



# Pathways into and out of commercial sexual victimization of children: Understanding and responding to sexually exploited teens

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## **Pathways into and out of commercial sexual victimization of children: Understanding and responding to sexually exploited teens**

### **INTRODUCTION**

For the past two years the University of Massachusetts Lowell and Fair Fund, Inc., along with partners in Boston, MA and Washington, D.C., USA, have been conducting an in-depth, field-based study of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) taking a life course perspective in examining the lives of female and male victims with a focus on prostituted teens. The Pathways Project examines pathways into and out of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) via prostitution and to provide useful information to practice and policy communities. The goal of the research was to understand the victims' perspectives; to identify the factors (individual, family, peer, school, and community contexts) associated with the commencement of CSEC; to identify factors that surround its maintenance and escalation; and to identify factors that impede or empower exiting from or overcoming exploitative situations. Our research included primarily qualitative methods with a focus on integrating researchers and grassroots organizers into the design, data collection, data analysis and dissemination. In the Boston metropolitan area and in Washington, DC, we interviewed 61 adolescents (aged 14-19) who experienced sexual violence via teen prostitution or who were runaways at risk for such commercial sexual exploitation.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) is a crime that has only recently received significant attention in the United States and around the globe. While the U.S. Department of Justice estimates that the number of children (those under the age of 18) currently involved in prostitution, child pornography, and trafficking may be anywhere between 100,000 and three million (Friedman, 2005) we find that knowledge of CSEC and our public response to the problem is still evolving.

Federal legislation (Trafficking Victims Protection Act – TVPA 2000 and revised in 2008), funding and task force activity continues to bring the domestic sex trafficking of children into focus in the U.S. This includes attention to traffickers who coerce children and youth to enter the commercial sex “industry” through the use of a variety of recruitment and control mechanisms and who engage the children in exploitation in strip clubs, street-based prostitution, escort services, and brothels. There is evidence from the field that domestic sex traffickers target vulnerable youth, such as runaway and homeless youth, and it is often reported that the average age of entry into prostitution in the U.S. is as a 12- to 13-year-old victim of commercial sexual exploitation. A variety of state laws address these crimes under statutes that often are located in several different sections of the criminal code or in statutes directed at juveniles or families. Statutes may criminalize the behavior of those who procure children for sex acts (commonly referred to as “pimps”), those “customers” who engage in or solicit sex acts with a minor (some of these individuals are referred to as “johns”), those who are involved in the production or the possession of pornography with a minor, and those who benefit from such commerce. But state laws also focus on the behavior of the children and their families and may lead to juveniles being prosecuted for prostitution related offenses, adjudication as delinquent or a determination that they are a person/ child in need of supervision.

The Pathways Project was a collaboration between the University of Massachusetts Lowell and Fair Fund, Inc., along with partners in Boston, MA and Washington, D.C., USA, designed to examine pathways into and out of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) via prostitution and to provide useful information to juvenile and criminal justice systems, social service and public health providers, not-for-profit youth-serving agencies, and communities to prevent CSEC and increase safety and well being of victims.

### ***Review of the approach taken in this study and in the preparation of this report***

One of the critical goals of this study was to learn from the youth we interviewed and to reflect their stories in our reports and recommendations. While this research relies on a multi-method approach, the wealth and richness of the data emerge from the voices of the young people. We have attempted to prepare this report in a way that gives voice to the youth in order to increase our understanding of CSEC. (Their quotes are unedited except for removal of potentially identifying information and of extra words which are replaced with ... in the text. Pseudonyms are used to improve readability and avoid depersonalization of the youth.) We have attempted to facilitate the emergence of new information and conclusions grounded in their experiences. If there are errors in this report in interpretation and extension of their stories or in the recommendations proposed these errors are ours alone.

In this research we also endeavored to keep our preconceived notions about the lives of the youth we interviewed and about the nature of commercial sexual exploitation of children from contaminating the design, the interviews and the examples of their words that we have selected to report here. In this report we hope to make clear how our own judgments and assumptions may have impacted what we heard and what we concluded. We would argue that the challenge to understand the construction of knowledge that we reveal here is one that arises not only in qualitative research but faces all social science researchers (Williams, 2004).

In this report we convey some of the strength and resilience that we heard in the narratives of the youth. But we also report the significant hardship and suffering they have endured and the extreme negative consequences of their experiences. Our recognition of their strengths and survival should in no way be used to excuse or minimize the brutality of the persons who have violated them. Similarly recognition of their victimization experiences and the impact of these violations are not intended to pathologize the youth to the point that we negate all understanding of their survival. And finally, when we make recommendations about policies and practices to protect youth and prevent exploitation it is from the perspective we heard many times that for these approaches to be successful, youth need to be involved in their implementation and programs need to give careful consideration about how to build on the strengths of the youth either as individuals or in a community.

In conducting this research and preparing this report we relied on the input and suggestions of many professionals, advocates, youth advisors and researchers. We welcome further discussion about next steps for policy, practice and research.

### ***Defining Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)***

In commercial sexual exploitation, a youth (aged 17-years-old and younger) is engaged, solicited or forced to engage in sexual conduct or performance of sexual acts in return for a fee, food, drugs, shelter, clothing, gifts or other goods. The sexual conduct may include any direct sexual contact and live, filmed or photographed display or other performances (e.g., stripping) involving sexual acts or for the sexual gratification of others. For purposes of this research we included domestically trafficked youth who comprise the majority of CSEC victims in the U.S.

### ***Background***

Despite some important research on CSEC, for a number of reasons, the sexual victimization of youth via prostitution has been understudied. As was the case with intra-familial child sexual abuse 30 years ago, commercial sexual exploitation may have escaped attention in large part because of the secrecy of the behaviors, the youth and vulnerability of the victims and the use of a variety of tactics by the perpetrators (including violence, fear, force, and “grooming”). In CSEC the youth is engaged, solicited or forced to engage in sexual conduct in return for a fee, food, or clothing. Further contributing to the neglect of this crime is the fact that often the children who are prostituted are throwaways, or are poor, minority, runaway or drug-involved and garner little sustained public concern or attention because they are not empowered constituencies (Estes & Weiner, 2001).

More attention has recently been paid to CSEC (Albanese, 2007; Cooper et al., 2005; Curtis et al., 2008; Estes & Weiner, 2001; Friedman, 2005; Gragg et al., 2007) and it is more likely today to be challenged on the local, national and international levels in an attempt to reduce the numbers of victimized children and the manner and severity of the harm inflicted on them. In recent decades, evidence has been mounting that commercially sexually exploited youth have been repeatedly victimized in a variety of destructive and damaging ways, including: physical (Widom & Kuhns, 1996), emotional (Kidd & Krall, 2002) and sexual abuse (Brannigan & Gibbs Van Brunschot, 1997; Forst, 1994; Silbert & Pines, 1981; Simons & Whitbeck, 1991); drug abuse (Inciardi et al., 1991) and social marginalization (Farrow et al., 1992; Inciardi et al., 1991).

According to work with victims of CSEC and researchers who have investigated this problem, CSEC primarily involves runaway, homeless and transient or unemployed youth who may trade sex as a means of survival or who are vulnerable to adults who manipulate them for profit. Children and youth exposed to the cumulative destructive factors of child maltreatment and CSE have been found to have many and deep harms and coincident needs. Both the anecdotal and, increasingly, the more systematic or empirically-based profiles of these prostituted teens (Curtis, et al., 2008; Cooper et al., 2005; Friedman, 2005; Gragg, et al., 2007) show patterns of involvement in multiple service-based systems (children and youth or child protective services, mental/behavioral health, juvenile/criminal justice, and physical health) because of their multiple, cumulative, and long-lasting needs. The best evidence we have to date is that, with a few notable exceptions, these agency involvements are usually not tailored to the needs of CSE youth and are usually short-lived, uncoordinated, and unsupported by professional best practices (whether expert- or evidence-based models) (Clawson & Grace, 2007; Estes & Weiner, 2001).

However, despite this documentation of harm, today in response to the prostitution of children, there is evidence that many of the same rationalizations offered 30 years ago to deflect attention from the criminal aspects of perpetration of intra-familial child sexual abuse are employed. The arguments that the girl “asked” for it, that she “volunteered” or willingly agreed to it, “enjoyed” it or “seduced” the male or that he did not know she was under the age of consent are used to defend policies that focus on arrest and control of the prostituted juvenile and release of the customer or “john” who could otherwise be charged with rape of a minor. These approaches reflect justifications which rationalize and neutralize the culpability of the person who pays to have sexual intercourse with a child or underage teen (Estes & Weiner, 2001; Flowers, 2001).

We also have found that as was the case with the first years of addressing the problem of child sexual abuse (CSA) in the 1970s and 80s, our understanding of CSEC is changing and evolving as we learn more about the victims and offenders. As with CSA research several decades ago, we have learned that the language we use to describe the behaviors is critical and nuances in terms (prostitute vs. prostituted, for example) are critical. With adolescents we face the difficulty of trying to find language that recognizes the vulnerability and victimization of those who are prostituted along with acknowledgment of the agency, volition and desires of the adolescent girl or boy (Williams, in press a). Refining and rethinking these terms is an on-going process. We also have had to think more about the language used to describe and properly characterize “pimps” who some have now labeled “3<sup>rd</sup> party exploiters” and “johns” many of whom fit the definition of rapist.

The programs our communities have fashioned and responses of the systems that care for youth, to date, have based their programming for CSEC on the customary “case” that comes to public attention-- frequently because of law enforcement involvement in an investigation that may involve prostitution of a child by a family member or pimp-involvement with one or more young victims and networks of exploitation and violent crime. From these pimp-involved cases we have learned that these offenders often have an uncanny ability to identify and exploit the needs of girls, especially those with prior victimization histories. Understanding and documenting law enforcement and social services experiences with these cases has made a tremendous contribution to our understanding of CSEC and to raising awareness of this problem (Priebe & Suhr, 2005; Friedman, 2005). Solutions based on these select cases may, however, miss important issues for victims of CSEC. The Pathways Study was designed to learn more about hidden victims and hidden issues.

## METHODS

### *Background*

Our reading of the literature led us to the conclusion that there was a need for life course and community approaches to developing policy and practice responses to CSEC via prostitution. Prior research on violence against women and sexual victimization has highlighted qualitative research as a useful tool for rich description of phenomena (Banyard & Williams, 2007; Dalla, 2002). In addition, in framing the “Pathways Study” the literature suggested a need for a life course approach to developing policy and practice responses to CSEC via prostitution (Williams, 2003).

This research utilized a highly collaborative design which integrated researchers, service providers, grassroots organizers and young women and young men who have escaped CSEC into the interview protocol, questions posed, and data review and analysis. A qualitative approach was seen by us as having great utility as a tool for rich description of phenomena. Such detail and texture we believed would be useful for understanding more about pathways into and out of CSEC which would be helpful to practitioners and policy-makers as well as lay the foundation for further study.

A critical component of this research is that it was designed to reflect the voices of the youth themselves - through their narrative accounts of their lives and pathways to CSEC. In addition, the adolescents we sought to interview were not those predominately involved in large cases known to law enforcement – but mostly runaway, homeless, or throwaway youth. Our intention was to create an opportunity for youth to help us to understand their lives and the pathways into and out of commercial sexual exploitation. In the Pathways Study we focused on recruiting youth who we labeled “high risk” runaways and also “prostituted” youth. Aware of how our stance toward the participants and the questions we asked could impact the findings, we did not use these labels with the youth and now understand even more about the value of avoiding the use of such labels and reliance on preconceived notions and pathologizing that surrounds this issue.

In the early months of the project we conducted focus groups composed of participating key agency partners who are representatives of law enforcement, social service agencies and non-governmental organizations that intervene in CSEC. We also held focus groups and met with advisory groups of young adults who were currently or previously involved in CSEC or at high risk for exploitation. These focus groups were designed to help refine participant identification, recruitment strategies, and the interview protocol. The youth groups helped us to incorporate youth language and perspectives into our interview protocol. As a final component of our data collection process we returned to our focus groups and youth advisors for assistance in interpretation of some of the results. This process is ongoing and we continue to involve these groups in review of reports and dissemination of findings that are useful for policy and practice communities.



### ***Recruitment and sample selection***

Based on a protocol approved by the University of Massachusetts Lowell Institutional Review Board, interviewers contacted participants at drop-in centers, youth shelters or at service agencies focused on street outreach and work with youth who were homeless or without a reliable place to stay and were not living with their parents or in state control. These agencies provided an array of services ranging from meals and a place to do laundry, to shelter, counseling and referral services. The teens who met criteria for inclusion (away from home at least one week, living outside of parental control, mostly with no fixed abode) and agreed to participate in a hour-long interview, were provided with a \$30 gift card along with information about available services. The interviews took place in the U.S., in the Boston metropolitan area and Washington, DC.

Our research called for interviewing boys as well as girls with a clear recognition that boys comprise a significant but understudied portion of the CSEC population. While the data below show that we achieved many interviews with boys, our field-based interviewing methods and more ethnographic-style approach was not well attuned to gaining access to commercially sexually exploited boys. Colleagues at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, recognizing this, employed a respondent-driven methodology (Curtis, et al. 2008) with great success and we recommend their strategy paired with ethnographic research to reach boys in other locations in the U.S.

### ***The interview***

The interview, though semi-structured in regard to specific topic areas to be addressed, was open-ended and could flow into areas that the participant wanted included in her or his own “story” of their life (see Appendix). The participant was carefully informed that we wanted to hear about life in “your own words... the way you want to tell it.” Most were very responsive to this opportunity to talk to an adult who clearly wanted to listen to them and use their words to, perhaps, help others.

In most interviews the first 20 minutes focused on rapport building, discussions of what the young person held to be most important in her/his life and her/his identification of the most important factors that shaped her/him into who she/he is now. In this part of the interview the participants frequently volunteered extensive information on family, peer, and community interactions and supports. The interviewer asked about experiences with leaving home and running away followed by questions about experiences with trading sex for money, goods or a place to stay. These experiences were then probed in detail. The latter parts of the interview generally revealed information on risk/protective/resiliency factors; health, medical and other self-described needs; service access and impediments to access; juvenile/ criminal justice history and perceptions of interaction with juvenile justice systems; and recommendations for changes in systems. At the end of the interview debriefing occurred and referral services were made available.

### ***The characteristics of youth interviewed***

Between July 1, 2007 and October 2008, 61 teens were interviewed by six female interviewers. These teens included 17 males, 42 females and 2 transgender youth. The participants often provided detailed responses to our question about their racial or ethnic group membership. They reported many overlapping or multi-racial identities including one or more of the following: Black or African American (n=29), White (n=20), Hispanic/Latina/Latino (n=11), Asian American (n=1). Twelve participants self identified as “mixed-race” or “mulatto” and for 2 race or ethnicity is unknown. Many of the youth also named other ethnic and immigrant groups (for example describing themselves as natives of a Caribbean island, South or Central American country, and of various European heritages). They were age 14- to 19-years-old (28 were under 18 and 33 were 18- or 19-years-old) and were youth who experienced commercial sexual violence as prostituted teens or who were runaways or those living on the streets or in shelters or with no reliable place to stay. In many documents we refer to these youth as “high risk runaways” in recognition that the living situations or lack of stable accommodation does indeed present significant risk but with no intention to foreclose discussion on how the youth manage that risk. Twenty-eight participants (24 females, 3 males and 1 transgendered youth) are in our CSEC-involved group as these youth told the interviewers about their own direct involvement in commercial sexual exploitation.

Because of the small sample of CSEC involved youth who were not female much of this report focuses on information from interviews with 24 CSEC involved girls. These 24 females were representative of the entire sample of girls in age and race. The young women were age 14-15(n=3), 16-17 (n=9), 18-19 (n=11) and unknown (n=1). All spoke of some experiences with CSEC that occurred before the age of 18.

In the interviews with the youth, their wish to help other young people predominated—one young man wanted to make sure that his words were heard saying, “*cause I wanna...make a statement. Something that can be remembered .*” They also often made comments at the end of the interview that reflected a sense of accomplishment. When asked if there was anything she wanted to add at the close of her interview a 17-year-old said, “*this .. this was a good thing - I talked a lot of stuff and I got everything out. It’s very good.*”

### ***Data analysis***

The findings presented here come from in-depth, case-oriented study and qualitative analysis of the transcribed interviews. The qualitative software program, ATLAS.ti was used to assist in organizing the data and examining connections between emerging themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

## **PATHWAYS IN TO AND OUT OF CSEC**

### **CHAPTER 1. LIFE IN CSEC**

Recently an agency director we know told us, “*when you see a young person hanging around the (central train) station late at night, you should think, if she is not already CSEC involved she will be.*” This perspective suggests that it may be of little value to categorize the youth we interviewed in groups such as “no known involvement in CSEC” or “one time involvement” or involvement of “short duration” or involvement of many weeks or months, or involvement of many years in “the life.” Indeed such a breakdown of our data would tell us little about the distribution of CSEC among youth (as we are unable to generalize from our sample to all youth). The agency director’s view likely reflects the perspective of many who have learned about CSEC in their communities in the past five years—the notion that youth are at risk in many venues and locations and such risk or involvement is difficult to predict. Our study is part of an effort to broaden our understanding of CSEC and the Pathways in and out of CSEC (although prediction of risk will require a different design and resources) and one of the key findings on the breadth of the experiences reported by the youth we interviewed suggests a need for a broad-based approach to prevention and intervention.

