

Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: A Network of Underground Players in the Midwest

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Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: A Network of Underground Players in the Midwest

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Trafficking of domestically born children in the United States into the sex trade has been recognized by the U.S. government under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2005. The Midwest has been exposed as a recruitment site for traffickers. Children who have been trafficked into prostitution often experience mental health problems, suffer physical and sexual assaults, have low self-esteem, and are put at risk for HIV/AIDS and other health problems. This article is based on qualitative interviews with 13 trafficked children from the Midwest. Findings reveal the experiences of victims and the network of players involved in trafficking in the Midwest.

Keywords trafficking, prostitution, human trafficking, sex trafficking, child prostitution, pimps, traffickers, domestic trafficking

Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Framing the Issue 15

Child sex trafficking involves the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person under the age of 18 for the purposes of a commercial sex act (Wilson & Dalton, 2007). The number of U.S. victims of the child sex trade remains elusive, given the illegal and hidden nature of the activity. Some estimate the numbers to be in the hundreds of thousands (Estes & Weiner, 2001). 20

When speaking of international trafficking there are *recruitment* countries, where victims are manipulated or forced into trafficking, *destination* countries, where victims are sent to work in the sex trade, and *bidirectional* countries where victims are both recruited and working (Farr, 2005). Similarly, in the United States there are recruitment cities, destination cities, and bidirectional cities. While recruitment of victims and selling of sexual services can take place in any city in America, smaller cities in the Midwest have been identified as recruitment areas (Davis, 2006), both manipulating and forcing youth into prostitution and then moving them around to various destination and bidirectional cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and Las Vegas (Wilson & Dalton, 2008). 25

Numerous factors contribute to the commercial sexual exploitation of children including individual, family, and peer-related factors as well as other environmental factors. Individual factors include criminal or deviant behavior, immaturity, poor sexual decision making, and engaging in survival sex to obtain basic needs (Cates, 1989; Cates & Markley, 1992; DuRant, Krowchuck, & Sinal, 1998). Family factors include family dysfunction such as parental instability, substance abuse, and serious mental illness (Cauce, Stewart, Rodriguez, Cochran, & Ginzler, 2003; Ferrara, 2001; O'Brien, 1991; Paradise et al., 35

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2001), promotion of prostitution by family members (Faugier & Sargent, 1997; Muecke, 40
 1992), a history of child abuse (Boyer & Fine, 1992; Brannigan & Van Brunschot, 1997;
 Briere, 1988; Briere & Runz, 1988; Gelles & Wolfner, 1994; Silbert & Pines, 1983;
 Simons & Whitbeck, 1991), and poverty (Azaola, 2001; Cauce et al., 2003). Peer factors
 include being introduced into the sex trade by friends or boyfriends. Environmental fac- 45
 tors that influence child trafficking include the existence of available adult sex markets in
 a community and having a community with a large population of transient males such a
 military personnel, truckers, tourists, and conventioners (Azaola; Estes & Weiner, 2003;
 Farley & Kelly, 2000; Hofstede, 1999).

Children who have been trafficked into prostitution often experience mental health
 problems, suffer physical and sexual assaults, have low self-esteem and are put at risk for 50
 HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. They are at increased risk of suicide as
 well as homicide (Flowers, 2001; *U.S. Midterm Review*, 2006; Volkonsky, 1995; Wilson
 & Dalton, 2008).

The passing of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 and its
 revision in 2005 has done much to change the perception of child sex trafficking at the 55
 federal level. According to the TVPA, anyone under the age of 18 who is trafficked into
 prostitution by someone economically benefiting from them is a victim of child sex traf-
 ficking. Understanding that children are manipulated into trafficking and may present as Q1
 willing participants, the federal law determined that children do not have to be trafficked
 against their will. Courts do not have to prove that any force, fraud, or coercion took place 60
 in order to prosecute traffickers. Simply, any child under the age of 18 that is trafficked
 into prostitution is a victim of child sex trafficking.

The TVPA helped to change the language of child sex trafficking in the United States.
 What was often referred to as *juvenile prostitution* prior to the passing of this legislation is
 now referred to as *commercial sexual exploitation of children* (CSEC). The act of manipu- 65
 lating a child into prostitution is now called *child sex trafficking* and those who were once
pimps are now referred to as *traffickers*. This shift in language has helped to create
 the beginning of a paradigm shift to reduce the tendency to blame the victim and to view
 the trafficker as someone committing a serious crime.

