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SEX TRAFFICKING CASES INVOLVING MINORS

KIMBERLY J. MITCHELL, DAVID FINKELHOR & JANIS WOLAK

HIGHLIGHTS

This bulletin summarizes findings from the National Juvenile Prostitution Study (N-JPS). It describes the prevalence and types of sex trafficking cases that ended in arrests or detentions by U.S. law enforcement agencies in 2005 and explores the characteristics of youth involved in sex trafficking, the characteristics of the cases themselves, and how police view these juveniles—as victims or as delinquents. The bulletin also covers policy and practice implications and recommends several next steps for advancing the handling of these cases. Some findings include the following:

- There were an estimated 1,450 arrests and detentions for sex trafficking crimes involving youth in the United States in 2005.
- Sex trafficking cases involving minors fell into three groups: (1) Third-party exploiter cases, (2) Solo juvenile cases, and (3) Child sexual abuse cases involving payment.
- Police treated 69% of juveniles as victims and 31% as delinquents.
- Findings indicate a strong relationship between a case originating with an outside report to police and the juvenile being treated as a victim.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most pressing issues related to trafficking in persons is the lack of data driven estimates of its scale and scope.¹⁻⁴ Understanding the number and characteristics of victims, the types and nature of the trafficking offenses they suffer and where those offenses occur is crucial to the provision of responses that decrease rates of trafficking and restore victims and survivors to healthy, productive lives. Accurate estimates are needed so that resources can be allocated appropriately to law enforcement and victim service agencies, so that changes in numbers and characteristics of victims can be tracked over time, and so that trafficking can be understood in the context of related crime victimizations that are measured by crime statistics (e.g., child sexual abuse, sexual assault).

The focus of this study was on sex trafficking of minors because they account for a substantial proportion of trafficking victims seen by law enforcement;⁵ victims are particularly vulnerable because of their young age^{6,7} and they constitute a distinct sub-population of trafficking

victims that has different relationships to law enforcement and service agencies than do adult victims of sex or labor trafficking.

The National Juvenile Prostitution Study (N-JPS) collected information from a national sample of law enforcement agencies in the United States about the characteristics of crimes involving juvenile sex trafficking and the numbers of arrests and detentions for these crimes during a 1-year period. The goals of the methodology were to construct a representative national sample of law enforcement agencies that would provide an overall picture of the law enforcement response to these crimes in the United States and understand how these cases emerged and were handled in a diverse group of agencies.

PREVALENCE OF SEX TRAFFICKING

Many have attempted to calculate the number of juveniles involved in sex trafficking in the United States, with estimates ranging from 1,400 to 2.4 million.⁸⁻¹² However, a close look at these diverse estimates reveals that none are based on a strong scientific foundation.¹³

TERMINOLOGY

Prostitution versus sex trafficking. Until recently, social service agencies and the criminal justice system have largely viewed juvenile prostitution as part of the spectrum of delinquency engaged in by adolescent runaways and street youth.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ This is beginning to change, however, and many are increasingly referring to the problem of youth involved in prostitution as “commercial sexual exploitation” or “sex trafficking,” which connote images of victims more readily than “juvenile prostitution.”

Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, any person younger than age 18 who performs a commercial sex act is considered a victim of human trafficking, regardless of whether force, fraud, or coercion is present. The language defining sex trafficking appears to refer specifically to crimes committed by a third-party exploiter. However, there is some debate about the distinction between prostitution and trafficking.¹⁷

The U.S. Department of Justice has encouraged law enforcement agencies to change policies that once treated youth engaged in prostitution as offenders or delinquents, to view such youth as victims of commercial sexual exploitation, and to make pursuing juvenile prostitution a priority.¹⁸⁻²⁰ To further this end, law enforcement officials have instituted training programs and specialized task forces throughout the nation.^{21,22}

When the National Juvenile Prostitution Study (N-JPS) was conducted, terms such as “sex trafficking” and “commercial sexual exploitation of children” were not in widespread use. As such, N-JPS used the phrase “juveniles involved in prostitution.” In light of the changing terminology, however, the authors use the term “sex trafficking” throughout this bulletin, while acknowledging that this was not the terminology presented to N-JPS participants.

Juveniles involved in sex trafficking. Youth who are arrested or detained in sex trafficking cases. This definition covers both youth who are trafficked by others and those who act alone. The authors do not refer to such youth as “victims” because N-JPS focused on whether and under what circumstances law enforcement viewed them as victims.

Third-party exploiter. Person who profits financially from selling juveniles for sex. Many of the third-party exploiters in the survey were pimps, but this category also includes some offenders who recruited or otherwise worked for pimps.

