Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Youth in the United States: A Qualitative Systematic Review

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Abstract

Background: Commercial sexual exploitation of youth (CSEY) in the United States (US) commonly involves 16-18 year old African American females at risk due to child abuse, exposure to crime, substance abuse, and running away. Research examining this phenomenon is growing, but requires synthesis to allow for its use by professionals who serve CSEY. The purpose of this review was to pool the qualitative evidence regarding CSE of adolescents in the US. Methods: Published and unpublished qualitative studies published in English since 2000 with current or previous CSE survivors were included. Results: There were 19 included studies with a total of 795 participants. Sixty themes were identified and grouped into three categories: experiences preceding sex work entry, experiences throughout sex work involvement, and experiences following exit. Conclusions: Understanding the barriers and facilitators of CSE can inform the development of interventions that address the needs of CSEY and youth at risk for exploitation. The results of this review highlight the internal and external influences involved in sex work entry and exit as well as needs for services, research, and advocacy.

Keywords: human trafficking, sex trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, adolescent, teen

Introduction

Child or adolescent sexual abuse for financial gain is known as Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Youth (CSEY), a type of human trafficking. It can include child pornography,
physical abuse, or sex work (Mukasey, Daley, & Hagy, 2007). Sex trafficking has received
The International Organization for Migration reported that 36% of human trafficking survivors
were youth and 27% were sexually exploited (Serojijtdinov, 2012).

In the United States (US), greater than 72% of CSEY are born in the US, yet anti-
trafficking legislation often focuses on international survivors (Harris, 2012). It is necessary to
also examine US CSEY survivors unique risk factors and needs.

CSE prevalence in the US is difficult to estimate because traffickers avoid law
enforcement by frequently moving youth across borders and by using online advertising for
marketing (Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), 2009). Because youth might carry false
identification, appear older than their true age, and are typically recruited when they are 9-12
years old and less likely to report abuse, prevalence is likely underestimated (Harris, 2012).

Estes & Weiner (2002) stated that about 244,000 youth were at risk for CSE who were
homeless, runaways, transgender, involved in gangs, abandoned, forced from home, lived close
to Mexican or Canadian border cities, or entered the US as unaccompanied minors. The Human
Trafficking Reporting System provides compiles US state and local trafficking information.
Between 2008 and 2010, 82% of trafficking incidents were sexual and more than 1,000 involved
CSEY (Banks & Kyckelhahn, 2011).

Risks

US CSEY survivors are commonly 16-18 year old African American (AA) (66%)
females (≥99%) with prior foster care or criminal justice system involvement (O'Malley, 2014;
Varma, Gillespie, McCracken, & Greenbaum, 2015). Poverty is a consistent characteristic of
survivors internationally (Carling, 2008; Dottridge, 2008; ECPAT, 2002, 2006; UNICEF Pacific,
2006; Varma, et al., 2015) and likely contributes to increased risk for AAs in the US.

Basson, Rosenblatt, & Haley (2012) reported that 75% of CSEY (N=113) experienced child abuse or neglect, 55% were abandoned by guardians, and many had parents who were involved in substance use, sex work, or other criminal activities. Behavioral manifestations of trauma involved self-injury (35%), running away (62%), and severe substance abuse (31%).

Reid (2014b) and Reid & Piquero (2014) reported that CSEY survivors were more likely to abuse substances, sell drugs, and to start use at younger ages than non-CSEY adolescents.

Effects of Trauma

Cole, Sprang, Lee, & Cohen (2016) compared CSEY to child sexual abuse survivors. Despite both groups experiencing domestic violence, emotional, sexual abuse, and neglect, they reported that CSEY exhibited more behavioral problems such as cutting school, inappropriate sexual behavior, substance use, running away, and involvement in crime. Basson, et al. (2012) found that greater than 50% of those who were exposed to CSE experienced depression, anxiety, attachment, and anger disorders. Nonetheless, CSEY remained in exploitive relationships due to fears of physical abuse, the trafficker’s request, and lacking funds for food, housing, and drugs (Carr, 2009). Traffickers also manipulated CSEY by playing the role of a boyfriend/friend, mandating debt repayment, or commanding loyalty after forcing the survivor to commit a crime (Reid, 2014a). Lacking confidence regarding school and independent living skills further perpetuated the need for sex work (Fields & Abrams, 2010).

