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A Three-Step Trauma Informed Model for School Counselors to Address the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Schools

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Abstract

The commercial sexual exploitation of children is a growing concern around the world. Education about this concern is a key component to preventing further occurrences. The Committee for Children found few educational models in U.S. schools. School counselors play a significant role in preventing, identifying, and connecting students to community resources. This article offers a three-step trauma informed model that can be replicated. School counselors can implement this model within their comprehensive school counseling program to increase awareness and provide support for exploited children, parents, and the community. This model encompasses three steps of awareness, identification, and support.

Keywords: sexual exploitation, children, education, trauma-informed, school counselors, model

Globally, over 30% of sexually exploited and trafficked victims are children (United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, 2021). In the United States a case of child sexual abuse is confirmed by child protective services every nine minutes (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network [RAINN], 2024b). The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is a severe form of child sexual abuse and a term that includes all nationalities of persons under the age of 18 who are used as a sexual commodity sold for profit. CSEC is illegal in all 50 states in the United States and is a global public health problem (Harrison & Todd, 2021). Exact numbers on children are scarce and the U.S. Office of Elementary and Secondary Education reports, “An unknown number... are trafficked within the country for sexual servitude” (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], Office of Safe & Supportive Schools, 2021). However, many of the survivors of CSEC are students in the United States school system (USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). It is crucial that schools take on the challenge of identifying and reporting suspected CSEC while connecting students to counseling services and resources (USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021).

To further expand and define the problem, CSEC is perpetrated by human traffickers who “prey on...children of all ages, backgrounds, and nationalities, exploiting them for their own profit” (U.S. Department of State, 2020, para. 1). Sex trafficking is defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 in which “a commercial sex act is induced

by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act is under the age of 18 years” (U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office on Trafficking in Persons, N. D.). Laws regarding the modern anti-trafficking movement began in 2000 with the adoption of the Palermo Protocol by the United Nations to prevent, suppress, and punish persons who engage in human trafficking, especially women and children (United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner, General Assembly Resolution, 2000). In the United States, Congress passed the Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, which was a federal law to protect survivors of sex and labor trafficking, prosecute traffickers, and prevent human trafficking in the United States (Finklea et al., 2015; U.S. Department of State, 2020). Despite worldwide and governmental restrictions, CSEC still exists throughout the world.

It is estimated that human traffickers victimize approximately 28 million people worldwide; with 80% subjected to forced labor and 20% in sex trafficking (United Nations’ International Labour Organization, 2022). More than 3.3 million individuals in forced labor are considered children (United Nations’ International Labour Organization, 2022). In the United States, criminal human trafficking investigations by Homeland Security Investigations has increase by 20% from 2021 to 2022 (Center for Countering Human Trafficking, 2023). Despite increases in human trafficking investigations, the U.S. Department of State (2020) contends it is difficult to ascertain reliable statistics related to human trafficking and particularly for children due to the hidden nature of the crime and barriers regarding sharing victims’ information. However, the National Human Trafficking Hotline (2023) reports 10,360 unique cases of potential human trafficking being reported to in the year 2021; of which, 6,699 cases were related to sex trafficking. More alarming is that approximate 30% of the sex trafficking cases involved minors (National Human Trafficking Hotline, 2023).

School counselors (SCs) are trained to recognize mental health warning signs (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2020) and are trained to take leadership roles in designing and implementing programs and services within schools to address this growing public health concern. It is important that SCs stay abreast of trends and research, as well as understand state and federal laws to address CSEC in their comprehensive programs. There is a paucity of literature on CSEC and currently there is no training specific to CSEC for SCs (Harrison & Todd, 2021). The

goal of this article is to synthesize relevant literature and present a three-step trauma-informed CSEC model to increase awareness, identify students who have experienced CSEC, and provide resources for those who are impacted nationally and internationally. The presented Awareness, Identification, and Support (AIS) Model was developed from published literature on the topic of CSEC. The authors discuss relevant literature, AIS Model details, and suggestions for implementation.

Method

The authors followed Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page & Moher, 2021) to develop the protocol for the systematized evaluation of literature (Grant & Booth, 2009). The authors used the PRISMA organizing features to provide a methodological framework to ensure a transparent and complete reporting of specific literature on the topic of CSEC. The search was conducted in August 2022 and again in March 2023 with specific search terms using three databases to find literature published between 2013 through 2023. The authors utilized Academic Search Ultimate including all databases with the following search terms: “commercial sexual exploitation of children” OR “CSEC” AND “model for schools” in the abstract with the additional criteria of full text, peer-reviewed, in United States, returning 118 records. The authors conducted another search utilizing ProQuest Central database with the same search terms without the ability to limit geographic location, returning 55 records. In Google Scholar the authors searched for the exact phrase of “commercial sexual exploitation of children” in the article title with 237 records. The combined searches resulted in 410 records. Duplicates articles were removed ($n = 137$) through an automated process leaving 273 records to be screened. The authors reviewed the records and excluded those that did not have full-text available ($n = 11$) or were stated as located outside of the United States in the abstract ($n = 68$) resulting in 194 records to be sought for retrieval. The authors divided the full text records to assess eligibility. The authors used specific exclusion criteria (such as not written in English, not located in the United States, not peer reviewed, and when the commercial sexual exploitation of children was only minimally addressed ($n = 178$) resulting in 16 publications specific to CSEC and covering a range of journal areas such as pediatrics, social work, psychology, nursing, public policy, interpersonal violence, social services, and child abuse and neglect. These 16 publications are identified with an asterisk in the reference section (*). See Figure 1 for the PRISMA Diagram.