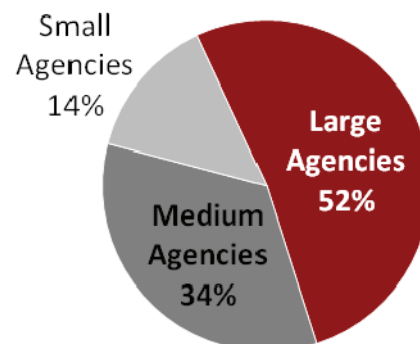
Client. Person who buys sexual services from youth (i.e., johns, customers).

The N-JPS estimate does not attempt to measure the number of youth involved in sex trafficking, but rather the number of arrests or detentions made by law enforcement agencies in cases involving juvenile sex trafficking in a 1-year period.

Using weighted survey procedures, it is estimated that there were 1,450 arrests and detentions for sex trafficking crimes involving youth in the United States in 2005. Although this estimate includes cases in which either adults or youth were arrested or detained, it corresponds fairly closely to another estimate of 1,400 juveniles taken into custody for prostitution and commercialized vice, which was based on Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Reports data from 2003.¹² Both of these estimates may undercount cases coming to the attention of law enforcement, however, because police who work with juveniles often may know of or suspect involvement in sex trafficking, but choose not to arrest or bring charges for lack of concrete evidence.¹³

More arrests were made by large law enforcement agencies than by medium or small ones (see Figure 1). Ninety-five percent of U.S. law enforcement agencies made no arrests in cases involving sex trafficking of minors in 2005. It is uncertain whether sex trafficking simply does not occur in these jurisdictions or whether agencies are unaware of existing cases. Even among large jurisdictions in which sex trafficking seems most likely, 56% of the agencies surveyed reported no arrests or detentions. These jurisdictions include cities that have reputations for considerable prostitution, gang, organized crime, and juvenile crime problems.²³ Further, 30% of the largest jurisdictions reported only between 1 and 10 cases in 2005. Just 6 agencies nationwide reported making more

Figure 1. Sex Trafficking of Minor Arrests, by Agency Size



than 50 arrests during the study year. In 2005, law enforcement made 84,891 arrests for prostitution-related offenses across the United States,²³ but according to the N-JPS findings, less than 2% of these arrests were in cases that involved juveniles.

TYPES OF SEX TRAFFICKING CASES

Many people stereotype juveniles involved in sex trafficking as runaways who end up walking the streets to survive.^{21,24,25} Running away, however, is not the only pathway that leads to sex trafficking.

Anecdotal reports suggest that children living in their own homes may be trafficked by family members or acquaintances. Some children who are sexually abused by family members or acquaintances receive money or other items as incentives for sex acts.²⁶ Juveniles may become involved in sex trafficking through gang activity as part of initiation rituals or to accumulate power and wealth for other members.^{21,27} Drug addiction or financial needs or desires may also draw juveniles into trafficking, and some youth from other countries have been brought into the United States for purposes of prostitution.

We created a typology to divide sex trafficking cases into three groups:

- Third-party exploiter cases
- Solo juvenile cases
- Child sexual abuse cases involving payment

Third-Party Exploiter Cases

Most juvenile sex trafficking cases that ended in arrest or detention involved third-party exploiters (see Figure 2)—pimps in most cases—who profited financially from selling juveniles for sex. The third-party exploiter category comprised an estimated 793 arrests or detentions made by police in 2005.

Two subcategories of third-party exploiter cases were distinguished:

- **Well-organized criminal enterprises** (e.g., a pimp prostituting a group of girls; call-girl services; businesses fronting for prostitution, such as massage parlors), which make up 41% of third-party exploiter cases.
- **Less formal, “small-time” operations** (e.g., one exploiter and one juvenile), which make up 59% of third-party exploiter cases.

In 45% of these cases, police arrested or detained the trafficked youth; in other words, they treated them as offenders rather than victims.

