



An Unholy Alliance

The Connection between Foster Care
and Human Trafficking

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Abstract

It is general knowledge within the anti-trafficking community that children facing abuse, neglect and parental substance abuse are at the greatest risk for human trafficking. Yet very little research has connected these same abused and neglected children that are currently in foster care with human trafficking. This paper examines the connection between foster care and human trafficking in the United States with special emphasis on sex trafficking. Within the human trafficking literature there is a very large gap regarding foster care and wards of the state. Very little statistical data are available on the prevalence of foster care children involved with sex trafficking but every report used in this research placed the number of children trafficked from foster care well above 50 percent. It is safe to say that minimally half of the victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE) currently on the streets today were at one time living in a foster care home or a group home run by the state. An even more surprising statistic is that 25 percent of the traffickers actively recruiting girls into human trafficking were also part of the foster care system at some point in their childhood. This paper explores the typical childhood experiences of CSEC and finds that it is not very different from the childhood of the traffickers that exploit them. The three different paths taking children and youth from the foster care system to CSEC are explained as well as the four common methods traffickers use to recruit their victims into CSE. Finally, this paper seeks to acquaint readers with what is currently known regarding the extent of human trafficking within the foster care system, who is at risk for becoming a victim, and recommendations for stakeholders interacting with human trafficking victims.

Definition of Terms

Human trafficking terminology remains controversial in the field of anti-trafficking; for the sake of this paper, the terms used are defined below.

Human Trafficking: “trafficking in persons, human trafficking and modern slavery” have been used as umbrella terms for the act of recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for compelled labor or commercial sex acts through the use of force, fraud, or coercion.¹

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC): refers to a range of crimes of a sexual nature committed against children and adolescents, including:

- recruiting, enticing, harboring, transporting, providing, obtaining and / or maintaining (acts that constitute trafficking) a minor for the purpose of sexual exploitation;
- exploiting a minor through prostitution;
- exploiting a minor through survival sex (exchanging sex / sexual acts for money or something of value, such as shelter, food or drugs);
- using a minor in pornography;
- exploiting a minor through sex tourism, mail order bride trade, and early marriage;
- exploiting a minor by having her / him perform in sexual venues (e.g., peep shows or strip clubs).²

Sex Trafficking of Minors: overlapping terms but distinct terms with CSEC, these terms are used to make distinctions that are necessary for law, research and in other contexts. For the purpose of this paper, the term will be used interchangeably with CSEC.

Child Welfare System: By its broadest definition, child welfare is the set of public and private agencies that provide social services to children and their families. Although it is often assumed to refer primarily to child protective services (CPS), the domain of child welfare also includes day care, parenting classes, and mental health counseling. Most families first become involved with the child welfare system due to a report of suspected child maltreatment. The overarching responsibilities of the child welfare system are to investigate reports of alleged child abuse and neglect; to provide services to families who are deemed unable to protect and care for their children; to arrange for children to live with foster families if they must be removed from an unsafe home environment; and to arrange for permanent adoptive families for children leaving foster care. Nonetheless, due to system complexity and fiscal disparity, child welfare procedures vary from state to state.³

- **Foster Care:** a system for children who are (a) removed from their parents / guardians, or (b) surrendered to the state by their parents. These children are placed with non-relative foster families, relatives, or group homes and institutions in exchange for a stipend.⁴

¹ Department of State. Trafficking in Persons Report 2015, 7.

² Institute of Medicine. *Confronting Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States*, 31.

³ “The Child Welfare System.” *Library*. First Star.

⁴ “Factsheet: Foster Care and Human Trafficking.” *Our Children*. California Against Slavery Research and Education.

- **Group Home:** a home for several foster children that is licensed by the state. Group homes are run either by house parents, who live with the children, or by shift staff, who transfer in and out every 24 hours.⁵

Child: a person who is younger than age 18 or who is not an emancipated minor (a child that is legally considered an adult).⁶

Youth / Minor: typically an adolescent between the ages 15 to the age when the foster care system ends, which varies by state, usually between the ages of 18 to 24.

