County Child Welfare social workers have an overall understanding and awareness of CSEC. However most participants reported that they were unsure as to whether they asked specific questions during interviews to identify suspected victims of sex trafficking. The majority of respondents also reported a lack of knowledge about whether their agency has a relationship with local police and youth shelters in order to help CSEC victims.

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## INTRODUCTION

The human trafficking trade is a modern form of slavery. The terminology “human trafficking” is an umbrella term for various kinds of exploitation of persons, including sex trafficking, labor trafficking, child soldiery, bonded labor, and organ trafficking (RestoreCorps, n.d.). It is a brutal and criminal industry that hides and exploits millions of individuals, mostly women and children, who are victimized in the dark throughout the world. This form of exploitation intersects different areas such as socio-economic status, educational-level, abuse, violence, and gender. In the United States, recent sting operations by the FBI brought media attention to hundreds of thousands of children under the age of 18 who are forced into prostitution, pornography, stripping, escorting, and sex tourism. The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is extortion perpetuated towards children through the use of violence and coercion.

Victims of human trafficking are virtually invisible to mainstream culture and identifying and assisting victims is one of the greatest challenges (Garrity & McClain, 2011). The United States is one of the top 10 destinations for human trafficking with reports of trafficking in over 90 cities (Hepburn & Simon, 2010). Although human trafficking is receiving increased attention in the United States, estimates and details about human trafficking remain elusive; even globally, the estimates of bodies used as slaves are still unknown (Hunt, Logan, & Walker, 2009). Inaccurate estimates and limited research have only provided a scope of what is considered to be the total worldwide. Currently, there are 20.9 million victims of human trafficking globally (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2014). An estimate annual worldwide

profit of \$44.3 billion is made from persons trafficked globally (Hepburn & Simon, 2010).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *Conceptual Framework*

Globalization, Feminist Theory, and Trauma Bonding Theory were used in this study to help understand human trafficking/CSEC still exists throughout the world. Globalization has created a world with an integrated global economy marked by free trade, free flow of capital, and the tapping of cheaper foreign labor markets (Globalization, 2014). Many countries that have economically lower levels per capita have increasingly higher risk for exploitation of people. Some of these countries include: Asia, South America, South East Asia, Central America, and North America. Issues related to victims include: poverty, unemployment, low social status, lack of opportunities, few prospects for the future, an idealistic view of the Western world and wealthier countries powers globalization (Amir & Beeks, 2009). For internationally trafficked adolescents, the promise of a better life in another country is frequently enough for girls or for their families to give them over to traffickers (Hodge & Lietz, 2007). Victims are presented with marriages, modeling, jobs, and fake promises in foreign countries only to be forced into trafficking.

Feminist Theory is concerned with understanding fundamental inequalities between women and men with analyses of male power over women. It's the basic premise that male dominance derives from the social, economic and political arrangements to specific societies. Historically, women have been marginalized from resources or power and have unequal power relationships with males in almost all

societies. The growth of a billion dollar entertainment and sex industry has been based on male-centered ideology (Best Practice, 2003).

Traumatic bonding theory suggest that the relationship “develops between two persons where one person intermittently harass, beats, threatens, abuses, or intimates the other” (Petocsky & Swanger, 2003, p. 37). This relationship has also been referred to as Stockholm Syndrome in which “both child and adult victims of human trafficking may experience traumatic bonding, experiencing terror toward their captors, but also gratitude for supposed favors.

### *Risk Factors*

This study identified several risk factors that make children and youth vulnerable to trafficking: substance abuse, homelessness, sexual and emotional abuse. Drugs and alcohol abuse are considered motivators into entry and continuation of prostitution. Brawn and Roe-Sepowitz (2008) found in their study of young girls that indicated approximately 60% of their juvenile sample used alcohol and drugs. They also found substance-abusing females were more likely to be white, living in unstable situations and in disorganized families. Heilemann and Santhiveern (2011) also found in their female adolescents sample, that they used illegal substances and alcohol to cope with emotions related to prostitution.

