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# Child Sex Trafficking in Lucas County

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Preliminary Findings  
from Interviews with  
Victims

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By Celia Williamson, Ph.D.

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## **Purpose for Studying Juveniles Involved in Sex Trafficking**

A 2005-06 federal investigation and consequent arrest of several Toledo pimps involved in a national prostitution trafficking ring was cited in several newspapers. In one investigation, indictments from the Grand Jury were handed down to 14 men and women from Toledo. Nine underage girls found in Harrisburg, PA who agreed to testify in the federal case, were from Toledo. Because of this case and subsequent investigations, Toledo has recently been cited by the FBI and National Center for Missing and Exploited Children as a major recruitment area for the commercial sexual exploitation of children by traffickers (Davis, 2006 p.8). In a series of front page articles in the Toledo Blade, local news coverage, and national coverage in the New York Times, the issue of underage girls involved in commercial sexual exploitation in Toledo has brought the problem to national attention. Recently the FBI reported receiving information on approximately 38 girls involved in trafficking in Lucas County. Of the 14 interviewed by this researcher thus far, each report knowing between 5 and 10 additional girls involved, some of which have and have not been involved in the juvenile justice system.

## **Objectives of Research**

The primary purpose of this study is to identify the experiences, well-being, and risk factors associated with juveniles who have been involved in prostitution. For the purposes of this study, prostitution is defined as trading sex for money, items, or a place to stay. Six main areas are being explored. These include (1) experiences with violence, (2) HIV risks and condom use, (3) emotional and physical health, (4) substance use, (5) home life & street life, and (6) experiences with local systems including the juvenile justice system, social service system, and the health care system. Interviews have also yielded information on the culture and experience of trafficking, places worked, safety, vulnerability to trafficking, customers, school experiences, and the progression through trafficking from entrance to present.

The results of the study will be used to better inform the Second Chance program and the juvenile justice community as well as other social service and health care programs in order to design more effective programming and provide targeted services to victims.

## **Gaining Permission**

Permission had been sought and gained from the Juvenile Judge and the University of Toledo to interview youth who volunteer to participate and whose parents sign informed consent forms for their

child to participate in this research. Teens who have been involved in prostitution were first identified by probation officers and juvenile justice personnel. Those teens were approached individually and confidentially and asked if they would like to participate in the study. They were free to accept or decline participation without repercussion. Provided the participant wanted to be interviewed and gave permission in writing, parents/guardians were contacted to gain written permission. Once permission was gained from both the adolescent and their guardian, the teen was asked to sign an informed consent form. The researcher then met with the adolescent to further explain the purpose of the study, who would see the results, the types of questions to be asked, the rules surrounding confidentiality, and their power to refuse to answer any questions or to end the interview at any time. If the teen gave permission to the interviewer, the interview took place. Thus far, no one that signed the informed consent form and met with the researcher has refused the interview.

### **Data Collection & Analysis**

Face to face interviews were conducted with participants who were involved with the Juvenile Justice Center and/or who were incarcerated in the juvenile detention center. Questions were open ended and participants were asked and encouraged to respond, talking as long as they'd like about each subject area until they believed they had described the subject in all of the ways they felt necessary. Interviews were audio-tape recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using qualitative methods.

Approximately 21 hours of interviews, yielding 191 pages of data, and over 150 research codes. Codes were categorized and collapsed into themes. Themes were linked in meaningful ways to understand the experience of trafficking. This is an on-going study. Preliminary findings are presented below.

