**MISSSEY DATA REPORT -- June 2009**

**Introduction**

The following report is a summary of the demographic and descriptive information of the 204 commercially sexually exploited youth seen through the MISSSEY program from its inception in June of 2006 to September 2008. This is a unique opportunity to describe this often unseen and underserved population. Research on this population remains limited- contributing to their "invisibility" in policy and academic literature. What little research there is estimates that there may be as many as 250,000 commercially sexually exploited children in the United States alone. More research and attention has been paid to large numbers (estimated in the millions) of children involved in international sex trafficking (Munir and Yasin, 1997, Estes, 2001 and Estes, 2004)

MISSSEY, in collaboration with WestCoast Children's Clinic (WCC) and Pacific Graduate School of Psychology (PGSP), has begun this research project in order to make commercially sexually exploited youth (CSEY) more visible and to advocate for their care. While there are unique qualities to the data collected, much of the demographic trends are consistent with similar populations (children in foster care, prostituted adults and children who runaway or are thrown away) in the US. These trends include an over representation of adolescent African American girls, high rates of mental health issues, substance abuse and other significant health issues. Policy recommendations will also be made based on this data.

Existing literature and best practices for CSEY are limited and often lack empirical support. Due to the hidden nature of this population one of the biggest challenges in addressing intervention and treatment of CSEY is identification and recognition. As a London research study explains, the concealed natures of CSEY keep the extent of the issue unknown to policy makers and agencies, and makes supporting data difficult to collect and nearly impossible to report accurately (Scott and Harper, 2006). As stated above, due to the hidden nature of this population, exact rates are nearly impossible to track, but annual estimates for CSEY in the US range from 200,000 to 325,000 (Gragg, Petta, Bernstein, Eisen, & Quinn, L., 2007; UNICEF, 2001; Lloyd, 2005). Even these high numbers are speculated to seriously underestimate both their numbers and types (Estes & Weiner, 2001).

The youth included in this data are those who were seen for outreach and advocacy services, and those who also went on to receive more extensive case management services. The data for this report, however, is pulled from the initial assessment completed during outreach. An additional report will be filed with the more detailed qualitative data from the case management files upon completion of data entry. MISSSEY provides outreach, advocacy and case management services to youth who are commercially sexually exploited in the Oakland/Alameda County area of California. In just over a year and a half from the onset, this program has provided services to 204 youth. In addition to providing these youth with unparalleled individualized service, MISSSEY has also collected self-reported information from each of these youth. While self-report data may be the most honest glimpse into who these youth are and where they come from, it is limited by their perception, biases and willingness to share. The self-report data was collected by a MISSSEY advocate through an interview at intake and limitations of timing and perceptions of authority are unknown, but may contribute to limited disclosure.

**Demographics**

Within the first 18 months of service MISSSEY worked with 204 youth. The majority of these youth are female- 98%, with 1 youth identifying as transgender and the other 2 male. As shown in Table 1, the data reflects an over representation of ethnic minorities, specifically African-Americans. Sixty-eight percent of the CSEY report being African American or mixed race including African American, compared to the general child population of Alameda county, where African Americans account for 13% of the child population (Child Welfare Dynamic Reporting System, 2008). This high rate of African American youth represented in CSEY is consistent with rates in New York City in 2006, where 67% of the youth were African American (Gragg et al., 2007). White, Latina, and Asian ethnicities all had lower rates then the general population; whites 8% vs. 27%, Latina/Latina mix 14% vs. 31% and Asian 6% vs. 24%. Five of the 204 youth were born in other countries (4 Latin America and one from Thailand). Close to 85% of the youth had English as their first/primary language, 4% were bilingual.

This data provides a snapshot of the demographics of commercially sexually exploited youth. They are almost all girls and also mostly girls of color- with a disproportionate amount of them coming from African American heritage. This is consistent with the data collected from the WestCoast Children's Clinic STAT program and with the existing literature (Lloyd, 2005; Gragg et al, 2007).

