

Understanding and Responding to Male Victims of Child Sexual Exploitation

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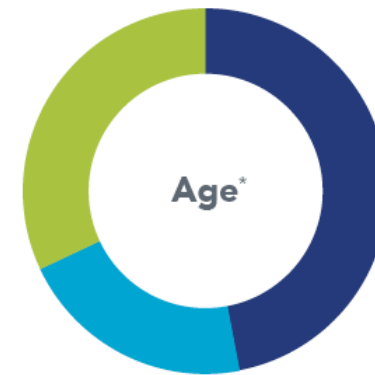
SPECIAL THANKS AND CREDIT TO TIM HITCHENS, ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR FOR THE SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION OF HAWAII'S DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, FOR HIS SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS SLIDE DECK



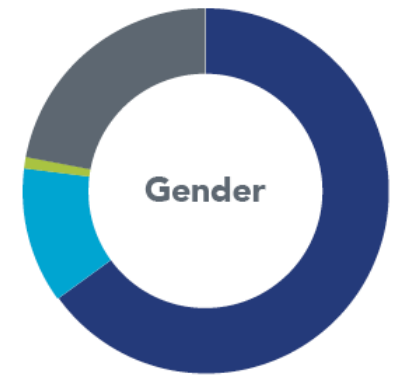
BOYS ARE EXPLOITED TOO

- Curtis et al (2008) in a study of commercial sexual exploitation of children in New York City estimated that adolescent males made up to 50% of CSEC victims
- The average age of entry for females was 15.15 years and males 15.28 years, but a higher percentage of boys (19%) entered the market under the age of 13 than girls (15%) (Curtis, 2008)

DEMOGRAPHICS



Adult **10,731**
Minor **4,945**
Unknown **7,402**



Female **15,042**
Male **2,917**
Gender minorities **109**
Unknown **5,010**

* At time of contact with the National Hotline

ADOLESCENT MALE SEX TRAFFICKING VICTIMS ARE A COMPLEX GROUP TO STUDY.

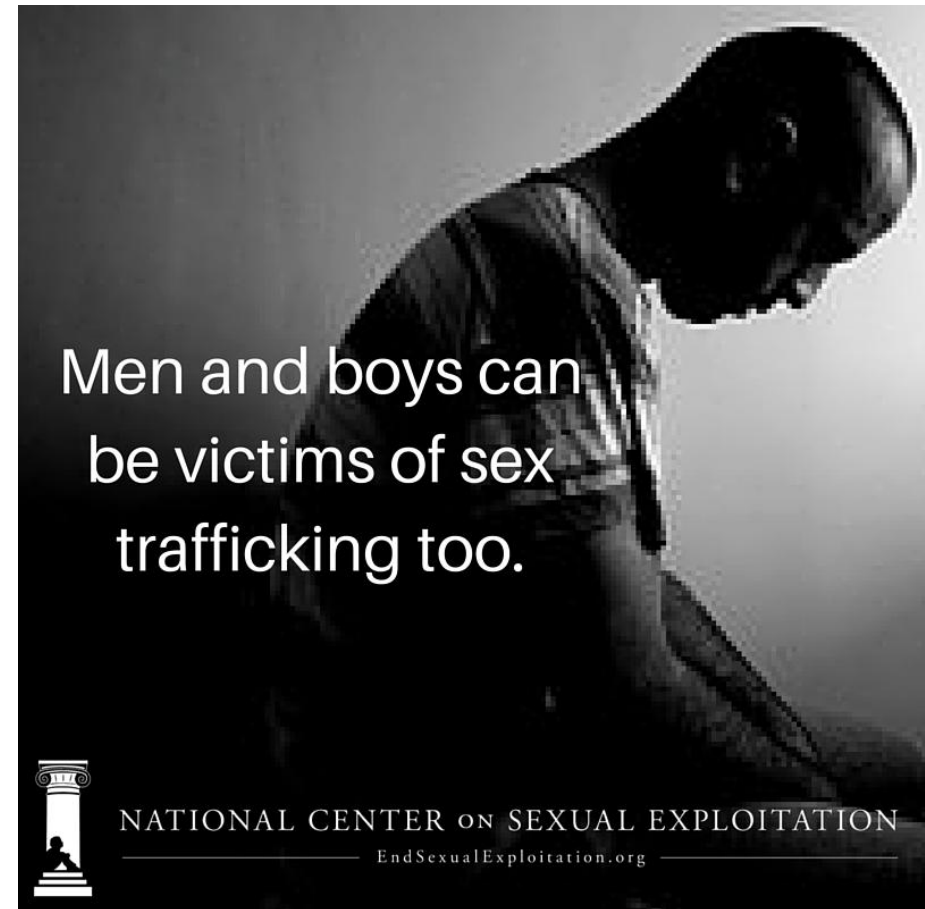
- They are rarely identified for a number of reasons.
 - Few agencies think to screen their male clients for sex trafficking as most public information about sex trafficking focuses exclusively on girl victims (Friedman, 2013).
 - The sex trafficking experiences of adolescent male victims appears very different from the 'norm' of sex trafficking with a traditional structure of pimp/trafficker and victim (Curtis et al. 2008)
 - The prostitution of boys is not as visible as that of young girls (McKnight, 2006, as cited in Clawson et al 2009).
 - Places and spaces where male victims are sold are different from places and spaces where female victims are sold (Roberts, 2013).
 - This is also rarely the focus of police or service interventions. While many [boys] are arrested on other charges, they are rarely screened for CSE (Friedman, 2013).

