EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF AN ABUSIVE HISTORY ON THE
PIMPING RELATIONSHIP IN THE COMMERCIAL SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN (CSEC) THROUGH THE LENS OF
ATTACHMENT THEORY

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
in
Child Development

by
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Summer 2015
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my work to my parents Hamdollah Borjian and Dr. Lahiye Hakkak who loved and supported me unconditionally through all these years.
Scars remind us where we've been. They don't have to dictate where we're going.

-David Rossi, Criminal Minds
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Exploring the Impact of an Abusive History on the Pimping Relationship in the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) Through the Lens of Attachment Theory

by

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Master of Science in Child Development
San Diego State University, 2015

The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is a multibillion-dollar industry in the United States, and includes: pornography, physical abuse, and child trafficking. Recent studies show that pimps/traffickers control the majority of CSEC victims in the U.S., and that there are over 240,000 CSEC victims every year, some who are younger than 12 years old. Researchers have identified risk and protective factors for CSEC; however, most of the studies describe these factors without using a theoretical framework. The present study examines the nature of the pimping relationship between sex traffickers and victims through the lens of attachment theory. A sample of fifteen stakeholders (e.g., law enforcement officers, service providers, advocates) who had work experience with CSEC were interviewed through a semi-structured interview format. Participants were stakeholders including law enforcement officers, service providers, advocates, educators, and survivors who have direct experience in working with CSEC victims. The results suggest that attachment theory may be useful in describing the pimping relationship between sex traffickers and victims. The results support and expand on previous research, which reports that CSEC victims are often victims of sexual abuse and have dysfunctional homes where they did not develop a secure attachment style or healthy bonding toward their parents. Supporting attachment theory, the stakeholders describe victims who have a history of abuse and who lack positive attachment figures, and who may have insecure attachment styles that increase their risk for CSEC. Specifically, CSEC victims may have preoccupied or dismissing insecure attachment styles that can lead to low self-esteem, trust and dependency issues, and isolation, that can make them vulnerable to the entrapment strategies of traffickers. Responses from stakeholders in the present study also support the existence of trauma bonding between CSEC victims and pimps. The results have implications for supporting the creation of healthy bonding to positive attachment figures as an important goal of both prevention and intervention programs for CSEC.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express sincere appreciation to my committee chair, Professor Audrey Hokoda for the useful comments, remarks and engagement through the learning process of this master thesis. Furthermore I would like to thank Dr. Ulloa, who served on my committee, and whose SDSU UGP grant funded this research. I also want to thank Dr. Monica Ulibarri, the co-author and co-investigator of the overall CSEC study. I would also like to give special thanks to Dr. Alyson Shapiro for her support and guidance in my work.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is a term to define the sexual abuse of children for monetary gain, which is a multibillion-dollar industry in the United States. Sexual exploitation includes pornography, physical abuse, prostitution, and child trafficking (Albanese, 2007). The CSEC problem is becoming more serious in the past decade. Approximately 300,000 children are at danger of getting involved in sexual exploitation in the United States every year (Adams, Owens, & Small, 2010).

Research findings indicate that the average age of entering into prostitution for victims is between 12 to 14 years old and the traffickers tend to target girls who have particular vulnerabilities (Reid & Jones, 2011). Other researchers reveal that some of the victims are as young as age 10 (Lloyd, 2011; Rand, 2009). Recent studies show that pimps/traffickers control the majority of CSEC victims in the United States (Reid, 2014).

The present study examines the pimping relationship through the lens of attachment theory. The purpose is to provide some insights about the nature of the pimping relationship between sex traffickers and victims. Researchers have identified various risk factors that might put a child at risk of CSEC victimization; however most of the studies focus on describing risk factors without using a theoretical framework. Few exploratory studies have investigated the pimping relationship despite evidence that specific risk factors (e.g., dysfunctional family relationships) are associated with attachment problems and may make children vulnerable to CSEC victimization (Flowers, 1998). The focus of this study is to examine factors that may prepare a child to accept and form a relationship with a pimp. The procedures involve interviews with 15 CSEC stakeholders including law enforcement officers, service providers, advocates, educators, and survivors. These people have direct experience in working with sexually exploited youth. The semi-structured interviews include
questions about CSEC risk factors and the stakeholders’ responses were analyzed based on the template analysis (TA) method to find themes that emerged more frequently in the interviews.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dysfunctional families are considered a significant risk factor in children who are victims of CSEC. Brannigan and Van Brunschot (1997) found that, in comparison to their peers, youth who were engaged in prostitution reported more negative characteristics in their parental home lives, more physical and sexual abuse, parental alcohol or drug abuse, and unstructured families. Researchers also suggest that family dysfunction and sexual abuse coexist with unique consequences (Trepper & Barrett, 1986). The next section presents research that identifies an abusive history as a significant risk factor.

HISTORY OF ABUSE

Research supports that experiencing sexual abuse put children at high risk for engaging in prostitution. Lloyd (2011) revealed that 70–90% of young women who are engaged in prostitution have experienced sexual abuse in their past. Girls who enter prostitution often report that they have experienced some type of severe maltreatment as a child. These varied experiences include molestation, physical and sexual abuse by a family member, rape, assault, and pornography (Flowers, 1998; Kaufman & Widom, 1999; Kramer & Berg, 2003; Simons & Whitbeck, 1991; Widom & Ames, 1994).

One study in Canada by Fedec and Schissel (1999) investigated the relationship between prostitution and abuse. The study was based on the theory that children who have experienced sexual abuse are more exposed to sexual advances; therefore, they are more likely to enter prostitution later in their lives. The results provide support that the experience of abuse, regardless of its severity, is a factor that puts children at risk for entering prostitution.

Some studies revealed that victims of CSEC who enter the life at younger ages are more likely to have experienced childhood sexual abuse (Council for Prostitution
Alternatives, 1991; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, nd). These children reported different kinds of chronic maltreatment including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse by multiple offenders (Farley & Kelly, 2000).

Cicchetti (1990) explained how experiencing maltreatment affects the development of attachments in children. Children who have a history of neglect and physical abuse often demonstrate insecure attachment styles (Sroufe, Egeland, & Kreutzer, 1990). Alexander (1992) suggested that chronic consequences of childhood sexual abuse in victims could be systematically linked to behaviors and symptoms of adults who have different types of insecure attachment style. Therefore, attachment theory is a helpful lens to use in this study. In the next section attachment theory and different kind of early attachment styles are described in order to explain the symptoms and behaviors that are associated with different styles of attachment in adults.

**ATTACHMENT THEORY**

Attachment theory can explain the effects of early attachment relationships on the adaptation levels of a person during their lifetime. Children need to develop a special bonding toward certain people in order to feel safe. Through this relationship children can rely on their attachment figures and make sure that they will provide emotional support and protection when it is necessary. Based on the quality of the care a child receives, different forms of attachment have been recognized (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Main & Solomon, 1990).

Attachment theorists suggested that developing attachment toward a caregiver leads to development of an internal working model in children (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998; Bowlby, 1980). The child will develop a model of other and a model of self, and these are the two essential aspects of attachment. In the process of developing an internal model of others, if the attachment figure is judged as supportive and protective, the child will represent others as trustworthy. Likewise, if the child’s attachment figure is abusive and neglectful, she/he will form an internal working model that other people are not reliable. In the process of developing an internal model of self, if the child perceives that the attachment figure responds to him in a caring manner, he will perceive himself as a worthy person; otherwise he may develop an internal working model that he is unlovable. As
a result, children who develop secure attachment styles perceive others as caring, protective, and reliable people, and perceive themselves as loveable. On the other hand, children who have insecure attachment styles believe that not only they are unworthy but also that other people are not trustworthy (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998; Bowlby, 1980).

**Categories of Attachment in Children**

Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) designed an assessment method called the strange situation procedure (SSP) to classify children’s attachment styles. In this procedure the parent leaves their child alone with a stranger for a period of time and then comes back to reunite with the child. Based on the observed behavior of children in this reunion, children are categorized into three different attachment styles: Children who have secure attachment styles have caregivers who they can use as a secure base and this allows them to explore new situations. They may be calm or get upset during the separation but in the reunion stage, they approach the caregiver and are easily comforted by them. Children with anxious resistant insecure attachment styles show ambivalent behavior in the reunion phase; they seek closeness with parents, however, they also show anger and avoidance of their caregiver. While they seem to want to get attention from the caregiver, they reject them and do not get comfort from them. Children who have avoidant insecure attachment styles show little emotion during the reunion phases. They do not seek closeness and actively avoid the caregiver (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Main and Solomon (1990) defined a fourth attachment style as disorganized. Children who have disorganized insecure attachment styles show overt fear of their caregiver, and during the reunion phase, they have contradictory behaviors and misdirected movements. These children show anger and fear in their behaviors that appear to indicate they feel in danger or threatened. According to Main and Hesse (1993), children who have disorganized insecure attachment styles often have mothers who suffer from trauma in their lives, and their children may be at greater risk of getting abused or neglected.
Categories of Attachment in Adults and Adolescents

Based on Bowlby’s theory, Bartholomew (1990) presented a practical model for attachment as it affects adolescents and adults. In this model, Bartholomew describes that in each person the internal model of self might be positive (self is considered loveable) or negative (self is considered unlovable), similarly the internal model of others might be positive (others are considered reliable) or negative (others are consider unreliable). Consequently, there are four patterns of attachment.

Having a positive internal model of both self and others results in the secure attachment style. People who have secure attachment styles have a sense of self-esteem and feel comfortable to develop close relationships with others. The combination of having a negative model of self and a positive model of others results in the preoccupied attachment style. People who have preoccupied attachment styles try to get other people’s approval in order to feel safe and protected. In the third pattern, the self-model is positive while the model of others is negative which results in the fearful attachment style. People who have fearful attachment styles emphasize independence and deny their dependency needs in order to keep their positive sense of self. The last pattern is the dismissing pattern in which both internal models of self and others are negative (Schafer & Bartholomew, 1994). People with dismissing attachment styles avoid intimate relationships in order to protect themselves from rejection or loss (Bartholomew, 1990).