When we asked the youth we interviewed whether they had ever been involved in trading sex for money or for something they wanted or needed (along with a series of other questions about CSEC involvement, see Appendix) about half of the youth we spoke to reported no direct experience that resulted in sexual contact someone had with them in exchange for money or goods. The youth, however, clearly knew about such behaviors and most had experiences or times when they either witnessed such exchanges, were approached by someone to trade sex for money, considered engaging in such experiences, narrowly escaped CSEC, or knew another young person (a close friend, acquaintance, peer at school, or family member) who had been prostituted. We report the experiences of those who avoided or narrowly escaped CSEC in Chapter 5.

There is a growing and compelling literature (including reports, journals articles, and films) on domestic sex trafficking of girls in the United States (Curtis et al., 2008; Clawson & Grace, 2008; Albanese, 2007; Gragg et al., 2007; Lloyd, 2006; Friedman, 2005; and Priebe & Suhr, 2005) and some about CSE of boys (Curtis et al., 2008). More informally we have also begun to hear directly from the survivors of CSEC themselves (GEMS, 2008). To date it has been difficult to get national estimates and descriptions of the breadth, scope and nature of CSEC (Estes and Weiner, 2001; Curtis et al., 2008; Friedman, 2005).

Many of the accounts of victims and much of our understanding of CSEC comes from those who work with women and girls known to law enforcement or those who have sought assistance escaping from pimps or other 3<sup>rd</sup> party exploiters. While each victim’s story is uniquely her own, it is remarkable how many of these fit the pattern of other young women from across the U.S, who became heavily involved in “the life.”

April, age 19, told the interviewer

*I ran away. And I was gone for like a month or two and that's when I got into prostitution. ... (I was) like 16. ... I met a um, guy while I was on the run ...I didn't know that he was a pimp and we were friends at first. And um, uh, he, he pretended to be my boyfriend for probably like 3 or 4 weeks and then .. he um, took me shopping you know, bought me a, a new wardrobe, shoes and at that age that kind of like, fascinates you. So, but when ... he actually took me out like on the track...I never, you know, experienced nothing like that. So I was nervous but I felt like I had no other choice so I did it.*

And Cecilia, age 18 at the time of the interview, told us what happened when she ran away:

*I started running away. ... I met this (older) guy and he just told me .. he was like, "what are you doin'?" And I said, "I don't have no curfew." (He) took me out shopping, took me out to eat. Did it for about .. probably about a month and then he's like .. time came he told me he needed help with his rent and he's about to get put out and .. maybe I could do .. I could talk to this guy to get like \$50 from him - just by talking to him. So I thought it was okay but when I went to go do it he wanted somethin' else so... I went back to the guy that I had met and I'm like "I'm not doing that." He was like, "It's a lot of money ... you really .. it's only one minute." So I just went on ahead and did it and then I ended up leaving home, moving in with him, and... ended up working for him."*

Alisha, 19 at the time of the interview, told the interviewer about being "in the life" and pimp involved:

*So I, you know, I was 14. I didn't know. .. So I said, you know, "I'll try it" so he took me downtown one night and I was jumpin' in and out of cars, turning dates. I was bringing him a lot of money.*

These narratives, and others from young women we interviewed, reflect an experience that those working with CSEC survivors sometimes refer to as being "in the life"—that is, being actively prostituted and living (almost exclusively) "in the life." Most of those "in the life" are pimp-involved and ties have often been severed with family and friends who are not "in the life" themselves. In addition to many of these narratives which are consistent with accounts by other survivors, the accounts of the youth we interviewed also offer a detailed examination of a slightly different piece of the puzzle. Our sample included a number of youth in earlier stages of involvement or coercion into CSEC and reflected a broad range of experiences. Because of our recruitment strategy and the realities of conducting field interviews with actively/ currently prostituted youth and also because we were very interested in learning about pathways IN to CSEC, many of the young people we interviewed were at the end of a continuum closer to early, transient or more moderate involvement. (Note: using the word "moderate" should not convey that the trauma or severity of the victimization was moderate. Even a one-time victimization experience is of grave concern and must be viewed as serious by all responders.) We refer to this as Early or Transient CSEC. Some youth we interviewed who were victimized by commercial sexual exploitation had never really gotten into "the life." Their experiences are documented in this report and their accounts are a key resource for data on exiting from CSEC and reflect different experiences when compared to the accounts of the young women who are frequently the focus of law enforcement task forces and specialized service providers.

For example, one young woman told the interviewer of a “one-time” involvement:

*Honestly, I am being honest with you, when I was 12-years-old I prostituted like one time - I did it ...I had sex for money one time and truly I did not enjoy it so I stopped; I never did it again. It was not the type of thing I.. I enjoy doing, and I don't see how any female or male could enjoy doing that.*

Later in the interview this young woman indicated that the “one time” was once for a period of some days and when she used the term “one-time” she perhaps was indicating “one episode.” Several years had elapsed since that week she spent on the fringes of being “in the life.” Clearly, as this report addresses elsewhere, there are events that may pull or push a teen with these experiences back in and service providers need to address prevention strategies to reach these youth.

Another young woman responded to the interviewer’s question of whether there was a time she traded sex for money or a place to stay with:

*One time... I needed fast cash, real quick ...to ... pay my rent and all my friends were doing it and I wanted to do it for one time. And she goes, “okay I can get \$100 bucks right now ... just you ... havin’ sex,” and he goes, “ya, I’m good for it (the money)...” and he gave me \$10 bucks... so I got played and it was just stupid .. and like, nobody knows... I mean absolutely nobody knows about that.*

There were many young women who told us about such incidents and reported that they avoided repeat victimization using a variety of strategies or because the experience was so disturbing or distressing to them. But all of these young women remain in situations of poverty, isolation from family members and limited work opportunities and have daily exposure to others in “the life” and men who may be “running a game,” raising questions about how our communities might reach these youth before they are revictimized and pulled more completely into “the life.”

The experiences of the young women who had been heavily involved in “the life” echoed the experiences reported by many victims across the country and revealed a remarkable fidelity with the accounts of victims and those who have encountered victims involved in cases reported by law enforcement and service providers across the U.S. over the past 5-8 years (Grace, 2009; Albanese, 2007; Friedman, 2005, Priebe & Suhr, 2005). The researchers took the stance and entered into the research with an open mind about what youth would report and the interviewers were careful not to influence the youths’ narratives with any preconceived notions about CSEC. The interview questions were most often along the lines of “please tell me more about that” and focused on what happened, how it happened and why. We stressed the importance of hearing the young woman’s own story in her voice the way she wanted to tell it. Interviewers were trained to be non-judgmental and as we were not prosecutors or police, the youth were in no way encouraged to be self-serving in their accounts. Given this neutral approach to eliciting the youths’ narratives, the conformity of the accounts of those who we interviewed were “in the life” with what has been reported to date in the field is remarkable.

The males we spoke to who told the interviewers of experiences with commercial sexual victimization also reflected a range of experiences with men and with women. As is mentioned above, we found our methods did not successfully identify a large number of CSEC-involved

males and recommend further research relying on a model exemplified in the work of Ric Curtis and colleagues (Curtis, et al., 2008).

As was the case with commercially sexually exploited females, among homeless males we found evidence of trading sex for a place to stay. One 19-year-old who was previously heavily gang-involved had fled his family and community and told the interviewer:

*I've just been homeless here three years. Movin' around uh, staying in parks in the summer... in the winter I get girl friends and go to their house... I don't like to stay in the shelter scene because I'm young and everybody usually tends to um, be more older than me and drunk.*

He reported being approached by older, wealthy men who asked for sex in exchange for a place to stay but that he had rebuffed such "offers." But in response to the interviewer's specific question about trading sex for money or a place to stay he reported:

*I mean I've went to women's houses and like laid down next to 'em and ... they say, "hey - you gonna go to sleep on me?" And, I mean, I know what they want and um, if I don't feel like doing it - I really just feel like sleeping, if I probably tell them no... they're gonna be like, "okay I gotta go" and at one o'clock in the morning or two o'clock in the morning, I don't want to go out. Right now - it's winter... (I) do it because I don't want to get kicked out. .... is that kind of like giving/ is that, is that like exchanging sex for a place to stay?... Oh, I'll sleep for food.*

One young man, age 19 at the time of the interview, told of his experiences with commercial sexual exploitation tied to his drug use and drug addiction.

*So I was smoking pot early, then drinking, then cocaine, then from cocaine I went to crack, and then eventually slowly, very sneaky, dope.*

When the interviewer asked about trading sex for money or a place to stay or something to eat, he said:

*So, people do many things ... for money, yeah exactly... people trade sex for not only for cash immediately but like for a place to stay or something to eat... I've done that for years. Off and on.... I'm not really into it, you know what I mean? I do what's necessary, you know, I do very little and get paid very much. ... started ... about .... I would have to be seventeen. (I) started getting back into drugs... people would introduce me to a way of making money. .. they knew I used drugs, so, "you want to see/do drugs all night?" ... so they did some things, went into some houses, and came out and then we got some drugs. And I said, "how did you make the money?" And they said, "got into it." ... And you know what? It's a world industry. It's a growth market. Sex is a growth market. Just like drugs. Drugs, you see, I can get them, I can tell you about eight corners I can guarantee to get drugs right now... And I know different houses (where I can get money for sex) .... it's, it's what I've learned to get through this. ... very rich men.*

One young man, who reported that his father was once a pimp and a crack dealer, had become a successful model and described his experiences at 17 and 18 as follows:

*I was a male hooker! Pays!...my own pimp. That's, that's what it was. You know, you're pimping yourself. I was ...modeling, like I said, I wasn't doing real big shows, I wasn't getting like big bread... I got to get money for, for sex.*

His "customers" were women, however, once again the commercial sexual exploitation of this young man by older females he encountered on the job was linked to drug use and drug sale:

*...not only did I do that, I had connections with crack, but I really didn't want to get back into that/I did some hustling... I have no options. Survival is, like I said, survival of the fittest... in order for me to live, and make money, I don't have a job or nothing like that? That's my last resort.*

This diversity in youth experiences with CSEC leads to recommendations that the efforts of the community, law enforcement and social services need to be broadened to prevent this wider array of CSEC and victimization of young women and men in addition to continuing to make sure communities are educated about young women "in the life."

## **CHAPTER 2: PATHWAYS IN**

In thinking about how to prevent and stop CSEC there has been a call for more attention to the perpetrators—that police should arrest and the courts should be used to prosecute the pimps who use violence, coercion and guile to traffic children and teens and the rapists, that is, the persons who solicit and pay for sexual contact with minors (Williams, in press b). While the Pathways Study provides information from the youth narratives about the behaviors of these actors – the “pimps” and the “johns”-- much of the focus of this study has been on understanding risk factors for CSEC via prostitution and learning about the individual characteristics of the youth and, more importantly, the youth’s interpersonal relationships, family environment and the community context of entry into CSEC. This focus was selected because research has not thoroughly examined how the child’s or teen’s experiences with sexual exploitation are linked to family, school or community supports and agency responses to troubled youth. There has been little or no research examining the way social resources operate for runaway teens and how such social capital, including the presence and response of state agencies and community based organizations, impacts entry into CSEC via prostitution. There have been calls for qualitative and quantitative research that relies on a life span approach to understand the role of social support in CSEC via prostitution (Dalla et al., 2003). Understanding what internal supports and external alternative support networks (including support by peers), if any, high risk and prostituted youth establish will help policymakers and social service agencies tailor their outreach and prevention programs.

Understanding the “attractions” associated with prostitution may also be key to developing invention programs. Do the youth assert that they were ‘doing what they want’ or determining their own life path by earning their own money? Do girls report that they sought the love of their pimp or admiration of friends, and not view themselves as the victims? What draws them into “the life,” what are the “pushes” and “pulls” and what role does the pimp play in all this? How is CSEC avoided or escaped by some vulnerable youth? This research provided youth an opportunity to share their experiences with the interviewers and their accounts provide a narrative of pathways in to and out of CSEC.

### **Social Context of CSEC**

It is important to place CSEC in social context if we are to work on prevention and control and design programs for youth. For the teens we interviewed their immediate social context was “life on the streets.” But, as suggested by Panter-Brick (2002), common notions of “street youth” are not sufficient to understand the diversity of their experiences. In this study we focus on the children’s own experiences in order to tell their stories and gain a better understanding of the social context of CSEC for children on the streets of the U.S.

The teens’ accounts of their lives and of the struggles and accomplishments in their lives in the few weeks before the interview, provides understanding of the social context of their experiences and status. Though not trained as sociologists or academically in the art of social observation the youths’ observations speak volumes:



*I'm not ashamed to be homeless but at the same time I don't like to broadcast it to everyone that walks by me. I like to do my laundry regularly... I like to shower regularly... I don't like to dress in like, rags. I like to try to dress like some ah, like normally to society... So that like, that's not the first thing that people get impressed upon them by me. It can be like, our conversation rather than, "oh, this is a homeless girl."*

*I make sure I'm clean because I do not/ I am homeless and I don't want to look homely.*

Their descriptions of their day-to-day lives make the level of hardship they encounter clear. Four youth told the interviewer:

*Well I had blankets but they threw 'em away yesterday.... When I went to squat at the park people cleaned everything up... threw it all away.*

*...you know, food is like the only really necessity.... I usually like, eat (out) of the garbage. I just think it's a lot easier. It's a lot cleaner than people think it is. ....a lot of the time like if people throw away leftovers, you know, it's still in that box, you know. ... I wouldn't, you know, just like... reach into the bottom of the trash can, (where) gunk builds up and like, you know, take something off there but...*

*(I usually sleep) by the (she mentions the doorway of a trendy youth-oriented national chain)... you don't get bothered.*

*Sometimes I would just like sleep in a stairwell or like, sit in one until um, a library opened and then I could go read and sleep in the library.*

The youth we interviewed were often runaways who were trying to survive life on the streets. They have told us about the time they spent searching for a safe place to stay, food and positive supports.

*I mean, in my case survival is trying to find a place to sleep every night... or trying to find, make sure that I'm, you know, that I'm not going hungry.*

*I already pretty much walked, you know, miles and miles literally a day..... and then I had to walk and then it started to rain half-way back .... and then by the time I got there, um, the shelter was almost completely filled and I did, was guaranteed, I mean, a place but I had to wait for the, um, shift change, for the staff to come in to get the bed....*

These are the adjustments youth make when they have no place to stay. They cope with the situation by sleeping in doorways, eating from the trash, and finding drop-in centers where they can do laundry.

But, after sleeping in train stations one young woman, Ramona, told us about her entry into prostitution as a teen:

*Well, um, I got involved with a friend who had been talking to me about it, and .... said you can make enough money, you know, to support yourself for a while. He said that he would be the person that would help me out, help me manage my money and everything like that. So I mean it was basically a pimp...you know what I mean?*

The social reality of life for so many of those interviewed revealed extreme economic hardship (although not all of the youth's families were impoverished, the youth were). Particularly interesting was their movement from street to street and town to town. Indeed this movement suggests an internal migration of youth that is not widely recognized as such in the United States. Demographers and youth workers, from outside the U.S. (especially those from so-called developing countries and nations impacted by years of civil war and unrest related to external aggression) suggest that youth migrate to seek sustenance and to escape the violence of wars, as well as, the violence in their families. Our initial examinations of these movements by the youth we interviewed in the U.S. reflect extensive movement of the youth, though not war related. Although this research was not designed to track these movements and the youth we spoke to were never questioned about a specific location, place or destination, in the course of the interviews they spontaneously provided information about their journeys within and beyond the two urban areas that are the focus of this project. They mentioned specific locations (a street, store, neighborhood hangout); resources in a community (homeless shelter, drop-in center, health clinic), or the locations of family members or members of their larger social network. Forty-seven of the 61 interviewees made reference to locations we could map. These 47 youth mentioned connections in or travel to/ from 99 cities; 32 states; and 21 countries. Further efforts to map these migrations are needed. For now their cross-jurisdictional journeys have important implications for understanding the challenges youth face and the need for service providers and educational systems to consider innovative approaches to assistance for migratory youth.

The accounts of the youth we interviewed reflected awareness of the grim realities of their lives and social position as they spoke openly about situations that most adults in the communities they visited around the country would prefer not to see (a teen sleeping in a doorway most nights only a block away from venerated universities or government offices). These accounts made it clear the youth are hidden in plain sight. Most interestingly, while many in the community may turn a blind eye to the youth on the streets, the participants' accounts made it apparent that they knew where they were and why they were socially located there. They were less likely to complain about their low status than they were to want to improve it through work, education and contributions to the community. They expressed their understanding of their situations in words that revealed their insight into their status and the realities they faced. Though they seldom would dwell on the dangers or the pains of life on the streets, they reflected acute awareness of their social status and the extreme challenges before them.