Several studies have shown that children and youth who have been homeless are at a greater risk for sexual exploitation. Many of the respondents stated that they needed basic survival commodities to survive. According to Johnson and Tyler (2006) the most common reason for running away was stress or becoming overwhelmed with family problems. Another study also reported that homeless youth engaged in prostitution to

provide for their basic needs (Prior & Williamson, 2009). Chong et al. (2011) found a correlation to sexual exploitation of children and emotional and sexual abuse. Chong found that at least one situation in which family dysfunction occurred and psychological maltreatment in prostituted youth and children. According to Dominique and Roe-Sepowitz (2012), experiences of early childhood are considered primary risk factors for commercial sexual exploitation of children.

### *Human Services*

Child protection agencies and law enforcement are typically responsible for outreach, identification, and services in human trafficking cases. The United States Department in 2009 conducted a study that found that found human health and law enforcement officials had difficulty identifying victims. The Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance (2008) also found there was uncertainty among service providers of the qualifications for an individual to be protected under the trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000. It was also found that the majority of justice system agencies did not have a plan or services for human trafficking victims.

In 2013, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) recognized there is a limited amount of aggregate data to identify the prevalence and characteristics of victims within the child welfare, runaway, and homeless youth systems (Administration for Children, Youth and Families, 2013). DHHS furthered stated while there are some emerging practices within child welfare systems, runaway and homeless youth programs, there is still work to be done to create evidence-based interventions and mediations that advocate improved outcomes specifically for CSEC victims.

The criminal system continues to charge United States children as prostitution

offenders instead of treating them as sexually exploited youth. These children typically suffer from poverty, trauma, sexual abuse, and are especially vulnerable to pimps and traffickers (Mir, 2013). Most often, minor girls who are picked up for prostitution offense are seen as self-prostituting, rather than as victims. Usually these victims have personal and family histories of substance abuse and physical or sexual violence (Mir, 2013). According to the analysis of the National Incident-Based Reporting System, police tend to view youth involved in prostitution as offenders (Halter, 2010). The sexual exploitation of children is a social issue that continues to have challenges due to its lack of clarity and complexity.

The child welfare system lacks data on trainings and the vital role social workers hold in mediation with sexually exploited children. Agencies use their own databases and this may lead to gaps in identification and such challenges as variations in definition of terms (such as CSEC and trafficking) that leads to difficulty in identify victims (Greenbaum, 2014). Child welfare agencies are left with gathering and researching their own protocols on identifying victims. In Florida, the Department of Children and Families released a human trafficking children tool indicator to assist child welfare workers in understanding human trafficking and identifying children who are victims themselves. However, the information provided with the tool indicates that it does not measure all instances of human trafficking or areas that may be explored to determine if human trafficking is present.

The lack of research on identifying children as victims during the screening process may reduce the likelihood that child welfare social workers will ask questions related to sexual exploitation. According to Greenbaum, “adults and children subjected to

trafficking do not self-identify, often due to shame, fear, and guilt” (p. 247). The fact victims themselves do not identify and child welfare workers do not ask proper questions may place victims at greater risk. Overall, there is a gap in current literature regarding the level of awareness among social workers in child welfare services. There is currently little research regarding knowledge and awareness about the sexual exploitation of children among social workers in the child welfare system. Research is needed to examine whether social workers are equipped to understand and intervene with CSEC victims.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this quantitative descriptive study is to examine child welfare social workers’ awareness and ability to identify and assess victims of commercially sexually exploited children. A cross-sectional survey design was used for this study with descriptive quantitative research methods. The survey assessed the level of awareness about CSEC children among child welfare social workers and barriers that prevent the identification of these children in the child welfare system. The following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What is the current level of awareness of social workers in CSEC?
2. What are the barriers to the identification of CSEC victims?

A total of 26 social workers, from Madera County child welfare services were involved in this study. The researcher provided a copy of the cover letter for this study to director, deputy director, and child welfare workers. The deputy director sent an email to child welfare workers one week prior to the agency’s monthly division meeting. The email was sent to all child welfare social workers interested in participating in this survey

during the last 25 minutes of the division meeting. Surveys were handed out at the end of the meeting. Once completed, social workers inserted anonymous surveys in a folder located at the entrance of the door.