Some organizations have always been enlightened and have indeed helped to shape 70
 the new law and new way of thinking about trafficking. Studies and reports from the
 Polaris Project, founded in 2002, Shared Hope International, founded in 1998, and End
 Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes
 (ECPAT), founded in 1991, have chronicled the abuse of children through both labor and
 sex trafficking worldwide. Each has acknowledged trafficking in Ohio. More recent studies 75
 and reports on child sex trafficking in the United States have surfaced from these organi-
 zations. Of particular interest to this article were the works of Davis (2006), from the
 Polaris Project, and Wilson and Dalton (2007; 2008), all of whom have focused their work
 at some point on the child sex trade in Ohio.

Davis's (2006) report described pimp-controlled prostitution in Ohio and the prac- 80
 tices of pimps who seek to economically benefit from children. She provided reasons why
 human trafficking, both labor and sex, flourishes in Ohio by describing the presence of
 structural influences such as major highways and waterways that run through vulnerable
 areas. Davis provided evidence of a pool of potential purchasers (e.g., the presence of
 military bases around affected areas) and the lack of targeted legislation in Ohio to curb 85
 this activity.

Wilson and Dalton (2007; 2008) analyzed data in news reports from Ohio and inter-
 viewed professionals involved in working with victims of human trafficking or who had

expert knowledge on the issue. Data analysis revealed the characteristics of human trafficking and the extent to which it occurs. Findings revealed that Toledo, in particular, has a significant amount of child sex trafficking and that victims typically experience trauma and depression as well as substance abuse and mental and physical health concerns. His study found that victims were in need of housing, employment, mental health treatment, education, and above all else, safety. 90

The purpose of our study and the subsequent article is to add to the growing body of knowledge about child sex trafficking in the United States, particularly in the Midwest, by describing the lived experiences of child sex trafficking as seen through the eyes and perceptions of the victims themselves. What we also discovered during the course of our investigation was the existence of loosely organized but sophisticated networks of players involved in domestic child sex trafficking. This article discusses the experiences of child trafficking victims who were recruited from the Midwest, rescued by law enforcement, and incarcerated in a juvenile detention facility, as well as the networks involved in recruiting and trapping youth in the sex trade. We chose Toledo, Ohio as the focus for our study because of the ease in obtaining study participants and the level of child trafficking taking place in this community. 100 105

Child Trafficking in Toledo, Ohio

The problem of child sex trafficking in Toledo, Ohio has been documented in reports and research articles (Davis, 2006; Fedina, Trease, & Williamson, 2008; Wilson & Dalton, 2008). A 2005 to 2006 federal investigation and subsequent arrests of several Toledo pimps involved in a national prostitution trafficking ring were cited in several newspapers and described in recent research (Wilson & Dalton). In this investigation, Grand Jury indictments were handed down to 14 men and women from Toledo. Nine underage girls found in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania who agreed to testify in the federal case were from Toledo. Because of this case and subsequent investigations, Toledo has recently been cited by the FBI and National Center for Missing and Exploited Children as a major recruitment area for the commercial sexual exploitation of children by traffickers (Davis, 2006). In a series of front page articles in *The Toledo Blade*, local news coverage, a national primetime special, and national coverage in *The New York Times*, the problem of underage girls involved in commercial sexual exploitation in Toledo has been brought to national attention. Recently, the FBI reported receiving information on approximately 38 girls involved in trafficking in Lucas County, Ohio. Each of the 13 girls interviewed by this researcher reported knowing between 5 and 10 additional girls involved, most of whom have not been involved in the juvenile justice system. 110 115 120

Objectives of the Research

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the experiences, well-being, and risk factors associated with youth who have been involved in prostitution. For the purposes of this study, prostitution is defined as trading sex for money, items, or a place to stay. Six main areas of the interviewees' experiences were explored. These included (a) experiences with violence, (b) HIV risks and condom use, (c) emotional and physical health, (d) substance use, (e) home life and street life, and (f) experiences with local systems including the juvenile justice system, the social service system, and the health care system. 125 130

Method

Gaining Permission

Permission was sought and gained from the Lucas County Juvenile Judge and the University of Toledo to interview youth who volunteered to participate in the study and whose parents signed informed consent forms for their child to participate in this research. Teens who had been involved in prostitution were first identified by probation officers and juvenile justice personnel. Those teens were approached individually and confidentially and asked if they would like to participate in the study. They were free to accept or decline participation without repercussion. Provided the participant wanted to be interviewed and gave permission in writing, parents or guardians were contacted to gain written permission. Once permission was gained from both the adolescent and the guardian, the teen was asked to sign an informed consent form. The researcher then met with each adolescent to further explain the purpose of the study, who would see the results, the types of questions to be asked, the rules surrounding confidentiality, and the teen's right to refuse to answer any questions or to end the interview at any time. If the teen gave permission to the interviewer, the interview took place. No one who signed the informed consent form and met with the researcher refused the interview.

