

Prostituted Youth in New York City: An Overview  
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 ECPAT-USA, 2001

“More and more children are going into prostitution, and it’s not because of poverty. It’s because of a lack [of will] to combat it.”

Kim Kao Hourn

Introduction

Through ECPAT’s work, child prostitution has gained attention as a global phenomenon that affects as many as two million children every year.<sup>1</sup> ECPAT started its campaign in 1991 in Bangkok, Thailand and focused on ending child prostitution in Asian tourism. After the First World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Stockholm, Sweden in 1996, a conference held to assemble and commit governments to work on the issue, ECPAT expanded its campaign to fight the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) everywhere, including child pornography and trafficking for sexual purposes. As a result, there are now ECPAT affiliates in over fifty countries.

However, although CSEC is a recognized problem in regions such as South and Southeast Asia, Latin America and Western Europe, there is still little recognition of the problem here in the United States. Unlike many other countries, the U.S. has failed to develop a National Action Plan to combat CSEC. On child prostitution in particular, hardly any comprehensive research has been done to document the number of prostituted children or the circumstances which have led them into prostitution. Much less do we provide adequate services for them. Yet, there are as many as 400,000 prostituted children in the U.S.,<sup>2</sup> and 45,000 to 50,000 women and children are trafficked into the U.S. every year, often to work in prostitution.<sup>3</sup> “Our political system directs people’s attention away from what’s actually happening here,” states Susan Breault, Executive Director of the Paul & Lisa Program, Inc., which provides outreach services to prostituted girls and women in New York and Connecticut.<sup>4</sup>

Why does that happen and, more importantly, why should we care? The prevailing view of prostituted children is that they are “bad kids” because of the taboos on both prostitution and youth and sexuality. One often hears such statements as: “they asked for it,” or “they like sex.” Yet, as this report documents, most prostituted youth have been sexually and otherwise abused in their homes or foster care settings, and many have run away or have been thrown out of their homes. Many of these youth don’t have

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Smolenski, “Paper 2,” *Sexual Trafficking: An International Horror Story*, ed. Rita J. Simon (District of Columbia: Women’s Freedom Network, 2000) 57. ECPAT uses the definition of a child given in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child wherein a child is any person under eighteen.

<sup>2</sup> As reported by Carol Smolenski at the Second Meeting of the International Advisory Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the United States, Canada and Mexico held on June 2, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Amy O’Neill Richard, *International Trafficking in Women to the United States: A Contemporary Manifestation of Slavery and Organized Crime* (District of Columbia: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2000) 3, <<http://www.cia.gov/csi/pubs.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Breault, personal interview, 12 October, 2000.

stable, loving families or basic necessities, and they often suffer from low self-esteem and have limited access to educational and occupational opportunities. In short, they are involved in prostitution because they have been forced and/or have few other alternatives available to them.

At the same time, the growth of the sex industry and the eroticization of youth in our society help both to increase the demand for young prostitutes and to make it seem like working in the sex industry is glamorous and profitable.<sup>5</sup> Our society's marketing of women's and girls' bodies as sexual commodities teaches boys and men that sex with young, conventionally beautiful and vulnerable girls is what they want. It teaches girls that they can sell sex and that sex is their only value. While girls are most susceptible to the sexualization of their bodies, boys are commodified in homosexual subcultures for their youth and vulnerability. Our interviewees also confirmed that girls are doubly vulnerable as most are under control of a pimp, while boys work on their own and have social networks with peers.<sup>6</sup>

In any case, the longer young people stay in the sex trade, the more they are at risk for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and AIDS. The more likely it is that they have also suffered from violence, and the harder it becomes to get out. Most significant, these youth come from all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds and all genders—child prostitution is not solely a matter of poverty or sexist attitudes. Breault stressed that we need to address this problem because “sexual exploitation doesn't discriminate—it has the possibility of endangering all of our children.”

By focusing on New York, where ECPAT-USA is based, this report presents the dynamics and ramifications of child prostitution in the microcosm of one city. It highlights the difficulty in accessing these youth and is as much about what we know as what we don't know. Through interviews with social workers, law enforcement officials, and others, we are learning that the problem only appears to be getting worse. Younger children are being coerced into prostitution under ever more violent circumstances. Gang pimping has become more common in recent years, as well as sexual assaults and kidnappings by pimps and clients. Thus, this report also serves as a plea for the recognition of the plight of these young people and offers steps for action.

### Definitions

Part of the difficulty in coming up with any numbers on prostituted youth has to do with the difficulty in defining child prostitution. Child prostitution is a continuum both in terms of the age of the young people involved and the range of exploitation. While I will most frequently use the term “youth” to encompass the range of ages, we must remember that many of these youth are still children as young as twelve. As for their activities, some youth work part-time, some full-time, and some are engaged in prostitution while others work in sex clubs, in the pornography business or both.

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<sup>5</sup> The term “sex industry” is widely used to connote all commercial aspects of sex, including pornography, prostitution, strip clubs, phone sex and sex on the Internet. While ECPAT does not endorse the normalization of commercial sex conveyed by this term, it is used in this report to designate this range of activities.

<sup>6</sup> Marya Gwadz and Rachel Lloyd, personal interviews, 18 October 2000, 12 July 2000. Claude Marsh, interview by C. Smolenski, April 29, 1999.

Children and youth on the street are especially vulnerable and often engage in what is known as “survival sex” or “sex for favors.” As the name suggests, sex is exchanged out of necessity for basic needs like food and shelter.