Aging out: the age when a minor is no longer supported by the child welfare system. Traditionally this has been age 18, but some states have adopted longer programs. For a complete list of aging out ages by state please refer to addendum 1.

Runaway: A runaway is a minor who is reported missing because his\her whereabouts are unknown to the child's legal custodian, the circumstances of whose absence indicate that the child voluntarily left the care and control of his legal custodian without the custodian's consent and without intent to return.⁷

Throwaway: A throwaway youth or child is someone who has been "locked out" or forced to leave home by his/her parents or caregivers.⁸ Also referred to as "throwaway youth."

Homeless Youth: The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) defines homeless youth as individuals who are not more than 21 years of age...for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative and who have no other safe alternative living arrangement. This definition includes only those youth who are unaccompanied by families or caregivers.⁹

Traffickers / Exploiters: Traffickers include those who recruit, transport, harbor, obtain, and exploit victims, often using force, threats, lies, or other physical and psychological methods of control. Traffickers lure victims into exploitative situations often by preying on their hopes to improve their lives and the lives of their families.¹⁰ Commonly referred to as "pimps," as this term is often distorted and glamorized, this paper will use the terms trafficker / exploiter instead.

Solicitors / Purchasers: individuals who pay for sex with minors, representing the demand for commercial sexual exploitation, often referred to as "johns."¹¹

⁵ "Fostering Definitions." *Fostering Definitions*. Fostering Florida.

⁶ "Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect in Federal Law." *US Department of Health and Human Services: Administration for Children and Families*. Child Welfare Information Gateway.

⁷ "Runaway Law and Legal Definition." *Definitions*. US Legal.

⁸ "Definitions and Dimensions." *A Place Along the Way*.

⁹ "Federal Definitions." Runaway and Homeless Youth. *Find Youth Info*.

¹⁰ "The Traffickers." *Overview*. Polaris Project.

¹¹ Institute of Medicine, page 34.

Introduction

The child welfare system is an important and necessary institution that protects children whose parents are unable to care for them. The overwhelming majority of children and youth in foster care placements and group homes are healthy and safe. However, it is undeniable that most children and youth who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation have been involved with the foster care system at one point in their lives.

Minimally half of the commercially sexually exploited children on the streets today were at one time living in foster care or a group home run by the state. While most reports place this number above 50 percent, the statistics widely vary. At the high end, Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Children and Families, the Honorable Joette Katz, stated in her testimony to the state that in Connecticut, 98 percent of children who are identified as survivors of sex trafficking had previous involvement with child welfare services, and many were legally in the care and custody of the Connecticut Department of Children and Families while they were being prostituted by traffickers.¹² Another study found that “at least 85 percent of all CSEC in New York [state] had a child welfare background and 75 percent of those residing in New York City had spent time in foster care.”¹³ On the statistical low end is the state of California that reported, “0.6 percent of children are in foster care and 50 percent of children sold in California are foster care children.”¹⁴ While the statistics may vary by report, state and city, the overwhelming evidence suggests that the foster care system is a breeding ground for CSEC. This paper endeavors to connect children and youth in the foster care system to CSEC by exploring who is at risk for becoming a victim; how the traffickers recruit and who are the traffickers.

Who Gets Trafficked: Typical Experiences of CSEC

From the research, three common paths emerged that take children and youth from the foster care system to victims of CSE. The first path is from foster care they run away and end up homeless and are lured by traffickers to become victims of CSE. The second path is from foster care they age out of the child welfare system, end up homeless and become victims of CSE. The third path is from foster care they are lured away; avoid becoming homeless by going directly into CSE. As the research also shows, not all children and youth in the foster care system end up victims of CSE. There are commonalities found in the background of victims CSE who were also

¹² U.S. Senate Finance Committee. *Testimony of Commissioner Joette Katz State of*

Connecticut Department of Children and Families.

¹³ California Child Welfare Council. *Ending the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of*

Children: A Call for Multi-System Collaboration in California, 11.