METHODOLOGY

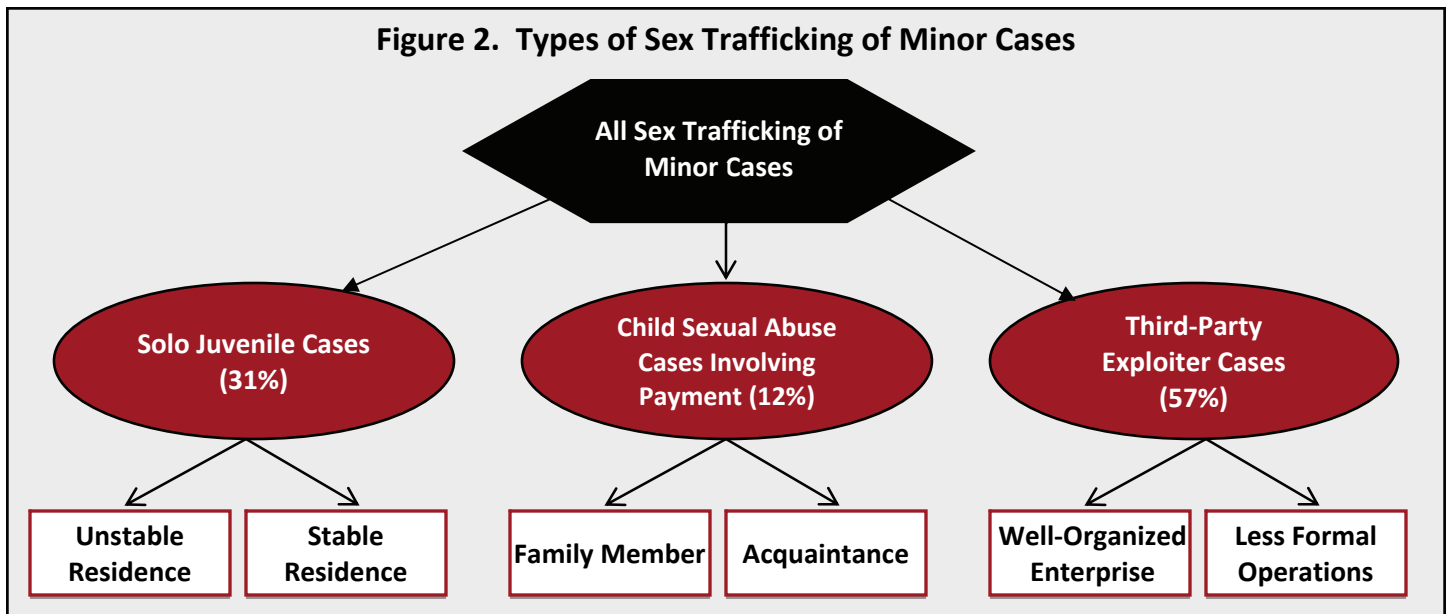
The National Juvenile Prostitution Study (N-JPS) was sponsored by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and conducted by the Crimes against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire. A national sample of 2,598 state, county, and local law enforcement agencies was surveyed by mail, plus one federal agency, to determine if agencies had arrested or detained juveniles or adults in cases involving sex trafficking of minors during 2005. A sample of respondents was also interviewed by telephone to gather additional information about individual cases. Cases had to involve (1) juveniles younger than age 18 involved in sex trafficking, (2) the exchange of money or something of monetary value (e.g., food, shelter, drugs, alcohol), and (3) arrests or detentions during 2005.

Agencies were divided into three groups:

- Large agencies with 1,000 or more sworn officers and 1 federal agency (n=138). These agencies included police departments in all major cities. This group was not sampled from; instead all 138 agencies were included given that prostitution cases were expected to cluster in large agencies.
- Medium-sized agencies with between 50 and 999 sworn officers (n=2,077). Of these, 1,072 were randomly selected for the survey.
- Small agencies with 1 to 49 sworn officers (n=12,954). Of these, 1,389 were randomly selected for the survey.

Responding agencies reported 877 cases involving juvenile sex trafficking. Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with investigators in 138 of these cases to gather information about the characteristics and circumstances of juveniles involved in sex trafficking, the characteristics of third-party exploiters, and details of the police investigation. Six of the 138 cases were excluded from the current report because no actual juveniles were involved (e.g., clients sought to buy juveniles for sex but did not reach one, investigators posed online as third-party exploiters or juveniles).

A full methodology report, which includes information about weighting, is available at http://cola.unh.edu/sites/cola.unh.edu/files/research_publications/JP-study-methodology-report.pdf



Solo Juvenile Cases

Police made an estimated 436 arrests or detentions in 2005 for sex trafficking cases involving solo juveniles or, in other words, juveniles thought to be working on their own (see Figure 2). Although police could find no evidence of a third-party exploiter, the presence of such figures cannot be entirely ruled out. Some juveniles taken into custody may try to protect a third-party exploiter from arrest. However, the fact that some youth do engage in sex trafficking without pimps is well established in the literature.²⁸ It is possible that the methodology overestimates the percentage of solo juvenile cases, but results suggest this category still represents a sizeable portion of cases encountered by law enforcement.

Solo cases were divided into two subcategories:

- **Unstable residence group**, which included many cases of stereotypical runaway survival sex—youth out on the street with no place to go for food or shelter who sell themselves to survive. This group also included youth with serious drug problems and youth rejected by their families, including gay and transgendered youth.
- **Stable residence group**, which included juveniles who seemed to be under less environmental pressure to engage in prostitution—they were not homeless, addicted to drugs, or cut off from family resources. However, many of these cases could not be firmly categorized because the investigators who were interviewed often did not know whether youth had run away from home or where they were living. Thus, a reliable statistical breakdown of these two subcategories is not available.

In 90% of solo juvenile cases, police arrested or detained youth as offenders—a considerably higher percentage than in the other types of sex trafficking cases.

