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PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS INCREASING THE RISK FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS TO BECOME VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Annotation

Most of the research on the risk for minors to become victims of human trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation up till recently focused on socioeconomic, psychosocial and demographic factors. As findings suggest, these characteristics have different impact across different cultures, regions, etc., thus scholars are starting to raise the question on their different impact on individual level. They notice that, in the presence of particular combination of characteristics, adolescent girls do not always become victims of commercial sexual exploitation, and some girls who are considered to be victims do not see themselves as victims of sexual exploitation. The aim of this article is to systematically overview psychological factors found through research, that are associated with the risk of becoming a victim of human trafficking. The systematic review focuses on commercial sexual exploitation of minors, particularly, girls, as the most prevalent form of human trafficking. Criteria for article selection include language of the article, the scope and methodology of the research done, sex of the participants of the research, age of being trafficked, and nature of risk factors analysed in the article. Final analysis comprised of six articles. The results show that risk of becoming victim of commercial sexual exploitation is linked with such psychological factors as low self-esteem, denigration of sexual self and others, dysfunctional attachment models, learned maladaptive problem solving strategies, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

der, lack of reflecting abilities, etc. These psychological characteristics may emerge after traumatic experiences such as loss, sexual abuse in childhood, multiple placements in foster care or maltreatment of the child, and later lead into risky behaviours like running away from homes, living on the streets, which increase risk of their exploitation. Results and future research suggestions are discussed.

Keywords: *psychological risk factors, human trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, female, adolescents, thinking patterns, attitudes.*

Introduction

Human trafficking (hereinafter - TIP), as described in the The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (hereinafter – UN TIP Protocol), means „the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.“ Exploitation forms include prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. Trafficking in Persons Report by US State Department, the reports by International Organization of Migration and other similar reports show that this topic draws more and more attention in recent years both in political and scientific circles. Also, researchers in different fields study the impact of TIP on person's welfare, scope of prevention and intervention, effectiveness of different prevention means, factors increasing risk of becoming the victim of TIP, etc. Most of the research addressing the issue focus on structural factors, i.e. demographic, socioeconomic and psychosocial risk aspects like gender, age, education, domestic abuse experience, especially sexual abuse, mode of peer relationship, etc. (Demir & Finckenaue, 2010; Reid, 2012; Salisbury, Dabney, & Russell, 2014; Gerassi, 2015; Chohaney, 2016). Research also show that in attempt to prevent this criminal activity, cultural differences need to be taken into account as risks of and reasons for being trafficked may vary across regions (Avramov, Slavov, & Taneva, 2013; Bryant-Davis et al., 2009; Karandikar, Gezinski, & Meshemiah, 2011; Kumar, 2013; Mai, 2013; Okonofua, Ogbomwan, Alutu, Kufre, & Eghosa, 2004; Rafferty, 2013; Tverdova, 2011). Recent findings show that structural or external factors are not immediate indicators of the risk to become victim of TIP, and internal, personality features need to be taken into account since not all TIP victims see themselves as ones, and may resist to enter support system (Mai, 2013; Salisbury et al., 2014). Some researchers conclude that there is a need to look deeper into relations between vulnerability and exploitation, taking into account not only economical, demographical or psychosocial factors, but also neglected psychological needs of the potential victim (Elzbieta Gozdziaik, Micah Bump & Loiselle, 2006; Meshkovska et al., 2015; Reid, 2011) or the extent to which external risk factors contribute to higher vulnerability to being sexually exploited.

