4. WHO ARE THE VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

4.1 Commonalities Among Victims

Risk Factors for Trafficking Victims

- Age
- Poverty
- Gender inequality
- Unemployment
- Sexual abuse
- Health/mental health problems
- Police/political corruption
- High crime

While current stereotypes often depict the victims of human trafficking as innocent young girls who are seduced or kidnapped from their home countries and forced into the sex industry (Bruckert & Parent, 2002), it is not just young girls who are trafficked. Men, women, and children of all ages can fall prey to traffickers for purposes of sex and/or labor. Victims may be trafficked into the United States from other countries or may be foreign citizens already in the United States (legally or illegally) who are desperate to make a living to support themselves and their families in the United States or in their home countries (Florida University Center for Advancement of Human Rights, 2003).

Regardless of sex, age, immigration status, or citizenship, certain commonalities exist among victims of trafficking (for both sex and labor), such as their vulnerability to force, fraud, or coercion (Protection Project, 2002). Traffickers prey on those with few economic opportunities and those struggling to meet basic needs. Traffickers take advantage of the unequal status of women and girls in disadvantaged countries and communities, and capitalize on the demand for cheap, unprotected labor and the promotion of sex tourism in some countries (Aronowitz, 2001; Miller & Stewart, 1998). Victims of human trafficking, both international and domestic, share other characteristics that place them at risk for being trafficked. These include poverty, young age, limited education, lack of work opportunities, lack of family support (e.g., orphaned, runaway/throwaway, homeless, family members collaborating with traffickers), history of previous sexual abuse, health or mental health challenges, and living in vulnerable areas (e.g., areas with police corruption and high crime) (Salvation Army, 2006).

Victims of international trafficking may be trying to escape from internal strife such as civil war and economic crises (Aiko, 2002). Many international trafficking victims originate from poor countries where human trafficking has become a significant source of income (Newman, 2006). Traffickers exploit conditions in impoverished countries in Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa, and Latin America that offer few employment opportunities and are characterized by high rates of organized crime and violence against women and children, discrimination against women, government corruption, political instability, and armed conflict (Bell, 2001; U.S. Department of State, 2005). Many trafficking victims are merely trying to remove themselves from unstable or unsatisfactory living conditions. According to the latest figures from HHS (as reported in the DoJ Annual Report to Congress), of those certified as victims of human trafficking in 2006, the countries of origin with the highest populations of victims were El Salvador (28%) and Mexico (20%) (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).

Traffickers often deceive their victims through false promises of economic opportunities that await them in more affluent destination countries, such as the United States. Thus routes of trafficking often flow from less developed countries to neighboring countries or industrialized nations with higher standards of living (Miko, 2000).

Many of those who accept offers from traffickers find themselves in situations where their documents are destroyed, their families are threatened with harm, or they are bonded by a debt they will not be able to repay (Human Trafficking Organization, 2006). Traffickers use threats, intimidation, and violence, as well as deception and trickery, to force or lure victims to engage in sex or labor in slavery-like conditions.

A Federal Case of Domestic Labor Trafficking

Labor camp owners recruit homeless African-American addicts from shelters throughout the Southeast, including Tampa, Miami, Orlando, and New Orleans, to work at labor camps, promising food and shelter for only $50 a week. The camp owners picked up the prospective workers in vans and transported them to isolated labor camps in North Florida and North Carolina. Once on site, the workers were supplied with crack cocaine. The cost of the drug was deducted from their pay checks. Every evening camp owners gave workers the opportunity to buy crack, untaxed generic beer and cigarettes from the company store. Most workers spiraled into debt. On average, workers were paid about 30 cents on the dollar after deductions. The case broke in 2005 after a Federal raid on the North Florida camp. Advocates were stunned that the camps could so easily exploit American citizens. *(Naples Daily News, September 23, 2006)*

Victims of labor trafficking may be promised well-paying jobs, yet once in the destination country they find themselves trapped in substandard living and working conditions. In these situations, abuse can range from the imposition of excessive working hours to verbal and physical abuse to sexual harassment and sexual attacks, and may extend to forcing the worker into the sex trade (International Organization on Migration, 2005). Migrants residing illegally in destination countries, such as the United States, are more exposed to this kind of abuse (Tuller, 2005). However legal citizens also can be subjected to such exploitation (International Organization on Migration, 2005).

In the United States, vulnerable workers have been recruited from homeless shelters and elsewhere, transported to isolated labor camps, and ultimately exploited and abused. According to some experts in the labor movement, the power differential between a farm worker and an employer can create a situation that may escalate into exploitation, regardless of the immigration status of the worker (Bales, 2004; Zeitlin, 2006).

