

DOMESTIC MINOR SEX TRAFFICKING

THE UNITED STATES



the ASSESSMENTS

Shared Hope International, with funding from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, implemented assessments in 10 U.S. locations where the DOJ has funded task forces to combat human trafficking. The findings of these field assessments have been provided to the task forces and may serve as a springboard for the development of an action plan to address Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking - the commercial sexual exploitation of America's youth.

The federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act defines a victim of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking as a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident minor under the age of 18 involved in a commercial sex act. This law emphasizes a "victim-centered approach" to human trafficking and creates an extensive framework of victim's rights.

Some rights given to Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking victims are:

1. They are not culpable for crimes committed as a direct result of their victimization
2. They should not be detained in facilities inappropriate to their status as crime victims
3. They must receive necessary medical care and other assistance
4. They will be provided protection if their safety is at risk or if there is danger of recapture of the victim by the trafficker

one girl's STORY

Tanya was walking home from middle school one day when she met her first pimp. He drove up beside her in a fancy car and told her she was pretty – she was 12 years old. Tanya was a smart kid, at the time she was taking classes for talented and gifted children. She thought it felt good to have someone interested in her; he was sincere and had a nice smile. Every day for six months he met her after school and they talked. He bought her small gifts and she said that she felt special to have someone care about her.

He was making an investment – an investment of time and a crafted illusion of trust and loyalty that bound her emotionally to him. After six months she finally agreed to get in his car. When the car door shut Tanya's life changed forever - her "boyfriend" was actually a pimp. Tanya had never left her community before, but she suddenly found herself far away from home. Her "boyfriend" revealed his true motive with regular beatings to establish absolute control over her – he took away her identity and made her his slave. For the next five years he prostituted her to over 100 men per month. She knew she couldn't run; she had already seen proof of his terrifying promise: "You're mine. I know where I got you and I can get you again." She was arrested for prostitution over 17 times in nearly as many states. There was no safe place for her to run, and with each arrest she spent more time in jail – labeled a "child prostitute" and charged with the crime committed against her, Tanya was without hope for rescue.

Thankfully, a diligent law enforcement officer recognized Tanya as a victim and she was finally rescued; she is now free from a life of prostitution and her pimp is serving 40 years in prison. Tanya's story is reflective of the hundreds of thousands of children across America who are still suffering under the violent control of a trafficker/pimp and the men who purchase their young bodies.

Today we stand in solidarity with hundreds of professionals who are answering a call to action in the identification and response to America's trafficked youth.

the ISSUE

- The U.S. Department of Justice states that the average age of entry into prostitution is 12-14 years old.¹
- Shared Hope International's field research confirmed that underage girls are the bulk of victims in the commercial sex markets – this includes pornography, stripping, escort services, and prostitution.²
- The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005 cited the Congressional finding that 100,000-300,000 children in the United States are at risk for commercial sexual exploitation at any time.³
- The prostitution of American children is a nationwide problem. The Shared Hope International assessment of Las Vegas reports that 1,496 children from 40 states were trafficked into and arrested for prostitution in Clark County, Nevada between January 1994 and July 2007.⁴

PIMP CONTROL: Traffickers/Pimps use violence and psychological manipulation to control girls and convert their bodies into cash.

"Well, I think I knew what he was, but I needed what I felt was being offered to me, which was protection, someone to care for me, someone that cared if I got hurt or if anything happened to me, which of course was all lies. I just wanted someone to care."

- Kristy Childs, *Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking - Prostituted Children in the United States: Identifying and Responding to America's Trafficked Youth*, Shared Hope International training video, 2008.

- The U.S. Department of Justice states that at least 75% of minors exploited through prostitution are controlled by a pimp.⁵ Traffickers and pimps target vulnerable children and recruit them into prostitution using violence and psychological torture to hold the victims in bondage.
- The Internet is a common tool of traffickers/pimps - every assessed location identified the use of the Internet as a common vehicle for the selling of children for sex. For example, in Salt Lake City, Utah, the Vice Unit of the Salt Lake City Police Department estimates that 1 of every 100 advertisements posted on the craigslist.com erotic page involves a juvenile.⁶
- 30% of shelter youth and 70% of street youth are victims of commercial sexual exploitation.⁷ In 2007, the Dallas (Texas) Police Department, Child Exploitation, High Risk Victims and Trafficking Unit identified 189 High Risk Victims - chronic runaways and youth with previous sexual exploitation. Further investigation revealed that 119 of those youth were child victims of sex trafficking.
- Familial prostitution – the selling of one's family member for sex in exchange for drugs, shelter, or money - is a large and overlooked problem in the United States; in fact 9 out of the 10 assessments performed by Shared Hope International reported familial prostitution as a severe form of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking occurring in the community. The federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act identifies these parents/relatives as traffickers.

¹ U.S. Department of Justice – Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section. <<http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/ceos/prostitution.html>>. Accessed on March 11, 2008.

² "DEMAND.: A Comparative Examination of Sex Tourism and Trafficking in Jamaica, Japan, The Netherlands, and the United States," Shared Hope International, July 2007. <www.sharedhope.org>. Accessed on September 10, 2008.

