

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

THE NEW THREAT LANDSCAPE FACING TENNESSEE'S CHILDREN

Presented by Lucas Trautman MD, MPH, ABPN,
Children's Advocacy Days

Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth

March 10, 2026

Trevecca Nazarene University

LUCAS A. TRAUTMAN, MD, MPH, ABPN, ABPM



MEDICAL DIRECTOR

Lakeside Behavioral Health System

NATIONAL MEDIA MENTAL HEALTH EXPERT:

BBC, Fox News, Washington Post

SUBSTANCES FREQUENTLY ENCOUNTERED BY TENNESSEE TEENAGERS

● Fentanyl

Fentanyl was responsible for 88.14% of all opioid overdose deaths in 2021 and 66.19% of all overdose deaths in 2021. On average, one person is dying from an overdose likely involving fentanyl every five minutes.res.

● Cocaine

Cocaine overdose deaths increased by 23.13% in 2021 and were detected in 24,538 deaths.

● Meth

Methamphetamine overdose deaths increased by 33.69% in 2021 and was detected in 32,856 overdose deaths

● Cathinones

Synthetic cathinones are marketed as cheap substitutes for other stimulants such as amphetamines and cocaine. Products sold as Molly often contain synthetic cathinones instead of MDMA

● Synthetic Cannabinoids

Approximately 280 new synthetic cannabinoids have entered the worldwide illicit drug market from January 2009 through January 2020.

SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS - THE INVISIBLE STRIKE FORCE

- Last year, 69% of U.S. overdose deaths were driven by synthetic opioids more than 74,000 lives erased
- Pills look identical to the real thing. The difference? A few salt grains of fentanyl can drop you dead before you hit the floor.
- Nitazenes now surface, opioids even stronger than fentanyl, untraceable on routine screens. Invisible weapons in plain sight.
- Cartels don't sell drugs anymore. They sell certainty: if it reaches you, you're playin Russian roulette.

SHADOW ROUTES AND THE NEW OFFENSIVE

- Precursors move from rogue labs in Asia to cartel kitchens in Mexico, then slip north in cargo, mail, speedboats, even submarines.
- In 2025, Washington escalated: cartels branded as terrorist organizations. That unlocked new rules of engagement.
- Maritime interdictions are now underway in the Caribbean, an emerging front that feels more like counterinsurgency than narcotics policing.
- Cartels adapt fast. Bulk shipments, micro -parcels, darknet storefronts. Each channel cut becomes two more. This is hydra warfare.

SUBSTANCES CIRCULATING UNDER THE RADAR

- Flualprazolam / Bromazolam
- Nitazenes - Isotonitazene, Metonitazene, Protonitazene, Etonitazene
- Para -Fluorofentanyl
- Tianeptine
- Xylazine

Xylazine



VETERINARY ANESTHETIC

Xylazine, which has been around since 2019, is a veterinary pharmaceutical that's now a common additive to fentanyl, heroin and cocaine.

LEADING TO OVERDOSE DEATHS

When combined with opioids, the potential for fatal respiratory depression increases.

Naloxone reverses opioid overdoses, but doesn't reverse the effects of xylazine nor is there a specific reversal agent

METHODS OF ABUSE

Recreational use of xylazine can occur via oral ingestion, inhalation, or IV injection, which is the most common route of administration. Also comes in xylazine-soaked paper.

This Will Continue to be a Problem in the US & TN

ANALOGS

As substances get scheduled, new forms are created

RESEARCH CHEMICALS

Easily purchased online as research chemicals labeled "not for human consumption."

THEFT OF FORMULAS

Back alley chemists steal formulas from pharmaceutical patents

ONLINE PHARMACIES

Unscrupulous online pharmacies often sell counterfeit products

ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUMS

Outlets such as Reddit provide instructions on how to use these drugs or find an equivalent.

What can this lead to?

- MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS MORE SEVERE
- SUBSTANCE USE'S EFFECT ON THE BRAIN
- STAGGERING INCREASE IN OVERDOSE DEATHS IN TN

Fentanyl & Contaminated Vape Products

- FENTANYL LETHAL DOSE \approx 2 MG
- LAW ENFORCEMENT HAS IDENTIFIED FENTANYL-CONTAINING VAPE CARTRIDGES AND TANKS
- ILLICIT VAPE CARTRIDGES ARE UNREGULATED BLACK-MARKET PRODUCTS
- CONTENTS MAY INCLUDE:
 - HIGH-POTENCY THC
 - SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS
 - VITAMIN-E ACETATE
- OPIOIDS OR UNKNOWN CONTAMINANTS
- YOUTH OFTEN ASSUME CARTRIDGES ARE “JUST THC”
- TENNESSEE CONTINUES TO SEE MAJOR FENTANYL PENETRATION INTO ILLICIT DRUG MARKETS

TANNER (age 14)

THC - Induced Psychosis

- 14 - year - old tried a THC vape with friends
- Within minutes, he became extremely paranoid
- Began hearing voices
- Thought dogs were chasing him
- Told doctors he had “1,000 babies in his stomach”
- Taken to the emergency room
- Hospitalized for 3 weeks before his brain returned to normal
- Diagnosis: THC - induced psychosis

**lesson: today's high -potency THC
can seriously affect the developing brain**

High -Potency THC Vapes & Adolescent Psychosis

MODERN THC VAPE CARTRIDGES COMMONLY CONTAIN 50–95% THC (VS ~10–20% IN TRADITIONAL CANNABIS)