Continuity of Attachment into Adulthood

Several researchers have designed studies with different methodologies to investigate the continuity of childhood attachment styles into adulthood (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Main & Goldwyn, 1988). These studies have linked adults’ attachment styles to children’s attachment styles.

Adults who have secure attachment styles, similar to children with secure attachment styles, are self-confident. They are comfortable with negative and positive feelings, and they can trust other people and build intimate relationships with them. Secure adults describe their parents as warm and supportive people (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Haft & Slade, 1989; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Adults who have preoccupied attachment styles,
similar to children with anxious attachment styles, are said to have problems with jealousy, dependency, anxiety, and confusion. They are afraid of being unloved and abandoned (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kobak & Sceery, 1988). Adults who have fearful attachment styles, similar to children with avoidant attachments styles, are not self-confident and they are not comfortable with relationships and closeness. Aggression, isolation, and having a cold and rejecting mother are some factors associated with this attachment style (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kobak & Sceery, 1988). Adults who have dismissing attachment styles, similar to children with disorganized attachment styles, are not self-confident and do not engage in social relations. They exhibit a mixture of preoccupied and fearful behaviors (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

**Consequences of Damaged Attachments**

While exploring the damaged attachments in survivors of abuse, Herman (1992) describes that victims have negative views about their worthiness and due to these negative beliefs they have low self-esteem and lack of independence in their relationships with others. A damaged view of self leads to losing the sense of control and action in relationships, and this disconnection, according to Herman (1992), causes victims of maltreatment to believe that other people are not trustworthy and that the world is a hazardous place.

Phillips and Daniluk (2004) state that children who experience sexual abuse consider themselves contaminated and feel shameful and invisible. Carnes (1997) also states that sexual abuse survivors usually have shame-based beliefs which make them feel like they are not lovable and worthy so people cannot care about them. Browne and Finkelhor (1986) revealed that children who experienced sexual abuse might develop a dysfunctional personal beliefs system, which may put them at a greater risk of sexual revictimization. They described four specific effects of sexual abuse as traumatic sexualization, betrayal, powerlessness, and stigmatization.

Research findings reveal that all types of insecure attachment including preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful styles are related to experiencing negative relationships and negative emotions (Beech & Mitchell, 2005; Shaver & Clark, 1994; Shaver & Hazan, 1993). They may also relate to higher victimization of forcible sexual assaults (Smallbone & Dadds,
Therefore, the insecure attachment style could put adolescents at risk for developing trauma bonding toward traffickers who approach them. Children with preoccupied insecure attachment styles have negative self-image and positive other image, and they are afraid of being unloved and abandoned (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). As a result they may be more vulnerable to seeking approval and love from a pimp and developing trauma bonding with them.

**Trauma Bonding**

Trauma bonding is defined as a strong emotional connection in victims towards perpetrators in the context of abusive relationships in which the abuser takes away control from the victim and show intermittent good and bad behavior towards them (Dutton and Painter, 1993). Due to trauma bonding, victims may not recognize themselves as victims and their pimps as perpetrators. A study initiated by Reid (2013) in the metropolitan area in the United States examined the views of experienced professionals who had work experience with sex trafficking of minors in that particular area. Research findings revealed that child victims do not see themselves as victims who got exploited by their traffickers. Most of the victims claimed that they were helping their boyfriend by engaging in prostitution. Trauma bonding is common between the trafficker and the victim. Many of the victims repeatedly flee to get back to their traffickers. Therefore, the sexual exploitation of children has become a low risk crime with a high reward for the traffickers (Reid, 2013).

Not many studies have examined trauma bonding in the relationship between victims and traffickers in CSEC literature. however, in order to clarify the relationship between sex traffickers and their victims, several researchers have revealed that this relationship is similar to the victim-perpetrator dynamics in abusive relationships of intimate partners (Bullard, 2011; Farley, 2003; Kennedy, Klein, Bristowe, Cooper, & Yuille, 2007; Stark & Hodgson, 2003). In both relationships perpetrators isolate victims and get them under emotional and physical control. They use sexual and physical violence to terrify their victims. Blackmailing the victim via producing pornography is also common (Stark & Hodgson, 2003).

In an empirical study, Dutton and Painter (1993) examined trauma-bonding theory in relation to the emotional attachments in abusive relationships. The participants in the study were females who had left an abusive relationship in the previous six months. The results of
this research supported the trauma bonding theory of abusive relationships, which included two elements: power imbalance and extreme intermittent maltreatment from abuser. These notions of abuse lead to the development of a strong emotional attachment from victim to abuser (Dutton & Painter, 1993). Similarly children with damaged attachment styles have damaged view of self, which results in not having a sense of control and action in their relationships (Herman, 1992). Because they feel shameful and unlovable they may be more likely to accept or normalize maltreatment from the abuser.

Dutton and Painter (1981) suggested a pattern of social trap, which leads to the development of an abusive relationship. The first abusive event happens at the beginning of the relationship as an abnormal incident. This incident is not severe and the man will apologize after committing the abuse. During this time the woman doesn't believe that the abuse will be repeated so she will develop an affective attachment toward her partner. Repetition of more severe abusive incidents will change the cognition in the victim that the abuse is inevitable and the trauma bonding will get stronger (Dutton & Painter, 1981). Similarly adults with insecure attachment styles are confused, isolated, anxious, and have low self-confidence. They also have experiences with aggressive, cold, and rejecting attachment figures (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kobak & Sceery, 1988). As a result it may be more likely that they find the abusive relationship as an acceptable relationship and develop bonding toward the abuser.

**ENTRAPMENT AND ENMESHMENT STRATEGIES**

It is suggested that pimps or sex traffickers may be psychopathic criminals who plan specific strategies in order to increase their chance of entrapping vulnerable victims (Albanese, 2007). Research findings suggest that sex traffickers use similar schemes in order to entrap their victims and recruit them; they have similar techniques to enmesh their victims and force them to continue working as prostitutes (Reid, 2014). It seems that these strategies are designed to form and maintain trauma bonding.

The entrapment phase has regular steps. In the first step, traffickers approach victims as a romantic partner and spend money on them. They help the victim and fulfill their needs in order to gain their trust. In the next step, traffickers start to normalize the prostitution and
convince the victims to engage in sex works for fun or to help them out with financial situations. Usually traffickers use peers to recruit victims. Getting the victims isolated is the next step in which the victims get disconnected from their families and friends; often traffickers take victims to new places. Sometimes traffickers use alcohol or drugs to get their victims under control as well as financial debt, which is another coercive tool. Victims also have mentioned that their partner was a gang member who recruited them. In some cases the trafficker took advantage of victim’s intellectual disability in order to manipulate them and get them recruited (Reid, 2014).

In the enmeshment phase, sex traffickers use specific techniques to keep victims continuing to work for them. Shame and blackmail and obligation are common techniques. Some traffickers force victims to be complicit in crimes. Pregnancy, financial control, intimidation, and providing hope and connection are other enmeshment techniques used by traffickers (Reid, 2014).

**Purpose of Current Study**

CSEC is a multibillion-dollar industry in the United States with over 240,000 adolescent victims in the U.S. every year (Estes & Weiner, 2001). Young adolescents, average age 12 to 14 years old, are being targeted by traffickers who may pursue girls with particular vulnerabilities (Reid & Jones, 2011). The purpose of the present study is to provide some insights about the nature of the pimping relationship between sex traffickers and victims through the lens of attachment theory. Researchers have identified various risk factors that might put a child at risk of CSEC victimization; this study further examines factors that may prepare a child to accept and form a relationship with a pimp. The procedures involved semi-structured interviews with 15 CSEC stakeholders (e.g., law enforcement officers, service providers), and using procedures described by template analysis (TA), themes that emerge from the stakeholders’ responses will be described.

Specifically, this study will examine themes related to having dysfunctional families and an abusive history as two risk factors that affects the development of attachments in children. Having a damaged attachment style can lead to low self-esteem, trust issues, deficiency in social skills, and isolation in children that can all dispose them for CSEC victimization. In this study we will use attachment theory as a theoretical framework to link
the merging themes that come out of the interviews. In addition to themes of a past history of abuse, themes that focus on attachment, perceptions of self and others, relationships and support, and trauma bonding will be explored. The study may provide a better understanding of the pimping relationship that can put a child at risk for CSEC and may have implications for prevention and intervention strategies.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 15 stakeholders including 5 law enforcement officers (3 male, 2 female), 2 female therapists, 3 survivor advocates (two female, one male), 2 female educators, and 3 female social workers, who all have direct experience in working with CSEC victims. One of the participants, a male survivor advocate, reported having experiences working with male CSEC victims; the rest of the participants reported that they worked with female victims.

PROCEDURE

This study is part of a larger study examining risk and protective factors associated with CSEC; Co-principal investigators, Dr. Emilio Ulloa and Dr. Monica Ulibarri, allowed me access to one of their datasets that included interviews with stakeholders with experience in CSEC. The participants were interviewed through a semi-structured interview format. Prior to initiation of the interview, the procedures and goals of the investigation were explained, and informed consent was given by each participant.

Participants were asked to engage in an in-depth, audio-recorded interview. The semi-structured interviews were designed to provoke information about a broad range of issues. Each interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted by two interviewers who are both psychology professors who have a broad knowledge about the local cultural circumstances associated with child sex trafficking. Some sample questions include:

1. Tell me about your professional background.
2. How did you first get involved with the topic of CSEC?
3. What training have you or have you not received with respect to CSEC?
4. What are differences between international and domestic sexual exploitation in terms of implications?

5. Thinking about the victims of CSEC you’ve met, how do you think their lives are different in terms of risks than victims who have not fallen into the life?

6. Sometimes survivors recover and might even thrive post victimization. What do you think sets those girls apart from those who can’t seem to get out of the life or thrive post victimization?

7. What services or resources do you think might help someone who is at risk for becoming a victim of CSEC or for someone who is in the life?

8. Reflecting on all of the experience you’ve collected over the years, what lessons have you learned that we researchers should really know?