Support for CSEY for survivors in the US is currently based on limited scientific evidence. While there is a growing body of literature that examines CSEY experiences, there were no systematic reviews that synthesized the qualitative literature from the survivor’s
perspective. The purpose of this review was to pool the qualitative evidence for use by professionals who serve adolescent or adult survivors.

**Methods**

The search for published and unpublished studies was conducted in nine databases using keywords: human trafficking, prostitution, commercial sexual exploitation, adolescent, teen, and youth. Reference lists of all retrieved studies were searched for additional studies (See Figure 1).

Qualitative studies that addressed the first-hand experience of current or former CSEY conducted in the US since 2000 (the year the Federal Bureau of Investigation established the Crimes Against Children Program, FBI, 2014) were included in the review. Abuse types included, but were not limited to sex work and child pornography. Studies pertaining to survivors of human trafficking or child sexual abuse without the experience of CSE were excluded.

Titles and abstracts were reviewed to exclude studies that did not meet the predetermined criteria. Full-text reports were retrieved and examined by the reviewers to: evaluate that inclusion criteria were met and to extract data. To capture the scope of experiences, themes were extracted using the investigators’ findings and the participants’ quotes. Quotes were identified to illustrate each theme. Broad categories were identified and the themes allocated to categories.

**Results**

The search resulted in the identification 1,290 unique references (See Figure 1). Studies were excluded if they were: 1) not conducted in the US (~43%), 2) not a qualitative study (~26%), 3) not CSEY (~24%), 4) CSE, but not youth (~4%), or 5) lacked participant quotes to validate the data (n=1). Three additional studies were identified from reviewing the reference lists of retrieved studies. A total of 19 studies were included in the review (See Table 1).
There were 795 participants. Investigators recruited youth in the US via snowball sampling, online survivor networks, social media and service organizations. In total, there were 462 female, 276 male, and 57 transgender participants with 269 Black or AA (35%), 173 mixed race (23%), 122 White (16%), 113 Latino (15%), 76 unknown/other (10%), and 11 Asian (1%) (counts excluded Williams & Frederick (2009) and Dank, et al. (2015) for incomplete race data). Excluding unknown race, there were 566 non-White (74%) and 122 White participants (16%).

Nine of 19 studies reported qualitative methods with no specific approach identified (Ashley, 2008; Cimino, 2013; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Curtis, Terry, Dank, Dombrowski, & Khan, 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, Pape-Blabolil, Harpin, & Saewyc, 2015; Holger-Ambrose, Langmade, Edinburgh, & Saewyc, 2013; Hurst, 2013; Williams & Frederick, 2009). Consensual qualitative research, feminist, narrative, photovoice, phenomenology, feminist case study, constructivist grounded theory, autoethnography, ethnography, and grounded theory were also used (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Meister, 2014; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Rothman, Bazzi, & Bair-Merritt, 2015; Stevens, 2012). Individual and focus group interviews and observations were most often used to collect data.

**Themes and Categories**

Sixty themes and three categories were identified: 1) experiences preceding sex work entry (n=18 themes), 2) experiences throughout sex work involvement (n=36), and 3) experiences leading to and following exit from sex work (n=6). The themes are described in terms of the range of experiences reported and participant quotes provide an illustration of each.

**Category 1: Experiences preceding sex work entry.** Experiences that contributed to youth vulnerability to CSE involved psychological and physiological needs, environmental stressors, and peer, caregiver, or trafficker influence.
Theme 1: Beginning sex work to support a drug habit. Drug addiction facilitated sex work entry for many youth. As addiction severity increased, so did the need for sex work to support the habit (Cavazos, 2014; Cimino, 2013; Dank, et al., 2015; Monheit, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

I do know that I started using drugs when I was 14, and I used them heavily…I know that has a large part to do with why I got involved in prostitution. (Monheit, 2010, p. 166)

Theme 2: Being groomed for sex work. Participants described a grooming process that preceded sex work. CSEY identified parents, foster parents, siblings, and boyfriends as traffickers. Often youth were offered assistance when vulnerable during pregnancy or after running away (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cimino, 2013; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

…I was like two, three months [pregnant] when I started talking to him…He was a good person far as like, I used to have to go to the doctor, stuff like that with my pregnancy he used to go with me and give me money…He was good to me until I had my baby…He was like, 'it's time for you to get out and do something.' I don't have no job what am I going to do. It's a job you can do, prostitution…(Robinson, 2004. pp. 104-105)