The survey included questions derived from two pre-existing instruments developed by the Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights and Shared Hope International. The survey questions include information about the participant's gender, age group, and experience in child welfare. The survey questions also include information about the subject's level of awareness about CSEC, identification of victims, and possible barriers faced when interviewing a possible victim. The survey contained 21 close-ended questions and four follow-up written questions. It contained seven true and false questions.

## **FINDINGS**

The following section presents the main findings gathered from surveys of 26 Madera County child welfare social workers.

### *Demographics*

The participants in the study were 26 Madera County child welfare social workers from Madera, California; 92% were female and 8% were male. In terms of age, 42.3% were 21-35 years old, 42.3% were 35-50 years old, and 15.4% were 51-65 years old. The majority of participants (73.1%), held master's degrees, 19.2% had bachelor's degrees, and 7.7% held "other" degrees. Lastly, (46.2%) of participants had worked between 2 and 5 years in child welfare, 19.2% of the participants had worked 6-10, years, 30.8% had worked 11-15 years, and 3.8% had worked for 16-20 years in child welfare.

### *General Understanding*

After demographic data was collected from participants, they were asked to self-rate their general understanding of commercially sexually exploited children; 11.5% of the participants rated their understanding as excellent, 38.5 % as good, 30.8% as average, 7.7% as fair, and 11.5% as poor.

### *Characteristics of a Recruiter/Trafficker/Pimp*

Respondents were also asked to describe the “typical” characteristics of a recruiter/trafficker/pimp. A total of 15 participants provided written responses. Seven participants reported similar written responses about personalities and physical appearances typically seen in pimps/traffickers. One respondent stated, “pimps are good looking and manipulative.” Another respondent wrote, that “pimps are very charming and charismatic. They tend to have a great deal of influence over others, very personable, and caring at first.” Another participant stated, “pimps/traffickers gain trust and then ask for favors, usually have “help” roles towards children and have the skills to gain trust and influence over others.”

### *Knowledge about CSEC*

Respondents were also asked to rate their understanding of the precise meaning of term human trafficking (see Table 1). The majority of the Madera County social workers rated themselves; 53.8% as “good” and 15.4% rated as “excellent.”

Table 1

*Respondents Self-ratings of Understanding of Term Human Trafficking*

| Understanding of Human trafficking | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Excellent                          | 4         | 15.4       |
| Good                               | 14        | 53.8       |
| Average                            | 7         | 26.9       |
| Fair                               | 1         | 9.8        |
| Poor                               | 0         | 0.0        |

Participants were also asked to rate their knowledge about the recruitment process typically used by traffickers or pimps with children; 11.5% rated their knowledge as “excellent,” 34.8% rated themselves as “good,” 30.8% rated themselves as “average,” 19.2% reported “fair,” and 3.8% self-rated as “poor” (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Respondents Self-Ratings of their Knowledge of Recruitment Process Used by*

*Traffickers/Pimps with Children*

| Rated Knowledge on the Recruitment Process | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Excellent                                  | 3         | 11.5       |
| Good                                       | 9         | 34.8       |
| Average                                    | 8         | 30.8       |
| Fair                                       | 5         | 19.2       |
| Poor                                       | 1         | 3.8        |

Table 3 highlights responses to a seven true/false questionnaire designed to examine respondents’ knowledge of situations and scenarios related to CSEC and social work practice. The correct response for each of the true/false questions was “true.”