*I'm at the, I'm at the bottom, you know? ... The only place I could really go is up.*

(Interviewer asks: What made you decide to come out here to get money?) *Because this is where the money is ... This is all rich, white people and large civilian houses and everything and in (her parents' home state) we live in shacks technically, you know ...*

The youth are also acutely aware of the stigma associated with homelessness and at times tried to assure the interviewer of their connection to those with more resources.

*Ya. I.. I do have some friends that live in houses, like I have a good number of friends that have houses.*

When asked about where they want to be in five years, most of the participants spoke of having their own place to live and getting an education and a job.

While our sample recruitment strategy was to locate youth who were runaways or living away from parental control and it is, therefore, not surprising that the youth we interviewed had difficulties in their home lives and family circumstances, the vulnerability of these youth to violence and crime is notable. Indeed in the U.S., children and youth are (as a group) at higher risk for violent victimization than any other group and these issues were brought up by the participants:

*I actually became used to sleeping on the street because to avoid fights in shelters.*

*It was just really bad, like there was no beds; there was nothin but roaches on the floor. You couldn't even get blankets .. like .. like they'd mixed up, you know, there wasn't no woman here .. men there. It was like .. I was like the only girl there and it was a whole bunch of like older men. Some of these men are like pedophiles and ex-convicts and murderers and stuff like that .. and I was .. sleepin on the floor like next to all these men and like these mens are like, they're like masturbating and stuff like that, and men next to me masturbating and I .. I can't even like. It was just ...ya, it was really bad.*

Of course we found that many communities provided some of the services and safe venues needed by youth, but teens were reluctant to turn themselves over to adults, especially when they had in the past found adults to be untrustworthy. They sought places to stay where they felt they were able to maintain some autonomy and the opportunity to make the situation work. If such was not available, they reported being taken advantage of by unscrupulous adults. One young woman, Rika, told us that at age 12 she:

*ran away by myself. <so you met all new people?> The "gutter punk crew" ... It's ... it's no good.*

In this environment it is of little surprise that children who are impoverished, alone and find no stable place to stay are victimized by CSEC. While some accounts of entrance into the life of being prostituted, of commercial sexual exploitation, reflect extreme force, violence and threats, many young women we interviewed described a gradual introduction to "the life." We heard many accounts of runaways (or children who were pushed out or moved out of their families) with no place to stay who were given shelter by people who eventually turned them out on the streets to exchange sex for money. While in some cases the prostitution of the vulnerable youth happened nearly overnight, we heard accounts of a gradual process of grooming the young person for eventual commercial sexual exploitation. As one former teen runaway, Olivia, told us:

*I spent the night over their house and then they took me to this other man's house and then that's when .. um .. we was over there and I had sex with that man and then he let me stay in his house for the rest of three weeks or whatever ... he was really nice .. he .. he didn't ask me for nothin' else or whatever. He was just like whatever I want to do I can do it and then that was it.*

In a common scenario, after a short time the demand for sex would become more frequent and more uncomfortable for the teen... at times she was asked and eventually required to have sex with others who were brought to the house or who made connection with her exploiters or directly with her on the streets or over the internet. Olivia continued:

*Like some time I just be like tired and I don't want to do it but it's like if I don't do it they gonna put me out so I just do it ..*

In the United States the societal response is less informed by a human rights sensibility in its approach to youth and gives the family sanctity and predominance in regard to responsibility for the child. But as the youth interviews revealed, this low status and a weak voice in our social system left them in dire straits on many occasions. This social context of the status of youth and the invisibility, poverty, cold, hunger and duress these youth were under makes it clear that it is not the pimps who create this vulnerability—mostly they take advantage of it. We have heard social workers and prosecutors express the opinion that it is fine to point the finger at poverty and social injustices but that “a prosecutor can’t indict poverty or the status accorded to children” and a social worker “can’t end world hunger.” The youth we interviewed suggest, however, that we need a broader view if we are to think about prevention of CSEC and harm to children.

### **Family Context of CSEC**

The Pathways Study was designed to learn from teens’ accounts of their lives in the way they wanted to tell it. The interviews did not probe specifically for their histories of intrafamilial abuse or neglect. We asked about their experiences with leaving home and what led to them live away from home and about running away or being asked to leave. Our research was designed to identify themes that emerged in their accounts to help understand pathways into or out of CSEC.

Because we purposely recruited youth participants who were living away from their families it is no surprise that many of them had experienced difficulties in their family lives. Often youth told us about these family experiences in the context of discussing the events that shaped them into who they are today. For example, Natalie, 19, told the interviewer:

*It’s kinda important, the bad things that happened, but they’re important because they did shape my life.*

They also talked about their families in response to interviewers’ questions about why they left home or ran away. Many shared similar accounts of multiple experiences of running away or leaving home. Sometimes this started at a very young age.

One young woman, age 18, told the interviewer about the first time she left home. She was so young she said that she: “*brought my coloring book.*” She returned home to continue to live with her mother but described a chaotic family life which she again fled after she located and went to live with her father. She reported that immediately it became clear to her that he did not want her around in his life with a new and very young girlfriend. She told the interviewer that not long after her arrival he drove her over 500 miles and deposited her at the door of a woman’s shelter (she was 17). As she noted:

*... he left me with \$2 in my pocket and dropped me off. So it was kind of “run-away and drop-off.”*

Other youth left once and never went back.

Several themes emerged that characterized the family relations that resulted in running away and their vulnerability to CSEC. These also have implications for social service agency and

community responses designed to either prevent CSEC or to respond to youth who have been victimized.

### Violence in the families of youth and the impact on children's vulnerability to CSEC

As the teens talked about important events in their lives that shaped them into who (and where) they are today, a common theme was experience with family violence including physical, sexual and emotional abuse; abuse of siblings by parents or parent-figures; attempts they made to protect siblings from abuse; violence they perpetrated themselves or were accused of perpetrating, and witnessing violence between adults.

Rita, age 16, told the interviewer:

*When I was five ...or turning six, my step-father came and took me...I was so happy - oh my god - I thought he was like my guardian angel. I remember feeling like the way he wrapped me and just picked me up and I felt so light and so torn. Like his hands... like I could just cover myself and like all the pain and all the suffering that I had gone through would just be vanished if I was in his arms. Um ... the years passed and like he would be - he would molest me.*

Nineteen year old Natalie, spoke about violence by her father against her sister and her mother. In addition her account reflected the family disruption that often accompanies this violence:

*He didn't want (my sister) to be born anyway ...he tried to kill the baby by kicking my mother in the stomach but instead of ...the baby dying, the baby was just born at 6 months...and, like, she was fine. She was in the hospital for a few months but she came out fine and he still was mad so I guess when she got out he shook her and they ended up taking my sister away to a foster home. But after he (died) we got her back.*

And after that:

*I watched my mother get beat up, not just by my father but like boyfriends she's had after that used to beat her ... after she broke up with him, me and my mom and all of my brothers... my sisters, we were all homeless together. We lived in a car...*

Some spoke of perpetrating violence (sometimes in self-defense or in mutually violent altercations) against parents and parent figures.

One young man told the interviewer:

*When I was young my... well my mother - she used to beat me a lot. So .. like and I kind of got used to it cause she used to beat us so much .. well beat me a lot ... She used belts.. ah...and she tried to beat me with a baseball bat but we hid the baseball bat... eventually she found the baseball bat ... she told my brother and sister to hold me down and she just started beating me. .. She just beat me a lot around the ages of 5 and 10 ... but then I like got slowly immune to it ...*

In a recent altercation he, his brother and his mother were injured, the police were called and at age 15 he was sent to juvenile detention.

There were many reports of the children having to leave their homes along with their mothers to reside in a shelter for battered women. In addition to disruptions when the adults separated, the teens spoke often about leaving due to violence in the home.

Zita reports:

*There was always yelling. There was always fighting. Police always coming up to the house and I decided to run away one night.*

One young woman, Cecilia, told the interviewer about her father's physical violence toward her and her mother and how this experience led to her to leave home for what she saw as the attention and affection of an older man, a man who was a pimp:

*When my dad gets angry it's physical. ... It's not, "well you can't go out for a week, you can't ..." It's .. it's physical and he is a big man. And I've watched my ma .. I grew up watching my mom be abused and being beat. I'd rather run away. I never thought about running away but I was .. I didn't want to go back to my mom's and the stuff started at my dad's and I was .. I'd rather be with people who, who showed me affection, got me things, just showed me attention."*

Sabrina, told the interviewer how abuse by a step-father caused her to leave home at age 17:

*it's not because he's my step-father. It's because when I was younger he tried to ... to have sex with me ... so whenever he tried to tell me somethin' like I don't want to hear it ... cause, you know, you don't respect me and I'm not gonna listen to you ... So then when he started tellin' me what to do that's when I got really really upset ... and that's when I left ... cause I'm like, you know, I don't have to put up with this. ... my mother - she knew that .. she knew that he was trying to have sex with me and she didn't do anything about it... So if I can't trust you and I can't trust my mother then what am I doin' here? I'm out ... I left .. I was sleepin' outside ... train stations, shelters... everywhere; like ... anywhere but there.*

While this history of physical and sexual abuse in childhood was not surprising, given prior accounts of prostituted teens, what was very notable was how many youth focused on multiple experiences with witnessing and being caught in the middle of domestic violence in their families. This partner violence between their parents figured in events that they said shaped them into "who they are today" and, as they left violent homes, placed many of them at risk for CSEC and, once pimp-involved, less able to leave in the face of his physical violence. The teens we interviewed seldom spoke of the abuse resulting in a report to authorities. Instead, a theme emerged that reflected risk and vulnerability from intra-familial violence that led to in the teen being removed from or pushed out of the home with no provision of any appropriate alternative living situations. The recurring theme of domestic violence in the home pushing teens into the streets and increasing their vulnerability to CSEC has not been documented in other research of which we are aware. In these situations the teen may witness repetitive partner violence between the parents or a parent and their intimate partner. In some accounts the teen attempted to intervene and accusations of violence were made against him or her.

Meagan, now 18, told the interviewer:

*and you know, he just started to yell at my mom, you know, kind of push-up on her to like get in her face ... and I was trying to, you know, trying to separate them. ...And from...trying to separate them he thought I was trying to...argue with him too. So his excuse, all the time when they get into arguments, is basically call the cops - call the cops, you know, you're going to jail, you know.*

Meagan at 17 was arrested and as a consequence found herself on the streets:

*the judge tells me...my step-father actually put a restraining order on me and I'm like, "oh wow, um .. you're releasing me and I have a restraining order. Where am I supposed to go?" And I was only 17. And, you know, they're like 'well, you know, here's fifty cents make a phone call.' And I'm like, 'who am I supposed to call?'*

There are other situations that fit with this theme, such as teens who attempted to protect younger siblings from violence at the hands of a parent or teens who struck or pushed parents. When this violence led to a call to police, in a number of accounts, such a report led to removal or relocation of the teen to an unsafe or untenable situation. Often in an informal arrangement, especially when the teen was 16 or 17 and viewed as soon able to be independent, she or he would go to live with a relative or to another location. Soon that situation became untenable or was no longer available to shelter and support them. The youth stayed at friends' houses including living in the basement or in a backyard shed until parents made them leave or helped them move on. For example, a friend's parents might scrape together bus fare so the youth could to head to another city. Eventually the teen would end up "couch-surfing" to a different location nearly every day and eventually would end up living on the streets or in the control of a perpetrator.

Matt, 17 said:

*My mother was like...she wouldn't let us back in. So, um, we was sleeping over neighbor's houses, in cars and stuff. We had a little bit of money on us. We had to scrap up the change. We slept in this abandoned car....*

#### Parental absence, mental health problems, criminality and negative behaviors and characteristics

In addition to disruption and increased risk for youth stemming from their violence in the home, teens told us about parental alcohol and drug abuse problems they encountered, parental and close family member criminality, as well as parents' mental health, problems.

Johnnie, a 19-year-old, told us about his father:

*He taught me how to cook crack... You know, he told me, there was an order...boil water, baking soda, oil, baking powder, depending on which kind of um, if you want to be hard coat... break it down and sell it for more? Or just what we call cold cut... Or you can make it into crack.*

Roxanne, 19, was asked by the interviewer why she ran away at age 12. "What led to you leaving or running away?" She replied simply: "My parents were alcoholics." And later went on to say, "I didn't want to hear their arguing any more so I just left."

Lara told of her grandmother “going to jail, off and on doing drugs” and about her mother not being there.

Meagan, 18, provided another angle on this family disruption and relocation:

*...my parents always have a hard time keeping apartments because of their drug and alcohol problems and I just got tired of going to hotels and motels and this and that and just traveling cause, you know, they never have, you know, the money to deal with me anyways.*

In response to the interviewer’s question –“what kinds of drugs are they using?” Meagan replied:

*Crack; they use crack but they can .. they can only get it when they have enough money... but, you know, I never really knew they .. they used crack... and my mother was kind of .. sick because she also is bipolar. .. and schizophrenic.*

Alberto, left home at age 12 and told the interviewer:

*... well, my mother she just had her own, her own problems with like um, emotions and stuff, emotional problems and uh, drinking. And she was doing her own thing her whole life, drinking and going to the club, going to the bar and hanging out with her boyfriend. And um, I didn’t want to put up with it anymore*

Another theme was significant absence of the mother from the lives of the teens. Britney, age 16, described it this way:

*Um, my mother.... it was like we was close but we was not really close. She was there but she really wasn’t there... it’s not like some type of Houdini thing but that’s how I felt; that she’d be here one moment then she pop out.*

And this was the same for Lara, 16, who said, “My mother, really’s not there, barely there.”

All of these family difficulties reflect a theme of intense and extreme family fragmentation, dissolution and total (Houdini-like) disappearance from the lives of some of the teens. The instability in the home life of these teens is likely to not be surprising to those who work with youth in drop-in centers and shelter situations but the recurrent theme of youth experiences with extremes in family dissolution, violence and dysfunction was notable. And based on the teens’ accounts there was, or had been very little, state intervention with their families unless someone died or nearly died as a consequence of violence.

Despite the teens’ experiences with abuse and violence in their families the youth-- notably the young women -- repeatedly expressed a clear desire for connection to family. At the time of the interview 27 of the participants mentioned family connections or family members as among the top 3 most important things in their lives:

*I’ve got friends but I need, like, family.*

*And I love spending time with my grandmother; that’s like my best friend.*



It was the young women we interviewed who most clearly expressed a wish for connection with their mothers and a desire to maintain relationship with mom, even if this relationship has been not at all healthy and, based on the information the teen shared with the interviewer, even when it appeared unlikely that the mother could be of any assistance. As Whitney, a 17-year-old, who had for most of her life been in a series of foster care placements, was “aging out” of the system and was a CSEC survivor, told the interviewer:

*..Cause she's been the only one that's been there really for me my whole life. My parents broke up when I was 2 ½ and my father was addicted to cocaine, so my momma's really the only one that was able to show me the good things in life which, at that time might not have been great but it still showed me how to be a woman. So she's just a really important person to me.”*

Or:

*I feel like I had the best childhood my mom could have provided.*

While at times extended family members provided important stability to their lives, as one young woman told the interviewer: “*I never really had a holiday, like a true holiday like I used to have after my grandmother died.*” We were provided with many more accounts of adult family members (uncles, aunts, grandmothers and older siblings) who assaulted the teens, involved them in criminal activities, laughed at or encouraged the abuse they suffered at the hands of others, threw them out on the streets or abandoned them. This is a dramatic theme that came from the narrative accounts of families that appeared to produce not even one supportive adult who could help a teen survive or even thrive. Perhaps this paucity of adult care-givers is one reason for the frequent mention by the youth we interviewed of an existing close connection with a much younger sibling (usually below the age of 6 or 7), a niece or a nephew or a deep desire to establish such a connection.

Rika, 17, said of her 3-year-old sister:

*...that's my life...that's my sister – that is something I can pretty much...I can give her what I never had so I want everything to be the best for her...*

Revealing a deep concern for her younger brother and sister, Zita, 16, told the interviewer:

*Everybody says that I'm their second mom ...because I am always thinking like, “oh my god – they haven't eaten” – like “oh man, like I want to transfer her to this school because this school is not providing the education level she needs” or “oh my god my little brother is so sensitive, I don't know how he is going to deal with these new little kids in the school.”*

And Whitney, 17, told us of her wish to focus on her much younger nieces and nephews:

*Because when I was growing up, all the people that I looked up to, that's how I learned to be me. And seeing them growing up looking at me and my brothers and sisters now, it's like, alright, we have to change and do something to show them the right way to do things and not to grow up and make the mistakes we did. They're very impressionable.*

These accounts make it apparent why these abused, homeless and runaway teens are at high risk for commercial sexual exploitation. Furthermore, their trauma histories are likely to make them not only more vulnerable to exploiters but also, at times, less likely to be able to function in youth programs.

