

No Crying in Sports - The Playbook of Athlete Trafficking

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Introductions

Maura Nsonwu is a professor in the School of Social Work at North Carolina State University.

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*This work is not affiliated with the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.



Objective

- Define & conceptualize human trafficking within the sports industry through social work and public health epistemological approaches & discuss the challenges of conceptualizing this multifaceted social problem.



Objective

- Identify areas within the global sports industry where the human trafficking is most prominent.



Objective III

- Identify and define key vulnerabilities of athletes throughout the recruitment process.

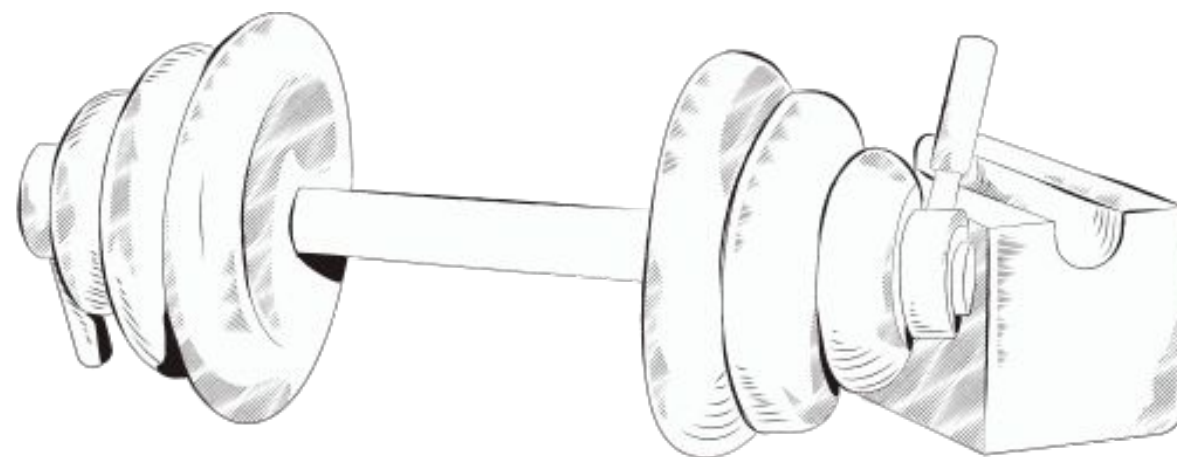


Objective IV

- Identify and discuss potential solutions and next steps to addressing this problem.

Positionality Statement

- We all have varying positionalities that influence how we interact with this topic. We acknowledge that we do not identify as survivors/victims. We did our best to approach this project with cultural humility, curiosity, and empathy.



Disclaimers

- We note that the exploitation of athletes is nuanced and varied. This project seeks to bring attention to these flawed aspects of the sports industry.
- We value the role of sports in our society and the commitment of coaches and athletes in their pursuit of success.
- With this in mind, we encourage our audience to think about the human trafficking of athletes as an unrecognized and unjust aspect of an industry that is often encouraging and inspiring for many.

Disclaimers Continued

- We utilized publicly available secondary sources for our research.
- Our presentation and research acknowledge the suffering, strength, and resilience that survivors/victims experience.
- Although our case presentations live within the public domain, we have chosen to redact any identifiable information regarding the survivors/victims to provide anonymity and honor their experiences.
- We utilize the terms victim (ex. V1, V2) and alleged perpetrator (AP) throughout our case studies.

Broad Overview

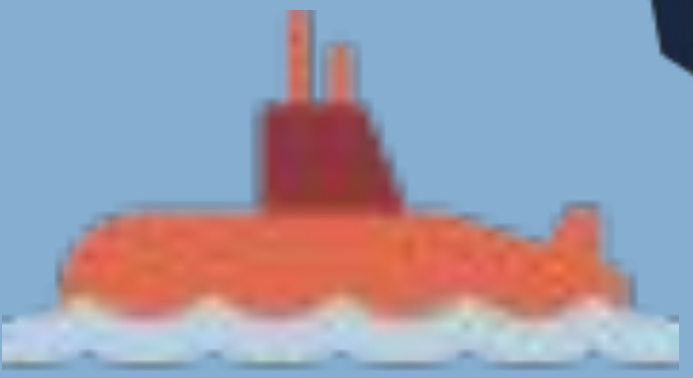
- The human trafficking of athletes is an often-unrecognized global problem.
- The 2020 Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) identified approximately 15,000 victims each year within Europe's soccer organizations (U.S. Department of State).

What circumstances do you consider when you think about human trafficking and sports?

1. The recruitment and solicitation of sex trafficking at large sporting events such as the Super Bowl.
2. The labor trafficking of persons to build infrastructure (stadiums, hotels and airports) for large international sporting events.
3. The recruitment and exploitation of high school athletes.
4. The recruitment and exploitation of college athletes.
5. The recruitment and exploitation of professional athletes.
6. The recruitment and exploitation of men, women and children.

Defining Human Trafficking within the Global Sports Industry

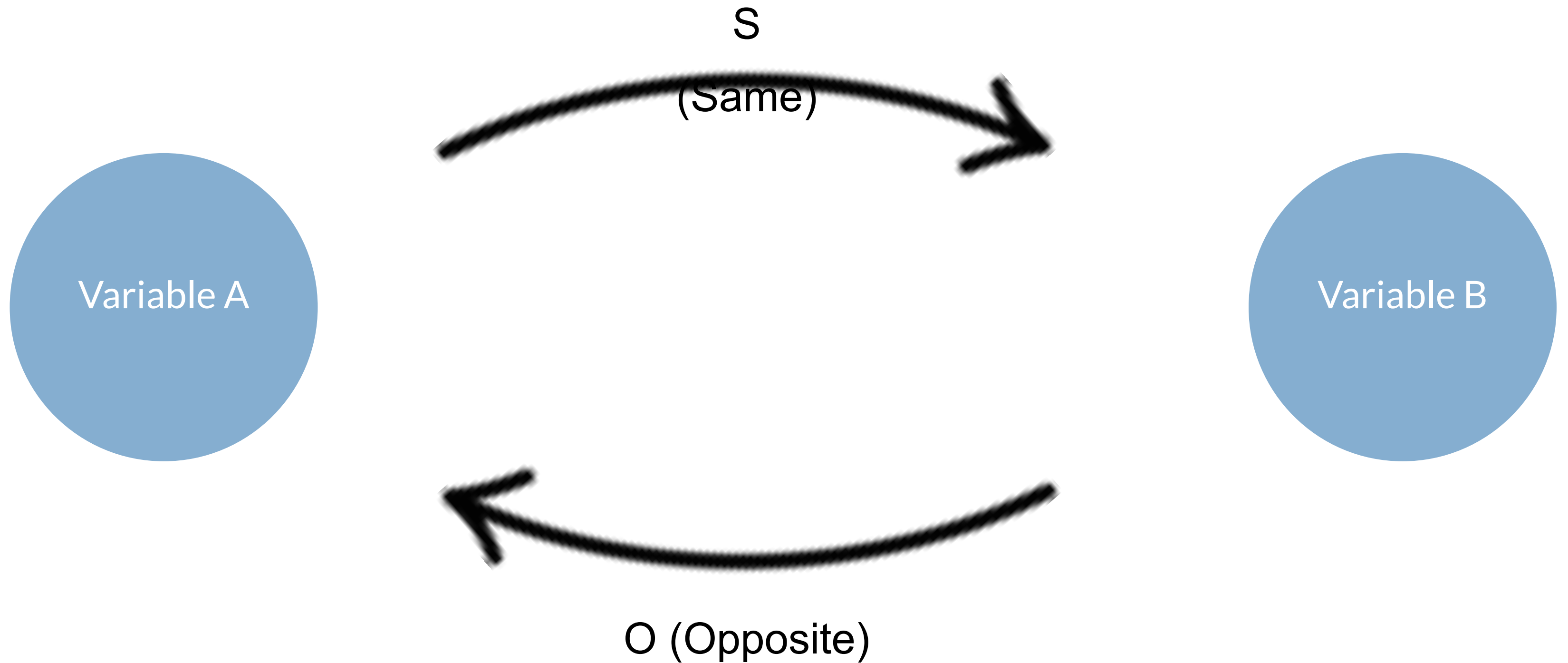
The 20th Trafficking in Persons Report published by the Department of State defines the human trafficking of athletes as the “exploitation of players' dreams” often perpetuated by “insufficient oversight by sports governing bodies and a lack of government enforcement” (2020 Human Trafficking Report).