Child Sexual Abuse Cases Involving Payment

The second type of sex trafficking case involved children who were sexually abused at the hands of family members, acquaintances, or caretakers and who were paid money as an inducement to engage in or continue these sexual activities (See Figure 2). Police made an estimated 170 arrests or detentions in 2005 for these cases.

These cases, which fall between commercial sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse, were divided into two subcategories:

- **Familial abuser.**
- **Acquaintance abuser.**

In general, although victims in these cases received money in exchange for sex, they did not engage in prostitution in the sense of having serial sex with various clients. These cases also differed from the third-party exploiter and solo cases in that most were reported by small law enforcement agencies. In the interviews, investigators were asked about cases that “involve juvenile prostitution, meaning money or something of value was exchanged for sex acts with or by someone who was younger than 18.” Small agencies may have cited these child sexual abuse cases because they had so few of the more stereotypical juvenile sex trafficking cases. Large and medium-sized agencies also may have had these more unusual cases but did not report them because the term “juvenile prostitution” evoked the more stereotypical situations. None of the juveniles in these cases were arrested or detained as part of the current crime.

Table 1. Juvenile Characteristics (n=132)

	All Juveniles (n=132) %	Third Party (n=77) %	Solo (n=41) %	Child Sexual Abuse (n=14) %
Sex**				
Female	90	100	77	78
Male	10	< 1	23	22
Age***				
11 or younger	< 1	< 1	0	2
12 or 13	10	10	5	21
14 or 15	33	46	9	34
16 or 17	55	43	87	29
Don't know	2	0	0	13
Race***				
White	59	63	42	83
Black	36	33	53	3
Other	4	4	5	0
Don't know	2	0	0	13
Hispanic ethnicity***				
	9	16	1	0
U.S. citizen				
	99	99	100	100
Area of residence***				
Urban	53	62	56	3
Suburban	23	22	15	49
Rural	4	5	4	0
Large town	7	6	5	18
Small town	5	1	2	29
Don't know	8	5	17	0
History of running away***				
	60	84	33	20
Prior arrests*				
	36	43	27	21
Detained or arrested as part of current crime***				
	54	45	90	0

*** p<.001, ** p<.01. * p<.05

Who are the Third-Party Exploiters?

Third-party exploiters were most commonly pimps or people associated with pimps (82%†). Other exploiters included people who were directly abusing juveniles (17%† overall: 14% acquaintances and 3% family members). Typically, only one exploiter was involved in each case (72%), but 17% of cases involved two exploiters and 11% involved three or more. Third-party exploiter cases were more likely than child sexual abuse cases to involve multiple exploiters.

Primary exploiters were usually men (85%). In 27% of cases at least one female exploiter—generally an older prostitute who helped recruit or monitor the juveniles—was involved. Exploiters were fairly young: 44% were age 20 to 29 and 24% were age 30 to 39. Exploiters in child sexual abuse cases tended to be older than third-party exploiters. Most exploiters were African American (59%) and U.S. citizens (91%).

Exploiters' length of involvement in prostitution varied, with 16%* involved for less than 1 year, 31%† involved

for 1 to 4 years, and 27%† involved for more than 4 years (27%† of police respondents did not know how long exploiters were involved).

Respondents often did not know about exploiters' prior arrests but those who did indicated a range of criminal histories, including sexual offenses against minors and adults, alcohol- and drug-related charges, weapons charges, theft, homicide or manslaughter, and nonsexual violent offenses.

Characteristics of Juveniles Involved in Sex Trafficking

The majority of juveniles involved in sex trafficking in 2005 were female (90%; see Table 1). Most were teenagers age 16 or older (55%), but 11% were younger than age 14. Fifty-nine percent were White, a number similar to the percentage of White youth ages 10–19 in the general population (62.9%)²⁹. However, 36% were African American, which is quite disproportionate to the 14.5% of youth ages 10–19 in the general population who were African American.²⁹ The majority (53%) lived in urban communities. All were U.S. citizens. Sixty percent had

†Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

histories as runaways and 36% had criminal histories. Slightly more than half (54%) were detained or arrested as part of the crime.

When reviewing demographics by case type, significant differences were found (see Table 1). Male juveniles were much more likely to be involved in solo and child sexual abuse cases than in third-party exploiter cases, while Hispanic juveniles were much more likely to be involved in third-party exploiter cases. Child sexual abuse cases more commonly involved youth age 15 or younger, White youth, and those who lived in non-urban areas. Youth involved in third-party exploiter cases were more likely to have a history of running away and prior arrests. Youth in solo cases were the most likely to be detained or arrested as part of the current crime.