¹⁴ “Factsheet: Foster Care and Human Trafficking.” *Our Children.* California Against

Slavery Research and Education.

in the child welfare system. There are four childhood experiences that victims of CSE commonly share: prior sexual abuse by a family member or family friend; parental neglect or abandonment; time spent as runaways or throwaways; or homelessness from aging out of the foster care system.

Every day of the year, thousands of America's children are coerced into performing sex for hire. Some of these children are brutally beaten and raped into submission. Others are literally stolen off the streets, then isolated, drugged, and starved until they become "willing" participants. Some children are alternately wooed and punished, eventually forming trauma bonds with their exploiters, similar to cases of domestic or intimate partner violence. Still others are living on the streets with no way to survive, except by exchanging sex for food, clothing and shelter.¹⁵

Sexual Abuse

Multiple factors work together leading children and youth down a path of sex trafficking and vulnerability to traffickers. Sexual abuse in particular is cited as a leading cause for entry into CSE, an estimated 65-95 percent of sex trafficking victims were sexually assaulted as children.¹⁶ A Las Vegas youth shelter found that 71 percent of domestic minor sex trafficking survivors had been sexually abused.¹⁷ The National Institute of Justice echoes this statement stating that "persons who were sexually abused as children are 28 times more likely than their non-abused peers to be arrested for prostitution."¹⁸

Victims of CSE are typically coerced into sexual exploitation in early adolescence with the average age for boys and transgender girls (from boy to girl) being slightly younger than girls. For boys and transgender girls, the average age is between eleven and thirteen, and for girls the age rises to between twelve and fourteen.¹⁸ There are high rates of sexual abuse in the homeless youth community, 21-42 percent of youth were sexually abused prior to running away from home. Those that had ever run away from home were four times as likely to report having been sexually victimized as those without runaway experiences (25 percent and 6 percent respectfully).¹⁹

We've all been molested. Over and over, and raped. We were all molested and sexually abused as children, don't you know that? We ran to get away ... We were thrown out, thrown away. We've been on the street since we were twelve, thirteen, fourteen.²⁰

¹⁵California Child Welfare Council, 5.

¹⁶ "Prostitution and Trafficking - Quick Facts." Prostitution Research and Education.

¹⁷ <http://www.nn4youth.org/wp-content/uploads/Fact-Sheet-RHYA-2014-Reauthorization.pdf>

¹⁸ "Factsheet: Foster Care and Human Trafficking."

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth, and

Families. (2002). *Sexual Abuse among Homeless Adolescents: Prevalence, Correlates, and Sequelae*. 6.4 summary.

²⁰ Boyer, D., Chapman, L., & Marshall, B. (1993) *Survival Sex in King County: Helping*

women out, 105.

Long term psychological side effects of childhood sexual abuse can include “higher levels of depression, guilt, shame, self-blame...anxiety, dissociative patterns, repression, denial, sexual problem and relationship problems.”²¹ An estimated 93 percent of juvenile victims of sexual abuse know their assailant.²² Since the assailant is usually a family member or a trusted family friend, the child learns to associate love with pain and sexual abuse. The lack of trust and inability to establish positive relationships can lead to re-victimization, where the sexual abuse victim gets repeatedly involved in abusive, dangerous situations or relationships. After years of negative self- thoughts, survivors have feelings of worthlessness and avoid others because they believe they have nothing to offer, making them easy prey for traffickers.²³

Neglect / Abandonment

Children and youth are put in foster care placements or group homes when their parents are absent or can no longer adequately take care of them, leaving them prone to feelings of abandonment. There are a variety of reasons why the child welfare system takes children into custody, but the most common are parental substance abuse, alcohol abuse, domestic violence or neglect. In an Oregon state study the most often cited reasons for the state to remove children from their home are as follows: 60 percent due to parental drug or alcohol abuse, 62 percent from physical abuse and 50 percent because of parental neglect.²⁴ The psychological effects of childhood neglect and abandonment are another factor predisposing children and youth to trafficking. Much like children who have experienced sexual abuse, childhood experiences of neglect or abandonment may leave children with difficulty trusting, guardedness, mood swings / depression, disconnected from community, family, friends, insecurity (feeling unloved or unwanted) or fear of rejection (a strong need to please others).²⁵