MISSSEY was also able to collect information about sexual orientation by asking youth how they identified themselves. Sexual minorities or those identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or questioning (GLBTQ) have been found to have slightly higher rates amongst CSEY, but our data reflects higher then any similar previous numbers with about 23% identifying as GLBTQ. A similar study surveying CSEY in New York City in 2006 found only 6% of the youth identified as GLBTQ (Gragg et al., 2007). This information about sexuality, shows a relatively high proportion of youth identifying as bisexual and may be useful in targeting services and addressing issues related to sexuality

| Race | Percent | Frequency (N) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| African American | 44% | 90 |
| Mixed Race African American | 24% | 49 |
| Mixed Latina | 18% | 17 |
| White | 8% | 17 |
| Latina | 6% | 13 |
| Asian | 6% | 13 |

**Table 1. Self-reported Ethnicity**
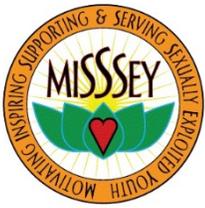
| Sexuality | Percent | Frequency (N) |
|---|---|---|
| Straight | 70% | 143 |
| Bisexual | 18% | 37 |
| Gay/Lesbian | 2% | 3 |
| Questioning | 3% | 6 |

**Table 2. Self-reported Sexual Orientation**

**Family/Institutionalization**

In looking into the family background of these youth several trends emerge:  two-thirds (67%) of the youth stated that they were raised by biological or adoptive parent(s), 6% stated they were raised in foster care and 23% raised by relatives.  Common perceptions of commercially sexually exploited youth include that they are usually children in foster care, or runaways- while this is certainly true this data indicates that the majority of these youth feel as though they were actually raised with their biological or adoptive parents.  This is important to note in terms of targeting intervention and addressing family issues.

The data hints to relatively low rates of child welfare involvement for this population. In a New York study of CSEC, 85% percent of the youth had prior child welfare involvement, of which 75% had lived in foster care (Gragg et al., 2007).  While the majority of the MISSSEY youth reported having been raised by their parents, 53% lived in a Group Home at some point. So while many of the youth identify that they have been raised in their own homes, many of the youth eventually come into contact with institutional care.

A major point of controversy is CSEY involvement in the legal system.  In many states, including California, minors cannot legally consent to sex to anyone 3 or more years older in age, yet can be charged with contradicting laws for prostitution/solicitation.  It is not unusual for CSEY to experience arrests and/or incarceration.  The data reflects this with 58% of the youth arrested for solicitation, 56% on probation, and 59% incarcerated at Juvenile Hall at the time they received services.

Consistent with common perceptions this data shows extremely high rates of runaway youth.  A staggering 83% of the youth had, at one time, runaway.  Thirty percent of the youth had run away between one and three times, while 30% had run away more than 8 times.  Twenty-eight percent of the youth stated that they ran away because they frequently fought with their parents, 13% due to abuse at home, 6% that they were kicked out of their homes.  When asked whether they felt safe in their parent's homes 19% said no, they were not.
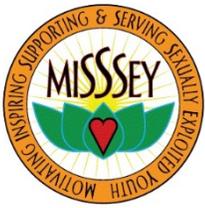
| Who were you raised by? | Percent | Frequency (N) |
|---|---|---|
| Parents | 66% | 136 |
| First Degree Relative | 23% | 46 |
| Foster Care | 6% | 13 |

**Table 3. Self-reported response to "Who were you raised by?"**

**Factors influencing commercial sexual exploitation involvement**

Factors contributing to the sexual exploitation of children can be put in three categories: contextual, situational, and individual. Attention is typically focused on situational and individual factors, giving little regard for the external societal influence. Some of the macro or contextual factors include: socio-economic, societal attitudes, child victims of crime and violence, existing market for adult prostitution, community knowledge concerning HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Examples of micro or situational factors include: family dysfunction, parental substance abuse, history of physical or sexual assault, school or other social performance failures, gang membership, and active recruitment to prostitution by peers, family members, or pimps. The greatest focused is often on individual or internal factors such as, poor self-esteem, depression, extreme hopelessness, external locus of control, and seriously restricted future orientation (Estes & Weiner, 2001).