Theme 3: Caring for others. The need to care for others influenced their entry into sex work. CSEY reported feeling responsible to care for their children, siblings, parents, and friends (Ashley, 2008; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

Then my mom had a daughter…where I was always stuck taking care of her. I had to, like, provide for her. So, it's like, it turned into where I was having sex to keep Pampers on my little sister or to keep shoes and clothes on my little sister. (Ashley, 2008, p. 28)

Theme 4: Developing relationship with a pimp. Relationships began with pimps (the term pimp is used in the results rather than trafficker to use language consistent with the participants) as a way to address unmet needs. In the absence of others to do so, the pimp was a provider. When the relationship later became exploitive, the emotional connection and sense of
loyalty was a powerful incentive to remain involved in sex work. (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Oselin, 2014; Robinson, 2004; Rothman, et al., 2015; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

...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…(Rothman, et al., 2015, p. 21)

**Theme 5: Experiencing child abuse.** Participants described experiencing every form of childhood abuse: sexual, physical, verbal, emotional, and neglect. They reported experiencing multiple forms of abuse from a single or multiple perpetrators that included biological, step- or adoptive fathers, the mother’s boyfriend, mothers, sisters, grandfathers, uncles, or neighbors (Ashley, 2008; Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Stevens, 2012; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

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 little money to feel and touch on me and stuff like that, so that’s how I got off into that [prostitution]. I learned then that if I wanted something, I had to give up something. (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011, p. 319)

**Theme 6: Experiencing pregnancy during adolescence.** Participants reported experiencing pregnancy prior to or while involved in sex work. Pregnancies resulted in abortions, miscarriages, or live birth. Children were in the custody of the participant, family members, or the foster care system (Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Curtis, et al., 2008; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Robinson, 2004; Stevens, 2012; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

I grew up in a house...abusive, and my father was an alcoholic…I started running away and I got pregnant when I was 15. My dad told me I couldn't live at home anymore. I left and had my son, and he went with his dad's family. (Cecchet, 2012, p. 34)
Theme 7: Gaining control of sexuality. For some participants, involvement in sex work provided them a sense of control and empowerment. Feeling powerless after experiencing sexual abuse, they realized a sense of identity, redemption, and agency in sex work (Bruhns, 2014; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Oselin, 2014; Rothman, et al., 2015).

...It's like, you feel powerful, you feel like you're somewhat in control, even though there's these people trying to take advantage of you. It's like, you level your self esteem by how much money you can make. And I think it's also a way to turn the abuse on its head...'I'm gonna say when and where this is gonna happen.' (Bruhns, 2014, p. 142)

Theme 8: Interacting with the education system. While youth identified helpful teachers or enjoyed school at times, they also described a lack of supervision from teachers, bullying, fighting with peers, involvement in crime while in school, disinterest, difficulty with academics, and cutting school to drink, use drugs, or loiter. As a result, many were expelled or failed to graduate from high school (Ashley, 2008; Bruhns, 2014; Curtis, et al., 2008; Hurst, 2013; Meister, 2014; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Stevens, 2012).

...I ditched school cause I was like having problems in that school like fighting every day. Really wasn't paying attention in classroom so I never did graduate from the eighth grade. But I was doing okay in school so they put me in the ninth grade. The school closed down, so after that I just didn't go back to school...(Robinson, 2004, pp. 177-178)

Theme 9: Interacting with the child protective/foster care system. Youth with foster care experience described that reporting abuse resulted in either no action or an exacerbation of problems: fear of family separation and undesirable placement changes. One participant described losing services due to having a job despite lacking readiness for independence at age 18 (Ashley, 2008; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

Sometimes I think if the system was a little bit better, it'd be less girls in the sex trade...I would go with social workers or I would go to teachers and I would say stuff, but the stuff they start talking about, like, 'Yeah, we about to come in your house. We going to arrest your parents. Separate you and your sister'...They back you up into a corner. (Ashley, 2008, p. 30)

Theme 10: Lacking a clear pathway into sex work. There was one participant quoted...
who reported no known reason for entering sex work. It is included to acknowledge that pathways into sex work varied and some were unexplained (Monheit, 2010).