According to ECPAT, in sum, child prostitution involves the sexual exploitation of the vulnerability of children for cash or some other form of pay, and it may involve an intermediary like a pimp.<sup>7</sup> This exchange is exploitative because it comes about in a relationship of unequal economic, cognitive and psycho-social power and often is physically and emotionally detrimental to the young person’s further development. As such, any form of CSEC constitutes a violation of children’s fundamental human rights. In order to emphasize that prostitution is not a criminal act “committed” by youth, the terms “sexually exploited youth” or “prostituted youth” are preferred instead of terms like child prostitution or juvenile prostitution. During the First International Summit of Sexually Exploited Youth held in Canada in 1998, youth formerly or currently involved in prostitution advocated for the use of “sexually exploited youth” in order to highlight their right to be protected from all forms of abuse, exploitation and threats of harm.<sup>8</sup>

### How Many Prostituted Youth Are There?

This report focuses primarily on prostituted and trafficked youth on the streets, the most visible and accessible population. However, besides the difficulty of defining who constitutes prostituted youth, youth on the street are a transient population. They might also be trafficked from city to city in the U.S. and Canada, or they might be trafficked from other countries into their respective ethnic communities. Furthermore, as prostitution moves further underground into brothels and other in-call places and relies on the Internet and paging services, it becomes virtually impossible to know how many underage youth are in brothels and what their conditions are.

Nevertheless, Susan Breault of the Paul and Lisa Program estimates that there are roughly five thousand youth and children in prostitution in New York City. There are up to 20,000 homeless youth in New York, some of whom are transitionally homeless, leaving home or foster care for brief periods of time, but a substantial and a seemingly growing portion remain continuously homeless.<sup>9</sup> We have spoken extensively to outreach workers and others who indicate that most of the sexually exploited youth in New York are from New York with a few from surrounding areas like New Jersey.<sup>10</sup> In addition, in his 1997 report on homeless youth in New York City, Michael Clatts et al. found that more than one third of four hundred thirty-two street youth surveyed earned money through prostitution.<sup>11</sup> Rachel Lloyd, Executive Director of GEMS, Girls Educational & Mentoring Services, works with girls aged thirteen to twenty-one in prisons and shelters at risk for CSEC, calculated that twenty-five percent of the girls she

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<sup>7</sup> ECPAT, *The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and the Work of ECPAT*, (Bangkok: ECPAT, 1996) 4.

<sup>8</sup> “Executive Summary,” *Out from the Shadows: International Summit of Sexually Exploited Youth*, (Victoria, Canada, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Michael Clatts and W. Rees Davis, “A Demographic Profile of Homeless Youth in New York City: Implications for AIDS Outreach and Prevention,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 13 (1999): 366.

<sup>10</sup> John Talmadge, personal interview, 14 August, 2000. Trudee Able-Peterson, 19 April, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Youth at Risk Project, *Lives in the Balance: A Profile of Homeless Youth in New York City* (New York: National Development and Research Institutes, Inc., 1997) 7.

works with are involved in the sex trade, including prostitution, stripping, phone sex, and pornography. There could be more youth involved in prostitution since many youth cannot or will not admit to it.<sup>12</sup>

New York Police detectives Kevin Mannion and Jim Held agree that there are hundreds of young prostitutes on the streets and more involved in the neighborhood topless bars and strip clubs as well as the pornography industry. For them, coming up with accurate numbers is complicated by the fact that many are identified as adults when arrested. They often have phony identification and stolen social security numbers. Mannion and Held have even arrested a few girls who all had the same photocopied birth certificate and identification card their pimp had given them.<sup>13</sup> They added that topless bars are probably employing underage youth, because they don't necessarily keep employment records. An employer might hire a topless dancer simply by saying: "You give me a \$100 to dance, and you keep the tips." Again, these estimates are probably conservative considering how little is known about sexually exploited youth in immigrant communities and trafficked youth.

### Who are these Youth? Age, Sexual Orientation and Ethnicity

In New York State, the legal age of consent is seventeen years, and a person as young as sixteen can be in a pornographic film or magazine. However, Rachel Lloyd stressed that the girls she works with are much younger. Both Lloyd and Breault of the Paul and Lisa Program agree that the average entering age of prostitutes has decreased from fourteen to thirteen or even twelve years of age in recent years. Also, many girls physically mature between the ages of twelve to thirteen and are prime candidates for the sex trade. According to Laura Italiano, reporting on the scene in East New York, Brooklyn, "the youngest girls are so popular, their customers cause traffic jams."<sup>14</sup> A twenty-year-old veteran prostitute in the area estimated that half of the girls in the renowned child prostitute tracks in East New York and Long Island City, Queens are between the ages of thirteen to fifteen.<sup>15</sup> NYPD Detectives Jim Held and Kevin Mannion also believe that the average age of street prostitutes in New York is only fourteen or fifteen. Since the *average* age for starting out is between twelve and thirteen, there are youth that start even younger. Lloyd reported that she has worked with girls who are now fourteen to fifteen-years-old but started selling sex when they were only eleven or twelve.

As boys primarily cater to the homosexual population and due to the additional stigma attached to homosexuality, there is little research about boys in prostitution in general or in New York in particular. When asked, several interviewees were able to estimate the scope of boy prostitution here. In Breault's estimation, if the boys prostituting in the West Village as well as the transgendered youth are included with the boys involved in prostitution for survival, there would be a higher number of prostituted

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<sup>12</sup> Child Welfare League of America, *Correlates and Distribution of HIV Risk Behaviors Among Homeless Youths in New York City: Implications for Prevention and Policy* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1998) 199. Rachel Lloyd concurred on this point.