**First involvement**

The data collected by MISSSEY offers a unique opportunity to understand how youth enter into commercial sexual exploitation. One of the questions asked in the initial interview assesses exactly this, how youth became commercially sexually exploited. The reasons vary from coercion by friends, people they know, being kidnapped, online entrapment and for survival. The most common reasons reported include: because of their friends (13%), because they ran away (20%), because of their boyfriend (5%), because of a pimp (8%), forced or kidnapped (2%). Through a combination of recruitment and access to limited resources support and resources, these youth turn to CSE as a form of survival.

**Legal interaction**

It is important to note that these youth are often criminalized for their exploitation: over half (59%) of the youth incarcerated in juvenile hall at the time of entering services, 58% percent of the youth were arrested for solicitation, nearly 56% of the youth were on probation. In addition to interacting with the juvenile justice system through being picked up for "prostitution" 86% percent of the youth had been arrested for other reasons such as theft, assault, warrants, and battery.

**Trauma history**

Childhood sexual and physical abuse, and witness to domestic and community violence are common risk factors amongst CSEY. Previous statistics show as many as 90% of CSEY have been sexually or
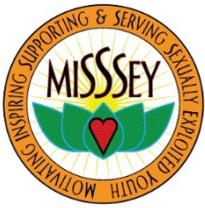
physically abused (Llyod, 2005). The MISSSEY data corroborates this finding:  half of the youth (51%) indicated that they had been in a physically abusive relationship, 43% reported that they had been physically or sexually assaulted. The majority of youth stated that they had experienced rape (64%, 131 youth).  Due to the sensitivity of these subjects and desire to protect others involved, particularly their perpetrators, the minors are likely to underreport or under identify their abuse histories.

Whether the youth currently felt threatened or afraid was also assessed.  The majority of youth said that they felt safe (53%).  Others indicated that they were afraid of their families (7%), pimp (7%), boyfriend (2%), and God (7%).

| Prior Trauma | Percent | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Physically or sexually assaulted | 43% | 89 |
| Physically abusive relationship | 44% | 90 |
| Experienced Rape | 64% | 130 |

**Table 4.  Self-reported 'Yes' responses to Prior Trauma checklist.**
**Note:  these frequencies and percentages reflect portions of the total N (204).**

## Psychiatric History and Mental Health

Street youth suffer disproportionately from serious mental illness, with CSEY suffering from mental health problems at two to five times the rate of the general adolescent population (Estes & Weiner, 2001). Sixty-six percent of street youth in a Seattle study were diagnosed with disruptive behavior disorders, attention deficit disorder, mania, schizophrenia, or posttraumatic stress syndrome (Estes & Weiner, 2001). In an accumulation of data collected from the WestCoast Children's Clinic's Screening, Stabilization and Transition program for Alameda county 1 in 4 were clinically depressed, 3% were diagnosed with PTSD, and 4% diagnosed with Bipolar disorder. A shocking 29% of these youth had been hospitalized for a psychiatric reason, and nearly a quarter (24%) had attempted suicide.  These figures are extraordinarily high and demonstrate the incredible level of distress that they experience.

## Health

Physical health is also a clear indicator of the well being of this population.  Thirty-two of the girls (16%) had children and at the time of interview 8 (3%) were pregnant.  Half of those with children had custody; the others were living in foster care placements or with relatives.  The majority of youth (77%) indicated that they did see a doctor regularly and 33% stated that they were currently being prescribed medications. Forty nine percent had been hospitalized at some point.  There is evidence that adults who have been prostituted have high rates of health issues including: STDs, high rates of miscarriage and that, in general, they complain of more health related problems (Farley, Baral, Kiremire and Sezgin, 1998).  Collecting more data on health related variables is suggested.

