



MASSACHUSETTS
GENERAL HOSPITAL

PSYCHIATRY ACADEMY

Substance Use Disorder and Sex Trafficking

Abigail M. Judge, Ph.D.

Founder & Co-Director, Boston Human Exploitation Advocacy Team (HEAT)

Massachusetts General Hospital

Clinical Instructor, part time, Harvard Medical School

Disclosures



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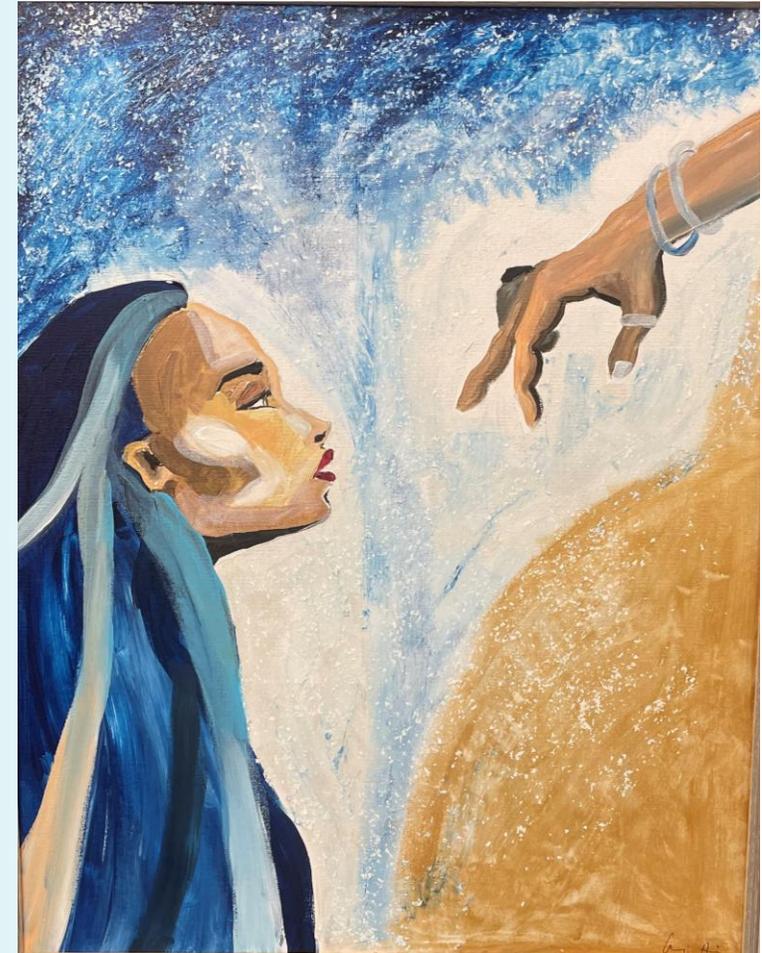
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“I have no relevant financial relationship with a commercial interest to disclose.”



Agenda

- Language and definitions
- Survival sex work, commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking and SUD
 - Limited research but highly prevalent
 - Barriers to care
- Unique role of addiction services



GET HELP

If you are a victim of human trafficking, call this number

1-888-3737-888

Text Help to 233733 (BeFree)



www.TraffickingResourceCenter.org

Consigue ayuda 

Si eres víctima de la trata de personas, llama a este número

1-888-3737-888

Ayuda de texto al 233733 (BeFree)

Kumuha ng tulong 

Kung biktima ka ng human trafficking, tawagan ang numerong ito

1-888-3737-888

Tulong sa Teksto sa 233733 (BeFree)

得到帮助 

如果您是人口贩运的受害者, 请拨打此号码

1-888-3737-888

文字帮助233733 (BeFree)

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING

THERE IS A WAY OUT



CALL 911

USE THE HAND SIGNALS



H

T

NOTIFY ANY POLICE OFFICER OR AIRPORT STAFF.



No shared language, no one sex trade

- A continuum: “choice, circumstance, coercion”
- Commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) and human trafficking (HT)
- Disputed language and framing within public health addiction services undermines collab and care



BOSTON
HEAT



A prevalent co-occurrence

50%

Lifetime history of sex trading among women presenting for SUD care.