The interviews were audio taped with the participants’ consent. Audio recordings of all the interviews have been produced if the participants agreed to have interviews recorded. The digital recordings of the interviews were allowed for reexamination of the recorded interviews in order to reduce threats to the accuracy of the research findings due to poor recall (Patton, 2002). Data was stored in a password-protected file, the original audio recordings were stored in a locked drawer. All research staff, including the transcribers, were required to sign pledges of confidentiality and agreements to use the data solely for statistical reporting and analysis.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

To analyze the data for this study, 9 of the interviews were transcribed and coded; the rest were coded from the audio recordings. Using procedures described in emplate analysis (TA) method, a systematic method for analyzing qualitative data, themes were identified based on the grouping of responses (King, 1998; King, Carroll, Newton, & Dornan, 2002).
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Researchers have identified various risk factors that might put a child at risk of CSEC victimization; this study further examines factors that may prepare a child to accept and form a relationship with a pimp. The transcriptions and audio recordings of semi-structured interviews with 15 CSEC stakeholders revealed six themes that continued to resurface during the analysis of the data. These themes and the responses of participants are presented in tables below.

**Theme 1: Abusive History**

The first theme was history of abuse. As presented in Table 1, fourteen out of fifteen stakeholder participants referred to a history of abuse as a significant risk factor for CSEC victims. Eleven stakeholder participants also talked about broken or unstructured family in the context of victim’s background. The participants talked about not having two parents, exposure to domestic violence, and troubled family. In general, the stakeholder participants describe victims as often coming from homes that were not considered safe and nurturing, which left them at risk for getting abused. For example, participant #13 stated “if you really want to get down to the nitty-gritty umm what really makes them at risk in that trauma is going back to childhood and doing more prevention more on developing safe healthy families and reducing childhood trauma.”

It was discussed by five of the participants that when children get sexually abused, these early sexual experiences may change their mentality for the rest of their lives. Two participants stated that experiencing early sexual abuse is common. As participant #10 said “Maybe 75 percent as I talked to them and asking questions it has been an unwilling participation in sex. So at very young age they’ve already been introduced into forcing myself on you. So it’s nothing new for them.” Two stakeholder participants stated that these
experiences make children believe that sex is an unwilling tool to get attention and love. Participant #5, who is an advocate but also a survivor of CSEC, used her experience to explain this mechanism. “I was raped many times when I was in the summer between first and second grade by my stepfather and I think that, you know, like warped my view of what sex was and so when I grew older I didn’t really enjoy sex. I just did it because I wanted to feel like somebody liked me or cared about me and so and if you didn’t want to have sex with me then you didn’t, you didn’t love me.” Participant #14 also said “sexual abuse is obviously also one of the risk factors, so when people are sexually abused they get a lot of attention, and they think that’s love and attention.”

**Table 1. Theme 1: Abusive History**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #1</th>
<th>Umm the majority what I had found was that there was some sort of abuse in their, their home, be it umm child abuse, be it umm mom and dad having domestic umm violence situation.</th>
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<td>Question: How do you think the girls who are involved with CSEC are different from girls who are not involved in CSEC? Answer: I think one of the primary reasons is the ability to communicate and the home structure.</td>
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| Participant #2 | I want to say 99% of the girls that I work with have all been sexually abused. I’m not even going to throw in physically abused, I’m just going to say sexually abused. I would say 100% but there’s like, I’m going to keep it at that because some girls would say, “That’s never happened to me.” so I’m just going to keep it there. I think it also depends on the home life, like home life is a huge, huge indicator umm you know whether it’s mom that says you’re, you know, you’re a hoe or calls you a whore to begin with or if it’s like an, an nonexistent parent like that’s not there. Often times my girls you know, they don’t have dads at home or if they do it’s not a very like positive role model dad and I really think there’s a linkage there. Because some of my girls on the other hand don’t have moms so it, it just kind of depends like it could just be like a one parent household. I’m going to say that instead. |

| Participant #3 | They have broken homes. There is often ugh sexual abuse that goes on in their lives. To me it’s the risk factors are, are the sex abuse early on. |

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<th>Participant #5</th>
<th>I can tell most of them will just umm say that they’ve been <strong>sexually abused</strong> or that they’ve been raped umm but they won’t, they won’t acknowledge the exchange of money because there’s just so much shame involved so they just, they just let, they kind of let me know that they have wounds.</th>
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<td>Yeah I think that probably the main [difference between girls who are victims and those who are not], honestly the main thing would be umm if they have been <strong>sexually abused</strong> before umm in life which makes it a lot easier for them to umm to prostitute themselves and if they were forced into it. You know, so most of them if, if they haven’t been sexually abused and they haven’t been umm treated like that in their, when they’re younger then that idea won’t pop into their head. Like that’s not a survival instinct but when you’ve been sexualized then, then you know it’s a tool that you can use. And I find that I think that most of them if not all of them, you know, that choose to do that, that actually make that choice have been sexually abused. I think that’s a theme, I’m fairly confident.</td>
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<td>It probably starts in, you know, 3 to 7 [laughs] you know when there’s a lot of <strong>sexual abuse</strong> that goes on. I was raped many times when I was in the summer between first and second grade by my stepfather and I think that you know, like warped my view of what sex was and so when I grew older I didn’t really enjoy sex I just did it because I wanted to feel like somebody liked me or cared about me and so and if you didn’t want to have sex with me then you didn’t, you didn’t love me.</td>
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<td>I know that a lot of the girls that I’ve worked with have said that you know, that they use drugs and that they have been <strong>sexually abused</strong>.</td>
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| Participant #6 | As a matter of fact it’s most common that that those in prostitution have has some childhood trauma, **sexual trauma**. |

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<th>Participant #7</th>
<th>We interviewed over 30 CSEC victims. Almost all of them admitted to some type of <strong>early sexual abuse</strong>, whether it was from a family member, um neighbor, but some kind of pre puberty sexual event that in my opinion has changed their, the way that they look at sex, from say some other normal person who does not have any kind of sexual experience until they are 18 or in 20’s or some other cases, so they’ve taken, there are some kind of negative sexual action that have happened in their life and that has somehow <strong>taken the emotional component of sex away</strong>, or has given them the ability to turn off the emotional component of the sexual act which I think is unique of that particular victim group.</th>
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<td>vast majority is that the girls come from some kind of very <strong>troubled family</strong>. Background had very little support or structure and school is not a priority, spend a lot of time unsupervised.</td>
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Table 1. (continued)

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<th>Participant #8</th>
<th>These girls are from single parents. They usually don’t have a very good relationship with their mother.</th>
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<td>Girls who got victimized in early years and don’t get any intervention and never talk about that at home (mother doesn’t believe them when they tell it) they are more at risk to get victimized again</td>
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<td>I believe the younger that the girl was at the time of victimization, either she was molested in her home by some family member or someone they knew, And no one, nothing was done about it. It just spins them [girls] out of the control.</td>
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| Participant #9 | It’s so hard to say. The broken family theme you know definitely comes to mind. You know the girls that you know don’t seem to have the opportunities that some other girls might have. They’ve been molested as a child. |

| Participant #10 | I think at list 5 out of 6 girls, may be 80 present of them, have been sexually assaulted by a family member. Maybe 75 percent as I talked to them and asking questions it has been an unwilling participation in sex. So at very young age they’ve already been introduced into forcing myself on you. So it’s nothing new for them. |

| Participant #11 | Majority of the girls that come our attention is, and that I’ve worked with, are mostly 14 and up, have had some sort of sexual abuse in their early childhood. |

| Participant #12 | When we look at their answers from their intake questions, but there’s a history of vulnerability and abuse. In particular sexual abuse, yet molestation, rape, things of that nature, also a significant exposure to violence or domestic violence in the home. Long before they had and intimate partner that abuse them. |

| Participant #13 | At the end of the day every single person that has walked through our doors has a personal history of trauma. |

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<td>Umm I’ve had girls who had parents that were Navy SEALS and they’re law enforcement or teachers like, people that would never thought, oh that could happen to her. And when you break it all down, they all had a history of trauma growing up. Most of them sexual abuse, umm but trauma across the board in terms of some so some sort of abuse, domestic violence in the home, substance abuse in the home, a death of a parent, umm some sort of violent episode, I can’t think of one kid that has walked through our doors who didn’t have a personal history of trauma. I mean if you really wanna get down to the nitty-gritty umm what really makes them at risk in that trauma is going back to childhood and doing more prevention more on developing safe healthy families and reducing childhood trauma.</td>
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<td>Participant #14 Sexual abuse is obviously also one of the risk factors, so when people are sexually abused they get a lot of attention, and they think that’s love and attention.</td>
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<td>Girls from homes where, many of them don’t have 2 parents, maybe never know who their father was.</td>
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<td>Participant #15 Mainly, sexual abuse, sexual trauma in their background but coupled with an exposure and a normalization to disbehavior itself.</td>
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<td>Yeah, so is there anything else other than sort of the exposure to? P: Obviously, like I said sexual trauma, Um abuse in the home, um… uh not a clear understand…well for the counterpart um the negative…so normalization and acceptance of unhealthy abuse.</td>
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**THEME 2: UNHEALTHY ATTACHMENT**

Table 2 shows that fourteen out of fifteen stakeholder participants talked about how victims did not have someone to bond with. For example, participant #11 stated, “Why do some fall in and some don’t? In my experience it has been some significant adults. Somebody is really watching out for this kid. Is going to hunt them down when they haven’t come home, but really that person who just stays on top of them. But in a good way like wants to know how they’re doing. And there is an open relationship and openness when this child knows that that they can be comfortable and even psychologically safe around this particular adult or person who cares in a healthy way and calls them on their staff.”
Ten participants mentioned that having an attachment to a special someone could be a protective factor for CSEC victims. For example, participant #14 said, “I think some of the protective factor would be some adult connection be it a teacher, a sports coach, the lady down the street, a young adult, maybe somebody that they trust.”

Eight participants stated that bonding with someone special could be used as an intervention to help victims come out of prostitution. This type of bonding could be formed by implementing a mentoring program. For example, participant #11 said, “[what factors do survivors have?] A person. It could be a teacher who you really connected with. It could be a neighbor who you really connected with”.

