

# Conceptualizing Juvenile Prostitution as Child Maltreatment: Findings from the National Juvenile Prostitution Study

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Two studies were conducted to identify the incidence (Study 1) and characteristics (Study 2) of juvenile prostitution cases known to law enforcement agencies in the United States. Study 1 revealed a national estimate of 1,450 arrests or detentions (95% confidence interval [CI]: 1,287–1,614) in cases involving juvenile prostitution during a 1-year period. In Study 2, exploratory data were collected from a subsample of 138 cases from police records in 2005. The cases are broadly categorized into three main types: (a) third-party exploiters, (b) solo prostitution, and (c) conventional child sexual abuse (CSA) with payment. Cases were classified into three initial categories based on police orientation toward the juvenile: (a) juveniles as victims (53%), (b) juveniles as delinquents (31%), and (c) juvenile as both victims and delinquents (16%). When examining the status of the juveniles by case type, the authors found that all the juveniles in CSA with payment cases were treated as victims, 66% in third-party exploiters cases, and 11% in solo cases. Findings indicate law enforcement responses to juvenile prostitution are influential in determining whether such youth are viewed as victims of commercial sexual exploitation or as delinquents.

**Keywords:** *juvenile prostitution; typology; criminal justice system; child maltreatment; law enforcement*

Until recently, social service agencies and the criminal justice system have largely viewed prostitution among juveniles as part of the spectrum of delinquency engaged in by adolescent runaways and “street youth” (Flowers, 2001; Gray, 2005; Kreston, 2005). This is beginning to change, however, and the problem of youth involved in prostitution is increasingly being defined as “commercial sexual exploitation,” a particularly serious form of sexual victimization. Youth service agencies have drawn attention to the circumstances that leave some youth vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation, such as being homeless or living on their own without the care and protection of families or the resources to support themselves (Bova Conti & Carson, 2005; Klain, 1999). Advocacy groups have focused on the exploitation of youth by pimps and others who profit financially from selling underage youth for sex (Children of the Night, 2006). News stories about an international market for the sexual trafficking of girls and women have raised concern (David, 2007; Dunphy, 2007; Zondi, 2006), and parallels between international sex trafficking and the plights of girls sold for sex by pimps in the United States

have been noted. Federal laws proscribing international trafficking for sexual purposes have been expanded to include U.S. youth involved in prostitution within the United States (Trafficking Victims Protections Reauthorization Act, 2005; Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, 2000). The U.S. Department of Justice has encouraged law enforcement agencies to change policies that once treated youth engaged in prostitution as offenders or delinquents, and to instead view such youth as victims of commercial sexual exploitation, and to make pursuing juvenile prostitution a priority (Ashley, 2008; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005; Friedman, 2007). To further this end, law enforcement training programs and specialized task forces have been instituted across the United States (Klain, 1999; U.S. Department of Justice, 2004).

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## Definitions

For the purposes of both studies detailed below, we have adopted certain definitions that reflect some of the issues raised by the research. We call the youth in these cases “juveniles involved in prostitution,” because that term covers both youth who are prostituted by others and those who act alone. We do not refer to such youth as “victims” because we are focusing on whether and under what circumstances law enforcement views them as victims. We use the term “third-party exploiter” for those who profit financially from selling juveniles for sex. Many of the third-party exploiters in the study were pimps (both male and female), but this category also includes some offenders who worked for pimps, such as adult prostitutes. We use the term “client” for individuals who pay juveniles involved in prostitution for sex (i.e., johns, customers).

## Considerations for Conceptualizing Juvenile Prostitution as a Form of Child Maltreatment

Because juveniles involved in prostitution have largely been considered delinquents, much of the research in this area has been conducted by criminology researchers (Gray, 2005; Kreston, 2005) with little orientation to the field of child maltreatment. Yet, the literature suggests that the field of child maltreatment should encompass juvenile prostitution for several interlocking reasons. First, illegal sexual activities by adults with children have been clearly designated as a core concern of the child maltreatment field, even when those activities involve some “voluntary” participation on the part of youth (Berliner, 2002; Hines & Finkelhor, 2007; Lanning, 2002). Second, juveniles involved in prostitution frequently have histories of maltreatment in their families of origin (Bell & Todd, 1998; Bova Conti & Carson, 2005; Cates, 1989; Nadon, Koverola, & Schludermann, 1998; Schaffer & DeBlassie, 1984). In fact, inadequate responses by child protection agencies to such maltreatment may be a factor in many of these cases. Third, juveniles involved in prostitution are frequently abused and mistreated by pimps, clients, and other adults they associate with, and they work under onerous circumstances that can have serious consequences for their health. Violent victimization (e.g., aggravated assault, sexual abuse) at the hands of pimps, clients, and other prostitutes is common (Klain, 1999; Miller & Schwartz, 1995; Silbert, 1982). Frequent, repeated sexual activity with strangers

makes youth vulnerable to HIV infection, other sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy. Other health concerns such as illness and poor nutrition beset the population, particularly because access to adequate health care is limited (Farrow, Deisher, Brown, Kulig, & Kipke, 1992; Klain, 1999; Yates, Mackenzie, Pennbridge, & Swofford, 1991). Drug abuse and the health and criminal repercussions associated with it are a large problem (Farrow et al., 1992; Klain, 1999; Silbert, Pines, & Lynch, 1982; Yates et al., 1991). Finally, a number of psychological disorders, such as depression and suicidality, plague youth involved in prostitution (Farrow et al., 1992; Klain, 1999; Yates et al., 1991). For such reasons, the need for a child protection response to and involvement in the management and treatment of these youth has been often expressed (Estes, Giardino, & Cooper, 2005; Gray, 2005; Klain, 1999). In fact, child maltreatment professionals have been among those who have pioneered the kind of multidisciplinary cooperation among police, child protection, treatment, and other social services that could be the most promising intervention for juveniles involved in prostitution.

Although views about the nature of juvenile prostitution appear to be changing, research on the dynamics of the problem has been sparse, making it hard to develop policy. When juveniles who are involved in prostitution come into contact with law enforcement, its responses are likely to be influential in determining whether such youth are viewed as victims of commercial sexual exploitation or as delinquents. Law enforcement responses can encompass attitudes toward youth involved in prostitution and how they are treated. This includes whether law enforcement gives priority to such cases, whether juveniles are charged with crimes, and what services are offered to them.

This article presents an overview of results from two studies based on a sample of law enforcement agencies in the United States about their responses to juvenile prostitution. Study 1 consisted of a national mail survey to law enforcement agencies inquiring about the number of arrests/detentions made in 2005 for juvenile prostitution crimes. Study 2 consisted of detailed telephone interviews with police about specific cases.

## Study 1

### Goal of Study 1

The main goal of Study 1 was to report on the estimated number of arrests or detentions for cases involving juvenile prostitution in 2005 in the United States.

## Participants

The National Juvenile Prostitution Study (*N-JPS*) collected information from a national sample of law enforcement agencies about the characteristics of crimes involving juvenile prostitution and the numbers of arrests and detentions for these crimes during a 1-year period. The goals of the methodology were to construct a representative national sample of law enforcement agencies that would provide an overall picture of the law enforcement response to these crimes in the United States and understand how these cases emerged and were handled in a diverse group of agencies. This study was conducted with the approval of the University of New Hampshire's Institutional Review Board.