83-98%

Rates of lifetime illicit drug use among individuals engaged in sex work in U.S.

”Hand in hand”

Substance use and commercial sex going hand in hand “is so ordinary that the meaning of the connection is taken for granted and left unexamined.”¹

¹Sallmann, 2010, p. 132



Research on “intersections of substance use and human trafficking is scant” (p. 1)

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jSAT

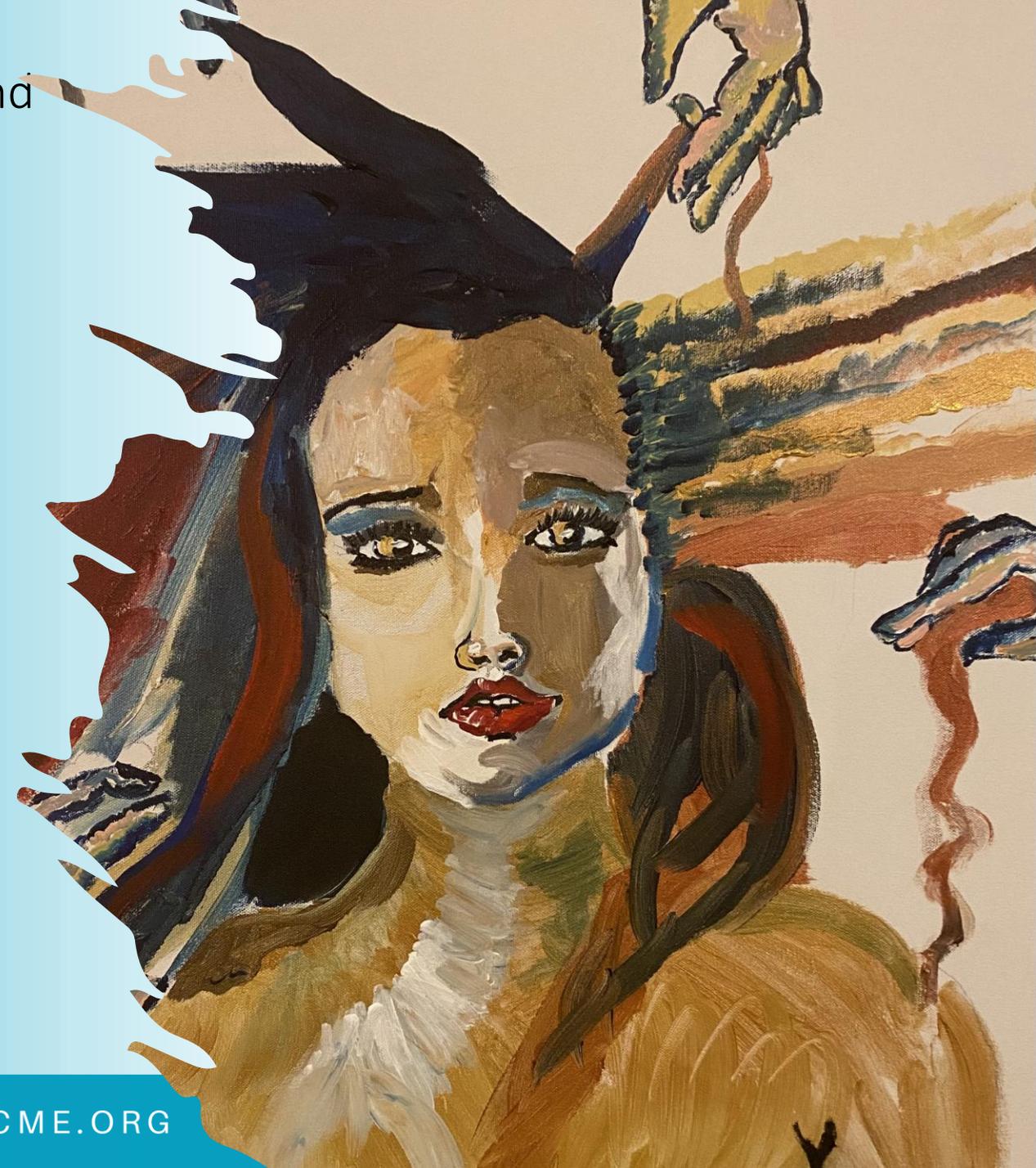
Service providers' perspectives on substance use and treatment needs among human trafficking survivors