³ U.S. Cong. Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005. PUBLIC LAW 109-164 – January 4, 2005 <<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/61106.htm>>

⁴ Vice Section, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) STOP Program. From January 1, 1994 - December 31, 2006 documented by "Rapid Assessment of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking and Facilitation of Services in Las Vegas, Nevada," Shared Hope International, August 2007. <www.sharedhope.org>. Accessed on September 10, 2008.

⁵ U.S. Department of Justice – Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section. <<http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/ceos/prostitution.html>>. Accessed on March 11, 2008.

⁶ "Rapid Assessment of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking and Facilitation of Services in Salt Lake City, Utah," Shared Hope International, August 2008. <www.sharedhope.org>. Accessed on September 10, 2008.

⁷ Estes, R. & Weiner, N. "Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico." University of Pennsylvania, 2001.

MISIDENTIFICATION: Exploited children are often labeled “child prostitutes” and punished for the crime that is committed against them.

“I always felt like a criminal. I never felt like a victim at all. Victims don’t do time in jail, they work on the healing process. I was a criminal because I spent time in jail. I definitely felt like nothing more than a criminal.”

– “Tonya”, Survivor of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking, featured in *Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking - Prostituted Children in the United States: Identifying and Responding to America’s Trafficked Youth*, Shared Hope International training video, 2008.

- In 8 of 10 locations in which Shared Hope International implemented assessments of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking, children are being detained in the juvenile justice system for prostitution or charges related to their exploitation. This is in direct conflict with their victim status under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act - the federal law that identifies commercially sexually exploited children as trafficking victims.⁸
- Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking victims were found in each of the 10 U.S. locations assessed by Shared Hope International. For example, a single outreach organization in Las Vegas, Nevada identified 400 prostituted children in a single month (May 2007).⁹ Minors who are engaged in prostitution are often misidentified and mislabeled as “child prostitutes.” They are punished for the crime that is being committed against them rather than identified as victims of sex trafficking as defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act - the federal law that protects victims of trafficking.

CRIMINALIZATION: While children exploited in prostitution are often arrested, their buyers and traffickers go largely unpunished.

“I think they should get time in jail too, because they’ve got to know that the women out there are scared for their lives, and they should try to help us get out of there somehow.”

-“Kelly”, Survivor of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking, featured in *Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking - Prostituted Children in the United States: Identifying and Responding to America’s Trafficked Youth*, Shared Hope International training video, 2008.

- State trafficking laws do not align with the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 9 out of 10 locations where assessments were conducted. This can impede the prosecution of traffickers/pimps and buyers of children while withholding victim status and special services from American children who are victims of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking.¹⁰
- When utilized, state and federal anti-trafficking laws have resulted in traffickers/pimps receiving sentences that range from 6 months in jail to 8 years in federal prison; however, assessments have revealed minimal application of these laws for cases involving prostituted American youth. Greater awareness of these laws and their application is necessary to increase the prosecution of these criminals.
- Very few buyers of prostituted children are arrested or prosecuted in the United States. Law enforcement agencies face legal and systemic challenges that interfere with the ability to investigate, arrest, and prosecute buyers.
- There is a severe lack of protective shelter for children who are victims of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking. In the 10 U.S. locations assessed by Shared Hope International just one protective facility that specifically works with this victim population was identified – the Letot Center in Dallas, Texas¹¹.

⁸ “Rapid Assessment of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking”: Las Vegas, NV, Clearwater, FL, Baton Rouge/New Orleans, LA, Independence, MO, San Antonio, TX, Salt Lake City, UT, Buffalo/Erie County, NY, Fort Worth, TX

⁹ “Rapid Assessment of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking and Facilitation of Services in Las Vegas, Nevada,” Shared Hope International, August, 2007. <www.sharedhope.org>. Accessed on September 10, 2008.

¹⁰ The Missouri state anti-trafficking law aligns with the federal TVPA regarding the definition of DMST

¹¹ “Rapid Assessment of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking and Facilitation of Services in Dallas, TX,” Shared Hope International, July 2008.

the STRATEGY

- **PREVENTION** includes proper victim identification enhanced by public awareness and training of those who interact with the vulnerable population of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Victims.
- Strong legislation that criminalizes traffickers/pimps and buyers while protecting victims and **PROSECUTIONS** resulting in convictions with appropriate sentences are critical.
- Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking victims require **PROTECTION**, including protective safe homes and tailored services that rescue and restore while removing the child from the control of the trafficker/pimp.

the LOCATIONS

Shared Hope International conducted assessments of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking in the following locations:

Las Vegas, NV
Clearwater, FL
Baton Rouge/New Orleans, LA
Independence, MO
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
San Antonio, TX
Salt Lake City, UT
Buffalo/Erie County, NY
Fort Worth, TX
Dallas, TX

about SHARED HOPE INTERNATIONAL

Shared Hope International rescues and restores women and children in crisis. For almost a decade, Shared Hope International has worked diligently around the world in partnership with local groups to prevent trafficking and to rescue and restore the victims of sexual slavery. Shared Hope International is bringing hope to women and children everywhere.

For more information visit www.sharedhope.org