A national sample of 2,598 state, county, and local law enforcement agencies was surveyed by mail asking them whether they had made arrests or detentions in juvenile prostitution cases. The sample was drawn using a database available through the National Directory of Criminal Justice Data (National Public Safety Information Bureau, 2006). This data set included an annually updated census of local, county, and state law enforcement agencies in the United States and was designed to provide geographic and other identifying information for each record included in either the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports files or the Bureau of Justice Statistics' Directory of Law Enforcement Agencies.

We constructed a stratified national sample of state, county, and local law enforcement agencies, dividing law enforcement agencies into three sampling frames based on the number of full-time sworn officers in each agency. The *first* frame consisted of 137 agencies, including all agencies in the United States with 1,000 or more full-time sworn officers and one federal agency. These agencies represented all major cities (e.g., New York City, Boston, Miami, Los Angeles) and counties (e.g., Orange County, CA; Miami-Dade County, FL; Nassau County, NY). We did not sample from this frame; we included all agencies, given that prostitution cases were expected to cluster in these largest agencies. The *second* frame consisted of law enforcement agencies with 50–999 full-time sworn officers. A total of 2,077 agencies fell into this category. Of these, 52% were randomly selected to participate in the study ( $n = 1,072$ ). The *third* frame consisted of law enforcement agencies with 1–49 full-time sworn officers. A total of 12,954 agencies fell into this category. Of these, 11% were randomly selected to participate in the study ( $n = 1,389$ ). The percentage of cases sampled from the second and third frames was chosen based on the population within

each frame, the likelihood of identifying cases that met our criteria, the resources of the study, and modeling this methodology off of prior successful research using these guidelines. Please refer to the study methodology report for more details about the sample selection (<http://unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/JP-study-methodology-report.pdf>)

Ninety-five percent ( $n = 2,281$ ) of the eligible agencies ( $n = 2,398$ ) responded to the mail surveys. Five percent of the agencies ( $n = 132$ ) that responded reported 877 arrests or detentions.<sup>1</sup> To be eligible, cases had to (a) involve juveniles younger than 18 years; (b) involve arrests or detentions in the calendar year 2005; and (c) involve the exchange of money or something of monetary value (e.g., food, shelter, drugs, alcohol).

## Design and Procedures

We conducted a mail survey of the law enforcement agencies in the sample.<sup>1</sup> In the mail survey, we asked agencies whether, in the calendar year 2005, they had detained or arrested any juveniles (age 17 years or younger) or adults (age 18 years or older) in cases involving juvenile prostitution. "Detained" was defined to include cases where juveniles were held under juvenile laws, for juvenile court proceedings, placed in residential care, or held for other reasons related to being minors. Eligible cases were defined as "where children or adolescents under the age of 18 were involved in prostitution. These could be cases where juveniles—either boys or girls—exchanged sex acts for money (or something else of monetary value) or cases that involved pimps, organized crime, or other situations where one person made money or gained financially in other ways from selling a child or adolescent for sex."

The response rate to the mail survey was 95% of eligible agencies. The great majority of agencies had no cases; only 5% of responding agencies ( $n = 132$ ) reported cases ( $n = 877$ ) that fit our criteria.

## Measures

Questions for Study 1 were developed through interviews and consultations with law enforcement. Completed surveys were also pilot-tested with police before the actual data collection began.

The full mail survey was modeled after another survey developed by the authors, the First National Juvenile Online Victimization Study (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003). This study collected data from law enforcement agencies about the incidence and characteristics of Internet-related sex crimes against minors. This,

as well as the current mail survey instrument, was a multipage booklet, formatted so that respondents could follow it easily. It included a “Frequently Asked Questions” section and a glossary of study terms, along with a toll-free telephone number so that respondents could contact the researchers if they had questions.

The mail survey asked four primary questions:

1. In the calendar year 2005, did your agency detain or arrest any juveniles for crimes involving prostitution? If yes, respondents were asked if any of the cases involved: (a) Pimps with juvenile prostitutes; (b) Businesses or other places fronting for prostitution (e.g., massage parlors, escort services); (c) Organized crime or gang-related juvenile prostitution; (d) Juveniles who were not U.S. citizens; (e) Juveniles from out-of-state; (f) Juveniles acting on their own who used prostitution to get money or goods—boys and girls; (g) Sexual abuse where juveniles were prostituted by family members or acquaintances; and (h) Sex tourism (a U.S. citizen traveling internationally to have sex with a minor in a foreign country).
2. In the calendar year 2005, did your agency detain or arrest any adults for crimes involving juvenile prostitution? If yes, respondents were asked if any of the cases involved the same characteristics listed above.
3. In the calendar year 2005, did your agency detain or make any arrests where someone who produced or wanted to produce child pornography paid money (or something of monetary value) to use a juvenile in sexually explicit pictures? (The payment could have been to the juvenile or to someone else.)

If respondents answered “Yes” to any of these questions, we asked them to list the case number, or other reference, and the name of the key investigating officer or most knowledgeable person for each case they reported (please note that the terms “case” and “arrest or detention” are used interchangeably through this manuscript). This information was stored and used in Study 2. In addition, we emphasized that agencies should return surveys, even if they had no cases to report.

## Weighting

A statistical technique called “weighting” was used to estimate annual numbers of arrests and detentions involving juvenile prostitution in a 1-year time frame

within the United States. Weighting takes into account sampling procedures and nonresponse, allowing the use of the data to project estimated annual arrest and detention totals with 95% confidence that the accurate number will fall within a specific range. In Study 1, agency-level mail interviews were obtained from a nationally representative stratified, single-stage probability sample of law enforcement agencies. In Study 2, telephone interviews were conducted with law enforcement investigators regarding the case, offender, and victim characteristics of a random sample of juvenile prostitution cases within their agency. Variance estimation stratum, primary sampling unit (PSU), base weight, and nonresponse adjusted weight variables were created for each of the Study 1 and 2 data sets to support unbiased estimation and variance estimation for the data. All analyses were conducted using SPSS 16.0 (SPSS Inc., 2007a, 2007c) with the Complex Samples add-in component (SPSS Inc., 2007b).

## Study 1 Results

### Numbers of Juvenile Prostitution Cases

There have been many attempts to estimate the number of juveniles involved in prostitution in the United States, with estimates ranging from 1,400 to 2.4 million (Edward, Iritani, & Hallfors, 2005; Estes & Weiner, 2001; General Accounting Office, 1982; Snyder & Sickmund, 2006; United States Department of Justice & Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, 2007). However, a close look at these diverse estimates reveals that none are based on a strong scientific foundation. No scientifically credible estimates of the overall number of juveniles involved in prostitution yet exist (Stransky & Finkelhor, 2008). The estimate derived from the N-JPS does not attempt to measure the number of youth involved in prostitution but rather the number of *arrests or detentions* made by law enforcement agencies in cases involving juvenile prostitution in a 1-year period.

Using weighted data, we calculated that there were an estimated 1,450 arrests/detentions for crimes related to juvenile prostitution in the United States in 2005 (95% CI range: 1,287 to 1,614). While our estimate includes cases in which either adults or youth were arrested or detained, this number corresponds fairly closely to another estimate of 1,400 juveniles taken into custody for prostitution and commercialized vice, which was based on FBI Uniform Crime Report data from 2003 (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). Both these estimates may undercount cases coming to the attention of law



enforcement, however, because police who work with juveniles may often know of or suspect involvement in prostitution but choose not to arrest or bring charges for lack of concrete evidence (Stransky & Finkelhor, 2008).