Features of Sex Trafficking

Most juveniles found clients on the street (86%) (see Table 2). Juveniles involved in solo prostitution were the most likely to find clients on the street (93%), with limited contact through other avenues. Most juveniles in third-party exploiter cases also found their clients on the street (82%), but some used other avenues as well, such as an escort or call service (26%) and the Internet (20%).

Money was exchanged for sex acts in almost all cases (98%), but other items, such as drugs or alcohol (14%) and necessities like food or shelter (3%), were also exchanged, but much less frequently. The average price paid by an individual client also varied, ranging from less than \$50 (28%) to more than \$150 (18%). The number of clients juveniles saw in an average week varied widely, ranging from 1 or 2 (7%) to more than 40 (4%). The most common sexual acts were sexual intercourse (83%) and oral sex (87%), with smaller but notable percentages involving anal sex (23%) and group sex (17%).

Only a small percentage of juveniles had false identification indicating they were an adult (9%), but this was more common for juveniles with third-party exploiters than in solo cases (13% versus 3%). One in five (21%) traveled across state lines for prostitution.

How Cases Originate in the Criminal Justice System

Sex trafficking cases primarily came to the attention of police in two ways:

- **Police-initiated activities (63%).** Types of police-initiated activity often overlapped and included vice squad investigations (33%), undercover operations (39%), proactive investigations (51%), and police on the scene observing a crime in progress (3%). In a

common scenario, police would be conducting surveillance or undercover operations in areas known for prostitution and, after stopping people who appeared to be engaged in prostitution, would discover they were minors. Some police stopped individuals specifically because they appeared to be young, but the investigations themselves did not appear to be targeting juveniles. In other cases, police received reports of crimes not specifically related to prostitution or juveniles (e.g., altercations, theft, drug-related offenses) and then, during the investigation, discovered juveniles involved in prostitution.

- **Reports to police (37%).** These included cases reported by juveniles (7%), parents or guardians (7%), other family members (<1%), group homes or residential treatment centers (3%), social services or schools (9%), business owners (4%), or other community members (4%). Police attention was also initiated through runaway or missing person reports (5%).

Police Viewpoint: Victim or Delinquent?

To examine how police view juveniles involved in sex trafficking, data on who was detained and charged in each case, and for what offense, was used to divide cases into three categories:

- **Juvenile as victim:** The exploiter only or both the juvenile and exploiter were arrested or detained but the charge against the juvenile was not prostitution-related (e.g., disturbing the peace, drug charge).
- **Juvenile as delinquent:** The juvenile was the only person arrested or detained.
- **Juvenile as both victim and delinquent:** The exploiter was arrested for conducting a sexual crime against a minor and the juvenile was also arrested on a prostitution-related charge.

As a result of this classification, 53% of juveniles were categorized as victims, 31% as delinquents, and 16% as both victims and delinquents. By examining these categories by case type, it was determined that police treated juveniles as victims in all of the child sexual abuse cases, 66% of the third-party exploiter cases, and 11% of the solo cases.

In the cases in which police treated juveniles as both victims and delinquents, we examined the case summaries more carefully to see if we could reclassify them into a victim-only or delinquent-only category. In every case, the juvenile's status was changed from both victim and

Table 2. Case Characteristics (n=118)

	All Juveniles (n=118) %	Third Party (n=77) %	Solo (n=41) %
Where clients were found			
Street***	86	82	93
Indoors***	3	5	0
Call service***	17	26	1
Business***	7	9	3
Places of drug use***	3	< 1	9
Truck stop***	6	6	2
Internet***	14	20	4
Telephone chat***	6	8	1
Type of sex act			
Sexual intercourse**	83	89	71
Oral sex	87	87	87
Anal sex***	23	30	9
Stripping or lap dancing***	9	12	5
Group sex***	17	23	6
Tied up, humiliated, or subjected to pain***	3	3	4
Item exchanged for sex act			
Money	98	97	100
Necessities***	3	4	1
Drugs or alcohol***	14	17	8
Goods***	1	1	1
Number of clients***			
1–2	7	10	2
3–5	15	24	0
5–20	16	19	10
21–40	14	15	12
40 or more	4	3	6
Don't know	44	30	70
Average price received***			
< \$50	28	17	49
\$51–\$100	31	34	27
\$101–\$150	14	19	6
\$151 or more	18	24	7
Don't know	8	6	10
Had a false adult ID**			
Don't know	6	7	3
Traveled across state lines			
Don't know	15	8	29
Traveled circuit			
Don't know	12	15	0

*** p<.001, ** p<.01. * p<.05

Note. Child sexual abuse cases were not included in this table because many of the dynamics included are not relevant.

delinquent to victim only because at least one of the following occurred:

- The initial charges against the juvenile were dropped once the investigator determined he or she was a minor.
- The investigator commented that the only reason the juvenile was charged was so that he or she could get needed services.

With these cases reclassified, 69% of juveniles were ultimately classified as victims and 31% as delinquents.