As Alisha, 19, told the interviewer:

*I tell 'em I don't remember cause that's what I choose. I'm like, "who wants to remember that?" Who wants to remember their father beatin' their mother up ... or getting raped by their own uncle? Who wants to remember that? Nobody remembers that.*

And this sentiment was also widely expressed:

*I went out to the street -- back out to the street and just, I didn't want to do their program because there are too many rules, too many rules and regulations.*

The themes that emerged raise many questions about how best to provide stability to youth who live in and run from such very troubled families. In addition, it raises the question, "how can communities reduce the likelihood that domestic violence will put a teen living in that home at risk?" Where teens are involved, these narratives stress that it is critical to look beyond the mental health impact of witnessing violence and the modeling of the violent interpersonal relationships. It is important to consider the material impact on the youth and the ways in which not only the lack of emotional nurturance but also the extreme poverty concurrent with such family turmoil and dissolution, places them at increased vulnerability to CSEC. The accounts by teens of their family experiences and the behaviors of family members lead to additional questions about the adequacy of any safety nets in place for these youth as they enter young adulthood. Even youth who have had the benefit of stable and loving families often find the need to rely on their families of origin for emotional and instrumental support well beyond childhood and well into their 20s or early 30s. The narratives of the youth interviewed for this study raise a critical question of how can communities provide support for young adults who have no stable families to which they can turn. In addition, for those teens who have been commercially sexually exploited these family histories raise important questions about the role (if any) of the teens' families in life after they escape from CSEC. How can the harmful influences be minimized while potentially beneficial connections are enhanced?

### **Social Services, Law Enforcement, School and Youth Agency Context**

In this section we examine the interactions of the youth participants in the Pathways Study with social services, law enforcement, schools and youth agencies and analyze themes that emerged about the role of these institutions in their lives prior to entrance into CSEC or in the very early stages of CSEC. Relying on our qualitative approach the themes provide insight into the role of such services proximal to the first experiences with or entrance into commercial sexual exploitation.

This method relies on an examination of the information teens shared about experiences that shaped them into who they are and about recent "good" or "bad" days. Although a series of questions (see Appendix) were included at the end of the interview to quickly solicit information

about people and programs in their communities that had been helpful or not helpful to them, this approach was not intended to provide the type of quantifiable information on numbers and types of contacts that could be obtained via a survey administered to a representative sample of youth. Instead, we sought to identify themes from the narratives of the youth themselves in the hope that such themes will assist the community to develop responses that are most highly attuned to the challenges the youth report that they confronted in their lives.

#### Youth falling through the cracks or missing needed services

One theme identified from analysis of youth narratives was a profound lack of supportive services provided when they were struggling to survive – as one youth put it-- “survive life.” This interesting juxtaposition of words makes clear the extent to which life was on going threat to survival. For some youth there was no suggestion in the interviews of an awareness that they could use or benefit from interventions from others outside the family. Indeed a number of youth purposely hid themselves or their needs or injury or their families’ difficulties out of a desire to “protect” the family or one or both parents. For example, many implied and one young male directly stated: “I would never rat out my parents.” Others mentioned lying about abuse allegations, minimizing an injury or saying that an injury was an accident so they could stay with their parents or could keep a parent from crying.

Some youth stayed away from social services because they were fearful of a violent parent if there was a report to CPS. Many were very protective of younger siblings and either threatened the parent or tried to escape.

One teen reported the following:

*My step-dad threw my brother into (a metal object) and sliced up his whole leg and then my mom and step-dad told me not to tell the social worker that he threw him (and to say) that he jumped and hit it...I wasn't gonna lie for him, especially after all the stuff he did to us. I wasn't gonna lie for him so I ran away.*

Whether through fear or ignorance or a desire to “survive life” the youth would protect their families from state intervention.

It was not always because the youth kept it hidden, however, that parents’ violence went unchallenged or, if challenged, was left unpunished leaving the child unprotected. Based on the accounts of the youth they discovered (or at least believed) that the severity of the violence was either successfully deflected by the parents or of no concern to those charged with protecting children from violence.

One young woman told the interviewer:

*My father, he'd beat me because I got a note sent home from school ... I didn't do my homework... that was the first time my father ever hit me like he was fighting a dude...kicking me in my back and he threw me against the wall and was punching me in my face and everything. ... I was like 12. When I went to school the next day I showed them everything. I had bruises, had big, big bruises on my thighs... I had big, big bruises on my side, big cuts all over my back. I had black eyes, like knots on my head and*

*everything and they called the police on my dad...my step-mother was like, "oh you don't care you just got your father arrested?" And I'm like, "no I don't.... I'm only 12-years-old and you see all these bruises I got on my body?...So the next time you put your hands on my little brother and he end up like that, I'm killing you..."*

This young woman sought intervention by child protective services. *"I wanted them to see what was going on in the house"*. But as she went on to explain:

*Ever since then they've called (protective services) like 3 times a year ... and my father always gets around it and I don't know why. I don't know how.*

In addition to a total absence of needed services at a young age this theme also reflected an absence of continuing services for youth who age-out of the system. Indeed this area of child welfare receives little funding and has warranted no evidence-based research to determine the effectiveness of interventions designed to assist the 16- and 17-year-old youth who are left to "survive life" on their own.

One young woman told the interviewer:

*My mother and my father was dealin drugs ... and she got hooked on drugs. So when I was about like 5-years-old, we got taken away and they brung us (the participant and 4 siblings) to a foster home... we was there for a while and then they started splitting us up cause we started getting older. When you're like 17 you can't be in a foster home... you have to be in independent living. So they started splitting us up so I eventually was on my own and, ah, when I turned 14 ... I moved to this new program. I've never run away before but I didn't like the program, I didn't like how the staff treated me... so I ended up running away with this, ah, this female... And that's how everything started. We met this guy. Yup, we met this guy. He gave us a place to stay and, ah, I was with him, I think, for a week and then like he started showin me videos, like Pimps Up, Ho's Down. He started showin me like all types of stuff and then he asked me if I would do it for him. You know what I'm sayin? So I, you know, I was 14. I didn't know. So I said, you know, "I'll try it." So he took me downtown one night and I was jumpin in and out of cars, turning dates. I was bringing him a lot of money.*

Once on the streets the youth experience a sense (and often a reality) that they are totally on their own and at 16 or 17 (or younger) that they need to fend for themselves. As one young woman told the interviewer:

*Once you turn 18-- well, it wasn't even when I turned 18 'cause when I turned 17 I got emancipated-- (you) become adult. Legally. When I was 17. And um, they/you can't call/you can't have contact with (the social workers).*

Aging out is not only a problem for youth in foster care settings, it is also an issue for youth on probation:

*I was on probation (at age 12) ... they made sure that I had to go to school every day... It was alright.*

Then at 17 she was released from probation and that was when she left home and was a victim of CSEC:

*Then I got involved with a pimp...and started doin' prostitution. So I was stayin' in hotels here and there and then I lived in (another state) until I found out I was pregnant and I came back.*

Our participants provided many examples of how the system failed them as they got closer in age to legal adulthood. As juveniles they were either not viewed as “at risk” or their vulnerability was misjudged. Police, in many jurisdictions across the U.S., were reported to make little or no effort to determine if a young woman was a minor at risk of abuse if she did not look like a “waif” lost on the streets. This response may have been based on lack of knowledge in some communities of the risks for youth, misperception about the characteristics of victims of CSEC, and little or no training on how to assess the age of a person encountered in the streets or to determine if the juvenile is in need of their assistance.

Another theme that emerged from the youths' narratives was their experience that the services provided to them were too much or misguided

Contrary to some abused children who wanted more protection from the state, others who were neglected or because of behavior problems found to be children in need of supervision told the interviewer of that experiences were either too intensive or the wrong kind of contact. Many reported multiple, serial, and troubled foster care placements. It may seem contradictory, following a strong call for more services for abused children, to point to a theme of youth reports of *too much* intrusion by the state into their lives, yet, youth experienced their placements as overwhelming, capricious, or guided by unknown forces that they found unexplainable and arbitrary.

*Some of 'em. Some of 'em were nice, but you never really got too comfortable because you didn't know how long you was going to be there... I'm not even really sure (why I'd have to move). Sometimes you wouldn't even know... Your case worker would show up and be like, um, um, well I don't remember exactly what was said, but she would show up and you would leave.*

Some of the observations on the foster care system were very thoughtful and revealed that the youth thought seriously about their own experiences. One 17-year-old teen, with many years of experience in foster care settings provided a thoughtful analysis of the problems with the intervention she received. Her analysis, though broadly dismissive of social services, is worthy of serious reflection.

She told the interviewer:

*(CPS) is a, a bunch of idiots, easiest way to put it... I don't see how putting someone with behavioral issues in another home... with strangers.... What is that getting done? ... Kids with behavioral problems need attention for their behavioral problems; not to be taken from the situation which got them there because, obviously, if you take yourself out of that situation you're not gonna solve anything. Nothing there (in the original family situation) is gonna get solved, so... putting kids in foster homes with new people, it's creating **new** problems, **new** things for them to deal with. I think the best solution for kids with behavioral problems is in-home therapy, you know, simple stuff... things that they can just go out and do and talk to somebody. An outside person can be like “oh, well I*

*see where you're coming from on this, maybe you should try this." It might take a while but I think that would help more than foster homes. Those foster homes should be used for kids who have been abused or kids ...home issues, like violence and neglect and stuff like that. It just doesn't make sense to me.*

This very young woman had met many other children in foster care and the experiences she had and observations she made while basically "embedded" in the foster care system helped her to formulate an opinion that the abused children did need the protection of foster care but that children with behavior problems will not do well in this environment. This young woman, with no formal education, presented an argument for an approach that involves working with youth in their communities, involving multiple systems and utilizing cognitive-behavioral strategies. She stated that she wanted to go to college and have a "psychology career then ... get like my own little like psych center so people can come and get some help."

The following are accounts of experiences with foster care that immediately preceded CSEC :

*Well, um, I was in foster care since I was 12-years-old and then in a group homes and that type of thing so yeah, I ran away a lot so.. I was only like 14 at the time, this guy was like 25. And um, I actually moved in with him and um, we were living together. And um, I really wasn't doing anything. I was living with him but um, I was going to stuff a 14-year-old shouldn't be able to go in clubs, strip clubs, um, drinking*

*I was a little bit older, I was probably like 16? And um, I was in a group home in (another city and state). And I didn't like it out there at all, um, so I actually ran away and I came back to (original city). ... then my social worker told me that ... I needed to get back into group home or whatever, a more structured environment. And um, I was moved out to (another city) and I didn't like it and I ran away. And I was gone for like a month or two and that's when I got into prostitution.*

*Yeah. I met a um, guy while I was on the run and um, we were/I didn't know that he was a pimp and we were friends at first. And um, uh, he, he pretended to be my boyfriend for probably like 3 or 4 weeks and then...*

And from another young woman:

*No, it was, um, it was time for me to transition into something less than a program ...to transition into a group home and that was their group home that they put me in. So ... It was a transition; my social worker was ah, bringing me to my, my new program... I was there for like two weeks and I called 'em... "I don't like it. I don't like it here. I want to go" and she's like "well, you're gonna have to give me time. You gotta be there for six months" and I was just like "okay"... and then I ran. (And that's when she met him) He was cute.... and I wanted to know him. And like, it's crazy cause once I fell in love with him that's when he asked me to do what I do. The first (pimp)... He was twenty-three... He was young but he was older than me. I lost my virginity to him that same night.*

Notably, girls are more likely than boys to report experiences with serial placements in foster care or group homes. The boys we interviewed often escaped the social services agencies when behavioral issues arose. The males' accounts were more likely to entail flight to the streets

without a stop-over in foster care. A few boys interviewed for this study had spent time in youth detention facilities.

A final theme in examining youth experiences with agency and community services suggests that there are some notable experiences that youth reported that they viewed as very positive.

They generally attributed the positive nature of the experiences to individual characteristics of the persons involved. When the interviewer asked specifically about people who had been helpful to them, many youth could think of not one person. However, there were a number of reports of helpful and supportive social workers (who would help them get home and away from a pimp), counselors, youth workers, teachers who supported their academic goals, lawyers, a probation officer, a foster parent, and a youth mentor. Notably, the youth focused on the attributes of the individual (e.g., “she was helpful”, “he cared,” “she took time with me,” and “I can all her anytime.”) while usually describing the larger agency or institution that employed the person in less than favorable terms. Some youth reported strong ties to a particular CPS worker or other supportive adult even after many years had passed.

The youth identification of some helpful adults brings into focus the serious challenges faced by youth who have lived in multiple jurisdictions, states, and regions in their short lives. The youth were highly mobile, their families highly transient and their contacts with potentially supportive adults were frequently spread across several states. Thus the supportive adults identified by the youth were often inaccessible and unavailable to provide on-going support. With few connections to their immediate community, finding new supportive adults present a challenge for these youth. And such adults did not seek youth out in the same ways that pimps and abusers did. Thus these narratives point to a need to assist youth in forming new meaningful connections with helpful, positive and pro-social adults and to create environments in which such adults can be encouraged to offer support to teens and young adults.

Many of the youth had experienced considerable difficulties with school, possibly related to learning disabilities but also due to truancy, behavioral problems and family dissolution and mobility. It was clear that for many teens these difficulties did not dampen their enthusiasm about or aspirations to complete their high school educations or attain higher degrees. Twenty-eight of the youth spontaneously mentioned school as one of the top three things that were important to them at the time of the interview. This is significant considering the multiple challenges of survival the runaway and homeless youth faced on a day to day basis. One young person wanted to just have a place to do homework. Others told the interviewer:

*Stay in school. That's the main thing - stay in school and just try and do the best that you can and don't give up on yourself; it's not worth it.*

*So I was, you know, telling my mom that, you know, “I'm willing to stay in school, just let me come home. Let me come home.”*

*I mean .. what can I say? .. Stay in school, don't be a fool.*

It was striking that the youth also often reported very good access to health care, HIV testing, and gynecological services. Of course when they are “in the life” youth may have been confined by the pimp to very brief contacts with health services, but in most locales youth could find health clinics that would provide services. The access to health services and of health care providers to these youth suggests that the health care system should become a more integrated participant in CSEC prevention initiatives as well as other behavioral health initiatives linked to schools, youth centers and other community agencies.

The significant challenges identified in providing care to teens in “foster” and group homes raise the question of what alternatives to foster care are possible for at risk youth? Is it possible to offer different living arrangements for 16- and 17-year-old youth who will either run or eventually age out anyway?

### **Individual and Peer Context of CSEC**

In addition to a social context that places children at risk for CSEC, the teens’ narratives suggested a peer context that is often immersed in a culture of CSEC.

Although it is clear that it would not be appropriate to hold underage peers responsible for CSEC, (same age or close in age) peers may have a significant role to play in the Pathways “in” to CSEC. For teens, of course, peer relationships are critical. Association with delinquent peers has long been theorized as one of the pathways to delinquency (Sutherland, 1947). The mechanisms through which such associations operate to lead to trouble for the teen(s) are still a matter of much debate and study. Our review of the narratives of teens suggests it is important to understand how risk for CSEC is linked to teen culture and to the nature of male-female sexual relationships and friendships.

### **Life as a teen related to "Pathways In"**

Clearly there is a teen culture that may envelop young people who eventually become victims of CSEC-- whether it is a devotion to music (hip hop, rap, or pop), a keen focus on "partying," drug use, a choice of a particular style of dress or adornment, or the types of communications and social networks used. Of course teen culture is not the same across the US or even within regions or cities, and it may differ based on groups or cliques, racial or ethnic identity, or socioeconomic status. But our interviews go further to suggest that an assumption that teens who are victimized by CSEC are deeply integrated into a broadly conceived "youth culture" would be erroneous. Clearly many of the teens we interviewed came from impoverished families, or had lived in numerous foster care settings, or had lived on the streets or "couch surfed" for some time before we encountered them. Most did not have cars or much access to any vehicles within their peer group. Although many found a way to keep in touch using popular social networking sites, few who were not currently CSEC involved had the latest cell phones and they did not have their own computers. Instead they made use of computers at public libraries or drop in centers, and often used cell phones borrowed from others or occasionally bought with limited minutes. We observed at least one interviewee who had no electronic device of his own but did have a voicemail box to get messages (including one from the interviewer) and, as he explained, to keep in touch with a parent. From their accounts of their lives it often appeared that many if not most



of these teens were not in the "in" groups at school (when they attended school) and were not highly focused on teen cultural icons in their references. Probably because of their extreme poverty but also reflecting their reality, one indicator of the lives and focus of the teens we interviewed is when offered a choice of a gift card for the stores suggested to us by teens in more stable environments (e.g., "Old Navy" "Marshalls" "Target" and others), they were much more likely to choose the CVS card (for a large pharmacy and sundries chain in the Northeast).

Of course, the current status of the youth did not mean that they were uninterested in typical teen culture. An account from one young female, Betsy, however, reflected a theme for many of these youth of being an outsider looking in:

*And I really don't know what a teen's life is like I mean I see teenage girls... They look happy. They have their little cell phones and ... they nice little outfits. I mean I have clothes or whatever don't get me wrong-- but it's not as nice as theirs. And they look happy. Their hair and nails done and .. and I mean I don't know. And they be having it .. they're with little friends.*

She continued:

*I'd be hurt cause I'd be sitting on the bus by myself and looking .... why can't I be that happy, you know. .. why .. why can't I have stuff like that?.... And then (they) have boys keep coming up to talk to them and try to get their number, you know, you know want to be real with them ... it .. it really hurts. ... I'm just saying .. but .. but it really do hurts and I don't think you know how bad it feels cause you an adult but I think you was a teenager you would probably know how it feels.*

We found several themes in the narratives of youth that revealed an approach to male-female relationships that put women in a role of passive acceptance of male dominance, as well as, reflected an extreme focus on the physical attributes of the male, his desirability to other women, his possessions and no concern about or on the contrary even an attraction to him due to his older age and the flattering nature of his attention and control.