Fifty-two percent of the arrests/detentions in the current study, an estimated 748, were made by large law enforcement agencies (i.e., 1,000+ full-time sworn officers). The medium-sized agencies (i.e., 50 to 999 sworn officers) made about one-third (34%) of arrests/detentions, an estimated 495. Small agencies (i.e., 1 to 49 sworn officers) made 14%, an estimated 207 arrests/detentions.

However, 95% of U.S. law enforcement agencies made no arrests in cases involving juvenile prostitution in 2005. The 5% of agencies that did make such arrests included 44% of large agencies, 8% of medium-sized agencies, and 1% of small agencies. We do not know whether cases involving juvenile prostitution simply do not exist in most jurisdictions, or whether agencies are unaware of existing cases. Even among large jurisdictions where cases seem most likely, 56% of agencies reported no arrests or detentions. These jurisdictions included cities that have reputations for considerable prostitution, gang, organized crime, and juvenile crime problems (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2006). Furthermore, 30% of the largest jurisdictions reported only between 1 and 10 cases. Just six agencies nationwide reported making more than 50 arrests during the study year, 2005. In that year, 84,891 arrests were made for prostitution-related offenses across the United States (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2006), but according to the findings from the current study, less than 2% of arrests were in cases that involved juveniles (weighted estimate = 1,450).

The great majority of law enforcement cases in the N-JPS Study involved actual juveniles who were involved in prostitution. However, a small group of cases, an estimated 3.5% (weighted  $n = 51$ , unweighted  $n = 6$ ), involved other scenarios, of two sorts. The first was comprised of cases in which law enforcement investigators used the Internet to pose online as third-party exploiters who were offering paid access to fictional juveniles. The second involved cases in which the would-be clients were reported to police for either advertising that they were willing to pay juveniles for sex or for soliciting juveniles who were not involved in prostitution.

## Study 1 Discussion

As a result of Study 1, we now have a better understanding of the scope of juvenile prostitution cases coming to the attention of law enforcement. However,

this design was unable to provide information regarding the types of juvenile prostitution police are encountering or how these juveniles are treated in the criminal justice system, both of which are extremely important if we are to mobilize efforts to help this population. Study 2, below, was therefore conducted to address these gaps in the literature. In Study 2, we (a) propose and describe a typology of the juvenile prostitution cases identified in the criminal justice system, as well as dynamics of the case itself and the exploiters; (b) explore how cases originate in the criminal justice system; and (c) identify factors that contribute to juveniles being considered delinquents or victims.

## Study 2

### Participants

If respondents answered "Yes" to any of the questions in the mail survey (Study 1), we asked them to list the case number (or other reference to the case) and the name and contact information for the key investigating officer on each case. Then we conducted detailed telephone interviews with case investigators (Study 2). We designed a sampling procedure for case-level interviews that took into account the number of cases reported by an agency so we would not unduly burden respondents in agencies with many cases. If an agency reported between one and three juvenile prostitution cases, we conducted follow-up interviews for every case. (Sixty-nine percent of the responding agencies with at least one case were in this group.) For agencies that reported between 4 and 15 cases, 50% were randomly selected for interviews. For agencies with 16 to 50 cases, we conducted interviews on a randomly selected 25% of cases. Finally, for agencies with 51 or more cases, we conducted interviews on a randomly selected 10–50% of cases, depending on the agencies' time availability.

Of the 877 cases reported by law enforcement, 16% ( $n = 142$ ) were not selected for the sample; and 3% ( $n = 24$ ) were ineligible; resulting in 711 cases in the sample. Ineligible sampled cases were not replaced in the sample because one study goal was to estimate annual numbers of arrests/detentions, for which we used statistical weighting procedures that required nonreplacement. Of these 711 cases, 19% ( $n = 138$ ) of the telephone interviews were completed by three trained interviewers between October 2006 and May 2007. Of those not completed, 36% ( $n = 257$ ) involved investigators that did not respond to requests for interviews, 44% ( $n = 313$ ) involved respondents who refused to be

interviewed, and <1% ( $n = 3$ ) involved duplicate cases or cases that could not be identified. Most of the refusals involved large law enforcement agencies that could not easily retrieve the case files required for the interviews because they did not have filing systems that allowed them to identify the prostitution cases that involved juveniles specifically. Please refer to the study methodology report for more details about the sample selection (<http://unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/JP-study-methodology-report.pdf>)

## Design and Procedures

Three trained interviewers conducted the telephone interviews using computer-assisted interviewing software. The interviewers attended a 2-day training session led by the lead researchers that provided extensive details about the background, purpose, and instrumentation of the study. They all also participated in a series of practice, mock interviews with each other and the lead researchers until they were sufficiently familiar and comfortable with the interview process.

## Measures

Questions for Study 2 were developed through interviews and consultations with law enforcement. Completed surveys were also pilot-tested with police before the actual data collection began.

The Study 2 telephone interview instrument consisted of the following sections, some of which were used in every interview and others were dependent on the facts of the case. The *juveniles acting alone section* was used in cases where a juvenile was arrested or detained for prostituting his- or herself (and no type of third party exploiter was involved, such as a pimp). The *crimes involving third party exploiter section* was used in cases where there was a pimp, madam, business owner, parent, or some other individual who was controlling or in charge of the prostitution of a juvenile. The *sex tourism section* was used in cases where a U.S. citizen traveled to a foreign country and paid for sex acts with a minor in that country. The *child pornography production section* was used in cases where the offender either paid a juvenile for sexual pictures or had some other commercial purpose for the images, such as a means of advertising a juvenile for prostitution. A section on *the police investigation* was used in all cases and gathered information about how the investigation began, involvement of other jurisdictions, types of investigative tools used (e.g., search warrants), and items seized. The *offender section* collected information about the demographic, family, emotional, and

behavioral characteristics of the offender in each case. For cases with multiple offenders, information was only collected about the primary offender. The *juvenile section* was used in all cases. It collected information about the demographic, family, emotional, and behavioral characteristics of the juvenile. For cases with multiple juveniles involved, information was only collected about the primary juvenile. Because juveniles involved in solo prostitution are treated differently across jurisdictions (i.e., as a victim or delinquent), the information on juveniles in these cases was always captured in this section. The only time information about a juvenile was captured in the offender section was when the juvenile was pimping or otherwise controlling the prostitution of another juvenile in some way.

## Data Analysis

A total of 132 of 138 cases in the N-JPS involved identified juveniles. The remaining six cases involved either attempted juvenile prostitution (i.e., the perpetrator did not reach the juvenile) or undercover operations where no juveniles were involved (i.e. the investigator was posing as a juvenile).

To address Aim 1, our typology was built around both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the survey. The quantitative data used for coding included whether a third party was involved in the exploitation of the juvenile and, if so, the relationship of that individual to the juvenile. These data were combined with a qualitative description of the case to inform our typology. Weighted chi-square cross-tabulations were run across all three of the main categories of our typology (typology categories described below) to determine differences in youth characteristics by case type. Additional weighted chi-square cross-tabulations were run to compare the solo and third-party exploiter cases in terms of cases characteristics, as well as a comparison of the exploiter characteristics between the third-party exploiter and CSA with payment cases.