<sup>13</sup> Jim Held and Kevin Mannion, interview by C. Smolenski, 6 May, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Laura Italiano, "13 Years Old and Turning Tricks," *New York Post*, February 22, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

boys than girls. Eunice Spivey, Senior Case Manager at Promesa's Transitional Independent Living Program for young homeless males aged sixteen to twenty, also believes that there are more boys than girls in prostitution in New York.<sup>16</sup> In addition, most male adolescent prostitution occurs in large cities with significant gay populations like New York.<sup>17</sup> Currently, researcher Marya Gwadz at the National Development and Research Institutes, Inc. (NDRI) is conducting a study of five hundred young men in New York aged seventeen to twenty-five who have sex with men. At the very least, boys form a significant minority if not half of the population of sexually exploited youth in New York.

It is equally difficult to ascertain the numbers of sexually exploited gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (GLBT) youth. Many prostituted boys have been cast out of their home for their sexual orientation, but others insist that they are not gay. Many young men insist that what they do with their customers is not even sex, let alone gay sex; they usually only allow hugging, kissing and oral sex to be performed on them.<sup>18</sup> At the very least, we also know that CSEC does not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.

Sexually exploited youth in New York reflect the ethnic diversity of the city. A report on New York City streetwalking prostitutes revealed that half of all the prostitutes were African-American, twenty-five percent were Latino, and twenty-five percent were White.<sup>19</sup> Two-thirds of the homeless youth Clatts studied were African-American or Latino.<sup>20</sup> Over eighty percent of the girls Lloyd works with are African-American, fifteen percent are Latino, and only approximately two percent are White. She added that Whites are underrepresented, because they aren't arrested as frequently. According to Lloyd, latent racism may also serve as one explanation for the lack of attention given to CSEC, because of the high percentage of prostituted youth who are of color: "They aren't your sympathetic victims—these kids are loud, foul-mouthed, and they're not White."

### The Sex Industry in New York City: Out of Sight, Out of Mind

In light of the above factors, how does the sex industry at large affect the involvement of youth? The sex industry in New York City has undergone major transformations during Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's term. In late 1995, his administration introduced zoning regulations stipulating that "adult establishments," including stores that specialize in sexually explicit magazines, books, and videos as well as strip clubs and peep shows, had to be located at least five hundred feet apart from each other and at least five hundred feet away from churches, schools and residential districts.<sup>21</sup> The regulations further restricted adult establishments from certain commercial and manufacturing districts. Also prohibited were all "adult physical culture establishments." This

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<sup>16</sup> Eunice Spivey, interview by C. Smolenski, 2 October, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> R. Barri Flowers, *The Prostitution of Women and Girls*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1998) 140.

<sup>18</sup> Donald Suggs, "Bargaining Power: Safer Sex and Survival on the Streets of New York," *POZ*, September 1998 <[http://www.thebody.com/poz/survival/9\\_98/power.html](http://www.thebody.com/poz/survival/9_98/power.html)>.

<sup>19</sup> R. Barri Flowers, *The Prostitution of Women and Girls*, 45.

<sup>20</sup> Youth at Risk Project, *Lives in the Balance: A Profile of Homeless Youth in New York City*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> City of New York, Department of City Planning, *The Zoning Resolution of the City of New York, Articles I, II, and IV* (New York: City of New York, 1995) <<http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/dcp/html/zonetext.html>>.

euphemism refers to massage parlors which include all-over body massages and possible sexual services administered by persons of the opposite sex. These efforts effectively shut down New York's major red light district around Times Square and significantly reduced the street prostitution in the Midtown area around Times Square, Park and Lexington Avenues between 25<sup>th</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> Streets, and the areas just south of Central Park on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenues.

Prostitution is illegal in New York,<sup>22</sup> but the Giuliani administration's crackdown has typically focused on the visible side of the sex industry and street prostitution, leaving the higher-status and discreet escort services and massage parlors relatively untouched. Now prostitution services have turned to using the Internet, pagers and cellular phones to conduct their business. A *New York Times* article suggests that the industry is growing even as fewer prostitutes work the streets, partly because of the anonymity, relative safety and low cost of using the Internet to set up appointments and transactions.<sup>23</sup> Forester Research indicates that "adult" Internet sites were already a \$1 billion industry in 1998, and over half the requests on Internet search engines are for sex, creating a new forum for prostituted youth where it is easy to lie about age.<sup>24</sup> The Hofstede Report on juvenile prostitution in Minnesota provides examples of how Internet chat rooms allow individuals to share information about police investigations and raids in order to avoid detection.<sup>25</sup> Traffickers are also relying more and more on using the Internet to promote their business.<sup>26</sup>

Like any service industry, prostitution is affected by the economy. It could be that the demand for prostitutes is increasing as current and potential clients who are positively affected by the economy have more disposable income for diversions like prostitution. Certainly, tourism to New York City is booming. As the operator of Redlightnet, the on-line prostitution clearinghouse remarked, "[Giuliani] has generally made the streets safer for all New Yorkers and tourists, and more tourists means more hookers to take care of them."<sup>27</sup> According to Rachel Lloyd of GEMS, prostitution indeed generates income: pimps can easily make \$1500 a night with five girls. Prices range from \$40 to \$50 for oral sex and \$75 for intercourse to \$150 for out calls, when the girl accompanies her client to his residence or hotel. A young, attractive girl with ten customers can conceivably make \$1500 on a weekend night by herself. The girls usually have to turn the money over to their pimps, and they often have to stay out late to fulfill the quota their pimp has set for them, working as many as seven to ten hours a night for six days a week.