4.2 Minor Victims of Domestic Sex Trafficking

Minors, including American children, are among the most vulnerable populations. A look at the characteristics of minors exploited through prostitution and prostituted adults who were recruited as minors (Raphael, 2004) provides useful information to help answer the question, "Who are the victims of domestic sex trafficking?" Minors are deceived, manipulated, forced, or coerced into prostitution every day. Nationally, the average age at which girls first become exploited through prostitution is 12–14 years old, but direct service providers around the country report they have been encountering increasingly younger victims over the past decade (Estes & Weiner, 2001; Lloyd, 2005; Spangenberg, 2001). For example, service providers in New York City report that the average age that girls enter prostitution has dropped

Risk Factors for Minor Domestic Sex Trafficking Victims

- Age
- Poverty
- Sexual abuse
- Family substance/physical abuse
- Individual substance abuse
- Learning disabilities
- Loss of parent/caregiver
- Runaway/throwaway
- Sexual identity issues
- Lack of support systems

from 14 to 13 or 12 years of age in recent years (Spangenberg, 2001). The average age that boys and transgender youth begin prostitution is even younger: 11–13 years old (Estes & Weiner, 2001).

In terms of race and ethnicity, all subgroups of adolescents are at risk for prostitution. The vast majority of male and female adolescents arrested for prostitution are White or Black (Flowers, 2001). The only specific research conducted on a subpopulation of exploited minors shows that African-American girls and women are arrested in prostitution at a far higher rate than girls and women of other races involved in the same activity (Flowers, 2001; MacKinnon & Dworkin, 1997). Although it appears that no socioeconomic class is immune to domestic trafficking, Estes and Weiner (2001) acknowledge that poverty (as noted previously for victims of trafficking in general) places adolescents at increased risk of exploitation. Though their sample was small (10 boys), Lankenau, Clatts, Welle, Goldsamt, and Gwadz (2005) found that 100 percent of a study's subjects were born into homes characterized as poor or working class. The correlation between poverty and trafficking has been corroborated by qualitative reports from law enforcement, social service providers, and others working in the anti-trafficking movements (Clawson & Dutch, 2008). Further, Lloyd (2005) states that low-income girls are at greater risk of recruitment and may find it harder to exit.

One common characteristic or risk factor for prostituted girls is a history of childhood sexual abuse. In 20 recent studies of adult women who were sexually exploited through prostitution, the percentage of those who had been abused as children ranged from 33 percent to 84 percent (Raphael, 2004). For example, a study of 106 adult women in Boston who were incarcerated for prostitution-related offenses or had ever been arrested for prostitution-related offenses found that 68 percent of the women reported having been sexually abused before the age of 10 and almost half reported being raped before the age of 10 (Norton-Hawk, 2002). Other smaller studies of prostituted girls affirm these figures. For example, the Huckleberry House Project in San Francisco reported that 90 percent of the girls involved in prostitution had been sexually molested (Harlan, Rodgers, & Slattery, 1981). Two other studies of juveniles estimated the percentage of girls engaged in prostitution who had a history of sexual abuse to be between 70 percent and 80 percent (Bagley & Young, 1987; Silbert & Pines, 1982).

Research has demonstrated that the younger a girl is when she first becomes involved in prostitution, the greater the likelihood that she has a history of childhood sexual abuse and the greater the extent of the abuse (Council for Prostitution Alternatives, 1991). Further, the history of childhood trauma experienced by most girls involved in prostitution includes abuse that is chronic in nature and takes the form of physical abuse, emotional abuse, and/or sexual abuse by multiple perpetrators (Farley & Kelly, 2000). A 1994 National Institute of Justice report (as cited in Spangenberg, 2001) states that minors who were sexually abused were 28 times more likely to be arrested for prostitution at some point in their lives than minors who were not sexually abused.

In addition to a history of childhood abuse, prostituted girls are likely to experience other forms of family disruption. Multiple studies suggest that girls involved in prostitution are more likely to come from homes where addiction was present (Raphael, 2004). For example, one study of 222 women in Chicago involved in prostitution found 83 percent had grown up in a home where one or both parents were involved in substance abuse (Center for Impact Research, 2001). Further, prostituted girls are more likely to have witnessed domestic violence in their home; specifically, girls are likely to have seen their mother beaten by an intimate partner (Raphael, 2004).

Some literature has begun to recognize a correlation between school-related problems, most notably learning disabilities, and sexual exploitation. Current research does not allow us to distinguish whether the learning disability was present before or is a consequence of the exploitation. However, the later the disability is diagnosed and an appropriate educational plan put in place, the greater the likelihood of the

girl experiencing failure in school and/or low self-esteem, making her vulnerable to exploitation (Harway & Liss, 1999).