To address Aim 2, weighted descriptive statistics were examined to explore how cases originated in the criminal justice system. Finally, to address Aim 3, weighted chi-square cross-tabulations were run to explore differences in juvenile and case characteristics based on police orientation toward the juvenile (victim or delinquent). Variables significant at the bivariate level were included in a weighted logistic regression model to examine whether the way cases come to police attention helps explain police orientation toward the juvenile.

## Study 2 Results

*Typology of Juvenile Prostitution Cases in the Criminal Justice System.* One of the functions of a typology is to orient people to the diversity that exists in a phenomenon. Because many people stereotype juveniles involved in prostitution as runaway youth (Barnitz, 1998; Deisher, Robinson, & Boyer, 1982; Klain, 1999) who end up being corralled by pimps or walking the streets to survive, a typology is useful to highlight other existing dynamics of juvenile prostitution. For example, running away may not be the only pathway that leads to involvement in prostitution for juveniles. Anecdotal reports suggest that children living in their own homes may be prostituted by family members or acquaintances. Some children who are sexually abused by family members or acquaintances receive money or other items as incentives for sex acts (Lanning, 2005), situations that may share some elements of prostitution. Juveniles may also become involved in prostitution through gang activity as part of initiation rituals or to accumulate power and wealth for other members (Klain, 1999; The Hofstede Committee Report, 1999). Drug addiction, or other financial needs or desires may also draw juveniles into prostitution. There have also been media stories about juveniles from other countries brought into the United States for the purposes of prostitution.

Our typology divides law enforcement cases into three groups that involve (a) third-party exploiters, (b) solo juveniles, and (c) conventional CSA cases with payment. The first category, third-party exploiters, involves pimps or others who profit financially from selling juveniles for sex. We divide this further into two subcategories—(1a) situations involving fairly well-organized commercial and criminal enterprises, like massage parlors and call-girl services, and (1b) those that might be described as smalltime or less formal operations, involving, for example, one third-party exploiter and one juvenile.

In the second category are solo juveniles, who offer themselves for sexual services (including pornography production), typically to people they do not know (i.e., clients), in exchange for money or items of monetary value. This group also has two subcategories: (2a) solo juveniles who lack a stable residence (e.g., runaways, homeless or transient youth), and (2b) solo juveniles who are living at home or in an institution (e.g., school or foster home).

The third category involves children who are experiencing sexual abuse at the hands of family, acquaintances, and caretakers and who are being paid money as inducements to engage in or continue these sexual

activities. These cases occupy a border between commercial sexual exploitation and CSA. In general, although these victims were receiving money in exchange for sex, they were not engaging in prostitution in the sense of having serial sex with a variety of clients. These cases also differed from the third-party exploiter and solo cases in that most were reported by small law enforcement agencies. When we interviewed respondents, we asked them about cases that “involve juvenile prostitution, meaning money or something of value was exchanged for sex acts with or by someone who was younger than 18.” Small agencies may have cited these CSA cases because they had so few of the more stereotypical juvenile prostitution cases. Large and medium agencies may have also had these more unusual cases but not reported them in our survey because the term “juvenile prostitution” evoked the more stereotypical situations.

The majority of the juveniles involved in prostitution were female (90%; see Table 1). Most were older teenagers (ages 14–17) but 11% were younger than age 14 years. Fifty-nine percent of juveniles were White; a number not too far off from the percentage of White youth in the U.S. population (ages 10–19, 62.9%; National Adolescent Health Information Center, 2003). However, 36% were Black, which is quite disproportionate to the 14.5% of Black youth (ages 10–19) in the U.S. population (National Adolescent Health Information Center, 2003). The majority lived in either urban (53%) or suburban (23%) communities. All juveniles were U.S. citizens. Over half (60%) had histories as runaways and 36% had criminal histories. Slightly more than half (54%) of juveniles were detained or arrested as part of the current crime. Other cases involved adults arrested for exploiting the juveniles.

*Third-party exploiter cases (57%, unweighted n = 77).* An estimated 793 (95% CI: 697–889) arrests/detentions were made by police in 2005 for cases involving third-party exploiters. Juveniles involved in this type of prostitution were almost exclusively female, making this the most predominantly female of any of the types (see Table 1). Almost half of these juveniles were ages 16 or 17 years (43%) and 46% were ages 14 and 15 years; they fell in between the juveniles involved in the other two main types in terms of age. These juveniles were the most likely subgroup to be of Hispanic ethnicity (16%). They were also the group most likely to have a history of running away (84%) and prior arrests or detentions (43%). Forty-five percent of the juveniles in these cases were detained or arrested as part of the current crime.

**Table 1**  
**Demographic Characteristics of (Primary) Juvenile Involved in Prostitution**

Characteristic	All Juveniles ( <i>n</i> = 132) Weighted %	Third-Party Exploiter Cases ( <i>n</i> = 77) Weighted %	Solo Cases ( <i>n</i> = 41) Weighted %	CSA Cases ( <i>n</i> = 14) Weighted %
Sex**				
Female	90	100	77	78
Male	10	< 1	23	22
Age***				
11 or younger	1	< 1	0	2
12–13	10	11	5	21
14–15	33	46	9	34
16–17	55	43	87	29
Do not know	2	0	0	13
Race***				
White	59	63	42	83
Black	36	33	53	3
Other	4	4	5	0
Do not know	2	0	0	13
Hispanic ethnicity**	9	16	1	0
Community***				
Urban	53	53	62	3
Suburban	23	21	15	49
Rural	4	5	4	0
Large town (25,000–100,000)	7	6	5	18
Small town	5	1	3	29
Do not know	8	5	17	0
History of running away***	60	84	33	20
Do not know	12	2	34	0
Prior arrests or detentions	36	43	27	21
Do not know	21	20	31	0
Detained or arrested as part of the current crime***	54	45	90	0

Note: Six cases (4%) did not involve identified victims.

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

\*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

We divided the third-party exploitation category into two subgroups based on the organizational complexity of the commercial operation—smalltime (59%,  $n = 43$ ) and organized (41%,  $n = 34$ ). Smalltime refers to situations where juveniles are prostituted by pimps but little commercial or organizational sophistication is involved. This subgroup includes pimps who may be trying to get into the business but are at early stages. In some cases, boyfriends acted as smalltime pimps. Some smalltime pimps were exploiting one juvenile; others were exploiting two or three.

In contrast to the smalltime subcategory, cases in the organized subcategory had some evident elements of organizational complexity, including affiliation with legitimate businesses such as massage parlors or motels, the involvement of criminal gangs, and Web sites such as online escort services. Organized prostitution cases were more likely than smalltime cases to involve multiple

offenders; 58% involved two or more compared to 20% of smalltime cases. Organized cases were also more likely to involve at least one female offender (48% vs. 30%), a third-party exploiter with a history of pimping (85% vs. 62%), or a juvenile who was being prostituted with adult prostitutes (77% vs. 43%).

*Solo cases (31% of cases, unweighted  $n = 41$ ).* An estimated 436 (95% CI: 310–562) arrests/detentions were made by police in 2005 for what we are labeling solo types of prostitution cases. Although police in these cases could find no evidence for a third-party exploiter, the presence of such figures cannot be entirely ruled out. Some juveniles taken into custody by police may try to protect a third-party exploiter from arrest. However, the fact that some youth do engage in prostitution without pimps is well established in the literature (Estes &



Weiner, 2001). It is possible that our methodology overestimates the percentage of solo juveniles, but the results suggest that this category still describes a sizeable fraction of the cases being encountered by law enforcement.

