

## Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Boys

According to a 2008 study by the *John Jay College of Criminal Justice*<sup>1</sup>, as high as 50% of the children who are being trafficked in the USA might be boys. Yet, the trauma and exploitation that happens to boys is often stigmatized, forgotten, misunderstood, or hidden in plain sight. Many boys who are being sexually exploited and trafficked are seen as willing participants, instead of for the victimization that they have experienced. Sadly, direct services in the USA are designed mostly for female survivors creating a large gap in resources specifically created for the unique needs of boys who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation.

- Many trafficked boys do not have a traditionally known pimp. Rather they might have a “market facilitator,” which is a person helping to facilitate the transactions between sex and money. “Market facilitators” might help take care of needs that arise (e.g., food, shelter, and clothing)<sup>2</sup>.
- Many boys who are trafficked have experienced sexual abuse, as well as lack of both familial support and attachments with safe adults. Some trafficked boys are viewed as “runaways” or “throwaways” having been kicked out of their home for various reasons (e.g., for being gay, bi-sexual, transgender, addictions, rebelliousness...).
- Some trafficked boys are first recruited by customers who are looking for sexual favors<sup>1</sup>.
- Some trafficked boys experience familial trafficking—which often starts at a younger age than other forms of commercial sexual exploitation.
- Peer recruitment is common and a multi-faceted form of recruitment. For example, a peer models “fast” ways of making money—creating social pressures for their friends to participate<sup>1</sup>.
- Survival trafficking meets basic needs including money, food, shelter, clothing, and substances.
- A trafficked boy is not automatically gay, bi-sexual, transsexual, or queer. Rather, many are also heterosexual which ties into the fear and shame they feel<sup>2</sup>.
- Buyers are often white/middle class men who are married and have a professional job. Yet, women can be buyers as well and need to be recognized as part of the problem<sup>2</sup>.
- Sometimes drugs are used to cope with the sexual traumas that a victim has experienced in the past, but it can also lead one to survival sex as they maintain their substance dependency.
- Boys can be found for sale in the same places as girls (on the street, track, internet sites, social media, call services, clubs, bars, male transit areas...)<sup>2</sup>.

## Ways You Can Respond to the Unique Needs of Trafficked Boys

- Educate law enforcement, juvenile justice, and social services on what trafficking of boys looks like and ways that they can change their intake processes to screen for exploitation and trauma.
- Remove the stigma surrounding male sexual trauma and victimization by talking about commercial sexual exploitation of boys.
- Engage with organizations that are trying to meet the needs of boys who have been exploited (including homeless shelters and LGBTQ+ safe spaces). If your local area does not have resources, talk to your local task forces about how they are going to respond these service gaps.
- When you meet a boy or a man who has been trafficked, give them validation, love, and acceptance. It has taken a lot of courage to be able to disclose their victimization.

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<sup>1</sup> Curtis, R., Terry, K., Dank, M., Dombrowski, K., & Khan, B. (2008). The commercial sexual exploitation of children in New York City, Volume 1: The CSEC population in New York City: Size, characteristics, and needs (NCJ 225083). Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>2</sup> Friedman, S. A. (2013). ECPAT USA: And boys too. Brooklyn, NY: ECPAT-USA (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes).