



Improving the Response to Child Sex Trafficking with Interagency Collaboration and Data Sharing

Human trafficking is an increasing problem globally, nationally, and locally in the San Francisco East Bay. In the last two decades, there has been an increased response through government approached solutions. A lack of systemically collected and analyzed data has led to slippery statistics published on human trafficking. These statistics most often lack methodology, but continue to lead policy discussions. By examining the Alameda County District Attorney's "SafetyNet," new research by the Alameda County District Attorney's Office (ACDAO) suggests that collection and maintenance of data on commercially sexually exploited children (CSEC) and interagency data sharing is essential to addressing the problem of child sex trafficking.

HEAT Watch's SafetyNet

Under the direction of District Attorney Nancy O'Malley, the Alameda County District Attorney's Office (ACDAO) created H.E.A.T. (Human Exploitation and Trafficking) Watch. The mission of H.E.A.T. Watch is to develop an effective, comprehensive, collaborative, and regional response to human trafficking of all forms; to provide tools, education, and community engagement to change societal, legal, and institutional approaches; and to support victims and hold their offenders accountable. A flagship program within H.E.A.T. Watch is SafetyNet. SafetyNet is an interagency meeting where partners share information about at-risk victims and victims of child sex trafficking. SafetyNet is also a database that maintains data on the youth discussed at SafetyNet.

A new study conducted by the ACDAO used interviews with participating agencies to better understand the program. The interviews revealed:

- **Sharing data on CSEC is highly beneficial** to the youth and the agencies who work with them. The information shared at the meetings helps agencies better advocate for CSEC clients. It also helps with consolidating resources and ensuring that different groups who work with each minor do not duplicate efforts.
- **Important relationships are established** through collaboration that ultimately benefits CSEC. Interviewees described trusting relationships they were able to build through SafetyNet, encouraging them to work together.
- **Probation's participation is crucial** to the success of the meeting. Their data is needed and they also need the information from these meetings in order to properly make recommendations to the court. In addition, interviewees expressed a desire for a CSEC representative from probation who is properly trained on the specific needs of these clients.
- **Data sharing among Social Services** is highly critical. Interviewees hoped for a higher level representative who could answer more of the questions that arise for Social Services. An assigned CSEC representative would be useful. More information and data sharing is also needed from Social Services.
- **Quarterly outcomes meetings** without cases on the agenda where participants could step back and take a holistic view of the cases they previously discussed in order to brainstorm needed policy and protocol changes.



- **More counties need interagency and collaborative groups** like SafetyNet. CSEC are highly transient and if each county had a SafetyNet, then counties could refer minors to the jurisdiction in which they reside.

The research also included an analysis of the SafetyNet data collected since 2011. There are several limitations to this data including that it is Alameda County specific, and the only data collected is data that is available to the ACDAO through SafetyNet data sharing, Girls' Court, and files the DA's office has on minors who are adjudicated. Several patterns and trends emerged from the data analysis including:

- **The percent of African American clients went down in 2014** while the percent of Latinos and Caucasians slightly increased.
- **The percent of male clients slightly increased in 2014.** The percent of males never went above 1 percent in 2011, 2012, or 2013, but in 2014, it went up to 8 percent. This could be because agencies involved are becoming more aware of identifying risk factors for male CSEC.
- **Only 2 percent came from outside of California** and 98 percent were from California. Of the 98 percent from CA, 60 percent resided in Alameda County, 13 percent from neighboring Contra Costa County, and 6 percent came from Sacramento County. Of those from Alameda County, 57 percent resided in Oakland.
- **Drug use, chronic absenteeism, and runaway history** are the three most common risk factors.
- **Only 6 percent of SafetyNet clients were not connected to any service.** Those without services are clients who refused services or clients transferred to other jurisdictions where there were not appropriate services available.
- **Castlemont High was the most common school among clients.** It is difficult to maintain reliable school data. Probation reports do not always include updated school information nor is education always discussed in Girls' Court or even at SafetyNet. Out of the 482 clients in the SafetyNet database, there are only 320 clients with any known school data.
- **Clients are very likely to be involved in the system.** Only 10% do not have system-involvement while 40 percent are currently or have previously been in the custody of Social Services and 63 percent are currently or have previously been in the custody of Probation. In Alameda County, children cannot be in the custody of both Probation and Social Services at the same time. Youth who fall under the descriptions of both systems get placed on the 241.1 court calendar in the Juvenile Court where it is then determined if the child should be in the custody of Social Services or Probation. It is difficult to maintain an accurate depiction of Social Service clients and cross-over youth as Social Services only shares data on 15 youth each week while all of the 482 clients in the database have changes to their system involvement on a daily basis.
- **Of the 482 youth, 84 percent have a juvenile arrest history, and 22 percent re-offend into the adult system.** Of the 22 percent who re-offended into the adult system, 34 percent were arrested for violations of California Penal Codes 647b and 653.22.



Recommendations

To continue improving outcomes for CSEC, policymakers should consider the following:

- **Mandatory collaborative and interagency meetings** in every county for agencies that work with CSEC and at-risk CSEC.
- **Probation, Social Services, School districts, District Attorney's Offices, and law enforcement should be required to collaborate and share data.** An easy way to share data would be to create a statewide or even a nationwide database where systems are required to enter their own data. This way, data would not only become more reliable, but it would also help other jurisdictions respond to each individual CSEC case properly when they are identified.
- **Probation and Social Services should be required to have designated CSEC-specific staff.** CSEC trained staff who work directly with this youth could also attend and support SafetyNet. It would be beneficial to this population to have more consistent adults in their lives rather than several different adults who frequently change as they are re-assigned throughout the different phases of their system involvement.
- **The definition of human trafficking should be re-visited** in order to make it easier for researchers to measure and analyze this phenomenon.

Conclusion

SafetyNet has been successful in helping agencies respond to CSEC and at-risk CSEC. By collecting and maintaining data, Alameda County is also able to better understand this population. If all agencies were required to enter their own information, the data would become more reliable which would allow agencies and policymakers to better respond to this problem. Probation and Social Services are the two main systems that have major influence over these children's lives and so their participation is not only crucial, but it could be helpful for the youth if they hired CSEC specific staff. This population is highly transient and always changing so the more jurisdictions that have collaborative meetings the better off the clients will be.

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