Legitimate businesses play their part in condoning the sex industry. There are over fifty pages of listings for escort services and ten pages for massage parlors in the 2000-2001 Manhattan Yellow Pages. Another example is New York's free weekly entertainment newspaper, *The Village Voice*. It is on the one hand an outspoken crusader

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<sup>22</sup> In the U.S., prostitution is only legal in certain districts of Nevada.

<sup>23</sup> Kit R. Roane, "Prostitutes on Wane in New York Streets but Take to Internet," *New York Times*, 23 February 1998.

<sup>24</sup> The Hofstede Committee, *Juvenile Prostitution in Minnesota Report 2, 3*.  
<<http://www.ag.state.mn.us/consumer/news/PR/hofstede.htm>>.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Report 2, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Amy O'Neill Richard, *International Trafficking in Women to the United States: A Contemporary Manifestation of Slavery and Organized Crime*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Kit R. Roane, "Prostitutes on Wane in New York Streets But Take to the Internet."

on the harmful conditions street prostitutes endure, but on the other hand, features hundreds of listings for sexual services in their advertising section. The popular *Sexy New York City 2000*, “the annual guide to NYC erotica,” lists five legitimate strip clubs, five swingers clubs and five peep show centers. Numerous sex magazines with more information on illicit sexual services abound, including *New York Action Magazine*, *Joe’s XXX*, *Screw*, and the *SuperGuide to New York City Sex*, as well as several websites.

Because of increased police presence in Manhattan, prostituted youth and adults have been forced to move to more dangerous and secluded industrial areas of town. Young girls are to be found in Long Island City and Queens Plaza in Queens; Williamsburg, East New York, the Gowanus area and Sunset Park in Brooklyn; and Hunts Point and a track along 161<sup>st</sup> Street in the Bronx. Ethnic communities have their own strips, including Roosevelt Avenue in Queens for Asians, Brighton Beach in Brooklyn for Eastern Europeans and Russians, and Chinatown in Manhattan.

It seems that boy prostitution has also become more clandestine. Bernard Pagioli, a Youth Services Officer at Port Authority Bus Terminal, stated that it is now rare to find boys at the Port Authority in Manhattan where most of them formerly congregated. “In the 80’s you would have maybe sixty kids a week [at the Port Authority]. Now we get maybe two or three kids a week, even that would be a lot.”<sup>28</sup> When Carol Smolenski of ECPAT-USA went out in a Covenant House van in the meatpacking district in May 1999, because of police presence, she said she only saw three boys on Weehawkin St. One said he was sixteen. According to researcher Marya Gwadz, boys’ strips include Tompkins Square Park in the East Village, while transgenders congregate in the meatpacking district and under the 59<sup>th</sup> Street bridge in Manhattan as well as in Jackson Heights in Queens.<sup>29</sup>

Trafficking in women and children is another business that flourishes out of sight, and it is arguably the most sordid side of the sex industry. It involves the use of force and deception to transfer people to work in prostitution and other industries in countries where they have no rights as illegal aliens, much less as prostitutes. Here in New York, the John F. Kennedy International Airport has emerged as a major port of entry into the U.S. Once here, women and girls trafficked for the sex industry may be moved along an internal circuit of cities, including New York, until the women can be put into brothels.<sup>30</sup> An Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agent in New York reported that Mexicans are trafficking Mexican teenagers into California to be transported to New York for prostitution. FBI agents in New York believe that there are about ten to twelve dance agencies specializing in Russian women with an employment of sixty to two hundred women in each and hundreds of escort services in the New York and New Jersey area, possibly with many underage girls.

Many more trafficked youth are likely involved in the sex industry in New York City. But, they are hidden by the highly organized local and international crime rings that bring them in and that are involved in a number of other criminal activities to protect their business, including extortion, racketeering, money laundering, bribery of public officials, and falsification of documents. Everything from massage parlors and spas to

<sup>28</sup> Bernard Pagioli, interview by C. Smolenski, August 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Marya Gwadz, personal interview, 18 October, 2000.

<sup>30</sup> Amy O’Neill Richard, *International Trafficking in Women to the United States: A Contemporary Manifestation of Slavery and Organized Crime*, 11-21.

sun tanning parlors and beauty salons are used as fronts for brothels, which generally receive protection from street gangs. The gangs protect the brothels from other criminal groups, watch over the women until their incurred debt is paid off, and retrieve any who have managed to escape. Mexican, other Latin American and Asian brothel owners further work to insulate themselves by restricting clientele to their own ethnic background.

### A Life of Risk and Hardship

The overwhelming majority of sexually exploited youth are runaways or castaways from dysfunctional homes where they have suffered physical, psychological and sexual abuse. Sexual abuse in particular is cited as a leading cause for entry into the sex trade—our informants reported that up to eighty to ninety percent of prostituted youth have been sexually abused. In fact, according to a report by the National Institute of Justice, persons who were sexually abused as children are twenty-eight times more likely than their non-abused peers to be arrested for prostitution.<sup>31</sup> John Talmadge reported that there are also up to 50,000 children in the foster care system, many of whom have been sexually abused. Gay and transgendered prostituted youth are often rejected by their families for their sexual orientation,<sup>32</sup> but again, sexual abuse can also be a decisive factor for boys. For a male child or adolescent, sexual abuse can be particularly debilitating as it contradicts their socialization into the typical masculine role of power, control and sexual aggressiveness.<sup>33</sup> On the streets, these children often feel that at least they can now get paid for what was previously done to them. According to Kimberly, a formerly sexually exploited youth in New York, “if someone violates you and gets away with it, you feel like what you have to lose by prostituting yourself is already gone.”<sup>34</sup>

There is also a growing need to address the runaway youth in immigrant families where traditional practices from the home country clash with American culture. According to John Talmadge, Chief of Staff for City Councilman Kenneth Fisher, the largest growth in runaway children is from immigrant communities.