Additional targeted searches for specific literature outside of the PRISMA method were conducted. One, for example, was to find publications related to CSEC statistics and victim demographics. Other searches were conducted to review counseling and therapeutic interventions that could be applied to working with CSEC in school settings and integrated into our model. The following is the review of CSEC literature and the presentation of the AIS Model.

Results of Literature Review on CSEC

The authors selected literature through the systematized PRISMA process, then analyzed and synthesized the information into topical areas (Grant & Booth, 2009; Page & Moher, 2021). We begin with how CSEC happens, contributing factors for risk of CSEC, the impact and trauma of CSEC, indicators of CSEC, addressing CSEC in schools, trauma sensitive evidence based approaches, ethical guidelines and school counselor’s role, and CSEC training.

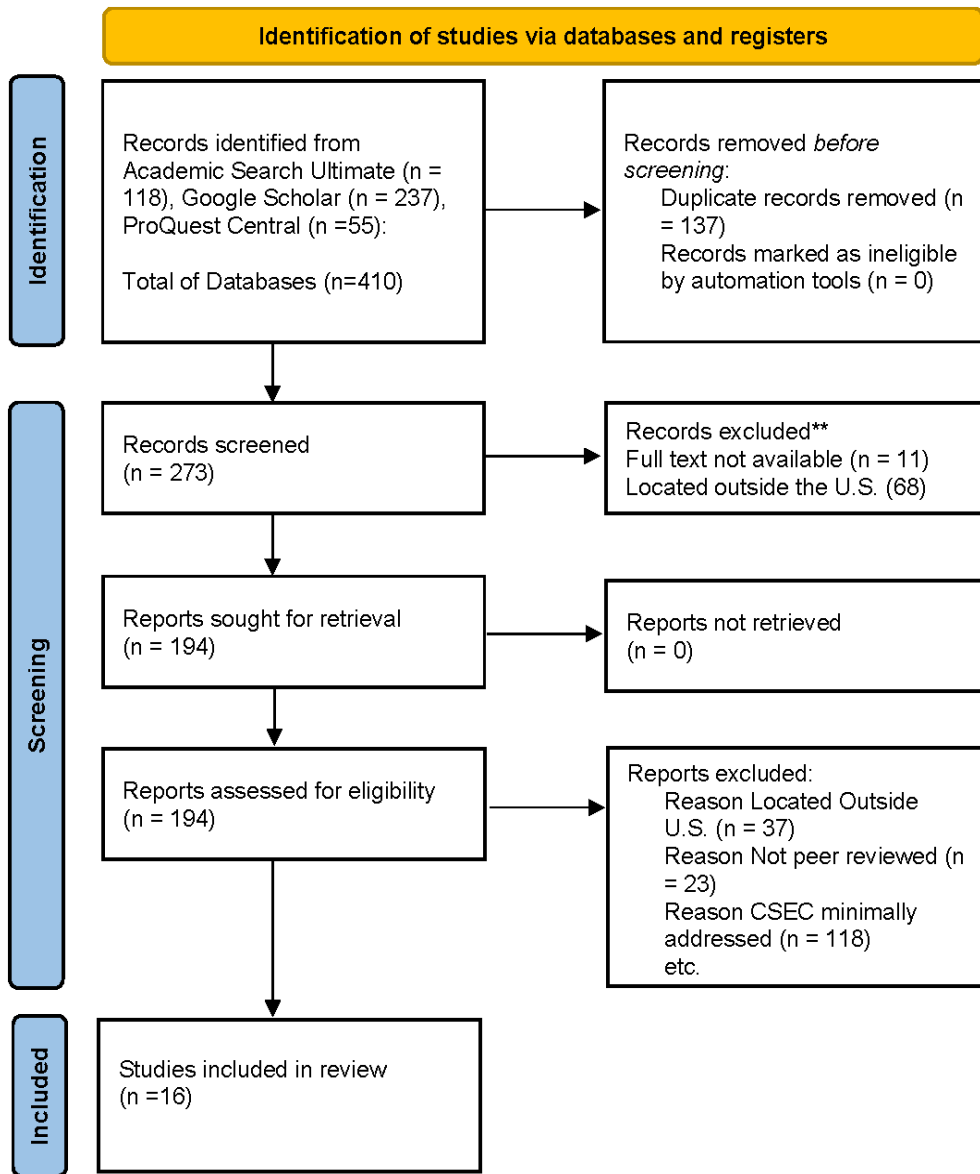
How CSEC Happens

Recruitment of children for the purpose of CSEC can transpire anywhere including schools, online, the child’s home, community events, parties, sporting events, and retail locations (USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). CSEC traffickers may promise money, fame, or to meet other needs (Rosenblatt, 2014). Traffickers often use coercion, fear, force, manipulation, and intimidation to control the child (Greenbaum, 2018; Lavoie et al., 2019; USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). The children are then sold at parties, hotels, businesses, and other common locations. Statistics indicate that children are often recruited and trafficked by family members, friends, acquaintances, romantic partners, and in some cases, strangers (Finigan-Carr et al., 2019; Lavoie et al., 2019; USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). CSEC traffickers do not adhere to past stereotypes of exploiters (Darkness to Light, 2015). Traffickers often target vulnerable children, work to secure their trust, fulfill their needs, and isolate them from their support system (USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). Once trust is accomplished, traffickers exert control over the child while normalizing the abuse. “No community, school, socioeconomic group, or student demographic is immune” (USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021, p.1). Each year as many as 100,000 to 300,000 children are at risk for CSEC (Committee for Children, 2021). The average age a girl is trafficked for CSEC is between 12-14 years old and for boys even younger 11-13 years old (USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). It has also been found that in some jurisdictions, African American minors (mostly girls) represent 50% of juvenile sex trafficking victims (USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander girls have also been found more likely to be sexually exploited than non-native peers (USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021).