Three stakeholder participants mentioned that not having someone special to attach to would put children at risk for developing some sort of bonding toward traffickers. They stated that these girls look for a people who show care and love for them. Participant # 12 said, “That is a manipulation and she’s seeking that, an unhealthy attachment because she just doesn’t have a healthy attachment from her home life. Because these children seek for a sense of belonging and attachment to love.”

One of the participants talked about how having a healthy attachment will help children feel worthy and build their self-esteem. Participant #1 said, “Psychologically we know that the formative years are the foundation years that your self-esteem is built. When you don’t have that in the formative years or a special someone be it a teacher, umm a rabbi, the priest, the umm, an aunt, umm a special someone for whatever reason. In some cultures it’s usually grandma that umm is a little bit more seasoned that tells the grandchild, “You can do anything you want to do, believe anything, you just need to stay away from this, this and this.”

Table 2. Theme 2: Unhealthy Attachment

| Participant #1 | Psychologically we know that the formative years are the foundation years that your self-esteem is built. When you don’t have that in the formative years or a special someone be it a teacher, umm a rabbi, the priest, the umm, an aunt, umm a special someone for whatever reason. In some cultures it’s usually grandma that umm is a little bit more seasoned that tells the grandchild, “You can do anything you want to do, believe anything, you just need to stay away from this, this and this.” |

(table continues)
| Participant #2 | A special someone or a special experience or something inspiring can, can be protective?  
Yes, but it has to be, it has to be big in the eyes of that particular child.  
Only takes one teacher to make a difference, that these particular teachers introduce what may happen to someone that runs away umm something terrible that happened at home you have a place a to go, you have somebody that wants to be with you. “Umm it might not be your mom and dad but I’m right here and I’m in Kansas and yes I want to be you” umm so that they know that their world isn’t imploding, that there’s still somebody that wants them. If you don’t reach out at that young age, at that elementary school age to let them know that there’s still somebody that wants them because we all have that, there we go crossing hats again, we all that basic need, we need to be needed, we all do.  
And it’s that throw away mentality like so many of these parents are fed up with their kids that they are kind of like bye-bye, like I’m already tired of you I didn’t even want, I didn’t even show up for your court date because I don’t really want you back in my house, and now you are here because probation put you here. They may have a mom and a dad, but that mom and a dad don’t provide support. Like that mom and a dad still tell them how much they suck and how stupid they are and how much they always gonna be a prostitute.  
Maybe they regain that relationship with parents, cause that can happen still, that helps, and that helps that moving forward. Interviewer: a special someone? Participant #2: yes. Interviewer: a mentor or parent or somebody else. ? Participant #2: yeah, and sometimes like they were in the life and they didn’t even pay attention, they’ve got into substance abuse and they’ve got into so many different things that they kind of just like maybe parent wasn’t a bad person maybe parent just was kind of like “I don’t know what to do to help you.” And so in those rare cases that parent can still be implement right? But for some of the girls it’s like having that mentorship and then maybe getting them shelter. Like that is the biggest thing Like with some of the girls it’s just like providing them that stable housing and then a mentorship or somebody that they can really like connect with.  
If they don’t have a stable family life, If they have two parents that are using drugs and alcohol and they are not emotionally and physically available to that child to teach them right from wrong as they’re growing up, if these kids are left to their own devices, even if it’s a, a good mom and dad but both of them are working jobs and they’re working overtime and they’re not there for their children and they don’t talk to them, they don’t talk to them, somebody else will. |
Table 2. (continued)

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<tr>
<th>Participant #4</th>
<th>If they don’t get a <strong>sense of family and bonding</strong> and being needed at home and the respect umm they’re going to go to <strong>seek these somewhere else</strong>, which would make them very vulnerable to gangs who try to say they will try to fulfill that sense of family.</th>
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<td>And then a basic one but it’s the most critical is that <strong>relationship she has</strong> with her mom. So that’s huge risk factor for some girls is who is that mother or female role model in her life? So if it isn’t mom is it an aunt or a counselor or grandma? The female umm the relationship between mom and daughter is extremely important in her development.</td>
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<td>Umm so that was something I saw is that the relationships that they have or that they had prior to being involved where <strong>not the strongest relationships</strong> or the, the biggest influencers that could have been something positive for them. So not to say that they didn’t have teachers but maybe they just <strong>didn’t have relationships</strong> with those teachers or coaches or parents or extended family members. They just didn’t seem to have someone there that really intervened and advocated for them because if they did then it’s you know, someone would have been you know, intervening or trying to help. And, and not to say that some girls didn’t but the majority of them felt like they didn’t have anybody there. Well, who is going to bat for me, I wasn’t even reported missing. Umm and for the ones [survivor] that I’ve met and have conversations with what seemed to make a difference is that they had a support system. So they had a <strong>mentor</strong>, umm they were connected with you know, programs that gave them some life skills and showed them, “Hey, we can show you a trade, we can show you customer service skills and you can get a job and see what that’s like.” So they seem to have those things in place. I have not had much conversations with girls who are not yet survivors or they’re wanting to exit and so I, I wouldn’t be able to speak to that. But for those who have umm and even some of the older women that I’ve talked to it seemed like they had someone in place that was helping them or guiding them that I think was a critical umm voice in their life that helped them you know, that champion that everyone needs.</td>
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<td>Participant #5</td>
<td>I mean and the more the people that are in there their lives on a daily basis are aware of all that, like and that <strong>truly care</strong> about it. Then I think we can at least do some decreasing of the problem.</td>
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Table 2. (continued)

| Participant #6 | It’s **Love**. When I finally spoke up about my abuse, I was at the age of 15 and I went to live with one side of my family, and it was halfway across the country. Totally different environment, different atmosphere. And these family members were nothing like the family members that I got away from. These family members were amazingly loving people and amazingly carrying people and poor. They had no money and happy nonetheless, and no judging and just beautiful people. And when I go out and tell my story I tell people about that and because the [39:10] smallest amount of time that I got from just this mountains of love you know overcame the long period of time years and I got such healed. I have a video presentation that I do see with my groups about a mental health professional and a patient…at the end of the interview professional says that the only difference between me and that person is not just the glasses but the fact that I had one loving person. A person who says “hey I am here help you, or hey you can talk to me, hey I get you, I don’t understand you because I haven’t had that experience but I can relate in a different way and I want you to relate in a different way. When I say love I have a broad definition of what that word means. Love is energy. It’s energy that I can’t pull out words to but it has a lot to do with presents. For me, that’s what it means for me, it is **presents**, you know. And a mentor can absolutely be that presents, absolutely. |
| Participant #7 | They [pimps] talk about a girl who doesn’t have a father, talk about a girl who doesn’t have any kind of a male model role in their life, a girl that doesn’t have a close emotional connection to anyone in her family, which again sometimes come from sexual abuse. So they’re also looking for someone to protect them from those kind of abusive relationships. |
| Participant #8 | I think having a constant person who shows **unconditional love** for them is a huge protective factor because they are protecting them and a lot of girls don’t have protection. Like you can have girls who have come from a good home but if there is an uncle that is abusing her or sexually molesting the girl, then and she, no one is listening to her and discrediting her and say no that didn’t happen or kind of letting her know “don’t say that in our family. That didn’t occur.” The protection has to be started at a very young age for the girl to know she is safe, so those young little girls who grow up and don’t feel safe like there is somebody there to protect them that is, to me that’s the cracks. |
Table 2. (continued)

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<th>Participant #9</th>
<th>[Why do you think <strong>mentoring</strong> is so important?] Because it <strong>gives them someone to call</strong> I mean I had girls call me after 2 years I haven’t heard from them, they are gone, they might be doing the same thing they were doing but they call me every once in a while and it’s like a little extension cord that they have with someone. At first it feels good because they know <strong>there is somebody there for them</strong> that is not judging them based on their past and somebody that validates them and loves them for who they are.</th>
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<td>Participant #10</td>
<td>[How girls get out of the life?] Something terrible, terrible happens to them that they decide to come out and somebody show some empathy to them, that you are the victim and we want to help you get out of this life. Showing girls that there are <strong>people that care</strong> about them out there and that truly do want to see them get out of life.</td>
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<td>[There are some survivors that manage to thrive, what do you think it is about them? That has have helped them?] A good family, somebody who, maybe they’ve got into the life and get away from their family for a while and they’ve come back and you know <strong>their parents</strong> take them in and that support group forms.</td>
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<td>Participant #11</td>
<td>I think it’s the family. I think the root of all issues in my personal opinion when it comes to in law enforcement in general it is the same issue, which is just the family. Mostly these girls I don’t think there has been one girl that really has 2 <strong>parents that care about them</strong> exclusively. And it’s always a <strong>yearning</strong> for that child that has <strong>somebody who actually cares</strong> about them. That’s what a big piece of it is in my personal opinion.</td>
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<td>One risk factor is <strong>family doesn’t care</strong> at home.</td>
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<td>I think the ones that did get out, the piece that they had was family. They had <strong>someone that actually cares</strong>. If it’s not an aunt in another state it is a brother that is willing to accept them in their home and trying to get them on their feet.</td>
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<td>Participant #11</td>
<td>Why do some fall in and some don’t? In my experience it has been <strong>some significant adults</strong>. Somebody is really watching out for this kid. Is going to hunt them down when they haven’t come home, but really that person who just stays on top of them. But in a good way like wants to know how they’re doing. And there is an open relationship and openness when this child knows that that they can be comfortable and even psychologically safe around this particular adult or person who cares in a healthy way and calls them on their staff.</td>
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Table 2. (continued)

| Participant #12 | A lot of times the family of origin is not always the strongest and so if a child can find other people like surrogates that can replace the family of origin for even just certain things like “I had a bad day I can’t talk to my mom about it but I can talk to you” you know if they have those other folks. Actually if there wasn’t even good attachment between the child and the parents, I mean between zero to five, that’s another thing [risk factor]. When you ask these girls what made it different with that teacher, that social worker, etc., they [girls] say they [social worker, teacher,] were looking for me. I knew somebody was looking for me. [What factors do survivors have?] A person. It could be a teacher who you really connected with. It could be a neighbor who you really connected with. That is a manipulation and she’s seeking that, an unhealthy attachment because she just doesn’t have a healthy attachment from her home life. Because they are seeking that sense of belonging and attachment that love, and also the fun stuff. I think a girl with a wire, social network of healthy buffers is more uh, one; safer from exploitation, but also more resilient for recovery. So I think we always need to do a lot more when it comes to preventing um continuation of gang involvement. That goes into early mentoring programs. Gotta start early, mentoring programs, got to start early. Um, grade school, the age: to middle school age and continuing into high school. Strong mentorship programs, I think mentorship programs for those that it appeals to faith based communities are awesome. Uh for those communities in which the faith based has a lot of influence on families. Just positive relationships. I mean the biggest vulnerability is not having those buffers. The other attributes that I’ve seen is just having a strong connection to a support system. It’s different for each one [victim] but someone, there is someone in their life, be it a social work that for whatever reason they have a great relationship with, or the probation officer, sometimes it’s grandma, older friend or sister, sometimes is colleges that I’ve worked and they have strong connection to. Or they somehow recover and have a great relationship with their family at home. But some sort of connection. |