Data Collection and Analysis

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 13 female participants; 7 African American, 5 White, and 1 Hispanic, between the ages of 12 and 17, who were involved with the juvenile justice center or who were incarcerated in the juvenile detention center, or both. Questions were open-ended and participants were encouraged to talk as long as they wanted about each subject area until they believed they had described the subject in all of the ways they felt necessary. Interviews were audiotape-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using qualitative methods.

Approximately 21 hours of interviews yielding 191 pages of data and over 150 research codes were completed. Using qualitative methods, transcripts of interviews were analyzed line by line to extract codes. Codes were categorized and collapsed into themes. Themes were linked in meaningful ways to understand the experience of trafficking. For example, codes such as "introduced [to trafficking]," "how introduced [to trafficking]," and "who introduced [to trafficking]" were collapsed into the themes of *Connectors* and *Recruiters*. Connectors and Recruiters were linked together with others who had roles in this underground system into the theme *Roles in the Underground Sex Trafficking System*, which later became the *Trafficking Ring*.

Results

Entrance Into Child Sex Trafficking

Respondents reported that recruitment into the child sex trade took place on the streets, while walking to a friend's house or hanging out with a group of friends, at corner stores, malls, and hang-out houses, outside of the juvenile justice center while waiting to meet with a probation officer, and at their own homes. They were approached by girls, women, young men, and older men. Most commonly youth were approached by someone who knew them, someone who knew of them through other friends, or someone they vaguely

knew from around the neighborhood. However, a few were approached by people they had never met, but who knew of them. 175

Although there are several techniques involved in recruitment, the two overarching types of recruitment were identified as *finesse pimping* and *guerilla pimping* (Erb & deBoer, 2006). Vulnerability was found to be a precursor to successful recruitment. Many girls were runaways at the time of recruitment. 180

Recruitment Through Manipulation: Finesse Pimping

Finesse pimping involves manipulating young girls into situations where they seemingly make their own decisions to enter, sell sexual services, and give their money to a trafficker. Several finessing techniques were described, from putting vulnerable girls into situations in which they feel obligated to pay back kindnesses shown to them, using *bait and switch* techniques that serve to exploit the dreams of victims, and utilizing victims' attempts to provide for their own basic needs. As a runaway at only 13 years old, Sandy was taken in by a friend of a friend who provided her with everything she needed to live. Thus, she wanted to pay back the kindness that was extended to her by this friend. She described, 185 190

She took me to her friend's house and I stayed there, and I was only 13 years old. I stayed with her one friend for a couple weeks. . . . she went and she took me and my friend out on dates and my other friend and my friend's little sister, and we did it, and then she just took us to the store and buy some hygiene products and stuff like that. 195

Bait and switch techniques involve presenting attractive opportunities as bait in order to gain the attention and build trust or hope in one's victim, only to switch the situation for the economic gain of the trafficker. Keri described the most common form of bait and switch. When dating a guy she thought was interested in her intimately, she soon discovered that he was interested in the amount of money she could earn by working for his trafficking ring. "He was like supposed to be my boyfriend but basically he . . . [became] my pimp." 200

When traffickers and their workers are not taking advantage of the emotions of young girls who may want boyfriends, they are often preying on other wishes and desires of adolescents. At age 16, Andi was approached as she entered the corner store. After much discussion, her new friend asked what she wanted to be when she grew up. When she responded, "a model," he discussed his friend's modeling business. The modeling business was in fact an escort service that focused on prostitution as a source of revenue for the trafficker. She described, 205

We went over to the guy's house that ran the escorting and the modeling thing, and he told me everything about the escort thing and how it was gonna go and stuff, and I'm asking him, what about the modeling? He said that he just doing escort right now, but when he get his money up, he was gonna get right to modeling. 210

Needing to meet their own basic needs for survival, some girls were trafficked and sold in exchange for food, shelter, transportation, and in some cases to accommodate a drug habit. When Lacey reached early adolescence, she began trading sex to meet both her drug habit 215

and basic needs. “I was 13 when I started prostituting through my uncle. First, basically I had sex to get crack. I would do it for a place to stay, food, a ride”. At age 16, Shauna’s trafficker made her work in exchange for those items she needed to meet her daily needs. 220 She described, “He bought me clothes, shoes, socks, makeup, and hygiene stuff. He said I was his girl. The first night I went out there and worked I had to turn my money over to a girl.”

Recruitment Through Force: Guerilla Pimping

Another form of recruitment is through what is known as guerilla pimping. This is 225 described as recruitment by force in which a trafficker approaches and forces his victim to work for him through the use of threat, physical violence, and intimidation. Sherry, who had been a runaway off and on since she was 11, was a prime target at age 14 for a local trafficker. She said,

I was walking down the street having fun, just recently got out of here [deten- 230 tion] in January. And all of the sudden this black Yukon rides up. He tried to talk to me, at first, but I told him how old I was and then he rolled up around the corner and jumped out the car and just started hitting on me for no reason. . . . [He] started beating me and just for no reason and he told me I was going to be his ho. And just started basically abusing on me and threatening me. . . . He 235 took me to the car and told me that I was going to make his money or he was going to kill my little brother and sisters and my mom. He said I’ve been watching you.