I wasn't abused. I had wonderful parents growing up. And I don't know what happened …I mean other women have good reasons. You know, they're like 'Oh, I was raped when I was seven. You know my parents abused me. My mom was a drunk. My father was a creep. I was fostered and my foster family put me to work like Cinderella.' I don't have a good reason that I can look back and say that's why. (Monheit, 2010, p. 171)

**Theme 11: Lacking options for traditional work.** Sex work was identified as the only option for youth to earn a livable wage because they lacked education and job skills. Transgender youth discussed the conflict between the desire to live one’s true gender identity and the need to live according to one’s biological gender in order to maintain a job (Ashley, 2008; Bruhns, 2014; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004).

…if there’s another way for a kid my age to make this much money, tell me ‘cause I’ll do it. (Curtis, et al., 2008, p. 103)

**Theme 12: Lacking parental supervision/engagement.** Participants described parental supervision and engagement were lacking at home. Even when basic needs were met, the lack of an attentive adult was described as a contributing factor to CSE. For some, the lack of attention was due to the parent’s need to work, while others expressed feeling neglected (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Stevens, 2012; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

Well, I was the type of child that never got any attention. I just always spent time by myself, whether it be playin’ by myself or different stuff…like, I never got beat with a belt or nothin’. I just didn’t get anything. I didn’t get verbally abused. I just didn’t get anything and that’s worser than gettin’ anything...(Hurst, 2013, p. 103)

**Theme 13: Lacking services before sex work entry.** Participants identified unmet needs and the inability to access support services prior to sex work entry. One participant specifically discussed a lack of knowledge about what abuse is and how to report it (Cavazos, 2014; Cimino, 2013; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Rees, 2010; Williams & Frederick, 2009).
Nobody told me that I was much more than my body. Nobody told me that somebody would want to take advantage of me…Nobody told me that, 'If your grandfather or somebody you trust is touching you, tell somebody'…I don’t know that that would’ve stopped anything however, if I had a place where I knew I could go, maybe it would’ve been different, you know? (Hurst, 2013, pp. 121-122)

**Theme 14: Leaving home.** Leaving home at a young age also preceded sex work entry.

Participants left home due to abuse, being forced out by a caregiver, or choosing to leave to avoid rules and expectations. The inability to secure basic necessities created a vulnerability to sex work recruitment (Ashley, 2008; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Holger-Ambrose, et al., 2013; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

When my mom kicked me out, I didn’t have nowhere to go. I lived on the street for a couple a days. When I met this one girl, and she asked me if I wanna make money ‘cause she said I’m a pretty girl. And I said, 'Sure.' She started showin’ me the places where you could go to pick up guys…(Curtis, et al., 2008, p. 50)

**Theme 15: Needing attention, acceptance, and love.** Many participants reported that sex work satisfied a need for acceptance, validation, and love. It made participants feel desired and important (Ashley, 2008; Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Rothman, et al., 2015; Stevens, 2012; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

Pimps come at girls that not like the prettiest girls, like the ones with high self-esteem. They come after the girls that basically need love. (Ashley, 2008, p. 29)

For me, it was how I felt about myself, so that I would allow people to treat me any way that they wanted. You could be horrible to me 95% of the time, but if 5% you were good to me…then that was OK. I would take that 95% bad. (Rothman, et al., 2015, p. 20)

**Theme 16: Normalizing sex work and crime.** Sex work and crime were viewed as normal and socially acceptable in the environments in which youth were raised. Drug use, sales, and sex work were overt in the neighborhood. Parents, siblings, and friends were involved and youth idolized sex workers in their lives (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino,
Theme 17: Recruiting/being recruited into sex work. Pimps recruited youth from shelters or service settings overtly as a pimp or covertly by initiating a romantic relationship. First encounters were also the result of being approached by customers on the street or casual persuasion by peers or other sex workers. Participants also recruited others for the pimp (Ashley, 2008; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Holger-Ambrose, et al., 2013; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Rothman, et al., 2015; Stevens, 2012; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

As soon as I got off the bus, the guy came up to me… I asked him where a shelter was and he said, 'There is a shelter right around the corner, but why would you want to sleep in the shelter when you can stay at my place?'…(Curtis, et al., 2008, p. 48)

Theme 18: Witnessing violence in the home. Youth witnessed violence at home between parents, caregivers, or other adults. Altercations involved fighting and the use of weapons (Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Hurst, 2013; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

