Sexual Exploitation: The Crisis and Eradicative Solution

Tonnie Adams Bracey
Northern Illinois University, Z1691985@students.niu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/ctrnonprofit-studentprojects

Part of the Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons, Leadership Studies Commons, Mass Communication Commons, Nonprofit Studies Commons, Organization Development Commons, Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, Social Influence and Political Communication Commons, Social Media Commons, Social Work Commons, and the Urban Studies and Planning Commons

Recommended Citation
https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/ctrnonprofit-studentprojects/24

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Nonprofit and NGO Studies at Huskie Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of Huskie Commons. For more information, please contact jschumacher@niu.edu.
Sexual Exploitation:

The Crisis, and Eradicative Solution
Abstract

French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr wrote, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” I find this to be true in our current era of the digital age. Although technology has gifted a newly improved and vast method of making worldwide connections and broadening our perceptions and views, a change in how we communicate has conveniently presented itself, but the historic pattern of how we handle these new advancements have indeed stayed the same. Smart phones are a mainstream vessel employing the world with a plethora of information while giving all sorts of people access to individual’s lives and personal spaces. As technology grows, laws to keep up with the fast-paced world are either not able to fully encompass the protection needed or have yet to be established. As history predicts, with the lack of government management of the ever-evolving digital technology, uncivilized behavior or immoral acts have followed suit. Sexual impressions in society and correlating relationships have exposed its ugly side with inhumane, egregious acts. If sexual exploitation was an issue before the digital age, it is ever more prevalent today. This paper will explain sexual exploitation, its detrimental effects and how digital technology has played a crucial role in emphasizing and spreading sexual harms, and with lack of government management, how NGOs play a crucial role in combating the issue. I will explain how implementing care to the most vulnerable and for the creation of ThehumanR.A.S.E., (an NGO entity designed to specifically and ruthlessly address stemming causes and penetrate grass root issues) is vital for social change and ratification of the current sexual health crisis identified as sexual exploitation.
Introduction

As a passionate NGO student immersed in an array of social difficulties affecting our human condition, I am obliged with the challenge of finding the area of social concern that will receive the most benefit as well as being the most impactful in my mission-driven servitude. After many years of analyzing and partaking in a great deal of public discussions (involving an array of social conditions within social media), I have concluded that sexual exploitation is the most important social issue that negatively affect the human condition. It is a complex problem that deals with the well-being of our mental, physical and emotional state. A problem that directly deals with the civility in humanity we claim to have evolved into. This is a factor on a global scale simultaneously affecting us all. Ignoring the problem doesn’t make it go away, it enables it, and it is time to confront the elephant in the community. When we end sexual exploitation, we will end a great deal of the world’s troubles. And with this focus, I have found my calling.

There must be mass awareness of this area of darkness and exposure of its causes and detrimental effects. Not being educated or aware of the harms have placed vulnerable persons in critical harm.

What is Sexual Exploitation?
Sexual exploitation happens when people in superior positions take advantage of their power and control to victimize someone for sexual means. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Sexual exploitation is defined as an “Actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.” (https://www.un.org/en/global-issues). Blatant sexual abuse, sex trafficking, prostitution, pornography, sexual extortion (threatening to send sexual depictions of someone for gain), and incest are all included in the harmful acts of sexual exploitation. These are the areas of specific harm that must be targeted and brought to broad cognizance awareness throughout communities.

Sexual Abuse, usually forced, is any sexual activity performed without given consent. Sexual harassment is also considered sexual abuse as well as being exposed to and seeing sexual acts or sexual abuse.

Sex trafficking is the forced, fraud or coercion of a commercial sex act for the purpose monetary, emotional, or sexual gain. Victims are sought out and targeted by perpetrators they know, ranging from family members, spouses, and friends of family to known and unknown members of their communities. Sex trafficking victims' range in all age groups, are male and female from all sorts of life and backgrounds. There are myths that victims of sex trafficking are kidnapped and bound against their will, “but most traffickers use psychological means such as, tricking, defrauding, manipulating or threatening victims into providing commercial sex”, (https://polarisproject.org/myths-facts-and-statistics/).
Prostitution, the occupation of supplying sexual favors for compensation. The ‘National Harm Reduction Coalition’, (an NGO founded in 1993) describes three reasons why sex workers resort to prostitution, out of “choice- a person chooses to do sex work, regardless of whether they have other options, circumstance-a person may not choose to engage in sex work under different circumstances, but sex work is providing them with something they need right now, coercion- a person is being forced by someone else to engage in sex work”

https://harmreduction.org/issues/sex-work/. Although some feel prostitution is a “choice”, It’s important to note that most people involved in prostitution are subjected to inhumane conditions. A study found that 73% of those in prostitution reported physical assault, 62% report having been raped since and during prostitution, 67% met criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD (leveled on the same level of combat veterans), and on average 92% stated that they wanted to leave prostitution and would if they had a viable alternative. Overall, prostitution is a form of work that disembodies its employee for the paid service of placing its customers in a subordinate position of entitlement. Customers use this transaction for the privilege to take advantage of the worker for disposable use.

Pornography, deriving from the Greek term pornographos (porne or pornos referring to “prostitution” and graphos meaning “written” (encyclopedia.com) was then contrived to the French word pornographie (quora.com). The literal term of pornography is written works of prostitutes. I have found that it has evolved into a modern conception of explicit or “erotic” depiction of a range of sexual acts to invoke an internal and/or physical response of arousal for its consumer. Pornography is a harmful means of sexual exploitation because of its predatorial use, its influence on sexual abuse, and cognitive consequences that distort healthy sexual
relationships within consensual partners. Pornography is an industry encompassing individual organizations that profit from the exploitation of women and children. Leading in the pornographic industry, ‘Aylo’ (formerly known as ‘Mind Geek’) is an organization whose sale strategy of free porn was developed to target adolescent boys exploiting them at an age when their minds are susceptible to X-rated adult content and easily influenced by novelty and risk taking. Studies have shown that majority of pornography contain violent sex acts and in return normalize sexual violence against women; contributing to domestic abuse. Pornography is harmful to male viewers. Porn is addictive. Young men struggle with impotency and need help being aroused by a human being. They then resort to prostitutes to fulfil desires triggered through porn use. A detriment concern happens when viewers get bored and seek out more deviant porn (child sexual abuse (CSA), and hardcore porn). I would argue that porn is a gateway for sex trafficking of women and children. Mentally unstable men who are bored with porn and no longer able to be sexually satisfied with healthy sex practices, have uncontrollable urges to fulfill needs derived from porn and are currently a major threat to women and children.

Sexual Extortion (also known as sextortion) is exploitation that involves blackmailing someone with threats of exposing their intimate images for a demand. The perpetrator knowingly uses their power to manipulate the victim with intimidation or trickery into fulfilling commands of sending more nude photos, videos, or implementing sexual acts. In most cases the victim knows their perpetrator and can be a spouse, a family member, a friend, or co-worker. In other cases, sexual extortion happens from online relationships or theft and hacking digital devices.
Incest, sexual abuse by a family member. This exploitation involves someone using their age, power, knowledge and experience to coerce and intimidate a family member into compromised positions of sexual abuse. Incest is the most underreported form of sexual exploitation. Many cases are never reported, and victims are unable to speak out until adulthood.

Online Sexual Exploitation

Social media is a widespread tool being used to spread and enforce unhealthy concepts of sexuality as well as creating ideals and enforcing stereotypes that play a role in how women and children are perceived and valued. With broadened exposure that online platforms bring, these concepts are perpetuated, contributing to the ongoing cycle of sexual exploitation. As technology advances and demand rises, sexual exploitation will be an evolving form of physical, emotional and psychological harm, IF we don’t act now.

The Most Vulnerable

With the inevitable vast exposure and social convenience that came with advancements of cell phones, Smart Phones are now a lethal commodity in the hands of children and deemed the most prone to online sexual exploitation. Children are easily accessible and exposed to online
predators and adult content due to lack of governmental regulation, censorship availability, parental awareness and challenges to monitor and control. Social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, and Snapchat are platform culprits of these harms, and it is a saddening truth to know as more information is being revealed, corporations have been more concerned with monetary profit than the welfare of children. (Kari Paul, 2024). Zuckerberg tells parents of social media victims at Senate hearing: ‘I’m sorry for everything you’ve been through’. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/jan/31/tiktok-meta-x-congress-hearing-child-sexual-exploitation). (Fact: There were 82 million reported cases of child sexual exploitation in 2022 to the National Center of Missing and Exploited Children, a substantial increase from the 46,000 reported cases in 2016.)

Sex trafficking and prostitution are gender-based forms of sexual exploitation. Men are the main stakeholders of the “global sex trade” as well as its consumers. (Halverson, H. 2019. Ending Sexploitation Podcast https://sexploitation.libsyn.com/podcast). People who are in the described vulnerable positions are primarily women, and children as well.