Contributing Factors for Risk of CSEC

There are three primary areas of contributing factors for risk of CSEC: societal, environmental, and individual (Developmental Service Group, 2014). At the societal level, contributing factors include community and societal standards and expectations about sexual behavior, systemic issues related

PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews which included searches of databases and registers only



*Consider, if feasible to do so, reporting the number of records identified from each database or register searched (rather than the total number across all databases/registers).

**If automation tools were used, indicate how many records were excluded by a human and how many were excluded by automation tools.

From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71

Figure 1
PRISMA Flow Diagram for Review of Literature

to gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Williamson & Flood, 2021). At an environmental level, contributing factors include dysfunctional family environments such as substance use, domestic violence, poverty, the justice system, and child protection involvement (Jaeckl & Laughon, 2020). Other environmental factors include living in an area with a large influx of prosperous workers or tourists and a thriving cash economy (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Greenbaum, 2018; USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). Individual risk factors include history of sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect (Jaeckl & Laughon, 2020). Other individual contributing factors may include parental abandonment, running away, homelessness, foster care, marginalized sexual orientation, impaired cognitive function; disability; and early pubertal maturation (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2013). Children who identify as LGBTQ are at higher risk of CSEC (Curtis et al., 2016; Dank et al., 2015).

The Impact and Trauma of CSEC

CSEC can have an impact on overall development throughout the lifespan and may manifest with trauma symptoms (Browne-James et al., 2021; Curtis et al., 2016; Dank et al., 2015; Letourneau et al., 2018). Each child reacts and responds to CSEC sexual trauma differently (National Sexual Violence Resource Center [NSVRC], 2015). In addition to the emotional scarring, the ways in which CSEC may impact children at school are as follows: (a) a decrease in reading readiness; (b) lower school attendance; (c) lower GPA; and (d) a higher dropout rate (National Child Trauma Stress Network Schools Committee, 2008). Children may also use negative coping mechanisms in response to CSEC experiences such as anger and aggressive behavior, social isolation, cutting and self-harm, disordered eating, high-risk sexual behaviors, and alcohol and drug usage (Browne-James et al., 2021; NSVRC, 2015; World Health Organization [WHO], 2017). Many children who experience CSEC are more likely to be misdiagnosed when symptoms are not assessed through a trauma-informed lens. Children may receive diagnoses such as a range of learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Emotional Behavior Disorder, or other childhood mental health disorders (Rumsey & Milsom, 2019; Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016). SCs can work to identify, support, collaborate, and advocate for children who have experienced CSEC (Browne-James et al., 2021). A school-based model will help SC with the proper identification of survivors of CSEC and support for those suffering symptoms. The goal is to reduce the impact of CSEC for children in school through trauma informed practices.

Indicators of CSEC

Children are not legally able to give sexual consent and are never responsible for their engaging in sexual behaviors and is considered abuse (Gibbs et al., 2018; USDOE, Office of

Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). Identifying children who are being sexually exploited or trafficked may be difficult due to their reluctance to disclose the abuse. Children may feel shame or fear, may still be under the control of their exploiter; or they may not be able to recognize themselves as a victim (Barnert et al., 2017; Greenbaum, 2018; USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). Survivors of CSEC rarely seek or receive any types of services, and less than 10% of survivors seek health, legal, police, or counseling support (Sumner et al., 2015; WHO, 2017). Indicators that are common when a child is involved in CSEC include having large amounts of cash or prepaid credit cards, new phones, clothes, or expensive material possessions, having a boyfriend or girlfriend who is noticeably older and controlling, frequently traveling to other cities or out of state, visiting hotels, or having branding tattoos (Gibbs et al., 2018; Greenbaum, 2018; USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021).

Behavioral indicators of CSEC may include changes in behavior or relationships, personal hygiene, sudden decline in academic performance; promiscuity, references to sexual situations or terminology beyond norms for their age, having a highly sexualized online persona, and possession of unexplained sexual paraphernalia (Barnert et al., 2017; Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, 2020; Gibbs et al., 2018; USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). Other behaviors include poor self-esteem, and mental health issues (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, 2020; Greenbaum, 2018; USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021).

Addressing CSEC in Schools

Schools and SCs are ideally situated to develop and implement programs to increase awareness and identify children with contributing factors and indicators of CSEC. According to ASCA's (2023) position statement, SCs should collaborate with school and family stakeholders to implement a preventive, school counseling program that includes warning systems for identifying children who may be engaging in harmful or risky behaviors as well as interventions to limit or eliminate the risk of negative consequences. SCs can adhere to ASCA's position statement by advocating for school-based programs designed to detect CSEC and provide support for individuals who have been connected to this behavior. Additionally, ASCA recommends that school plans outline protocols for reporting suspected CSEC to identified school personnel or child protective services, which can be implemented worldwide. Schools globally can work collaboratively develop relevant curriculum and training on CSEC that is tailored to the students' culture and developmental level. CSEC training can be added to the school's existing curriculum on child abuse recognition and reporting programs for students, parents, teachers, and staff.

While specific CSEC training and curriculum for schools is newly emerging, three non-profit organizations, 3Stands Global Foundation, Love Never Fails, and Frederick Douglass Family Institute, collaborated to develop the

Prevention Organized to Educate Children on Trafficking (PROTECT) curriculum (California Department of Social Services, 2022). PROTECT offers a CSEC training curriculum in K-12 school settings to promote the need for awareness, reporting protocols, training, and prevention (California Department of Social Services, 2022). The PROTECT curriculum has been implemented in California, Utah, Texas, Michigan, Ohio, and Georgia with an expected expansion to other states (3 Strands Global Foundation, 2022). The International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (2019), which was developed by U.S. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, has also expanded its focus to now offer training for first responders including teachers and parents in schools worldwide. The training offered covers content related to identifying vulnerable populations, school child protection policies, protocols for handling incidents, and other comprehensive services.

