Improving the System Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation among Children and Youth

An Examination of Identification Strategies and County Service Provision

A Panel Presentation to the 2021 CWDA Conference

Panelists

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State and federal policy require identification

2015: Creation of the CSEC Program in Child Welfare and opt-in funding allocation. (SB 855 – CA)

- *Clarified* that CSE is child abuse
- Provides funding to counties that create interagency protocols guiding *identification* and response to children who are trafficked for sex.

2016: Preventing Sex Trafficking and Supporting Families Act (federal)

- Title IV-E agencies must *identify* children and youth in their care who are victims of or at-risk of sex trafficking

2017: CA implementation of Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (SB 794)

- Identify youth experiencing or at risk of sex trafficking among children receiving child welfare services
- Receive training in the identification, documentation, and determination of services

But how do we effectively identify youth who are experiencing or at-risk of sex trafficking?

You can't stop what you don't see…

The most effective way to improve identification of youth who have experienced exploitation is through universal screening.

What is Universal Screening?

- Use a validated instrument
- Screen all youth meeting a pre-determined criteria for vulnerability:
  - Involved with child welfare, juvenile justice, specialized mental health, or other system serving youth who have experienced trauma or have unmet basic needs
  - Starting at age 10
- Use results of screening to guide next steps, including a full assessment of needs, and further investigation if needed to confirm victimization

Universal Screening is supported by data…

- Without universal screening, 75% of youth experience ongoing exploitation for 2 or more years before identification

- Most youth don't self-report: 75% of youth don't view their experience as abuse or exploitation

- Exploitation often begins earlier than we expect:
  - 50% are under the age of 14 when exploitation begins
  - Nearly 10% of youth ages 10-11 have clear or possible indicators of trafficking

Universal Screening is supported by policy guidance…

National Advisory Committee on the Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth in the US – Report on Best Practices and Recommendations to States (2020):

- **Recommendation 2.4** Implement policies and procedures that require universal screening for all children and youth receiving services through runaway homeless youth, Title IV-E funded, and unaccompanied minor programs.

- "Screening tools should be based on rigorous scientific evidence and undergo validation in relevant populations."

- Recommends universal training on indicators of trafficking, and advanced training for staff who are responsible for screening.

Key Takeaways

- To ensure youth who are at-risk of or experiencing sex trafficking are identified early, implement a universal screening protocol for all youth age 10 and over.

- To ensure your screening protocol accurately differentiates between youth who do and do not have indicators of trafficking, use a tool that has been validated for your setting (see NAC report for examples).

- Provide initial and ongoing training to staff on recognizing the signs of trafficking.

Next…. Learn from a county that has been implementing universal screening utilizing a validated tool, the Commercial Sexual Exploitation – Identification Tool (CSE-IT)

Monterey County and the CSE IT

Monterey County was among the first counties to utilize the CSE IT as a Pilot County, and continues its strong partnership with West Coast Children's Clinic today.

- **2015:** Monterey County Identifies the CSE IT as it's Standard Screening Tool.

- **REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION:** Since the framework of our program was developed as a regional effort, utilization of the CSE IT also extended to our Child Welfare partners in Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties. This has evolved to meet the specific needs of each county.

- **STANDARDIZATION ACROSS MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM:** All partners, including child serving government entities and community based non profits were trained to utilize the CSE IT and encouraged to create protocols for screening all youth served between 10-18.

- **2018: CSE IT H&I PILOT:** In 2018, Monterey County began piloting the CSE IT Intake and Hotline Tool. Prior to this, the CSE IT was not utilized in the front end. This pilot let to universal screening on the front end for all intake calls regarding a child between the ages of 10-18.

- **2021: WEB BASED CSE IT APPLICATION:** In 2021, Monterey will be continuing its long partnership with West Coast to pilot the web based CSE IT program, continuing to build upon our agency's capacity to screen and identify youth impacted by trafficked and exploitation.