The scope of this article is commercial sexual exploitation of minors (hereinafter- CSE) as one of the most prevalent form of TIP. Many authors who study experiences of victims of TIP agree that domestic sexual abuse in early childhood or adolescence is one of best predictive factors for TIP. This issue, however, still lacks research, since not all sexually abused minors become victims of TIP, including CSE, and some of those who are considered to be sexually exploited may not even consider themselves as being exploited (Dodsworth, 2014; Wilson & Butler, 2013). Research also show that placement into foster care as well as frequent change of foster families can contribute to increased risk of becoming victim of TIP (Salisbury et al., 2014; Coy, 2009). Minors who run away from home and live on the streets are also at higher risk of becoming victim of TIP (Wilson & Butler, 2013; Williamson & Prior, 2009), but even if it is agreed that running away from home is a very strong predictive factor of TIP, research show that homelessness is characteristic only to a few victims. Some authors tried to differentiate between the victims by charting the trajectories to victimization, based on the assumption that vulnerability to commercial sexual exploitation might develop because of the influence of the characteristics of the social group the potential victim is a part of (Edberg, Gies, Cohen, & May-Slater, 2014; Wilson & Butler, 2013; Williamson & Prior, 2009; Tyler, 2000). For example, he or she lives in risk „saturated“ community or risk factors are observed only in victim’s family while the community is not high-risk, etc. M. Edberg and other researchers tried to develop a model that could help to identify potential victims of CSE as early as possible, thus preventing them from being trafficked. These efforts were mostly oriented towards identification of structural risk factors, while seeking to give them as quantifiable form as possible (Reid, 2011; Salisbury et al., 2014). This helps to assess the risk quickly, thus becoming prerequisite for effective early prevention. On the other hand, in spite of agreement on psychosocial, socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of potential victims, they are not sufficient to predict victimization (Salisbury et al., 2014; Smith, Davis, & Fricker-Elhai, 2004). Some researchers who observe the connection between certain forms of delinquent behaviour, which can be also seen in the behaviour of victims of TIP, and childhood sexual abuse say that both delinquent behaviour and victimization to TIP might be associated with psychological characteristics as well, though the latter are much less understood and studied in connection with TIP. For example, a child who experienced sexual abuse have to find explanation for his experience, and later this becomes background for his or her further social, emotional and cognitive development. Without timely notice and prevention of sexual abuse, cognitions influenced by this traumatic experience can inhibit development of adaptive competencies (Smith et al., 2004; Tyler et al., 2000). There is not much research done in the field of cognitions of victims of TIP as well as of other psychological or personality aspects, though researchers assume certain psychological characteristics of a potential victim alongside already evaluated factors. While interacting with demographic, socioeconomic and psychosocial risk factors, they affect development of risky behaviours (Shaw & Butler, 1998; Smith et al., 2004; Negriff et al., 2010) and increase the danger of becoming victim of TIP (Reid, 2012; Reid, 2011). In most of the cases, research of psychological risk factors use qualitative methods and retrospectively analyze victims’ experiences prior to exploitation (Dodsworth, 2014; Williamson & Prior, 2009; Coy, 2009). Some authors do not consider the findings of such research to be reliable. However, it is inevitable to further the research of individual differences in victims of TIP, that may be observed in their thinking patterns, attitudes, etc., to enhance

effectiveness of prevention and intervention in this field. Thus, the aim of this research is to systematically overview psychological risk factors that are pointed out as risk-increasing factors for becoming a victim of TIP alongside the most frequently analyzed psychosocial, socioeconomic and demographic ones. In this article, psychological risk factors are considered to be individual's thinking patterns, expressed attitudes towards self and others, problem solving strategies, etc., that are associated with risk of becoming the victim of TIP, including CSE, and could help to differentiate between different victimization levels.

1. The process of systematic review

The articles were selected using databases PsychARTICLES, SocINDEX Full text, Academic Search Complete via EBSoHost database search engine. Primary search syntax (psychological risk factors AND human trafficking OR sexual trafficking) did not yield any results, thus the search was expanded by removing the word „psychological“ from the syntax, and replacing „human trafficking“ or „sexual trafficking“ with „sexual exploitation.“ Articles were selected according to the following criteria:

- The article is in English or Lithuanian language;
- Human trafficking for sexual exploitation or commercial sexual exploitation;
- Participants of the research were women;
- Participants of the research were trafficked or involved in prostitution when they were adolescents;
- Risk factors analysed in the research relate to their state of mind, attitudes, thinking patterns, subjective evaluations, feelings, etc.

I attempted to select the articles where quantitative and/or qualitative methods were used for analysis of psychological risk factors as well as systematic review or meta-analysis method was employed.

Figure 1 shows the flow of the article selection process. Final analysis yielded 6 articles as the remainder were only descriptive papers without any qualitative or quantitative research or analyzed experiences of victims of TIP during the time of exploitation while the scope of this review is to look into experiences prior to being trafficked. The articles were coded according to the author, publication year, academic journal, digital object index (a.k.a. DOI), type of the article (systematic review/meta-analysis, qualitative research, quantitative research), general risk factors, psychological risk factors to becoming victim of TIP.

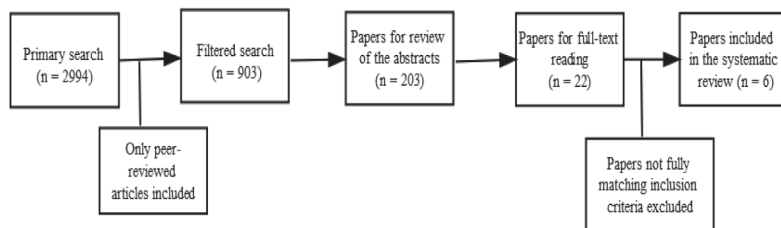


Fig. 1. Article selection process

2. Research results

In most of the articles, the research is implemented by employing qualitative methods to retrospectively analyze experiences, memory, motivation, etc. of victims of TIP or forced prostitution (Reid & Piquero, 2014; Williamson & Prior, 2009; Dodsworth, 2014; Coy, 2009; Bryant-Davis et al., 2009). One systematic review was included into analysis. In selected articles, psychological risk factors are analysed in connection with demographic, socioeconomix and psychosocial factors. Table 1 provides the summary of the results the systematic review.