Table 3

*Seven Questionnaire on Knowledge about CSEC*

| Knowledge about CSEC   | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| 1. Trafficked youth and children often self-disclose exploitation to social workers or human health professionals  |           |            |
| True   | 4         | 15.4       |
| False  | 22        | 84.6       |
| 2. Children who are trafficked may still be under the control of a pimp/trafficker, even after they are returned to foster care, family home, or are rescued |           |            |
| True   | 25        | 100.0      |
| False  | 0         | 0.0        |
| 3. Outward symptoms of depression or hostility may present as difficult behavior to assistance when working with a possible victim.                          |           |            |
| True   | 26        | 100.0      |
| False  | 0         | 0.0        |
| 4. Sexually exploited children and youth often identify as victims   |           |            |
| True   |           |            |
| False  | 12        | 46.2       |
|  | 14        | 53.8       |
| 5. Prior sexual abuse is commonly experienced among commercially sexually exploited children   |           |            |
| True   | 21        | 84.0       |
| False  | 4         | 14.8       |
| 6. Exploited children typically report their traffickers/pimps   |           |            |
| True   | 7         | 26.9       |
| False  | 19        | 73.1       |
| 7. Chronic runaway and homeless youth are at highest risk for exploitation   |           |            |
| True   | 25        | 92.6       |
| False  | 1         | 3.8        |

One hundred percent of the respondents correctly identified “true” when asked if children who are trafficked may still be under the control of a pimp/trafficker, even after they are returned to foster care, a family home, or rescued. All 100% of respondents answered “true” when asked whether symptoms of depression or hostility may present as difficult behavior toward assistance when working with a possible victim. The majority of respondents 92.2% correctly answered “true” when asked whether chronic runaway and homeless youth are at highest risk for exploitation; 84% of the respondents also answered “true” correctly to the question about whether sexual abuse a common

experience among victims. Less than half of respondents, 46.2%, answered “true” when asked whether sexual exploited children often identify as victims. At 15.4 %, participants answered “true” to the question about whether children and youth self-disclose to social workers or human health professionals about their victimization.

The total number of true responses for each respondent was summated to assess the respondents’ overall knowledge about CSEC. The mean score on the scale was 4.7 (SD=.9999); 4.2% of respondents received a perfect score of 7; 16.7% received 6 correct responses; 33.3% had 5 correct responses; 37.5% had 4 correct responses, and 8.3% had 3 correct answers.

Participants were asked about the extent to which they would agree or disagree that they experienced difficulty in interviewing a possible victim of CSEC. Table 4 illustrates the participants’ responses; 30.8% of the respondents agreed, 26.9% were not sure/neutral, 34.6% disagreed, and 7.7% strongly disagreed that it was difficult to interview a possible victim of CSEC.

Table 4

*Difficulty in Interviewing a Possible Victim of CSEC*

| Difficulty in Interviewing | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Strongly agree             | 0         | 0          |
| Agree                      | 8         | 30.8       |
| Not sure/Neutral           | 7         | 26.9       |
| Disagree                   | 9         | 34.6       |
| Strongly disagree          | 2         | 7.7        |

Participants that perceived difficulty in interviewing victims were asked to provide written follow-up responses. A total of 11 participants provided follow-up answers to this question. Four respondents similarly described difficulty with engagement and interview process with possible victims. One participant reported difficulty in terms of “asking the right questions when interviewing a child without making them scared.” Another respondent reported that “knowing how to engage during the interview process” was difficult. Another respondent stated, “The victims might live in the same community and are scared to come forward and speak against the perpetrator.” Two respondents described the need to provide a safe environment for interview and disclosure.

#### *Response Barriers to CSEC*

Participants were also asked to self-rate perceived barriers in responding to a possible victim of commercial exploitation; 60.9% of respondents felt that there were barriers and 39.1% did not. The following question asked participants to provide written responses to perceived barriers while responding to a possible victim of CSEC. Fourteen respondents provided written responses to the follow-up question. One respondent stated that barriers included “locating a victim, fear of victim, lack of training by [the] social worker, and lack of collaboration with other agencies” as possible barriers. Another respondent stated that “victims are often treated by law enforcement as criminals, not victims and this creates a barrier when working with a victim.” A third respondent identified a barrier as the “lack of specific interviewing techniques with [a] possible victim.” Two participants reported their lack of understanding of the legal system and

laws related to commercial exploitation of children was a barrier that limited their ability to provide service.

*Agency Collaboration*

When asked whether the agency provided adequate information on commercially sexually exploited children, 76% of respondents stated no and 24% stated yes.