How is victim or delinquent status influenced by how cases originate?

One feature of sex trafficking cases that has important practice and policy implications is how these cases come to the attention of law enforcement. The data show a strong relationship between a case originating with an outside report to police and the juvenile being treated as a victim. By contrast, juveniles are much more likely to be treated as delinquents if the case comes to police attention due to police initiative alone.

A number of youth-specific characteristics could account for this finding, particularly age (e.g., family members of younger juveniles are more likely to be concerned about their disappearance and thus more likely to report them

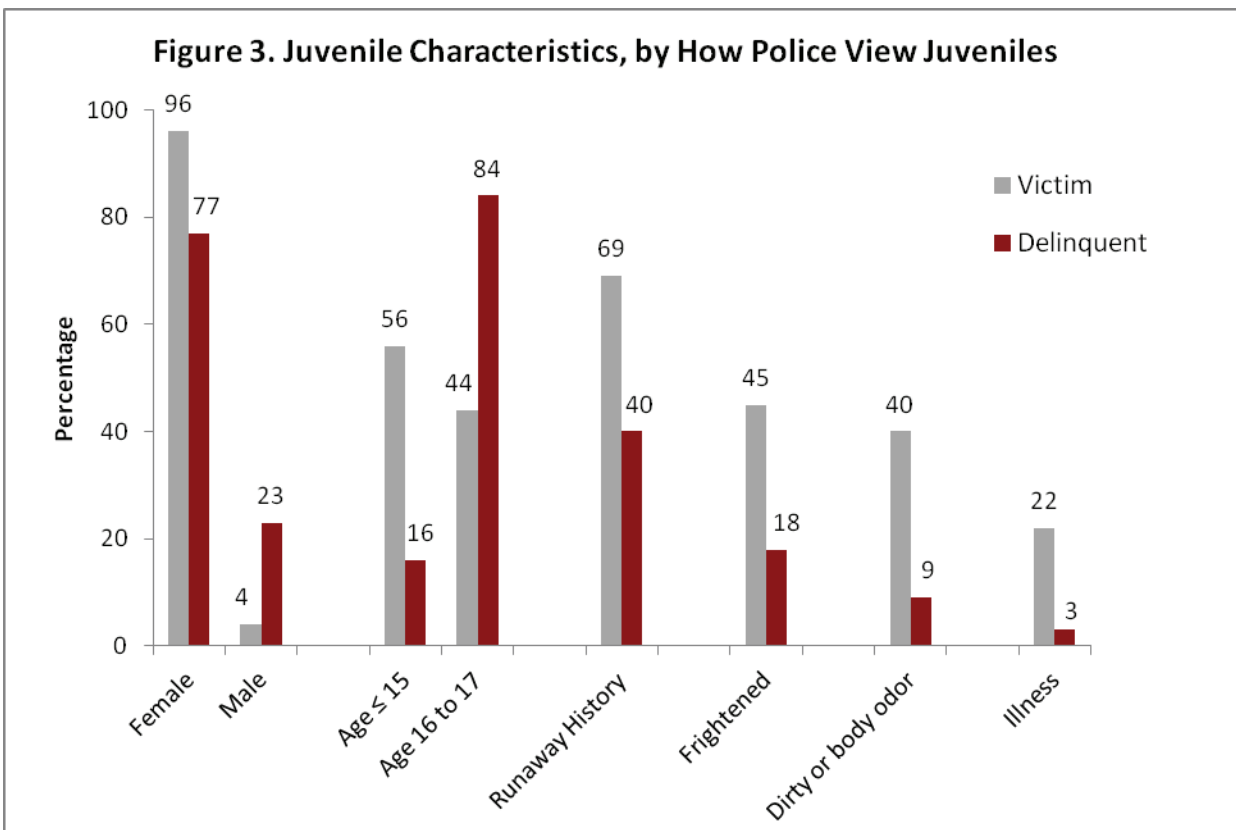
to police as missing). Indeed, juveniles were more likely to be treated as victims than delinquents if they were age 15 or younger (56%); female (96%); had a history of running away from home (69%); were frightened (45%), were dirty or had body odor (40%), or were ill (22%) during their initial encounter with police (See Figure 3). Even after adjusting for these characteristics, however, how the case came to police attention was still a strong and significant factor in how police treated the juvenile. Cases that began through a report to police (as opposed to police action) were almost eight times more likely to involve juveniles treated as victims.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings from the N-JPS have bearing on a variety of matters related to policy and practice issues surrounding juveniles involved in sex trafficking. Results highlight areas important to address in future research to inform policy in this area. What follows is a discussion of a few of these issues.