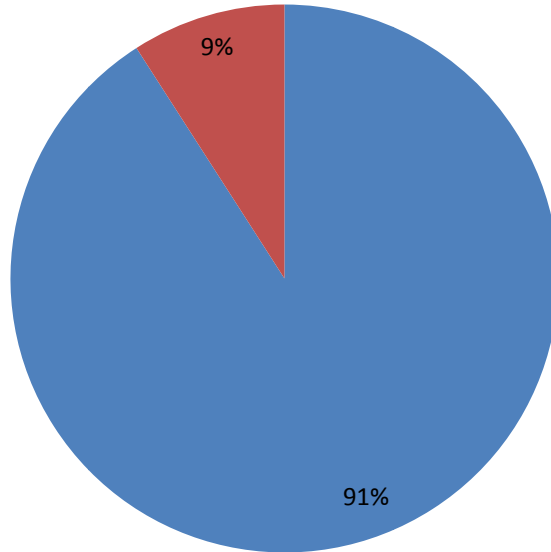
### **Preliminary Findings**

Twenty-three (23) referrals were made by the Juvenile Court during 2005-2007 for participation in the research study. Because this study is unfunded, the researcher has to interview and analyze as time becomes available. As such, fourteen children have been interviewed thus far. The preliminary findings from this report cover 11 of the 14 girls interviewed. Those are depicted and described below:

Of those 11 interviewed and data analyzed, a majority (91%) experienced child abuse in their home.

## Experienced Abuse in the Home

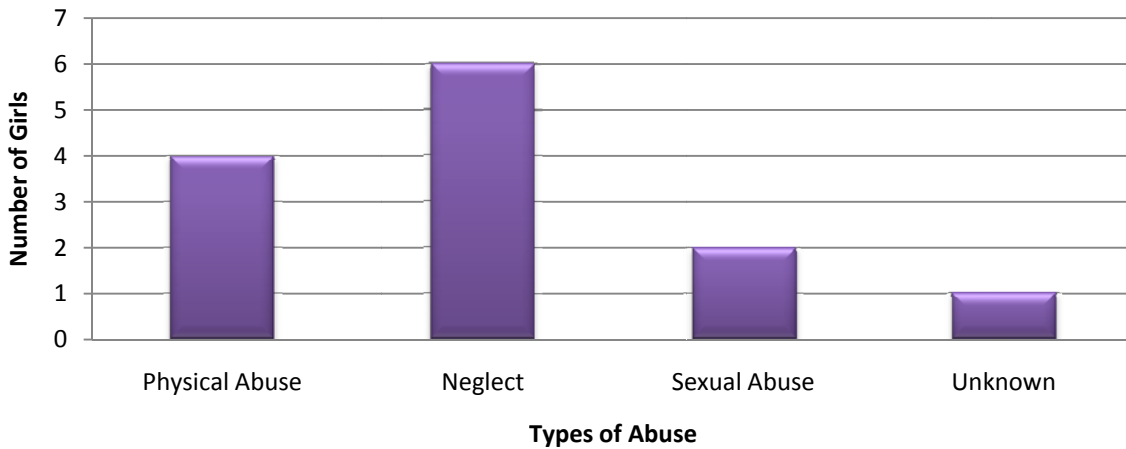
■ Abuse ■ No Abuse



My step dad used to beat us a lot. He used to beat my mom too. - 16 year old

Mom knew about the sexual abuse, but didn't want to say anything because she wanted to keep her husband - 17 year old

## Types of Abuse in the Home



\*Respondents may have experienced more than one type of abuse.

We were starving...we had no money, no lights, no gas. One box heater for whole family. He didn't want to waste drug money on Christmas presents or birthday presents. He took our toys away when I was 8. He sold them and bought drugs. I started prostituting at age 11.

In addition to the popular belief that childhood sexual abuse may be a precursor to prostitution and trafficking, neglect was found to be most prevalent among this population. Of those that reported experiencing child abuse, most reported neglect, followed by physical abuse and sexual abuse. One reported being abused but didn't specify how.

Neglect involved children living in homes where they believed they lacked enough food for themselves and their siblings, not enough essential clothing or "ragged" clothing, and with gas and lights turned off at some times during the year. Prostitution was reported to fulfill their needs and engage someone who could provide for their basic needs and/or be engaged in prostitution activities to be able to care for their needs themselves.