After only an average of thirty-six to forty-eight hours on the streets, young people are solicited for sex in exchange for money, food or shelter,<sup>35</sup> and their risk for sexual exploitation is increased by the lack of an adequate social safety net to care for them. In New York, there are only about five hundred beds in shelters for the estimated 15,000-20,000 homeless youth.<sup>36</sup> Most shelters are for adults twenty-one and over, and most children are too scared to go to them because of their history of abuse from adults. And yet in 1997, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development

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<sup>31</sup> National Institute of Justice, Report (1994).

<sup>32</sup> Sarah McNaught, “The Lost Boys,” *Weekly Wire* 27 October, 1997  
<[http://www.weeklywire.com/ww/10-27-97/boston\\_feature\\_3.html](http://www.weeklywire.com/ww/10-27-97/boston_feature_3.html)>.

<sup>33</sup> Don Wright, “Acknowledging the Continuum from Childhood Abuse to Male Prostitution,” *BC Institute Against Family Violence Newsletter*, Spring 1995  
<[http://www.bcifv.org/backiss2/spring95/nf\\_continuum.html](http://www.bcifv.org/backiss2/spring95/nf_continuum.html)>.

<sup>34</sup> Suggs, “Bargaining Power.”

<sup>35</sup> Mark Clayton, “Sex Trade Lures Kids from Burbs,” *Christian Science Monitor*, September, 1996, The Hofstede Committee, *Juvenile Prostitution in Minnesota, Report 1, 5*.

<sup>36</sup> Randi Glatzer, “New York is Hell if You’re 18 and Homeless,” *The Village Voice*, 14 July, 1998, David Kihara, “Giuliani’s Suppressed Report on Homeless Youth,” *The Village Voice*, 24 August 1999.



returned to the state \$1.3 million of the allocated \$3 million for homeless youth.<sup>37</sup> Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has also attempted to cut all funding for preventative programs for teens like the Juvenile Prostitution Diversion Program, although in 1999, the City Council was able to restore \$278,000 to this outreach service.<sup>38</sup> City Councilman Fisher has repeatedly noted the inadequacy of services for homeless youth, including shelter beds, medical facilities and counseling centers.<sup>39</sup>

Drug abuse can also be a factor driving young people into prostitution. However, Lloyd indicated she only sees a predominant usage of marijuana among the girls she works with. They were born in the 1980's during the crack boom, and they have seen their parents, relatives and others on crack and have rejected it in their own lives. In fact, a recent *New York Times* article suggests that the decrease in crime in New York and other major cities across the country is due to the crackdown on crack undertaken by the poor communities themselves. Among eighteen to twenty-year-olds arrested in Manhattan in 1996, only twenty-two percent tested positive for crack or cocaine in their urine, which experts believe the current figure to be, compared to seventy percent in the same age group in 1988 during the height of the crack epidemic.<sup>40</sup> Girls working under pimps or in establishments may be more protected from drug use because, while under the influence, they cannot work as effectively and may not be as attractive to clients. On the other hand, Michael Clatts reported that the majority of homeless youth in New York City in his study have used drugs, including cocaine, crack, Heroin, LSD, alcohol and marijuana.<sup>41</sup>

Prostituted children face far more significant, even life-threatening risk factors, including AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, potential pregnancy and especially violence from clients and pimps. Sources indicate that prostituted children are aware of the dangers of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases and, for the most part, practice safe sex with their clients. Still, over half of the youth surveyed for Clatts' report considered it "somewhat likely or very likely" that they would get AIDS.<sup>42</sup> According to Kimberly, the formerly prostituted youth mentioned earlier, "You start by making rules for yourself, but if you're out there and you're not getting the money you want, you can start giving in."<sup>43</sup> First of all, youth may engage in what is known as "raw sex," or sex without protection, for more money. Secondly, police sweeps have both shortened the time street prostitutes have to assess their clients and to set terms of negotiation, increasing the risk of engaging with a customer who may not be interested in safe sex and may be violent. Thirdly, drug use can lower resistance. As Matt Bernstein Sycamore, a twenty-four-year-old gay man working in the escort field, commented, "You may not be interested in the guy, but you get more interested when you're high. And clients are conscious that they can use drugs to get whores to do things they wouldn't do otherwise."<sup>44</sup> Finally, in face of the need to maintain control in the often dangerous

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<sup>37</sup> Randi Glatzer, *New York is Hell if You're 18 and Homeless.*

<sup>38</sup> Citizen's Committee for the Children of New York, *Adopted FY 2000 Budget* (New York: Citizen's Committee for the Children of New York, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Glatzer, "New York is Hell."

<sup>40</sup> Joyce Purnick, "Some Truths Behind Those Fine Statistics," *New York Times*, 17 July, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Youth at Risk Project, *Lives in the Balance: A Profile of Homeless Youth in New York City*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Donald Suggs, "Bargaining Power: Safer Sex and Survival on the Streets of New York."

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

relations prostituted youth engage in, they feel that the only way they can display affection to those close to them is by taking a risk. In Lloyd's experience, for example, many girls don't use condoms with their pimps, although pimps usually engage in unprotected sex with all the girls in their charge.