Juveniles involved in solo cases were considerably more likely than those involved in third-party exploiter cases to be male (23% vs. < 1%; see Table 1). These juveniles were also the oldest overall, with 87% ages 16 or 17 (vs. 43% of third-party exploiter and 29% of CSA cases). These juveniles were the most likely to be Black (53%) and to live in an urban community (62%). One-third had a known history of running away and 27% were known to have prior arrests or detentions. However, this type of case had the most missing data about history, with approximately one-third of investigators unable to answer questions about the characteristics of the juveniles. The juveniles in this category were the most likely to be detained or arrested as part of the current crime (90%).

The solo category was further divided into two groups. In the “on-the-street” subcategory, there were many cases of stereotypical runaway survival sex, youth out on the street without a place to go for shelter or food, turning to selling themselves to get money to survive. When these youth first arrive on the street or in an area, and maybe for a lengthy period of time afterward, they may do this on their own without a pimp (Sheridan & VanPelt, 2005; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). Other juveniles in desperate circumstances obviously are young people with serious drug problems who are in need of lots of money to feed their habit. Still others are gay and transgendered youth who are cut off from family and peers, experiencing considerable stigma and isolation and who may also be at particular risk for this type of prostitution. Many of the on-the-street solo cases come to the attention of police through undercover operations, whereas other cases came to the attention of police through citizen reports.

In contrast to the on-the-street subgroup, there appeared to be some solo juveniles, who were not homeless, drug-addicted, or cut off from family resources, and seemed to be under less environmental pressure to engage in prostitution. Other researchers like Richard Estes (Estes, 2001) have noted youth involved in prostitution while living at home, in some cases in public housing, traveling from the suburbs, or engaging in these acts with friends. This category may include teenage male hustlers, who may see this activity as a form of adventure or even status within some of their subgroups.

Many of the investigators we talked to did not know whether juveniles had run away when they became involved in prostitution, and many did not know where

juveniles were currently living. As such, we cannot provide a reliable statistical breakdown of the size of the on-the-street versus the home-based solo juveniles involved in prostitution.

*Child sexual abuse (CSA) with payment cases (12% of cases, unweighted n = 14).* An estimated 170 (95% CI: 53–287) of the arrests/detentions made by police in 2005 were for cases involving the exchange of money in what appeared to be more conventional CSA scenarios. Similar to solo cases, 22% of the juveniles were male (see Table 1). This type of prostitution involved the youngest juveniles with 23% being younger than 14 years of age. These juveniles were the most likely to be White (83%) and live in a suburban community (49%), large town (18%), or small town (29%). They were the least likely to have a known history of running away (20%) or prior arrests or detentions (21%). None of these juveniles were arrested or detained as part of the current crime. CSA with payment cases can involve adults with a number of different kinds of personal relationships to the juvenile. The first obvious subcategory is where a family member is the abuser. Nonfamily abusers may also make payments for sex in fairly conventional CSA cases.

### Juvenile Prostitution Case Dynamics

The typology developed here has been used as a format for differentiation of cases, but the third category, the CSA with payment cases, has been excluded from this summary, because many of the dynamics discussed here are not relevant. In regard to the context of the prostitution activity, the majority of juveniles found clients on the street (86%; see Table 2). Other locations included through an escort or call service (17%), the Internet (14%), and a place of business (7%; e.g., massage parlor). Juveniles involved in solo prostitution were the most likely to find clients on the street (93%) with limited contact through other avenues. Juveniles in third-party exploiter cases found clients through a variety of other avenues including an escort or call service (26%), the Internet (20%), and through a business like a massage parlor (9%). Money was exchanged for sex acts in almost all cases (98%), but some other items were also exchanged, although much less frequently—drugs or alcohol (14%) and necessities such as food or shelter (3%). The number of clients juveniles saw in an average week varied widely, ranging from 1 or 2 (7%) to more than 40 (4%); with many seeing between 3 and 40 per week. The average price paid by an individual client also varied, ranging from less than U.S.\$50 (28%) to more

**Table 2**  
**Characteristics of the Prostitution**

Characteristic	All Juveniles ( <i>n</i> = 118) Weighted %	Third-Party ( <i>n</i> = 77) Weighted %	Solo ( <i>n</i> = 41) Weighted %
Where juvenile found clients <sup>a</sup>			
On the street <sup>***</sup>	86	82	93
Indoors <sup>**</sup>	3	5	0
Escort or call service <sup>***</sup>	17	26	1
A business <sup>**</sup>	7	9	3
Places of drug use <sup>***</sup>	3	< 1	9
Truck stop	6	6	6
The Internet <sup>***</sup>	14	20	4
Telephone chat or party line <sup>***</sup>	6	8	1
What was exchanged for sex acts			
Money	98	97	100
Other items exchanged			
Necessities <sup>***</sup>	3	4	1
Drugs or alcohol <sup>**</sup>	14	17	8
Goods <sup>***</sup>	1	1	1
Do not know	19	12	33
Number of clients in average week			
1 or 2 <sup>***</sup>	7	10	2
3–5	15	24	0
6–20	16	19	10
21–40	14	15	12
More than 40	4	3	6
Do not know/not ascertainable	44	30	70
Average price paid by individual client <sup>***</sup>			
Less than U.S.\$50	28	17	49
U.S.\$51 to U.S.\$100	32	34	28
U.S.\$101 to U.S.\$150	14	19	6
More than U.S.\$150	18	25	7
Do not know/not ascertainable	8	7	10
Acts prostitution involved <sup>b</sup>			
Sexual intercourse <sup>*</sup>	83	89	71
Oral sex	87	87	87
Anal sex <sup>***</sup>	23	30	9
Stripping or lap dancing <sup>***</sup>	9	12	5
Group sex <sup>***</sup>	17	23	6
Tied up, humiliated or subjected to pain <sup>***</sup>	3	3	4
Had a false adult ID <sup>*</sup>	9	13	3
Do not know	6	7	3
Traveled across state lines for prostitution <sup>**</sup>	21	27	11
Do not know	15	8	29

<sup>a</sup> Do not know responses range from 2% (on the street) to 16% (a business).

<sup>b</sup> Do not know responses range from 5% (oral sex) to 32% (tied up, humiliated, or subjected to pain).