CSE IT Screening and Identification

UNIVERSAL FRONT END SCREENING (CSE IT H&I)

- All hotline referrals for ages 10-18 are screened

- Screening occurs regardless of any mention or concern for SA or Exploitation

- Universal screening helps identify youth who may be highly at risk or in the early stages of grooming

- Outcome of CSE IT H&I will determine whether a referral is identified as CSE IT from the get-go.

CYCLICAL BACK END SCREENING (CSE IT LONG FORM)

- CSE IT Long Form is utilized by social workers with open dependency caseloads

- Current process is to screen identified CSEC youth, youth for whom the SW has a suspicion of CSE, as well as any youth who has returned from an AWOL

- Screening is to be done for these youth every 6 months, as well as upon the return of an AWOL.

- Long Form also utilized by Investigating social workers when the hotline tool yielded "no concern" but the investigating SW later receives information that causes concerns for CSE.

CSE IT Screen:
A Three Tiered Response System

Immediate Crisis: 120 Minutes

- Identified through the hotline as a **CLEAR CONCERN**

- Requested as immediate response by first responder or reporter

- Goal: meet the immediate health, safety, and basic needs of the youth

- Include a Social Worker, Law Enforcement, an Advocate from Rape Crisis, and Child Advocacy Center Staff

Non-Emergent: 10 Days

- Identified through the hotline with as **CLEAR CONCERN** with NO immediate danger, OR as **POSSIBLE CONCERN** at the discretion of the ER Supervisors

- A **CLEAR CONCERN** or **POSSIBLE CONCERN** screen from the back end staff which is relayed to the MDT Coordinator

- Goal: meet ongoing needs, address concerns, risky behaviors, harm reduction, natural supports services/resources available

- Include: a Social Worker, CSEC Advocate, CBH, MCOE, and others already working with youth.

Ongoing: Monthly

- Monthly case review of all identified CSEC cases/referrals including Probation Cases.

- Includes updates on recent CSE IT Screens, and data collection for number of screens and date of original screen.

- Goal: review identified cases and address new risks or issues with the cases.

- Includes a SW Staff, Community Partners, Behavioral Health, Probation, Law Enforcement, Public Health, Office of Ed, etc.

Challenges & Successes with CSE IT

SUCCESSES

- Exclusive utilization amongst MDT partners in Monterey County

- Universal Screening for hotline calls ages 10-18.

- Utilization of CSE IT has provided a tangible and formal access point and threshold for staff to know when to activate the CSE Protocol and MDT

- Demographic information tracked via utilization of the CSE IT is beneficial for forecasting needs and targeting resources within this population.

- Questions asked as a part of universal screenings has enhanced the global assessment process for screening social workers.

CHALLENGES

- Keeping staff trained amongst community partners has been challenging as new staff are hired. Community partners creating and implementing protocols for tool utilization has also been a challenge.

- Universal screening on the back end, as well as consistency in regular screening has been a challenge.

- Having a history of screens done on specific youth is a challenge. We currently do not have a mechanism or a system for storing historical screening info on specific youth.

- Data tracking overall is challenging. There doesn't currently exist a good data entry or tracking system. Mo. County has created our own tracking tool within Excel.

Successes & Challenges Post Identification

SUCCESSES

- A robust and engaged multidisciplinary team, that includes a wide variety of disciplines and areas of expertise.
- A well structured, consistent, and survivor informed outreach program (community events, printed materials, tools for staff, and an annual awareness symposium).
- Strong relationships between MDT partners and service providers. Communication between agencies is fairly seamless, even outside of monthly MDT meetings.
- Continuing to participate piloting and utilizing newly emerging resources and partnerships (i.e., Web Based CSE IT application, PACT Regional Cohort, CSEC Action Team)
- Clearly delineated roles and responsibilities of various agencies and CBO's
- Strong partnership with Juvenile Probation Partners (shared contracts, trainings, resources, etc.)

CHALLENGES

- Evolving to then next stage of the trafficking program, including: identification of home based placement options, therapeutic services for survivors and their families, etc.
- Keeping up with ongoing training needs for the steady influx of new social workers.
- Answering the question of "we've identified, now what?" (lack of services in smaller counties, how to provide support to families that are protective but lack support and resources to be informed on this issue, etc.)
- Supporting MDT Partners in finding solutions for similar challenges that they have within their agency.
- A sense that while the initial identification and response were well developed by CDSS in response to legislative changes, the "what happens after" question has been largely left unanswered.