Whether one is under the control of a guerilla pimp or finesse pimp, each victim must make her quota every time she is called to be engaged in prostitution. Sherry’s beginning 240 quota was \$50. Every day her quota increased by \$50 until it reached \$400 per day. Sherry chose to make her quota in any way that she could, short of selling her body. She described,

I was like just beating up people and taking their money just so I wouldn’t 245 have to go out there and sell my body to somebody, but I was getting money to save my little brothers and sisters and my mom life.

At age 13, Sammie was recruited into prostitution. After a few years of learning the game, Sammie had to pull in \$1,500 a night. She said,

He told me that I couldn’t come in every night unless I made \$1,500. One 250 night I only had maybe \$700. I was tired. I didn’t feel good and I was ready to go in. I got back to the hotel room and he tried strangling me, cuz I didn’t have enough money.

Family Life Before Recruitment

A majority of respondents reported that neglect or abuse had occurred in their families that resulted in runaway, throwaway (being kicked out of the house), or giveaway behavior 255 (being given to others such as child protection, foster care, or relatives). A majority (91%) experienced child abuse in their home. Most of the girls (77%) involved in the study had

been involved with child protection services at some point in their lives. Over half had also been involved in the foster care system.

Sixteen-year-old Brenda reported, “My step dad used to beat us a lot. He used to beat my mom too.” Andi also described, “When I was 13, my mom used to whoop me with extension cords and switches and stuff. I just got tired, so I ran away and went to a pay-phone to tell them my mom’s beating on me.” 260

Over half of the girls (57%) involved in prostitution reported being sexually abused by someone outside of their family. Almost 30% of the girls reported being sexually abused by someone in their family. Fourteen percent of the girls reported being sexually abused by someone both in and outside of their family. 265

Although sexual abuse and physical abuse were common among the girls, neglect was found to be most prevalent among these respondents. Of those that reported experiencing child maltreatment, most reported neglect, followed by physical abuse, and then sexual abuse. One reported being abused but did not specify what form(s) of maltreatment she had experienced. 270

Neglect was seen as involving children living in homes where they believed they lacked enough food for themselves and their siblings, did not have enough essential clothing or had “ragged” clothing, and had their gas and lights turned off at some times during the year. Prostitution was reported to fulfill their needs and engage others (traffickers and purchasers) who could provide for their basic needs. Sue described her family life prior to being trafficked into the sex trade. She said, 275

We were starving . . . we had no money, no lights, no gas. One box heater for the whole family. He didn’t want to waste drug money on Christmas presents or birthday presents. He took our toys away when I was 8. He sold them and bought drugs. I started prostituting at age 11. 280

Youth reported feelings of stress during their childhoods from daily hassles, acute traumas, and chronic conditions resulting from the abuse. Many reported additional stress from the emotional, mental, or physical obligations and adult responsibilities they had in the family. 285

Sixty-four percent of the girls interviewed reported having one or both parents addicted to drugs or alcohol. Parental substance abuse served to disrupt the lives of girls. Such abuse often caused significant and chronic stress and resulted in many of them having to provide the primary care for their siblings. 290

Coming from a family where stressors are ever-present and runaway behavior is common, such girls are at high risk of being trafficked and in entering the network of characters involved in trafficking rings. Most girls interviewed had been involved in runaway behavior at least once, running away from situations they believed were intolerable. Some girls described being thrown away, while others describe being given away. The following are examples: 295

Well it was maybe 3 days before my 15th birthday. Me and my dad had just got into an argument. Me and my dad, we never really seen eye to eye before. So he told me to leave, to get the hell out of his house, so I left. I was staying with a friend of mine and I met this guy. He turned out to be a pimp. (Sammie, 17) 300

My mom put me and my brother in foster care when I was 4 and he was 5. Her boyfriend was beating her up or something and they said they was going to take us or she could give us over. She gave us over. (Elaine, 17)

The girls reported several reasons that they ran away from home. The most common reason was stress, or being overwhelmed with family problems and being ill-equipped to deal with them. Girls who had parents that were substance abusers, had serious mental health issues, or were otherwise unavailable or unable to adequately care for their children commonly took on the emotionally and physically demanding responsibilities of the care of the family. Because they had excessive responsibility along with adult worries and lacked the authority and resources to be successful in the care of the families, they typically failed, periodically gave up, and ran away. Most experienced inner turmoil while on the run and wished to be back home under better circumstances. However, whether on the run or at home, the girls continued to experience chronic stress. Spending time on the streets often simply served to result in swapping stresses related to a dysfunctional home life for stresses related to a predatory and survival-based street life. The girls reported that systems such as the juvenile court and social services simply brought additional demands in their attempts to “put a girl back on the right path in life,” while providing minimal relief to existing stressors. The additional stressors caused by these institutions sometimes resulted in the girls being overwhelmed to the point of giving up and running away again.

