Meet them beneath the surface, or wherever they are: A Harm Reduction Approach to Working with Youth and Young Adults Engaged in Sex Trade

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Brief Bio

- Coordinated Street Outreach Programs with young adults and adults working in the sex trades
- Worked in DV for over 10 years
  - Housing
  - LGBTQ
  - Shelter
- Completed PhD & Adjunct Professor of Social Work at PSU
- Former Sex Worker
Learning Objectives

- Define and clarify harm reduction principles and provide examples of harm reduction based services with people in the sex trades
- Explore the intersections of Trauma-Informed Practice and Harm Reduction Principles
- Recognize and acknowledge concerns with utilizing a harm reduction approach and identify concrete strategies for applying harm reduction in your work with people engaged in sex trade
Why do youth trade sex?
One story

- 15 year old, white, woman
- Found by law enforcement in Arizona with 29 year old boyfriend
- Sold sex to buy drugs for her and boyfriend
- Brought to agency by FBI officers because she was trafficked
- Engaged in Forensic Interview with a sexual assault forensic interviewer & advocate
Service Provider Approach

- Harm Reduction
- Trauma-Informed
- Sex Trade
Harm Reduction Principles

- Aim to improve public health and sees the humane treatment of all people as its core value
- Show unconditional respect and caring
- Accept drug use as a reality
- Explore values and biases about drug use
- Empower and affirm users as the primary agents for improving their lives.
- Recognize that social injustices affect people’s vulnerability to and capacity to deal effectively with drug related harms
HR Principles cont.

- Set of practical strategies to reduce the negative and social consequences of drug use.
- Concerned with the quality of life over drug use cessation
- Provide options in a non-coercive and non-judgmental way
- Strategies range along a spectrum from safer use, to managed use, to abstinence
- Reinforces successes; avoids condemning clients who experience challenges
- Does not remove a coping mechanism until another is in place
Trauma Informed Care

From Trauma Informed Oregon

“Trauma Informed Care (TIC) recognizes that traumatic experiences **terrify, overwhelm, and violate** the individual”

(https://traumainformedoregon.org)
Trauma Informed Oregon

The Foundations of Trauma Informed Care

- Commitment to Trauma Awareness
- Understanding the Impact of Historical Trauma and Oppression

Agencies Demonstrate Trauma Informed Care with Policies, Procedures and Practices that:

- Create Safe Context through:
  - Physical safety
  - Emotional safety:
    - Trustworthiness
    - Clear and consistent boundaries
    - Transparency
    - Predictability

- Recognize and Honor the Individual through:
  - Relationship
  - Respect
  - Compassion
  - Acceptance and Non-judgment
  - Mutuality
  - Collaboration

- Restore Power through:
  - Choice
  - Empowerment
  - Strengths focus
  - Skill building
Sex Trades

- Range of sexual activities that are traded or exchanged for something of value including
  - money, housing, food, transportation, drugs, or anything else that someone needs
- The experiences of people in the sex trades can include a combination of choice, circumstance, coercion, or force
Systems of Power & Control

- Education
- Healthcare
- Housing
- Religion
- Criminal Justice
- Legal
- Department of Human Services
- Child Welfare
- Immigration
- Government
- Employment/Labor
- Family
- Social Service
- Military
- Economy
This “power and control wheel” was created by Emi Koyama and Lauren Martin to illustrate how domestic violence shelters may inadvertently abuse power and control over survivors who seek services from them. In no way is this meant to discount the fact that advocates have been doing, and continue to do, extremely important and life-saving work. Rather, it is meant to incite discussion as to what we still need to work on in our empowerment-based and social change advocacy. Please contact Emi at emi@eminism.org.
Barriers or Resistance to HR?

- Work in a “no substance using” environment
- Work with mostly minors and it is illegal for them to smoke, let alone get high, use drugs, or drink alcohol
Responding to Youth and Young Adult Experiences

- Prioritize youth voices
- Safe harbor laws
- Adultification
- Harm Reduction Housing
- Access to Food
- Develop Peer led and accessible street-based and comprehensive drop-in services
- Center trans women and girls of color to meet the needs of less marginalized
What does this require?

✿ Engage in deep safety planning with your clients
  ✿ Consider the levels of power & control they interact with
  ✿ When or if they plan to meet up with their intimate partners
  ✿ Communication, self-care, supplies, etc. needed for when they trade sex
  ✿ Around sexual health, safety, boundaries, desires
  ✿ Navigating housing, employment, transportation
What can you take away?

- Overcoming barriers to using a harm reduction approach
- Help broaden access to and improve gender-affirming health care
- Participate in relationship-building across systems and services to help develop living-wage employment opportunities
- Create safe and supportive housing and place protocols that are culturally responsive, trans and non-binary affirming
Thank you!

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Please feel free to reach out to me with any feedback or questions.