ADOLESCENT MALE SEX TRAFFICKING VICTIMS ARE A COMPLEX GROUP TO STUDY.

- They are rarely identified for a number of reasons.
 - Adolescent male victims may be unwilling to identify as a victim due to feelings of shame or fear of being labeled gay or perceived as gay (Friedman, 2013).
 - Victims may not self-identify as a sex trafficking victim due to a lack of understanding of the meaning of the term sex trafficking.
 - Boys are frequently misclassified as willing participants or offenders rather than victims due to gender norms (Lillywhite & Skidmore, 2006).
 - Lack of gender-inclusive screening tools contributes to chronic under-identification (HHS/OTIP, 2020).

BOY-CENTRIC RISK FACTORS

- Boys primarily sell their bodies to:
 - “survive financially”
 - “explore their sexuality”
 - “make contact with gay men,”
 - money was listed as a major motivator to continue prostituting



(Flowers, 1998, as cited in Clawson et al 2009).

BOY-CENTRIC RISK FACTORS

- Among prostituted youth (both boys and girls), up to 77 percent report having **run away** at least once (Seng, 1989).
- Curtis et al (2008) interviewed 111 adolescent male victims of child sexual exploitation found that 44% reported they were **homeless**.
- In interviews with youth (all genders) through Covenant House, ninety-one percent (91%) were offered bogus work, including opportunities that would meet the definition of trafficking. 19% experienced trafficking at some point. 60% of those who experienced trafficking were male. (Murphy, 2016).
- Boys often avoid shelters and services perceived as unsafe or female-focused (Lillywhite & Skidmore, 2006).

BOY-CENTRIC RISK FACTORS AND LGBTQ INTERSECTION

- A disproportionate number of boys involved in commercial sex, about 35%, self-identify as sexual minorities, e.g., as gay, bisexual, or as transgender/transsexual (Estes & Weiner, 2001).
- Boys are more likely than girls to leave home due to a feeling of being unwanted or misunderstood regarding their sexual orientation (McKnight, 2006, as cited in Clawson et al 2009).
- Between 40 and 50 percent of boys exploited through prostitution had been thrown out of their homes because of sexual identity issues (Earls & David, 1989; Seattle Commission on Children and Youth, 1986, as cited in Clawson et al 2009).
- Family rejection related to sexual orientation is a primary pathway into exploitation for boys (Friedman, 2013).
- LGBTQ+ boys face compounded risks due to stigma, homelessness, and lack of affirming services (Josenhans et al., 2020).