How the Game is Played in Middle America: The Underground Social Network and the Players Involved

Analysis of the data revealed that there are several players connected to domestic minor sex trafficking that assume various roles within the social network of prostitution. This loosely connected system of players serves to keep the underground network operating with little disruption from law enforcement, neighborhood watches, or social service agency interventions. The roles played by those in the underground network include *connectors*, *recruiters*, *groomers*, *traffickers*, *bottoms*, *watchers*, and *wife-in-laws*. With the exception of *watchers* and *connectors*, all other terms are used among law enforcement to identify roles with this underground economy. *Wife-in-laws* and *bottoms* are terms used within trafficking networks. However, prior to this research the terms *grooming* and *recruiting* were thought to be techniques carried out by the trafficker and not necessarily roles that may be assumed by others. In addition, this article separates out each role, defines them, and provides a complete picture of a community network of players as described by child trafficking victims. Each role described serves a purpose in keeping the trafficking of children in operation. Other than the trafficker themselves, it is believed that each knows little about the entire series of enterprises but acts fairly independently as a link in the overall chain of trafficking. Once a link is removed through law enforcement or social service intervention, it is quickly replaced with another player seeking to make money from the potential available dollars within the trafficking game.

Connectors, a term identified by the authors, are those in neighborhoods that “hook you up” with someone that knows about how to make money in prostitution. They may introduce a girl to a recruiter or to a trafficker. Connectors may be compensated in the form of cash or they may benefit by being held in good favor by a trafficker or recruiter and compensated in other ways such as drugs, free drinks at the club, or other favors.

Recruiters, a term commonly referred to among FBI and helping professionals, are more closely linked to the trafficker or to the enterprise of prostitution itself. Recruiters seek to find “fresh faces” to provide to the trafficker, a practice called *knocking*. Recruiters often play other roles in prostitution or child trafficking networks. They may work for the trafficker in other capacities such as drug dealing or may be former recruits themselves. Laura, a trafficking victim, was forced to recruit others into trafficking. She described,

“We went to Atlanta, to a different truck stop. Ok, he had maybe seven girls and when you’re trying to get another girl to come home with you guys, it’s called ‘knocking’. They call it ‘knocking a bitch’ basically.”

Groomers are those that prepare victims for prostitution through various means, from purchasing clothing to teaching them how to negotiate deals with customers. A trafficker may take on the role of grooming or may rely on one or more trusted associates to groom victims. A groomer may also be an adult woman or youth who is involved in prostitution who may be grooming as a part of her responsibilities to the trafficker. Adult women who are involved in prostitution, independent of a trafficker, may be compensated monetarily for each girl they groom and turn over to a trafficker. They may work around traffickers and take a fee for introducing girls to various purchasers; or they may simply reap the benefits of being connected to fresh faces in prostitution and attracting new business opportunities for themselves to make money selling sex. 355 360

Traffickers are “pimps” with the sole purpose of sexually controlling and exploiting others to make money. Girls under the trafficker’s control are required to pay him and to follow the rules as a member of his stable. In turn, the trafficker pays all of the girls’ bills and provides their clothing, food, and other basic needs. Traffickers sometimes recruit girls for themselves. Seventeen-year-old Sharon described the following: 365

I was walking to the store and he knew that I was staying with my friend. He told me that I looked vulnerable. I didn’t know what that meant, but he told me that I looked vulnerable and that I needed some guidance in my life. . . . I knew one of his girls that he had. . . . He had two very nice cars. He had 3 or 4 girls. He was a nationwide pimp. He had been everywhere from Vegas all the way up to D.C., down in Florida, up in Maine, you know, trafficking. He was just telling me all the new things I could see and how much more fun I would have with him. I’d be able to drive. I’d be able to smoke weed all day. . . . He told me it would be free, you know, he’ll provide it. He was telling me that I could go shopping every day. . . . One day I was just like I’m tired of having no money. I never prostituted before or even thought of doing it. He finally talked me into it. 370 375 380

At 14, Diamond was introduced to a female trafficker who was 25 years old. She described the following:

She explained everything to me and she told me 30 minutes would be \$150 to basically suck the guy up and have sex with him . . . we’d basically go to a hotel or the guy would call you and say he’ll be at this place at this time. . . . and there is an Internet cite called Craig’s list and that was what she was on. 385