Another risk factor that emerges for youth at risk for exploitation through prostitution is the loss of a parent through death, divorce, or abandonment. For example, in two separate studies of adolescent girls involved in prostitution, a third of the sample had a deceased mother (Norton-Hawk, 2002; Raphael & Shapiro, 2002). This familial disruption often results in the child's involvement in the child welfare system, involving placement in foster care or group homes. One study in Canada of 47 women in prostitution found that 64 percent had been involved in the child welfare system, and of these, 78 percent had entered foster care or group homes (Nixon, Tutty, Downe, Gorkoff, & Ursel, 2002). The themes of trauma, abandonment, and disruption, begun in childhood, are central to the narratives of adolescent girls trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation. Girls describe having had a profound sense of being alone without resources: "They [the women and girls] described their isolation, lack of connectedness, and feelings of separation as the single most important factor in making them vulnerable to prostitution to begin with…" (Rabinovitch, 2003).

The prostitution of boys is not as visible as that of young girls (McKnight, 2006). According to Flowers (1998), boys primarily sell their bodies to "survive financially, explore their sexuality, and/or make contact with gay men," with money a major motivator to continue prostituting. Young prostituted males are also more likely to be involved in criminal or delinquent behaviors in addition to prostitution (Flowers, 1998); however, they are arrested much less frequently (McKnight, 2006). McKnight also states that boys are more likely than girls to leave home due to a feeling of being unwanted or misunderstood regarding their sexual orientation. Similar to girls, however, most boys exploited through prostitution come from dysfunctional homes and a large percentage have been the victim of some kind of abuse in the past (Flowers, 1998).

4.3 Other Populations at Risk for Trafficking: Runaway and Homeless Youth

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Reports (2006), across the United States 36,402 boys and 47,472 girls younger than age 18 were picked up by law enforcement and identified as runaways. Girls who run from their homes, group homes, foster homes, or treatment centers, are at great risk of being targeted by a pimp (or trafficker) and becoming exploited. Research consistently confirms the correlation between running away and becoming exploited through prostitution. Researchers have found that the majority of prostituted women had been runaways; for example, 96 percent in San Francisco (Silbert & Pines, 1982), 72 percent in Boston (Norton-Hawk, 2002) and 56 percent in Chicago (Raphael & Shapiro, 2002). Among prostituted youth (both boys and girls), up to 77 percent report having run away at least once (Seng, 1989). Experts have reported that within 48 hours of running away, an adolescent is likely to be approached to participate in prostitution or another form of commercial sexual exploitation (Spangenberg, 2001); however, no definitive published research substantiates this claim.

Like girls, boys exploited through prostitution are most often runaways or throwaways (Flowers, 2001; Lankenau et al., 2005; Moxley-Goldsmith, 2005). For example, one study found that two-thirds of males exploited through prostitution had run away from home prior to becoming involved (Allen, 1980). While many of the factors leading to a young person leaving home are similar for boys and girls, it is estimated that between 40 and 50 percent of boys exploited through prostitution had been thrown out of their homes because of sexual identity issues (Earls & David, 1989; Seattle Commission on Children and Youth, 1986). Approximately 25–35 percent of prostituted boys self-identify as gay, bisexual, or transgender/transsexual (Estes & Weiner, 2001). Further, regardless of the boy's self-identification, at least 95 percent of all prostitution engaged in by boys is provided to adult men (Estes & Weiner, 2001).

Regardless of their sex, when minors leave their homes, it is to protect themselves, often because they view living on the streets as either less dangerous or no more dangerous than staying at home (Hyde, 2005; Martinez, 2006).

Once on the street, homeless youth are at risk for being victimized because they lack the funds, interpersonal and job skills, and support systems necessary to survive on their own (Martinez, 2006). Having often come from chaotic families, runaways tend to lack strategies for problem solving, conflict resolution, and meeting basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter (Martinez, 2006; Robertson & Toro, 1999; Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Yoder, 1999). Some minors turn to substance abuse, crime, and "survival sex" to meet their basic needs (Greene, Ennett, & Ringwald, 1999; Riley, Greif, Caplan, & MacAulay, 2004; Robertson & Toro, 1999). Furthermore, exposure to the dangers of the street makes them more visible and vulnerable to traffickers, and their risky lifestyles and routines put them at greater risk of being victimized (Kipke, Simon, Montgomery, Unger, & Iversen, 1997; MacLean, Embry, & Cauce, 1999; Tyler, Cauce, & Whitbeck, 2004).

Most runaway/throwaway youth are likely to run to and congregate in urban areas, so it is not surprising that there is general consensus that a greater percentage of minors are exploited in the U.S. sex industry in urban areas, though they may be brought from suburban and rural areas (Flowers, 2001). However, an increase in minor arrests in suburban counties/areas and rural areas has experts speculating that the increase is indicative of an expansion of prostitution beyond city limits (Flowers, 2001). While these data are somewhat outdated, anecdotal evidence from service providers indicates that this trend continues (A. Adams, personal communication, March 2006; N. Hotaling, personal communication, June 2006). However, further research is needed to determine whether the increase in suburban arrests is due to better identification or an actual increase in incidence.