Runaways / Throwaways

A childhood of abuse and neglect greatly increases the chances for children to be lured into commercial sexual exploitation. It is also what runaway, throwaway and foster care children have in common. When asked, “What is the typical victim [of CSE] you come across?” FBI Agent and leader of the Tampa Area Crimes Against Children task force Gregory Christopher said, “A lot of these kids are foster kids, runaway kids. There are not a lot of people looking out for them. I’d say about 70 percent or so are foster kids. We work closely with DCF (Department of Children and Families).”²⁶ The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children support

²¹Hall, Melissa and Joshua. “The long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse: Counseling implications,” 2.

²² Breakdown by Gender and Age. *Who are the Victims*. Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network.

²³ Hall, page 2.

²⁴ “Foster Care 2006.” *Children, Adults and Families*. Oregon Department of Human Services.

²⁵ Child Welfare Information Gateway. *Long-Term Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect*, 3.

²⁶ Vander Velde, Jessica. “FBI agent leads task force targeting pimps in child prostitution.” Tampa Bay Times.

Christopher’s estimate, finding that “68 percent of missing children reported to NCMEC who are also likely child sex trafficking victims were in the care of child welfare when they went missing.”²⁷ The good news is that the majority of runaways return to their placements within two weeks to a month. The bad news is that some youth never return. In August of 2013, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services announced that 78 children in custody of child protective services were missing and 38 of those children had been missing for more than three months.²⁸ The majority of children and youth that go missing often become homeless and there are enormous amounts of information linking homeless youth with sex trafficking. This is especially true for LGBT adolescents who make up 20 percent of the homeless youth on the streets but only 10 percent of the general youth population.²⁹

Aging Out / Homeless Youth

Children and youth in the foster care system and those that run away from child protective services are more likely to become victims of CSE. Yet traffickers and exploiters also prey on youth “aging out” of the foster care system. In early 2015, the American Youth and Policy Forum announced “26,000 youth turn 18 and age out of the foster care system each year.”³⁰ Aging out of the child protective services system can be a traumatic experience for foster care youth. Many get a letter two weeks before their 18th birthday telling them to vacate their home on their birthday. Some states offer financial and housing support until the youth reaches 21 or 22 but the qualifications and times vary by state. Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia all allow children to remain in the foster care system until they are 21 years old. While the states listed above have the same extended age, the requirements vary drastically by state.³¹

In Connecticut children can remain in the foster care system until age 21 if enrolled in a post-secondary education program and can stay until age 23 if the youth complete one year of college by age 21. Yet in Oklahoma the only way a youth can remain in the foster care system until age 21 is if the youth has not finished high school or a GED program, leaving very little incentive for the youth to graduate high school on time at the traditional age of 18.³² Iowa and Hawaii have extended foster care to age 20, but that is only under “rare circumstances.” If enrolled in high school or a high school completion program then Wisconsin will allow foster care youth to stay in the system until they are 19 years old. The varying state regulations show

²⁷ NCMEC

²⁸ Ellis, Randy. “Missing: 78 children from Oklahoma Department of Human Services custody.” *The Oklahoman*.

²⁹ “LGBT Homeless.” National Coalition for the Homeless.

³⁰ <http://sharedhope.org/2015/02/16/discussions-on-foster-children-aging-out-of-system-holes-in-current-support-networks/>

³¹ “State Resources.” Aging Out Institute.