ADOLESCENT CANNABIS USE INCREASES RISK OF PSYCHOSIS 2–4×

LARGE COHORT STUDIES SHOW UP TO 11× HIGHER RISK OF PSYCHOTIC DISORDERS IN TEEN USERS

CANNABIS-INDUCED PSYCHOSIS OFTEN PRESENTS ACUTELY WITH PARANOIA, HALLUCINATIONS, AGITATION

UP TO 50–75% OF CANNABIS-INDUCED PSYCHOSIS CASES LATER CONVERT TO SCHIZOPHRENIA-SPECTRUM DISORDERS

HIGH-POTENCY VAPING DELIVERS RAPID BRAIN THC EXPOSURE, INCREASING PSYCHIATRIC RISK

Online Platforms & Teen Exploitation Risk

HIGH-TRAFFIC YOUTH PLATFORMS

- Roblox
- Discord

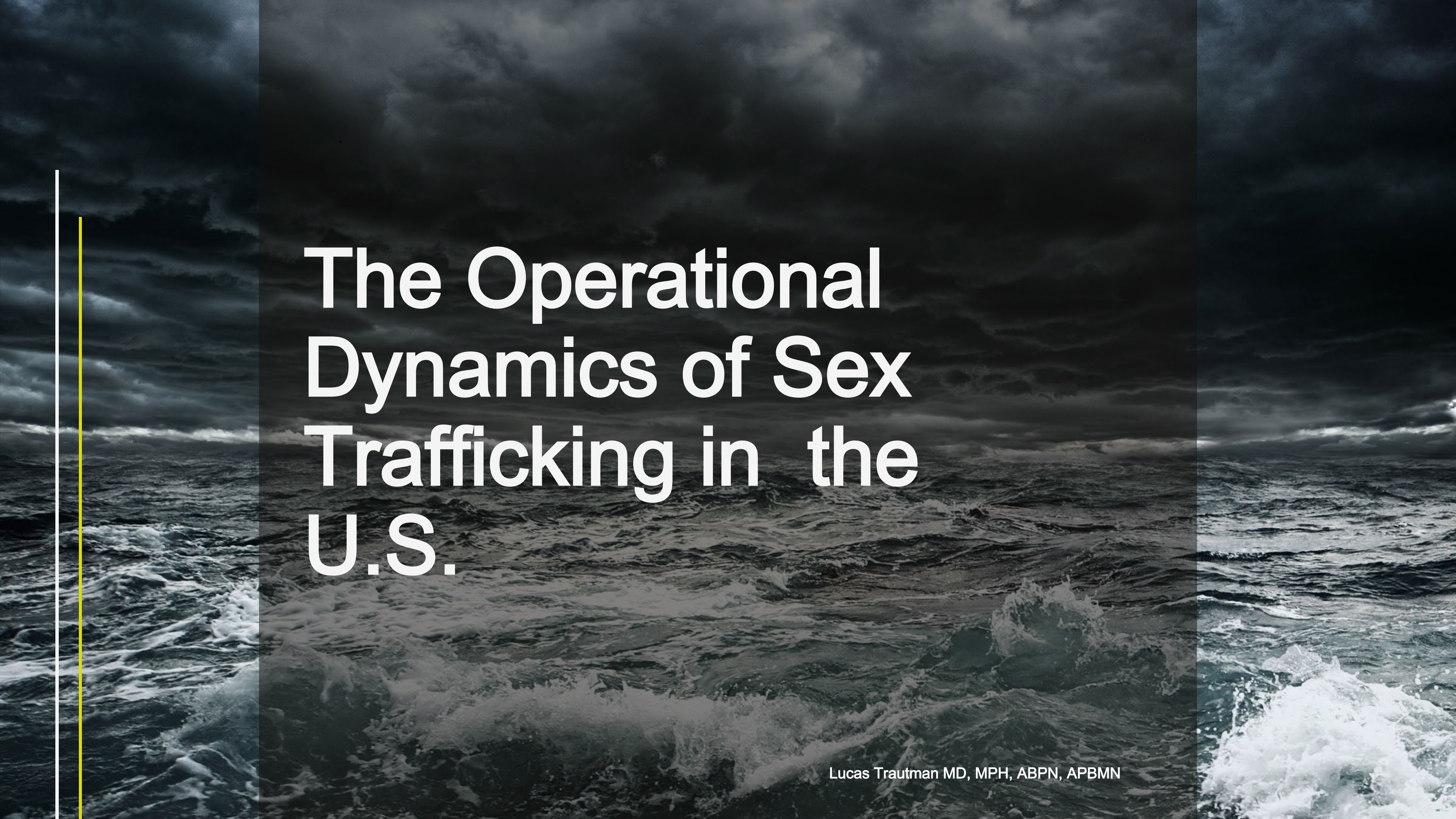
RISK DYNAMICS

- anonymous adult access to minors
- private messaging outside parental oversight
- migration to encrypted chats

DOCUMENTED HARMS

- sexual grooming
- sextortion
- trafficking recruitment
- drug distribution networks

GAMING
PLATFORMS
NOW FUNCTION
AS LARGE
UNMODERATED
SOCIAL
ECOSYSTEMS



The Operational Dynamics of Sex Trafficking in the U.S.

Lucas Trautman MD, MPH, ABPN, APBMN

SEX TRAFFICKING IN AMERICA — THE HIDDEN FRONTLINES

- Hotline data confirmed 21,865 victims in 2024. Most are women and girls. That is the visible surface.
- Analysts project the true figure: between 100,000 and 325,000 women and children trafficked every year in the United States.
- Recruitment is no longer dark alleys. It is Instagram, TikTok, job boards, DM invites. The net is cast through screens, not streets.
- Traffickers run their victims like assets: short -term rentals, burner phones, shell companies, rotating aliases. The machinery is fluid, adaptive, invisible.

AUTUMN'S STORY

WHY SO FEW TRAFFICKERS FACE JUSTICE

- To convict, prosecutors rely on survivors testifying for 12 to 30 months against their captors. That means reliving rape and coercion in a courtroom again and again.
- Many cannot continue. Fear, PTSD, relocation, and threats silence them.
- Defense attorneys shred credibility, exploit memory gaps, and twist the narrative.
- The media yawns unless the case is sensational. Everyday slavery hides in plain sight, unreported and unpunished.
- Result: thousands trafficked, only a trickle of convictions. The system itself is part of the captivity..

RECOGNIZING DISTRESS IN WOMEN AND GIRLS

- Victims rarely say “I am trafficked.” The signs show in posture, eyes, and fear.
- They scan the room as if someone is always watching.
- Their words sound scripted, rehearsed, borrowed
- They rarely carry their own ID. Their phone is not really theirs
- In clinical settings: flat affect, unexplained injuries, chronic fatigue, sudden changes in appearance, secrecy online.
- One red flag alone may be nothing. A pattern of fear and control is the signature of captivity.

MADDIE'S STORY



Thank you.

Lucas Trautman MD, MPH, ABPN, APBM