### **Recruitment**

Respondents reported being recruited by girls, women, young men, and older men. Vulnerability was a precursor to successful recruitment. Many girls were runaways at the time of recruitment. Recruitment in to child sex trafficking involved many players and connection to an underground social network.

### **Underground Social Network and the Players Involved**

Within the social network of prostitution, there are several players connected to trafficking that assume various roles. This loosely connected system of players, serves to keep the underground network operating with little disruption from law enforcement, neighborhood watch, or social service agency interventions. The roles played by those in the underground network include: connectors, recruiters, groomers, traffickers, bottoms, watchers, wife in laws, tricks, bouncers and/or security guards. Each serves a purpose in keeping trafficking in operation. Other than the trafficker, each knows little about the entire series of enterprises, but acts, sometimes independently, as a link in the overall chain of trafficking. Once a link is removed through law enforcement or social service intervention, it is quickly replaced with another player seeking to make money from the potential available dollars within the trafficking game.

Connectors are those in neighborhoods that "hook you up" with someone that knows how to make money in prostitution. They may introduce a girl to a recruiter or to a trafficker. Connectors may be compensated in the form of cash, or they may be held in good favor by a trafficker or recruiter and compensated in other ways e.g. drugs, free drinks at the club, or other favors. Recruiters are more

closely linked to the trafficker or to the enterprise of prostitution. Recruiters seek to find 'fresh faces' to provide to the trafficker. Groomers are those that partner with a girl to prostitute together. If this is the case, typically a groomer is a woman selling herself as well and has established connections to customers in and out of town. Groomers teach girls about the business of prostitution and are compensated monetarily by each girl they traffic and/or reap the benefits of being connected to fresh faces in prostitution.

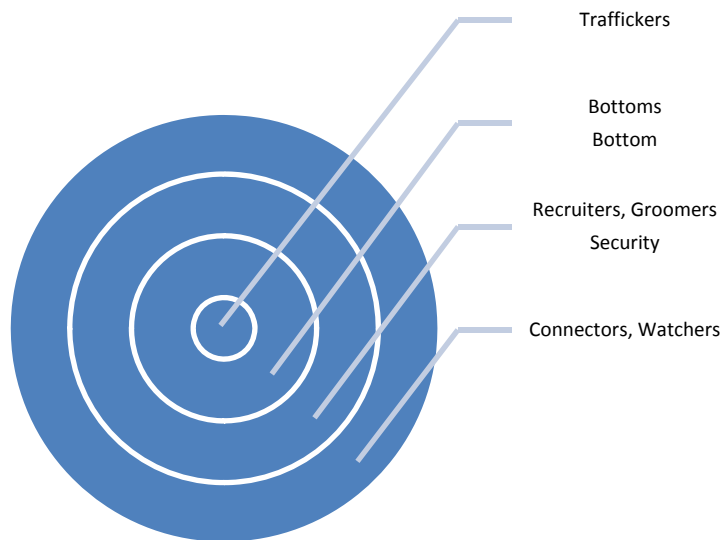
Traffickers are "pimps" with the sole purpose of sexually controlling and exploiting others to make money. Girls under his control are required to pay the trafficker and to follow the rules as a member of his stable. He, in turn, pays all of the bills, provides the clothing, food, and other basic needs required.

A bottom is known as the woman that is closest to the pimp, may have been with him the longest, and often knows the most about his business. She is the most trusted woman in his stable. The bottom is often the second in command and may demand the quota from women in the pimp's stable, dole out the consequences if someone breaks the rules, and makes sure women learn how to make money effectively and efficiently.

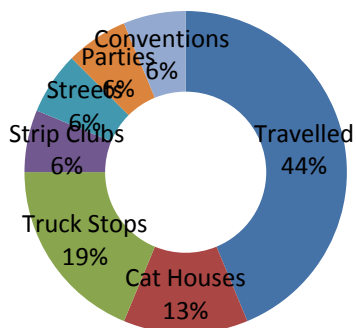
The watcher is the person assigned to walk girls back and forth at the truck stop, make sure they don't slip out of the strip club after dancing, and make sure they come back to the car after being dropped off at a motel room. In theory, they provide security for women. In reality, they are there to make sure money is collected and the trafficked girl doesn't escape. In smaller organizations, the trafficker may serve as the watcher. Wife-in-laws are the girls that belong to the pimp's stable. They may be set up in an apartment together or a house with the bills paid by the trafficker in exchange for their loyalty to him and hard work for him.

