

## Grooming and Recruitment

**Recruitment Tactics:** There is a complex abusive relationship established between a trafficker/pimp and the adolescent victim. A trafficker/pimp targets vulnerable youth such as chronic runaways and adolescents with histories of abuse. These youth are usually easier to manipulate and have vulnerable characteristics such as low self-esteem and a strong desire for protection and love. Traffickers/pimps use calculated and sophisticated recruitment tactics to gain the trust of their victims. The following list outlines confirmed tactics used by trafficker/pimps during the recruitment phase. The order of tactics may vary and recruitment may not include all or any of the trends listed below. It is important to note that during this phase the trafficker/pimp presents as a friend, boyfriend, or caretaker – his role and agenda as an abuser/exploiter is often hidden.

1. A trafficker/pimp will hang out in places such as malls, arcades, group homes, and bus stops – anywhere that allows a high potential for interacting with youth.
2. A trafficker/pimp will engage youth in conversations to assess their home and life situation and determine her vulnerabilities and dreams.
3. A trafficker/pimp will target adolescents' weaknesses, tell them what they want to hear, and give them what they need.
  - If they want love, give them *love* and become their *boyfriend*.
  - If they need a place to *live*, offer them *shelter*.
  - If they are *lonely*, become their *friend*.
  - If they don't have a loving *father*, become their *protector*.
  - If they are *poor or have low self-esteem*, sell them a *dream* and offer a life of *status*.
4. A trafficker/pimp will fulfill promises to earn the potential victim's trust, love, and devotion. The trafficker/pimp often fulfills a role that the child has been lacking. It is during this stage that the trafficker/pimp *appears* to care and love the youth: this behavior then becomes the foundation for all future psychological control. After the relationship turns exploitative and violent, the victim will reflect on this period of time and do anything to re-achieve that positive and rewarding level in the relationship.
5. A trafficker/pimp will work to isolate the victim from all forms of positive contact or interaction with friends and family members. He strategically removes any safety net, familiar persons, and resources, gradually making the victim physically, mentally, emotionally, and financially reliant on the trafficker/pimp.
6. A trafficker/pimp will begin demanding uncomfortable sex acts or physical interactions from the child and will punish refusal, hesitation, or complaints with physical and emotional abuse. The trafficker/pimp will become more abusive and blame the victim for the abuse. If the victim does not comply, the trafficker/pimp may take a variety of approaches to gain control over the youth. Some examples of these approaches are:

- Threaten that she will not receive the glorious life she was promised by the trafficker/pimp.
  - Attach the act of prostitution to proof of her love for the trafficker/pimp.
  - Physically abuse her until she complies and then show affection (e.g.; beatings, starvation, locking in closets, gang rape, forced drug use, etc., followed by love-making and preferential treatment).
7. A trafficker/pimp will then transition the victim to prostitution. This transition can be accomplished through a violent induction such as gang rape. It can also be accomplished through psychological manipulation, calling on the victim to repay her debt or provide money for them to pursue the dream he has painted for her.
  8. Once the minor has engaged in prostitution, the trafficker/pimp begins to reshape the way the victim views the world. The trafficker/pimp assigns the shame, humiliation, and guilt that the victim is feeling to the way the people outside of the 'prostitution life' view them.

**Physical Control:** A trafficker/pimp may exert physical force on a DMST victim in order to control her. Physically, the trafficker/pimp is often larger in size and stronger, enabling him to inflict pain and injury. Force is utilized to reinforce that the trafficker/pimp is always in charge. Consistent with themes of domestic violence, the beatings are intermittent and often are followed with praise, affection, or gifts. Many of the beatings occur in front of her stable sisters or wife-in-laws as a warning against any behavior that is defiant of the trafficker's/pimp's rules. Additionally, violence may be inflicted on one girl for the punishment of another, creating a sense of loyalty to the *family* or the group as a whole.