³² “The Nation’s Children 2012. *The Child Welfare League of America*.

how inconsistent the foster care system is by state. Even with the best intentions by the state child welfare systems, 40 percent of youth “aging out” of the system end up homeless..³³

Common Theme in the Three Paths

The three common paths that take children and youth from the foster care system to victims of CSE all have the same shared experience; namely, homelessness. As was aforementioned, homelessness greatly increases the chances of a child or youth being approached by a trafficker. The risk is so great, that an estimated 75 percent of all sex trafficking victims were at one point homeless.³⁴ Even when the homeless youth are not being coerced into CSE, they are often forced into survival sex for basic necessities like food or shelter. A New York City provider of services to homeless youth found that approximately 48 percent of youth engaged in survival sex because they did not have a safe place to stay.³⁵ Research on the prevalence of CSE within the homeless foster care community has been sparse, but in the past year, Congress has heard important legislation that could help with more accurately quantify the problem.

Legislation

There are two important pieces of legislation that connect CSE to homeless foster care youth. The first (currently pending in Congress) is the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act that would provide critical updates to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, which expired in September of 2013. This act is essential in that it prohibits discrimination “against anyone based on actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or disability by a program receiving funding from the act.”³⁶ Besides providing funding for research, training, coordination, aftercare services and suicide prevention, the act also mandates that data on trafficking and sexual exploitation of homeless and runaway youth be collected.

The second act is the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014, which President Obama signed into law on September 29, 2014. This new act “takes important steps forward in protecting and preventing children and youth in foster care from becoming victims of sex trafficking.”³⁷ It requires state agencies to identify and document children and youth in the foster care system at risk for CSE and provide the necessary services. No later than two years after the law is enacted (September 24, 2016) states must immediately report (within 24 hours) children under the responsibility of the state who are identified as sex

³³ <http://sharedhope.org/2015/02/16/discussions-on-foster-children-aging-out-of-system-holes-in-current-support-networks/>

³⁴ “Prostitution and Trafficking - Quick Facts.” Prostitution Research and Education.

³⁵ <http://www.nn4youth.org/wp-content/uploads/Fact-Sheet-RHYA-2014-Reauthorization.pdf>

³⁶ <http://www.politicalsocialworker.org/runaway-homeless-youth/>

³⁷ <http://www.childrensdefense.org/library/data/fact-sheet-on-hr-4980.pdf>

trafficking victims. This law will greatly improve the availability of data on the prevalence of CSE in the foster care system and the services provided for victims of CSE. Since this bill has been passed states such as Wisconsin have taken steps to create a separate state level cross-system human trafficking task force co-chaired by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Department of Justice (DOJ).³⁸

How Traffickers / Exploiters Recruit

It is commonly known that pimps recruit from homeless shelters, foster care group homes and alternative high schools. Where families and positive relationships are nonexistent is where traffickers prey. Nationally, 1.7 million children run away from home each year with 1 in 3 homeless teens being lured into CSE by a trafficker within 48 hours of leaving home. Statistically this means that at least 800,000 runaway children will be lured into commercial sexual exploitation each year.³⁹ The National Alliance to End Homelessness issued a brief that stated:

*Runaway and homeless children are vulnerable to CSE both because of their young age and their circumstances. High numbers of youth who are homeless report having been solicited for prostitution and pimps have been known to actively target locations where homeless children and youth congregate, including on the streets, at foster care group homes and runaway and homeless shelter programs.*⁴⁰

Children without stable homes that come from backgrounds of abuse or neglect often end up in the foster care system. While in the care of the state, a shocking number of children end up as victims of CSE, which often serves as a “training ground” for CSEC. As one youth explained:

*...being in foster care was the perfect training for commercial sexual exploitation. I was used to being moved without warning, without any say, not knowing where I was going or whether I was allowed to pack my clothes. After years in foster care, I didn't think anyone would want to take care of me unless they were paid. So, when my pimp expected me to make money to support 'the family,' it made sense to me.*⁴¹

Traffickers recruiting at foster care group homes and on the streets use one of four tactics. The first is the boyfriend technique where the trafficker will pretend to be in a relationship with the victim and shower her with gifts and attention, often this is the first time an abused or neglected youth has been shown (what she mistakes to be) love and kindness. Research found that “28 percent of sexually exploited women within the U.S. described a past intimate partner

³⁸ <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwreview/fedPlans/human-trafficking-task-force-plan.pdf>

³⁹ “CASE Campaign Against Sexual Exploitation.” *National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse*.

