Experiences of Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth in the United States: A Qualitative Systematic Review

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Experiences of CSEY in the US
A Qualitative Systematic Review
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Disclosure Statement

No relationships to disclose.
CSEY

Type of human trafficking involving sexual abuse of a child or adolescent (pornography, physical abuse, or sex work) for financial gain\(^1\)
Background
Prevalence

244,000 youth at risk (US, Canada, Mexico)²

82% human trafficking incidents involving sex trafficking³

1,000 youth between 2008-2010³
Reasons for Under-reporting

- Frequent moving across borders
- Online advertising\(^4\)
- False identification
- Appearance changed to look older\(^4\)
- Lack of follow through on abuse reports\(^5\)
Common Characteristics

Consistencies and Inconsistencies

66% AA
99% Female
73% Age 16-18

40% White
12% Male
72% Age 14-17

56% AA
100% Female
Mean age 16
Influences

Preceding Entry

- Abandoned\textsuperscript{10}
- Criminal activity by parents
- Abuse and neglect\textsuperscript{10}
- Polyvictimization\textsuperscript{11}

Preventing Exit

- Fear of exploiter
- Need for food, housing, drugs\textsuperscript{12}
- Manipulation\textsuperscript{13}
- Lack of education/independent living skills\textsuperscript{14}
Purpose

• Explore the experiences that influence youth vulnerability to sex work
• Aggregate qualitative evidence to describe characteristics of CSEY
• Explore factors that influence sex work entry, continuation, and exit among adolescents in the US
Methods
Search

- Published and unpublished
- 9 databases
- KW: human trafficking, prostitution, CSE, adolescent, teen, youth

Inclusion/Exclusion

- Qualitative study
- First hand account of current or former CSEY
- US since 2000
Categories/Themes

- Investigator findings
- Emergent themes within quotes

Illustrations

- Compiled across all studies to validate themes
- Selected most representative and poignant
Results
### Participants
- N=795
- Females 462
- Males 276
- Transgender 57
- States: AZ, CA, CT, FL, IL, MA, MN, NY, WA, DC
- Or Midwest, West, Northeast, South, Southwest

### Methods of Inquiry
- General qualitative
- Consensual qualitative research
- Feminist
- Narrative
- Photovoice
- Phenomenology
- Grounded theory...

### Categories
- Experiences preceding entry
- Experiences facilitating continuation
- Experiences facilitating exit
Experiences preceding entry

- In hospitable Environment
- Unmet Needs
- Influence of Others
Inhospitable Environment

“The people that my mama gave me to, one [of] their sons molested me real bad. I would go through the house and he would catch me in the kitchen and do stuff to me…Grandpa, his daddy, he would always give me a little money to feel and touch on me and stuff like that, so that’s how I got off into that [prostitution]. I learned that if I wanted something, I had to give up something.”¹⁵

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Unmet Needs

“…If you think about a bad relationship that you were in, at first it wasn’t bad. There was so much love there, but maybe after about 6 months…it just turns bad, but you want so much for what it was in the beginning to return that you’ll stay in that relationship and you’ll do anything in hopes that it will return back to that. But the problem for girls in the life and with pimps is that that was never real, so it will never, ever go back to that because it never existed…”16
Influence of Others

“…I was raised up with the game period, the pimping. My daddy was a pimp…My uncles ‘nem was pimps and I knew when I used to see the women and the houses we were in I was like, I was the one that lingered on with the adults.”17
Experiences Facilitating Continuation

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Risks

“...I know there are things as far as like STD’s and HIV and I don’t care. What I mean is, I really don’t care if a person want to go out there and have sex. I used to feel bad 'cos there was a lot of kids got out there at an early age, but...I actually have to go out there and make money, you know, so how can I care about the risks...” 18
Rewards

“Such is the power of effective slave training. When done properly—with just the right mix of isolation, degradation, violence, pain, terror, and occasional kindness—it can really be used to control someone body and soul.”