...what can I do cause if I try to break it up, he'll push me out the way. I have seen my father break my momma leg, break her ribs. I done seen her bust his head…You know those big old ash trays? I done seen her bust his head with that…and my daddy used to mess around on my mother a lot. And the lady that he was messing around with shot my mother in the arm… I'll never forget none of that…(Robinson, 2004, pp. 157-158)

Category 2: Experiences throughout sex work involvement. Themes in this category reflect the day-to-day experiences of sex work such as encounters with customers, pimps, other sex workers, and health, legal, and safety risks. Participants detailed pros and cons of sex work including factors that enabled its continuation or prevented an exit.
Theme 1: Accepting health and safety risks. Certain health and safety risks were expected and tolerated as a part of sex work. Sexually transmitted infections and injuries secondary to violence were discussed (Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010).

…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...(Rees, 2010, p. 104)

Theme 2: Being coerced/controlled. To coerce youth to continue sex work, pimps supported basic needs while convincing youth there was no other way to do so. They threatened or committed violence, forced drug use or supplied an addiction, controlled money, withheld forms of identification, and were intermittently kind (Bruhns, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Stevens, 2012; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

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. (Stevens, 2012, p. 90)

Theme 3: Being violated within the context of sex work. Many participants reported previous rapes and assaults. Non-violent acts included failure to pay for services or robbery. Perpetrators were customers, sex workers, police, and pimps (Ashley, 2008; Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Stevens, 2012; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

I had one experience with a [john] who stabbed me with a stun gun in my neck, and then all over. I was fighting him and I kept on feeling like I was gonna go to sleep, but I knew that if I went to sleep he was going to kill me. He tried to strangle me and he was telling me he was going to kill me. He hit me with a baseball bat, tore my clothes, some of my nails came all the way off. My hair was pulled out. He finally stopped. I can't remember
why. He started driving and then I jumped out of the car. Some guy helped me, and the paramedics were asking me what kind of drugs I took…(Cecchet, 2012, p. 55)

**Theme 4: Belonging to a community of sex workers.** The sense of community that fellow sex workers experienced was reported as a positive aspect of sex work. They shared resources, helped one another emotionally, to obtain customers, and to feel safe. (Ashley, 2008; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010).

…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. (Monheit, 2010, p. 212)

**Theme 5: Coping with mental health/illness.** Participants reported problems with concentration and focus, intimacy and interpersonal relationships, depression, suicidality, and psychosis. Experiences with therapy, medications, and self-care to manage symptoms were described (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Hurst, 2013; Meister, 2014; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Stevens, 2012).

…at any moment that I sat still, just like flashbacks and memories, and just horror would happen. So I tried to keep my mind distracted at all time. (Bruhns, 2014, p. 132)

**Theme 6: Dealing with customers.** Youth described typical customer experiences. They identified customer characteristics, types of services, and financial transactions (Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

Most of the people I kind of mess with are married and they have like careers…And you can see in their face when they have, like a troubled marriage or something like that. They always talk about their wife or kids and the temptation...(Dank, et al., 2015, p. 31)

**Theme 7: Earning fast money.** The ability to earn money quickly was seen as another positive aspect of sex work. Youth reported that earning large sums of money in a short time was exciting. On the other hand, a long wait for a low wage paycheck was seen as a deterrent to leaving sex work (Ashley, 2008; Bruhns, 2014; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al.,
I was addicted to getting the money. It's like I couldn't live without turning a date, everyday turning a date. Two, three, four, five dates and the money. So I was attracted to it. You get accustomed to it...(Robinson, 2004, p. 113)

**Theme 8: Experiencing loss.** Losses associated with sex work were both abstract and concrete. They included: innocence, identity, jobs, or children (Cecchet, 2012; Curtis, et al., 2008; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Stevens, 2012).