ASCA (2016) identifies SCs as “key players” in promoting a trauma sensitive environment who can assist in identifying, supporting, and promoting success for students who have experienced trauma (para. 3). SCs all over the world can support this population by providing services that combat distrust, build rapport, provide life skills training, promote autonomy through college and career planning, support educational scholarship, promote survivor empowerment, and encourage outside treatment through individual and group counseling. As part of the ASCA model, SCs can provide mental health services that are more short-term in nature using evidenced-based approaches (ASCA, 2019a).

More research is needed to assess the knowledge of SCs related to the identification of CSEC (Litam & Lam, 2020); however, Litam and Lam (2020) found that SCs highly rated their knowledge about sex trafficking but rated lower their ability to help survivors. Counselor education programs that are accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs standards ([CACREP], 2024) train SCs on responsibilities on school emergency plans, crisis, disasters, and trauma. Identifying CSEC and working with CSEC survivors falls within this competency area (Litam & Lam, 2020). Therefore, SC training programs can be encouraged integrate awareness, identification, and trauma interventions specific to CSEC in their SC training programs.

Trauma Sensitive Evidence Based Approaches

While there are a variety of approaches counseling professionals could employ that focus on trauma in general, the authors found a lack of literature on counselor education and counseling approaches that SCs can employ specific to working with CSEC survivors in a school setting (Browne-James et al., 2021; Conners et al., 2021; Litam & Lam, 2020). The recovery needs will require a comprehensive and collaborative approach with the school and the community with flexibility to meet the unique needs of CSEC to cope with the aftermath of this exposure (Marquez et al., 2020).

The National Education Association (2022) described “trauma-informed” or “trauma-sensitive” schools

“reinforces skills and the knowledge needed to positively interact and supports students dealing with the mental and physical impact of trauma” (p.1). There is a need for trauma-informed practices in schools, and school-based counseling approaches and strategies that support the individual needs of CSEC. Trauma informed schools incorporate evidenced-based trauma-specific interventions to address the growing CSEC cases (Chafouleas et al., 2019). Implementing evidence-based approaches, behavioral practices, interventions, and support could provide CSEC with a safe-haven while in school, which is critical when helping students succeed (ASCA, 2022b). Specifically, trained SCs can integrate aspects of trauma informed approaches using Expressive Techniques such as Narrative counseling, Play Therapy, and peer to peer support to reduce trauma symptoms (Manay et al., 2022; Romagnolo & Ohrt, 2017; Wymer et al. 2020).

Expressive Techniques: (Grades 6-12)

The ASCA National Model (2019a) states school counselors are to use emerging evidenced-based counseling theories and techniques that promote emotional/social development (p. 94). Expressive techniques are one of many approaches school-counselors can employ in a school-based setting and are taught in school counseling programs (Bradley et al., 2009). Expressive techniques offers a variety of interventions for counseling children and adolescents, such as art, music, and writing and story-telling, that SCs can customize to address a CSECs academic, social, emotional, and mental health related issues (Bradley et al, 2009; Farouk & Edwards, 2020; Haskins et al., 2016; Nafziger & DeKruyf, 2013).

The Narrative approach is type of expressive technique, when used by SCs to assist students who have experienced CSEC, has been found to allows children to safely share their experiences by incorporating forms of art, music, and drama in the sessions (Fein, 2003; Romagnolo & Ohrt, 2017). Moreover, Haskins et al. (2016) found in some cases this approach can be effective in as little as three to five sessions. While there are many benefits to this approach, it is most effective with students who are more self-reflective and open to sharing their stories (Haskins et al., 2016). Narrative approaches that include storytelling or autobiography, and other forms of writing may work well in a secondary school setting with CSEC survivors in grades 6-12 with appropriate training and delivery of support (Bradley et al., 2009).

Play Therapy Interventions (Grades K-5)

While Play Therapy can be used for adults and older students, it is a well-supported empirical intervention that can be used with younger children who have experienced CSEC in a variety of settings (Trice-Black et al., 2013; Winburn et al., 2017;). Play Therapy offers a variety of options SCs can use with students in Kindergarten through fifth grade CSEC’s academic, emotional, behavioral, trauma and other

mental health needs while at school (Trice-Black et al., 2013).

Winburn et al. (2017) stated SCs who are trained in play therapy can offer a non-threatening way of “bridging the gap between [the child’s] experiences and cognitions” as well as providing away to intervene with students who are at risk of academic failure, which could be helpful to CSEC survivors (p. 1). With Play Therapy, SCs can integrate a variety of techniques such as play, art, storytelling, and music with CSEC in individual, classroom, and group settings (Trice-Black et al., 2013; Winburn et al., 2017). SCs working with CSEC students who struggle with trauma or abuse may find play therapy helpful as these students work through issues related to aggressiveness, specific fears, and other conduct or childhood issues that could impact the student’s academic and social/emotional development (Kottman, 2009).

Peer to Peer Support

Given that students often share personal information with peers (Manay et al., 2022; McElvaney et al., 2014), SCs can develop a peer-to-peer model which will help create a culture of peer awareness and support within the school to reduce instances of CSEC through education, identification, and connection. ASCA (2021) encourages SCs to incorporate peer-to-peer programs to enhance the effectiveness of school counseling programs. As part of this model, SCs can help raise awareness of CSEC within the school and community. A peer-to-peer model can supply a way for SCs to train students on how to identify peers with contributing factors and indicators and what to do if a peer is CSEC (Manay et al., 2022).