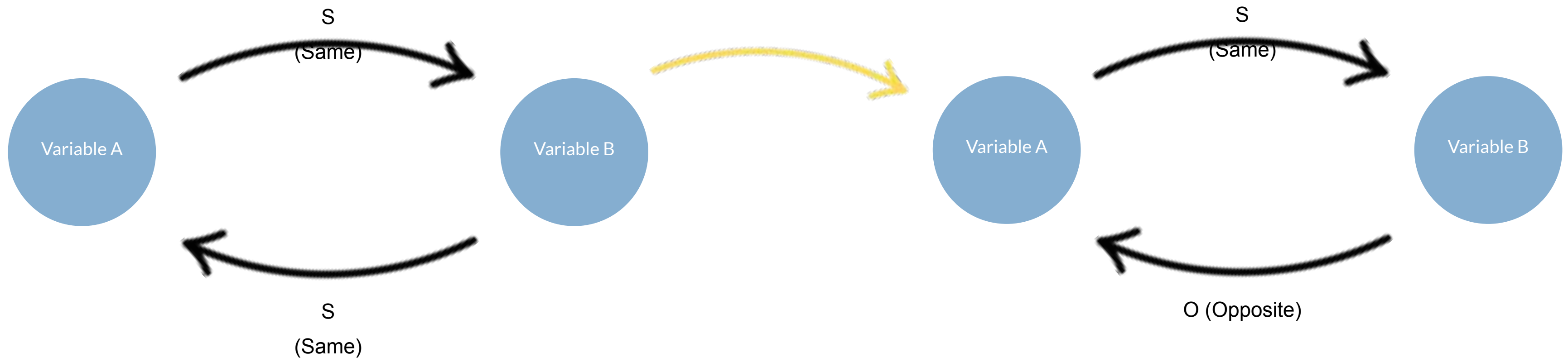


University of Nottingham's Rights Lab

- There is a significant lack of data about trafficking and sports.
- Research has been documented in media reports and white & grey papers.
- Scholarly literature focuses on the study of sports and human rights, sports and migration, and sports and child rights.
- Most of the research on victims of human trafficking and sports focuses on individuals or groups that have migrated to another country to play sports.
- Victims of human trafficking in sports can be men, women, adults and children.