Evaluating California's CSEC Program: Implementation, Outcomes, and Impact

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The California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP)

CCWIP is a collaborative venture between the University of California at Berkeley (UCB) and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).

The project is housed in the School of Social Welfare, and provides agency staff, policymakers, researchers, and the public with access to critical outcome information on California's child welfare system.

CCWIP is supported by the California Department of Social Services, Casey Family Programs, and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

Evaluating California's CSEC Program

The impact of CSEC-related legislation and policy on youth outcomes and child welfare system performance remains largely unstudied.

In June 2014, the California legislature enacted SB 855 (Chapter 29, Statutes of 2014), which created an Opt-in CSEC Program that provides counties with funding and guidance in order to serve youth and families impacted by commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking.

Since its inception, approximately 75% of counties have opted into the state CSEC Program. California is now well-positioned to evaluate the impact of SB 855.

Evaluating California's CSEC Program

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has invested in a multi-year policy evaluation to study the impact of Senate Bill 855.

The following slides describe the upcoming policy evaluation which will be conducted collaboratively by the following:

CDSS Child Trafficking Response Unit

CDSS Research, Automation and Data Division

The Urban Institute

The California Child Welfare Indicators Project

Process

Goal: The process study will identify, describe, and measure the extent to which services, staffing, and organizational structures changed during SB 855 implementation within and across counties.

Specifically, we will determine the ways in which participating counties utilized SB 855 funds and implemented:

- Interagency protocols

- Multidisciplinary teaming

- Specialized child welfare service provision

- Additional intervention and prevention strategies

Process

This evaluation will use our **Continuous Quality Improvement** (CQI) approach to evaluation. CQI is an iterative process of planning a project activity or strategy, implementing it, evaluating it, and then using immediate evaluation results to improve ongoing planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA)

This approach combines rigorous evaluation methods with the real-world contingencies associated with implementing complex social programs and policies such as SB 855.

Process

Research questions will include:

What are the components of SB 855 in terms of services? Staff? Organizational structure?

What were the barriers and facilitators to implementation?

How did the implementation of SB 855 vary across counties and why?

To what extent did agencies within counties collaborate to implement SB 855?

What are the key successes of SB 855? How do those vary across counties?

What are best practices for implementing local CSEC response programs?

Did the COVID-19 pandemic disrupt or facilitate CSEC services or protocols?

Outcome

Goal: Describe cross-system performance and examine child-level outcomes for youth with known or suspected experiences of CSEC following SB 855 Program Implementation.

Areas of inquiry will include:

- Child protection responses to CSEC

- Child welfare outcomes

- Cross-agency social service receipt

Outcome

Research questions will include:

Among youth that met the state's definition of commercially sexually exploited children before and after SB 855 implementation, what were their experiences in the child welfare system related to:

- Safety?

- Permanency?

- Wellbeing?

Did the pattern of youth identified as being at-risk or confirmed victims of commercial sexual exploitation change after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Outcomes

Research questions will include:

To the extent that data availability allows, how did these youth encounter, access and utilize services following experiences of CSE:

o Emergency medical care?
o Mental and behavioral health services?
o Reproductive health services?
o Preventative healthcare?
o Education system?
o Probation services?
o Welfare support?
o Parenting support and childcare?

Impact

Goal: Assess the impact of SB 855 implementation on:

- *Multiagency service utilization*

- *System-involvement*

- *Key child welfare outcomes*

    Safety

    Permanency

    Well-being

Impact

Determine the ways in which participating counties utilized SB 855 funds and understand the extent to which participating counties implemented:

- *Interagency protocols*

- *Multidisciplinary teaming*

- *Specialized child welfare service provision*

- *Additional intervention and prevention strategies*

Data Sources

Annual CSEC Program County Plan Reviews

Stakeholder Surveys

Site Visits and Key Informant Interviews

Linked Service Records and Administrative Data

Questions? Please Contact:

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