The interviewer asked 16-year-old, Lara, "And how did you, how did you meet him?"

*Uh, it was about 12 o'clock at night. I'm .. walking across like a big parking lot to my house... He pulls up/no, he blows the horn from across the street. "Bla, bla, bla". I'm like, "who's that?" And just keep on goin. I look back and I see him pulling into the parking lot where I'm walking and I say "oh." He pulls up in this big, cute little truck, or whatever. He's cute so I'm like, " oh what's goin on?" I'm on the phone. I said, "I'm going to call you back." So he in the car, "Yo ma, you're real cute." So I'm like, "how ya doin?" You know, he, he's a tad bit older than me but he's cute. <How old?> He got a car. I'm not sure, but he's like 20, late twenties or early thirties but he's older than me. <Okay> So I'm like "oh he's cute, he's got a car." So, the first thing I come up and say "you got a wife? Big old truck, fancy truck, you got a wife?" ... He said, "No, I don't got no wife, you know." So I'm like, oh, he's real cute, you know? And so I got in the car.*

A recurrent theme is the way in which the attention of a desirable older male overwhelmed all caution in the young women we interviewed. While their family lives may have placed them at risk for the approaches of such men, the appeal of a cool, cute, male in combination with neglect

or abuse by family made his approach more likely to be successful in pulling her into “the life.” For some of the young women interviewed, even after they had been exploited by such a man in the past, there remained a conviction that the cute and cool guys are the ones you want to attract and perhaps get to be “real” with. If such a man sought her attention or wishes to have sexual relations in many instances the young girls responded.

*Um, like the strangest thing happened... I'm in the car and like he wanted somethin' but that's just all dudes. So I wasn't really, you know, surprised about that one. He wanted something from me and I was like, “no, no, no!” ...He wanted to have sex...And it was the first time with him and I'm like, “wow.” You know.... I wanted to do it. Because, I don't know, I guess I liked him. And he was real cute so, I wanted to do it.*

Of course some of the young women we interviewed had learned from past experiences: One who had been hurt before and was once briefly a victim of CSEC told us:

*and people always say “a boy will tell you anything”, and now I see that it's true. Mmm .. Yes, don't believe nothing boys say.*

But for other young women the seduction by the pimp was enabled by notions of his behavior as part of a repertoire of appropriate male-female relationships:

*He came to pick me up. And the weirdest thing is, when he got there/just listen to everything how I'm saying it. When he got there, there was a lady in the car, in the front seat...She was just real pretty, little heels, nice little dress, skirt all the way up here to half of her legs. She was looking real pretty and icy, diamonds and everything. Okay. He told her to get in the back and let me sit in the front. And I'm like, “wow.” You know, in my head, “so she gets in the back.”*

In a short time, however, for teens we interviewed, the attentions of an older, cute, possessive male turned to coercion into prostitution, CSEC, and entrance into “the life.”

Another theme that emerged from the interviews tied peer relationships and pathways in to CSEC to the “friend” who introduced young women and girls to prostitution. In the case of one girl, Serena, a friend at school recruited her into “the life.”

*I mean the first time it happened I was kind of like scared, but at the same, I had to follow her move ... you know, whatever she did, I did; you know, wherever she went across the trick, whatever y'all call them, then I did, you know ... um .. and as the day start... started getting longer I started to learn more so I was able, when she did leave me .. I was able to do it by myself.*

Some of these experiences when they are over may result in the young woman questioning any friendship and avoiding future friendships. These sentiments convey the complexity of peer relationships and the way in which they propel some youth into commercial sexual exploitation. Few had true friends who could keep them from the pimp.

*I don't have friends. I only have acquaintances.*

*I don't have true friends, you know, cause friends wouldn't let another friend, you know, go on to this predicament.*

### **CHAPTER 3: CSEC AVOIDENCE**

We interviewed many teens who had encountered CSEC but reported that they had no direct experiences trading sex for money or other goods. Thirty-four youth reported no experiences with CSEC. There were eighteen 18- to 19-year-old youth in this group (7 females and 10 males and 1 transgendered). Those under the age of 18 included 11 females, 4 males and 1 transgendered youth. There was one female whose age was unknown. At the time of the interview, these youth did not reside in a stable living environment and some considered themselves homeless, although periodically living with friends, family, or in shelters. These youth often had experienced similar family histories.

The youth reported that they left their homes for a number of reasons including the following:

Parents kicked them out for misbehavior or drug use. Gus, a 19-year-old told the interviewer:

*It wasn't me...me leaving home, it was more about my father kicking me out .. because ..I was acting really stupid and coming home high and being a bad influence on my little brother, which, I could fully understand now... he told me that he kicked me out to teach me a lesson.*

Chaz, an 18-year-old said:

*I was just bein' stubborn and didn't want to follow the rules. You know, I can't blame anybody but myself, you know, I put myself in the situation where I'm at now.*

Physical abuse also motivated the youth to leave. Dion, age 15 reported:

*My mother - she used to beat me a lot..So .. like and I kind of got used to it cause she used to beat us so much .. well beat me a lot .*

Some youth left home chaffing at parental rules and constraints. Gus mentions that he:

*...just kept on coming home high, acting stupid around people and broke the rules and what not ...*

Matt, age 17, talked about why he chose to leave the over-crowded living situation in his house:

*More people moved in and now there's 14 people living in this 4 bed-room house. Now, there's five kids, the grandmother, the husband, the grandmother .. um .. daughter, me, a 16-year-old, the brother, I mean the cousin .. the 17-year-old, that's 10, the friend - that's 11, the boy - the baby father of the kids - that's 12, and the .. um .. sister - that's like 13....*

Some youth found themselves homeless after leaving a foster home. Cecilia, age 19, talks about why she left foster care as a younger teenager:

*We went to foster care, we went to her first and um, ya she really, she did not like us at all. And we used to have sit in the corner, the like the nine months that we were there, we had, we sat in the corner that whole time. And she, ah she beat the mess out of us."*

Many of those young people who escaped these situations by heading to the streets reported no CSEC involvement but did recount experiences with being approached by others to get involved

or having a friend who had been exploited in this way. While each youth's experience is unique and nuanced, several themes emerged as we read and re-read their accounts and examined how they handled their experiences in situations of potential high risk for CSEC.

Some who avoided CSEC were also adept at avoiding other situations in which persons would attempt to exert control over them. So there were reports of learning to avoid control by child protective services and "escaping" from foster care (although, of course as we have seen there were many who left foster care and quickly became a target for commercial sexual exploitation.) Those who avoided it often survived through connection to one or more non-abusive romantic partners or the development of groups of support -- either informal networks they formed or joined or through reliance on networks of community agencies and drop-in centers that were most accessible to youth and required little of them in return for some key support and shelter.

In the literature on runaways there have been many attempts to describe the different ways homeless, runaway and throwaway youths are viewed (Springer, 2001) and to describe their living experience (Thompson, et al 2000). Typologies of youth have been identified. This approach can oversimplify the unique characteristics and issues each youth faces on a daily basis but can be useful in an attempt to understand the different challenges youth face (Mallett, et al 2004). As we reviewed the narratives of the homeless/throwaway non-CSEC youth in this study the following themes emerged that suggest potentially useful constructs of ways in which the youth cope with their lives on the street. It is important to note that a youth may not exclusively belong to one group and that the strategies that have emerged from our analysis may not work for all youth or for these youth as time passes and new difficulties are encountered. Also these strategies may involve more risk of other types of victimization or harm.

### **Themes that reflect coping for homeless, runaway and throwaway youths who are not CSEC-involved**

#### Traveling and continued movement as a strategy for survival.

The first theme involves youth who may be considered the "Travelers." This theme emerged as we read about youth who were adept at the use of a wide variety of means to seek shelter and at moving on when danger was present – this included couch-surfing/-hopping with friends or family members other than parents. These youth would also at times use shelters (often lying about their age) to avoid inclement weather and avoid being forced into other situations deemed by them to be more dangerous. Many of these youth slept outdoors when weather permitted.

Mikai, 19, talked about finding a place to sleep:

*Sometimes - like I try to be smart about where I sleep. I try to like kind of find like .. have a squat or something. If I'm going to be like just in a place for a few days. I wouldn't sleep out in the open anywhere.*

Daniel also 19, told the interviewer about the challenges of transporting his things with him while moving around, finding a place to stay and looking for employment:

*I've had experiences where like I've had a place to stay for a few days and then comes you have another place to stay for a few days but in that same time you're lugging a lot*

*of your belongings with you. You're basically stashing.. what you do have left over that really is impractical to... carry with you on and off the bus all day, or ...interview for a job...*

#### Use of a "Cut and Run" strategy for survival.

This theme reflects the actions of youth who appear strongly motivated to avoid being located by family members or others and who are highly adept at such strategies. A common element of this theme is that they often travel a long distance from their home base and actively avoid contact with parent or caretakers. This theme is similar to the traveler theme because it suggests that the youth are adept at moving away from situations they deem to be dangerous or unhealthy for them.

Daniel, (referring to his family):

*I got a couple of voice-messages, you know on the cell phone you know, on voice-mail but I never returned them.*

Montel, Age 19 (talking about avoiding his mother):

*I just avoid the questioning and go around to a different place.*

The interviewer asked Montel if he thinks his mother worries about him.  
*She .. I know she does but she should have been worried about me before.*

And finally he was asked if he would go back home if he could and replied:  
*No. Not a chance.*

#### Street-dweller strategy.

This theme reflects youth who have found a way to exist as long-term residents of the streets and have adapted to their situation by learning how to survive in often the most brutal and physically challenging situations. These youth often do not use shelters or try to seek overnight accommodations. At times the street-dweller approach also involved reliance on pseudo-families but also was present among youth who reported suffering from mental disorders or heavy drug or alcohol use and abuse.

Mikai found a place to sleep:

*....in a little park...It's like... the cops really don't care if you sleep there. A lot of people sleep there. It's a lot warmer than the river too, which is good this time of year.*

However, even sleeping outside on a cold night was preferable to some youth like Alberto, who told the interviewer:

*I had a couple of cold nights where I didn't want to stay at my friends' house and I stayed out in the winter but didn't want to put up with no rules or anything. I wanted to have some freedom.*

*Well I had blankets but they threw 'em away yesterday. When I went to squat at the park people cleaned everything up..... threw it all away..... And there's nothin there so I had to go to sleep, like you know .. outside with nothing.... and it got really cold. Kyle, age 17.*

Another coping strategy is to use shelters. Shelter-dweller.

Lying about their age, some youth use adult shelters, but this solution may place them at high risk for violence or other danger. Often alone, the absence of a social network marginalizes the youth and forces them to look at daily needs instead of a long term goal of finding a safe place to live, finishing school or looking for a job. Older teens also find living in shelters difficult at best.

Bee told us about her experience at a shelter:

*I've stayed at a shelter once which was terrible. Because I've had bad experiences with um, other alcoholics, like friends, that have ruined their lives and now I even hate the smell of alcohol and so I hated that and the problem with pedophiles, I mean, there are a ridiculously amount of pedophiles just out on the streets around here ....I mean, the staff don't really do anything.*

And Nola said:

*Right now I think the shelter, in and out of shelters and stuff is one of the biggest struggles of my life now.*

Dante, age 18 shared some insight into why staying in a shelter may not be best for him:

*I'm not tryin' to refuse help from the shelters but me being the person I know, I'm more vulnerable in the shelter. I'm more vulnerable to do bad things, be in a bad mood.*

### **Coping with living life on the streets**

The CSEC and non-CSEC involved homeless youth in this study were seeking the same things: love, support, safety, a job, a safe place to live, money. And both groups often had the same approach into getting what they want.

#### Romantic partner/emotional support

Young women often sought a romantic partner, someone to help them avoid attack, gain emotional support and navigate the streets safely.

Bee said:

*I have a boyfriend and I've been with him seven months. We've been out on the street together, so he's really important in terms of supporting me.*

It is the quest of finding a suitable partner that put many young women at risk for getting involved in CSEC.

#### Pseudo-family

The street-dweller youth often lived with others who shared common goals such as

staying safe and sharing food and drugs. They looked out for one another. They were knowledgeable about life on the streets and shared this information with others. Often they used the available resources at drop-in centers and medical health care centers. One clear difference for non-CSEC involved youth was that pseudo-family life revolved around survival on the streets and not making money for the pimp-businessman.

*We're there for each other. We support each other. Um, it's good not to be like lonely out here, we can protect each other. We can keep each other motivated, to like work for things and you know it's always good to have somebody to love you. It just makes you happier and, and/it, it makes things easier to like keep hope for other things.*

### Food and necessities

The youth who utilized services directed at homeless youth often took advantage of a full range of services such as hot meals, showers and washing and ironing their clothes. In addition, they got tested for HIV, received advice and counseling from the center staff, and checked their status on MySpace or Facebook. It was also a place where they were able to simply hangout for a few hours.

Daniel spoke about his experience at a drop-in center:

*I mean you can, you can eat, you know. You can put your stuff, even if it's just for a few hours until they close for the day. I mean it helps not having to carry a backpack if you want to apply for a job, you know, just like, wear your jacket.... I mean even, even just that little bit of time, cause all the shelters, I mean, they have a year's waiting list just to, for lockers ...*

Some youth either did not know of drop-in services or were highly suspicious of the staff and sought other ways to obtain food. Some “spanged” (a contraction of the words spare and change) and used that money for their daily meal. If not successful, they often went hungry.

*For food I usually like eat out of the garbage; I just think it's a lot easier. It's a lot cleaner than people think it is.*

*Like the days that I didn't have any food or a place to sleep like I just hung out in one spot, spanging until I could make enough money to buy some food. And then ....I was kind of like .. it felt kind of degrading because I'm usually not used to being homeless.*

### Spirituality

Some youth reported that faith in God or a spiritual being helped them cope with their current living situation.

Matt shared with the interviewer:

*I know God got me so I don't care. He guided me all this damned times so I don't ....So I know not to be crestfallen or despondent about ... oh ... just gloomy and feeling alone and depressed about where I'm going to go next cause I will finds a way ... Cause everything happens for a reason if you believe and understand this, okay? I'm here for a reason; everything happens for a reason.*

## **Challenges of homelessness**

The youth encounter numerous challenges in their recent lives.

### Isolation

Social networking played a large part in the lives of homeless youth. The youth who isolated themselves from others were under more stress than those who had others to rely on. Montel shared with the interviewer:

*I don't like to talk to people; I just like to ... I don't know I smoke weed to relieve stress. I'll smoke a cigarette and that's it; I'll just sit there by myself and just think about everything and try to see how I can ... go a different way to see more ideas of what I can do to change more stuff.*

*He continued:*

*...a friend will turn against you. That's why they have a saying "keep your enemies closer than your friends" cause you never know, I could have a best friend and he could stab me in my back. I learned the hard way.*

Andy, age 16, told tell us:

*When I'm alone and just thinking because I see things that aren't there and it's hard to deal with it and sometimes it scares me.*

### Making money

The youth found a number of means (legally and illegally) to make money for the things they wanted or needed. Most expressed a desire for gainful employment but even the act of getting to an interview posed a number of challenges.

Daniel spoke about some of the challenges:

*Well just like to be able to have a bus pass versus, you know what I mean? Having to pay, I guess like an example would be like \$2 for each fare, if you have a weekly pass you know what I mean, you need money for that but it saves you a lot of money too. There's not always times where, you know, I mean you can go get free food and free meals because you have to do other appointment...and do other things and so you kind of miss out.*

Talking about interviewing for a job: *Ya can't say "oh I'm staying with some people.... Oh, I'm just renting a couch", you know and storing my stuff. You know that like, you have to kind of not lie but in a sense you have to like, you have to...*

And finally:

*You still have to be able to afford to go to the hours that they want you to work and be able to make it on time and be able to go there and in a way you have to kind of, like you can't tell 'em, you know what I mean, at least in my situation it's like you can't say your situation.*



### Illegal Activity

Some youth opted out of legal employment and sold drugs or stolen goods to make money. Chaz told the interviewer:

*So I'm just sittin' there thinkin' like, you know like if I was, if I was to, you know, sell all my product, I would probably make more than what a person makes at McDonalds within two weeks. If I was to, if I had let's say five, five rocks which is \$20 a piece that's, that's basically someone's check, I mean, that's for two weeks.*

Sabrina, age 19 said simply:

*We sell drugs. Not just drugs; drugs like just weed - that's all we sell.*

And Daniel:

*I was sellin weed, E, some pills and stuff, kind of I guess, it was like a part-time job sort of...*

Alberto spoke of how he occasionally turned to illegal activity:

*If I had to sell like, a bag of weed or something marijuana or you know what I'm saying? Sell a stolen phone or you know, a stolen pager you know, a stolen bike - I'd sell stuff, you know, like that. I wouldn't really, I wouldn't periodically like keep selling drugs or do different things to get money, um, but I never hurt nobody.*

### Drug Use

Drug use played an important role in the lives of some of the youth of this study. For some it was a way to cope with living on the street but also an impediment to getting the things they need.

