

Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking of Boys

When working with vulnerable youth, it is important to remember that girls, boys, and transgender youth can all be victims and survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) and domestic minor sex trafficking. By knowing the indicators of male survivors of trafficking, we can provide the services needed for boys and young men.

- Male minors may make up as much as 45% of the population of CSEC. Many of these boys engage in sexual activity to meet their basic needs¹.
- Some studies argue that family services are the most essential service needed to prevent male involvement in CSEC. Homelessness is the primary risk factor cited for male minors who are involved in CSEC, and male minors most frequently become homeless due to family dysfunction².

Characteristics of Male Survivors of Trafficking:

A focus group of male and transsexual survivors found that male survivors³:

- Frequently talk about their exploitation in the 3rd person (as if it happened to someone else). This is a common defense mechanism to cope with traumatic experiences.
- Are often able to recognize victimization in others but not when it happens to them.
- View themselves as “handling their problems” or doing what they “have to do to survive.”
- Use different slang than girls, so it is important to ask what they mean if you don’t understand what they’re saying.
- Live in the moment and have no sense of future. To counter this, safety plans should focus on getting through the rest of the day and tomorrow instead of next week or next year.
- Are often forced to be “gay for pay.” Neither male nor female survivors can choose their clients, and it is believed that the majority of male survivors are heterosexual⁴.
- Are frequently unable to afford to negotiate safer sex. Boys express fear and dread about STIs before and during sex acts. There is also a lot of stigma around AIDS impacting only gay males.
- Usually live with a “family” with a “God Mama” or “Mama” who is generally also a trafficker who works as well.
- Tend to work together but may have controlling factors, such as

In some markets, there is an informal caste system within male CSEC. This includes, in descending order: escorts, street workers, internet dating, and club dancers.

- Status within the system is reinforced by jealousy, judgment, sense of territorialism.
- Escorts tend to be older and have a regular set of clients. Escorts create a “power dynamic” by learning about the buyer’s family and life. The youth can then threaten to

¹ Curtis, et al., 2008; Coleman, 1989; Earls and David, 1989; Estes and Weiner, 2001; Fong and Cardoso, 2010; Gwadz, et al., 2004; Hammer, et al., 20020; Hyde, 2005; Jones, 2010; MacLean, et al., 1990; Willis et al., 2013.

² Quintana, et al., 2010; Walls and Bell, 2011.

³ Procopio, S. (2014, November). The commercial sexual exploitation of boys and adolescent males. *Male Survivor 14th International Conference*.

⁴ 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.

blackmail the buyer to reduce the threat of violence.

- The Internet plays a crucial role in male CSEC. About half of encounters are set up online. Chat rooms and video feeds are also used to conduct “dates.”
- Club dancers perform at gay clubs and then use back room to sell sex. On the East Coast they travel to Miami in the winters, and head North in the summers.

Program and service needs of male survivors of trafficking:

- Male-specific shelters and “specialized housing.” Beyond simply having housing, males in CSEC need housing tailored to the specific needs, struggles, and traumas they’ve experienced prior to, during, or after engaging in commercial sexual exploitation⁵.
- Substance abusing counseling, family services, education, prevention education, job placement and retentions services, and LGBTQ-friendly services are all important services for survivors⁶.
- Mentors and other programs that provide a positive male influence⁷.
- Vocational training opportunities which draw on the skills developed in the street economy, for example salesmanship. Sales work (cars, furniture, real estate, electronics, etc.) has both a low barrier of entry and a high, instant payoff could help a youth transition from the “street” into “formal” economies⁸.

Arrest statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice indicate that male minors are charged with prostitution in far fewer numbers than female minors⁹. Boy victims of CSEC also enter the juvenile justice system on charges unrelated to their trafficking, such as truancy or trespassing.¹⁰

- Some police departments’ processes arrested youth based on physical anatomy. Transgender youth are often forced to reveal themselves to officers for processing which can be traumatizing.
- Male minors are less likely than female minors to be referred to services by law enforcement agencies. This may be explained by a cultural inhibition to acknowledge males as victims¹¹.

⁵ Bastedo, 2014.

⁶ Curtis, et al., 2008; Clawson, et al., 2009; Gwads, 2009; Penry, 2011; Reichert and Sylwestrzak, 2013; Walls and Bells, 2011; Whitbeck, et al., 2001.

⁷ Bastedo, 2014.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Puzzanchera and Adams, 2011; Snyder, 2012.

¹⁰ Shared Hope International, ECPAT-USA & John Hopkins University, 2013

¹¹ *Ibid.*