Ethical Guidelines and School Counselor’s Role

SC competence is an important expectation for counselors in school settings and supports the needs for awareness and prevention trainings. The American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2014) states, “Counselors are to practice only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, state and national professional credentials” (Standard C.2a). SCs must work within their scope of training based on ASCA’s ethical standards and consult with a counseling supervisor when in doubt (ASCA, 2019). The ASCA Ethical Standards (2022) requires SCs to maintain professional competence in current SC issues by utilizing current interventions and best practices (Standard B.3.b). The ASCA National Model (2019) encourages SCs to employ evidenced-based approaches in individual and group settings. ASCA Code of Ethics (2022) states SCs are to collaborate with students and their parents or guardians as appropriate (Standard B.1.a). Because children are minors, their parents and guardians have certain rights according to the law (Standard B.1.d, h) that must be respected and adhered to. SCs are also expected to be aware of the legal mandates regarding confidentiality and know when to breach confidentiality (Standard A.2.). SCs should advocate for all students to ensure safety and determine

when information creates an unsafe environment for students (A.10.b). SCs are to facilitate short-term individual and group counseling to address students’ academic, career, and social emotional issues (Standard A.4., A.7). When it comes to a student’s safety, the ASCA Code of Ethics requires SCs to report all incidents of abuse and neglect in accordance with the local school board violations, state, and federal laws, use risk assessments, and make the appropriate referrals (Standards A.9., A.11, A.6).

CSEC Training

Schools have a vital role in providing a safe environment for educating, preventing, and supporting survivors of CSEC (USDOE, 2021). Many professionals in schools do not feel prepared to address this growing problem nor do they believe they are adequately trained to offer the necessary support. Rizo et al. (2021) found school administrators were limited in their comprehension of CSEC and believed SCs and social workers should be responsible only for identification of CSEC and then referrals to community resources. With the proper training SCs could help address this need within the schools through increasing awareness and prevention, identifying indicators, and providing support services through a comprehensive SC program model (ASCA, 2019; Shin & Na, 2021; USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). With the appropriate CSEC training, SCs are well positioned to provide services that could help bridge this gap through trauma-informed approaches and can serve as collaborative change agents for students impacted by CSEC. While training program specific to CSEC are limited (Rizo et al., 2021), non-profit organizations such as Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS), Darkness to Light, and Mission Kids (2024) offer CSEC trainings with curriculum material to SCs, administrators, and other support staff and often serve as a vital partner and resource for schools. GEMS (2023) offers a three-day intensive CSEC training curriculum for professionals working with CSEC youth. This training is funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention that created the leading CSEC curriculum (GEMS, 2023). ASCA (2019) encourages SCs to be leaders and advocates for all students. Once trained in CSEC, SCs will be trained in applicable laws and can better identify and support children who have experienced CSEC in a trauma-informed manner (Mission Kids, 2021). SC trained specifically in CSEC through a consistent model can provide leadership and offer school-wide training to teachers, families, and students. Romagnolo and Ohrt (2017) echo this call to action by advocating for a CSEC model designed for SCs in schools.

School-based Awareness, Identification, and Support (AIS) Model and Implications

To address this call, meet the need, and bridge the gap, the authors propose a three-step trauma informed CSEC Awareness, Identification, and Support (AIS) Model that SCs can integrate into comprehensive SC programs that align with

ASCA Professional Standards and Competencies (ASCA, 2019). To provide trauma informed services and without overwhelming children who have experienced CSEC, schools are encouraged to first establish support (Marquez et al, 2020). Marquez et al. (2020) found that it may be “best to address at least some...basic needs (i.e., shelter, food, safety, legal concerns, education) prior to initiating treatment to enhance the likelihood of successful therapeutic engagement” (p. 259). SCs can assist in these efforts by collaborating with social workers to address the student’s needs while also offering support. SCs can provide ongoing school-wide trainings on awareness, prevention, identification of CSEC and support. SCs can advocate for and participate in school-wide trauma-informed approaches, the coordination of evidence-based screenings and risk assessments, and the identification of policies and procedures that may be potentially harmful to children who have experienced CSEC (Middleton et al., 2018). The following is an overarching view of the AIS Model with each area expanded and explained in detail:

- Step 1: Awareness & Prevention
 - Schoolwide Training
 - Parent & Community Training
- Step 2: Identification and Assessment
 - Level A Identification
 - Level B Report and Respond.
 - Level C Refer, Recommend, Reintegration, and Ongoing Evaluation
- Step 3: Support for CSEC Students

Step 1: Awareness & Prevention

Awareness and prevention is the first step in the AIS Model. School and district level initiatives that promote awareness and prevention are essential to reducing the risk of CSEC. ASCA (2019) states SCs should “facilitate in-service training or workshops for families, administrators, other school staff, teachers or other stakeholders to share school counseling expertise” (p.5). School leaders understanding and supporting the school counselor’s role and advocacy related to CSEC can assist in this effort. Although there are other trained mental health professionals in the district, SCs are often the only fulltime trained mental health professional on site in many schools (Pincus et al., 2020).

To increase awareness and prevention of CSEC, SCs should work to educate all stakeholders including school personnel on the indicators of children who are experiencing CSEC, “particularly those who work with students in higher-risk groups, or staff who, by virtue of their positions, are most likely to notice red flags” (USDOE, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021, p. 15). Some of the key personnel should include SCs, parents, teachers, bus drivers, school nurses, attendance officers, and administrative assistants. These individuals should also be trained in how to refer students who are experiencing CSEC.

In the current ASCA model (2022), SCs provide comprehensive services to all students aligned with their school’s

Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework. MTSS is a culturally sustaining support framework that is used to implement data-based problem-solving to achieve student success through academic and behavioral instruction and intervention using tiered approaches to improve learning and social/emotional functioning (Sink, 2016).