(table continues)
Table 2. (continued)

| Participant #13 | The trafficker is not going after the straight A student who’s captain of the volleyball team and ASB president. That’s too much work. She has all those protective factors umm because she’s going to school on a regular basis, because maybe she does have at least one involved parent or guardian or something or that’s pushing her and supporting. She then has maybe a coach umm and teachers who are supporting her and pushing her and friends. So I think one of the biggest priorities [in terms of services you provide to a victim] is connection to umm a support network umm hopefully that support network includes other survivors. Someone who is out of the life umm and is in a place of being able to give back and where they can see that hope. They have some sort of foundation; they have people in their life that give a shit. I think that’s why our foster care kids are such at high risk and are some of the umm most challenging to serve and treat, because they don’t have anyone in their corner. And they need a foundation, a family, a mentor, an auntie, best friend’s mom, you know, someone who is fighting for them? I think the ones that maybe tend to be more leaders or thrivers or if umm, fall in your kind of question umm they have a la a larger support network. |
| Participant #14 | Because if there is not somebody who is looking out for them and they don’t have the strong foundation and basis to know what is okay and what isn’t. They can easily swayed to someone who is going to pay attention to them, be it for negative reasons and consequences, they don’t know that. I think some of the protective factor would be some adult connection be it a teacher, a sports coach, the lady down the street, a young adult, maybe somebody that they trust. |

**Theme 3: Self-Image**

The third theme found was self-image and how victims feel about themselves. As it presented in table 3, twelve stakeholder participants referred to having a negative self-image as a characteristic found in victims. Ten participants described victims as people with low self-worth and low self-confidence. They felt that they were unlovable individuals who don’t deserve any good behavior. Participant #6, who is also a survivor of CSEC, even referred to the negative self-image as a mentality of prostitution. He stated, “I already had that mentality of prostitution, yeah um, it stayed with me, I had no worth, I had no direction, I had no purpose other than to serve others for there were nothing for me. And that grow into my adult
life and there I was.” Participant #4 describes how this negative self-image change victim’s mentality, “it’s the, the issue of self-worth comes into play with all of these girls. And not just with CSEC, I mean multiple issues we see with girls. Does she feel like she has any value? Is she important on this earth to anybody? Most girls that I have seen that chose a, a destructive path they all had that in common, is they didn’t feel that they had any value and they kind of felt like “I’m just taking up space and I’m not important to anybody.” And so when you walk around feeling that way you’re more likely to engage in things that are harmful and destructive because you’re not even putting yourself on the map, or so to speak.”

Four participants made a connection between having a person who shows love and care and self-image. For example, participant #3 said, “Through all of this if you have parents that aren’t paying attention to you often have low self-esteem.” In addition participant #8 referred to low self-worth as a consequence of early sexual abuse, “I think the girls who have victimized early on, they take on all kinds of other issues that come around them like drug abuse is one big one, then the emotional health, they have a very low sense of self-esteem and they don’t, they feel they deserve everything wrong. They really truly believe they deserve just junk, they are not worth anything.”

Finally, eight participants stated that having a negative self-image may put children at risk of seeking for approval or acceptance from others, which puts them at risk for getting manipulated by traffickers. Participant #4 explained it as this, “But umm that would be something else is, is common with a lot of the girls, it’s that they’re looking for something that they’re obviously not getting at home or in the community and a lot of the times is they’re looking to be noticed, they’re looking for someone to see them, you know, and accept them for who they are. Umm and so the right person comes along, it’s very easy to manipulate them, you know, because you’re going to hear what they’re wanting to hear, it’s that “I see you and your beautiful, you’re important,” etcetera. So I think that value of belonging and being accepted is critical for girls”.
| Participant #1 | They [victims] don’t have anything, there’s nothing left. “I’ve got to get out of this town because there’s nothing here for me. **Nobody loves me**, nobody wants me.” But we need to let them know that there is and we do want them. But if you’re always told since you were born “**You’re worthless**, you’re not good for anything,” you already have it in your mindset come fifth grade that these teachers are full of shit. “What do you mean I’m worth, I’m worth something? Nuh-uh, I’ve been told all my life,” so it has to be told when they were very, very young. |
| Participant #2 | So I think often times girls, and this is why I’m like really intense with my girls, I’m like: “girls, how many of you if somebody shows you that they care just a little bit you just open up your, open up your stories?” and for the most parts most girls are like giggling and they’re laughing because they’re like, they’re like “I do, I do” like most girls do. Women, in gen. women. Now I ask my adults the same question and they’re like “yep, I do that. I… I… you know he said he cared, so I decided to share” and it’s as easy as that. |
| Participant #3 | Through all of this if you have **parents that aren’t paying attention** to you, you often have low self-esteem. Ugh you often have depression, you often have anxiety, you often have umm depending on. **A need and a drive to be accepted**, that’s what all kid want. Everybody wants to be told that they’re accepted, that they’re wanted, that they’re loved, that they’re beautiful |
| Participant #4 | It’s the, the issue of **self-worth** comes into play with all of these girls. And not just with CSEC, I mean multiple issues we see with girls is, does she feel like she has any value? Is she important on this earth to anybody? Most girls that I have seen that chose a, a destructive path they all had that in common, is they didn’t feel that they had any value and they kinda felt like “I’m just taking up space and I’m not important to anybody.” And so when you walk around feeling that way you’re more likely to engage in things that are harmful and destructive because you’re not even putting yourself on the map, or so to speak. Umm so from me the risk factor is at a young age is she already exhibiting those signs that she doesn’t have any sense of empowerment or umm does she not know what self-efficacy is so does she not know that she can excel in a particular subject or activity or, or sport for example. So the self-worth piece is critical in, in their development and it doesn’t start in middle school, it starts way before [giggles] in elementary, right? |
But umm that would be something else is, is common with a lot of the girls, it’s that they’re looking for something that they’re obviously not getting at home or in the community and a lot of the times is **they’re looking to be noticed, they’re looking for someone to see them, you know, and accept them** for who they are. Umm and so the right person comes along, it’s very easy to manipulate them, you know, because you’re going to hear what they’re wanting to hear, it’s that “I see you and your beautiful, your important,” etcetera. So I think that value of belonging and being accepted is critical for girls.

What it came down to for them at least from what they’ve shared it’s like somebody **actually began to value them** for the first time and in that process they learned to value themselves as well. And that can be why maybe some who are not out yet they don’t have that safety net and, and they’re just at a point where they’re you know, lost or you know kind of forgotten who they are and they’re not at a point where they’re, they’re ready yet or, or don’t even know where to begin you know, to start that healing process yet.

**Participant #5**

When little, umm little homosexual boys come out. I know I’ve had a lot of friends who are transvestites and I know from when they were very, very young their family, they come out their families throw them out literally 10, 12, 13 they throw them out of the, of the house, umm abandon them. And then they umm, and often times they even sexually abused by a man so they have confusion about their sexual orientation and then they go and they end up in an area that’s predominantly homosexual and they get umm introduced to speed or to dressing up or to prostitution at a very young age and then that, that, that warps, they know they can make money by using their body for something that they’ve been, **everybody that they love has turned them away for, these people love them for it.**

Now this is what’s safe because **my own mom doesn’t love** me and these people do and this is what I need to be doing. And so then they, I’ve had umm like three of my friends have died of AIDS from working the streets, from very young ages, my, my transvestite friends. And then because it became the, the tension like when were bullied they feel ugly and they feel umm because they were rejected and then they, they get, they get that boost of, of, of umm morale or what have you. **“I’m sexy, all of these bitches want me”** “And I’m, and I make all the money and you guys,” and then they get this, they turn into another person. And then they feel stronger and safer and like they’re in charge and then they die of AIDS or they, you know, I know some that like now they do lots [phone vibrating] of umm.

(table continues)
Table 3. (continued)

| Participant #6 | It’s a long **need for acceptance and belonging** that all kids experience obviously but in this sense you know the kid the CSEC victim feel like there is something desperately wrong with them so the search for approval from those who are the ones giving them that emotional need and feed that emotional need, that’s extreme. And they go to extreme mix to get just that. And they may never get it. Um I never got it. But I did go to some extreme to get it and I’m not uncommon in that regard.

I already had that **mentality of prostitution**, yeah um, it stayed with me, I had **no worth**, I had no direction, I had no purpose other than to serve others for there were nothing for me. And that grow into my adult life and there I was. |
| Participant #8 | [What are resilience factors] I think if the girls have more **connections** outside of their immediate family where they **feel they have some kind of value**. And they know that they have some kind of either skill or some kind of attribute that they can take initiative on outside of their regular home, and are given value, and are validated by other people, I think that can help. But for a lot of these girls, they stay within those same circles and they are given the same fed in and they don’t see a bigger future for themselves.