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

\*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

\*  $p \leq .05$ .

than U.S.\$150 (18%) for services with juveniles involved. Juveniles with third-party exploiters reported a more diverse range in terms of client numbers and prices paid than those juveniles in solo cases. The most common sexual acts juveniles performed were sexual intercourse (83%) and oral sex (87%), with a smaller but

notable percentage providing services that involved anal sex (23%) and group sex (17%). In addition, juveniles with third-party exploiters performed a more diverse range of sexual acts for clients. Only a small percentage of juveniles had false identification, indicating they were an adult (9%), but this was more common for juveniles

**Table 3**  
**Characteristics of the (Primary) Exploiter**

Characteristic	All Exploiters ( <i>n</i> = 97) Weighted %	Third-Party ( <i>n</i> = 77) Weighted %	CSA ( <i>n</i> = 14) Weighted %
Type of exploiter <sup>a</sup>			
Pimp or other controlling person	82	100	0
Acquaintance	14	0	82
Family member	3	0	18
Number of exploiters <sup>*</sup>			
One	72	65	95
Two	17	21	5
Three or more	11	14	0
Sex of (primary) exploiter			
Male	85	85	84
Female	15	15	16
Any female exploiter	27	31	18
Exploiter age <sup>***</sup> (years)			
Younger than 19	7	9	0
20–29	44	52	13
30–39	24	22	37
40–49	5	3	16
50 or older	10	1	34
Do not know	10	13	0
Exploiter race <sup>†</sup>			
White	39	29	70
Black	59	69	30
Other	1	1	0
Exploiter citizenship <sup>**</sup>			
United States	91	97	70
Outside of United States	6	2	17
Do not know	3	1	13
Time involved in prostitution			
Less than 1 year	16	9	50
1–4 years	31	35	8
More than 4 years	27	31	17
Do not know	27	25	17
Area exploiter lived in			
Urban	45	56	6
Suburban	17	15	33
Large town (25,000–100,000)	10	5	18
Small town	6	1	29
Rural	7	4	13
Do not know	15	20	0

<sup>a</sup> No significance tests performed as this was one of the main criteria for determining type of prostitution case.

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

\*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

\*  $p \leq .05$ .

†  $p \leq .10$ .

with third-party exploiters (13% vs. 3% of solo cases). One in five (21%) traveled across state lines for prostitution.

### Who are the Third-Party Exploiters?

The third-party exploiters in these cases were most commonly pimps or other people who controlled the

prostitution of the juvenile (82% of all cases, see Table 3). But other exploiters included people who were directly abusing the juvenile (17% overall, 14% acquaintances and 3% family members). Typically, there was only one exploiter involved in the case (72%), but 17% of cases involved two exploiters and 11% involved three or more. Third-party exploiter cases were more likely than CSA cases to involve multiple exploiters. Primary exploiters

were usually males (85%); however, in 27% of cases at least one female exploiter was involved. Female exploiters were generally older prostitutes who helped recruit or monitor the juveniles. Exploiters were fairly young with 44% between the ages of 20 and 29 years, and 24% between 30 and 39 years of age. CSA exploiters tended to be older than third-party exploiters. A majority of exploiters was Black (59%) and citizens of the United States (91%). CSA exploiters were more likely to be citizens of countries other than the United States (17% vs. 2%). Exploiters' length of involvement in prostitution varied with 16% involved for less than one year, 31% involved for 1 to 4 years, and 27% involved for more than 4 years (27% of police respondents did not know how long). Respondents often did not know about the exploiters prior arrests, but those who did indicated a range of criminal histories including prior arrests for sexual offending against minors and adults, alcohol and drug-related charges, weapons charges, theft charges, homicide or manslaughter, and nonsexual violent offenses.

### How Do Juvenile Prostitution Cases Originate in the Criminal Justice System?

Juvenile prostitution cases came to the attention of police in two primary ways: first, through some sort of police-initiated activity (63%) and, second, in response to an external report regarding a specific juvenile or juveniles (37%). Types of police-initiated activity often overlapped and included vice squad investigations (33%), undercover operations (39%), a proactive investigation (51%), and/or police on the scene observing a crime in progress (3%). In a common scenario, police would be conducting surveillance or undercover operations in areas known for prostitution and after stopping persons who appeared to be engaged in prostitution would discover they were minors. Some police stopped individuals specifically because they appeared to be young, but the investigations themselves did not appear to be targeting juveniles. In some other cases, police received reports of crimes not specifically related to prostitution or juveniles (e.g., altercations, theft, drug-related offenses) and then, during the investigation, discovered juveniles involved in prostitution.

The other main avenue for cases was through reports coming to police about specific juveniles. These included juveniles who went to police themselves because they were being victimized by third-party exploiters or assaulted by clients (7%). It also included cases reported to police by parents or guardians (7%) or other family members (< 1%), group home or

residential treatment centers (3%), social services or schools (9%), business owners (4%), or other community members (4%) who believed that a young person was involved in prostitution. Police attention was also initiated through runaway or missing person reports (5%).

### Police Orientation Toward the Juvenile: Delinquent or Victim?

To examine how police are oriented to this crime, we divided the cases in the sample ( $n = 132$ ) into three initial categories: (a) juvenile-as-victim orientation, (b) juvenile-as-delinquent orientation, and (c) both victim and delinquent orientation. This was done by examining who was detained and ultimately charged in the case, and for what offense. Juveniles were categorized as being treated as victims if (a) only the exploiter was arrested, or (b) both the juvenile and exploiter were arrested or detained but the charge against the juvenile was not a prostitution-related charge (e.g., disturbing the peace or a drug charge). Juveniles were categorized as being treated as delinquents if they were the only person arrested or detained. Juveniles were categorized as being treated as both a victim and a delinquent if the exploiter was arrested on a charge specific to a sexual crime against a minor (e.g., sexual assault of a minor) and the juvenile was also arrested on a prostitution-related charge. As a result of this classification, 53% ( $n = 70$ ) of juveniles were categorized as victims, 31% ( $n = 41$ ) as delinquents, and 16% ( $n = 21$ ) as both victims and delinquents. When examining the status of the juvenile by case type, we found that all the juveniles in CSA cases were treated as victims, 66% in third-party exploiters cases were treated as victims, and 11% in solo cases were treated as victims ( $\chi^2 = 98.382$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Next, for the 21 cases in which juveniles were treated as both victims and delinquents, we examined the case summaries more carefully to see whether we could classify them into a victim or delinquent only category. In all 21 cases, we were prompted to change the juveniles' status from both victim and delinquent to victim only because at least one of the following occurred (a) the initial charges against the juvenile were dropped once the investigator determined he or she was a minor, or (b) there was a specific comment from the investigator that the only reason the juvenile was charged was so they could get needed services. With these cases reclassified, 69% ( $n = 91$ ) of juveniles were ultimately classified as victims and 31% ( $n = 41$ ) as delinquents.

The status of the juvenile as either a victim or a delinquent was related to a number of juvenile and case



characteristics when examined through bivariate analyses (see Table 4). Juveniles considered to be victims were more likely to be female than juveniles considered delinquents (96% vs. 77%); age 15 or younger (56% vs. 16%); a history of running away from home (69% vs. 40%); were frightened (45% vs. 18%), were dirty or had body odor (40% vs. 9%), or ill (22% vs. 3%) during their initial encounter with police, and if the case came to police attention through a report to the police (as opposed to some form of police action, 47% vs. 9%).

### Does How Cases Originate Have Any Implications for Whether a Juvenile Is Treated as a Victim or Delinquent?

One feature of juvenile prostitution cases that has important practice and policy implications is how these cases come to the attention of law enforcement. Very interestingly, the data show a strong relationship between a case originating with an outside report to police and the juvenile being treated as a victim (see Table 4). By contrast, juveniles are much more likely to be treated as delinquents if the case comes to police attention due to police initiative alone. However, a number of youth-specific characteristics could account for this finding, specifically the age of the juvenile (with the assumption that family members of younger juveniles are more likely concerned about their disappearance and thus more likely to be reported to police as missing). A logistic regression was conducted to adjust for other potentially explanatory characteristics (see Table 5). Even after adjusting for all the significant characteristics found in the bivariate analyses, how the case came to police attention was still a strong and significant factor in how the juvenile was treated by law enforcement. After adjusting for age, sex, and appearance during the initial encounter with police, cases that began through a report to police (as opposed to police action) were almost 8 times (adjusted odds ratio = 7.92) more likely to have the juvenile treated as a victim. Juveniles were also more likely to be treated as victims if they were younger (15 years or less), female, frightened, or were dirty/had body odor at the time of the initial encounter with police.