Each tier within the MTSS framework allows SCs to differentiate their services depending on need. Specific to CSEC, tier one services allow SCs to provide CSEC training that is more preventative in nature. This is done through school-wide training to teachers, staff, and students along with offering parent and community training. Tier two services allow SCs to provide individual and group training to help students identify peers who may exhibit indicators of CSEC. Tier three services allow SCs to collaborate with mental health professionals within the school and community, referring students in need of clinical treatment (ASCA, 2022; Sink, 2016).

School-Wide Training

To increase awareness and prevention of CSEC, school-wide training initiatives can be implemented. School professionals are mandated reporters who must report suspected child abuse; however, some school professionals may have received little to no training on CSEC, or they may believe that it does not exist within their community (Harrison & Todd, 2021). SCs can train school professionals and students to recognize indicators and impact of CSEC (ASCA, 2020). Through this training, professionals and students will be able to report suspected CSEC to SCs, who are mandated report will then report to child protective services (ASCA, 2022). Likewise, school professionals and students need to be trained on the dynamics of CSEC recognizing that children experiencing CSEC may be hesitant to report their abuse due to prolonged exposure or due to the relationship with the perpetrator, who may be a guardian or caregiver (Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2017). Hartinger- Saunders et al. (2017) found that 60% of mandated reporters have never been trained on CSEC and that 25% did not believe that it was happening within their community, which is why CSEC training organizations like GEMS, Mission Kids, and Darkness to Light could help bridge this knowledge gap for SCs. It is also important for SCs and school personnel to recognize that it is not their responsibility to investigate the alleged abuse or the truth of the allegation; instead, it is their responsibility to follow legal and ethical obligations as a mandated reporter (ASCA Ethical Standards, 2022; Tuttle et al., 2019).

In addition to the professional level, awareness and prevention training can be implemented at the peer level. Given students confide in peers about sexual abuse more often than adults (McElvaney et al., 2014), SCs can also develop a peer-to-peer CSEC awareness programs, which focuses on training students to identify risks and warning signs in their peers and explains how to properly report CSEC confidentially. If students recognize indicators of CSEC or suspect a student CSEC, reporting can be done in numerous ways such

as face-to-face to the school counselor(s) or trusted adult within the school, an anonymous box located in a neutral place in the school (e.g., media center) or a text line. Texting has been reported as the fastest growing means of reporting trafficking to hotlines (Polaris Project, 2019). Due to this, schools can set up a specific number and encourage students to report CSEC within or outside of the school setting. Peer-to-peer trainings can be tailored to multiple settings, including classroom instruction, group, or in conjunction with parent training.

The AIS program can be infused into a comprehensive SC programs but should be tailored to the developmental level of the students. Effective SC is a collaborative process involving SCs and other school stakeholders (ASCA, 2019); working together, they can identify students in need. However, without training and continued professional development for school professionals, some students may not be properly identified or may continue to experience ongoing CSEC.

Training for school personnel can occur before or after school, during teacher workdays, through predesigned training materials, or an online training module. The ability of SCs and school professionals to recognize potential indicators or involvement in CSES may help to prevent and protect youth from further victimization (Harper et al., 2018). Table 1 provides online CSEC resources for schools.

Parent and Community Training

Awareness and prevention extend to training for parents and community partners. Parents and community members may be resistant to address CSEC in schools; however, working together, SCs and school professionals can help parents and community members recognize and react responsibly to CSEC as well as recognizing risk factors that will aid in the prevention (Harper et al., 2018). SCs can also help parents and community members understand how myths and attitudes towards CSEC create barriers to identification and treatment (Litam & Lam, 2020). Parents should also be informed of the factors and indicators for CSEC and be provided resources on how to discuss this topic with their child. Helping parents understand contributing factors can assist in the awareness and prevention of CSEC (Harper et al., 2018). Handouts can be distributed that contain the child abuse reporting information. If parents suspect their child is involved with CSEC, the SCs should provide referrals to appropriate resources. SCs follow up with these families to ensure services have been provided. Table 2 provides online CSEC resources for parents and the community.

Step 2: Identification and Assessment

Identification and assessment of support needs are parts of the second step in the AIS Model. To assist in identifying CSEC students, schools can develop an AIS Model team which includes SCs, administrators, teachers, and school psychologists to evaluate the needs of the students and organize a plan of action. The team would determine the roles

Table 1
Online CSEC Resources for Schools

Organization	Description	Website
Mission Kids	A non-profit organization that provides training to schools on the CSEC and offers a variety of resources including curriculum materials to schools.	https://missionkidscac.org/
Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS)	Offers a 3-day intensive CSEC curriculum/training for schools and is funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. GEMS created the first national training curriculum on the commercial sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking of children and youth.	https://www.gems-girls.org/get-trained
Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas	The goal of Community Toolbox is to help provide peer education program support.	https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/improving-services/peer-education/main
Tim Tebow Foundation	A global law enforcement database with over 50,000 children worldwide who work to identify and protect children impacted by CSEC worldwide.	https://timtebowfoundation.org/unknown/home.php
International School Counselor Association	The International School Counseling Association provides leadership and advocacy for the profession of school counseling in international schools. They provide resources, professional development, and a collaborative network benefiting student success in the global community.	https://iscainfo.com/