Table 1. Psychological risk factors

<i>Author (s), year</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Research method</i>	<i>Psychological risk factors</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
<i>Jane Dodsworth, 2014</i>	<i>n = 12 18-51 years old women who were involved in prostitution as adolescents</i>	<i>In-depth interview, semi-structured</i>	<i>Reactiveness, powerlessness, hopelessness, helplessness, low self-esteem, inability to be reflective, sense of chaos, lack of coherence, seeking approval and affection, feeling different („black sheep“), „alien“ self concept</i>	<i>Besides risk factors, the article analyses protective factors, which determined whether the participants of the research saw themselves as victims.</i>
<i>Maddy Coy, 2009</i>	<i>n = 14 17-33 years old women, who were placed in foster care and were involved in prostitution as adolescents</i>	<i>Unstructured interview (narrative interview with arts workshop)</i>	<i>Lack or no strong connections with biological/foster family, not feeling settled, having no one to talk to, learning not to trust, being stigmatised, different; worthlessness, low self-esteem; psychosocial vulnerability; feeling not being heard in placement; „I“ insignificant, willingness to conform to others; perceived powerlessness during placements</i>	
<i>Celia Williamson and Michael Prior, 2009</i>	<i>n = 13 12-17 year old adolescent girls involved in prostitution</i>	<i>Unstructured interview</i>	<i>Chronic stress, feelings of stress during their childhoods from the emotional, mental, or physical obligations and adult responsibilities they had in the family, additional stress caused by requirements of social services</i>	

<i>Author (s), year</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Research method</i>	<i>Psychological risk factors</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Mark C. Edberg, Stephen V. Gies, Marcia I. Cohen, Suepattra May-Slater, 2014	n = 25; adolescent girls and 18-24 year old young female adults	4-phase research combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Risk factors analysed in phase 4 (information and understanding about the context and circumstances which prompted entrapment or involvement in commercial sexual exploitation): indepth (ethnographic) interview, semi-structured	Extremely high level of general victimization; illusions of relationship or family with pimps, learning or intellectual disabilities, big ambitions/expectations, low self-esteem, PTSD	Article analyzes trajectories of involvement or being forced into commercial sexual exploitation by employing social ecology approach. Involvement or being forced can be reactive or proactive
Joan A. Reid, 2011	n = 174; 89 % afro-americans, 7% white, 2% hispanic, 1% indian, 2% mixed race	Combination of qualitative and quantitative methods	Negative self-schema, sexual denigration of self and others ($r = 0.28, p < 0.01$)	The article analysed factors that have affect on child maltreatment. This systemic review include only those which the author indicated as having connection with risky sexual behaviours or involvement or being forced into prostitution
Joan A. Reid, 2012	n = N/A; articles from 2000 to 2011	Systematic review	Low self-esteem, feelings of isolation; desire for love and belonging; need for acceptance; consequences of traumatic/stressful experiences (loss of husband, e.g.)	

Most of the articles indicate that psychological risk factors develop due to experienced trauma, mostly domestic sexual abuse. When effects of traumatic experiences interact with the environment, the characteristics of subculture of social group surrounding the potential victim, the peer and family relationship, the presence or the absence of support system, the stability of relationship they can accumulate certain thinking patterns, attitudes towards self and others (e. g. denigration of sexuality of oneself or others, „objectification“ of self, etc.). This can encourage minors to choose maladaptive problem solving strategies such as running away, or encourage them to stay in contact with people who may take advantage of their vulnerability and exploit them in commercial sex market or sell them to others. The main psychological factors increasing risk

of becoming victim of CSE comprise of negative view about oneself or low self-esteem, including sexual „self“, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder caused by sexual abuse, maladaptive coping strategies, unresolved attachment deficit, search for acceptance and affirmation. Just by themselves, these factors do not predict the risk. The trajectories of getting involved or being forced into prostitution, or being trafficked show that certain psychosocial and other risk factors add to their development, e. g. parental strain tend to cause child maltreatment. This, consequently, adds to development of negative „self“ schema, or experience of sexual abuse in childhood can eventually lead to denigration of sexual self and others. On the other hand, psychological risk factors can be mediators on the path to development of other factors increasing risk of becoming victims of CSE (Edberg et al., 2014; Reid, 2011).