## General Discussion

The findings from these two studies have bearing on a variety of matters related to policy and practice issues surrounding juveniles involved in prostitution. Study 1 presents a national estimate of the scope of juvenile

**Table 4**  
**Characteristics by Police Orientation Toward Juvenile**

Characteristic	Victim ( <i>n</i> = 91) Weighted %	Delinquent ( <i>n</i> = 41) Weighted %
How case began ***		
Report to police	47	9
Police action	53	91
Sex **		
Female	96	77
Male	4	23
Age ***		
15 or younger	56	16
16–17	44	84
Race		
White	66	48
Black	30	48
Hispanic ethnicity	10	7
Lived in urban community	54	49
History of running away **	69	40
Do not know ***	1	36
Prior arrests or detentions	39	27
Do not know **	16	38
Initial encounter with police		
Negative demeanor (disrespectful, aggressive, resistant)	30	20
Frightened **	45	18
Do not know **	3	26
Tired to flee or elude police	13	6
Do not know **	3	24
On drugs or alcohol	9	4
Do not know	7	15
Dirty or body odor ***	40	9
Do not know *	6	23
Ill ***	22	3
Placement		
Home **	45	22
Juvenile detention center	16	17

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

\*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

\*  $p \leq .05$ .

prostitution cases coming to the attention of law enforcement. Findings from Study 2 are exploratory in nature and provide a next step in the line of research concerning juvenile prostitution. Results highlight areas important to address in future research to inform policy in this area. What follows is a discussion of a few of these issues.

## Juvenile Prostitution in the Criminal Justice System

Findings from Study 1 suggest that cases of juveniles involved in prostitution are not a high priority for most

**Table 5**  
**Complex Samples Logistic Regression Predicting Police Orientation Toward the Juvenile**

Predictor	$\beta$	SE	Odds Ratio <sup>a</sup>	95% CI <sup>a</sup>
Case began through report	3.220***	7.13	7.92	4.15–10.13
Juvenile age 15 or younger	1.966***	.383	3.60	2.43–4.66
Juvenile was female	2.059**	.777	1.25	1.10–1.29
Juvenile was frightened during initial encounter with police	1.965**	.697	3.40	3.50–4.80
Juvenile was dirty or had body odor during initial encounter with police	2.557***	.621	6.23	3.00–9.06
Juvenile had history of running away	.174	.433	1.11	0.63–1.63
Juvenile was ill during initial encounter with police	-.444	.810	0.65	0.13–3.03
Pseudo $R^2$				
Cox and Snell	.428			
Nagelkerke	.604			
McFadden	.453			

Note: CI = confidence interval.

<sup>a</sup> Odds ratios are adjusted to more closely approximate relative risk (Zhang & Yu, 1998).

\*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

law enforcement agencies. These data were collected from a period of time soon after federal task forces were formed and pushes were being made to address these cases through increased training and law enforcement activity. Because of this, these numbers can be seen as providing a baseline measure for what may be increasing law enforcement activity. Tremendous improvements are needed in mobilizing law enforcement to recognize and document juvenile prostitution. Consideration should be given to the possibility of a mandatory reporting system with data aggregated by the FBI. The existing system, being reformed under the growing National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) protocols, is nonetheless inadequate for this problem because it does not gather information about important distinctions like the role of the juvenile or the type of juvenile prostitution case.

Journalists, advocates, and researchers would all like to have some incidence estimates about the numbers of juveniles involved in prostitution. There have been a number of crude efforts to develop such an estimate, but they are all scientifically indefensible. For example, the widely cited estimate of 326,000 from Estes and Weiner is about youth “at risk,” not youth actually involved in prostitution and is based (among other things) on guesses that one-quarter of 1% of all youth plus 35% of a national estimate of runaways are “at risk” (these and other estimates are critiqued in Stransky & Finkelhor, 2008).

The estimate of 1,287 to 1,614 provided in this study is not an answer to the prevalence question and does not even do much to promote an answer. It does provide some confirmation that numbers derived from the

Uniform Crime Report are of the correct magnitude in representing the dimension of juveniles encountered by law enforcement recorded as engaged in prostitution. Nonetheless, to some observers, it may seem improbable that 300,000 juveniles are involved in prostitution if only such a small number (one half of 1% of that estimate) are coming to law enforcement attention. However, there have been other social problems widely ignored at the official level by authorities. Until better estimates are available, we think it best not to even mention unscientific guesses, to say that no good estimates are available, and to simply cite what is known about the cases coming to official attention, warning that these are poor indicators of the true scope.

### Mobilizing Law Enforcement Around This Problem

Our findings suggest that in many communities, police are doing little about this problem. We base this conclusion on the inability of so many large urban law enforcement agencies (56%) to identify any cases for our study. It seems unlikely given that the kinds of widespread social forces that produce the problem—family physical and sexual abuse, running away, drug dependency, the problems of youthful sexual minorities, the influence of adult prostitution in communities—are present in so many large urban communities. Even if police are encountering such cases, but the problem is just that agencies cannot locate the cases within their record keeping system, that in itself testifies to a low level of system awareness or orientation toward the

problem. Our suspicion, however, is that some agencies either do not see it as a priority or do not feel they have the resources or expertise to get involved.

However, clearly some law enforcement agencies have become very proactive. The highest arrest rate was in Los Angeles (0.15 per 1,000 people, unweighted) and the second highest was San Francisco (0.06 per 1,000 people, unweighted). If all the largest agencies were working cases at the rates of Los Angeles and San Francisco—our unweighted estimate could be as high as 13,879 from these large agencies alone (based on the Los Angeles rate) or 5,552 (based on the San Francisco rate); instead of the unweighted estimate we received from these largest agencies, which was 618.

To mobilize law enforcement around this problem, we need to encourage cross-disciplinary agencies to work together. Events such as annual trainings in the recognition of juvenile prostitution are an important first step. These could be the stand-alone trainings that focus solely on the problem of juvenile prostitution, or information could be integrated into a broader CSA training event. Encouraging communication both across departments within a particularly large agency and across jurisdictions may also go a long way toward a better response to such crimes. Finally, organizing case files to highlight and thus easily identify juvenile prostitution cases could be beneficial to investigations.

### Recognizing Diversity

As often happens with social problems that have not been extensively researched or even described by journalists, strong stereotypes tend to dominate thinking about juvenile prostitution—the runaway and homeless youth who gets recruited on the streets by a pimp. Although an important fraction of the juvenile prostitution population does appear to fit this stereotype, there are other dynamics that need to be incorporated into our thinking about the problem as seen from our findings from Study 2. A majority of juveniles involved in prostitution are not homeless youth. Moreover, not all youth operate under the control of a pimp and other exploiter. Many juveniles operate on their own, and some may well be involved in what might be described as a voluntary way without manipulation or dire need. Journalistic and research accounts have clearly identified some youth, particularly boys, but some girls as well, who are drawn to the money or excitement of this activity (Estes, 2001). We are reluctant to say how large a portion of the 31% of solo juveniles would fit this description, because we do not have sufficient information on the living contexts

of these youth. However, we think it important to acknowledge this as part of the spectrum and to train law enforcement agents, social service providers, and prevention planners to anticipate such youth, who may require different kinds of interventions.