⁴⁰ National Alliance to End Homelessness. *An Emerging Framework for Ending Unaccompanied Youth Homelessness*.

⁴¹ California Child Welfare Council, page 6

relationship with the man who later trafficker them.”⁴² Once the trafficker gains the confidence of the young girl, he will then isolate her and make her completely dependent on him.

I fell in love with this guy and thought he was the one...and he called himself a pimp. But he always tell me I'm his Bottom Bitch⁴³ and whatever. He put me on the stroll, out there with black eyes and broken noses. I was out there messed up. This was in Atlantic City.⁴⁴

The “boyfriend” will usually will do one of two things: say he is having money trouble from all the gifts he bought her and needs her to sell her body for money or he will introduce her to drugs and take advantage of her weakened mental state to sell her body.⁴⁵

The second way traffickers recruit is through violence. Often called the “gorilla” technique, the trafficker will violently grab the victim off the street and beat them into submission. The trafficker might also threaten the youth, telling her they will kill their family or friends.

...all I heard was, ‘Man, go get that girl!’ And one of them came out and dragged me by my hair, and he pulled me into the car...after [I] was kidnapped, at least six men gang-raped [me]. [I] was then driven to Sacramento, where [my] thirty-two year-old pimp put [me] out on the street as a prostitute.⁴⁶

The third way traffickers prey on their victims is through the use of the Internet and websites such as Backpage.com and Craigslist.org. Andrea Powell, the advocate who runs Fair Girls, says she's seen girls recruited from almost every social network that exists. Facebook and Tagged are two of the most common, she says, but even more limited sites like Twitter and Instagram get used for solicitation.⁴⁷ Traffickers are becoming more tech-savvy and with the Internet so accessible in America, it is not difficult for a lonely, abused child or youth looking for love and attention to be tricked or coerced into becoming a victim of CSE.

Finally, traffickers send their “bottom bitch” or other “family member”⁴⁸ out to recruit new victims for CSEC. The most loyal girl usually befriends other vulnerable girls and convinces her that she makes lots of money selling her body. The “bottom bitch” usually talks up how good her life is with the trafficker and how well he takes care of her.

⁴² Assessing and Reducing Risk, page 526.

⁴³ A misleading term since the bottom bitch is at the top of the hierarchy of the CSEC the trafficker exploits. This girl has usually been with the trafficker the longest, makes the most money and is the most loyal.

⁴⁴ Curtis, Ric et al. (2008) *The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in New York City: The CSEC Population in New York City: Size, Characteristics, and Needs*, 48.

⁴⁵ “How Pimps Recruit.” The Mary Magdalene Project.

⁴⁶ California Child Welfare Council, page 14.

⁴⁷ Fink, Erica and Segall, Laurie. “Pimps hit social networks to recruit sex workers.” CNN Money. 27 Feb. 2013.

⁴⁸ Term used by traffickers to mean the group of CSEC under control of the trafficker or “daddy.”

I ran away from the group home I was staying at upstate, and one of my friends she introduced me to stripping. We was in a house party in Brooklyn and, well, she intoxicated me because I felt uncomfortable with it. She put three E-pills in my drink and after that, I was just turnin' tricks like there was no tomorrow.⁴⁹

Friends and acquaintances are very influential on victims of CSE and often, it is the other trafficked youth who try to convince their friends in the group home or shelter to live “the life” with them. The majority of the victims of CSE are so brainwashed by the trafficker, thinking that they have a good life, that when they recruit their friends they believe they are helping them. A research study done by Prostitution Education and Research found that it was not about the money; “instead, they described social contexts where sex work seemed integral to their peer networks, and these networks seemed to draw in others over time.”⁵⁰

