

# KNOW THE FACTS:

## Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

*The commercial sexual exploitation of children is a large and growing concern around the world. Every year thousands of children are coerced, kidnapped or tricked by traffickers or pimps into the sex trade. Even though commercially sexually exploited children are routinely arrested as prostitutes and charged with prostitution in the United States, every act of “prostitution” where a child is involved is actually an act of child abuse, rape, and sexual exploitation.*

- According to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, a federal law passed in 2000, any child under the age of 18 years old who is used for the purpose of exploitation through sexual servitude (prostitution), regardless of the absence of economic leverage, manipulation, fraud, coercion, threats, force or violence is considered a **commercially sexually exploited child and a victim of human trafficking**. A child victim of human trafficking does not have to prove that they were tricked or violently forced into sexual exploitation in order to be considered a victim of human trafficking under this federal law. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act applies to every child human trafficking victim in the United States, whether trafficked domestically or internationally.<sup>1</sup>
- The U.S. Department of Justice states that the average age of entry into prostitution is 12-14 years old.<sup>2</sup>
- Underage girls are the bulk of victims in the commercial sex markets, which include pornography, stripping, escort services, and prostitution.<sup>3</sup>
- A University of Pennsylvania study from 2001 estimates that close to 300,000 children nationwide are at risk of falling victim to some sort of sexual exploitation. Outreach workers concur, saying that of the 1 million to 1.5 million runaway children in the country, about a third have some brush with prostitution.<sup>4</sup>
- Sixty percent of children exploited in prostitution are first recruited by peers.<sup>5</sup>
- The overwhelming majority of runaway, homeless, abused, and at-risk children are approached by pimps and drug dealers within 48 hours of landing on the streets.<sup>6</sup>
- Earlier childhood sexual abuse greatly increases vulnerability to commercial sexual exploitation during teen years. According to national statistics, children who are sexually abused earlier in childhood are four times more likely than their peers to be targeted and victimized by commercial sexual exploitation. Other risk factors for commercially sexually exploited children include homelessness, inadequate supervision or care by parents or family, and exposure to domestic violence in the home.<sup>7</sup>
- The rise of the internet and increased use of technology have led to more children being exploited in the commercial sex trade. Pimps use the internet, text messaging, and digital and web cameras to set up “dates” for their “girls.” The girl never has to leave the van she is sitting in or the hotel room where she has been placed to be exploited, making her harder to find and harder to save.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000*, H.R. 3244, 106th Cong., 2nd Sess. (2000).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (November 2007). *Domestic sex trafficking of minors*. Retrieved July 22, 2009, from <http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/ceos/prostitution.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Shared Hope International (July 2007). *DEMAND: A comparative examination of sex tourism and trafficking in Jamaica, Japan, The Netherlands, and the United States* [Electronic version]. Retrieved on July 22, 2009, at <http://www.sharedhope.org/files/DEMAND.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Fang, B. (2005, October 16). Young lives for sale: Why more kids are getting into the sex trade—and how the feds are fighting back [Electronic version]. *U.S. News & World Report*. Retrieved on July 15, 2009, at <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/051024/24sextraffickers.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Schetky, D.H. (1988). Child pornography and prostitution. In D.H. Schetky and A.H. Green (Eds.), *Child sexual abuse: A handbook for health care and legal professionals*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

<sup>6</sup> Project to End Human Trafficking, Prostitution Research and Education Center, Breaking Free, and The National Center on Missing and Exploited Children. *Buying sex stops here*.

<sup>7</sup> Brantley, N. (June 2009). *Framing the issues of commercial sexual exploitation of children*. Motivating, Inspiring, Supporting & Serving Sexually Exploited Youth (MISSEY).

<sup>8</sup> Brantley, N. (June 2009). Presentation on victims of commercial sexual exploitation on behalf of Motivating, Inspiring, Supporting & Serving Sexually Exploited Youth (MISSEY) (hereinafter MISSEY Presentation).



# KNOW THE FACTS: Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

- A study in San Francisco of 149 youth identified as commercially sexually exploited children found that:
  - 61% of the youth had been raped one or more times
  - 55% were foster care youth from group homes
  - 82% had previously runaway from home multiple times
  - 60% had previously been arrested for solicitation<sup>9</sup>
- Mental and overall health problems for commercially sexually exploited children are two to five times higher than the general population of adolescents.<sup>10</sup> The San Francisco study referenced above found that:
  - 25% of the 149 youth were clinically depressed
  - 3% were diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
  - 4% were diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder
  - 25% had a history of suicide attempts that required hospitalization
  - 52% had serious drug abuse problems
  - 16% had been pregnant or had children
  - 43% reported a history of physical or sexual assault
  - 53% reported feeling unsafe
  - 58% reported being arrested for solicitation
- Venereal disease and suicide attempts are the two greatest health risks for prostituted youth.<sup>11</sup>
- The average life expectancy of a child after getting into prostitution is seven years, with homicide or HIV/AIDS as the main causes of death.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Brantley, N. (June 2009). *Framing the issues of commercial sexual exploitation of children*. Motivating, Inspiring, Supporting & Serving Sexually Exploited Youth (MISSEY).

<sup>10</sup> *MISSEY Presentation*. This data represents a group of commercially sexually exploited youth that were served through West Coast Children's Clinic's Screening, Stabilization and Transition program.

<sup>11</sup> Schetky, D.H. (1988). Child pornography and prostitution. In D.H. Schetky and A.H. Green (Eds.), *Child sexual abuse: A handbook for health care and legal professionals*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

<sup>12</sup> Fang, B. (2005, October 16). Young lives for sale: Why more kids are getting into the sex trade--and how the feds are fighting back [Electronic version]. *U.S. News & World Report*. Retrieved on July 15, 2009, at <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/051024/24sextraffickers.htm>