Table 2
Online CSEC Resources for parents and community

Organization	Description	Website
RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)	RAINN conducts programs to prevent sexual violence, help survivors, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. Their National Sexual Assault Online Hotline (Open 24/7) provides free, confidential, help for sexual assault victims, and their friends and families. They can also help victims find local Crisis and Counseling Centers.	https://www.rainn.org/
National Center on Sexual Exploitation NCOSE	The leading non-profit organization exposing the links between all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation.	www.endsexualexploitation.org
National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)	The mission is to help find missing children, reduce sexual exploitation, and prevent child victimization.	https://www.missingkids.org/HOME
Darkness to Light	A non-profit organization that provides training to adults on child sexual abuse prevention and is committed to empowering adults to end sexual abuse.	https://www.d2l.org/
OUR Rescue	An organization that seeks to bring worldwide awareness on the global epidemic of child sex trafficking. They assist survivors of all ages. They also provide global educational awareness through multiple films specific to CSEC (Example: Sounds of Freedom).	https://ourrescue.org
Congressional Black Caucus Foundation	A foundation that provides a snapshot of information on sex trafficking among black females (Davey, N.D.).	https://www.cbcfinc.org/ https://www.cbcfinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Sex-TraffickingReport3.pdf
International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children	The International Centre provides resources, support and training which connect victims and families with support services.	https://www.icmec.org/education-portal/

each member would play, discuss how to screen students, and then educate faculty. The AIS Model team will then begin implementation by beginning the screening process, to be done twice a year.

SCs can use informal and evidence-based screeners to help identify students who need further evaluation or intervention. Informal indicators to be considered include: a) housing or caregiving instability; b) prior abuse or trauma; c) notable changes in health or appearance; d) risky environmental exposure; e) unhealthy, dangerous, or violent intimate relationships; f) signs of current trauma; g) being controlled or coerced by another person; and h) exchanging sex for money or material goods (Basson et al., 2019). More formalized screeners can be used to assess support needs, for example, the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) screener (Finkelhor et al., 2015). The ACEs is a 10-item questionnaire which screens for traumatic events that occurred for a child from birth to age 17. SCs may also use the Commercial Sexual Exploitation – Identification Tool (CSE-IT; Haley & Langs, 2017). The CSE-IT has eight indicators ranging from no concern to clear concern for exploitation.

After the AIS team has identified a student who may have experienced CSEC, the AIS team would then follow mandated reporting procedures in their state and district. It is important that the AIS Model team complies with mandating reporting protocol in cases of suspected CSEC to comply

with legal guidelines. After reporting, the AIS team then further evaluates the student to identify the support needs. Students are placed in one of three levels for school based support. The three support levels are listed in the Table 3.

Level A Identification

SCs can provide school-based support to assist in the identification of children who experienced CSEC. SCs may determine informational topics that may be most beneficial to students to be presented on a school wide based, classroom instruction based on their developmental levels. For example, grades K-5 will focus on good touch/bad touch, stranger, online and community safety, practice safety scenarios, setting physical boundaries and emotional regulation. Grades 6-12 will build upon the foundational skills learned in K-5, while also focusing on abduction prevention, internet/cyber safety, reinforcing warning signs and risks in individuals and peers and reporting protocols. Interventions implemented at Level A should be assessed to ensure their effectiveness and to assess additional schoolwide needs.

Level B Report and Respond

Once school personnel have identified a student, a mandated reporter must report to the agency (e.g., Child Protective Services) mandated by their state laws and district policies.

Table 3
Student Support Level for CSEC

Level	Qualifications	Action	Intervention
Level A	All students	Identification	Classroom Instruction, school wide assembly, peer-to-peer & parent training
Level B	Children identified as having CSEC history	Report & Respond	Small group counseling
Level C	Children in Zone 2 who are experiencing academic, social, emotional challenges at school.	Refer, Recommend, Reintegration, and Ongoing Evaluation	Individual counseling, mentoring, referrals, and reintegration

The next is for the SC to further assess for ways to develop a school-based response appropriate for each CSEC student. Table 4 provides examples of responses that align with the SCs roles and promote academic, social, and emotional development.

Level C Refer, Recommend, Reintegration, and Ongoing Evaluation

Level C school based support is designed to refer students of CSEC to outside counseling and recommend additional support within the school, including reintegration. Reintegration in Level C can include individual counseling, one-on-one mentoring, or referrals to community agencies for more intensive services (Ockerman et al., 2012). SCs using individual counseling should implement evidence-based approaches such as Narrative Therapy (grades 6-12) and Play Therapy (grades K-5). SCs should keep in mind that ASCA has identified providing long-term individual counseling as an inappropriate role for SCs (ASCA, 2019). SCs could work with family members on referrals, resources, and information on how to best support CSEC students.

The SC may also implement evaluations and assessments to check progress and see if additional services are needed. Assessments may include pre and posttests, counselor observations, and student self-reports. Assessments can be provided weekly, monthly, or quarterly based on the individual need of students. The assessments are not for diagnosing purposes, as this is outside of the scope of school counseling and should only be used to help the SC track student progress and to provide additional resources.

Step 3: Support for CSEC Students

Providing support for CSEC students is the last step in the AIS Model. When working with CSEC students, SCs should research and maintain a list of community resources within

the area. Below is Table 5 Online CSEC Resources that can be provided to students nationally and internationally.

CSEC students will need ongoing support and referrals throughout their school career (O’Brian, et al. 2022). While the levels of the AIS model presented here by the authors are differentiated, they do not represent a linear process. Based on the complexity of trauma, children who have experienced CSEC may have fluctuating needs across all three levels of the AIS model as they develop and mature. SCs should continually collaborate with local mental health professionals. We encourage SC to have parents sign a waiver to allow mental health and SC to work with others to help the child who has experienced CSEC. The SC can also collaborate with the school social worker to assist with meeting basic needs. The SC should refer to a school psychologist to rule out learning disabilities. SCs can offer children who have experienced CSEC individualized supports when transitioning and reintegration back into school. Children’s needs may overlap with Level 2 as students may require ongoing school based supports such as those listed in Table 4. Additionally, referrals for career support may be needed for older children such as resume writing, interviewing skills, college and career readiness, interest inventory, financial planning, and establish practical career goals.