BOY-CENTRIC RISK FACTORS

- Boys were also more likely to use drugs (68%) than their female counterparts (58%)
- Boys were more likely to be on probation (24%) than girls (18%)
- Boys were more likely to report suicidal ideation (92%) than girls (82%)
- Boys also had a lower low self image (48%) than girls (43%)



(Homeless Youth Serviced by YouthCare/Orion House, 1989-1994; cited in Estes & Weiner, 2001)

BOY-CENTRIC RISK FACTORS

- Based on the NIBRS data, the year in a male's life when he is most likely to be the victim of sexual assault is age 4 (DoJ, 1999 cited in Estes & Weiner, 2001).
- Early sexual victimization significantly increases vulnerability to later commercial sexual exploitation (Friedman, 2013).
- Boys were more likely to enter the commercial sex market by a “customers approaching them” the first time than girls, with boys reporting this 32% of the time, girls only 16%. Therefore, Boys are more likely to be recruited directly by buyers rather than traffickers, complicating identification (Curtis et al., 2008; Friedman, 2013).
- Boys who had experienced sexual exploitation reported more anxiety, depression, and loneliness than their non exploited peers. (Pitcher et al, 2017)
- In three studies, boys were more likely than girls to report a history of sex for monetary exchange. (Homma et al, 2012).
- **Lack of a pimp is often incorrectly interpreted as lack of trafficking (HHS/OTIP, 2020).**

GENDER STEREOTYPES IMPACT BOYS

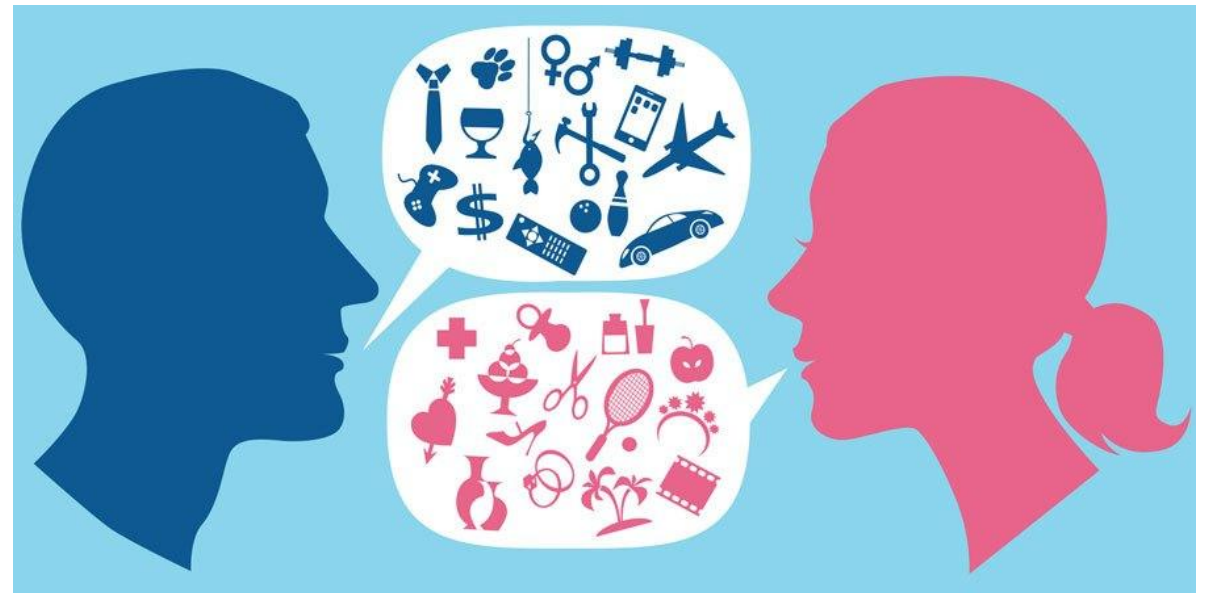
- Young men still feel they are expected to be strong and in control, know everything about sex and know how to 'look after' themselves. This leads to young men finding it hard to access services, to admit inexperience and to talk about their emotions (Trust for the Study of Adolescence, 1999, cited in Lillywhite & Skidmore, 2006).