Bouncers or security guards are sometimes hired to watch girls who work the strip clubs to be sure they aren't abused or taken advantage of by the audience. Bouncers/Security is usually paid per girl, per night.

### TRAFFICKING RINGS



### Places Where Girls Prostituted While Involved with Trafficker



Most girls trafficked in Lucas County are forced to work in other areas outside of Lucas County. Trafficked youth reported working in New York, Florida, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Washington DC, Arkansas, Atlanta, Dayton, Fort Wayne, Detroit, Cleveland, and Akron. Girls reported working at truck

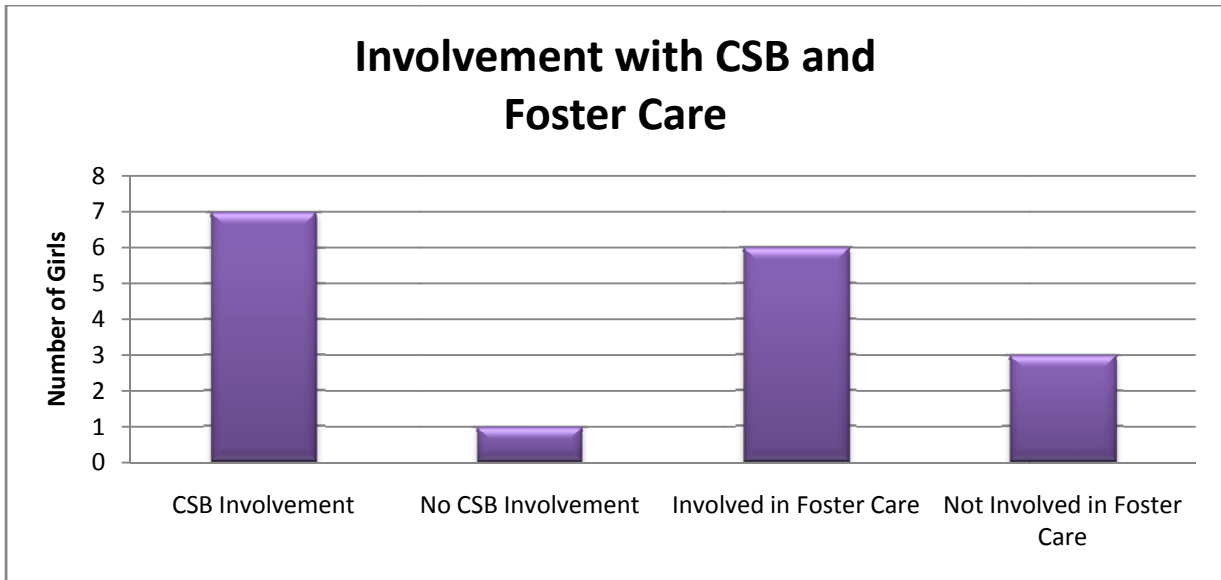
stops, cat houses (houses set up for prostitution in which the owner takes a portion of the earnings), conventions, the streets and private parties.