Persons are vulnerable to trafficking if they are in unstable living conditions, have a history of being abused, have a caretaker who are addicted to drugs or are addicted to drugs themselves, run away from home, have no support group, and are in financial despair. Predators are aware of these vulnerabilities and are prone to target people within these demographic groups baiting victims with manipulative scripts of rescue. Women of color exist as the vast majority who fall within this range.
African American women are sexually exploited through mediums depicted through the Jezebel stereotype. “Jezebel is a name with biblical origins that has come to signify an oversexed or hypersexual Black woman. Harris-Perry (2011) found that...stereotypes about African American women have been prominent in political and popular culture since the Civil War and influence how Black women perceive themselves and are perceived by others.” (Golash-Boza, 2022, pg. 140). “The stereotype of Jezebel was derived from the sexual exploitation and victimization of Black women, often of a way to justify sexual relations with enslaved women (Collins, 2004). Black women, seen in this role, are often viewed as promiscuous, loose, immoral, sexual aggressors, and lacking sexual restraint.” (Bond, Leblanc, Williams, Gabriel, Amutah-Onukagha, (2021). Race-Based Sexual Stereotypes, Gendered Racism, and Sexual Decision Making Among Young Black Cisgendered Women. Health Education Behav., 48(3), 295-305. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8491461/

“Latinas are most likely to be portrayed as either hot-blooded women anxious for sexual fulfillment or maids anxious to please (Rodrigues 1997).” Golash-Boza, 2022, pg.141

Although there has been improvement with an increase of positive character depictions in the media for African American and Latina women, these characters are still overshadowed with modernized versions of the Jezebel and “hot-blooded” stereotypes. In the billion-dollar music industry, Latina and African American female rappers like Belcalis Marlenis Almanzar (stage name Cardi B), Megan Jovon Ruth Pete (stage name Megan the Stallion) and Janae Nierah Wherry (stage name Sexy Red) personify these over-sexualized characters. With sexually suggestive and explicit lyrics, as well as visual content, according to the definition of
pornography, these three women depict just that. Their works are displayed on mass media platforms on radio, television and social media streams; public “family-friendly” based platforms.

Sexual Script Theory (or SST by John H. Gagnon and William Simon) explains ideas of how male and females are intended to sexually interact with each other and how sexual behaviors are perpetuated and passed down socially from generation to generation. Seeing that the same Jezebel stereotype is being imposed in the mass media since slavery and is even more prevalent today, SST theory is proven true within social beliefs about African American women. This is indeed a stemming cause of sexual exploitation and an “elephant in the community” that is imperative of addressing for social change.

The Solution

When addressing any crisis in life, I believe it is necessary to dig into root causes of an issue. I am a resident of North Carolina and figured this is where I would start. Out of the non-profit organizations (NGOs) fighting here that I have researched, I found that they are all active in advocacy with spreading awareness and fighting for political policies to prevent exploitation. Significant efforts are being placed into passing two bills that will benefit victims. One bill is the H.R. 7137- Trafficking Survivors Relief Act of 2024 that will protect victims of sex trafficking from receiving charges on their police reports and provide judicial defense in court (introduced to the House Committee on the Judiciary). Another is the H.R. 5856- Federick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Reauthorization Act of 2023 that will grant $1 billion dollars
to Health and Human Services over an expansion of 5 years to pay for signage and other awareness tools, and employ and educate sex trafficking survivors so that may reenter society as well as programs that aid with housing, legal services, and other necessities (received in the Senate). Although this will be a great legislative accomplishment that will provide tremendous support and administer aid to victims, stemming issues that directly target the dehumanizing of the most vulnerable, or the forums that normalize unhealthy concepts and sex practices manifesting in men are neglected. There is a societal need for an organization that will directly address the crisis of sexual exploitation with proactive solutions. On March 13, 2024, I concluded to take on that need and founded an NGO to do just that.

The Non-Governmental Organization

Name of Organization

‘The Human R.A.S.E.’ - Rally Against Sexual Exploitation

The name is a play on “human race” signifying unity and solidarity amongst race in relation to an oppression affecting everyone.

Mission

TheHumanRASE is a mission-based charitable organization with a goal of eradicating sexual exploitation and its harm to all persons involved.
Vision

In replace of mediums used to normalize sexual harm, we will popularize healthy sex practices and dispose negative conceptions that influence sexual abuse. Activism “branding” with visual content will influence empowerment and social transformation needed to create impactful social change. Through advocation, spreading awareness, educating men, women, and youth of healthy sex practices we will win the crisis of sexual exploitation, targeting root causes within cultures and society.