Erica Koegler^{a,*}, Claire A. Wood^b, Sharon D. Johnson^a, Lilly Bahlinger^a

^a University of Missouri-St. Louis, 1 University Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63121, United States of America
^b Missouri Institute of Mental Health, 1 University Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63121, United States of America

1. Introduction

In the context of a national opioid epidemic, research should examine populations that are most vulnerable to illicit substances, such as survivors of human trafficking. The United States' Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) defines human trafficking as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery” (Victims of Trafficking & Violence Protection Act of, 2000). Sex trafficking has been defined as instances “in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age” (Victims of Trafficking & Violence Protection Act of, 2000). Research focusing on the intersections of substance use and human trafficking is scant. The purpose of the current study is to assess the nature of substance use among survivors of all types of human trafficking and identify the treatment



Using Substances and Exchanging Sex as “Going Hand-in-Hand”

(a) Exchanging: “A means to an end”

(b) Using: “Making it easier to do”

(c) Using and Exchanging:
Enabling each other

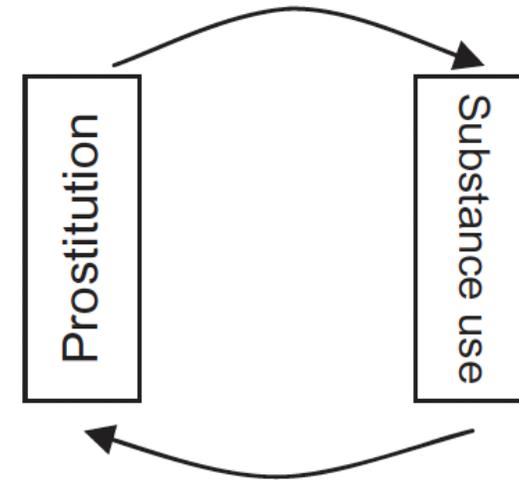
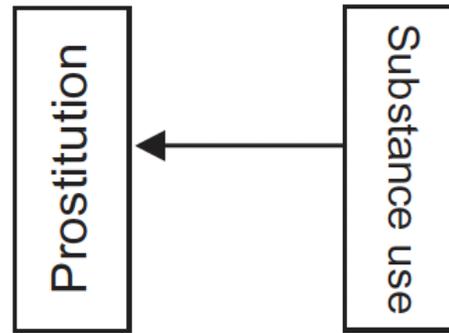
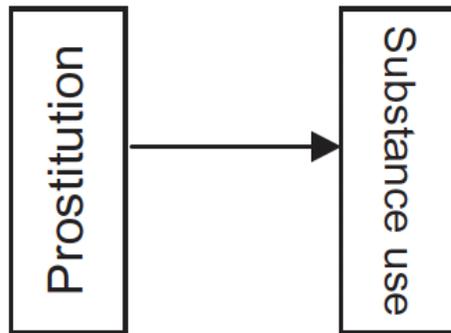
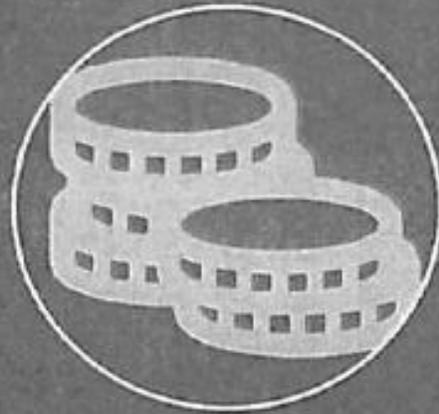


FIGURE 1 Conceptual diagram: Variations of the theme.



