

AAP: How physicians can recognize and support victims of child exploitation

Celeste Krewson, Assistant Editor

The American Academy of Pediatrics has updated their report, “Exploitation, Labor and Sex Trafficking of Children and Adolescents: Health Care Needs of Patients,” to provide updated guidance on how physicians can recognize and help children and adolescents subjected to trafficking or exploitation.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has provided updated guidance for physicians to recognize and help youths at risk of or subjected to sex trafficking or exploitation in their report, “Exploitation, Labor and Sex Trafficking of Children and Adolescents: Health Care Needs of Patients.”

The report, which was published online December 19, 2022, discusses how measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 may have also increased the risks of trafficking and exploitation.

“During COVID-related lockdowns and travel restrictions, children and families were isolated, and many suffered income loss, which can increase their vulnerability to exploiters and traffickers,” said Jordan Greenbaum, MD, lead author of the report.

Greenbaum also noted that some children may not be aware of when they are being exploited, making them less willing to disclose their situation to a healthcare professional. This can make recognition of exploitation and trafficking difficult.

About 3.3 million children and adolescents were estimated to have experienced forced labor worldwide in 2021, of which child sex trafficking is a subset. Commercial sexual exploitation affected an estimated 1.7 million children and adolescents in 2021, according to the International Labour Organization.

Children and adolescents are at high risk of exploitation when they have unstable housing, or if they are missing from care, minors of a marginalized group, unaccompanied immigrant youth, or from families which experience violence, substance use disorders, or mental illness. Communities with low resources also put children and adolescents at greater risk.

Red flags for trafficking and exploitation are discussed in the report, along with screening tools and detailed information for medical evaluation and aftercare.

“Physicians can play a vital role in offering critical services to vulnerable and exploited children and adolescents,” Greenbaum said. “An important first step is to develop trusting, respectful relationships with patients who need to feel safe and supported.” – www.contemporarypediatrics.com, December 23, 2022

Reference

American Academy of Pediatrics issues clinical report update on exploitation, labor and sex trafficking. American Academy of Pediatrics. December 19, 2022. Accessed December 20,

2022. <https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2022/american-academy-of-pediatrics-issues-clinical-report-update-on-exploitation-labor-and-sex-trafficking/>