Respondents were also asked if they agreed that certain questions were asked to identify suspected a victim of sex trafficking during client contacts (social worker visits with clients); 4.0% of respondents strongly agreed, 28.0% agreed, 52% were not sure/neutral, and 16.0% disagreed (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Questions Asked to Identify Suspected Victims of Sex-Trafficking*

| Specific Questions Asked to identify suspected victims of trafficking during client contacts | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Strongly Agree   | 1         | 4.0        |
| Agree  | 7         | 28.0       |
| Not sure/neutral   | 13        | 52.0       |
| Disagree   | 4         | 16.0       |
| Strongly Disagree  | 0         | 0.0        |

When asked to what degree does the agency have a relationship with local police and youth shelters that can be beneficial while working with commercially sexually exploited victims, 20% agreed and 48% were not sure/neutral (see Table 6). Only three respondents strongly agreed that the agency had a relationship with police and youth shelters.

Table 6

*Agency relationship with Local Police and Youth Shelters*

| Agency relationship with local police and youth shelters | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Strongly Agree   | 3         | 12.0       |
| Agree  | 5         | 20.0       |
| Not sure/Neutral   | 12        | 48.0       |
| Disagree   | 4         | 14.8       |
| Strongly disagree  | 1         | 3.7        |

*Awareness of Services*

Participants also were asked to self-rate their awareness of services available to victims of sex trafficking; 56% of participants stated they were aware of services and 44% reported they were not aware. A total of thirteen respondents provided follow-up written responses to services of which they were aware for CSEC victims. Five participants identified the advocacy organization, Central Valley against Human Trafficking. Three other respondents listed Centro La Familia, a social service organization. Four respondents identified Victim Services as a referral source, a community action partnership of Madera County that provides comprehensive services to victims of crime, sexual assault/rape, and domestic violence. Two respondents reported that Molly’s House, a non-profit residential program for female children of sexual trafficking located in Fresno, California also provided services to victims of human trafficking. Other participants listed: Madera Police Department, non-profits, and the Mexican Consulate as resources.

## **DISCUSSION**

Participants reported their understanding as to the meaning of the term human trafficking and CSEC as “good.” The results from the true/false questions on knowledge about CSEC suggested that the majority of respondent had a general awareness of CSEC. The majority of respondents also correctly answered whether chronic runaway and homeless youths are at highest risk for exploitation. The responses given by participants are consistent with the empirical research on homelessness and sexual abuse. For example, Johnson and Tyler (2006) found that homeless youth are likely to engage in survival sex due to limited resources and lack of opportunities.

Most respondents also correctly answered two of the true/false questions about traffickers/pimps and the self-identification of child victims. The majority of child welfare social workers correctly answered that children often do not report their trafficker/pimp. In addition, about half of respondents correctly answered that exploited children often do not identify as victims. According to Petocsky and Swanger (2003), traumatic bonding is often seen in many trafficking cases in which many victims endure physical and violent abuse that contributes to bonding with their trafficker. In addition, Reid (2013) conducted a study that found exploited children are often unwilling to cooperate with law enforcement due to their denial of victimization and self-identification as a victim rarely occurs with most defending the trafficker.

More than half of participants reported on the lack of adequate information provided by the agency on commercial sexual exploitation of children. These results are similar to studies that have reported the lack of training for providers on human trafficking. The study conducted by the Office of Justice Assistance (2008) reported that

of 135 service providers, only 7% of justice system agencies and 39% of service provider's respondents had some form of training on human trafficking. The lack of training of service providers yields an enormous barrier to assistance for the victims.

Participants reported having mixed feelings about asking certain questions to identify suspected victims of sex trafficking during client contacts. The lack of identification by social workers may place a child at greater risk of exploitation. Recognizing the youths and children as victims by child welfare social workers requires screening for sexual exploitation as well as other types of abuses. Identifying a victim of commercial sexual exploitation early in child welfare case will increase the effectiveness of intervention and assist a social worker (Oregon Department of Human Services, 2012).