SUD
initiation



SUD
maintenance



Escalation of
SUD

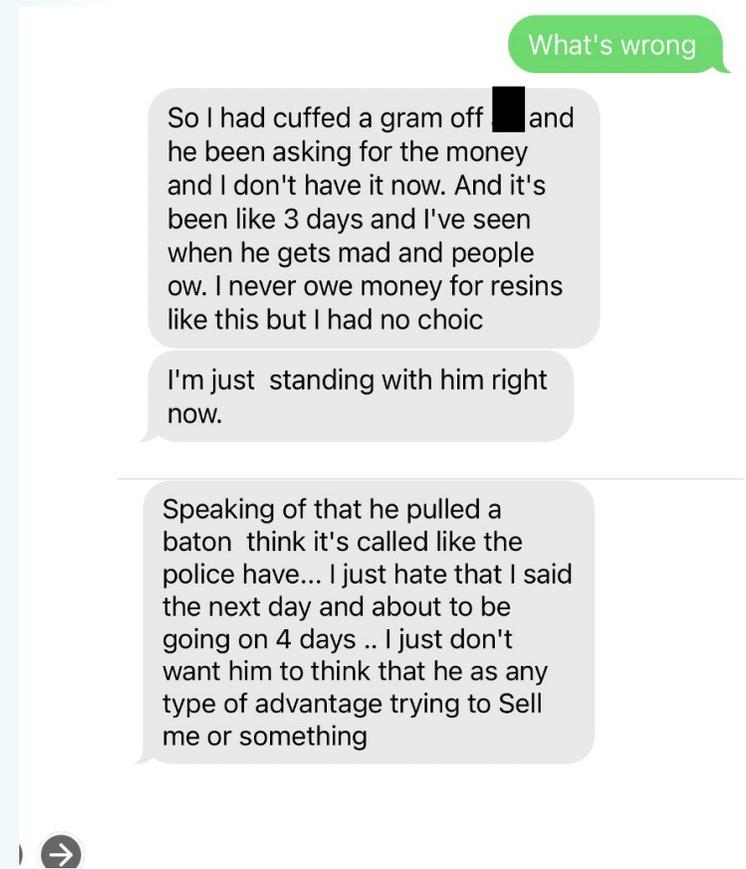
Polytrauma



SUD-specific pathways

- Controlling access to drugs or MOUD
 - “Dealer,” which could also be partner
 - Weaponizing addiction
- Exploitation within recovery settings, e.g., MMTP, detox, sober homes
- For all: don’t expect identifying circumstances as exploitation

Debt example: “I had no choice”





Recent MA examples: Weaponization of addiction, drugs as coercion

Recidivist Sex Trafficker Sentenced to 15 Years in Prison for Sex Trafficking Four Victims

“Justice was served today. Trevor Jones’s decades-long criminal career is defined by his willingness to exploit women and profit from their pain. He preyed on women struggling with addiction, fueled their dependence and inflicted violence and fear to maintain control. The victims in this case endured unimaginable abuse at his hands,” said United States Attorney Leah B. Foley. “This case is a stark reminder of the devastating intersection between drug trafficking and human trafficking, and why we will continue to aggressively pursue offenders who operate at that intersection. Today’s sentence should send a clear message that this office will dismantle those who traffic in human lives with the same relentlessness they show their victims.”

Jones demanded “loyalty” and “dedication” from his victims, enforcing his requirements by punishing victims with acts of violence, threats of violence and withholding controlled substance from drug-dependent victims. At times, to compel some women to follow his rules, Jones used his fists or other weapons –including a belt, cane, metal rod and pistol. In one instance, the violence he inflicted on a victim resulted in a broken nose and missing teeth. Jones beat another victim with a belt causing bruising throughout her body. When confronted with the injuries he caused, Jones told the victim that she deserved the abuse. Jones was also verbally abusive toward another victim, locking her out of the house, demanding to know where her “loyalty” was and berating her for not “contributing everything” she was making. Another victim experienced degradation from Jones, with him telling her that she needed to “make daddy proud” and scolding her for being “disobedient.”

