



# SEX TRAFFICKING <sup>1</sup> OF YOUNG MEN AND BOYS



Although women and girls remain the focus of human trafficking awareness and service provision, young men and boys can also become victims of sex trafficking and exploitation. The International Labor Organization estimates that 2% of the 4.8 million people forced into sex trafficking worldwide are boys.<sup>2</sup> Although girls still make up the vast majority of victims, this leaves 96,000 young men and boys in need of intervention and services. Various factors along with gender biases often leave boys overlooked in these provisions, which only simultaneously increases their vulnerabilities.

Many young men and boys are forced into sex trafficking situations as a means of survival. Homelessness is the primary risk factor cited for young men and boys who are involved in sex trafficking. Male minors most frequently become homeless due to family dysfunction.<sup>3</sup> Once on the streets, many boys and young men are forced to engage in sex in exchange for basic needs such as food and shelter.<sup>4</sup> Although this form of sexual exploitation is commonly referred to as "survival sex," this concept should not apply to minors forced to have sex with adults, as it gives a connotation of agency. LGBTQ<sup>5</sup> youth are especially vulnerable to sex trafficking as they are more susceptible to leaving home as a result of their family not accepting their identity. This not only leaves these youth at increased risk of homelessness but also leaves them susceptible to exploitative recruiting which brings young men to large cities to engage in the commercial sex industry.

## What does sex trafficking of young men and boys look like?

- Forced to exchange sex for meeting their basic needs
  - Also applies to being forced to exchange sex for the needs of a partner or child
- Forced to engage in sex with men, or "gay for pay" regardless of their own sexual identity and preferences. Neither male nor female survivors can choose their clients, and it is believed that the majority of male survivors are heterosexual<sup>6</sup>
  - Youth join the group in promises of participating in dance competitions. However, the young men are then brought to perform at strip clubs and subsequently brought to larger cities to engage in commercial sex
- Transgender youth may be exploited in exchange for hormone shots which may be too expensive or unavailable to youth without adult consent
- Typically exploited within communities where all members of the community are expected to pool money together collectively for everyone to live from
  - Live with a "family" in homes referred to as "House of Divas" or "House of Love"
  - The "family" is usually headed by a "Mama" or "Godmama" who trafficks youth
- May "work chat lines" which involves being forced to solicit sexual conversations with individuals via telephone services
- Just as with female victims of sex trafficking, male victims may also be exploited through escort services, street solicitation, internet solicitation, or within dance clubs
  - Male victims can be exploited through all the same forms of control as female victims including by pimps, families, or gangs

<sup>1</sup> Sex Trafficking is inclusive of Child Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Survival Sex

<sup>2</sup> International Labor Organization (2012). [http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_181961/lang--it/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_181961/lang--it/index.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Quintana, et al., 2010; Walls and Bell, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Meredith Dank (2015). *Surviving the Street of New York*. Urban Institute.

<sup>5</sup> This includes individuals who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer identifying individuals; also encompasses transexual, transgender, genderqueer/gender nonconforming, cisgender, intersex, pansexual, asexual and two-spirit

<sup>6</sup> Friedman, S. (2013). *And boys too: An ECPAT-USA discussion paper about the lack of recognition of the commercial sexual exploitation of boys in the United States*.

# FAST FACTS: SEX TRAFFICKING OF YOUNG MEN AND BOYS

## Identifying and Assessing Male Victims and Survivors

- Provide a safe and affirming space for assessment
- Familiarize yourself with the language and slang used specific for male
- Recognize that boys and young men may talk about their exploitation in the third person (as if it happened to someone else).<sup>7</sup> This is a common defense mechanism to cope with traumatic experiences and the shame that may feel
- Acknowledge that young men and boys may struggle with identifying themselves as victims due to gender biases of sexuality and sexual abuse
  - Young men and boys may feel that they were acting responsibility to fulfill their own needs or the needs of a partner or child rather than being victimized

## What kinds of services should be provided to young male survivors?

- Prioritized provisions to meet the individuals basic needs
- Mental health services that meet the specialized needs of young men and boys
- Appropriate services that meet people where they are
- Male-specific shelters and transitional housing that includes programming to address the specific needs, challenges, and traumas they've experienced prior to, during, or after being involved in sex trafficking<sup>8</sup>
- Family reunification services, only if the young men or boys are interested
- Educational opportunities, including vocational training, job placement and retention services, and life skills
- Mentors and other programs that provide a positive male influence<sup>9</sup>

Organizations providing services to victims and survivors of human trafficking need to ensure that they are providing equal access to services for all individuals regardless of gender identity. Young men and boys deserve an opportunity to leave the silence and begin on a path to healing. Preventative efforts also need to be in place to protect young men and boys from discrimination and family conflict as a result of their identity. As society becomes more educated and open to the multitude of individual identities, hopefully more young people can feel accepted by their families and communities. This acceptance would ensure youth have access to support systems which can protect them from homelessness and the risks of exploitation.

<sup>7</sup> Procopio, S. (2014, November). *The commercial sexual exploitation of boys and adolescent males*. Male Survivor 14th International Conference.

<sup>8</sup> Bastedo, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Bastedo, 2014.

*This project was supported by Grant No. 2016-TA-AX-K045, awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.*