A *bottom* is known as the woman that is closest to the pimp, may have been with him the longest, and often knows the most about his business. She is the most trusted woman in his stable. The bottom is often the second in command and may be the one to demand the quota from women in the pimp’s stable, dole out the consequences if someone breaks the rules, and she makes sure women learn how to make money effectively and efficiently. Seventeen-year-old Sammie described her experience as a bottom by saying, “I did like the second guy I was with . . . I did start to love him. I was his bottom bitch. You know, the girl that sleeps in the bed with him and drives all the other hoes around.” 390

The *watcher* is the person assigned to walk girls back and forth at the truck stop, 395 make sure they don't slip out of the strip club after dancing, and make sure they come back to the car after being dropped off at a motel room. They may be assigned to drive the girls to destinations out of town. In theory, they provide security for women. In reality, they are there to make sure money is collected and that the trafficked girl does not escape. In smaller organizations, the trafficker himself may serve as the watcher. When Andi went 400 out of town to work, she was driven by a guy in a van. She reported that when she asked him if he was a pimp he said, "he just went to escort the females."

Wife-in-laws are girls that are informally partnered with each other and who belong to the same pimp. They may be set up in an apartment or house together with the bills paid by the trafficker in exchange for their loyalty to him and hard work for him. More successful 405 traffickers will have a stable of wife-in-laws who work for his economic benefit. Sharon described, "Their name for him was Daddy. We had to call him Daddy. I'd give him my money and whatever I needed or wanted, I'd ask for it."

The previous descriptions were provided to explain the various roles assumed in domestic child sex trafficking as they have been revealed through interviews with child 410 victims. The victims who participated in this study reported that a trafficker may assume all of the roles necessary to be successful in the sex trade, may involve various players with multiple roles, or may arrange for various players to play singular roles as described previously. For further illustration, see Figure 1.

Even though most trafficked youth involved in this study worked in Toledo, respon- 415 dents reported that the city offered little in comparison to the money made while traveling. These respondents were also manipulated or forced to work in other areas outside of Lucas County. Trafficked youth reported working in New York, Florida, Georgia,

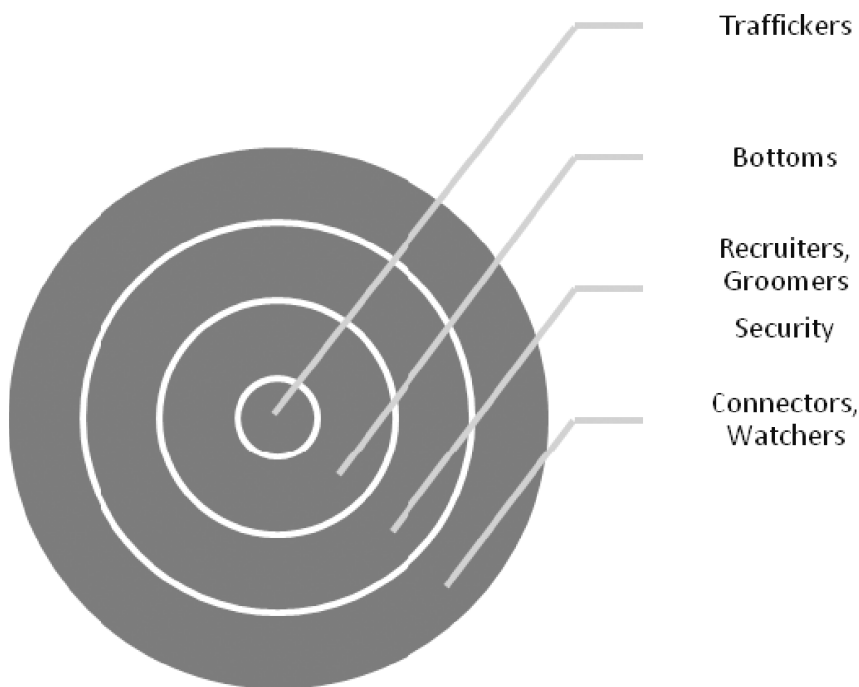


Figure 1. Trafficking rings.