U.S. v Jones, 2025

U.S. Attorney’s Office, District of Massachusetts



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He allegedly also has a history of targeting women — many struggling with substance abuse — whom he controlled through violence and access to drugs to perform commercial sex and sell drugs, the statement said. He “created a climate of fear” by claiming connections to law enforcement and other influential figures through his nonprofit and coordinated drug transactions using the nonprofit’s phone, the statement said.

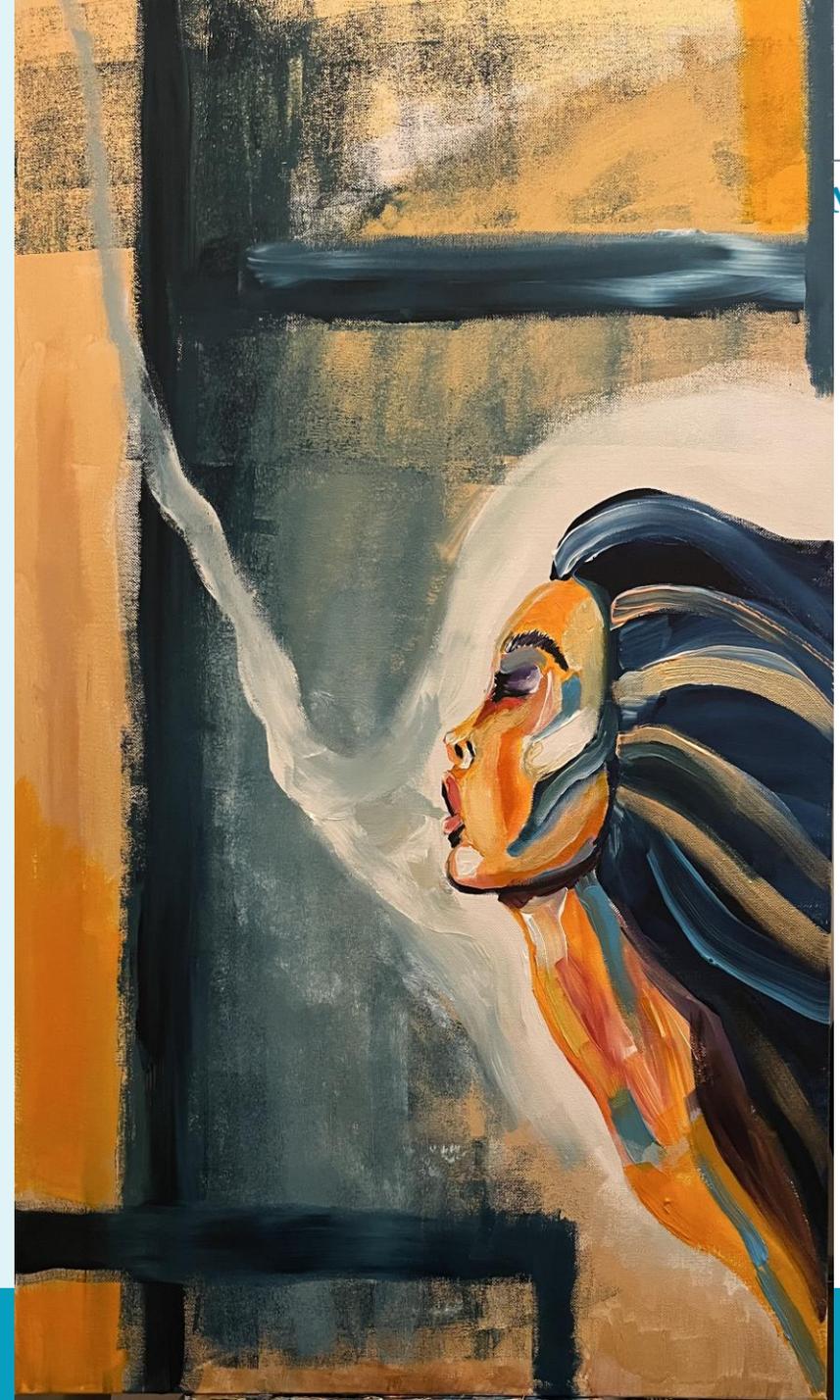
Because of his prior conviction, Tooley faces a minimum of 10 years and up to life in prison and a fine of \$8 million, if convicted of the new charges.