Implications to Policy Makers and a Global Population

CSEC is a global issue and needs to be addressed systematically. School administrators, SCs and policy makers can work together to combat this rising issue impacting children worldwide. SC are ideally situated to implement this model into their school system and advocate local policy makers to ratify this model into all school in the district and into the school structure. This will also require a commitment to funding for training and implementation. Policy makers can also be encouraged to increase awareness on a community wide basis. This awareness, identification, and support model can be used as framework to support schools across the globe.

Limitations and Recommendations

Limitations are found within the literature review process as the authors conducted a systematized review of literature found within the United States and a targeted review of international literature. We recommend future research include a systematized review of global literature on the topic of CSEC. United States based SCs and international applications may need to adjust and modify the model to meet the individual needs of children who have experienced CSEC based on the cultural norms, laws, and the sensitivity of this topic. Assessment procedures may need to be modified based on the culture or ability level of the student. A limitation of the model may be parental consent, which may not always be given due to the nature of the topic and their fears of re-traumatizing the student. Those who provide direct services to children who have experienced CSEC need to be

Table 4
Examples of School Counselor Responses

CSEC Student Need	School Counselor Response Examples
Safety Plan	Help CSEC students develop a school-based individualized safety plan by identifying sources of support (i.e., counselors, administrators, teachers, friends), healthy coping skills, and calming techniques. The safety plan may also include a list of resources such as books, websites, and places like calming corners within the school when they need to take a break, and important contact information, and emergency numbers when the child is not at school.
Course Schedule	Work with the school’s master scheduler to ensure the CSEC student has course schedule and course offerings that are on track for graduation, especially if the student is in high school or secondary school.
Experiential Courses	Advocate for CSEC students to be placed in experiential courses such as art, music, robotics, business/entrepreneurship, and advanced placement courses when appropriate.
Academic Supports	Advocate for CSEC students to receive academic supports for reading and math, early intervention plans, tutoring during the school day, and enrichment courses when available during extended learning times.
Attendance	Work with school administrators to resolve CSEC attendance issues and develop an appropriate discipline plan using positive behavior interventions and supports.
Collaboration	Collaborate with other school based mental health professionals to evaluate if the student qualifies for academic supports. They may be able to offer resources that can also temporarily assist with meeting basic needs such as food, clothing, personal products, school supplies and additional academic supports.
Small Group Counseling	<p>Offer small group counseling as a school-based support for CSEC students who may be interested in a more private and smaller setting to learn and practice skills on topics that promote academic, social/emotional, and behavior improvement.</p> <p>Purpose: Offer support and specific skills to CSEC students who have expressed interest in participating in a school-based small group. Goal of the school-based Small Group: to improve and support the academic, social/emotional, and behavior development of CSEC students.</p> <p>Target Audience: identified CSEC students and those who fall within the risk indicators and have expressed interest in attending the small group. Recommended size: (2-5).</p> <p>Psychoeducation Topics: Academics: study skills, testing taking strategies, goal setting, career counseling, college readiness training, organizational skills, time management, school/life management Behavior: conflict resolution, communication skills training, assertiveness training, problem-solving and decision-making training, self-care and self-compassion budgeting Social: friendship 101, social skills training, setting healthy boundaries, social media safety Emotional: anger manager, self-esteem, emotional regulation, grief/bereavement</p>

adequately trained in trauma informed interventions to prevent re-traumatizing students, particularly when offering group counseling. Recommendations include classroom instruction, small groups, and school wide assembly topics should be designed based on the developmental level and culture of the served population.

Conclusion

CSEC continues to impact thousands of children each year (Casey Family Programs, 2022). As a result, SCs can play a key role in identifying potential and current students. SCs can educate students, parents/caregivers, educators, and community leaders on the signs and dangers often associated with CSEC. SCs can also connect students and caregivers with community and national resources. To best serve

students who are exploited and those most at risk, it is important SCs are trained and equipped with resources within the school as well as resources within their community.

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Table 5
Online CSEC Resources for Students

Organization	Description	Website or Phone
National Human Trafficking Hotline	A safe, confidential service that will connect you to a trained staff member from a sexual assault service provider in your area.	Call 1-888-373-7888 (TTY: 711) or send a text to BeFree (233733).
National Trafficking Sheltered Alliance	Find residential services for recovery from trafficking or sexual exploitation.	https://shelteredalliance.org/send-a-referral/
National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC)	NHTRC provides a hotline and other information for survivors of human trafficking	https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en/report-trafficking/
CyberTip Line	The Cyber Tip Line is operated by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in partnership with the FBI and other law enforcement agencies.	1-800-843-5678 https://report.cybertip.org/
International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children	The International Centre provides resources, support, and training to prevent child abuse, neglect, and sexual exploitation.	https://www.icmec.org/education-portal/
Love Justice International	Their mission is to share the love of Jesus Christ by helping children impacted by CSEC.	https://www.lovejustice.ngo/
Home of Hope for Girls	Home of Hope for girls, located near Johannesburg, South Africa, offers a safe residence to children and teens who have survived abusive situations, predominantly linked to child sex trafficking.	https://www.homeofhopeforgirls.org.za/
Destiny Rescue	Destiny Rescue works to rescue children from sexual exploitation in Cambodia, Dominican Republic, Kenya, Nepal, Togo, and many undisclosed locations.	https://www.destinyrescue.org/our-work/where-we-work/nepal/
Polaris Project	Polaris Project is transforming the way that individuals and communities respond to human trafficking, in the U.S. and globally.	https://polarisproject.org/

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