Yet for all prostituted youth, the most immediate danger is not disease, drugs, or the police, but violence. R. Barri Flowers reports that most women prostitutes have been physically abused by parents, relatives, lovers, customers and pimps. Moreover, approximately "seventy percent of all female prostitutes are victims of repeated rape by their male customers, on average thirty-one times a year."<sup>45</sup> One young prostitute in New York was kidnapped by her client at knife-point and gang raped by five of his friends.<sup>46</sup> Lloyd of GEMS concurs that most of the prostituted girls she works with have been kidnapped by their clients: "If she's been on the streets [working] six months to a year, it's almost guaranteed she's been kidnapped."<sup>47</sup> Breault added that she has seen cases in which girls have been branded with irons, burned with acid or beaten to the point that they needed hospitalization. Three transgendered prostitutes who had been forced to leave the Times Square area during the 1996 crime sweeps and moved uptown to 135<sup>th</sup> Street and Amsterdam Avenue and 130<sup>th</sup> Street and Fifth Avenue, both more dangerous areas, had been murdered by the end of 1997.<sup>48</sup> Transgender prostitutes often deal with clients who are so ambivalent about their own gender identity that they lash out more violently than other clients. Researcher Marya Gwadz agreed that transgendered prostitutes are the most vulnerable. Gwadz opined, "they're the ones you hear about getting killed."<sup>49</sup> The death rate is a significant factor for all prostitutes; the Justice Department reported that the rate of mortality for female prostitutes is forty times the national average.<sup>50</sup>

We know less about how many prostituted girls become pregnant and what happens to their children. Yet a 1996 survey of 1,936 adult female prostitutes found that more than two-thirds had at least one child, and the average number of children was two. Twenty percent lived with their mother while working as a prostitute, and nine percent of the children were in foster care.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, given the high percentages of sexual abuse among prostituted youth, a 1998 study on the correlation between child abuse and adolescent pregnancy found that young women who were sexually abused during childhood are more likely to report earlier intercourse and pregnancy than women who were not abused.<sup>52</sup> Thus, prostituted girls may have a higher rate of pregnancy than their peers not in prostitution. Another study reported that young women who had been raped or coerced into having sex at least once were twice as likely to become pregnant as those teens who had not suffered such abuse.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> R. Barri Flowers, *The Prostitution of Women and Girls*, 64.

<sup>46</sup> Laura Italiano, "13 Years Old and Turning Tricks."

<sup>47</sup> Rachel Lloyd, personal interview.

<sup>48</sup> David Kihara, "Giuliani's Suppressed Report on Homeless Youth."

<sup>49</sup> Marya Gwadz, personal interview.

<sup>50</sup> Statistic found in R. Barri Flowers, *The Prostitution of Women and Girls*, 64.

<sup>51</sup> Adele Weiner, "Understanding the Social Needs of Streetwalking Prostitutes," *Social Work* 41 (1996): 97-106.

<sup>52</sup> K. Fiscella et al. "Does Child Abuse Predict Adolescent Pregnancy?," *Pediatrics*, 101 (1998), 620-624.

<sup>53</sup> J. W. Kenney et al. "Ethnic Differences in Childhood and Adolescent Sexual Abuse and Teenage Pregnancy," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 21 (1997), 3-10.

Finally, prostitutes are arrested more often than their pimps and customers and can face police brutality. This is particularly true for the prostitutes operating at the lowest level of the prostitution subculture—including those on the street and drug-addicted prostitutes. According to senior retired police officer Joe Haggarty, in order for a case to be prosecuted against a pimp, at least one of the pimp's girls must testify, but many refuse.<sup>54</sup> Despite their abuse, pimps provide a roof over the heads of their prostitutes, and the girls are often very loyal to their pimps. New York Police Detectives Mannion and Held added that it is very difficult to have the chance to talk to prostituted girls because any statements made against the pimp could also incriminate the girls. Other issues which have prevented officials from helping prostitutes include lack of time and having to deal with many different actors, including juvenile corrections officials, social services and family and criminal court. "If we don't act on the information that day, the case is gone. They are very fleeting cases."<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps, the most telling evidence for the suffering of young people in prostitution is that most don't like what they are doing. Mary, an eighteen-year-old homeless woman in New York, worked as a prostitute for a while, but stopped when it finally made her too sick to trade sex for a place to sleep.<sup>56</sup> Ann hung herself at the age of sixteen after a life of abuse and prostitution.<sup>57</sup> Rachel Lloyd of GEMS believes that seventy-five percent of her cases have post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), from their home lives as well as from prostitution, but they don't know what else to do. PTSD is a psychological reaction to extreme physical and emotional trauma, and a study of prostitution in five countries found that sixty-seven percent of the prostitutes met the criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD—a rate similar to that of torture survivors.<sup>58</sup> Many of these youth are also extremely lonely, without positive role models to support them. One young Latino man talked of suicidal depression after the loss of his parents as a toddler and his grandparents as a teenager, leaving him to the streets.<sup>59</sup> A twenty-year-old Latino youth, who was thrown out of his home at the age of seventeen, summarized his life, "I ain't got no job, nothing to look forward to and nobody."<sup>60</sup>

### Pimps: Who They Are and How They Recruit Girls

Pimps come from all classes and ethnic backgrounds, and even family members have been charged for pimping youth, though most are male. A 1998 news article reports that forty-nine-year-old Robert Leroy York, a four hundred pound quadriplegic, was convicted of running a Manhattan escort service with ten young prostitutes. African-American Lynn Stewart, twenty-three, was charged with pimping, beating and raping girls aged eleven, thirteen, fourteen and seventeen. Twenty-five-year-old Marisol Sanders, herself a prostitute, was accused of repeatedly selling her eleven-year-old niece over a nine month period to a wealthy former Warner Bros. Executive, aged sixty-nine,

<sup>54</sup> Joe Haggarty, personal interview, 28 August 2000.