Male		Female
Dominant	↔	Submissive
Independent	↔	Dependent
Intelligent	↔	Unintelligent
Rational	↔	Emotional
Assertive	↔	Receptive
Analytical	↔	Intuitive
Strong	↔	Weak
Brave	↔	Timid
Ambitious	↔	Content
Active	↔	Passive
Competitive	↔	Cooperative
Insensitive	↔	Sensitive

GENDER STEREOTYPES IMPACT BOYS

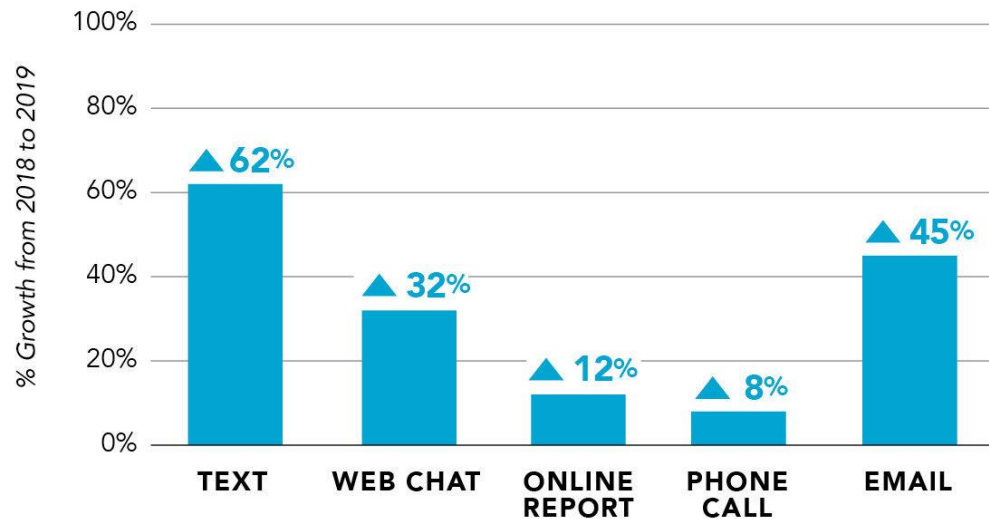
- Masculinity norms discourage disclosure, help-seeking, and emotional expression (Lillywhite & Skidmore, 2006).
- Violence against boys is frequently minimized or normalized in social and professional responses (Dennis, 2008).
- Gender stereotypes shape practitioner bias, leading to missed intervention opportunities (HHS/OTIP, 2020).



WHO'S SELLING?

- Girls were more likely to have a pimp than boys or transgendered youth (14% vs. 3% vs. 0%, respectively). (Curtis, 2008)
- The majority of the 41 youth who said that they currently had pimps, said that they were male (n=37, 90%), but somewhat surprisingly, 4 youth said that they had female pimps or market facilitators. (Curtis, 2008)
- Girls, boys and transgender youth all reported surprisingly high percentages of their “friends” as responsible for their entry to the markets (46%, 44%, and 68%, respectively) (Curtis, 2008) Peer-based recruitment blurs the line between victimization and perceived complicity (Friedman, 2013).

Trafficking Related Contacts in 2019



<https://polarisproject.org/2019-us-national-human-trafficking-hotline-statistics/>