Determining Prevalence Estimates

Data collection for N-JPS started soon after federal task forces were formed and pushes were being made to address juvenile sex trafficking through training and increased law enforcement activity. Because of this, the numbers in this bulletin provide a baseline measure for



what may be increasing law enforcement activity. Tremendous improvements are needed in mobilizing law enforcement to recognize and document juvenile sex trafficking. Consideration should be given to the possibility of a mandatory reporting system with data aggregated by the FBI. The existing system, the National Incident-Based Reporting System, is inadequate because it does not gather information about important distinctions, such as the role of the juvenile or the type of sex trafficking case.

Journalists, advocates, and researchers would all like to know how many juveniles are involved in sex trafficking. There have been a number of crude efforts to develop such an estimate, but they are all scientifically indefensible. For example, the widely cited estimate of 326,000 from Estes and Weiner²⁸ is about youth “at risk,” not youth actually involved in prostitution, and is based (among other things) on guesses that 1/4 of 1 percent of all youth plus 35% of a national estimate of runaways are “at risk.” (These and other estimates are critiqued by Stransky and Finkelhor.¹³)

The N-JPS estimate of 1,450 juveniles being arrested or detained for sex trafficking is not a good indicator of the true scope of the problem. It is helpful, however, that the estimate is close to the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports’ estimate of 1,400 juveniles taken into custody for sex trafficking.¹² Keeping these two estimates in mind, it may seem improbable that more than 300,000 juveniles are involved in sex trafficking if only such a small number (1/2 of 1 percent of that estimate) are coming to law enforcement’s attention. Until better estimates are available, it is best to simply cite what is known about the cases coming to official attention rather than to promote unscientific guesses about the overall number of juveniles involved in sex trafficking.

Recognizing Diversity

As often happens with social problems that have not been extensively researched or even described by journalists, strong stereotypes dominate the thinking about sex trafficking of minors—the runaway and homeless youth who get recruited on the streets by a pimp. While many do appear to fit this stereotype, other dynamics must be considered. A majority of juveniles involved in trafficking are not homeless. Moreover, not all youth operate under the aegis of a pimp or other exploiter. Many juveniles operate alone, and some may be involved without either outside manipulation or dire need. Both journalists and researchers have identified some

youth, particularly boys, but some girls as well, who are drawn to the money or supposed excitement of this activity.¹⁰ Without sufficient information on the living conditions of these youth, the authors are reluctant to say how large a portion of the 31% of solo juveniles would fit this description. It is important, however, to acknowledge this as part of the spectrum and to train law enforcement agents, social service providers, and prevention planners to anticipate encountering such youth, who may require different kinds of interventions.

It is also important to recognize other forms of diversity within the population of juveniles involved in sex trafficking, including those exploited in their own homes. Developing a typology, such as the one proposed in this bulletin, is a useful way of ensuring that practitioners and policymakers acknowledge this diversity. The three categories that make up this typology—third-party exploiter cases, solo cases, and more traditional child sexual abuse cases—are intended as a starting point. The field will certainly benefit from adding or refining categories as research continues, but recognizing these first three should help advance a better understanding of the sex trafficking of minors.

Mobilizing Law Enforcement

Findings from N-JPS suggest that in many communities, police are doing little about this problem. This conclusion is based on the inability of so many law enforcement agencies—even large, urban ones (56%)—to identify any cases for the study. It seems unlikely that there are no cases given the widespread social forces that can produce the problem—family physical and sexual abuse, running away, drug dependency, the influence of adult prostitution in communities—which are present in so many large, urban communities. Even if police are encountering such cases but cannot locate them within their record-keeping system, that, in itself, testifies to a low level of awareness. The authors’ suspicion, however, is that some agencies either do not see the sexual trafficking of juveniles as a priority or do not feel they have the resources or expertise to get involved.

Clearly some law enforcement agencies have become very proactive. Los Angeles had the highest arrest rate (0.15 per 1,000 people), with San Francisco coming in second (0.06 per 1,000 people). If all large agencies were working cases at these rates, the estimate for large agencies alone could be as high as 13,879 cases (based on the Los Angeles rate) or 5,552 cases (based on the San Francisco rate).

Cross-disciplinary agencies should work together to mobilize law enforcement around the problem of sex trafficking of minors. Annual training events specifically about this crime are an important first step. Information also can be integrated into broader child sexual abuse training events.

Encouraging communication both across departments within agencies and across jurisdictions may also help lead to better responses to these crimes. Finally, organizing case files to highlight and thus easily identify sex trafficking cases could be beneficial to investigations.

Acknowledging the Dual Status of Juveniles

Data from this study clearly testify to the complicated public policy dilemma of intervening with juveniles involved in sex trafficking. To what extent do youth and society benefit or suffer from the actions of the justice system and the limited tools that it has? Should these juveniles be treated as delinquents and arrested, taken into custody, or sent to juvenile detention facilities? Should they be treated as victims and provided with advocates and child protection workers? Although most child advocates prefer a victim framework that recognizes that these youth are in many cases terribly abused, deprived, and manipulated, it is not entirely clear that the child welfare system has the tools needed to deal with these youth. Some may have committed other crimes, for example, so some jurisdictions may find it easier to assist these youth using the juvenile justice system as opposed to the child welfare system.