## Substance Use

Unlike their adult counterparts, CSEY generally are not working to support a habit, but finding themselves forced into this life as a form of survival. Substance abuse for common street drugs amongst this population is relatively low with methamphetamines, pharmaceuticals, cocaine and other drugs all reported at rates less than 5% of CSEY. One exception to this is 28% report having used ecstasy-which many youth use to enable them to have sex. Table 5 shows alcohol was the most commonly used, followed closely by marijuana. For a small portion of these youth, substance abuse is more than experimentation- with 11.5% of the youth having been placed in a drug treatment program.

| Substance | Percent | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Alcohol | 35.8% | 73 |
| Marijuana | 62.3% | 127 |
| Ecstasy | 28.4% | 58 |
| Tobacco | 10.3% | 21 |
| Cocaine | 4.9% | 10 |
| Methamphetamine | 4.9% | 10 |

**Table 5. Self-reported 'Yes' responses to Substances Used checklist.**
**Note: these frequencies and percentages reflect portions of the total N (204).**

## School and employment

A clear point of strength for these youth is school attendance and performance, with 62% of the youth report they attend school and 51% report being excellent students. This data is important as some of the most consistently identified protective factors have been supportive, caring relationships, especially connectedness to family, school, and other adults in the community (Edinburgh & Saewyc, 2009). This also illuminates how a vast majority of these youth could potentially reached and served through school-based outreach and services. Approximately 30% of the youth were no longer attending school or had dropped out-which articulates a need for educational services and support. Close to a third (31%) of the youth had had a job. Both school and employment may be areas of strength and resilience for these youth. Documenting the relatively high rates of school enrollment and the presence of employment is unprecedented in the literature and, as stated above, may be useful in finding opportunities to serve this population.

## Summary

The MISSSEY program provides unprecedented services to an incredibly underserved population that includes research and data collection. Through their work, they have begun to collected information and are able to describe this "invisible" population of youth. This data also reflects how decisions of CSEY

are influenced by their age, emotional and mental development, life histories, environment, limited options, and extreme vulnerability to the tactics of pimps and recruiters (Llyod, 2005, p. 17). The detail and quantity of this data helps to articulate the needs of these youth, who report extremely high rates of experiences of rape, physical assault, suicide attempts, serious substance use and criminalization of their exploitation. The data also begins to show the incredible resilience of these youth who are able to seek out medical care, maintain school attendance and obtain and keep employment.

**Policy  Recommendations:**

Based on the above findings there are several policy recommendations stated below:

- The data from MISSSEY provides an opportunity to see these youth who often remain invisible. The MISSSEY data highlights the disproportional representation of African American girls commercially sexually exploited youth population. Targeted education, information and services need to be provided for these youth. In addition, the MISSSEY data begins to highlight a significant majority of the girls identifying as sexual minorities – lesbian/gay, bisexual or questioning. This information raises the question of how sexuality might influence the provision of services: are there issues particular to being a sexual minority involved in both the exploitation and treatment of these youth?

- While the Literature shows that youth in institutional care are at a much higher risk and often targets for commercial sexual exploitation, it is important to remember that two thirds of these youth report their families raised them and that they attend school. This suggests that there should be preventative interventions geared towards children in schools and not just services targeting children once they have entered into institutional care.

- The extraordinarily high rate of involvement with the juvenile justice system (mostly through arrest for "solicitation") needs to be examined. The criminalization of children who are being exploited is highly problematic. How can the system better serve these youth- without re-victimizing them through labeling them as criminals?
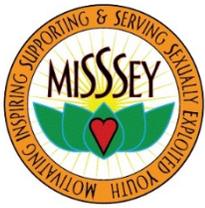
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