“…I knew who my people were, where I belonged, who I belonged to…The good parts was the sense of belonging. I knew I belonged to that group of ghetto hustlers.”
Neutral

"Sometimes they don’t even want sex, sometimes they just crave the attention, and sometimes they just want that person to be next to them. I guess they just like, feed off of the attraction or whatever but, it’s cool, like they, they’re very nice, take me out to eat, chill, watch a movie, sometimes of course there have been sexual encounters, but like it doesn’t really—it’s not so strong. Not like how regular dates would be if you wanted to just have sex, you just want sex and then money and that’s it."

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Experiences Facilitating Exit

- Turning Points
- Opportunity and Support
"I can't explain for other people but I can explain for myself...I slept with 50 men over that weekend, Friday through Sunday. I probably got like 5 to 6 hours sleep, um, just constantly out there, you know, cold and freezing, and I was thinking to myself 'oh my god it will never end'. I was jumping in and out of cars constantly, sucking dick, fucking, you know, and I was just like what if I catch HIV?....you know, I feel like a big whore and that kept on going through my head, why the fuck am I doing this? Do I want to be another statistic, you know, another transgender girl gets in a car and a boy doesn’t know 'she's' a 'he'...and he takes her and kills her, takes her off and plays it off and then leaves her in the middle of nowhere and shoots her, stabs her up or cuts her body up...and I got scared...I was like I can't do this anymore, I have to think about myself, you know, this is not working...and I told him [i.e., pimp] that I wanted to be out and he didn’t take it very well. He told me if he ever saw me that he would shoot me."

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Opportunity and Support

"You know since being here I've learned a lot of things. I live a better life today because I don't live by the codes of the streets anymore. I now decline sexual propositions in exchange for money. When I first came in I didn't know what I wanted at the time, but I did know that I didn't want any more of what I had been getting. It was the structured program set up that really helped me to talk about some things that had happened to me and what life was like when I was on the streets. I was able to tear down some fences and build some new ones and I was able to begin to see myself in another life. A lot of that was because the structure the program gave me, and all the things they offered, such as housing, food, job training..."22
Discussion
Critical Review Findings

1. Layers of psychological, physical, environmental trauma
2. Deterrents to reporting abuses
3. Interactions with police
4. Positive and negative reinforcements for sex work
5. Service needs NOT limited to youth alone
6. Specialized service needs for transgender youth
Implications for Policy and Practice

1. Infrastructure for interdepartmental information sharing needed
2. Screening for polyvictimization in school, health, social service, and criminal justice settings
3. Training for professionals appropriate to role
4. Law enforcement policies and procedures that prevent further abuse and establish a safe setting to seek assistance
5. Recognize signs of emotional fatigue, shift in goals, absence of trafficker, and engagement with support agency to facilitate exit
Questions?
## Table of Included Studies