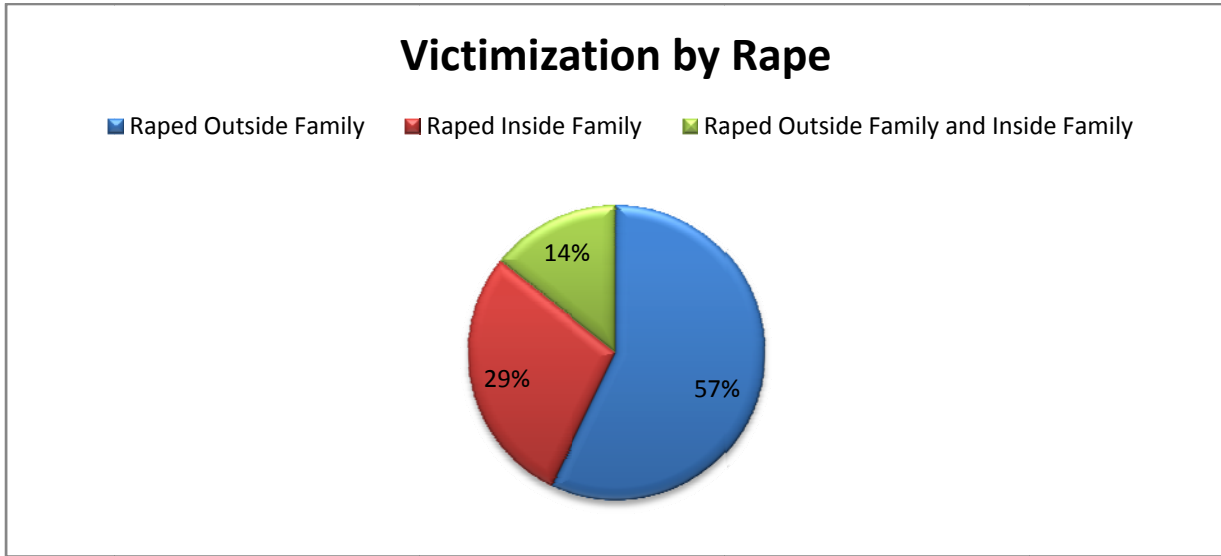
I was 13 when I started prostituting through my Uncle first- basically I had sex to get crack – Then through another guy, then by myself. I would do it for a place to stay, food, a ride.

He bought be clothes, shoes, socks, make-up, and hygiene stuff. He said I was his girl. The first night I went out there and worked I had to turn my money over to a girl.

A majority of the girls were trafficked into the sex trade by someone. Two reported not being involved in selling sex. Many girls trafficked into the sex trade by someone (82%) escaped, were rescued, or were let go by their trafficker. Sixty-four percent (64%) reported prostituting themselves on the streets of Toledo. However, Toledo offered little in comparison to the money made while traveling. As time passes and without targeted intervention, over 77% of prostituted girls will go on to participate in adult prostitution (Ventura, Williamson, et.al, 2006)

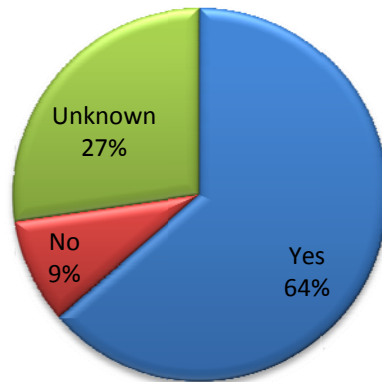


Most of the girls (77%) involved in the study had also been involved with Lucas County Children’s Services. Over half had also been involved in the foster care system.



Recognizing that any sexual activity with under aged girls, with or without their consent is sexual exploitation or a form of molestation and/or rape, we only included those reports by girls of sexual activity that did not involve their consent. Over half of girls involved in prostitution reported being raped by someone outside of their family. Almost 30% of girls reported being raped by someone in their family. Fourteen percent of girls reported being raped by someone both in and outside of their family. This does not include multiple rapes reported by a single girl.

## Parental Substance Abuse



Sixty-four percent of the girls interviewed reported having one or both parents addicted to drugs or alcohol. Parental substance abuse served to disrupt the lives of girls and caused significant and chronic stress and left many to try and care for their siblings.