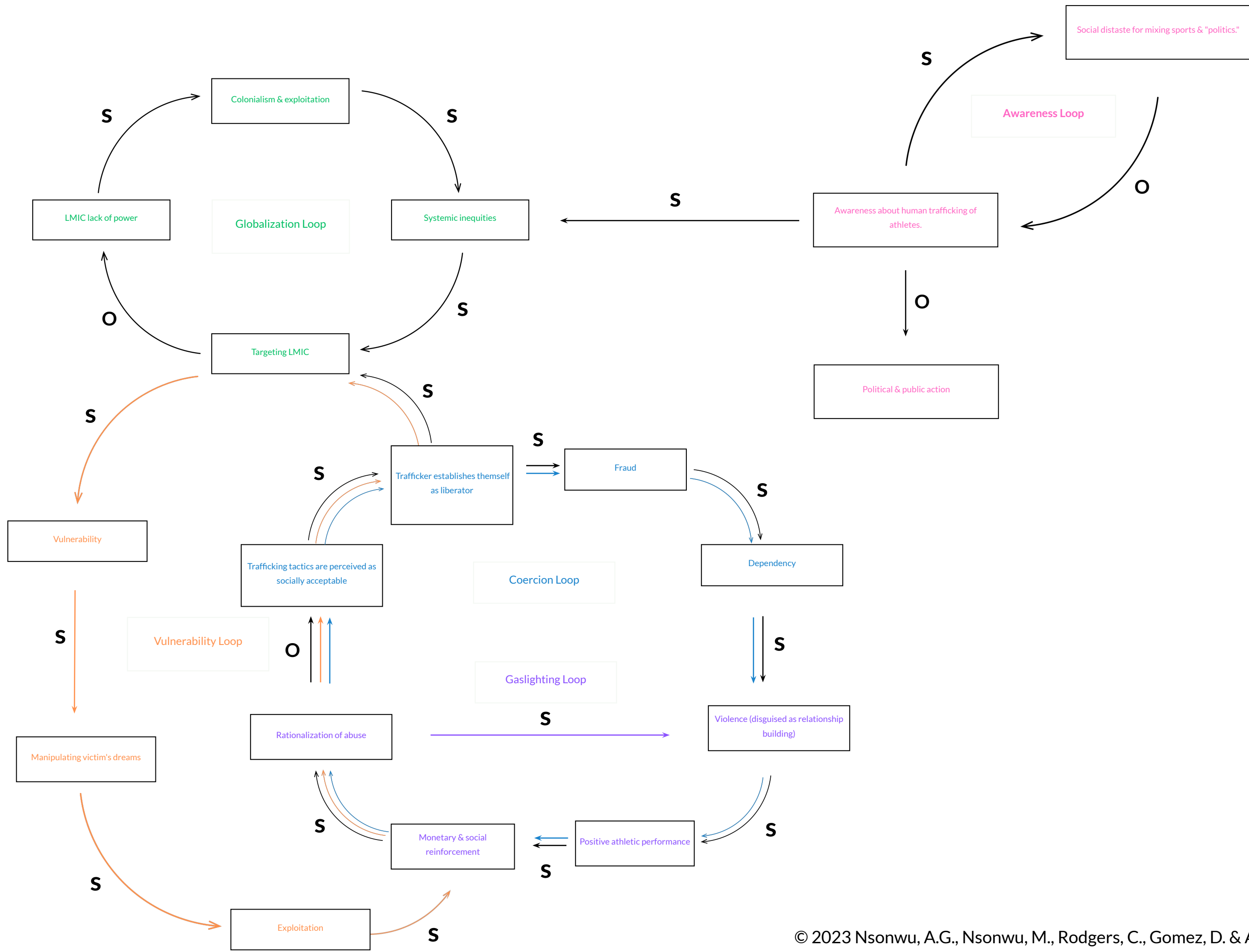
Systems Thinking



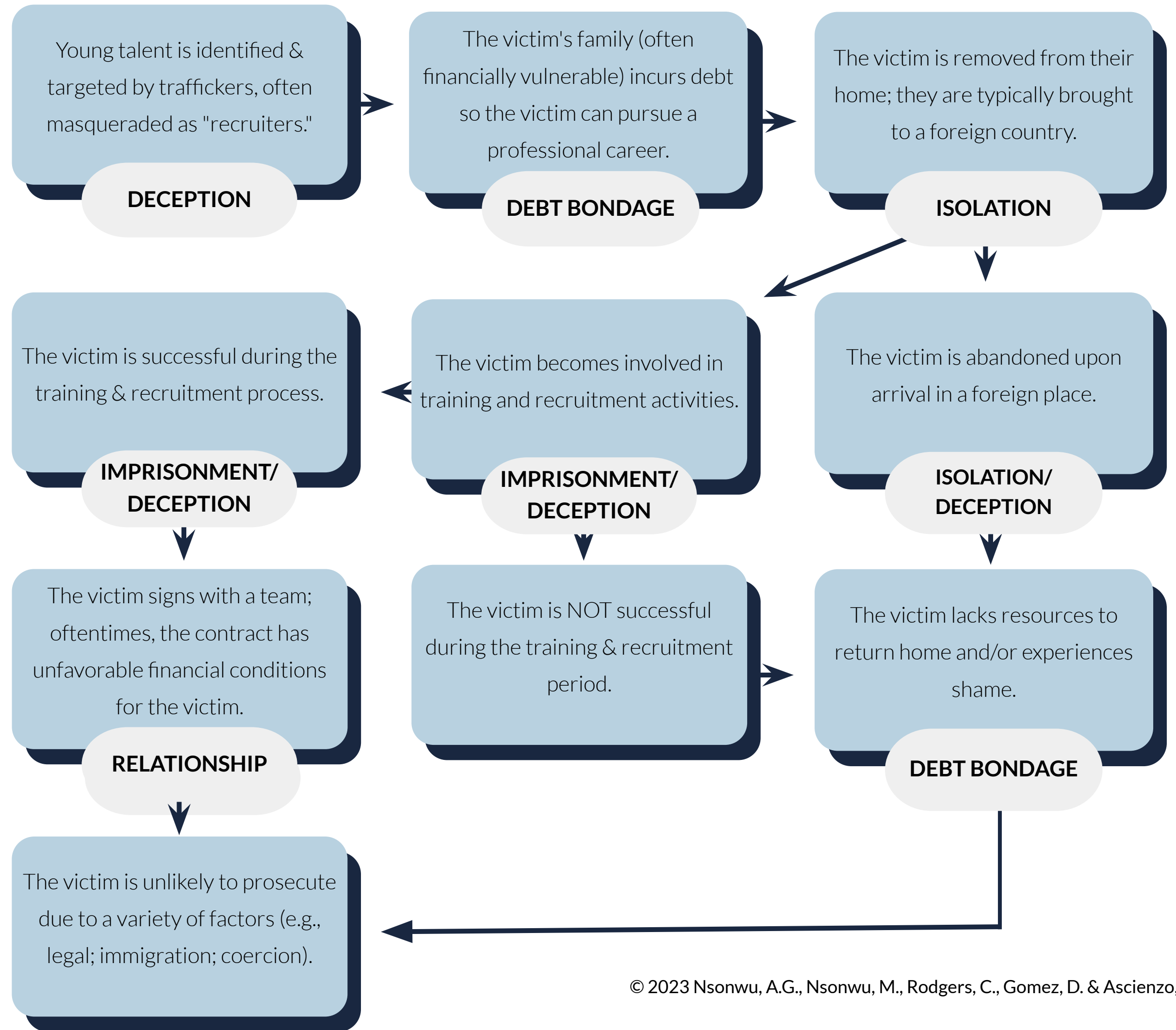


Reinforcing Loop

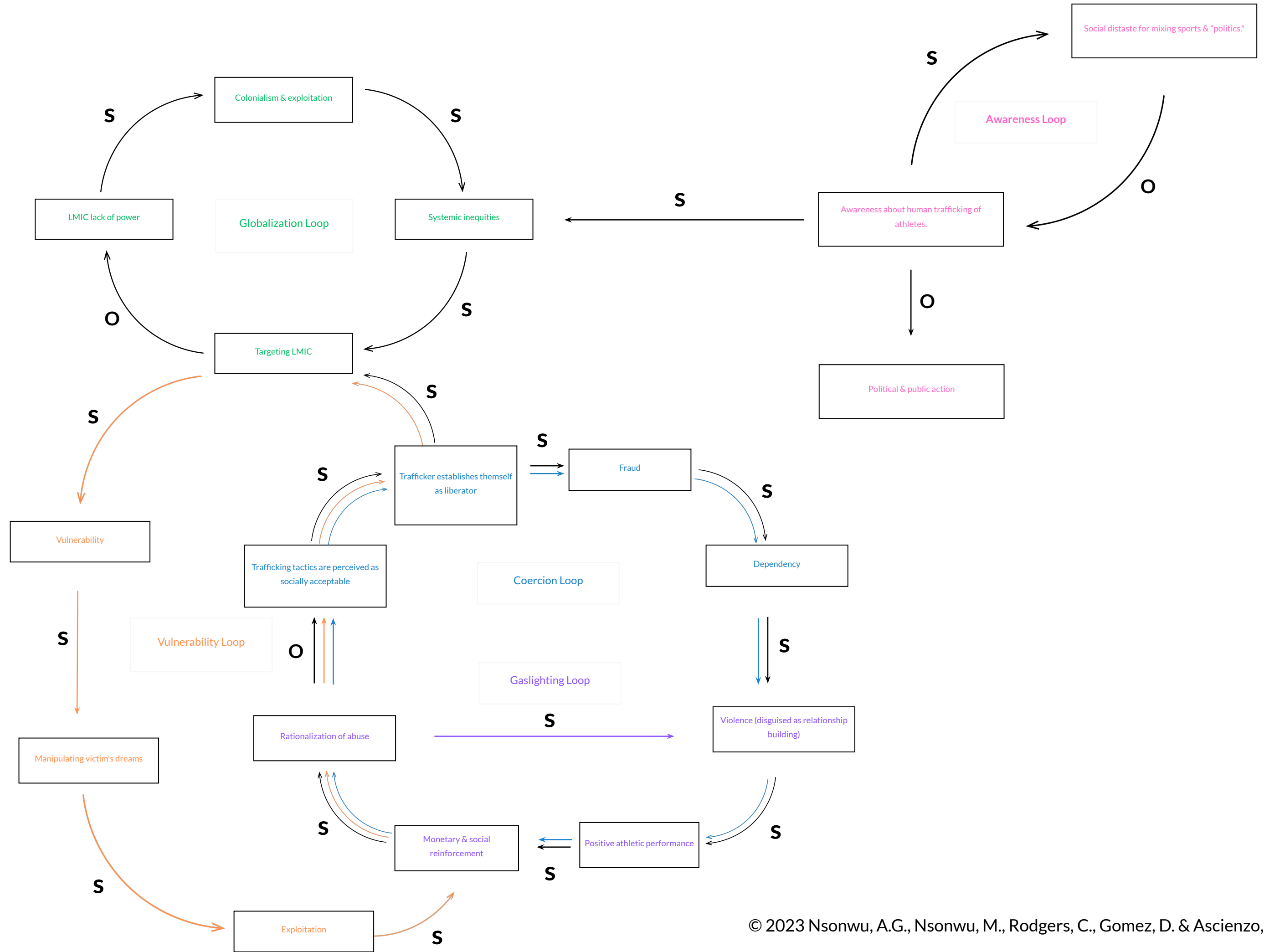
Balancing Loop



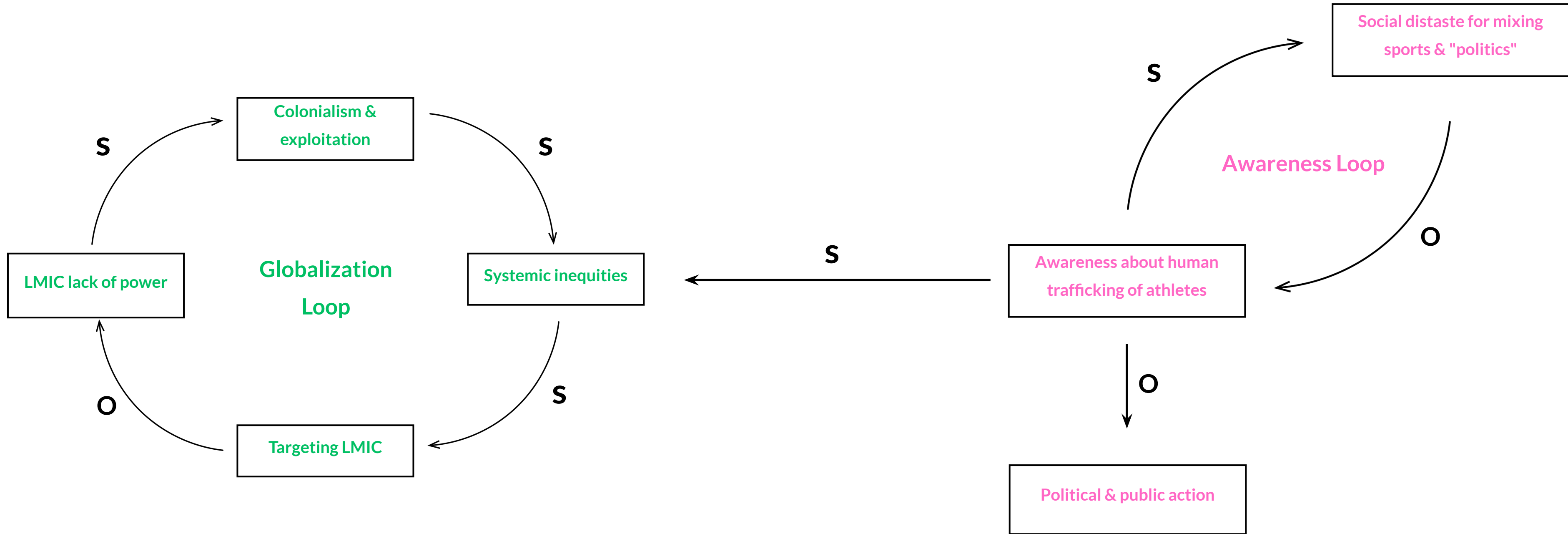
Systemic Patterns in the Human Trafficking of Athletes