Talking about his drug use, Gus explained:

*I have a urge to smoke some pot and I have an appointment to get to, my brain would tell me I have to get to the appointment but I also want to smoke some pot and the pot overpowers going to the appointment. .... I would like to, like slow down and completely stop my drug and alcohol use. And it's kind of been getting in the way of what I've been trying to accomplish in life.*

Sabrina said:

*I smoke a lot of weed. And some people it makes paranoid and some people it doesn't. To me, it doesn't.*

Robert, age 19 told the interviewer:

*I know I have to stop smoking weed and I know I have to stop drinking and I just want to stay home and I want to work. Go home and work. I don't want to go out. I don't want to walk around and have a good time. I don't care, my good times are over. I've done it for too long.*

## Avoiding CSEC

Many homeless youth live with and around CSEC involved youth but managed, at least up to the time of the interview, to avoid getting involved. Some of the interviewed youth recognized that they could get pulled into this world and actively stayed away from it. Natalie said:

*If you make yourself look like you would do stuff like that then, of course, they're gonna ask you ..but when you .. when you really are .. a really proud person .. and you really do try .. and you really are trying to get things taken care of for yourself, they're not gonna ask you.*

Dede, age 14 said:

*You always should dress appropriately cause you don't know who may be watching you and they may think of different things the way you dress – “maybe she's a tramp, maybe she sells her body”, you know. So I always wear things that .. to cover my body. I don't want .. I don't want to send a message out to people that's not good and one that just use you for your .. just for your goods.*

Nola commented:

*I don't know; that's just to me that is so nasty and if I say I'm never gonna do somethin, I pretty much say, I'm mean that's it.*

And Terry, age 18 told the interviewer:

*Like a couple of people have, like a couple of guys and and I'm just like 'no.' I'd, I'd rather just sleep on the street. There's, there's no way in hell that I would do something like that. Are you kidding me? There's no way. It's like I'd rather sleep out in the freezing cold. And not even sleep, I'll just walk all, walk all, all night ... than do that. ....I really think that's just something you just don't do. I don't know, people do it but I just.... really think you should not do it. As bad as it seems, like as bad as your situation seems you should never go to that point and like of sleeping around just to have a place to stay. Like no.....*

Montel told the interviewer:

*You can never forced into it unless like, you want to, cause I know a lot of homeless people that would not do that but they will spare change all day. That's something you must want to do to try and get money faster than just being patient. That's the quick way out, you know; it's the easiest way out.*

While some youth have been creative in their strategies to avoid victimization through commercial sexual exploitation their narratives reflect a need for housing options including youth shelters, transitional housing, permanent housing and supportive housing for homeless youth. In addition, access to funded services through mainstream programs there is a need for youth development programs that engage youth in ways that build leadership and decision-making skills. Finally, income assistance to homeless youth would help them to access educational and vocational programs.

## **CHAPTER 4: CSEC and PATH MAINTENANCE**

In the earlier chapters of this report on pathways in to CSEC some of the examples give a sense of the ways in which commercial sexual exploitation commenced in the lives of the teens we interviewed. We also suggested that there were some classic “in the life” accounts that we were told that fit almost exactly parallel with reports we have heard in the field, from those working with survivors around the country and from survivors themselves. In addition, the youth told us about short-term or one time victimization experiences of involvement in CSEC. Many of the youth indicated that they had escaped or had stopped after a short duration of involvement. Chapter 5 addresses some of their accounts of exiting CSEC.

In this chapter we take a closer look at a theme we have called “path maintenance,” based on the youth narratives about their experiences in “the life” and the factors that may be related to staying there or getting “stuck” in a life of commercial sexual exploitation. Clearly one major element of this status is force, fear and coercion by a pimp or trafficker. Many teens had great difficulty negotiating a path out. Notably these include those teens with few supports outside of “the life” and also those who are most invisible to their communities.

In describing the psychology and social psychology of the interactions that contribute to path maintenance it is important not to lose sight of the cultural and societal frame that surrounds the commercial sexual exploitation of youth in the U.S. The methods used by pimps and others to control and exploit children and teens exist in a context of a larger culture that normalizes the “pimp” and “ho” terminology and roles. In the U.S. today there is a market for baby clothing that displays the word “pimp” on a toddler’s blue shirt and “ho” on a pink shirt. Recently stores were found to stock panties for pre-adolescent girls with the phrase written on the front “who needs credit cards?” The notion of a child as a “ho” and other cultural messages that teens receive in music and the media normalizes the propositions made by pimps. As one teen told the interviewer:

*But like it’s crazy; they go from all different ranges. They don’t care if you’re 14. They don’t care if you’re 13, 12. And it’s like a lot of girls these days is doin it. . A lot of girls these days is doin it, ya.*

On the demand side of CSEC, the “john” and the societal response to these individuals who pay a child or teen for sex is an important element of the “path maintenance.” Prostituting children is a booming commercial enterprise with great demand. That these perpetrators and rapists are released or fined or sent to school so they can have their records expunged reinforces the message to youth that what happened to them is not a big deal. As two young women making reference to the widespread demographics of their “clients” / “johns” told the interviewer:

*You know, there was husbands. There was boyfriends... the ones who were married, the ones who weren’t, and the ones who were driving a luxurious car with a ring on their finger.*

*Don’t talk to me like I’m nobody (she tells the local cop on the beat) ‘cause I guarantee you your son came to see me the other day.*

Understanding the cultural context in which CSEC occurs, helps to ground these themes of path maintenance that emerged from the interview data.

### **Survival and CSEC**

To understand why youth stay “in the life” it is also important to understand these youth as survivors. In addition to victimization, coping and survival is a key theme for runaway and homeless teens (Williams, in press b). Of course the nature of this survival is complex and fraught with contradictions. To some outsiders it may barely resemble “survival.” But based on their own reports these teens have “survived” the extreme difficulties that violence in their natal homes and on the streets have presented. They have negotiated life at a very young age to deal with hunger and poverty. They see CSEC as their most recent episode of survival. Yes, in no uncertain terms they have been victimized and in some jurisdictions they are counted among the offenders and have violated the law. The complexity of their lives and their survival skills, however, often are not taken into account in common depictions of the prostituted teen. The narratives of these teens suggest that being prostituted is not only a form of sexual victimization and exploitation representing extreme vulnerability but that it is also, for some, a form of survival based coping (Goodman et al., 2009).

### **Control exercised by the Exploiters**

Exploitation and control are, of course, a major aspect of CSEC, although there may be some in the community who still would suggest that this life is the “choice” of teens rather than a survival strategy. The reality is that CSEC involves adults having sex with children and teens in exchange for money or goods. For those teens “in the life” it also involves and ultimately would not continue without a 3<sup>rd</sup> party exploiter—the “pimp” or “daddy.” This person, usually a male, procures the child for the “customer-exploiter-john” and benefits from the exchange. The primary feature of CSEC is the status of the exploited person as a child. Sex with a child is achieved through coercion, manipulation, grooming or force and although this varies by state, without consent.

### **Force and violence**

In addition to the power and authority that comes with the older age of the pimp (in relation to the victim) the narratives of the teens we interviewed provided extensive evidence of force and violence. Interestingly the force and violence were not as often used to pull the teen into the life, but more commonly relied upon to make her stay. Extreme violence by a pimp has had the impact of leading to teens exiting “the life” as is described in the next chapter. The violence reported by our participants that kept them in “the life” often was directed at others but executed before an audience of other young girls, thus maximizing its impact on maintaining control over the young women and girls. Many of the accounts of violence reported to the interviewer were about violence her pimp or another pimp perpetrated against another female.

*I mean sometimes you get some pimps that are nice but then you get other pimps, like the pimp that I went to (another distant state) with. He whooped this girl's ass right in front of me.*

*And when you come out your mouth wrong for your daddy you get slapped. Um, I don't remember what she said but she said somethin' and she had her hair like up into a ponytail.. he picked her up by her ponytail off her feet and it was just like, pow!, slapped the s \_\_\_ out of her.*

*He had other friends that were pimps. And I seen them do some things to some of the girls that work for them. But luckily I never went through any of that. <Like what kind of things?> Beat 'em. Um, just embarrassing, like humiliating things in public. Slap 'em in public, um, I seen some of 'em stripped-- like if they weren't/like when I was working at the hotels in the day, they'd be other girls in other rooms, they'd have stripped their clothes off and throw 'em out if they didn't have their money. Um, them type of things.*

Violence, rules and control were not used extensively to bring the youth into prostitution possibly because the pimp did not want to severely injure a young woman whose body he could sell. Instead, many of the violent incidents appeared to be directed at maintaining the profitability of the business of CSEC. Anyone who endangered the broad profitability for the pimp could expect violence in return.

*Now it's very, very dangerous for a female to go out there and do it on their own because if a pimp know that you don't have a pimp or what they call "daddy"... that's so dangerous. I've seen people get shot in the head in front of me over it*

*It wasn't like he was threatening me not to leave, it was just most telling me not to snitch. Not to tell anything. Or you know like giving any information. <So did he threaten you if you left then?> No.*

This last example reflects the violence that pimps used to keep their activities profitable. If a child was arrested the most important thing for a pimp was that she not "snitch." His threats were directed at extinguishing that possibility to protect his "business." This is an important distinction that should not be lost on law enforcement and others who attempt to extract testimony against a pimp from a child. While she may not have experienced physical violence directly at his hands, it is likely that she witnessed it often and has learned that dire consequences will be meted out to the snitch.

### **Psychological manipulation and isolation**

It is likely that the psychological manipulation the pimp employs is the most common tool he uses to bring a teen into "the life." We have heard how pimps "romance" teens, starting off as a "boyfriend" who showers her with gifts and attention. This works, especially with young women who have received little from their families or foster families.

*He treated me nice. Spent a thousand dollars on me. Got my nails done, my eyebrows arched. My hair, I had weaves. He just spent a whole lot of money on me. And I felt like a queen. Everything I needed he'd get it for me.*

*I felt like a Queen.... I never felt like a queen before.*

*I went shopping all the time; always got my nails done, always had my hair done but it was on his terms, when he wanted to go.*

Once the child was in “the life” and had experienced its traumatic consequences, the pimp appeared to know exactly when to reel her back in to “daddy.” As one young woman told the interviewer:

*I mean when you get the money it feels good... When you're buying the stuff from the money it feels good when you have the cars, the clothes, the jewelry. All that feels good but at the point in time when you're jumpin' in and out of cars, sleepin' with this guy and then goin'... to sleep with that guy, you feel nasty... You feel like... like you're not wanted ... and that's when the pimp comes in to make you feel like you're wanted... You know what I mean?*

But pimps also used more than affection and attention to keep the teen trapped in “the life.”

*He would always just remind me, “you have nowhere else to go, if you go back home you're gonna go to jail. I take care of you, ain't nobody else gonna take care of you like that.”*

These narratives exemplified the isolation effectively fostered by the pimp was highly successful, especially with those teens who were most isolated and alienated from family and community. If she had any potentially supportive family ties the pimp threatened to tell those family members. In addition, to insure isolation and protect against a snitch, he cut off all means of direct communication:

*He took my cell when I met him,... when he introduced me to what I guess was gonna happen... he gave me a cell phone and I guess he would give his clients the number and they would call me when they were on the way to the room.*

As life in “the life” continued the isolation of the victim grew stronger and as Pam, 19, told the interviewer:

*I keep myself distant from everybody cause I don't feel like they approve of me ..*

### **The strength of the commercial market**

The narratives of the teens suggest that the strength of the commercial market for the pimp and the ways in which “the life” met some of the needs of the youth (appealing to a desire for “fun,” “material reward”, and “success”) played a central role in path maintenance—in keeping them in “the life.”

The pimps made money. That much was clear based on the accounts of the youth. When one teen was asked, “How much money would you usually give him in a day?” she responded, “probably like, 500 to 800 dollars.” <Was that 7 days a week?> “Yeah. Sometimes not on Sunday though.” But amounts of over a thousand a day for each female were commonly reported to the interviewer.

Of course none of the money was given to the teen.

*He would buy the food. He took all the money,..anything I needed I had to ask him.*

*Um, typically ho's are not supposed to have no money. All the money goes to your daddy. Your daddy's supposed to take care of you. He's supposed to take you shopping. He's supposed to put minutes on your phone. He's supposed to buy you food, supposed to give your family money if they need money - everything. He's supposed to be pretty much like your personal bank. That's what it's supposed to be.*

This financial control was a technique used by the pimps but also simply a basic part of the business of CSEC. Such a business focus was clearly evidenced in many accounts of the pimps' behaviors and also in the young women's understanding of this "job."

*There was three other girls with us. One of them was pregnant and we ended up dropping her off in (another state) because she was pregnant.... Every state, every new state that we went to...we started working and we'd make some money in that state and then we'll stay in a hotel for a night and then we'll leave the next day and go to another state and make the money in that state and so it's like a ... trail 'til we get to (the other side of the country).*

Leaving a pregnant teen in another state should not be viewed as a good will gesture but rather it reflected a pimp's business decision in executing a cross-country business plan that demanded no malfunctions.

Some young women's accounts also made it clear that they understood the financial enterprise. One teen referred to being in "the life" as her "job." And Alisha offered her market assessment:

*When you're a female you can make any street a strip and that's what we call it, a strip. Any person, if you look good enough and if you're showin' enough, any person's gonna pull over --and that's anywhere you are.*

Another told the interviewer:

*So, once you get your dates and you get into that business you have a cell phone, you have a business phone that they call and there's calls all day. The phone don't stop ringing.. You gotta know how to work the system. If you don't know how to work the system then you don't make no money.*

Anyone who might doubt that CSEC was approached as a business by some pimps might be convinced otherwise by the description of one 16-year-old girl's first days under the control of a 30-something pimp.

*Like he would tell me, um, "One," he had a board and we/T'd sit there and he'd ... stand up and like put the stuff on the board. For instance, um, if you get a client and you're doing an in-call? How would you know the police at the door? Rather than some client?*

On a number of levels this young woman's account is striking. This pimp had within a period of less than a week brought a neglected 16-year-old he had never before met into his "employ." He then implemented a detailed training session for her and another new recruit complete with a white board and question and answer sessions.

## **Rules and social control through other players in “the game”**

This enterprise has rules that the pimp and his surrogates use for social control.

*.. you're not supposed to talk without him saying you could talk. You're not supposed to back talk. You're not supposed to leave when you want to leave. You cannot walk to the store. You can't go outside. You can't sit on the front porch.*

*You just have to do whatever he says ...No boyfriends. Nothing; you ... you have no life. You stay ... you live hotel to hotel and take calls. That's it. You just have to be obedient.*

Most of the teens were very willing to tell the interviewers these rules and recited them willingly and often with great attention to detail. Their detailed reports of the rules indicated the importance of following these rules for their own survival. One young woman told the interviewer:

*It's like...It's called “The Game”... I don't know if you've heard of it. ... it's like the pimp has female or multiple females and when he has multiple females there's always his number one girl, the girl that, you know, brings in the most money . And his number one sits up front in the front seat when he's drivin'.. Like, um, it's called the track where the girls work the streets. It's called the track and when you're on the track you have to stay in the street... when other pimps walk by, like when other guys walk by that have, that have other girls you have to put your head down. You can't look at them. You can't talk to them. You can't step on the same sidewalk as them...when you do, when you violate any of those things it's called, um, they break your pockets. ... And that means like say like if I'm on, if I'm on the date, I mean, in the streets and there's another pimp walks by and if look at him he can come and take my money that I'm makin for my pimp. ... he can just come and take it because you're disrespecting your pimp by looking at another pimp. ... And like you can't be on the same sidewalk as another pimp.*

The rules are in place to control the teens and control the market. The pimp's position in the market is enforced and bolstered by these rules and by the behaviors of the other market-makers and their willingness to follow the same rules.