<sup>55</sup> Jim Held and Kevin Mannion, interview by C. Smolenski.

<sup>56</sup> David Glatzer, "New York is Hell."

<sup>57</sup> Laura Italiano, "Angel's Hellish Life of Prostitution," *New York Post*, 22 February 1998.

<sup>58</sup> Melissa Farley, et al, "Prostitution in Five Countries: Violence and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," *Feminism and Psychology* 8 (1998): 405-426.

<sup>59</sup> Youth at Risk Project, *Lives in the Balance: A Profile of Homeless Youth in New York City*, 16.

<sup>60</sup> George A. Smith, *Teen Sexual Exploitation* (New York: Covenant House, 1998) 14.

with six children, who allegedly raped and sodomized the girl.<sup>61</sup> As for their appearance, both Lloyd and Joe Haggarty indicated that for the most part, pimps are attractive, expensively dressed men. Officer Barnard Pagioli at the Port Authority added that many pimps now dress like businessmen, either in suits or in “corporate casual” style in order to make it difficult to pick them out, and they drive BMWs instead of Cadillacs.

The new trend is that pimps are also getting younger. Lloyd estimated that their average age is now between eighteen to twenty years. As Officer Pagioli observed, “Kids are picking up kids and pimping them.”<sup>62</sup> Senior Officer Haggarty commented that he has seen a pimp as young as sixteen. In 1999, two twenty and seventeen-year-old men were charged with first-degree kidnapping and promotion of prostitution of a thirteen-year-old girl in East Flatbush, Brooklyn.<sup>63</sup> Also in 1999, two Bronx brothers in their mid-twenties recruited several fifteen to sixteen-year-old girls from a local high school for the purposes of prostitution and to sexually exploit them personally.<sup>64</sup>

Another development Lloyd has seen in recent years is the pimping of girls by gangs. These girls are under the control of more than one gang member, which places greater restrictions on their freedom. They are also subject to more violence, including sexual assault and rape, and may be at greater risk for STDs and AIDS, since they will likely have more than one gang member as a sexual partner. As gangs continue recruiting new members and violence increases, girls are likely to become increasingly vulnerable to sexual exploitation by gangs.

It is equally important to look at how pimps recruit girls. As Breault of the Paul and Lisa Program emphasized, “we greatly underestimate the intellect, the cunning and entrepreneurship of pimps.” Firstly, pimps use a variety of venues to recruit girls, all the while keeping an eye out for the most vulnerable girls. It is well recognized by youth workers in New York City that one of the prime sites that pimps target for recruiting new girls is youth shelters. Lloyd does part of her training with girls in group homes, and she estimates that one out of every ten girls in group homes become sexually exploited. Secondly, pimps also use their own girls to lure new recruits. According to Lloyd, pimps motivate their girls by offering them a new pair of jeans or an opportunity to get their nails and hair done as an incentive to bring in new girls. Finally, many pimps work their girls in a number of different cities in order to escape law enforcement authorities. Haggarty estimates that only fifteen percent of pimps are locally based, and detectives Held and Mannion concur that many pimps in New York take their girls to work in escort services, sex clubs and topless bars in Jersey City, New Jersey and vice versa.

#### Customers: Who are they?

The customers of prostitutes have been studied even less than prostituted youth. But they outnumber prostitutes in any given location, and the vast majority are men. While we don’t have any figures on New York, the Minneapolis, MN Southside Prostitution Task Force estimates that there about 1,500 women prostitutes for the 15,000

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<sup>61</sup> Laura Italiano, “Hall of Shame,” *New York Post*, 23 February 1998.

<sup>62</sup> Barnard Pagioli, interview by C. Smolenski.

<sup>63</sup> Michele McPhee, “Two Accused of Forcing Girl into Prostitution,” *New York Daily News*, 30 August 1999.

<sup>64</sup> Greg B. Smith, “Duo Busted Recruiting HS Hookers,” *New York Daily News*, 16 May 1999.

to 30,000 men costumers they serve every day.<sup>65</sup> Considering that New York is a much bigger city and popular for tourism and business, there are probably far more customers here. We do know that customers come from all classes, ethnic backgrounds, and sexual orientations. A customer may have a good job and a wife and children, he may be a high school or college-aged “john,” or he may be combining business with pleasure.<sup>66</sup>

According to outreach worker Claude Marsh, heterosexual couples also proposition male or female prostitutes for the purpose of group sex,<sup>67</sup> and the same is probably the case with homosexual couples. The police are not immune to child sexual exploitation either. In 1998, a *Daily News* article reported that a former cop was convicted of trying to buy sex from a thirteen-year-old boy in Queens.<sup>68</sup> In late 1999, a New York City detective was arrested and charged with possession of child pornography, including tapes showing the rape of a twelve-year-old girl, and another depicting sex between a fourteen and sixteen-year-old and their father.<sup>69</sup> Acts of prostitution can occur in a customer’s car or home or in a hotel—East New York in Brooklyn still has motels that rent rooms by the hour.