Causal Loop Diagram



Causal Loop Diagram

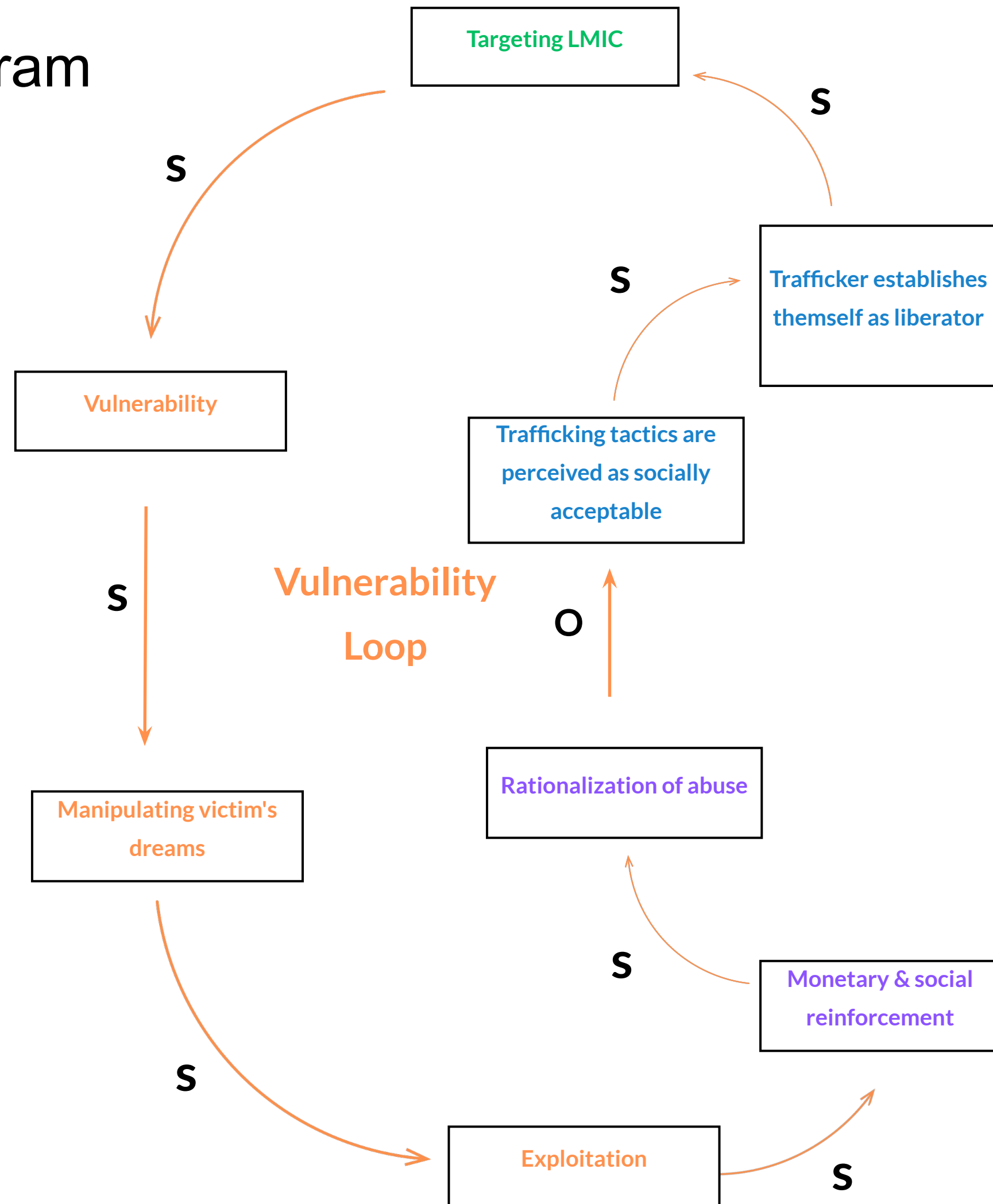




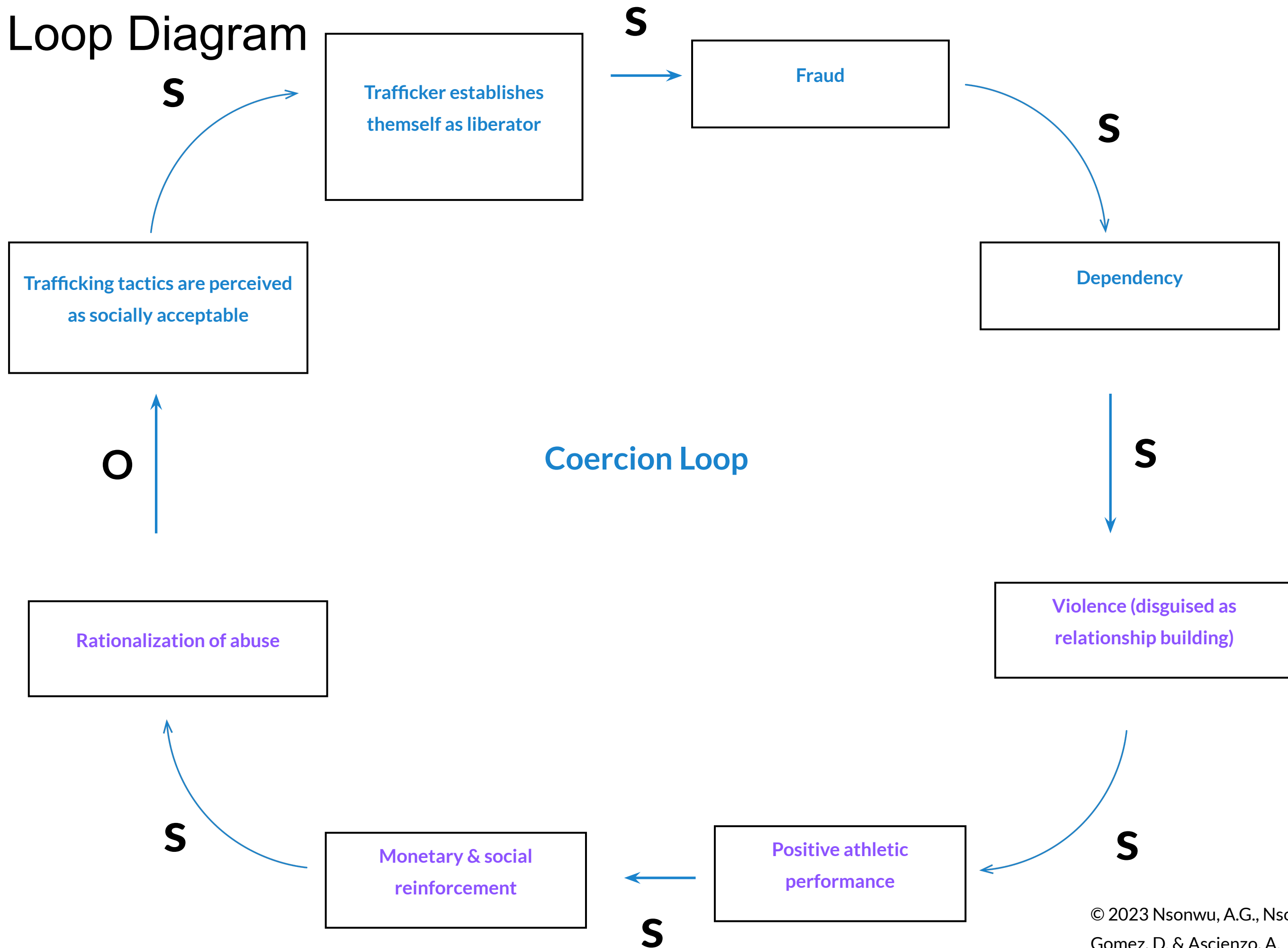
In what other ways does globalization effect human trafficking?

