

RESEARCH SNAPSHOT: DOMESTIC CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING INSTITUTE EVALUATION

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

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Introduction

Domestic Child Sex Trafficking (DCST) is a rising and multifaceted issue within the United States. The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), through funds from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, developed training and judicial practice tools with the goals of identifying and servicing victims of DCST. NCJFCJ created a curriculum to specify ways to identify victims of sex trafficking, explain the trauma experienced by victims, and develop appropriate intervention and treatment. With this knowledge on child sex trafficking, judges make more informed decisions.

Background and Methods

A pre/post-test design was used to evaluate changes in knowledge, attitude, and decision making following completion of the Institute. The pre-survey was disseminated online to evaluate prior knowledge on DCST topics (e.g. trauma-informed systems of justice); understanding of DCST terms (e.g. renegade) and views on DCST issue (e.g. “judges have great discretion in how they treat victims of sex trafficking”). In addition, participants were given case scenarios to evaluate ability to identify DCST red flags and how judicial officers were currently responding (or likely to respond) to cases.

The post-survey was distributed onsite to participants in paper form with the goal of gauging change in knowledge (information learned from pre-survey to post-survey), attitude (response to whether training improved capacity), and practice (if participants anticipated changes in their actions).

“I will be much more proactive in my own role on the bench/more trauma informed [and] responsive in how I interact with my youth. I will share my knowledge and not be afraid to show my passion to my colleagues and ask/challenge them to become more informed.”

KEY FINDINGS

- Participants reported increases in knowledge acquisition—in all topic areas; significant differences in seven topic areas; and improvements in identifying DCST terms
- There were statistically significant increases in perceptions of policy and practice.
- Participants were more aware of DCST red flags following the institute and self-reported they are more able to identify victims following participation in the institute.
- Participants also responded differently to the case scenario following the institute, with increased likelihood of ordering trauma screenings and referring victims to advocates, as well as bringing child welfare to the table.

Results

A majority of the participants have five or more years of experience as a judicial officer and have worked on both child abuse/neglect and juvenile justice cases. In terms of knowledge acquisition, from pre- to post-survey, there was an increase in knowledge for each of the topics and significant statistical changes for seven of the topic areas.

From the pre- to post- survey time period, there was an increase in a majority of the terms participants were able to define. Participants were also more likely to identify sex trafficking myths post-institute. In particular, there was a significant increase in the number of participants who responded correctly to the myth or fact statement on “the average age for entry into sex trafficking is 14-17.”

Statement (Myth or Fact?)	Answered Correctly in Pre-Survey	Answered Correctly in Post-Survey	Percent Difference
The average age for entry into sex trafficking is 14 - 17 years old.	38.5	81.8	43.3
One out of three runaways will be lured into prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home.	84.6	100	15.4
Children in the foster care system are more vulnerable to become DCST victims	100	100	0
Only pedophiles buy sex with minors.	100	100	0
Only girls are victims of sex trafficking	100	90.3	-9.7

The case scenarios assessing practitioners’ ability to identify child sex trafficking red flags and responses to cases revealed significant improvements from pre- to post-responses in identifying red flags, and there was an increase in the total number of hearing order outcomes proposed by the participants. Within the post-survey, participants post-institute were more likely to respond to the case by saying they would request screening for trauma, involve the victim in placement decisions, appoint a victim advocate, and involve child welfare.

All participants reported that training increased their capacity to address DCST issues. In addition, participants intend to modify their court practices by being more proactive at identifying red flags and forming collaborative teams to address jurisdiction specific issues. Participants also identified challenges, including concern with buy-in from community stakeholders, availability of resources and time as barriers to change.

Research Snapshots highlight key elements of reports and projects that address the need for empirically-based research on systems change in the juvenile and family court system. For more information, please visit our website: www.ncjfcj.org

The mission of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges is to provide all judges, courts, and related agencies involved with juvenile, family, and domestic violence cases with the knowledge and skills to improve the lives of families and children who seek justice.

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