I think the girls who have **victimized early** on, they take on all kinds of other issues that come around them like drug abuse is one big one, then the emotional health, they have a **very low sense of self-esteem** and they don’t, they feel they deserve everything wrong. They really truly believe they deserve just junk, they are not worth anything. |
| Participant #10 | You pick that right victim who doesn’t have any **self-esteem**.

They have very low **self-esteem**.

[What are factors that protect girls?] I think a child that feels confident in who they are and the family has surrounded them with **love and caring**, that girl has resilience. |
| Participant #11 | Usually the vulnerability is to have someone to love me. That **acceptance that love**.

If the child is experiencing major issues with **self-esteem** or body image, because kids at that age they don’t understand the higher thoughts that comes with self-esteem it’s more based on how they look so everybody are saying yes you look good no you don’t look good, and they think that being hyper sexualized is a way for people to like you. And even willing to do more risky behavior for **acceptance**. |

(table continues)
Table 3. (continued)

| Participant #12 | **Desensitized to what is healthy and unacceptable** to a sense of human dignity, of what is tolerable like deserve this, or I don’t have to take this. There are options and feeling that there are other safe options to pursue instead of staying in a situation. So it’s either...um, it leaves them vulnerable to **not recognize an unhealthy situation** or it leaves them vulnerable to **not feel that they deserve something else**. They might feel like “well this sucks... It’s not ideal, this isn’t Disney life, but who the hell has a Disney life? This is my reality and its what I deserve, the only thing that I’m gunna have.” |
| Participant #13 | You have a young lady that’s often growing up very confused with **low self-esteem**, lack of self-confidence, lack of self-worth. Umm, uh and not, real understanding of what’s safe and what’s dangerous. There is a history of vulnerability and abuse, in particular **sex abuse**, exposure to violence and domestic violence in the home long before they have their first intimate partner that abuses them. **Change their mind** of what is healthy or acceptable, what is tolerable and I deserve this. **They might feel like this is the only thing they deserve.** I think kinda really going back and looking at body image and **self-esteem** and self-worth uh in girls as they develop and grow up I think is vital. |
| Participant #14 | They [girls] have so **little self-worth**. I think so many of them think so little of themselves that they don’t really feel or know that they can be and do something else. Some girls have that **self-esteem** that protects them. Many of them are girls who don’t have **sense of stability on love** from a very early age. |
| Participant #15 | I get kids that have already experienced a lot of failure. So, the kids I’m getting are already coming in...with **lower self-esteem**, poor sense of their work, you know academically disenfranchised already. |
**Theme 4: Others Image**

The fourth theme found was a negative image of others. Table 4 shows that three participants stated that the victims have trust issues and they may feel that other people are trying to lie and hurt them. Participant #1 explained that victims have negative image toward other people because they have hurt them. “Because they’ve been hurt I guess for lack of a better word so many times and deceived umm so many times that you can’t do anything to me that somebody else hasn’t already done so shut the “f” up, you know? So that takes time to break that.”

Three of the stakeholder participants pointed out that even before engaging into prostitution victims had negative image of others and could not trust them. They referred to this negative image as one of the consequences of early sexual abuse. For example, participant #6 who is a survivor explained his experience like this, “As far as my relationships go with friends, I had them I wanted them I didn’t know how to interact with them, I didn’t know how, I didn’t know how I can actually be that open to anybody about what my inner trouble was, what my hidden trauma was, what I was going through at home, what my secrets are, how do you trust anyone with that and carry out with me through my adult life.” Moreover, two participants referred to withdrawal behavior and isolation as risk factors. These behaviors could be considered as evidence of victims having a negative image of others.

### Table 4. Theme 4: Others Image

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Because they’ve been <strong>hurt</strong> I guess for lack of a better word so many times and <strong>deceived</strong> umm so many times that you can’t do anything to me that somebody else hasn’t already done so shut the “f” up, you know? So that takes time to break that.</td>
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<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>We’re all effed up in the head because we’ve been <strong>abused</strong> by people that we, that we <strong>trusted</strong> or that we loved or that we thought loved us or strangers.</td>
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<td>You know what I mean; there are signs that you could see. Yeah there’s <strong>withdrawn behavior</strong>, you know, if you’re all, you don’t talk to nobody, you fight all the time, you know, there’s symptoms that they can be, that can be acknowledged.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Participant #6</th>
<th>That oversexualization or <strong>early sexualization</strong> disturbs everywhere that you think you know, from a very young age it just <strong>makes your whole mindset</strong> and the whole way that you think about sexual interactions with people and just some of the most destroyed ways.</th>
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<td>It’s been my experience that CSEC victims have a really <strong>difficult time with relationships</strong>, as you might expect. I’ll use my personal example to draw an answer for this question “I <strong>basically trusted no one</strong>, and when I say I trusted no one, I mean I trusted no one.” When you are a child and you have anyone that is a leadership liger or figure head for you and that person takes advantages of you in that way, your trust goes out the window it is not that you don’t want to trust it is just that that is gone.</td>
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<td>As far as my relationships go with friends, I had them I wanted them I didn’t know how to interact with them, I didn’t know how, I didn’t know how I can actually be that open to anybody about what my inner trouble was, what my hidden trauma was, what I was going through at home, what my secrets are, <strong>how do you trust anyone</strong> with that and carry out with me through my adult life.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I tried really hard throughout my early 20’s so I can really build on some friendships and really hold onto it. I just couldn’t, I couldn’t figure out how because I was too well trained to not do that and I trained myself to not do that, part of that though, I’m leaving to go back to the roots of my experience there, is that I was trained to even <strong>stay away from friends and relationships</strong> so that I could never spill the beans about what is going on so there was an external pressure there too, to not build a relationship.</td>
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<td>Participant #9</td>
<td>How can they live a normal life and have a normal relationship with somebody, you know if they <strong>fell in love</strong> with somebody and all <strong>that person</strong> did was <strong>turning around</strong> and turn them into a prostitute, I would imagine that there is some sort of, that they will have some sort of thought to not involve in relationships.</td>
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<td>Participant #11</td>
<td>[What are protective factors?] When there is a true relationship when real trust is built cause that’s a part of dynamic with kids who’ve been involved in CSEC, their idea of trust or concepts of trust, I mean, they don’t know what it is. <strong>They don’t know what good trust is.</strong> They know what manipulation is but they don’t know what genuine authentic trust is.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant #14</td>
<td>Perpetrators prey probably on girls who are <strong>alone</strong>, and girls who <strong>aren’t together</strong>.</td>
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THEME 5: TRAUMA BONDING

The fifth theme that emerged from the data was trauma bonding. Participant #4 explained how the need for having attachment toward a person and having low self-worth play a role in developing trauma bonding between the trafficker and their victim. “So one [risk factor] is [that] girls are looking to connect and much more than boys, so we know that they’re almost pre-wired in their brain to build relationships and so what happens is for girls when they don’t have them that, that inner ability of “I believe in myself and I have good self-esteem,” she’s going to find other ways to fill that void. So it could be, “Let me find a relationship because I’m wanting a relationship,” even if it’s negative for her it’s filling a void that she doesn’t have. Umm the other one I would see at least with my students is the need to be, to belong, which we know, you know, that’s Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, right? Is the need and it’s our human nature to want to belong and for girls especially because they’re wanting, they’re wanting to bond and have relationships.”

Eight of the stakeholder participants mentioned that victims do not identify themselves as victims. They tend to believe they are in a relationship. They tend to see their pimps as a boyfriend who loves them and they try to protect them or run back to them. For example, participant #4 described the relationship between victims and their pimps like this, “One of the most challenging things is working your way in an interview with the victim from “I’m in love with him he is my boyfriend” to “he is telling you to go and have sex with strangers and then give him the money” like if this person really loves and cares about you wouldn’t he want you to never be around other men or have sex with other people? And trying to work through that progression with them and that is usually the first time that they kind of see that glimmer of hope where you recognize that they have always known that there is something wrong with this relationship but there is such an emotional connection that pimps have with these girls that because that pimp had provided or that girl at first, often the first, romantic encounter with a 14 year old girl, the power of that is very, very difficult to understand.“

As mentioned before, trauma bonding development is based on two dimensions. The first dimension is power imbalances, which can occur when the perpetrator takes control over the victim and isolates them. The second dimension is good and bad treatment, which switches frequently in the relationship (Dutton & Painter, 1981). The responses of the
stakeholder participants appear to support that trauma bonding is evident between pimps and CSEC victims.

Seven participants stated that pimps take control over the victim by moving them to other places in order to isolate them and also by taking all the money from them so they cannot leave. For example, participant #10 stated, “They [pimps] want to disorient that female. They want to get her to another area. They take her here and move her to Orange County. She doesn’t know Orange County. They’re gonna get her out of the city that they don’t have any way to contact anybody. They don’t feel safe. There is no running away.” He also said, “at first pimps let girls got nice things, got decent food but by the short time later they are not making any money every dime is going back to that pimp. Everything that they ever had goes back to him.

Eight participants talked about trafficker’s good behavior at first and threatening behavior afterward, such as beating and threatening, after entrapment. Some of them also mentioned that pimps switch from bad behaviors to good ones in order to make victims stay in the life. Participant #10 described pimps’ behavior as, “you and I don’t understand that but they do they know that they have a place to stay at night. They have someone that maybe beats them up during the day and loves them at night but they would have been removed from that, they don’t have anything.”