What are some possible solutions to disrupt the awareness loop's balancing relationship?

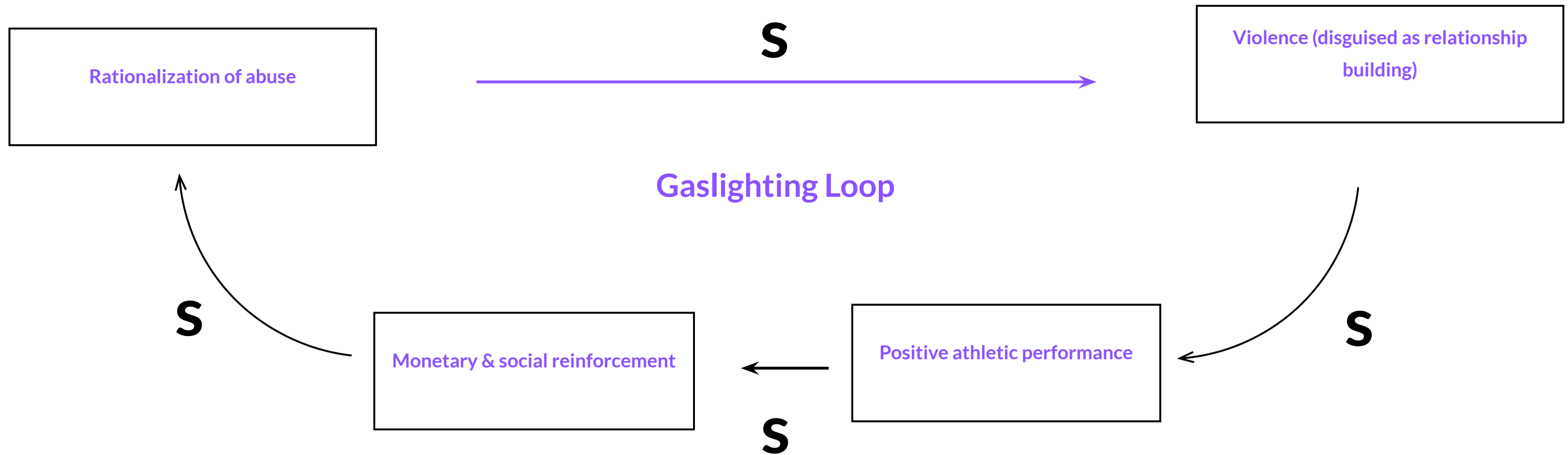
Causal Loop Diagram



Causal Loop Diagram



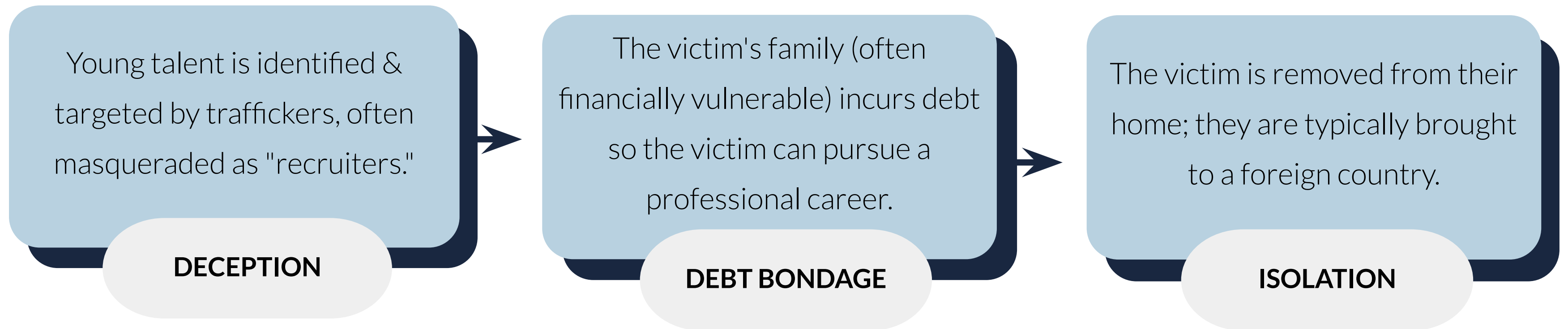
Causal Loop Diagram

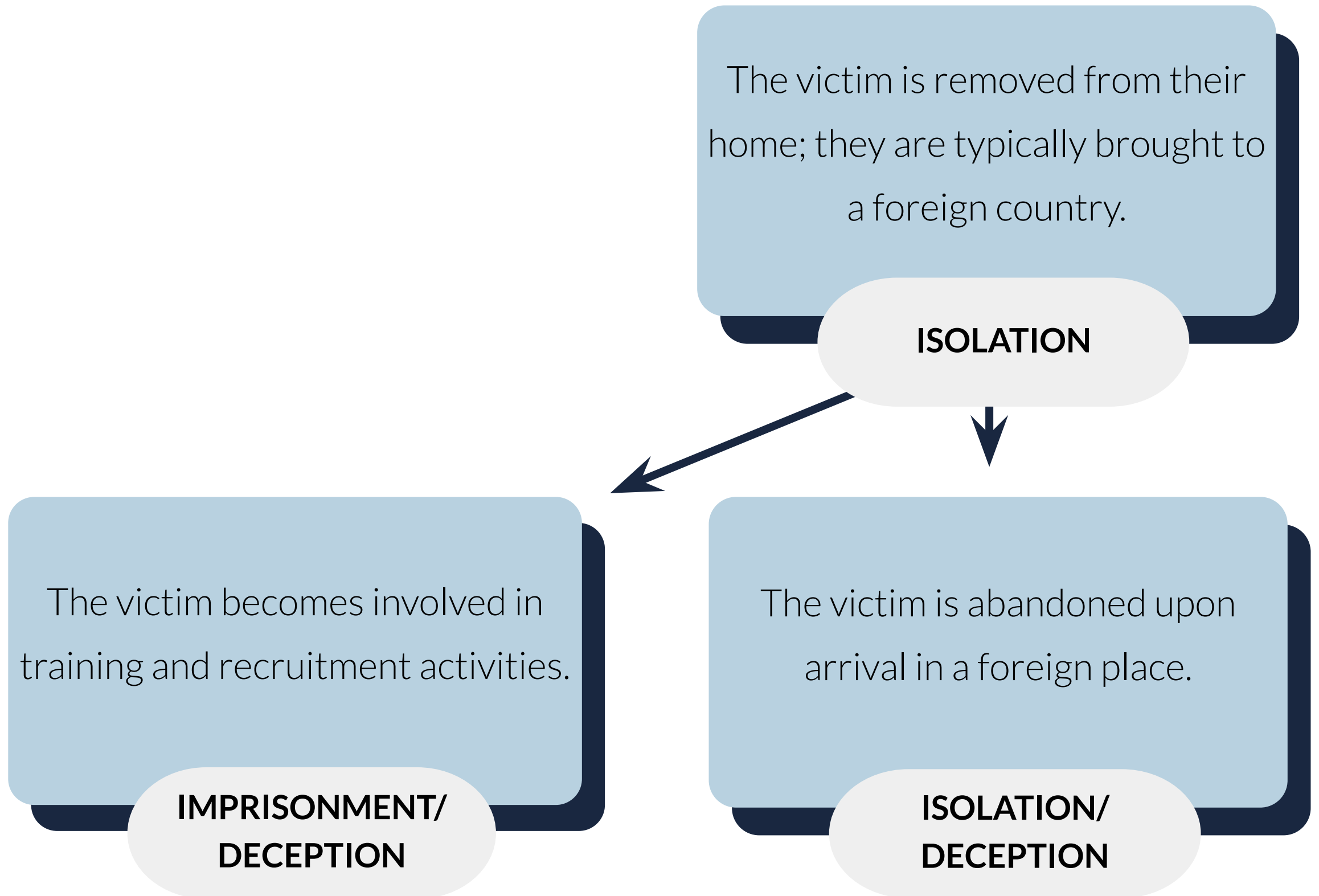


Can you think of circumstances where gaslighting is used to coerce others?