### Runaway Reasons

Girls report reasons they ran away from home. The most common reasons were because they reported being stressed out due to family dysfunction, having too many responsibilities for the care of family and younger siblings, and experiencing repeated abuse and/or neglect. Girls, who have parents that are substance abusers, commonly took on the responsibilities for the care of the family. Because they have excessive responsibility along with adult worries and lack the authority and resources to be successful in the care of the family, they typically fail, periodically give up and runaway. Most experience inner turmoil while on the run and wish to be back home under optimal circumstances. Girls believe systems that provide additional stressors, while providing minimal relief, add to the stress; overwhelmed girls give up and run again. However, whether on the run or at home girls experience chronic stressors. Spending time on the streets serves to assist girls in swapping stresses related to a dysfunctional home life for stress related to a predatory and survival based street life.

## **Entrance Risks**

Coming from a family where stressors are ever present and runaway behavior exists, girls are at high risk of being trafficked and in entering the network of characters involved in trafficking rings. Those involved in trafficking are present at hang out houses, schools, corner stores, malls etc.

## **Conventional Values vs. Practices of the Underground Social Network**

A majority of the girls discussed their values in relation to prostitution and in relation to their current and future lives. Girls involved in the study displayed conventional values that rejected prostitution as a way of life or a moral way of making money. A majority of the girls dreamed of healthy families, close relationships, homes, an education or GED, an occupation, and having a loving intimate relationship that may lead to marriage and children.

## **Mental Health**

Entrance into prostitution severely affects self esteem, self confidence, and self worth. Girls experienced both shame (being something wrong) and guilt (doing something wrong). Most report depression, hyper vigilance, and symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Some girls had already been diagnosed with depression and bipolar disorder. Chronic stress, periodic acute Trauma, and daily hassles are ever present with few positive informal support systems.

It's like every time you do it, it eats a part of you away, and it's just like its unexplainable how it makes you feel. You're worthless; you're not any good anymore. You're damaged goods. Like me, I never think that a man would want to touch me or actually love me.....

I feel like shit and that I can't never do anything right. And it tears me up, like to want to go out and make money so bad. I can't get no job. I've tried everywhere. I mean nobody will hire me. So still to this day I think about it. Like I have to make some money some kind of way....

Customers love me...and it made me feel so good, but then it made me feel bad when I would go to sleep...

## What can Court do to help? Preliminary Collection of Responses from Trafficked Girls

- We need someone to talk to, to turn to, someone we can trust. Not nobody's who's gonna snake us and turn their back and look down on us or judge us for what we've been through. We need support and people that care.
- Have meetings and get to true feelings
- It's very hard to get out. Need support groups and job and gain self respect. They don't care about themselves. People should let them know they're with somebody that cares about them. Girls just want to be loved. To take care of themselves or their families and that's the fastest way to do it
- Court should do something when kids are raped as children
- Get me involved in a program
- Focus on positive things with me instead of negative
- Have a drug/alcohol program
- Offer restitution or whatever – something to do, something to earn.
- Programs should be about prostitution, pregnancy, and foster care
- Build self esteem
- Be strict, keep kids active in positive ways, and show ways to have fun and get money – earn way to Cedar Point etc.
- Telling kids not to do it is least effective and just putting them in jail
- Get girls who already in it to think about if they want their daughter out there
- If you want to get them out tell them to tell someone- a teacher, counselor, family member, adult, police and they will take care of it. Call for help and say 'he won't let me leave' and police will be there
- Don't keep girls locked up. Keep them in school
- Reach them at 10
- What keeps girls in it? – money, pimp, look happy wearing great clothes
- Talk to them about pregnancy, about my experience, about tricking is not cool, before everything becomes a habit.

## **Immediate Needs**

The streets provide support, although negative and life altering, it offers places to sleep, ways to earn money, a network of accepting others. Competing with the street by offering an intervention of two hours per week or more, can't compete with the underground network of players and continued system of support. To counter this system, our community must continue to offer case management and support and offer safe and long term housing supported by qualified, educated, and empathetic staff. Services in a safe house should include trauma treatment, medication management, education and Job training among other interventions. Second Chance will be opening its Safe House for trafficked girls within the next three months.