*If a pimp is talkin to a ho, he has to tell her that he's a pimp. He can't just carry on a conversation with her. She needs to know from the beginning that he's a pimp. And usually they'll be like, the, the normal pimp first conversation goes, “ah yo' bitch, what's goin,” or “when you choosin up?” ...something like that.*

*You can't talk to 'em, can't look at 'em. Can't touch 'em even if they put their hands of you, you cannot touch them, can't look at them, you can't say nothing. .... So, if you talk to them or if you stay on the sidewalk it's called “being out of pocket” and you have to give that pimp the money that you have in your pocket at that time. It's pretty much a big game; that's all it is. It's just a big game...*

*Then you have to give them the money you have in your pocket at that time and then, um, let's see if I can explain it, they call your pimp and be like, “listen, your bitch is out-of-pocket.” This is what she gave me. And then you have a decision at that time, you can*



*either choose up, which means that you can go with the other pimp or you can go back to your pimp. Ya; and usually when you go back it's not a pretty sight.*

*Any pimp that you mess with they, they are experienced. They know the game, they know the ropes, they know what they supposed to do. They know how to talk to a girl. They know how to get a girl. They know it all.*

### **CSEC Path Maintenance—When teens are hidden in plain sight**

In addition to and in part because of the control of the pimp, the commercially sexually exploited teen is hidden in plain sight. She may be out on the streets, or more and more frequently, marketed on the internet, but the rules keep her in control. The fear that she has of the police is reinforced by the pimp and by her brief encounters with law enforcement. The interviewer asked one 16-year-old: “Were there times when you felt unsafe when you were out there with the clients or with other pimps?” And the teen replied, “*Not really. I was more scared of like, police.*”

In most jurisdictions there is little proactive police activity designed to identify underage youth among those who are known to be involved in prostitution. As a result the teens remain hidden. One young woman told the interviewer of her frequent encounter with police who had never seriously questioned her about her age. One night, her guard down due to intoxication, she decided to no longer remain hidden in plain sight:

*Later on that night I went (out) again and... the officers stopped me cause I was ... drunk and he said he seen me before walking around. And I just got so tired of it... I just broke down in tears. I said “I’m 15. I’m a runaway and I’ve been telling everybody I’m 24, 25 and I’m out here prostituting. I want help!”*

There are numerous examples of teen’s interactions with people in the community who could potentially have rescued them or offered other assistance--persons and business that did not take a pro-social approach but instead stood by as witness to CSEC.

One example of this comes from an account of teen’s interactions with hotel staff and management. After a teen spoke about the many times she was booked by the pimp into the same chain hotel in a suburban location, the interviewer asked, “Do you think the hotel manager knew you guys were there?” The teen replied:

*I mean, they had to...they had to know what was going on. ‘Cause it was, it was in the open. But um, I don’t really think they cared. As long as they got their money I don’t think they cared. <Did you ever think about asking anyone for help?> No, because I was underage, I was scared of like, what was going to happen and at that age I was scared of what people was going to think. So I didn’t really ask nobody for help or nothin’. I was pretty much on my own.*

The teens’ narratives reflect the nature of the entrapment in CSEC and the myriad of difficulties they encounter in exiting “the life.”

## **CHAPTER 5: ESCAPE and EXIT from CSEC**

There are many, complex, and significant barriers to exiting prostitution. The teens' self-concept and self-esteem may be damaged. Familial supervision, support, and protection are often weak or operate in just the opposite direction, to damage and harm the teens more. Their closest peers often experience the same kinds of difficulties and they themselves may even support/condone sexual exploitation via prostitution. School personnel typically are not knowledgeable enough to be on the alert for CSEC or, if they are vigilant and encounter such activities, commonly they do not have procedures, practices, and policies in place to adequately challenge and respond to it (Priebe & Suhr, 2005). Finally, communities generally do not know much about the problem and how to confront it. In short, many adolescents appear to face long odds against getting out of "the life" of prostitution because they suffer many and intense risks, have weak or nonexistent protective shields, have few resources upon which to draw, have scant (if any) exiting options, and limited capacities for resilience even if they do manage to leave the life (Friedman, 2005; Priebe & Suhr, 2005; Estes & Weiner, 2001).

Commercially sexually exploited girls interviewed who were in "the life" stated that at some junctures they felt that it was unsafe to try to leave. The level of control, both physical and mental, was so intense that they could not leave for fear of future abuse or not knowing who to turn to for help.

*Several times day... guys would, you know, call me ...and it was just the most terrifying thing ever... it just... I can never show my fear and I'm the type of person that doesn't like to show fear cause I don't cry often but several times, you know, a night I would pretend that I was in the shower but I was actually crying because I didn't know what else to do... cause I wasn't really allowed use the phone or nothing like that and I like to eat and he didn't really feed me that much and it's just I really didn't know what else to do.*

Fear and violent incidents did lead some teens to leave the pimp even at great risk to their own safety. Their lack of resources and the absence of visible community support, however, often pushed them back. In many communities if they were arrested or went to the authorities they were greeted with blame and disdain or extreme measures. While at times motivated by considerations for their safety, steps such as prosecution and confinement could trigger a re-experiencing of past traumas and, thus, being locked-up was, as the pimp had promised, even more frightening than being in "the life." Under these conditions it is not surprising that young women returned to the pimp or were at high risk for recruitment by another pimp.

### **Exiting "the life"**

We asked the young woman, "tell me a little bit about like what you made you start thinking about.... getting out of this life." She replied:

*Because it was bringing down my self-esteem. I didn't feel good no more. I wasn't ... I didn't feel connected with my family and I missed my family and I just kept getting more*

*and more into trouble, and I'm not the type .. and I wasn't the type of person who got into trouble.*

Another told us about how the violence she witnessed by the pimp against another young teenage girl who “worked” for the same pimp precipitated her leaving:

*And she was in the tub and I went in the bathroom; the whole tub was filled with water. She was bleeding from her eyes...she was bleeding from her lips. She was bleeding from her nose. She had scratches on her neck. I was just like 'oh I can't, I can't go through this. I can't.' And after I seen her I had to leave him (the pimp) ... even if I didn't have no place to go...*

For another teen, witnessing violence against another young girl also played a role in her leaving the pimp. She was present when one of the other females involved with her pimp did not follow the rules and would not help program new cell phones for “work” that night. A third female reported this to the pimp and when he returned to their location he brutally beat the young woman. The young woman told the interviewer that after she witnessed the consequences of the beating she left the pimp. She told the interviewer: “*I couldn't do anything else. I couldn't do no more.*” But she also reported that her resolve to leave her pimp was weakening. She had found support from a counselor and group but needed to confront the challenges and decision-making dilemmas raised by so many of the youth we interviewed. How could she find assistance to work through the decisions she needed to make in her life given the complete lack of emotional or material support from her family? In the face of prospects for a dismal life struggle regardless of her decision she viewed “the life” as one possible way to take care of herself, put clothes on her body, and have someone (the pimp) who would take care of her too. For her the alternative was to go home and just struggle to cope with a neglectful, criminally involved and impoverished family. Her limited support system had deteriorated and she saw the alternative of life with the pimp as a decision to “just keep struggling life.”

The account of this young woman and of several others who had “exited” the life and connected to some potentially supportive services in their communities revealed enormous risks of re-recruitment absent solutions that give youth recognition of the difficult steps they are taking and assistance locating safe places to live that do not totally discount their abilities to exercise responsible choice. Youth need to participate in planning the steps for a positive future. The teens sought opportunities to build a new, healthy support system and complete their educations. At 16 and 17 the youth often were aware of and caught up in the dwindling services available to those who are aging-out of the youth services systems.

As one young woman reminded the interviewer:

*That's why most, the majority of girls that are in this business are girls that are runaways and girls that are from the (CPS) programs. It's because they feel like they don't have nobody there for them to care for them and plus they're and putting, um, food in their stomach. They're putting on brand new clothes. They're driving in cars, getting fake names, going to clubs, you know what I'm saying that's the life to a 15- and 14-year-old girl. ... and when they get older they realize that that's not the way they want to go and they want to do something else like me. When I got older I realized like I don't want to*

*be doing this all my life. You know what I mean, like I don't want to do it all my life. Please, I'm a lot smarter than that.*

In addition to social services, law enforcement had a role to play in exiting “the life.” They did not always play the same role in every jurisdiction. Missed opportunities for police to detect CSEC or intervene when risk for CSEC was high have been noted in earlier sections. When face-to-face with a teen victim of commercial sexual exploitation police often view her as an offender (Halter, 2009) or blame the victim for her situation.

As a young woman who had been injured in a fight with a pimp described her interactions with the police:

*They told me ... like, “it's your fault,” you know? And I said, “Excuse me? I'm the one who is sitting here ... (beaten up) .... and you say it's my fault?”*

Youth reported that the police had no alternatives available to help them escape “the life.” An arrest of the young person was more likely to occur when they were not (or claimed to not be) pimp-involved. But such an arrest might logically drive the youth to a pimp. In the absence of coordinated community responses (such as the SEEN program in Boston) police may have viewed arrest as the only option available to them.

Police interactions with teens were discussed often in the interviews. The youth experiences highlight difficulties in the encounters with police. As we noted in an earlier section, teens in “the life” were often more afraid of the police than the pimp. Teens, however, also told the interviewer of positive connections with law enforcement:

*He said, “what's goin' on” and actually sat there and listened to me while he was taking me to the station... and I still talk to him to this day ... I just... feel like they are family. They helped me out a lot.*

Participants also discussed a number of encounters with law enforcement in which the officers on patrol missed an opportunity to remove a teen from an exploitive situation. Unlike policies relative to domestic violence, when conducting filed interviews officers seldom removed the teen from the control of the adults or others she was with, even by asking her to have a more private conversation out of earshot of the others. For example, one young teen reported being parked late at night in a vehicle with a 32-year-old man when the police pulled up and asked her, “you okay, young lady?” And she responded, “yeah, I'm good.” At that point instead of taking steps to speak privately with the minor or more carefully assess her relationship to the man, the police reportedly said to the male, “Well, weren't you over here with another girl/two other girls last week? I mean, dude, you've got to stop doing this.” Such interaction suggests that the police had suspicions about the intent of the male but did not act further on them.

In another account provided by a participant, the response of police reflected not only a missed opportunity to assist a teen but direct police misconduct. As the young woman told the interviewer:

*I had got in a car .. with a guy and I guess the police officer was following us. When we parked.. he put on his lights and we got out of the car and he's like "what are you doing?" To which she replied “Nothin', this is my friend.”..You know you have to make up stories. "I have a boyfriend so we're not allowed to do anything in my house, you*

*know, I know it's embarrassing but we come out here to....." ... and the police officer is like "oh, I know what you're doing, just give me the money and you can go." Ya, he wanted the money and so for the longest time I'm telling him I didn't have no money and then I just finally gave in, I'm like, it's not worth it, I'll get another date .*

On several occasions police assistance came as a result of proactive steps taken by the prostituted teen. One young woman told the interviewer:

*I just packed my things and I went across to the police station and I told 'em I said "look, I'm on the run. I've been on the run since I was 14-years-old. ... you can reach my (caseworker) on this number."*

The police got in touch with the caseworker and in a few days the teen was provided with transportation to the state she had left some years earlier. Sadly at that time there were no specialized services for CSEC survivors and this teen ran away again, back to a former pimp.

Many of the teens we interviewed recounted interactions that had occurred in other jurisdictions or which occurred across the U.S. before increased training and community coordination around CSEC had occurred. There are some new programs in place to begin to address these issues and help teens exit "the life." Recommendations and implications that follow are built on these developments and grounded in the narratives of the youth who shared their experiences with us in the Pathways Study.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS—IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE**

The Pathways Project has examined pathways into and out of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) via prostitution with the goal of providing useful information to practice and policy communities (including juvenile and criminal justice systems, social service and public health providers, not-for-profit youth-serving agencies, and communities) to prevent CSEC and increase safety and well being of victims. The study was designed to understand perspectives of the interviewed youth; to identify the factors (individual, family, peer, school, and community contexts) associated with the commencement of CSEC; to identify factors that surround its maintenance and escalation; and to identify factors that impede or empower exiting from or overcoming exploitative situations. Our research included primarily qualitative methods with a focus on integrating researchers and grassroots organizers into the design, data collection, data analysis and dissemination. In the Boston metropolitan area and in Washington, DC, we interviewed 61 adolescents (aged 14-19) who experienced sexual violence via teen prostitution or who were runaways at risk for such commercial sexual exploitation.

Our research called for interviewing boys as well as girls with a clear recognition that boys comprise a significant but understudied portion of the CSEC population. While we achieved many interviews with boys, our field-based interviewing methods and more ethnographic-style approach was not well attuned to gaining access to commercially sexually exploited boys. More research on boys that builds on the work of Curtis and colleagues (2008) is need.

In this section we summarize the most salient points and themes we extracted from the narratives of the youth we interviewed and the implications for policy and practice. This report has emphasized the voices of the youth. There are, of course other voices to be heard and recommendations to be made by those in our communities charged with responding to this serious problem. It has been the intent of this project to help give voice to the youth and provide their input to those who may not have an opportunity to hear their voices. Reading this section is no substitute for reading the actual words of the teens who shared their experiences with us.

### **The need to change the way we think about CSEC and commercially sexually exploited youth**

Analyses of the narratives of homeless, runaway and sexually victimized (prostituted and trafficked) teens suggest the need for a more nuanced understanding of both harm and survival that has important implications for practice and policy communities responding to human trafficking within and across borders.

Our research found that coping and survival is a key theme for high-risk runaway and homeless teens. The nature of their survival is complex and to some outsiders may barely resemble “survival.” But based on their own reports they have “survived” the extreme difficulties that violence in their natal homes and on the streets have presented. They have negotiated life at a very young age to deal with hunger and poverty. They see this as survival. Agency staff and policy-makers need to understand how important this identification as “survivor” is tin the

approach they take to assisting teens victimized by CSEC and why young women and men may rebuff their attempts at “rescue.” Some teens may believe that they have in large part already “saved” themselves simply by still being alive.

The teen narratives reflect themes of harm and survival and even agency that any portrayal of these teens as one-dimensional “victims” or “offenders” misses. Yes, in no uncertain terms they have been victimized and in some jurisdictions they have also violated the law. The complexity of their lives and their survival skills, however, often are not taken into account in common depictions of the prostituted teen. This victim image may garner the support of charities and politicians but this victim label may do them a great disservice in the long run because the portrayal of the weak, “innocent,” helpless victim is directly challenged by the teen the police or a would-be service provider encounters in the field. Instead of a sad-eyed victim they confront a strong, willful, survivor who looks and acts quite differently from the victims portrayed in the media. That survivor may be mislabeled “offender” because she does not conform to the stereotype of victim.

There are even more difficulties when this perception of victims impacts the policies and services that are put in place. To escape CSEC teens need a safe place to stay with nutritious food and services that respect their “survivor” status and foster resilience. But often there are no services that meet their needs. Some teens see the streets as less harmful and more likely to help them “survive” than the programs offered in their communities. Teens may be understandably reluctant to turn themselves over to adults, especially when they have found so many adults they have encountered to be untrustworthy.

Older teens need places to stay where they may be able to maintain some (appropriate) levels of autonomy and be empowered to make the situation work. Our interviews with prostituted teens reveal a long history of highly destructive families fraught with violence and dysfunction. Many of the teens have been in numerous foster care settings or have lived on the streets or with no permanent home for months and even years. They often have little trust in the child welfare systems that they have encountered in the past. Their experiences and the evidence available about their survival based coping skills suggest a need for the development of meaningful partnerships between youth and social services. Without such partnerships that provide the youth a pathway to achieve freedom from the life of prostitution and the control of the pimp and without some meaningful control over their lives (including in many cases freedom from their families) (Bittle, 2002) there is little likelihood of success. Service providers need to understand that while victimization via CSEC is damaging, for some throwaway youth it can be part of their survival-focused coping/ micro control (Goodman et al. 2009).

Implementing an approach that would meet the needs of prostituted teens requires a shift in the way we understand social control of youth and a major cognitive shift in how we view the relationship between the states, teens and their families. The narratives of teens who have been prostituted underscore the urgency of this need along with the complexity of making this policy change and putting the appropriate empowering supports in place.

As has been increasingly recognized in the literature on resilience and coping there are some who exhibit exemplary outcomes after adversity, those who while not exceptional in their

functioning show positive development in the context of adversity, and finally those who may initially show negative consequences of trauma but over time recover adaptive functioning (Banyard & Williams, 2007). Researchers have challenged models of resilience that reflect a linear pattern of increasing growth across time (Harvey, 1996; Barringer, 1992; Banyard & Williams, 2007). Luthar et al. (2000b) suggest that there are developmental progressions to adaptation and survival and that new strengths but also new vulnerabilities may emerge with changing life circumstances. Patterns of resilience may thus be better represented as a spiral than a straight ascending line. This research on prostituted teens may be best understood in the context of such a spiral of harm and coping, recovery and resilience. Determining the trajectory will require future study of the lives of high risk runaway and prostituted teens over the lifespan. The narratives of these prostituted teens suggest that being prostituted is not only a form of sexual victimization and exploitation representing extreme vulnerability but that it is also, for some, a form of survival.

### **Unique Challenges of CSEC for Program Development and Policy**

There are unique aspects of CSEC that are challenging for most systems that have been developed to provide services for youth. These challenges include:

- Youth victimized by CSEC and those at high risk frequently reside in and cross multiple jurisdictions even on a daily basis (many hundreds of communities were mentioned by the interviewed teens). The multijurisdictional nature of the problem calls for innovative coordinated responses by all parts of the system (social, legal, medical, etc.) in multiple jurisdictions and willingness to cross jurisdictional boundaries to provide services for youth;
- Many of the teens involved in CSEC are throwaway and disconnected youth. This complicates the process of identifying children in need of services in any jurisdiction. It also complicates treatment planning because often the youth have no adult family members who are prepared for or capable of caring for them;
- Youth who have been victimized via CSEC have often experienced complex trauma-including witnessing violence, neglect, abuse, and sexual violence that results in traumatic behavior responses that may inhibit their ability to reach out for or trust in the support being offered. Furthermore, a lack of trust or sense of worthlessness may lead teens to run away from assistance and supports. Special care must be taken devising programs that will draw youth in rather than recreating for them the distinct feeling that they are once again being abused, neglected or violated.