Flow Diagram





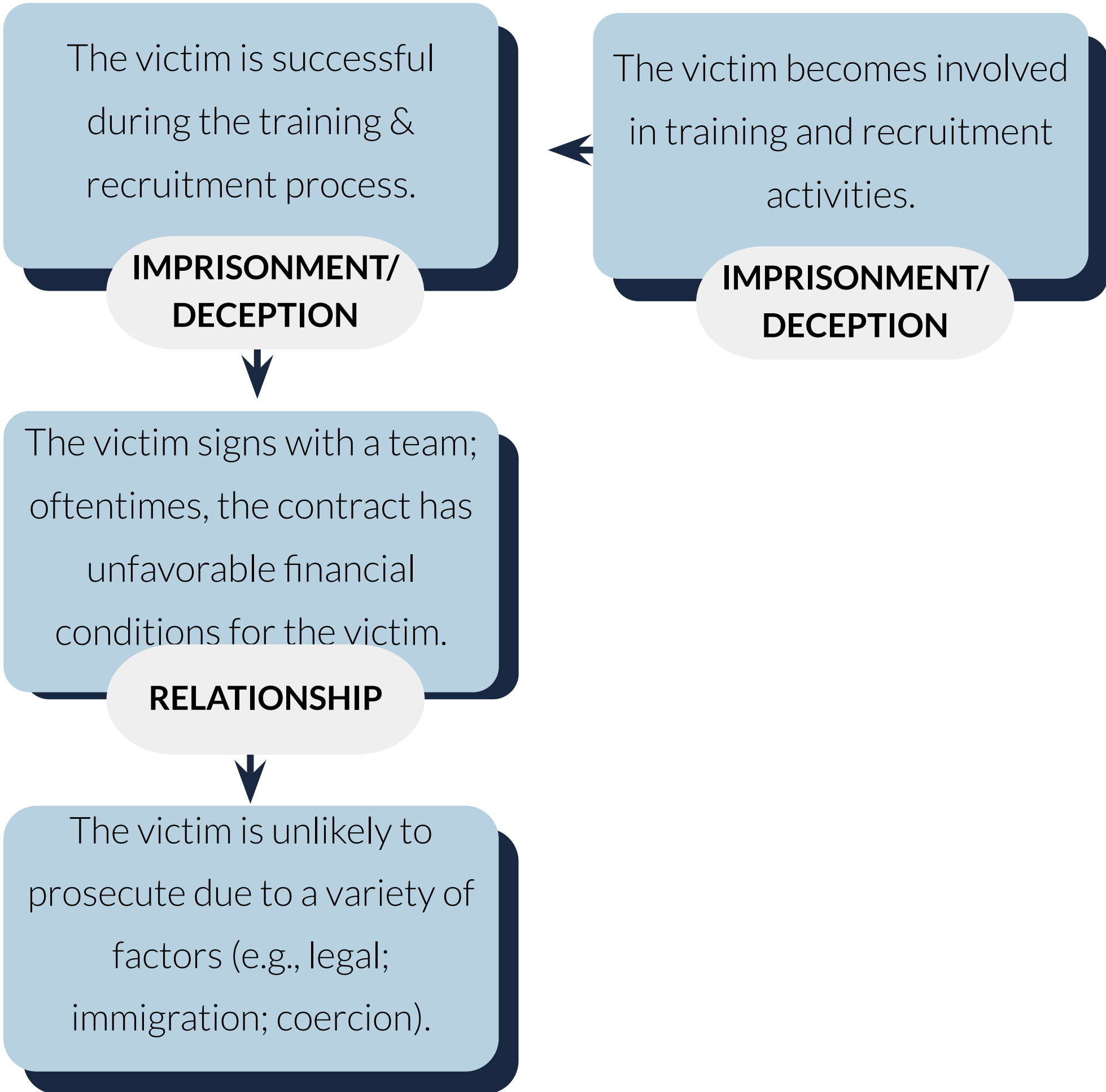
The victim is abandoned upon arrival in a foreign place.

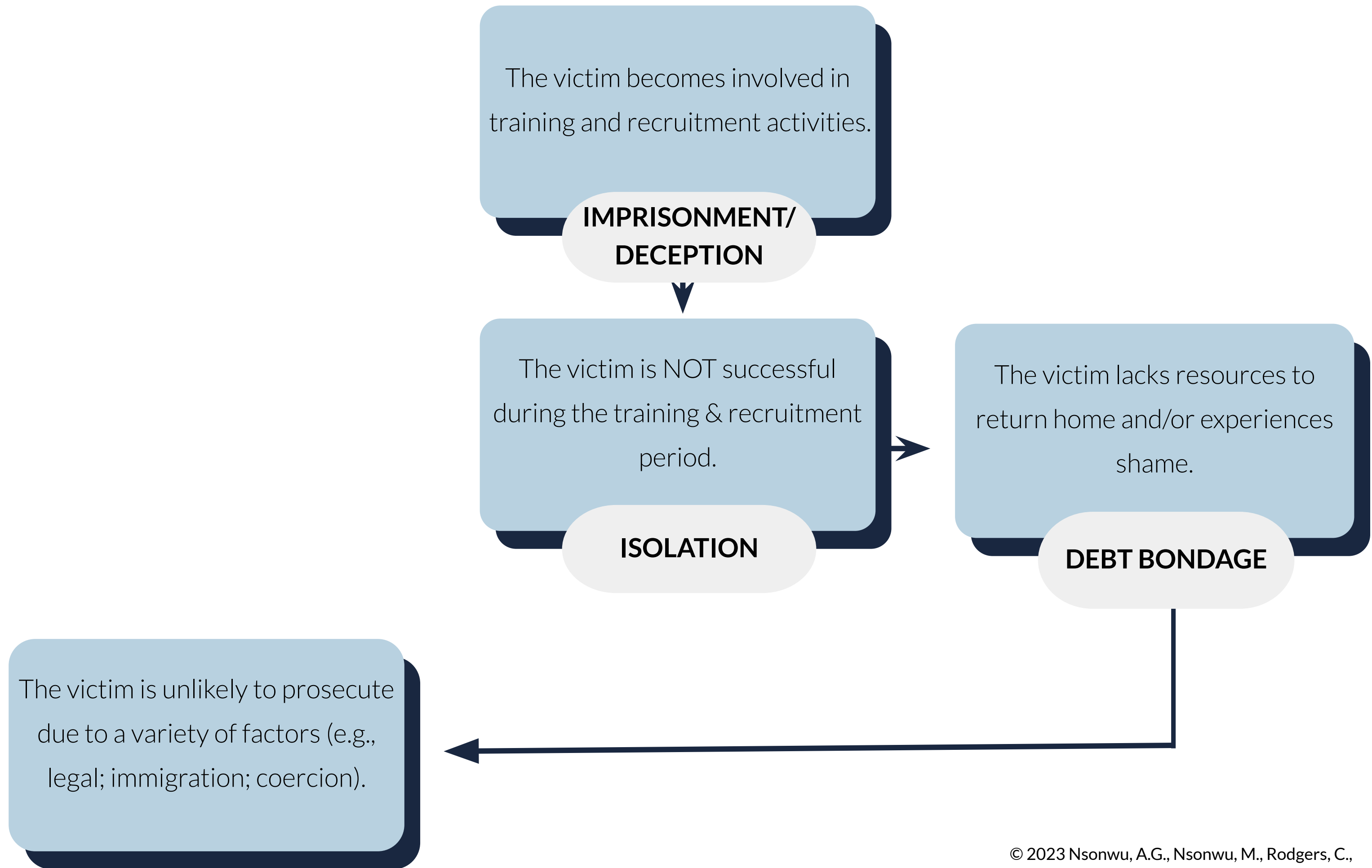
**ISOLATION/
DECEPTION**

The victim lacks resources to return home and/or experiences shame.