The participants also reported mixed feelings as to the degree of the agency relationships with local police and youth shelters that are beneficial while working with commercially sexually exploited victims. This is consistent with the previous research literature; often the different types of agencies that serve victims fail to collaborate with one another. The Institute of Medicine & National Research Council Report (2013) emphasizes that no one sector or area of practice can fully respond effectively to the complex problems surrounding human trafficking crimes. Collaboration and coordination among multiple sectors is vital in the assistance provided to victims. Finally, respondents noted barriers and difficulty in interviewing and responding to a possible victim of commercial sexual exploitation.

#### *Implications for Social Work Practice*

Child welfare social workers have the vital role in assisting at risk and child victims of commercial sexual exploitation. It is crucial for agencies in child welfare to

develop training in identifying and assisting victims as well as screening and assessment to help victims of trafficking. The participation and collaboration between different sectors of human health providers and law enforcement is paramount. In the State of California, several bills have been enacted for the protection of victims and prosecution of human traffickers. However, some participants of this study were unclear about the laws related to CSEC. This is a major barrier for social workers that do not understand or are unaware of laws pertaining to victims. Yet, the lack of a systemic approach by child welfare agencies places CSEC and those at risk due to lack of delivery of effective services. The lack of report systems and illegal transportation of victims also impact these data that are available for child welfare agencies in terms of victim documentation. Due to the fact that a majority of cases of sexual exploitation of children are not reported or little evidence of a crime is preserved, agencies do not collect information about sexual offenses.

The empirical literature indicates that children involved in human trafficking are often homeless or have a history of sexual and emotional abuse, running away, or involvement in the foster care system are at highest risk for victimization or exploitation. The lack of awareness and training among human service providers, health care, community partners, placement providers, and juvenile system jeopardizes how a victim will be assisted. This results in the misidentification of children and youth as a teen prostitutes and criminals and their placement in the juvenile justice system or foster care (Center for Human Rights for Children et al., 2011). Unfortunately, others who are not arrested or prosecuted will not likely receive the services and assistance needed. In this

study, the majority of participants were unclear about whether they asked correct and specific questions when interviewing a suspected child victim of sex trafficking.

Child welfare agencies must develop specific policies on the screening of victims of trafficking that have experienced a form of sexual exploitation. The limited research on identifying victims during screening does not assess the psychological and physical trauma experienced by the child. The lack of evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies for trauma-informed care are one of the challenges present in the child welfare system (Walker, 2013). According to Berger and Fong (2010), multi-disciplinary units must collaborate with child victims of sexual exploitation to implement mental health services that are adapted to culturally diverse victims found in child sexual trafficking.

Often, the child welfare system face challenges in finding specialized foster care placements focused on stabilization, support, and after care for victims of sexual exploitation (Walker, 2013). Consequently, there is a need for additional resources from government and nongovernmental sources to provide long-term victim and legal services for all victims. This is especially needed for marginalized populations such as, male and transgender victims. Sustainable housing is a significant issue in achieving long-term recovery and self-sufficiency for victims of human trafficking (Coordination, Collaboration, Capacity, 2014). Currently, Molly's House and Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission of Sanctuary Youth Services are one of the few youth facilities specifically focused on children who have been victims of human trafficking in Fresno California, 20 miles south of Madera.

### *Recommendations for Policy*

Due to the challenges faced by child welfare agencies in response to CSEC, the need for a California multi-system that incorporates a collaborative approach. It is crucial for law enforcement, legislation, courts, child welfare agencies, victims, and victim advocacy organizations to collaborate and to evaluate policies related to CSEC and the child welfare system. In addition, the lack of data collection must be addressed to develop a system that measures and documents specific cases of commercial sexual exploitation among child welfare agencies. It is important to introduce trainings focused on prevention and identification. Lastly, public policies must lead to the development of specialized services in child welfare that are uniquely applicable and effective for trauma of victims who have experienced sexual exploitation. It must include cultural and political awareness of marginalized undocumented and LGBTQ children who are often not assessed. Creative public policies can provide the first steps in prevention and assistance from child welfare agencies to victims.

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