**Table 5. Theme 5: Trauma Bonding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #1</th>
<th>Where umm they [pimps/handlers] are taken under their particular wing and praise at first so that they learn to trust that particular person then slowly they begin to control umm everything about that young lady umm and they begin to play with them in certain sexual umm manners that it becomes at first very scary for the young girls depending on their age and then it becomes not a big deal.</th>
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<td>Participant #2</td>
<td>They [pimps] can be in jail and still tell girls those things. And girls will be like “oh, no no no, I’ll still make money and I put it on your pucks because I don’t want you to go and cheat on me.” you know, because to them, guess what? That person’s still my boyfriend. That person’s still my person. So that’s really difficult and I think that that’s really heartbreaking too, because it’s kind of like how do you help a girl that’s going through that manipulation. You know, victim and, <strong>that bond that they create with this perpetrator.</strong></td>
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<th>Participant #3</th>
<th>I see that there is just no support system. They don’t have like friends they’ve been <strong>kept isolated</strong> by the pimp so friendships aren’t something that they have much of and if they did they’ve kind of lost them because maybe the pimp just completely has them like deleting those friends out of their lives.</th>
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<td>I’ve had men and women both that I can see what’s going on, <strong>they don’t understand that they’ve been victimized</strong> and I try to refer them to the services that can really help them both on the immigrant side and on the recovery side.</td>
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<td>‘Cuz it’s very hard, it’s very hard working with kids, particularly teenagers ‘cuz you have to break through that hard headed teenage mode to let them know they weren’t hip, slick, and cool. They didn’t have everything under control and that when they ran away from the control of their parents they <strong>ran into the control of a pimp</strong> or a trafficker, but because he spoon talks them he, they feel like, like <strong>he really loves them</strong> and this is what they need to do.</td>
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<td>They might have girls that they’ve gotten and they’re pretty young that they think they’re all loved and they’re part of this mentality and this <strong>Stockholm syndrome</strong> where you protect your, your perpetrator and they’re maintaining everything up there while they were in jail and they get out and they got a home and everything else to go to.</td>
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<td>this is the <strong>psychological bonding</strong> that they use with them, the traumatic bonding that they use with them to make them stay. Ugh I know of a lady that was kidnapped at the age of 18 and ugh after he went through all of the umm <strong>isolation</strong> and gang rape and, and all these other things he drove her to her little brother’s junior high school and they sat outside while they watched her little brother come out. He had a gun on the seat and he says, “If you ever try to leave me I’m going to kill your little brother and then I’m going to go kill your parents.” So she went out there and did this and endured this for the safety of her family where a lot of kids that are younger they say, “If you do this I’ll go back and get your cousins, I know where your auntie lives, I know this, I know that.” And they make these <strong>threats</strong> that used to many years ago were very hollow and they are much more vicious and they’re much more brutal and they will do these things now. And if you have the gang mentality that is tied to it and you are able to get out of this and testify he’ll have his little homies and his buddies go out and do something and it’s this <strong>psychological trauma bonding</strong> that goes on that keeps them in this for the safety of their family and friends.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant #4</td>
<td>So one is girls are <strong>looking to connect</strong> and much more than boys, so we know that they’re almost pre-wired in their brain to <strong>build relationships</strong> and so what happens is for girls when they don’t have them that, that inner ability of “I believe in myself and I have good <strong>self-esteem</strong>,” she’s going to find other ways to <strong>fill that void</strong>. So it could be, “Let me find a relationship because I’m wanting a relationship,” even if it’s negative for her it’s filling a void that she doesn’t have. Umm the other one I would see at least with my students is the <strong>need to be, to belong</strong>, which we know, you know, that’s Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, right? Is the need and it’s our human nature to want to belong and for girls especially because they’re wanting, they’re wanting to bond and have <strong>relationships</strong>.</td>
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<td>Participant #5</td>
<td>They <strong>love their family</strong> even though their families <strong>hurt</strong> them, they don’t want, they <strong>don’t want the reporting</strong>. Like once they’ve come into the hands of a pimp or somebody who’s <strong>controlling</strong> them through violence or drugs they umm there’s really, there’s really not much you can do until, unless they really want out or there’s somewhere safe for them to go.</td>
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<td>Participant #7</td>
<td>I had pimps explaining to me that recruiting a young girl to prostitute, juveniles specifically, is like an easy robbery. If you have to pick between to things you’re gonna pick the easy rubbery. He equated that to recruiting a juvenile prostitute over an adult prostitute. Juvenile is not gonna talk back to you, she doesn’t understand any of those interpersonal communication relationships and it can be <strong>is basically dominated and controlled</strong>. One of the most challenging things is working your way in an interview with the victim from “I’m in love with him he is my boyfriend” to “he is telling you to go and have sex with strangers and then give him the money” like if this person really loves and cares about you wouldn’t he want you to never be around other men or have sex with other people? And trying to work through that progression with them and that is usually the first time that they kind of see that glimmer of hope where you recognize that they have always known that there is something wrong with this relationship but there is <strong>such an emotional connection</strong> that pimps have with these girls that because that pimp had provided or that girl at first, often the first, romantic encounter with a 14 year old girl, the power of that is very, very difficult to understand. The pimps take girls to places that they don’t know where they are they don’t communicate with others, take <strong>control</strong> over them this way, take them from where they live.</td>
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Table 5. (continued)

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<tr>
<th>Participant #8</th>
<th>These girls have poor, <strong>poor relationships</strong> with men, and they always go after those though cookies that <strong>treat them bad</strong> and they don’t leave them and come back and it’s just the big circle of domestic violence and that kind of thing.</th>
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<td>Participant #9</td>
<td>It always comes down to just the girl that happens to you know <strong>falling madly in love</strong> with this guy and he’s got this intention of turning around and pimping around to make money and these girls are willing to do anything for them.</td>
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<td>The pimps sometimes give them drugs to have more <strong>control</strong> over them.</td>
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<td>The pimp will <strong>take the girl to another place</strong> to cut her from her family if she has strong family the pimp need to take her far geographically but if she has a broken family he will take her maybe two blocks away it depends on how much power the pimp has to take her far and how much he thinks it is necessary.</td>
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<td>Participant #10</td>
<td>[Girls say] “He loves me. He tells me <strong>he loves me</strong>. He is the first one who bought me something from the coat factory. He is the first one who did this.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>At first pimps let girls got nice things, got descent food but by the short time later they are not making any money every dime is going back to that pimp. Everything that they ever had goes back to him. Because that’s what they do they bring you in and it’s the same story they say hey look at the glimmer look at food look at the clothing… and as time’s goes on he starts stay more and more and more away and before long you know they might have been <strong>nice and sweet</strong> to her but there is definitely a time and every one of these where they’re gonna <strong>get bitten</strong>, every one of them, there is gonna be a physical, there is gonna be a biting. The biting is after a month or so when you are not making enough money and you don’t have any other place to go.</td>
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<td>They [pimps] want to disorient that female. They want to get her to another area. They take her here and <strong>move her</strong> to Orange County. She doesn’t know Orange County. They’re gonna get her out of the city that they don’t have any way to contact anybody. They <strong>don’t feel safe</strong>. There is no running away.</td>
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<td>You and I don’t understand that but they do they know that they have a place to stay at night. They have someone that maybe <strong>bits them up during the day and loves them at night</strong> but they would have been remove from that, they don’t have anything.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Participant #11</th>
<th>Often time girls say that they [pimps] like to <strong>punch</strong> them in the face or in the head. Because you can’t see the bruise in the head.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participant #12</td>
<td>Going back to that original topic of a <strong>romantic relationship</strong>, if this young woman is in love with their perpetrator that is a tough road to recovery. And so I remember when I use to do direct practice working with a girl in individual therapy, um on and off. You know she had done our 12-week group therapy and we continued to do individual therapy and from the time we meet her, she was doing group therapy and continued with me. I, it was a good 6 months...before she finally had that emotion of anger towards her pimp. And um, once she finally got angry towards the idea of him, I knew she had turned that corner of recovery. Until then, she was always protecting him or not saying anything other than something as favorable about him...”but he always took care of me, he always looked after me, you know we were in the business together.”</td>
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Kind of like a befriending aspect where the friends like “well, come hang out with me, come meet my bf” and what not. Next thing you know they’re in the car, he takes them to the track and says uh “I got your book bag, I know where you live, get out make this amount of money in this amount of time or going home telling your mom you’re a whore.” Or I’m going home and I’m going to get your sister or your little sister to do it. You know they have this kind of **fear tactic cohesion**. And her feeling that she has no other choice but to do what he said.

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<tr>
<th>Participant #13</th>
<th>Well, I think when you look at their victimization <strong>so much of that control gets taken away</strong>, they didn’t, they couldn’t control when they slept, when they ate, where they slept, who they slept with, what that person did to them, what part of their body, I mean, when you’re doing, having to do a [inaudible segment] with a stranger and he’s paying, he’s expecting to do whatever he wants to do, and so to have no control over your body in terms of where things are put and how they’re put and the violence that you endure umm and then to have no control over your... your thinking too, you know, fee feeling, I know many of the girls will say like, he knows what I think. Like the level of control is that much like he is in my brain, he knows what I’m thinking all the time, if I even have a bad thought about him he is gonna know. Umm and then to the basic like, control over your living in terms of where you’re gonna sleep and when you’re gonna sleep and eat and pee, and like, all of those things. That’s all been taken away</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participant #14</td>
<td>Many of them are <strong>physically abused, beaten, burnt, stabbed, pinched</strong>; we can go on and on.</td>
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Table 5. (continued)

| Participant #15 | Lots of threats to the families especially...especially for new comers or different immigrant group, you know, so the Muslim communities, the Chaldean communities tend to have a lot more shame. Layers, with their communities and the religious connection. Um, definitely seen that how they’ll even, or even just “I’m going to show your brother this” and then certain cultures look bad on them. That would be horrendous, if not completely dangerous. And really the exploiter then takes that, cus [/because/] now their over there, “fine, you get home yourself then,” you know and...and so its gets put back on them very quickly and further alienates them and isolates them. They literally have disconnected form use to be their support system. You know, their families, their extended families, friends, and that’s the whole point. I mean they get more and more isolated and so their constantly fending for themselves. Now working against the …the traumas on, that she has with the exploiter and working to understand that but hopefully helping her develop some healthier bonds. They don’t want to understand that their victims, they don’t see themselves as victims. They actually, in many ways see themselves, at least in my...in my seat here at the school, they see this as actually something to be proud, of often, um, they are quite proud of it. |