Recruitment Tactics SEX TRAFFICKING

Intimate Partner/Marriage Proposition **1,067**

Familial **981**

Job Offer/Advertisement **515**

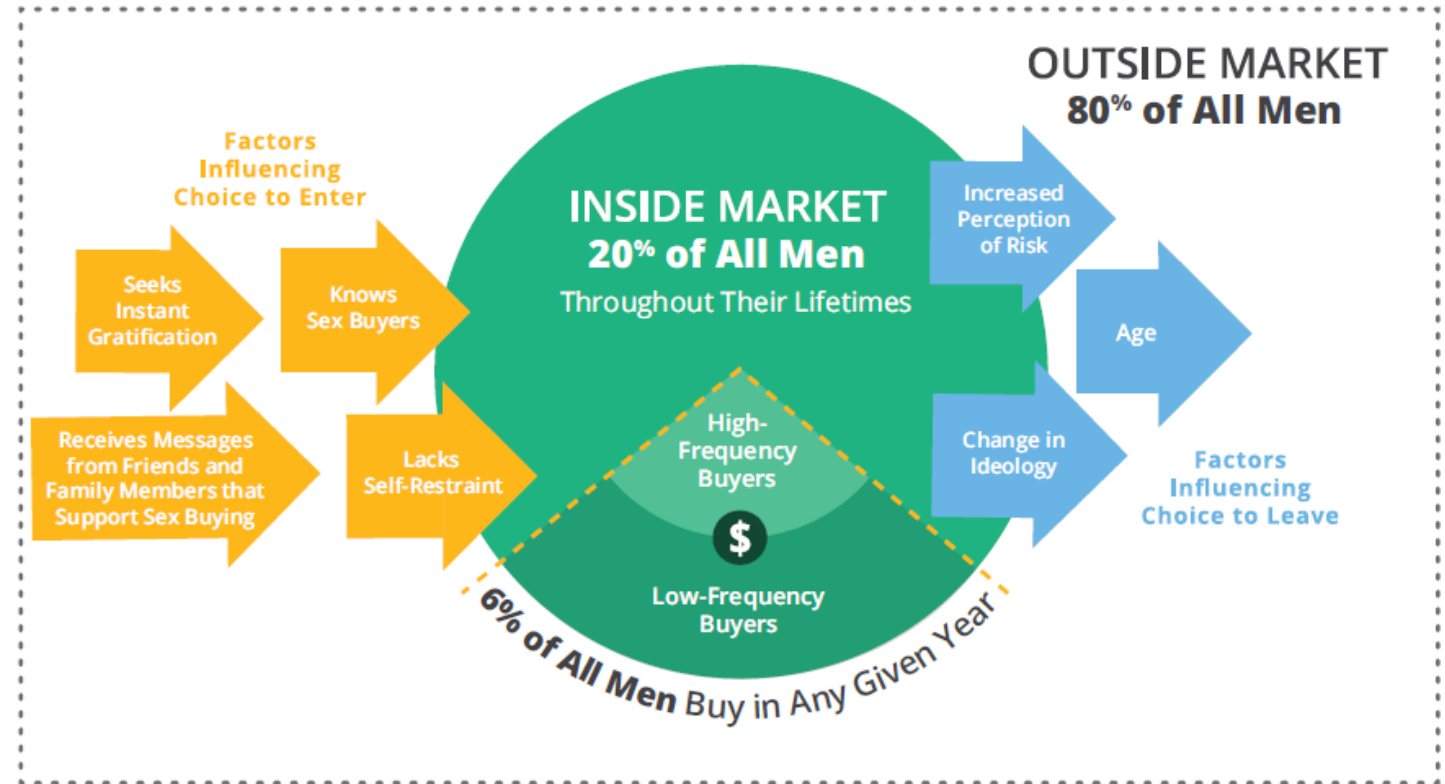
Posing as a Benefactor **438**

False Promises/Fraud **353**



WHO IS BUYING?

- Almost all of the youth (91%) said that they dealt mainly with male customers (Curtis, 2008)
- At least 95% of all the commercial sex engaged in by boys is provided to adult males (Estes & Weiner, 2001)
- Demand-side interventions rarely acknowledge male-male exploitation (Josenhans et al., 2020).
- Failure to confront demand reinforces invisibility of male victims (Dennis, 2008).



SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Cole (2018) interviewed 323 service providers who worked with child sex trafficking victims in the U.S with 28.8% reporting that they had worked with male victims. They found that most of the male victims were trafficked through prostitution (84.3%) and 34.7% were exploited in pornography.
- Friedman (2013) interviewed 40 social service organizations, only 18 reported they would serve boys. Of 37 agencies that provided traffic-specific services, 15 said they are willing and able to serve CSEB and 10 already had provided services to boys. Most CSEC programs were designed for girls and lack capacity to serve boys safely and effectively.
- Looking only at organizations specifically focused on commercially sexually exploited children, only four out of 25 organizations will serve boys and only two organizations have provided services to more than five CSEB. (Friedman, 2013)
- Providers report uncertainty about how to engage boys without reinforcing stigma (Lillywhite & Skidmore, 2006)
- Workforce training rarely addresses male victimization explicitly (HHS/OTIP, 2020).

THE POLICE

- Boys report significantly more encounters with the police than girls, especially for charges like “disorderly conduct, drug possession, jumping the turnstile in the subway, or trespassing.” Girls, on the other hand, only surpassed boys in two categories of arrest: “loitering for prostitution” (7% vs. 3%, respectively) and “prostitution.” (Curtis, 2008)
- Boys also reported a greater number of arrests and a high frequency of arrest than girls: 13 boys said that they had been arrested “more than 10 times,” but only 4 girls reported exceeding 10 arrests; and 46% of the boys reported an arrest in the previous year, while only 28% of the girls reported the same. (Curtis, 2008)
- The question then becomes not “why do men and boys have sex for money?” but “why do men and boys have sex with men?” (Dennis, 2008)
- Boys were more likely than girls to be considered offenders. As boys most often do not have the formal coercion of a pimp, this may account for them being more frequently labeled as offenders rather than victims. Law enforcement also may be affected by other issues, such as the demeanor of the adolescent, the officer’s sympathy for a particular teenager, or specific law enforcement policies in a jurisdiction (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2004).

