



Know the Facts: Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is a growing national crisis, as youth vulnerabilities are increasing, and the internet makes detection, protection and prosecution difficult. Each year thousands of children are coerced, kidnapped or tricked by traffickers or pimps into the sex trade.

- According to U.S. federal law, there is no such thing as a “child prostitute,” and any child under age 18 engaging in commercial sex is, by law, a victim of sex trafficking. Despite this, far too many children are sexually exploited and do not know how to escape the vicious cycle.¹
- The average age of entry into “the life” is 15 years old.² In Washington state, the average age is 14 years old.⁶
- Underage girls are the bulk of victims in the commercial sex markets, which include pornography, stripping, escort services, and prostitution.³
- Sixty percent of children exploited in prostitution are first recruited by peers.⁴
- 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.⁵
- The largest known population of youth vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) are runaway and homeless youth. Annual counts of these youth have been tracked by several organizations for many decades. The risk estimates for CSE within this population range from 1:5 to 1:6.⁶ Other risk factors for commercially sexually exploited children include early childhood sexual abuse, foster care, or domestic violence in the home.⁷
- LGBTQ+ youth, especially those experiencing homelessness, have an especially high risk for human trafficking victimization.⁸
- 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 the victim so they never have to leave the location they’re being exploited from, making it harder to locate and secure services for the victim.⁹
- Occurrences of abuse are emerging with extraordinary frequency around the country as predators are increasingly using video games to make connections with children. 97% of boys and 83% of girls in America play video games making them an easy access point into these children’s lives, and the normalization of chatting with strangers through gaming chat functions makes the especially vulnerable.¹⁰

Information provided by StolenYouth in conjunction with Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (CAASE).

Sources:

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

² 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>.

³ 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>

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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*.

⁶ Boyer, Debra. (2019) *Commercially Sexually Exploited Children in Seattle/King County 2019 Update*. StolenYouth.

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

⁸ Human Trafficking. <https://www.covenanthouse.org/homeless-issues/human-trafficking>.

⁹ 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).

¹⁰ Bowles, N. Keller, M. Video Games and Online Chats are "Hunting Grounds" for Sexual Predators. (2019) <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/12/07/us/video-games-child-sex-abuse.html>