Who are the Traffickers / Exploiters

Traffickers and exploiters tend to have the same childhood background of abuse and neglect as their victims. In a recent study of ex-traffickers in Chicago, 24 percent were at one point committed into foster care as a child and 48 percent of the interviewees had run away from home due to physical or sexual assault.⁵¹ One small study of male traffickers listed the average education level of the traffickers between eighth and tenth grade and the vast majority began trafficking between 18 and 23 years old.⁵² In this study 100 percent of the interviewees experienced physical violence in their home or foster care placement and 80 percent had experienced sexual abuse as a child by a family member, foster care parent or close family friend.⁵³

The Urban Institute put out a report called “The Hustle” which explores the underground commercial sex industry of Atlanta, Dallas, Denver, Miami, San Diego, Seattle and Washington DC. This report found that “nearly one-third of the pimps said they entered the underground commercial sex economy because they grew up around it. Exposure to sex work as children made the trade seem like a normal achievable means to earn a living.”⁵⁴ One pimp that was interviewed explained, “My mom was a prostitute. I had a sister who was an erotic dancer and another was a prostitute.”⁵⁵ Others said they were trying to escape a life on welfare, dangerous

⁴⁹ Curtis, Ric et al. page 50.

⁵⁰ Ibid. page 51.

⁵¹ Raphael, Jody and Myers-Powell, Brenda. (2010). From Victims to Victimiziers: Interviews with 25 Ex-Pimps in Chicago. DePaul College of Law. Chicago, IL, 1.

⁵² Raphael, Jody and Myers-Powell, Brenda. (2009). Interviews with 5 Ex-Pimps in Chicago. DePaul College of Law, 2.

⁵³ Ibid, page 3.

⁵⁴ <http://datatools.urban.org/features/theHustle/>

⁵⁵ Ibid.

public housing projects and believed that pimping would allow them to move up the economic ladder.

Traffickers transcend all race, gender, socio-economic or educational stereotypes. Besides the two studies quotes above, there are very few statistics in the anti-trafficking field that focus on the demographics of exploiters. There is not “currently any research that has examined specific sex difference in the risks associated with becoming traffickers [yet most] national and international reports indicate that the traffickers are primarily men.”⁵⁶ The academic research into traffickers has been so localized to these small studies that the only similarities found from the research is that traffickers come from the same abusive background as the victims they exploit.

What traffickers may lack in demographic commonalities, they make up for in similar personality traits. Traffickers tend to be manipulative, controlling, exploitative, violent, aggressive, cruel and have low empathy. They treat their victims as objects, repeatedly selling the victim’s bodies, without regard to their physical or mental well-being. There is almost no empirical research regarding traffickers, but a university study done in Canada linked traffickers with psychopathic tendencies. This study found that 36 percent of traffickers involved in the study qualified as being a psychopath, which is significantly larger than the 20 percent found in the control group.⁵⁷

Recommendations

After reviewing the current CSEC literature and researching the connection between foster care and human trafficking, the OLP Foundation has three recommendations. We believe that increasing awareness, expanding prevention programs and developing intervention approaches are essential to helping end the commercial sexual exploitation of foster care children and youth.

Awareness

Increased awareness and skills among service providers, educators, law enforcement and others concerned about the growing number of youth drawn into commercial sexual exploitation through the foster care system.

Beginning at the community level, service providers such as social workers, case managers, group home employees, teachers as well as police officers and medical professionals

⁵⁶ Institute of Medicine, page 108.

⁵⁷ Spidel, A et, al. “The Psychopath as Pimp.” The Canadian Journal of Police and Security Services 4.4, Winter 2006, 196.

like doctors and nurses need to be aware that CSEC is happening in their communities and how to identify and assess a victim of CSE.

While most social workers, case managers and group home employees are cognizant of human trafficking, they also need to know the signs to identify and assess victims of CSE. It is also important for direct service providers to know the severe health risks associated with CSE. The average life expectancy of a victim of CSE from the first time they are exploited to when they die is seven years.⁵⁸ The physical health problems seen in the victims are a result of malnutrition; sleep deprivation, extreme stress and severe violence for years at a time. For all stakeholders involved, it is important to know that the leading causes of death for victims of CSE is homicide and HIV / AIDS.⁵⁹

It is estimated that 28 percent of sex trafficking victims come into contact with a health care provider, during their time in captivity.⁶⁰ If all medical professionals were aware of CSEC and able to identify victims, then earlier interventions could help save a victim from months or years of violence and sexual abuse. Minor victims of CSE can be arrested, detained and given permanent records as offenders. With increased awareness in the law enforcement and legal communities, victims of CSE will be given treatment instead of jail time and treated as victims instead of perpetrators.