**Psychological Control:** A trafficker/pimp does not need to physically bind a DTM to maintain control; rather, the psychological tactics are equally and often more difficult to recognize and understand. Research has shown that the majorities of DMST victims has been victimized through childhood sexual abuse and/or childhood physical abuse, have experienced caretaker abandonment, and/or are chronic runaways. Traffickers/pimps approach adolescents and target their vulnerabilities. Although certain populations are at a higher risk than others, no youth is invulnerable to the tactics of a trafficker/pimp. Youth are often targeted and manipulated systematically and over an extended period of time before the sex trafficking victimization actually occurs. In the beginning, a trafficker/pimp tends to mask his abusive side, displaying a loving side until he has earned the trust of a child at which time the relationship becomes exploitative and violent. Past experiences may condition a youth to believe abuse is "normal" and when the relationship becomes abusive the youth believes she is to blame or is responsible for the abuse.

Research has shown that traffickers/pimps regularly target and recruit youth 12-14 years old. This period in the psychosocial development is critical for adolescents who are developing and establishing their identity, and traffickers/pimps take advantage of this developmental phase. They will often rename their victims to distance them from their identities and establish their new identities as a "prostitute." Additionally, traffickers/pimps work hard to make prostitution seem like a choice the victims made on their own. The adolescents are quickly led by the trafficker/pimp to believe they have no alternatives to prostitution; it is who they are.

The "turning out" period is rife with intermittent violence and mixed messages which resemble domestic violence and create trauma bonds often seen in Stockholm Syndrome, a psychological response to traumatic situations in which victims become sympathetic to their exploiters. Stockholm Syndrome is a term which derives from a 1973 hostage incident in Stockholm, Sweden. At the end of six days of captivity in a bank, several kidnap victims actually resisted rescue attempts and refused later to testify against their captors. The psychological and behavioral outcome of Stockholm Syndrome, also referred to as trauma bonding, is the emotional bonding of a victim with the captor as a defensive mechanism to increase the chance of survival. Small acts of kindness and humanity by the captor are

magnified, since finding perspective in a traumatic situation is by definition impossible. It is important to note that these symptoms occur under tremendous physical violence, torture, and psychological duress. The behavior is considered a common survival strategy for victims of interpersonal abuse and has been observed in domestic violence victims, abused children, prisoners of war, and concentration camp survivors.

Some examples of behavior related to Stockholm Syndrome may include:

- A victim defending her abuser by either denying that victimization occurred or minimizing the level of violence.
- A victim defending her abuser to friends, family, or authorities when an attempt is made to have her identify the abuser and recognize the violence.
- A victim taking responsibility for provoking the violent behavior from the abuse.
- A victim taking responsibility by stating that she understands the reasons behind the abuser's violent behavior.
- A victim acting resistant to leave the abuser or abusive situation.

Although DTMs revere their trafficker/pimp, they also fear him. At any moment they know the trafficker/pimp is able to hurt them if they do not comply with the demands, but they also depend on the trafficker/pimp to provide for them. Traffickers/pimps work to isolate the minor from any person or influence that may counter these messages or increase a victim's sense of self-worth. DTMs will stay with or return to the trafficker/pimp in hopes for the better future that is often promised, or for the simple reason that they believe that have no other place to go.

Traffickers/pimps place these adolescents in a dilemma, forcing them to *choose* between two equally bad options: either they "work" for the trafficker/pimp in prostitution or they are severely beaten or killed. As a result, DTM's often believe prostituting was their choice and blame themselves for not leaving the trafficker/pimp or prostitution.

Another way of maintaining control over the DTM is through the threat of recapture and/or violence against the adolescent's family. Youth are often recruited in their home community and the trafficker/pimp may know where the victim lived with her family. Anticipating that she will consider running away once the relationship turns abusive, the trafficker/pimp reminds the adolescent that he knows where she lives and will find her again or hurt her family.

A third method of psychological control over a DTM by a trafficker/pimp can be the use of photographs of the adolescent engaged in prostitution acts as blackmail to keep the youth tapped and compliant. The victim is ashamed and fears exposure of the demeaning and exploitative situations to family or friends.