Another strategy to spread social awareness is with a youth forum. Approved youth who take a pledge of respecting their own bodies and the bodies of others, with “pledge bracelets” given away free to all youth (with parents’ approval and participation). These bracelets are worn as a consistent reminder that youth are cared for, and that their bodies matter. The bracelets also signify activism and unity against sexual exploitation which will display hashtag #thehumanrase.

Past, Present, Planned Activities

TheHumanRASE is a mission-based charitable organization with a goal of eradicating sexual exploitation and its harms to all persons involved. As is, the nature of all our activities will be for advocacy and charitable purposes working towards that vision.
1. **The Pledge of Self-Love and Preservation with “Consent for Change.”**

TheHumanRASE corporation will be presented to the Wake County community with its campaign of “Consent for Change.” A movement to encourage social change with activism of peaceful assembly to combat sexual exploitation through pledges. Pledges will be offered through verbal, visual, and written consent from members of the community. The goal is to encourage mass social awareness of sexual exploitation. To invoke activism for social change through encouraged participation through pledges from community members to refrain from any activity that contributes to sexual harm to themselves or others. “Consent for Change” will also be acknowledged visually by the wearing of TheHumanRASE t-shirts and ‘pledge bracelets. TheHumanRASE aims to create unity and solidarity amongst members of the community. The ‘pledge’ awareness literature and materials will be obtained from donations (first donations have already been contributed directly from TheHumanRASE’s President), and from fundraising. Implementation of the movement will be conducted by TheHumanRASE supporters and will continue to be ongoing until TheHumanRASE has reached its mission of eradicating sexual abuse.

2. **Safe Places for Uncomfortable Conversation**

Until TheHumanRASE corporation has occupancy of a physical location for its headquarters it will create spaces for communication via its social media accounts and its website to conduct interviews with single adults, married couples, parents, persons of the sex-trade industries
(former victim’s, workers and consumers) to encourage public awareness, practice empathy, and engage in open conversations about taboo topics within the community. Some of these topics will discuss incest, rape, pornography, prostitution, stemming causes of unhealthy fetishes, and other social perversions that are influencers of sexual abuse and other causes for miscommunication and sexual disconnection within marriages. Our goal is to give voice to victims and their internalized challenges that stem from sexual abuse, miseducation, learned helplessness, unhealthy sexual practices, and stereotypes within genders. These will be 1 hr. interviews and at the conclusion of each, TheHumanRASE will provide mission-intended resources aimed to give solutions designed specifically to the interviewee’s needs and concerns of struggles that stem from sexual abuse. TheHumanRASE will create volunteer opportunities for trained and established professionals to give emotional support to interviewees before, during and after interviews. Funding for production will be obtained through donations, grants, and fundraising.

3. The RASE Program

With growth of our organization and corporate partnerships, in the future ThehumanRASE will serve as a means to provide sustainable independence for former victims through our RASE Program. The program will give victims access to resources for counseling workshops, G.E.D. completion, sustainable housing, and job opportunity through available employment at TheHumanRASE; following all mission-driven practices for the benefit to our constituents. Funding for the RASE program will be obtained from grants, donations, and fundraising.
4. **Advocation Through Broad Awareness Fundraising**

With ongoing training, research, and professional collaborations, TheHumanRASE aims to educate the public about the many harms of sexual exploitation; in all its forms. We will equip potential victims, high-risk persons, and the families of both, with public knowledge and awareness that aids to end all forms of sexual abuse.

(a) *Community Fundraising Events.* TheHumanRASE will partake in vendor made available opportunities at public social gatherings and local community events. At these events we will educate consumers of unsafe sex practices and offer solution driven resources, pledge commitments for volunteers, accept monetary donations from supporters, and spread visual awareness while simultaneously invoking self-loving empowering speech presented with TheHumanRASE’s sellable items. These items will consist of copyright statement t-shirts made by TheHumanRASE staff, and “homemade” self-care items such as candles, soaps, lotions, etc. The funding for events will come from donations and TheHumanRASE sale items that connects between marketing its charitable purpose. These items will also be available for sale on TheHumanRASE’s website with opportunities to give monetary donations for events and advocacy activities as well.

Our first fundraising event took place on March 30, 2024, in North Carolina at the ‘Flea Market at the State Fairgrounds’. Volunteers and I passed out sexual exploitation awareness materials,
donated items were available for a monetary donation of the donor's choice and there was raffle ticket gift basket giveaway and I used twisted dreadlocks for donations as well.