It is also important to recognize other forms of diversity within the population of juveniles involved in prostitution including those exploited in their own home by family members or by other acquaintances. We think a typology is a useful way of ensuring that this diversity is incorporated into the thinking of practitioners and policy makers. The typology we proposed is emphatically provisional and is intended as a starting point which can certainly benefit from additional categories or refinement as research continues. However, it should help advance a more complex understanding of the problem.

### Terminology

Consistent with this observed diversity, we do not find value in some other current efforts to rename the problem. For example, there have been proposals to talk about this population as “prostituted juveniles,” and while this does have the virtue of emphasizing the victimization element in many of these youth’s situations, not all these youth are necessarily prostituted by someone else, which is the clear implication of the phrase. Another proposed relabeling, “trafficked youth,” is even more misleading, because it implies that all the youth involved in prostitution are moved around by someone. Not only are many youth on their own, but even among those with exploiters, it would appear according to our data that at least some were in their community of residence, meaning they probably were not being taken across state or international borders. From the cases available to our study, the organized movement of youth from community to community for sexual purposes appeared to apply to only a small segment of the youth we identified as involved in prostitution. Among the terminology available, we favor “juveniles involved in prostitution” as an adequate general term that contains a minimum of assumptions about the youth in this population.

### Dual Status of Juveniles Involved in Prostitution

Our findings clearly testify to the complicated public policy dilemma surrounding intervention with juveniles involved in prostitution—to what extent do the youth and society benefit or suffer from the actions of the justice system, and the limited tools that it has? Should these juveniles be treated as delinquents—arrested, taken into

custody, or sent to juvenile detention facilities? Should they be treated as victims and provided with advocates and child protection workers? Although most child advocates prefer a victim framework that recognizes that these youth are in many cases terribly abused, deprived, and manipulated, it is not entirely clear that the child welfare system has the necessary tools to deal with some of these youth. Some have committed other crimes, for example, and some jurisdictions may actually find it easier under current arrangements to provide assistance through the juvenile justice system as opposed to the child welfare system.

It appears law enforcement needs multidisciplinary, hybrid, multicomponent response systems specifically designed for this population of youth that can use the tools and respond to youth in a variety of different kinds of situations. Some communities appear to be engaged in the development of such integrated systems, but others may have not even begun to think about the issues. More research is necessary to determine the feasibility of such systems as well as the effectiveness of those which may already be in practice.

### **The Next Steps in Conceptualizing Juvenile Prostitution as Child Maltreatment**

In addition to the idea that communities should mobilize to develop multidisciplinary, integrated responses to juveniles involved in prostitution, some other elements are suggested by this study. Such responses will go a long way toward reconceptualizing juvenile prostitution as a form of child maltreatment.

*Bystander mobilization.* Responses to youth involved in prostitution appeared more victim oriented and thus perhaps more compassionate when the cases came from community reports. It may be possible to promote more of such community reporting by actively educating communities—including social workers, teachers, young people, family members, and victim service professionals—to be advocates for youth they believe to be getting involved in prostitution. Such reporting may short-circuit prostitution careers at an early stage in their development.

*Prevention education.* The fact that some youth are drawn into prostitution by its presumed excitement or glamour suggests the need to better inoculate young people against some of this imagery, in the same way we attempt to inoculate young people about the allures of drugs. Discussions about the reality of prostitution may need to be part of general youth safety and health

education programs especially in communities where such activity is known to exist. Professionals working in the field of child maltreatment, particularly those in direct contact with high-risk youth, may be in a good position to have these conversations with youth (particularly those youth who may not have a safe home and caring parents to speak with them).

*Safe houses and residences/victim resources.* Homelessness can create a need to engage in prostitution, and the lack of a safe environment may allow exploiters to track, cajole, and coerce youth back into their activity. To rescue some of these youth, many services may be required, including housing, legal assistance, education, and healthcare. Only with the support of these services may youth see advantages to avoid returning to the environment where they were victimized in the first place.

*Specialist interviewers/investigators.* This population of youth is highly alienated, evasive, isolated, and often intimidated. It may not be possible to help them and to catch and prosecute those who exploit them, without a detailed understanding and experience about their situations and their psychology. This suggests the need for specially trained police and interviewers, who can connect with the youth, or at least get useful information from them. Victim service providers who are already trained in the special needs of victimized youth could prove invaluable in this area.

### **Limitations and Strengths**

*Study 1.* Our numbers do not reflect the actual number of juveniles exploited by prostitution, but only those involved in cases where someone was arrested or detained. Furthermore, our numbers are certainly underestimated to some degree because six large agencies that may have made arrests did not respond and thus were not included. Some of the nonresponding agencies had difficulty retrieving cases in response to our request for a number of reasons. In some, there was no centralized record keeping, and some could not easily distinguish between prostitution cases involving juveniles and those involving adults. Other factors also contribute to possible underestimates. Our numbers do not include juveniles involved in prostitution but arrested or detained on other charges such as loitering, drug use, or disturbing the peace. Some juveniles may escape the attention of law enforcement when they are taken into custody because they lie about their ages or have false identification.



*Study 2.* Some errors and biases may have been introduced because the respondents were law enforcement investigators. Police were regarded as the best sources for in-depth information about the nature of juvenile prostitution crimes because their professional responsibilities require them to gather intensive information about these cases. However, the information they provided could be biased by training, professional attitudes, or the adversarial nature of their roles in some of these cases.

These numbers are estimates based on the sample of cases that were the subjects of the interviews. Although the study was designed to yield a nationally representative sample of cases involving juvenile prostitution crimes, we had a low response rate that limits the generalizability of the findings from Study 2. Findings should be considered exploratory and taken as suggestions for next steps in this line of research.

The information in this study was gathered from law enforcement investigators so that the information about juveniles is based on their impression at the time of the crime. Gathering information from mental health and victim services professionals or juveniles themselves would provide much more insight into this victim population in terms of their mental well-being and both the short- and long-term impact of involvement in these crimes. Finally, some of the unweighted cell sizes are small due to the low endorsement of certain behaviors in the commission of these crimes. As such, instability of some estimates is possible.

## Conclusion

Until recently, social service agencies and the criminal justice system have largely viewed prostitution among juveniles as part of the spectrum of delinquency engaged in by adolescent runaways and "street youth" (Flowers, 2001; Gray, 2005; Kreston, 2005). This is beginning to change, however, and the problem of youth involved in prostitution is increasingly being defined as "commercial sexual exploitation," a particularly serious form of sexual victimization. Our findings from law enforcement agencies about their responses to juvenile prostitution support the notion that views about the nature of juvenile prostitution appear to be evolving. The results from the current study have bearing on a variety of matters related to policy and practice issues surrounding this crime. When juveniles who are involved in prostitution come into contact with law enforcement, its responses are influential in determining whether such youth are viewed as victims of commercial sexual

exploitation or as delinquents. Multicomponent response systems specifically designed for this population of youth that can use the tools of different agencies and respond to youth in a variety of different kinds of situations appear to be needed.

## Note

1. Ineligible agencies involved those that were duplicates, represented multiple units within one agency (e.g., child abuse unit and vice unit), multiple districts within one agency, or had no jurisdiction to investigate these crimes.

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