What may be needed are multidisciplinary, hybrid, multi-component response systems specifically designed for this population of youth that can use the tools of different agencies and respond to youth in various situations. Some communities are discussing the development of such integrated systems, but others have not even begun to think about the issues. More research is needed to determine the feasibility of such systems and the effectiveness of those that may already be in practice.

Conceptualizing Sex Trafficking as Child Maltreatment

Because juveniles involved in sex trafficking have largely been considered delinquents, criminologists with little involvement in the field of child maltreatment have conducted much of the research in this area.^{15,16} Yet the literature suggests that the field of child maltreatment should encompass sex trafficking for several reasons:

- Illegal sexual activity involving children is a core concern of the child maltreatment field, even when those activities involve some “voluntary” participation on the part of youth.³⁰⁻³²

- Juveniles involved in sex trafficking frequently have family histories of maltreatment.³³⁻³⁷ In fact, inadequate responses by child protection agencies to such maltreatment may be a factor in many of these cases.
- Juveniles involved in sex trafficking are frequently abused and mistreated by pimps, clients, and other adults with whom they associate, and they work under onerous circumstances that can have serious consequences for their health. Violent victimization (e.g., aggravated assault, sexual abuse) at the hands of pimps, clients, and other prostitutes is common.^{21,38,39}
- Frequent, repeated sexual activity with strangers makes youth vulnerable to HIV infection, other sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy. Other health concerns such as illness and poor nutrition beset this population, particularly because access to adequate health care is limited.^{21,40,41}
- Drug abuse and the health and criminal repercussions associated with it are a large problem.^{21,40-42}
- A number of psychological disorders, such as depression and suicidality, plague youth involved in prostitution.^{21,40,41}

For these and other reasons, the need for a child protection response to and involvement in managing and treating these youth has been often expressed.^{15,21,43} In fact, child maltreatment professionals have been among those who have pioneered the kind of multidisciplinary cooperation between police, child protection, treatment, and other social services officials that could be the most promising intervention with juveniles involved in sex trafficking.

Next Steps

- **Bystander mobilization.** Responses to youth involved in prostitution appear more victim oriented, and thus perhaps more compassionate, when the cases come from community reports. It may be possible to promote more community reporting by educating community members such as social workers, teachers, young people, family members, and victim service professionals. Such reporting may short circuit the prostitution careers of these youth at an earlier stage in their development.

- **Prevention education.** The fact that some youth are drawn into sex trafficking by its presumed excitement or glamour suggests the need to better inoculate young people against some of this imagery, much as society attempts to inoculate them against the allure of drugs. Discussions about the reality of prostitution may need to be part of general youth safety and health education programs, especially in communities where such activity is known to exist. Professionals working in the field of child maltreatment, particularly those in direct contact with high-risk youth, may be in a good position to have these conversations with youth (particularly those youth who may not have a safe home or caring parents to speak with them).
- **Safe houses and residences and victim resources.** Homelessness can create a perceived need to engage in prostitution, and the lack of a safe environment may allow exploiters to track, cajole, and coerce youth into engaging, or reengaging, in this activity. To rescue some of these youth, many services may be required, including housing, legal assistance, education, and health care. Only with the support of these services may youth see the advantages of avoiding the environment where they were victimized in the first place.
- **Specialist interviewers and investigators.** This population of youth is highly alienated, isolated, and often intimidated and therefore can be evasive. It may not be possible to help them, or to catch and prosecute those who exploit them, without a detailed understanding of and experience in their situations and their psychology. This suggests a need for specially trained police and interviewers who can connect with the youth, or at least get useful information from them. Victim service providers who are already trained in the special needs of victimized youth could prove invaluable in this area.

CONCLUSION

These findings—that most juveniles involved in sex trafficking are classified as victims rather than delinquents—indicate that views about the nature of sex trafficking are evolving. The results have bearing on various matters related to policy and practice. When juveniles who are involved in sex trafficking come into contact with law enforcement, the officers' responses will determine whether the youth are viewed as victims of commercial

sexual exploitation or as delinquents. Many people stereotype juveniles involved in prostitution as runaways, but the typology used in this bulletin highlights other dynamics that can bring minors into the world of sex trafficking. Due to the many health concerns associated with juvenile sex trafficking, the need for a child protection response to these youth and continued involvement in managing and providing treatment for them often has been expressed.^{15,21,43} What appears to be needed are multidisciplinary, hybrid, multi-component response systems specifically designed for this population that can use the tools of different agencies and can respond to youth in various situations.

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For Further Information

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