While it is important to educate service providers about the existence of CSE, it is even more important to increase awareness and knowledge among young people and foster care youth on the dangers of being lured into commercial sexual exploitation. It is difficult to help a minor victim of sex trafficking if they do not believe they are being trafficked or do not understand the terminology. Training and education in schools and foster care group homes can help the youth understand how traffickers recruit and how to avoid becoming a victim of CSE.

Prevention

Strengthen CSEC training programs for foster care families about the typical signs and dangers faced by foster care youth and encourage cooperation among all stakeholders.

Foster care family training varies by state, some states currently include information about human trafficking and others do not. For the states that do not include any information about the signs and dangers of CSEC we encourage the state to expand their current training and programs to develop effective foster care family centered training to prevent foster care children and youth from becoming victims or exploiters of CSE. We also support forming strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of prevention programs across all stakeholders who may come into contact with victims of CSE: service providers, law enforcement, legal community, educators

⁵⁸ “Addressing Misconceptions: Prostitution.” *Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation*.

⁵⁹ California Child Welfare Council, page 15

⁶⁰ “Turning Pain into Power: Trafficking Survivors’ Perspectives on Early Intervention Strategies.” *Family Violence Prevention Fund*. 2005, 14.

and health professional. Eventually, the goal is to have a standard CSEC training for foster care families and youth that has been vetted by all stakeholders involved to create a comprehensive informative program to prevent youth from falling victim to CSE.

Intervention

Require that all training and approaches be trauma informed and culturally sensitive. The risk for re-traumatizing victims of CSE needs to be minimized and can do so with the use of a trauma informed approach. The goal is to “provide a safe environment in which the survivor can begin to...feel safe.”⁶¹ Severe trauma can destroy a victim’s belief in a safe and caring world and culture plays a significant role in how the trauma is identified, explained and resolved. A culturally sensitive approach in which the service provider is aware of how the victim’s culture affects their worldview is necessary for trauma informed care. It’s important for service providers and foster care foster families to understand the needs of all backgrounds, ethnicities, races, genders and religions.

Housing, or lack there of, is a major difficulty when using a trauma informed approach for victims of CSE. Traditionally, when police pick up victims of CSE, they are usually charged with prostitution and put into a juvenile delinquency facility or prison. Now that more stakeholders are using a trauma-informed approach to CSEC, victims of CSE need to be placed in residential facilities with support services to help heal. Yet, there is a shocking lack of beds for domestic victims of commercial sexual exploitation in the United States. To put this in perspective, The Samaritan Women, a Maryland residential facility, has a 14-bed capacity, making up five percent of all beds available in the United States for domestic victims of sex trafficking. The development of long term (six months to a two years) residential treatment facilities with support services is essential for the healing process of CSEC.

Conclusion: Ending the Vicious Cycle of Abuse

The themes of childhood trauma, abandonment, and disruption are central to the stories of adolescents trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation. Without families to work on their behalf, it’s much more difficult to rescue foster youths from sex trafficking and keep them out of the cycle. Multiple factors work together leading children and youth down a path of sex trafficking and vulnerability to trafficker. But vulnerability does not just come in the form of sexual or physical abuse. Many children put into the foster care system and then lured into CSE come from backgrounds of homelessness; either from running away, aging out of the system or being thrown away. The goal is to end the vicious cycle of abuse and re-traumatization for victims of CSE, through increased awareness, prevention and intervention.

⁶¹Smith, Michael. “Trauma Informed Practice to Victims of Human Trafficking.” *The Salvation Army*.

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