Pennsylvania, Washington D.C., Arkansas, Atlanta, Dayton, Fort Wayne, Detroit, Cleveland, and Akron. Girls reported working at truck stops, cat houses (houses set up for prostitution in which the owner takes a portion of the earnings), conventions, the streets, and private parties. 420

Experiences of Victims While Involved

Victims were taught how to work effectively and efficiently in carrying out their daily responsibilities of dressing up and working the streets, cat houses, truck stops, or parties. 425 They were trained, watched, and forced or manipulated into believing they should hand over their money to others involved in the trafficking ring. Jamie described how she was trained to work the truck stops using a CB radio. She said,

You start off by, “breaker 1–9 break, break. Who got the copy on. They call me Vanilla,” and tell them channel 32, and they would go to your channel and you would talk and ask what color house you got, meaning what color your car is. Then you keep talking and ask them where they are, what part, and you get out, and when a truck driver see you they flag you down. . . . I gave the girl the money the girl held my money after every date I had. 430

Trauma Through Physical Violence. Robbery, rape, and physical assaults were the most common forms of violence that youth experienced while involved in trafficking. At age 14, Jamie described her first robbery: 435

We was just sitting in the alley and here comes a guy walking down the alley. I didn’t think nothing of it. It was like four o’clock in the morning. Then the guy come walking with his head down and then he comes out of nowhere. . . . And my heart dropped. I thought I was going to die. . . . I just gave him the money. . . . He had the gun mostly on me, then my friend. 440

Andi described a brutal rape she endured that lasted for hours. Her rapists remain at large. She said, 445

So basically they just kept pressuring me like, “mom, you gonna do this the easy way or the hard way?” . . . They violated me in every way possible. And I just remember trying to hold back the tears and how much pain I was in and how they laughed and thought it was funny. . . . Like I remember everything that happened, but at that moment I was not there. Like you leave your body. . . . that [the rape] lasted about a good three or four hours. And when they were done with me, threw more dope in my face and left me in the room. . . . About eight o’clock in the morning, [I was] walking down some street . . . and stopped some dude in a car and asked for a dollar so I could get on the bus to get home. He just looked at me like I was crazy and then gave me a dollar. 450 455

Carla described a physical assault perpetrated by her trafficker:

He was suppose to be my boyfriend, but basically he was my pimp. . . . He tracked me down and rammed the back of my car. Um, pulled me out of my car, hit me in the back of my head with something and knocked me out. The

next thing I remember was waking up in the house that we were staying at together. . . . He got on top of me and busted up my nose. He blackened both of my eyes and fattened my lips. 460

Mental and Emotional Trauma. Life in prostitution severely affects self-esteem, self-confidence, and self worth. Girls experienced both shame (being something wrong) and guilt (doing something wrong). Most reported depression, hypervigilance, and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. Some girls had been diagnosed with depression and bipolar disorder. Chronic stress, periodic acute trauma, and daily hassles are ever-present, with few positive, informal support systems. Carla described, 465

It's like every time you do it, it eats a part of you away, and it's just like it's unexplainable how it makes you feel. You're worthless, you're not any good anymore. You're damaged goods. Like me, I never think that a man would want to touch me or actually love me. 470

Fourteen-year-old Jamie said,

I feel like shit and that I can't never do anything right. And it tears me up, like to want to go out and make money so bad. I can't get no job. I've tried everywhere. I mean nobody will hire me. So still to this day I think about it. Like I have to make some money some kind of way. 475

Leaving a Trafficker

For the girls involved in this study, attempts to leave traffickers involved either escape or being rescued by law enforcement. Jamie described the following experience: 480

I had to take money from him to leave 'cause I didn't have no way home. I was all the way out on Monroe. He showed me where the money was, he had like a couple thousand. I didn't take a lot, I only took a little bit. Then I went and called at the payphone down the street. I called my mom and told her to come and get me and then my aunt and her boyfriend came and got me. . . . I went home and about the next day or so he was looking for me, he didn't know I took money from him or anything. Well you know he got me back in his car . . . same old stuff. 485

When Andi was trafficked to Washington D.C. by her adult female cousin to work a convention, they were approached by two FBI agents posing as potential customers in the hotel bar. She recalled, 490

We all got in the shower and stuff, changed our clothes. Me and my cousin went down to the bar and then two dudes came and asked did we want a drink. . . . But they was undercover. They have a picture of me. When I went back up to the room, security grabbed me like, "we need to talk to you." And I was on locked down there for a day. 495

Although it is nearly impossible to prostitute oneself without an adult trafficker or at the very least adult purchasers, 64% of the girls reported going on to prostitute themselves

on the streets of Toledo after leaving the control of a trafficker. As time passes without targeted intervention, over 77% of prostituted girls will go on to participate in adult prostitution (Ventura et al., 2007). 500

Conventional Values vs. Practices of the Underground Social Network

A majority of the girls discussed their values in relation to prostitution and in relation to their current and future lives. Girls involved in this study displayed conventional values that rejected prostitution as a way of life or a moral way of making money. A majority of the girls dreamed of healthy families, close relationships, homes, an education or GED, an occupation, and having a loving intimate relationship that might lead to marriage and children. Andi expressed the sentiment that many others described: 505

I'm not a bad child. It's just the stuff that I go through, as far as . . . neglect and stuff like that. It's just too much on my mind right now and I'm only 16. It's just hard right now. I want so much better for myself. I want to graduate. I want to get married. I want to go to college. I want to get a good job. I want to be able to do that. 510

