

Youth at higher risk of involvement in the sex trade

All youth can be recruited or forced into the sex trade.
However some youth are more at risk.

Youth in foster care and youth with child welfare involvement

A 2007 research report out of New York State found a high correlation between child welfare involvement and subsequent commercial sexual exploitation. Between 85 to 89% of youth reported to be commercially sexually exploited had prior child welfare involvement.¹

Youth who are homeless, AWOL, runaway, in unstable housing situations

Research results demonstrate a consistently high risk of involvement in survival sex or other forms of commercial sexual exploitation for youth without stable housing. The most recent federally funded national study found 70% of homeless youth are at risk of being commercially sexually exploited.²

Out of school youth, unemployed youth, low or no income youth

While not documented specifically in research, youth in group discussions have reported a lack of money or survival needs (even when youth have a place to live), lack of access to jobs and lack of skills from dropping out or being pushed out of school as direct links to their involvement or consideration of the sex trade to make money.

Youth with family involved in the sex trade and/or an active sex trade in their community

Youth in prevention workshops continue to identify being around an active sex trade in their community or family members involved in the sex trade as a risk factor. Youth stress that people in the community are more likely to encourage or recruit them and an active sex trade normalizes the option.

Youth with a history of sexual abuse

All research studies that ask youth who are or have been involved in the sex trade about previous sexual abuse prior to any commercial sexual exploitation find rates of up to over 90%. Research also suggests that sexual abuse is a factor independent of any resulting running away or substance abuse.³

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning youth

LGBTQQ youth make up 20 to 40% of all homeless youth, resulting in high rates of survival sex.⁴ Additionally, a study in Canada found the LGBT youth were three times more likely to trade sex for survival than heterosexual youth.⁵ Almost 60% of transgender girls and young women reported exchanging sex for money in recent Chicago-based research.⁶

Youth of color

African American minors are over-represented in prostitution arrests, comprising 55% of all arrests of juveniles for prostitution across the U.S. in 2002.⁷ Evidence suggests this may have to do with unequal law enforcement strategies that target communities of color. However, this may also reflect a higher involvement of African American youth. Latino, Asian, Native American/First Nations, and African American youth all experience systemic inequality, for example, represented in higher rates of poverty and involvement in the child welfare system. This suggests a higher risk of involvement as well.

¹ Gragg, F. et al. (2007). New York Prevalence Study of Commercially Sexually Exploited Children. <http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/reports/CSEC-2007.pdf>. Accessed April 8, 2009

² Estes, R and Weiner N. (2001). The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the United States, Canada and Mexico. http://www.sp2.upenn.edu/~restes/CSEC_Files/Complete_CSEC_020220.pdf. Accessed April 8, 2009.

³ Simons, R. and Whitbeck, L. (1991) Sexual Abuse as a Precursor to Prostitution and Victimization Among Adolescent and Adult Homeless Women. Journal of Family Issues, 12(3).

⁴ National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (2007). Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth: An epidemic of homelessness. http://www.thetaskforce.org/reports_and_research/homeless_youth. Accessed April 8, 2009.

⁵ Gaetz, S. (2004). Safe streets for whom? Homeless youth, social exclusion, and criminal victimization. Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice, 46(6).

⁶ Howard Brown Health Center (2008). <http://www.howardbrown.org/uploadedFiles/HowardBrownResearchNews0408.pdf>. Accessed April 8, 2009.

⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2002). Crime in the United States. http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius_02/html/web/arrested/04-table43.html. Accessed April 8, 2009.