Adapt & Evolve LLC did not respond to the Globe’s request for comment Wednesday

Boston Globe
9/23/25

Clinical significance & challenges

- Poorer clinical outcomes
 - Higher psych sxs - esp CSE/HT
 - More chaotic use
 - Violence-related mortality
 - Disproportionate HIV & blood-borne infections
- Access challenges
 - Competing survival priorities
 - “Everyday discrimination”¹
 - Fear of arrest
 - Provider and institutional stigma
 - Racism
 - Relevance
- Addiction services - opportunity to engage



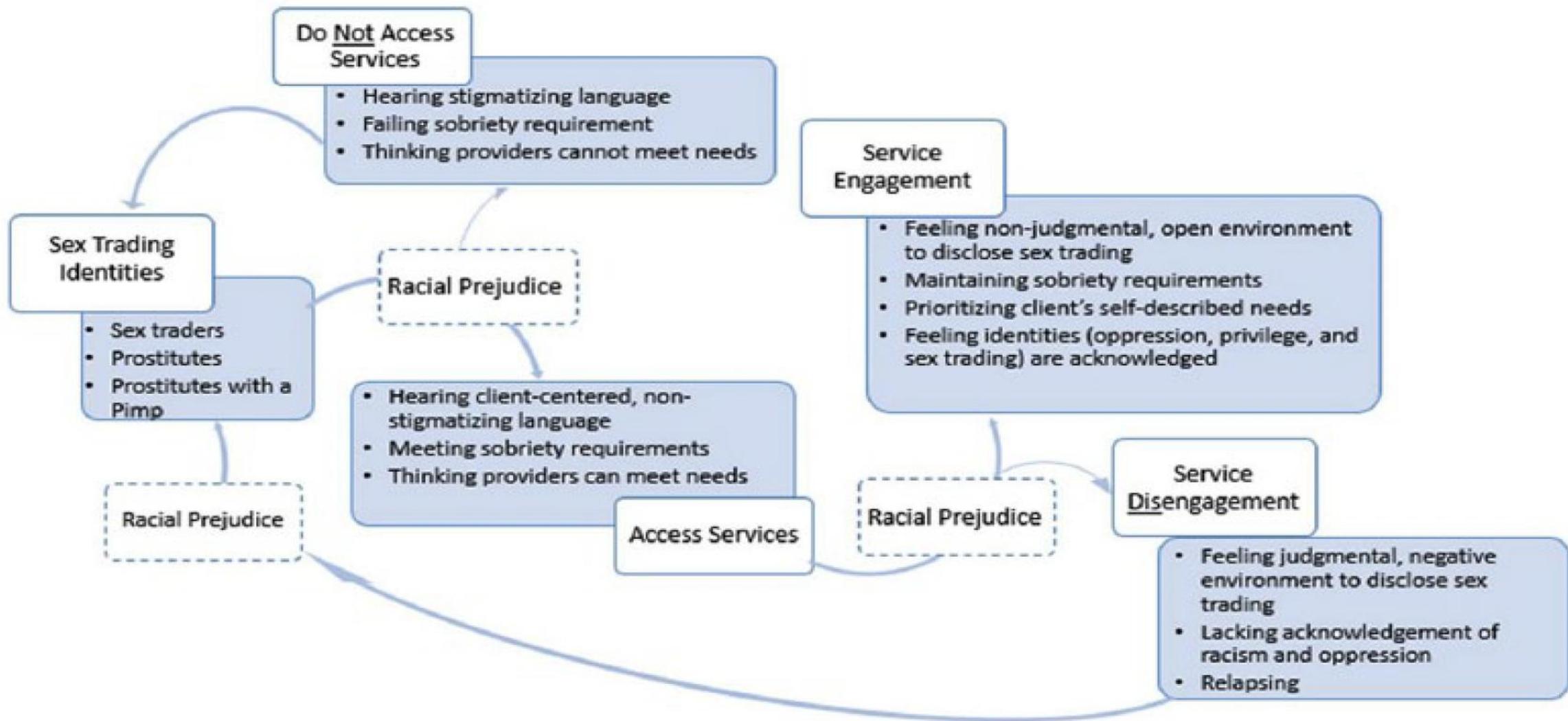


Figure 1. How adult women who trade sex engage in services.