Discussion 515

Limitations

While the majority of trafficked girls identified in this study were vulnerable to trafficking because they suffered abuse and neglect from tragic home lives, vulnerability through family dysfunction is but one source of creating vulnerability in children who fall prey to traffickers. The questions we chose to ask highlighted dysfunctional family patterns for this group of girls. That said, we did not explore other powerful influences discussed in the literature, such as individual and peer factors, along with larger environmental factors often documented as playing a significant role in child trafficking. In addition, it was not our intention to suggest inadvertently that those most susceptible to trafficking may be those that are poor, neglected, and abused. We believe that family dynamics and socioeconomic status are significant risk factors, but we acknowledge that those interviewed for the study were youth that had been arrested and incarcerated, and that those most likely to be arrested and incarcerated in this country are the poor and the abused. As such, we acknowledge that numerous risk factors create vulnerability, and not just poor children who come from substance abusing, neglectful or abusive parents. Vulnerability can be found and created in children that come from wealthy, two-parent, seemingly healthy families (see Flores, 2007). 520
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Conclusion

The most common response at the local level to domestic minor sex trafficking is to arrest and incarcerate victims in juvenile facilities. Other than a shift in language, little has been done to curb the trauma girls face as a result of trafficking. In fact, being arrested by the authorities must be viewed as a second form of victimization and trauma. Even though a victim of any other crime would not be arrested and incarcerated, all of the victims interviewed for this study were rescued by police as trafficking victims and incarcerated in juvenile detention. Most would agree that the arrest and 535
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incarceration of victims serves to retraumatize children already traumatized through their trafficking experience.

This pattern of arrest and incarceration may be occurring in part because some confusion still exists as to whether youth involved in prostitution are victims of child abuse (through commercial sexual exploitation) and in need of care, protection, and a plan for improved quality of life from the social service community, or are juvenile prostitutes, and are therefore delinquents who are in need of incarceration, probation, and supervision through the court system. In our view, it is difficult for youth to successfully prostitute themselves without an adult trafficker or adult purchasers involved, and thus they should be viewed and treated as victims in need of care.

Differences between traditional and alternative perceptions of child abuse and child trafficking may confuse professional helpers who are mandated reporters of child abuse. When more traditional forms of child sexual abuse occurs (i.e., when a child is sexually abused by an adult), the child typically feels powerless and is asked to keep the abuse secret. In these cases, the child is not normally the seducer, and aside from the perpetrator, society sees the act as a bad thing and the child as a victim. When one is a victim of trafficking, people involved in this underground network tell the child that prostitution is a good thing and that she will make money and have power over men. The child may be trained by others to act as the seducer. Even though the child has been indoctrinated into the role as seducer, this role remains the source of confusion for mandated reporters.

Furthermore, when traditional child abuse occurs, the child usually keeps the secret of the abuse from her friends while still participating and fulfilling her roles within the conventional system, such as attending school and other events. When a child is being trafficked for sexual purposes, it is commonly not a secret from friends who belong to the same or similar social networks. This type of child abuse victim may be operating outside the system, meaning she is not in school or missing blocks of time from school while being trafficked to other communities. Such dynamics are sometimes mistakenly seen even by helpers as signs of the victim being a ready and willing participant in the sex trafficking operation she has been manipulated or forced into. Finally, all of this takes place in a society that is usually sympathetic and supportive of the more traditional child sexual abuse victim while often evaluating the behavior of the trafficked child as negative and criminal (Delaney & Cotteril, n.d.).

As society strives to change its view of child trafficking victims, we feel that views of purchasers must also change. Strangely absent from legislation and conversation is the consequences for purchasing sex from children. Ultimately, it may be necessary for a paradigm shift to occur in which the purchaser of sexual services from a child is no longer referred to as a *john* or a *customer*, but is instead referred to as a *child sexual predator*, as would be the case in any other instance in the United States when an adult seeks out sex with a child (Hotaling, 2006).

In our view, the streets provide support, albeit negative and life-altering. They offer places to sleep, ways to earn money, and a network of accepting others. In offering typical social service interventions of two hours per week or more, agencies cannot compete with the underground network of players and their continued system of support. To counter this underground system, communities must learn to identify victims in settings where those involved in the underground economy and conventional players may intersect, namely through criminal justice, health care, and social service systems. Referrals to comprehensive social service programs must take place. Necessary social service interventions should include case management services, nonjudgmental support, and safe, long-term housing staffed by qualified, educated, and empathetic staff. Interventions must focus on

trauma treatment, medication management, education, and job training. In response to these needs, the Second Chance Safe House residential program in Toledo, Ohio, will be opening its Safe House for trafficking victims before the end of the 2008 calendar year.

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