DEBT BONDAGE

The victim is unlikely to prosecute due to a variety of factors (e.g., legal; immigration; coercion).







Case Study

US Gymnastics 

Young gymnasts recruited to train for elite coach/ make Olympic team with dream of greatness.

DECEPTION

Victims often overextended physically, emotionally, mentally, & financially. Will train for years hoping for a professional future.

DEBT BONDAGE

Victims encouraged to move to train with "the best" and move to a different training facility.

ISOLATION

Victim is successful in making Olympic team/ winning prestigious competitions.

**IMPRISONMENT/
DECEPTION**

Victims encouraged to go "all in" on training and spend as much time as possible at the gym.

**IMPRISONMENT/
DECEPTION**

Victims feel as though coaching methods are acceptable because they've made the team.

RELATIONSHIP

Victims unlikely to report any misconduct or trauma on behalf of the coach due to feelings of indebtedness/ fear of professional ruin.

Young gymnasts recruited to train for elite coach/ make Olympic team with dream of greatness.

DECEPTION

Victims often overextended physically, emotionally, mentally, & financially. Will train for years hoping for a professional future.

DEBT BONDAGE

Victims encouraged to move to train with "the best" and move to a different training facility.

ISOLATION

Victim is isolated from former supports and put into toxic gym environment; AP allows harmful "treatments."

**ISOLATION/
DECEPTION**

Victims feel stuck in current gym; experience immense shame surrounding failure, depression, SA, & SI.

DEBT BONDAGE

Victims unlikely to report any misconduct or trauma on behalf of the coach due to feelings of indebtedness/ fear of professional ruin.

Young gymnasts recruited to train for elite coach/ make Olympic team with dream of greatness.

DECEPTION

Victims often overextended physically, emotionally, mentally, & financially. Will train for years hoping for a professional future.

DEBT BONDAGE

Victims encouraged to move to train with "the best" and move to a different training facility.

ISOLATION

Victims encouraged to go "all in" on training and spend as much time as possible at the gym.

**IMPRISONMENT/
DECEPTION**

Victim is NOT successful and doesn't make Olympic team, but is abused and humiliated during daily trainings.

ISOLATION


Victims feel stuck in current gym; experience immense shame surrounding failure, depression, & sexual assault.

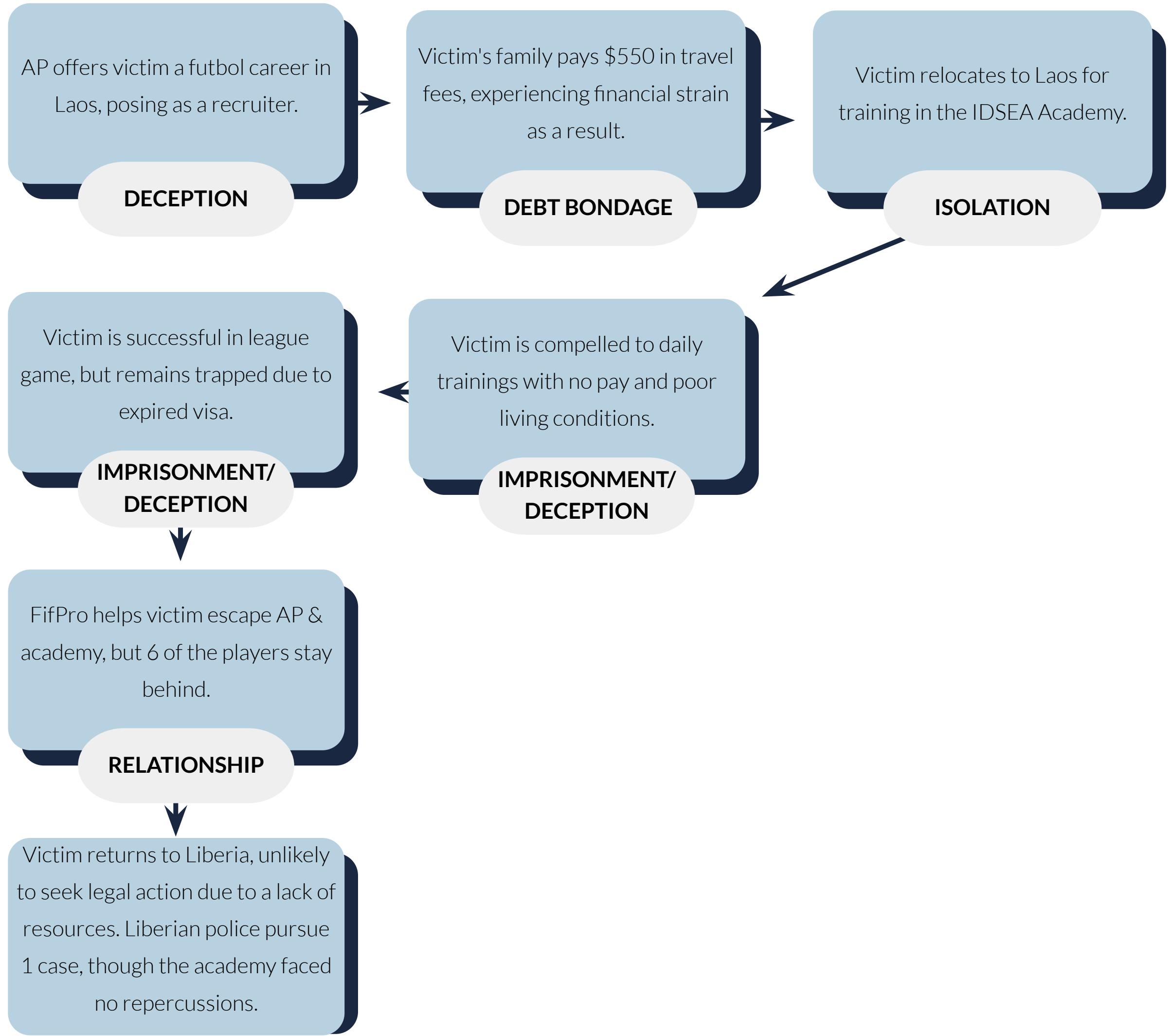
DEBT BONDAGE

Victims unlikely to report any misconduct or trauma on behalf of the coach due to feelings of indebtedness/ fear of professional ruin.



Case Study

Soccer/ Fútbol 



TIP Report Recommendations

- Need to take a more systematic and standardized approach to addressing the exploitation of athletes.
- Conduct due diligence on the agents that teams and their scouts work with.
- Governments should acknowledge when athletes are not adequately protected and should investigate cases.
- Governments should consider increasing coordination between youth or child services programs and sports programs.
- Train consular officers.
- Provide nationwide public awareness initiatives.

Call to Action

- Educate and prepare high school coaches, school social workers, teachers, and administrators.
- Increase prosecution efforts & build out legal understanding/ accessibility.
- Providing funding and increased access to client-centered services for survivors.
- Increase awareness of the nuance and complexity of human trafficking to address contemporary wicked problems in collaborative efforts across disciplines.



Thank you!



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Case Study

Baseball
IV

AP1 & AP2 convince V1 to defect, enticing him with an MLB career.

DECEPTION

V1 indebted to AP1 for securing his smuggling; expected to repay from future MLB earnings.

DEBT BONDAGE

V1 & V2 defect from Cuba to Mexico with AP3/cartel; kept in hotel until price is paid.

ISOLATION

V1 signs with US MLB team for \$42 million; pays \$1.3 - \$2.5 million to AP1 & AP2.

**IMPRISONMENT/
DECEPTION**

Victims escape to Mexico to establish residency under AP1 & AP2's guidance.

**IMPRISONMENT/
DECEPTION**

Victim is threatened by AP3/cartel; AP1 & AP2 tell victim to seek asylum to cover their crime.