**Theme 6: Trafferker’s Strategies**

The last theme found suggests that traffickers know about trauma bonding and prey on girls who are vulnerable and at risk for developing trauma bonding. As presented in table six, seven participants mentioned that pimps know that girls are at risk for developing trauma bonding toward them and that they know how to play their roles to form this bonding. For example, participant #10 said, “You pick that right victim who doesn’t have any self-esteem that has been had issues in her life and you give them this opportunity the pimp give her this opportunity, within two days they are able to get that little girl to go out and sell herself and may not be two times in the first day, it may be like you know hey let’s try it just once and look how much money we got, and it’s an ability to make money very quickly, that is now feeding into their ability, so they [pimps] have been taught that. That’s a learned technique.”
Table 6. Theme 6: Trafficker’s Strategies

| Participant #2 | People manipulate and utilize whatever has happened to you in your past because as a girl you’re gonna already have shared that with that person. You’re gonna say “I’ve been sexually abused, I’ve been at group home, I’m running away, whatever, and I’m trying to hang out with these people” and that grooming process is not very hard for these guys or girls, because now I know your weaknesses. |
| Participant #4 | They look for that girl who they know they can manipulate. And they know which ones have the low self-worth because often times you know, girls are walking around and they’re very confident, you can tell which are wanting to speak up in class and volunteer or what not, you can tell the ones that they don’t want any attention whatsoever, pimps know that. They’re not going to go after girls walking with their head held high and is going to give you attitude you know if you approach her and tell you where you can go, they’re going for that girl who’s okay, she’s a little, she’s, she’s weak and maybe she’s a little timid and you know they’re much older than them so you know, an average age is 13 to 14. But they know when you’re trying to hang out with a gang it’s because you don’t have a family already. Gang members know that, that’s why we come together, right? Because they say, “We are each other’s family and support.” If she already had that somewhere else she wouldn’t need you, so they off the bat know she’s coming around because she needs us for something. |
| Participant #7 | They [pimps] talk about a girl who doesn’t have a father, talk about a girl who doesn’t have any kind of a male model role in their life, a girl that doesn’t have a close emotional connection to anyone in her family, which again sometimes come from sexual abuse. So they’re also looking for someone to protect them from those kind of abusive relationships. |
| Participant #10 | You pick that right victim who doesn’t have any self-esteem that has been had issues in her life and you give them this opportunity the pimp give her this opportunity, within two days they are able to get that little girl to go out and sell herself and may not be to times in the first day, it may be like you know hey let’s try it just once and look how much money we got, and it’s an ability to make money very quickly, that is now feeding into their ability, so they [pimps] have been taught that. That’s a learned technique. |
And I think that that’s often times what the trafficker plays on is that, their warning system is broken. And I think a lot of that is connected back to the breakdown of their boundaries at a very young age or never having boundaries develop. So if you’re abused, uh a victim of sexual abuse, then you never really learn that you have any control over your body, that you get to say no to certain touch, that things, what’s safe touch versus unsafe touch umm because you never had, no one ever told you the difference and no one gave you the option to say no and so when those boundaries are broken down at such a young age, then we have someone who’s now twelve thirteen years old, going through puberty, going through adolescence with no boundaries, with no warning system. Who wants to be loved, who wants to have affection, and wants to date someone maybe older and the trafficker knows all of that and he plays on all that and then he comes in and provides all those things that are missing and the reality is I don’t care if you’ve had trauma or not, when you’re an adolescent girl you are looking for attention, you are looking for love, you are looking to be popular, and depending on how you identify with your sexual orientation, you are looking for a boy. Right? And so, he plays on that.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #13</th>
<th>Perpetrators prey probably on girls who are alone, and girls who aren’t together.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participant #14</td>
<td>Male and female exploiters and recruiters have shared with me openly that they know exactly what to say and when to say it, just depending on where she is. So, again I’ve seen them recruit and attempt to recruit both ends of the spectrum.</td>
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CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to use attachment theory as a framework to examine the pimping relationships in CSEC. Semi-structured interviews with CSEC stakeholders were coded to examine risk and protective factors associated with CSEC that focus on attachment-related themes, such as relationships with others, perceptions of self, social support, and trauma bonding. Findings support previous studies that identify a history of early sexual abuse and having a dysfunctional family as common risk factors for CSEC, and the results suggest that insecure attachment styles stemming from these family factors may put a child at risk for CSEC and trauma bonding.

Specifically, the stakeholders’ responses support previous research (e.g., Lloyd, 2011) showing that early sexual abuse is a significant risk factor for CSEC. Furthermore, the stakeholders describe CSEC victims who are more likely coming from broken homes or unstructured families. The findings suggest that from the perspective of the stakeholders, these early sexual experiences and dysfunctional families may result in children developing insecure attachment styles. That is, the results support Bowlby’s (1980) attachment theory in that the stakeholders describe CSEC victims who have negative internal working models in either how they see themselves (self image) and how they see other people (other image). Children with secure attachment styles have positive self and other images; whereas, children with insecure attachment styles have at least one negative internal model (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bowlby, 1980).

The majority of stakeholders describe CSEC victims as having a negative self internal working model. For example, several of the participants said that due to early sexual abuse experiences, CSEC victims feel they deserve to be treated disrespectfully. Twelve participants mentioned that CSEC victims have low self-esteem and self-confidence. They feel they are not loveable and that they do not deserve anything good. As participant #14
said, “They [girls] have so little self-worth. I think so many of them think so little of themselves that they don’t really feel or know that they can be and do something else.”

In contrast, data on the internal working model about others (other image) were conflicting. On the one hand, three stakeholder participants clarified that even before engaging in prostitution, victims had no trust towards others. A participant mentioned that it was difficult for victims to trust other people, open up, and share their feelings because of the shame they felt about their previous sexual abuse. In addition, two other participants pointed out that children who display withdrawal behaviors and seem to be isolated from peers are at greater risk of getting manipulated and victimized by pimps. These results support that CSEC victims may have negative other image.

However, many of the participants describe CSEC victims who appear to have a positive internal working model of others in that they report that victims can be easily manipulated by traffickers and trust them. Several participants mentioned that girls are looking for approval and acceptance from other people and that is why they trust pimps easily and fall in love with them. Thus, the results support that CSEC victims may have insecure attachment styles in that they appear to have a negative self-image, and either a positive or negative other image. Specifically, according to Bartholomew (1990), CSEC victims may have a negative self image and positive other image (insecure preoccupied attachment) or a negative self image and negative other image (insecure dismissing attachment style).

The results of this study also support that stakeholders view CSEC victims with insecure attachment styles as vulnerable to the entrapment strategies of pimps. Participants describe CSEC victims who are seeking approval and bonding and getting manipulated by traffickers. For example, stakeholders report that traffickers “look for that girl who they know they can manipulate. And they know which ones have the low self-worth”, and that they target children ”who wants to be loved, who wants to have affection, and wants to date someone maybe older and the trafficker knows all of that and he plays on all that and then he comes in and provides all those things that are missing”.

The results also support that CSEC victims may have developed trauma bonding toward their pimps. The strong emotional connection between victim and perpetrators in trauma bonding happens when perpetrators isolate and control the victim, and intermittently
reward and abuse the victim (Dutton & Painter, 1993). In addition, due to trauma bonding, victims may not recognize themselves as victims and their pimps as perpetrators (Reid, 2013). Responses from stakeholders in the present study support the existence of trauma bonding between CSEC victims and pimps. Stakeholders described that many of the CSEC victims often do not identify themselves as victims, but insist on protecting their pimps. They tend to believe they are in a relationship with their pimps. Moreover, pimps take victims under control by moving them to unfamiliar places and taking all their money. Stakeholders also reported that the pimps threaten victims and are sexually and physically violent towards them.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

There are number of limitations to this study, most notably sample size which is a small convenience sample of 15 participants. Moreover, the present study included only semi-structured interviews with stakeholders. Interviews with victims of CSEC that are included in the larger study will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how attachment affects risk and protective factors for CSEC. Finally, most of the stakeholders in this study described female CSEC victims; only one of the participants had experience working with male victims. Future research could focus on male victims to investigate gender differences in risk and protective factors related to CSEC.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

The stakeholders report that having a special someone, a person to connect to and bond with, could be a protective factor for at risk children from entering into prostitution; it could also help CSEC victims to break trauma bonding with their pimps and get out of prostitution. As one participant stated, “having a constant person who shows unconditional love for them is a huge protective factor.”

The stakeholders suggested attachment-informed strategies for prevention and intervention for CSEC. Many of the participants pointed out that victims are more capable of breaking the trauma bonding and coming out of the prostitution life if they can connect to another person. They all referred to this person as a “special someone” who can gain the victim’s trust and connect to them. Stakeholders talked about the need for mentoring
programs as an intervention strategy that could provide an opportunity for victims to connect and bond to a positive role model. This could be considered as a surrogate attachment, which can break trauma bonding between victims and their pimps.

Stakeholders suggest that prevention efforts target at risk children who are young. One participant stated “we try to find at risk children in the middle and high schools which it is already too late and we have missed the bus. We need to find them when they are in the elementary schools.” The findings suggest that age-appropriate secondary prevention programs can target at risk elementary school-aged children with insecure attachment styles. Specifically, mentoring programs that provide positive attachment figures and that address negative self image and trust issues associated with preoccupied and dismissing insecure attachment styles may provide a protective factor for CSEC victims.

**CONCLUSION**

In summary, this study addresses CSEC, a multibillion-dollar industry in the United States with over 240,000 victims, some who are younger than 12 years old (Reid & Jones, 2011). The study provides some insights about the nature of the pimping relationship between sex traffickers and victims through the lens of attachment theory. The study replicates and extends on previous studies that identify risk factors (e.g., history of abuse, lack of positive relationships with adults) associated with CSEC by providing evidence that attachment theory can be useful in describing potential mechanisms by which early family dysfunction makes some children and adolescents vulnerable to entering into relationships with pimps. The stakeholders describe CSEC victims, who because of their history of abuse and a lack of positive attachment figures, develop perceptions of self and other that can make them vulnerable to traffickers’ entrapment and enmeshment strategies and trauma bonding. The stakeholders’ responses support that attachment theory is useful in identifying a pattern of risk and protective factors that can help understand the dynamics of the pimping relationship and can be applied to the development of prevention and intervention programs.
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