Screening?

- No “gold standard” for screening
 - Relationship building rather than the perfect tool - disclosure happens when ready
 - Rapid Appraisal for Trafficking (RAFT) Chisolm-Straker et al., 2021; Vera Inst. Justice, 2014
 - Benefits and harms of documentation Dell et al., 2023
- Gentle curiosity - not voyeurism
 - Explain why I’m asking
- Considerations:
 - Relevant to the encounter?
 - Ways to ask
 - Considerations for non-BIPOC provider and BIPOC pt
 - Do they want help for this?
 - ** Can you provide resources?



Disclosing Sex Trading Histories to Providers: Barriers and Facilitators to Navigation of Social Services Among Women Impacted by Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Lara Gerassi, PhD, LCSW,¹
Tonya E. Edmond, PhD,²
Vanessa Fabbre, PhD, LCSW,²
Abby Howard, MSW, LCSW, CPCC
and Andrea J. Nichols, PhD²

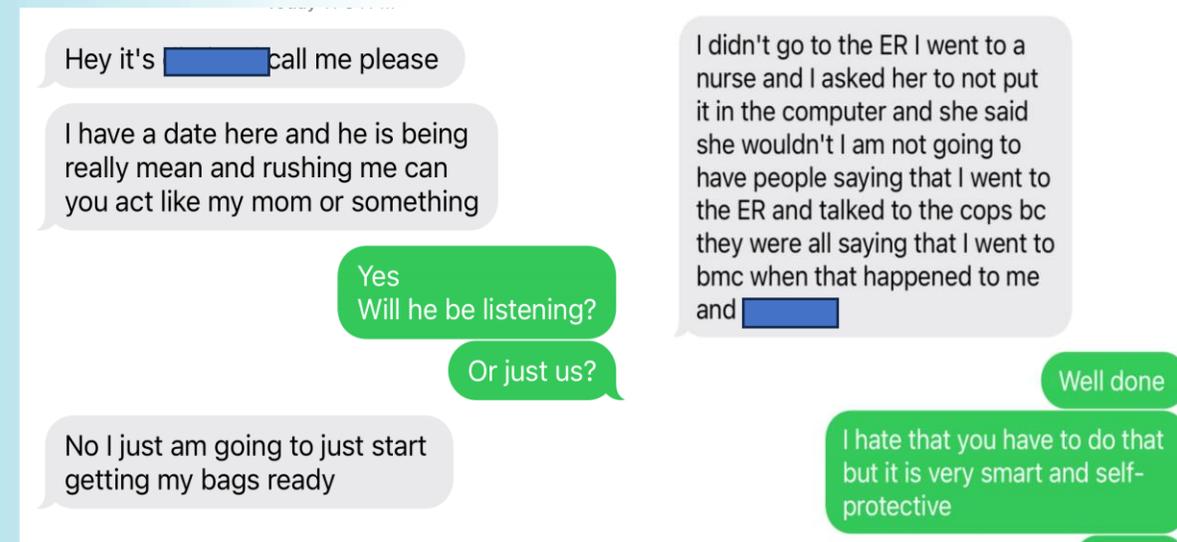
Experiences of Racism and Racial Tensions Among African American Women Impacted by Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Practice: A Qualitative Study