(pictured below, Tonnie Bracey)

(Tonnie Bracey with gift basket winners)
(The next fundraiser event is scheduled for the 2024 Juneteenth celebration in Raleigh, NC. where we will launch “Consent for Change”)

(b) Group Presentations. TheHumanRASE will conduct presentations about sexual abuse and the dire need for action in the form of preventive measures to combat sex trafficking, give adult supervisory tools, and educate attendants on federal and state policies and laws. As part of these presentations, TheHumanRASE will ask for financial support for implementing its mission. The funding for printed material and other advocacy handouts will come from donations, TheHumanRASE’s purpose driven item sales, and grants.

Education

With so much exposure to miseducation about anatomy of the sexes being tossed around on social media, it is important that broadened awareness of healthy sex practices, taboo issues, as well as sex talk be a normalized discussions amongst communities. It’s my belief that ignorance is the main cause of vulnerability, and this is why many women fall victim to misconception about their bodies. Men should also be educated on the health of themselves and women as well, with aided material infused with inviting tones and sensitivity, influencing peace and understanding across relationships. Women should also be encouraged to speak up about their sexual needs and wants in marriages. This is a taboo issue I have found across ethnic groups leading to the spread of disease and unwanted pregnancies.
Educating material will be found on TheHumanRASE website, as well as engaging forums of experts in the field of sexual exploitation, educators of healthy sex practices in relationships, as well as the teaching of anatomy across sexes.

I also plan to inform how perpetuating stereotypes such as the Jezebel in black culture, explicit music with sexually explicit lyrics and content that demean women and simultaneously impose negative reflections of themselves and their worth amongst their peers and people in successful positions. This over-sexualized environment normalizes the dehumanizing beliefs of women and in return negatively affects how women are portrayed in society when reporting rape and seeking out justice.

**Collaboration**

Although grass-root issues in specific communities are not a tactic for other established nonprofits aiding in the fight of sexual exploitation, they are a huge aid and asset in tackling the fight in preventing immediate dangers, providing after care of abuse and protective resources. I plan to join and volunteer with two established non-profit organizations that are fighting against sex-trafficking here in North Carolina. They are the North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NCCASA), and Project NoRest.

NCCASA is described as “an inclusive, statewide alliance working to end sexual violence through education, advocacy, and legislation.” ([https://nccasa.org/about-us/history](https://nccasa.org/about-us/history)). They were established in 1986 and advocated for the marital rape law to be included in NC General Statutes in 1989.

Project NoRest is a statewide organization that focusses on spreading awareness of sex trafficking of children and youth and providing trauma support and post care to victims. They also advocate
for improved policies to identify sex victims, and improved cooperation and collaboration with agencies serving sex trafficking victims (https://projectnorest.org/about/).

Supporters
Targeted supporters are Christians, married couples, single parents, surviving victims of sex exploitation, and youth (ages 13-18), young adults (ages 18-25), social-media influencers, as well as community leaders (sport coaches, teachers, police officers, and upcoming people of the entertainment industry (musical artists, actors, content creators on social media). The idea is to encourage membership of our organization, support, and advocation through the wearing of TheHumanRASE merchandise, as well as support of public walks and rallies orchestrated through our establishment or other collaborating non-profits.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I am aware of the enormous challenge TheHumanRASE will take on in its mission, but if fear were an obstacle, I would not have come this far in life. Sexual exploitation is a beast at its worst, and we must deploy change. The stories of sexual exploitation of victims are an ever more pressing issue that has hit home for my family, friends, neighbors and many others on social media and around the world. The egregious stories of victims have employed me with compassionate action. Many are suffering, feel hopeless, and are without a voice. I serve to be a
vessel through ThehumanRASE organization and will implement necessary sacrifices to give them the support and encouragement in knowing that eradicative change is coming.

Sources

5. https://prostitutionresearch.com/category/quickfacts/
https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/ramifications-incest

12. Kate McMaugh, (2024), Incestuous Abuse Continuing into Adulthood: Clinical Features
and Therapists’ Conceptualisations, Journal of Trauma & Dissociation,


14. Kari Paul, (2024). Zuckerberg tells parents of social media victims at Senate hearing:
‘I’m sorry for everything you’ve been through’. The Guardian.
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/jan/31/tiktok-meta-x-congress-hearing-
child-sexual-exploitation

Stereotypes, Gendered Racism, and Sexual Decision Making Among Young Black
Cisgendered Women. Health Education Behav.,48(3),295-305
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8491461/

Speechless After Winning Best New Artist In 20221. GRAMMYS.
video-2021-grammys-rewind

Additional References

17. https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/trafficking