### ***Comprehensive training is critical for communities***

An obvious key to engaging an exploited youth is being able to identify him or her. However, due to the underground and transient nature of this form of CSEC, the lack of awareness and understanding of the problem by providers and law enforcement, and the complex psychological influence of the perpetrators, identifying exploited youth has been a tremendous challenge.



(Clawson, H. & Dutch, N., 2008; Friedman, 2005). For this reason, the sexual exploitation of children has been referred to as an epidemic and the most hidden form of child abuse in the US (Estes & Weiner, 2001).

A number of training programs have been developed in communities (examples include: My Life My Choice, Boston; Girls Educational and Mentoring Services - GEMS, New York; Standing Against Global Exploitation - SAGE, San Francisco; Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition, San Diego; Polaris Project, Washington DC; Center to End Adolescent Sexual Exploitation - CEASE, Atlanta; Breaking Free, Minneapolis; You Are Not Alone - YANA, Baltimore; Paul & Lisa, Hartford; PROMISE, Chicago; National Center for Missing and Exploited Children - NCMEC, Alexandria; Children of the Night, Los Angeles). In 2007, the Salvation Army partnered with GEMS, Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition and Polaris Project for the Community Capacity Intervention Project (CCIP) with the goal of initiating a coordinated and well-informed community response to CSEC in five cities: Atlantic City, Chicago, Denver, San Diego and Washington DC. The first step to the development of a response in each city was the completion of a 4-day comprehensive training on CSEC for local stakeholders and providers. The University of Southern California evaluated CCIP and found the trainings to be quantitatively effective in increasing knowledge, attitude and skill among the multidisciplinary audience (Ferguson, K. & Soydan, H.). The benefits of training were further supported by another study that identified training “smart and often” as a promising strategy for identifying victims (Clawson, H. & Dutch, N., 2008).

The Pathways project findings suggest that training for social service providers, therapists, teachers, and other adults who frequently may come into contact with CSEC involved youth, in addition to helping them understand the issue of CSEC, must provide guidance in developing the specialized services both the larger community and the youth need. Our findings also underscore the need to involve those who work with domestic violence and run shelters for battered women, substance abuse treatment program staffs, those who operate shelters for homeless adults as well as youth and school personal. Such training should include:

- Developing programming designed to confront social norms that support CSEC;
- Enhancing peer support for preventing sexual exploitation;
- Developing social networks for teen survival including positive uses of the internet for outreach and services for youth and social networking for positive change;
- Rethinking and helping to build communities of support for teens;

**Specific components of community and social service response that require implementation for the prevention and control of CSEC.**

- Funding and implementation of both emergency and transitional shelters with personnel who are qualified to help prostituted and sexually exploited children.

- Providing the comprehensive types of services we expect other countries to provide for internationally trafficked victims. These include rehabilitation, health care, locating communities of support, and reintegration;
- More support is needed for programs that provide youth with a safe place to stay, nutritious food, positive support networks that address their needs and empower them to make safe choices; and intervention for trauma and for behavioral issues that make it difficult for them to function in traditional settings.
- Developing programs that are far more intentional in reinforcing the connection to key adults.
- Addressing the issue of balancing family connection with the protection of the child. Assuring that children are protected from abuse by interventions and removal from dangerous and abusive situation. Providing services for youth behavioral issues that may not require removal from their homes.
- Developing comprehensive programs to assist youth who are aging out of the child welfare system.
- Increasing reliance on a “Youth Development” model to maximize participation of youth, support youth autonomy and foster their strengths for survival. Recognize and support youth “agency” especially through utilizing youth as peer mentors.
- Identifying youth as peer/ community leaders who can be involved in helping youth avoid and exit CSEC.
- Identifying programs that interact with prostituted teens but may not have been included in early prevention efforts in program development and coordination—including domestic violence shelters and schools.
- Developing not only coordinated community responses but also multijurisdictional and coordinated national responses that are designed not only for the benefit of law enforcement and prosecution but also for providing services and support for youth whose lives span multiple jurisdictions.
- Increasing community awareness so more community members can provide support and pro-social response to CSEC involved and high risk youth in their communities.
- Developing ways to use electronic media and social networking to reach youth and provide them with information on where to find support and also how to keep in touch with program staff.

This study was not designed to assess the mental health of participants. Such a study is needed to plan and provide appropriate interventions to address child traumatic stress and behavioral problems. As we learn more from the victims of CSEC we have come to understand that theories of child traumatic stress and conceptualizations developed from research on other types of child sexual abuse, for example intrafamilial child sexual abuse, may not be sufficient for understanding the complexities of the social context of CSEC. Many CSEC victims are

adolescents and this is a more challenging stage of the life course in many ways. In general, our observation has been that while the community can muster concern for pre-pubescent, sexually abused, children this concerned response is less often forthcoming when the victims are adolescents. Perhaps this is because of the challenges of dealing with adolescents who have begun to more clearly form their own identities and desires and because, when compared to younger children, they have a greater level of integration into the community. This makes societal responses necessarily more complex and requires the involvement and coordination of more individuals, community groups and institutions. Seldom has the child sexual abuse literature addressed these special issues of interventions with adolescents.

### **Direct Law Enforcement Efforts at the Perpetrators**

A large national survey of law enforcement found a significant indicator of whether human trafficking cases were investigated to be their agency's understanding and awareness of the problem (Farrell, A., McDevitt, J. & Fahy, S., 2008). To address this challenge, many organizations need to improve law enforcement knowledge, understanding and skills for identifying and responding to at risk teens. In addition:

- Training of law enforcement (not just those in special units) is needed to help police identify and assist at-risk and prostituted teens and to improve skills for communicating with them and connecting them to service providers;
- Police need training on ways to detect the juveniles amongst those persons they question or arrest for prostitution. An arrest that provides a teen who has presented fake ID with an adult identity backed up by her own fingerprints means that in future arrests for prostitution this teen will more easily pass as an adult and be summarily treated as such;
- Police need to have available alternatives for safe shelter (not lock down) if they want teens to be willing to talk and assist in the prosecution of pimps and rapists (the "johns" who pay for sex with them);
- Police, prosecutors and youth public defenders need to participate in innovative coordinated responses and extensive practitioner collaboration. -- CSEC cases are challenging for systems (e.g., youth reside in and cross many jurisdictions).

Today in response to the prostitution of children, there is evidence that many of the same rationalizations offered 30 years ago to deflect attention from the criminal aspects of perpetration of intra-familial child sexual abuse are employed. The arguments that the girl "asked" for it, "enjoyed" it or "seduced" the male or that he did not know she was under the age of consent are used to defend policies that focus on arrest and control of the prostituted juvenile and release of the customer or "john" who often could be charged with rape of a minor. These approaches reflect justifications which rationalize and neutralize the culpability of the person who pays to have sexual intercourse with a child or underage teen (Estes & Weiner, 2001; Flowers, 2001). While it is true that in the 1970s and 1980s children who were victims of intra-familial child sexual abuse (CSA) were not commonly arrested or prosecuted as happens with CSE victims today, it is useful to recall that in the early stages of the discovery of CSA (Herman, 1981) it was

common for the young teen to be the one removed from the home and viewed as “incorrigible” or as a person in need of supervision based on her alleged “misbehaviors” (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 2004). In the 1970s it was not unheard of for the authorities to place female teen victims of incest in youth detention settings ostensibly for the purpose of “protecting” these victims while avoiding “contamination” of other “wards of the state” who resided in group homes and community settings. In truth this was a means of controlling these teens. The incest survivor was feared for her advanced sexual knowledge and “promiscuity” suggesting once again that, for girls, victimization is one short step in a pathway to the juvenile justice system (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 2004).

Although they often may find themselves kept in secure detention, recent research indicates that minors involved in the sex trade or trafficking who come into contact with the police are as likely to be viewed as victims as offenders (Halter, 2009). Our available social and legal responses to commercially sexually exploited children and youth, however, often make such an assessment of little practical difference for the teen victim. Indeed, in the U.S. minors who are found to have traded sex for money may also be arrested and charged in criminal courts or even when viewed as victims they may be threatened with such charges if they do not cooperate with the authorities. Recent research reveals that U.S. law enforcement personnel are inconsistent in their treatment of juveniles involved in prostitution (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2004; Halter, 2009). This inconsistency may reflect the conflict between law enforcement driven criminalization of prostituted youth and application of other statutes and regulations that define sexual contact by an adult with a person under 18 as a reportable act of child maltreatment. Indeed child, welfare agencies may place responsibility on the offending adults or on other adults who failed to protect the youth.

The empirical evidence about the criminal justice interactions with prostituted teens and the impact of the system response on these youth is scant. Until such research is conducted, we must turn to evidence related to practice with teens charged with other types of offenses. We have seen evidence that increased criminalization of youth and application of harsh sanctions has generally not deterred these individuals, but, in many cases, these juveniles go on to commit more frequent and more serious crimes (Frazier, Bishop & Lanza-Kaduce, 1999). In addition, prosecution is likely to be disproportionately applied to minority youth. Although the prosecution of prostituted teens had not been studied empirically, the Pathways Study findings suggest that it is similarly unlikely that such action will have a significant deterrent effect on the behaviors of the teen or the pimp.

Some have argued that recent changes in prosecutorial policies or family court statutes that allow prostituted teens to escape prosecution will be a boon for the pimps who, as a result, will find that such changes make it easy to quickly get those identified by police as under-age back out “on the streets” with no consequences or interruption of profit. Others suggest that the pimps may even become more inclined to target and recruit teens, knowing these teens will not be prosecuted. But this argument misses the point that with a pro-prosecution of teen victims’ policy in place, under-age girls are most likely to hide their age from law enforcement. Unfortunately, such under-age females then often see the pimp as the one person who can protect her from the “system” and likely incarceration. In addition, the threat of prosecution of a juvenile may increase the likelihood that during all interactions with the police the teen will try to hide her young age and, when arrested, attempt (often successfully) to pass herself off as an adult .

### **Justice calls for more arrests and serious charges lodged against the “pimps” and “johns.”**

Achieving justice and social control of prostitution requires a law enforcement focus on the purveyors of sex with a child—the pimps—and also on the demand side focusing on the customers or “johns.” Evidence suggests that customers’ decisions to engage in prostitution are more free and consensual than those of prostitutes (Monto, 2004). More research is needed on strategies to reduce the demand side of prostitution. Recommitting law enforcement efforts to arrest of perpetrators should be easy; however, prosecuting the pimps is not unlike interdiction in the drug trade where finding the kingpins or bosses requires more resources for investigations that are likely to cross state and even national boundaries. Thus far in most jurisdictions the major law enforcement strategy has been to “clean up” prostitution through a focus on arrests of prostitutes and customers, often using sting operations. When these mostly street or internet-based sting operations occur it is unlikely that the third party exploiters, the pimps and purveyors of sex are apprehended. More coordinated time consuming coordination of law enforcement and prosecution efforts are required to reach the individuals and networks. Sustained and coordinated efforts applied by a law enforcement focus on pimps are likely necessary before more meaningful success will be achieved.

Some jurisdictions have decided not to eliminate the prosecution of prostituted teens but to make it a rarely used option, offering teens the “opportunity” to escape prosecution. In these jurisdictions there are many difficulties faced in an attempt to encourage the teens to regain trust the authorities. To that end, anecdotal experience in cities such as Boston have shown that it is important that the justice system not *renege* on promises too quickly and that prosecutors, judges, law enforcement, and social service providers understand the complexities of the prostituted teens’ victimization experiences and connection to the pimp or others in “the life.” Exiting the web of relationships and social problems that contribute to a youth’s vulnerability to commercial sexual exploitation is likely to be a process that requires some second chances. These second chances may not be forthcoming unless the juvenile and criminal justice system actors are educated about these matters. The success of these approaches requires careful evaluation and documentation.

A review of the family background and experiences of many prostituted teens reveals a long history of highly destructive families fraught with violence and dysfunction. Many of the teens have been in numerous foster care settings or have lived on the streets or with no permanent home for months and even years. They often have little trust in the child welfare systems that some of them have encountered first hand or heard about from others. Their experiences and survival based coping skills suggest a successful strategy for care and support of these youth may be achieved only through the development of meaningful partnerships between the youth and social services (Williams, in press b). Without such partnerships that provide the youth a pathway to achieve freedom from incarceration and some meaningful control over their lives (including in many cases freedom from their families) (Bittle, 2002) there may be little likelihood of success. Such new partnerships need to be implemented and carefully evaluated. The narratives of teens who have been prostituted underscore the urgency of this need but also must be balanced against the complexity of making necessary policy changes to put appropriate empowering supports in place.

It is not enough to develop such programs for youth and to change the way they are treated in the criminal and juvenile justice systems, approaches to stopping prostitution of teens require a broader societal focus. Such an approach should address the social conditions that propel teens into prostitution including family violence, lack of financial and material resources, and sexual socialization of males that feeds demand for teen prostitution and supports patriarchal social relations that facilitate pimps having power over teen girls. Meaningful partnerships are needed between youth and social services to help the teens regain control over their lives.

There are limitations to the current study. The most important of which is that it used a small sample not demographically representative of all prostituted teens or CSEC survivors. More work in this area is needed. However, given the relative paucity of research this study adds the voices of victims to discussions of ways to prevent commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth. Future research focusing on the issue of harm and survival for prostituted teens over time will be important. Such research also will have important implications for social responses to survivors of CSEC that are empowering and build on survivor's strengths.

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## APPENDIX

### Pathways to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children – A Life Course Perspective General In-depth Qualitative Interview Questions

We are talking to young people to learn about their experiences in their own words. This is a time when you can talk about your life--- the good and bad and what you want for the future. Your life story and your thoughts and suggestions will be confidential but your experiences and ideas will help others learn from you so kids growing up today can have a better life—especially when they are trying to survive life (on the streets). I have some questions I plan to ask but mostly want to hear your story the way you want to tell it.

1. Please tell me the top three most important things about your life as it is now.
2. Tell me about the most recent good day you had...
3. Tell me about the most recent bad day you had...
4. Tell me about the first time you ran away or left home.
5. Tell me about the last time you ran away or left home.
6. What are the most important parts of your life story that shaped you into who you are today?
7. Now taking us up to the present day, do you have a (romantic) relationship with someone you feel emotionally and/or physically close to? Tell me about it (or the most recent relationship)
8. We are interested in teens' day to day lives. What happens on a "normal" or "typical" day for you these days?
9. How often have you been in a situation where you didn't know where you were going to stay or where you were going to get your next meal? What did you do?
10. How do you get stuff—get the things you want?
11. People have different ways of making it in the world and of getting things they want. Have you ever traded sex to get something you wanted? What happened?
12. Has anyone ever forced you to give sex for money or other goods? What happened?  
(alternate question if has not happened to interviewee): Do you know anyone who has done this? What happened?
  - a. When you trade sex or sexual activity which of types of sexual activities have you been involved in?
  - b. Was there a time when you started trading sex or sexual activity for money or other things more and more? How old were you? What led to this? What happened?
  - c. Have you thought about leaving or moving on? Getting out? Why?
  - d. If you did leave or move on, what do you see happening?
  - e. Do you know someone who has left or moved on? How did it go for them?
13. Are there times when you feel unsafe or frightened?
  - a. What do you do? When was the last time you felt safe?
14. Are there things that you feel strong or healthy about?
  - a. What makes you feel strong or healthy?
15. Where do you want to be next year at this time? Five years from now?

- 16. In the past year have you gone to a doctor or a health clinic? (NO—skip to next Q).  
Tell me about going there, how did you hear about it/ select this place to go to and what was that experience like?**
- 17. Was there a time in the past year you needed to see a health care provider and you didn't go? Why not? What kind of help did you need? What would make it more likely you would go?**
- 18. What has your interaction been with police?
  - a. How should the police treat people your age?**
- 19. Young people sometimes go to youth drop in centers, community centers, shelters, counselors or calling hotlines-- Have you been to or used youth drop in centers, community centers, shelters, counselor or called a hotline? When was the last time you went to or used one of these?**
- 20. If you see yourself needing help where do you go?**
- 21. Here is a list of types of people and types of programs. Please tell me if any of the following have been helpful, made no difference, or made things worse?
  - a. Someone in your neighborhood?
  - b. A teacher?
  - c. Someone at a school you attended?
  - d. Someone in a recreation program or community center?
  - e. A counselor or therapist?
  - f. A social worker?
  - g. A health care worker or doctor?
  - h. A police officer?
  - i. A probation officer?
  - j. A lawyer?
  - k. A minister or clergy?
  - l. A friend?
  - m. A family member?
  - n. Some other person who was helpful in your life?
  - o. Was there anything else in your life that was helpful?**
- 22. Have you talked to any of these people about (*prostitution—other issues raised*)?  
What did they say? What did they do? How did this help or make things worse?**
- 23. What (if anything) do you think you need right now to make life better for you?**
- 24. What would you recommend to someone your age or younger who is following in your footsteps?**
- 25. Is there anything else you feel it is important for us to know about that we did not talk about? What?**