At 17 somebody had given me an STD...and didn't let me know about it and it made me sterile and I was never able to have children...And for part of that story I'm grateful because I wouldn't have been able to survive taking a child through what I went through But that's another piece of me that...was taken. (Monheit, 2010, p. 23)

**Theme 9: Experiencing obstacles to exit.** Participants identified conditions that made exiting sex work complicated. Addiction, regular customers who increased payment for returning to sex work, ambivalence about exiting (readiness), and the failure to act by persons who witness CSE, but do not report it (Cimino, 2013; Dank, et al., 2015; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

...I always tell myself I’m giving up on the trade of sex work because I think of it as a trade but then once I think about like those regulars and...sometimes they’ll be, 'Oh really are you going to do that?' And it’s so easy to go back like they’ll...make usually some of the best offers...I kind of feel like they’re my fan base. (Dank, et al., 2015, p. 28)

**Theme 10: Experiencing safe/unsafe places to work.** To avoid assault and arrest, many perceived online was safer for meeting customers. Sex work occurred in cars, hotels, customers’ or their own homes, or on the street (Cecchet, 2012; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Holger-Ambrose, et al., 2013; Rees, 2010; Stevens, 2012).

I have a profile set up on the internet for escorting...2 days ago I met this dude online who wants to pay me $150 for sex and...I'll be leaving here to go meet up with him...I don't even do that now [street] because I don't want to get arrested...(Rees, 2010, p. 76)

**Theme 11: Experiencing discrimination, stigma, and guilt.** Participants described self-loathing and guilt feelings. They also felt discrimination and stigma from family members, the
community, and police (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Curtis, et al., 2008; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010; Stevens, 2012; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

I didn't see myself as a victim when I got out...I saw myself as a wretched prostitute...a disgusting wretched prostitute...I lived with that shame...(Cavazos, 2014, p. 82)

**Theme 12: Feeling exhausted.** Participants reported overwhelming emotional and physical fatigue at times. Sex work became intolerable at these times (Cecchet, 2012; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004).

When I was arrested I was so sick...and tired that they had to arraign me from the doorway. My drug of choice was heroin. I couldn’t even walk to stand in front of the judge so they arraigned me from the doorway...(Oselin, 2014, p. 326)

**Theme 13: Feeling fear.** Participants described fear and its sources. Potentially violent customers, death, the dark, arrest, and being exposed as a sex worker were common themes (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

It was just really bad, like there was no beds [at shelter]; there was nothin but roaches on the floor...I was like the only girl there and it was a whole bunch of like older men. Some of these men are like pedophiles and ex-convicts and murderers and stuff like that...and I was...sleepin on the floor like next to all these men and...they’re like masturbating and...ya, it was really bad. (Williams & Frederick, 2009, p. 20)

**Theme 14: Getting customers.** Strategies to obtain customers were discussed. At times, sex work was organized by pimps around major events, on call, or by referrals from friends or fellow sex workers, online advertising, and street solicitation (Cavazos, 2014; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Holger-Ambrose, et al., 2013; Rees, 2010).

…It makes it faster to meet someone online and find out what they do and then just go straight to their place or a hotel. (Holger-Ambrose, et al., 2013, p. 333)

**Theme 15: Glamorizing the life of sex work.** For some, the life in sex work was
described as glamorous. Shopping, travel, and parties were enjoyable aspects of the life (Ashley, 2008; Bruhns, 2014; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rothman, et al., 2015).

....from 18-24 it's pretty crazy but fun. I mean this is the time where I'm being flown to Miami, flown to New York, flown to Chicago...I have lots of money. I'm playing with high rollers, people in sports. I was...Cute, I made quite a bit of money. Did it feel good inside? No, but superficially, you know, it was exciting...(Monheit, 2010, p. 186)

**Theme 16: Going in and out of sex work.** Leaving and returning to sex work repeatedly was reported in several studies. Returns involved unsuccessful attempts to leave a pimp due to stalking or inability to meet survival needs, or leaving one and going to another (Cavazos, 2014; Dank, et al., 2015; Robinson, 2004).

I was 12. And I met him and just like nobody at that point in time cared...about me so it was like he was there...see we have this episode where I’ll leave him and he’ll find me and snatch me up...and you know he’ll be like why do you keep trying to leave me, because like I’m trying to change but...he’s not a bad guy. (Dank, et al., 2015, p. 53)

**Theme 17: Having conflict with others.** Participants complained of fights in shelters that led to youth choosing to sleep on the street or to rely on pimps or customers for shelter instead. Some also complained of conflicts with other sex workers and pimps over territory (Curtis, et al., 2008; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

...where we work at and all the places you go, you can't just be out there and don't have no man. Cause it be other women out there who gone tell they man you ain't got no man and they'll try to take your money...(Robinson, 2004, pp. 156-157)

**Theme 18: Having faith.** Some participants described that faith in a higher power gave them strength to survive the difficulties involved in sex work. They reported feeling protected (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Meister, 2014; Robinson, 2004).