BOYS CAN ALSO BE OFFENDERS

- Many boys redefine themselves as “hustlers” and “escorts,” rather than “prostitutes” in order to deal both with their own sense of shame and with the omnipresent stigma they experience in their travels (Adams, 1998, as cited in Estes & Weiner, 2001).



POINTS OF INTERVENTION

- More Research on Boys
- Inclusive Language
- Universal Screenings
- Trainings For Staff
- Male Mentors/Male Workers
- Male-centric Spaces



RESEARCH OR LACK THEREOF

- Dennis (2008) conducted a systematic review (of both male and female) literature and found 166 peer-reviewed articles that discussed the commercial sexual exploitation. Saewyc et al (2015) conducted a lit review of 33 articles published on just males from 1990-2015. We found an additional 4 articles in our review from 2015-2025.
- 84% of the articles in the Dennis's sample discussed only female sex workers, 10% only male, and 6% both. 17%, explicitly stated that they were limiting their populations to women.
- The majority, 67%, presented the term “prostitute” as precisely identical to “female prostitute” and “sex worker” as precisely identical to “female sex worker.”
- Two-thirds of the articles concerning female sex workers (gender specified or assumed) described violence as the most significant threat. No article mentioned the violence that male sex workers might experience.
- The threat of AIDS appeared in 26% articles concerning dangers to female sex workers (specified or assumed) and in 57% of those concerning dangers to male sex workers
- Only 15 of the 166 articles focused on juveniles, and girls were ten times more likely than boys to be the subjects of scholarly scrutiny and intervention

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

- The term “prostitute” or its equivalents was preferred in 66% of the articles concerning women (specified or assumed), but in only 25% of the articles concerning men, while 75% of the articles concerning men preferred the term “sex worker” or its equivalents. The implication is clear: women are forced to participate in sexual exchanges, but men are not. (Dennis, 2008)
- When the researchers began calling pimps “market facilitators,” many youth seemed far more willing to discuss their relationships with them. (Curtis, 2008)

Images that come up when “prostitute” is googled:



UNIVERSAL SCREENINGS

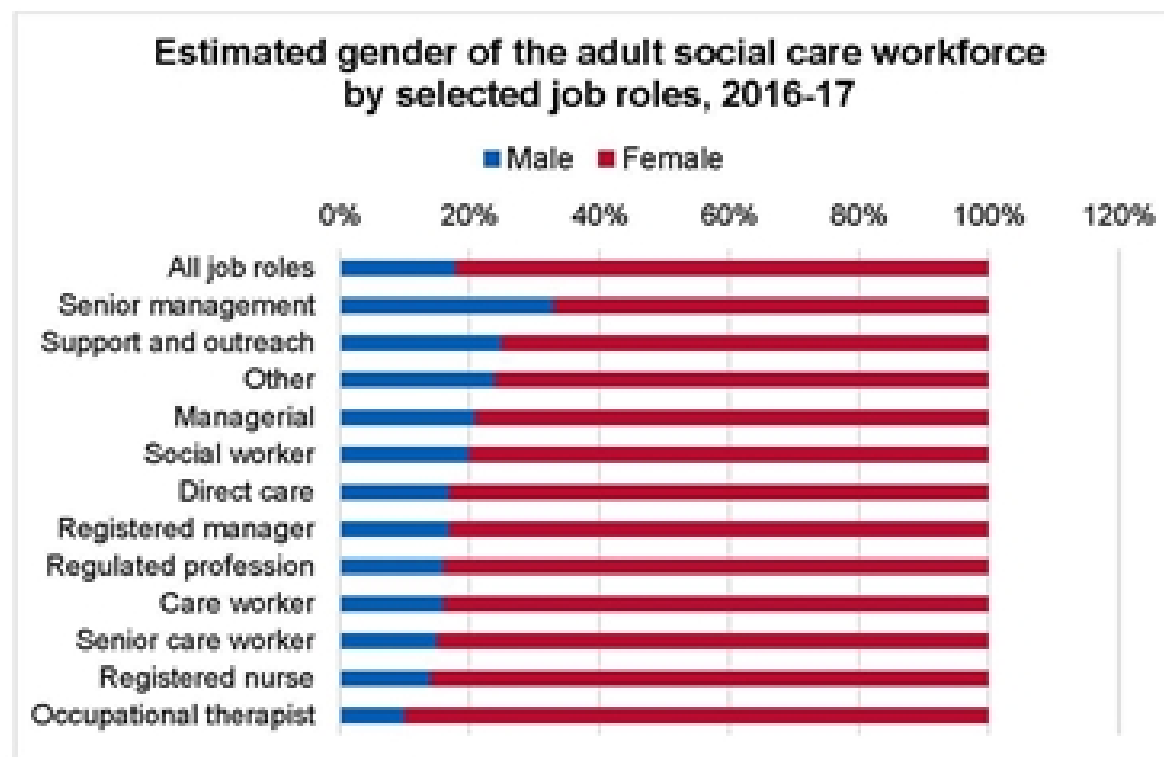
- Studies show that up to 88% of trafficked persons see a healthcare provider during their time in captivity. (Tiller & Reynolds, 2020)
- Few agencies think to screen their male clients for sex trafficking as most public information about sex trafficking focuses exclusively on girl victims (Friedman, 2013).
- Trauma-Informed Approaches are needed for agencies and law enforcement (NIJ, 2014 and Macias-Konstantopoulos 2016 in Tiller & Reynolds, 2020)
- SEEN Coalition of the Suffolk County (MA) Children's Advocacy Center, within 48 hours of any agency identifying a girl or boy being exploited through prostitution, representatives from all relevant agencies (including law enforcement, child protective services, medical providers, and district attorneys) convene to jointly ensure the victim's immediate safety needs are met and to plan for longer term needs and recovery. (Teen Prostitution Prevention Project, 2006 as cited in Clawson et al, 2009)

TRAINING FOR AGENCY STAFF

- Many young men surveyed had experiences of sexual exploitation, including in some cases, obvious targeting by older men, but these indicators were often unrecognized by unit staff. This highlights a lack of training and support for residential workers, that can result in a failure to identify sexual exploitation of male children (Munro, 2004, cited in Lillywhite & Skidmore, 2006).
- Male sex workers were assigned considerably more agency than female sex workers, the chief danger ascribed to them was HIV rather than violence, and the question of their sexual orientation was always addressed, whereas female sex workers were always assumed heterosexual. (Dennis, 2008)
- Staff must be trained to recognize trauma behind aggression and risk-taking (Lillywhite & Skidmore, 2006).

MALE MENTORS/MALE WORKERS

- Survivor-led, male-staffed outreach increases trust and identification (Friedman, 2013).



<https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/About/Blog/Article/What-do-we-know-about-men-working-in-social-care.aspx>

MALE-CENTRIC SPACES

- 84% of boys cite job training and housing (emergency, transitional and long-term) to allow them to leave “the life.” (Friedman, 2013)
- Safe, affirming environments reduce barriers to disclosure for boys, especially LGBTQ+ youth (Lillywhite & Skidmore, 2006).
- Needed services include: housing, counseling, CSEC-specific programs, male CSE survivors and outreach workers, school-based prevention, drop-in centers for street-involved youth, coverage and coordination among agencies. (Friedman, 2013)

TAKE AWAY POINTS

- Boys are exploited too
- Inclusive, interdisciplinary, and public health approaches are urgently needed (Pitcher et al., 2017).
- Not enough research has been done on male sex trafficking victims
- Effective prevention requires gender-inclusive policy, practice, and data systems (Josenhans et al., 2020; HHS/OTIP, 2020).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Data in the presentation highlight that boys are more likely than girls to be recruited directly by buyers and less likely to have a pimp. **How does this challenge traditional trafficking frameworks, and how should screening tools and investigative practices be adapted to reflect these different pathways?**
- **How do current justice-system responses perpetuate harm for exploited boys, and what would a trauma-informed, victim-centered alternative look like in practice?**
- **What protocols, policies, and practices, can be implemented at your agency or place of employment to better meet the needs of male victims?**