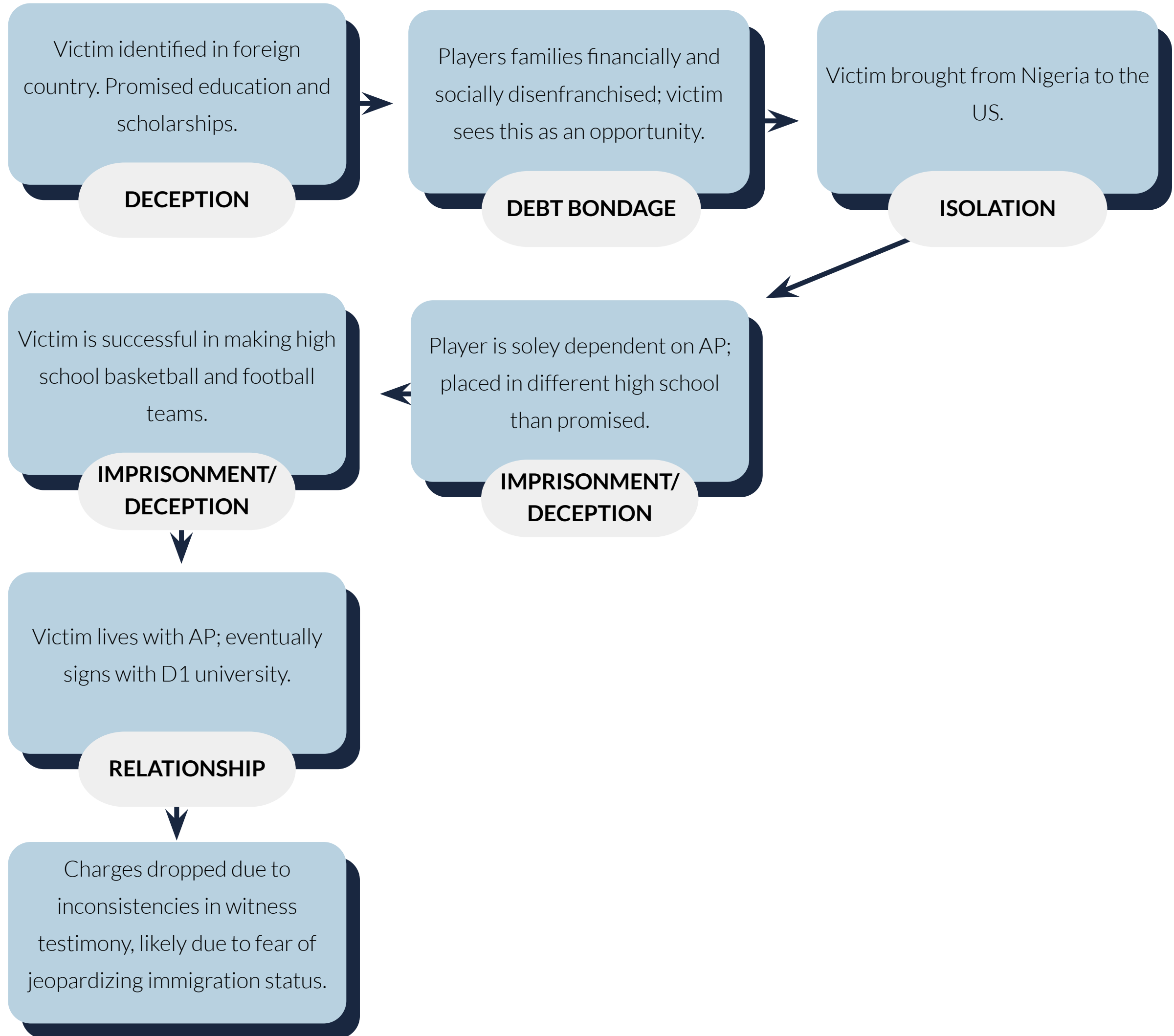
RELATIONSHIP

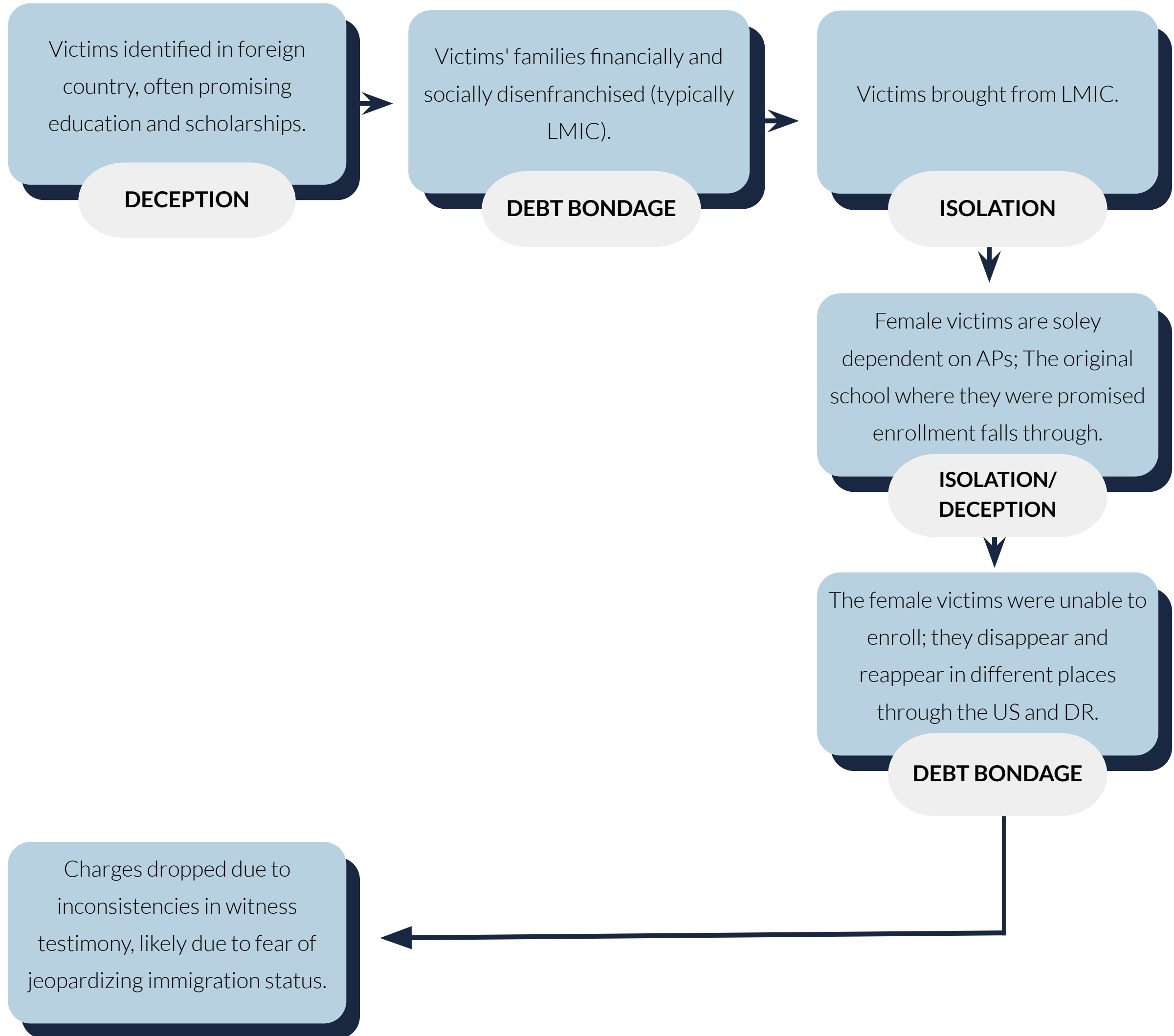
V1 does not speak about what happened. AP2 and AP3/cartel member receive prison time.



Case Study

High School Basketball





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Acronym List

- AP - Alleged perpetrator
- FIFA - The Federation Internationale de Football Association
- FIFPRO - The Federation Internationale des Associations de Footballeurs Professionnels
- LMIC - Lower-and-middle income countries
- "O" - Opposite direction
- P1 - Perpetrator 1
- P2 - Perpetrator 2
- "S" - Same direction
- SA - Sexual assault
- SI - Suicide
- V1 - Victim 1
- V2 - Victim 2