Lara B. Gerassi¹

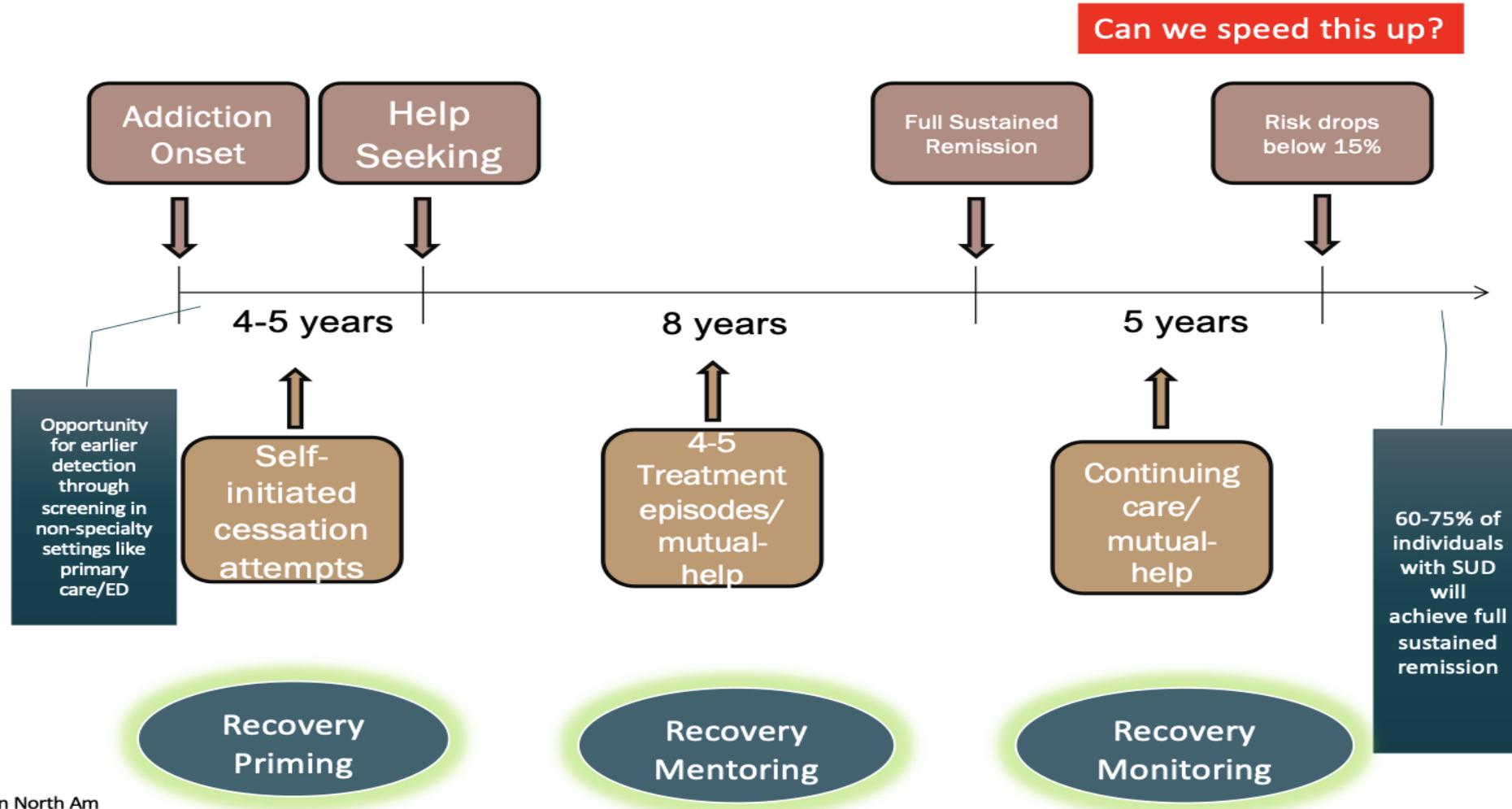


When exploitation and SUD are ongoing

- Plan for an incremental process - “safer” rather than safest
 - MI and harm reduction support “emerging autonomy”
- Shared decision-making rather than coercion and control
- Don’t denigrate exploiter



The clinical course of addiction and achievement of stable recovery can take a long time ...





Getting more involved

- Educate yourself about the sex trade ecosystem in your setting, area, population
- Build capacity through community partnerships
 - Who else is doing this work?
 - Warm hand-off's
 - Anticipate mistrust, lead with humility
- The power of unlikely collaboration
 - Law enforcement and criminal justice



Thank you!

amjudge@mgb.org

www.bostonheat.org