For the majority, age is not as important as whether the individual prostitute is attractive to the particular customer or not. Many men don’t know how old the prostitute is, and they don’t ask. According to sociologist Julia O’Connell Davidson, pedophiles, who are defined as desiring prepubescent youth, are in the minority as customers of child prostitutes: men primarily become exploiters of youth through their prostitute use, not by explicitly looking to hire prostituted children. She adds that “the vast majority of child prostitutes are integrated into the mainstream sex industry which serves all those who wish to purchase commercial sex.”<sup>70</sup> In other words, as this report has tried to show, there is no niche market specifically for underage prostitutes. Just like adult prostitutes, they are to be found on the streets, in strip clubs and in escort services. Understanding child prostitution requires a comprehension of the dynamics of the sex industry at large.

### Conclusion: Where Do We Go From Here?

Four trends that have emerged regarding prostituted youth in New York City are revealed in this report:

- The age of sexually exploited youth seems to be decreasing.
- The situation of sexually exploited youth is becoming more violent in terms of physical and sexual violence and the forms of high-risk sex youth are forced to engage in.
- It is becoming more difficult to monitor the number of sexually exploited youth because prostitution has increasingly moved off the streets.
- There are insufficient services to provide sexually exploited youth with the opportunities and support that would allow them to leave and recover from sexual exploitation and other abuses.

<sup>65</sup> Mark Clayton, “Minneapolis ‘Shouldn’t Have to Sell its Daughters,’” *Christian Science Monitor* September 1996.

<sup>66</sup> See <<http://www.platinum-girls.com/customers>> for profiles of clients in New York.

<sup>67</sup> Claude Marsh, Interview by C Smolenski 29 April, 1999.

<sup>68</sup> Mike Claffey, “Ex-officer Convicted in Sex case,” *New York Daily News*, 18 March, 1998.

<sup>69</sup> Joseph P. Freid, “Detective Accused of Having Child Pornography” *New York Times*, 3 December 1999.

<sup>70</sup> Julia O’Connell Davidson, *The Sex Exploiter* (World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, 1996) 4-5.

Our research reveals important gaps, especially 1) the lack of research on certain aspects, 2) inadequate prevention programs, 3) deficient services for currently or formerly prostituted youth, and 4) lack of acknowledgement that there is a problem of sexually exploited youth in New York.

Research. Youth prostitution is a complex phenomenon requiring additional research. Research is needed to demonstrate the impact on young people's lives and the cost to the community of having its young people sexually exploited. Presenting the suffering of these youth as well as assessing the negative impact on communities can work to change the current attitude toward prostituted youth that they are responsible for their own exploitation.

More research is needed on other topics, including boy prostitution, prostitution of young people as it manifests itself in different kinds of brothels and sex clubs, and the impact of homelessness and domestic abuse on the likelihood of a child entering prostitution. We also know very little about the clients of prostituted youth.

Programs and services. Considering the risks and hardships these youth face, from physical violence to sexual assault and health risks including AIDS, what they need first and foremost is care, counseling and medical and legal services. Many interviewees, including Rachel Lloyd of GEMS, stressed the need for long-term services—"a safe place where they can build a good sense of self-esteem and have positive influences from the people around them."<sup>71</sup> Susan Breault envisioned a transitional living program, at least eighteen months in duration, followed by a supervised independent living program so that the youth always have a support network available. However, as Breault noted, "more money needs to trickle down to the service providers in the streets, in the schools, and in the trenches. My battle cry has always been that these agencies need to be recognized and funded."<sup>72</sup>

Services for trafficked youth should be tailored specifically to their needs, so that researching the conditions under which they are trafficked is a priority. A new visa category specifically for trafficking victims was recently created by federal legislation. But who qualifies for it and how their needs will be met once they are given a visa are open questions. In essence, New York needs to develop a network of services for all people trafficked into the city.

Heightening sensitivity to the problems of prostituted youth. In order to affect change, attitudes about prostituted youth need to change. More understanding on the part of law enforcement officials would help lead to prosecutions of the exploiters, not the victims. A dedicated concern for the welfare and future of all youth in the community at large would result in a greater investment in services for homeless and abused youth as well as work to prevent future cases of abuse.

In order to move to the next step in all these areas of need, ECPAT-USA and its partners the International Organization for Adolescents (IOFA) and Girls Educational Mentoring Services (GEMS) have founded the New York City Task Force on the Sexual Exploitation of Young People. It includes youth services organizations, elected officials,

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<sup>71</sup> Rachel Lloyd, personal interview.

<sup>72</sup> Susan Breault, personal interview.

counselors, researchers, and other interested groups to raise the political profile of the problem of prostituted young people in New York. The Task Force's goals are:

- 1) To share information and best practices among organizations providing services to trafficked and/or sexually exploited children and youth and those working to eliminate the sexual exploitation and trafficking of children and youth in New York City.
- 2) To document the nature and extent of sexual exploitation and trafficking of children and youth in New York City.
- 3) To serve as a locus for data collection, recommendation and dissemination of information on trafficked and sexually exploited children and youth in New York.
- 4) To lobby for specific policies, especially for education and prevention, and the enforcement of laws pertaining to trafficked and sexually exploited children and youth and to examine policies and statutes that may inadvertently put young people at risk.
- 5) To increase youth participation in developing policies and program for trafficked and sexually exploited children and youth.

By building a network of people interested in eradicating commercial sexual exploitation of young people, doing collaborative research, and educating and involving young people themselves, the task force aims to change attitudes and get the necessary resources to provide services for sexually exploited youth and prevent the further proliferation of this form of child abuse.