Conclusions

The research show that risk of becoming a victim of TIP, including CSE, is built not only on certain psychosocial, socioeconomic and demographic factors, but also related to certain psychological characteristics of an individual such as thinking patterns, learned coping strategies, attitudes towards self and others. The nature of them often depends on characteristics of social environment, victim's cultural background. This systematic review reveals that the risk of victimization to TIP for the purpose of sexual exploitation increases due to aspects of potential victims' thinking patterns and attitudes as well as effects of traumatic experiences interacting with certain socioeconomic, psychosocial and demographic factors. Psychological risk factors for increased risk to become a victim of TIP include low self-esteem, negative perception of self and others, including sexual denigration of self, feeling isolated, different in a negative way; dysfunctional attachment models like seeking for approval and/or affection, no strong connections with immediate family members, or illusions of relationship with potential traffickers; maladaptive coping strategies, and PTSD. It could be noted that many of these factors could be related to the identity issues, which can be caused by different structural factors. Also, when we talk about low self-esteem or negative self image, which in many cases, according to the research analyzed in this article, is related to the experience of childhood sexual abuse, it could be important to ask the question whether these have developed due to traumatic experiences or they already manifested prior to them. Again, comprehensive research in this field, is rather scarce, which could be due to the wide spectrum of potential victims or the latency of the phenomenon of TIP itself, but also to the complexity of the phenomena itself. Thus, since the risk of becoming a victim of TIP is associated with the complex interaction of multiple factors, further research in this field need to be furthered and take into account also the findings of the research analyzing cognitions and thinking patterns of those who experienced sexual abuse, runaways, homeless, those with addictions to substance when studying psychological factors increasing the risk to become the victim of TIP, including CSE. Also, there is a great need to address the extent to which these psychological factors interact with other risk factors associated with the emergence of the risk for TIP.

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PSICHOLOGINIAI VEIKSNIAI, DIDINANTYS NEPILNAMEČIŲ MERGINŲ TAPIMO PREKYBOS ŽMONĖMIS AUKA RIZIKĄ: SISTEMINĖ ANALIZĖ

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Santrauka

Jungtinių Tautų Palermo protokolas prekybą žmonėmis apibrėžia kaip „žmonių verbavimą, pervežimą, perdavimą, slėpimą ar jų priėmimą gąsdinant, panaudojant jėgą ar kitas prievartos, grobimo, apgaulės, sukčiavimo formas, piktnaudžiaujant padėtimi ar pažeidžiamumu arba mokant ar priimant pinigus ar kitą naudą tam, kad būtų gautas kito tą žmogų kontroliuojančio asmens sutikimas siekiant išnaudoti.“ Išnaudojimas apima įvairias seksualinio išnaudojimo formas, įskaitant ir prostituciją, priverstinį darbą ar paslaugas, vergiją ar veiklą, panašią į vergiją, tarnystę ar organų pašalinimą. Tyrimai, nagrinėjantys prekybos žmonėmis problematiką, prevencijos, intervencijos galimybes, dažniausiai koncentruojasi į psichosocialinius, demografinius, ekonominius, kriminogeninius ir kultūrinius veiksnius, nors pastaraisiais metais atsiranda tyrimų, rodančių, kad vien išoriniai veiksniai nėra pakankami paaiškinti, kodėl vieni asmenys tampa prekybos žmonėmis aukomis, ir kurti efektyvias prevencines priemones. Pradėtas kelti klausimas apie individualių psichologinių veiksnių įtaką didesnei rizikai tapti prekybos žmonėmis auka. Šio straipsnio tikslas - sistemškai apžvelgti psichologinius veiksnius, didinančius riziką tapti prekybos žmonėmis auka, t. y. individualūs mąstymo modeliai, nuostatos apie save ir kitus, problemų sprendimo strategijos, ir pan. Sisteminei analizei pasirinkta analizuoti straipsnius, kuriuose tyrinėjamos merginos ar moterys, kurios būdamos nepilnametės, buvo įtrauktos į prekybą žmonėmis seksualinio išnaudojimo tikslais. Galutinei analizei atrinkti 6 straipsniai. Sisteminė analizė parodė, kad su padidėjusia rizika tapti prekybos žmonėmis auka dažniausiai yra susiję tokie psichologiniai veiksniai kaip žema savivertė, seksualinio „aš“ ir kitų nuvertinimas, disfunkciniai prieraišumo modeliai, PTSS, gebėjimo reflektuoti savo patirtį stoka ir kt., kurie dažnai yra susiję su išoriniais rizikos veiksniais.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *psichologiniai rizikos veiksniai, prekyba žmonėmis, komercinis seksualinis išnaudojimas, nepilnametės, mąstymo modeliai, nuostatos.*

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