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<td>Bruhns, 2014</td>
<td>Consensual qualitative research</td>
<td>11 F</td>
<td>CSEY lived experience, exit and recovery</td>
<td>Oakland, California/CSEY service setting</td>
<td>Exiting is facilitated by: social support, consistent relationships, and support in meeting basic needs.</td>
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<td>Cavazos, 2014</td>
<td>Feminist</td>
<td>13 F, 3 T</td>
<td>Experiences of CSEY</td>
<td>Midwest and west/national online recruitment</td>
<td>Trauma-informed, substance use and medical care, education, housing, and family reintegration needed.</td>
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<td>Cecchet, 2012</td>
<td>Narrative interviews</td>
<td>6 F</td>
<td>CSEY resilience</td>
<td>Seattle/ Trafficking service setting</td>
<td>Pregnancy, stress, and forming caring relationships led to sex trade exit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cimino, 2013²</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>2 M, 4 F (+10 adult-entry participants)</td>
<td>Examination of intentions to exit prostitution</td>
<td>Phoenix/Sex worker service setting, flyers, and internet</td>
<td>Exiting sex work is influenced by attitudes, agency, self-efficacy, skills, and environmental constraints.</td>
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<td>Coburn &amp; Osolin, 2011²³</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>20 F (+20 adult-entry participants)</td>
<td>Events preceding sex work entry and outcomes</td>
<td>Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Chicago, Hartford/Non-profit</td>
<td>Sex workers’ needs vary depending on age of entry: adolescent vs. adult.</td>
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<td>Curtis, et al., 2008</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>N=249: 53.5% M, 42% F, 4.5% T</td>
<td>CSEY characteristics, experiences, &amp; service needs</td>
<td>New York City/street youth service agencies</td>
<td>CSEY survivors were largely born in the US and did not have pimps. Housing was the most significant service need.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dank, et al., 2015</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>N=283: 47% M, 36% F, 16% T</td>
<td>LGBTQ involved in survival sex</td>
<td>New York City/street youth service agencies</td>
<td>Youth worked both under trafficker’s control or independently. Most expressed a desire to stop sex work.</td>
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<td>Holger-Ambrose, et al., 2013</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>12 F and 1 T</td>
<td>Exploration of homeless CSEY service needs</td>
<td>Minneapolis &amp; St. Paul/Youth shelters and street corners</td>
<td>Basic needs and health and safety education recommended for youth prior to CSE exposure.</td>
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<td>Hurst, 2013</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>40 F</td>
<td>Relationship of</td>
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<td>Prevention efforts are recommended</td>
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<td>Meister, 2014</td>
<td>Photovoice</td>
<td>5 females</td>
<td>Exploring current health and safety of former CSEY</td>
<td>Miami-Dade County/CSEY service agency</td>
<td>Youth distrusted law enforcement. Engagement between police and CSEY needed.</td>
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<td>Monheit, 2010¹</td>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>7 F (+8 adult-entry participants)</td>
<td>Lived experience of sex work</td>
<td>2 large northeast and southwest cities/sex work service agency</td>
<td>Entered sex work for money, housing, drugs, and to feel loved. Lack of self-agency made complicated exit.</td>
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<td>Oselin, 2014¹,²</td>
<td>Ethnography/Grounded theory</td>
<td>14 F (+26 adult-entry participants)</td>
<td>Sex work exit/sex worker-serving organizations</td>
<td>Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Chicago, Hartford/Non-profit</td>
<td>Sex work service organizations can support and improve quality of life for those who are/are not ready for exit.</td>
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<td>Rees, 2010</td>
<td>Constructivist, grounded theory</td>
<td>18 T</td>
<td>Lived experience of transgender CSEY</td>
<td>New York City/Youth service agency</td>
<td>Mentorship, employment support, and advocacy for transition-related healthcare delivery.</td>
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<td>Robinson, 2004</td>
<td>Feminist case study</td>
<td>3 F</td>
<td>Lived experience, high school dropouts involved in sex work</td>
<td>Chicago/Sex work service agency</td>
<td>Common experiences included: limited or no supervision, pregnancy, substance use, sexual abuse, truancy, high crime, and untenable home life.</td>
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<td>Rothman, Bazzi, &amp; Bair-Merritt, 2015</td>
<td>Constructivist grounded theory</td>
<td>4 females</td>
<td>Exploration of abusive dating relationships prior to CSE</td>
<td>Location undisclosed. Violence advocacy agency</td>
<td>CSEY leaving violent relationships is similar to intimate partner violence. Opportunities to exit are brief and complicated by emotional attachment.</td>
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<td>Stevens, 2012</td>
<td>Auto-ethnography</td>
<td>1 F</td>
<td>Personal experience</td>
<td>New York City/self-reflection</td>
<td>Shame contribute to mental illness for survivors. Need validation to heal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Williams &amp; Frederick, 2009</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>24 F, 3 M, 1 T</td>
<td>Factors leading in and out of CSE</td>
<td>Boston, Washington, DC/Youth shelters and service agencies</td>
<td>Complex trauma can elicit behavior that makes it difficult for teens to request or accept the help</td>
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