...I feel like he [God] keeps me away from a lot of things. I feel like he saved my life in a lot of situations...he was also like a shield for me...I went to church a lot. You know, to kind of get me away from life sometimes. So he’s kind of like, a rock that I can lean on. Since I didn’t really have a rock, but I always had him...(Meister, 2014, pp. 33-34)
Theme 19: Having individual protective factors. Participants in three studies discussed personal strengths that helped them survive. Others identified strengths they developed as a result of sex work (Cavazos, 2014; Meister, 2014; Monheit, 2010).

And you know, it's not been easy with the [criminal] record that I have, but I think you prove yourself...And you reinvent yourself...you know, you knock on a front door and they don't let you in. You knock on the side, they don't let you in. I'm coming through the window, you know? I'm really tenacious, yeah. And I think those are some of the transferrable skills that come from the life that I led...(Monheit, 2010, p. 216)

Theme 20: Identifying transgender specific themes. Transgender youth viewed sex work as a means to express their gender identity. It was a way to achieve a feminine appearance (male to female transgender) and to “date.” Transgender youth opted for black market hormones and procedures due to the lengthy process associated with transitional care in a healthcare setting. In addition, “passing” presented danger when customers were unaware that the sex worker was transgender (Ashley, 2008; Cavazos, 2014; Curtis, et al., 2008; Rees, 2010).

...and one girl I knew, she got shot over it...got shot in the eye because the guy didn't understand and he was freaked out because he didn't, you know, know how people would respond to it...I mean, she was passable, you know...if you walked down the street, you would be like, 'she's beautiful', you know, but this guy destroyed her...now what's she supposed to do when she got shot in the eye...(Rees, 2010, pp. 145-146)

Theme 21: Interacting with the health system. Health provider interactions involved case managers, emergency medical technicians, physicians, therapists/psychologists, and residential counselors. They accessed services in the community, clinics, psychiatric and drug rehabilitation facilities, residential care, and acute emergency services. The quality of interaction ranged from highly supportive to unresponsive. They also discussed a tendency to reject assistance initially due to lack of trust (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

At first I rejected everybody, I didn't want nothing to do with them. I wasn't ready yet. But they always went beyond...they always would encourage you to live up to yourself,
love yourself. They just helped build your self esteem...So they was just like really supportive. 'If you need someone to talk to, I'll be there'...(Bruhns, 2014, p. 138)

**Theme 22: Interacting with law enforcement.** There were police interactions that were positive: being rescued by an officer, receiving help to exit, being spared from arrest, or being shown kindness. However, negative and even abusive interactions were reported as commonly: failure to assist when asked, harassment, entrapment, rape, quid pro quo sex acts, or forced informing to avoid arrest. Participants described lacking trust in police and feeling frustrated when police intervention interfered with the ability to make money (Ashley, 2008; Cavazos, 2014; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Meister, 2014; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

They thought we were the cute ones out there, so we unfortunately ended up doing all the police parties. They pay you a whopping $5.00 for a blow job. Yeah. Yeah and the police know. They knew who I was. They knew I was there. They knew I was underage. I told them I wanted to go home. They didn't help me. (Hurst, 2013, p. 114)

**Theme 23: Interacting with the criminal justice system.** Repeated arrests were common for those involved in sex work over time. Incarcerations and attempts to achieve justice for victimization were also discussed (Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Curtis, et al., 2008; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Stevens, 2012).

I had been to the penitentiary twice, one more arrest and I would have gone away for a long, long time. I became so scared of getting in a car with an undercover cop...that was a big fear for me. Because when you go to prison, you don’t really know if you’ll get out alive. (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011, p. 327)

**Theme 24: Learning the rules.** Sex work required learning a set of rules. Novices were mentored by experienced sex workers. Learning rules was necessary to avoid conflicts regarding territory, money, and the hierarchy (Cavazos, 2014; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

...It’s called 'The Game'... it’s like the pimp has female or multiple females and when he has multiple females there’s always his number one girl, the girl that, you know, brings in
the most money. And his number one sits up front in the front seat when he’s drivin’...It’s called the track and when you’re on the track you have to stay in the street...when other pimps walk by, like when other guys walk by that have...other girls you have to put your head down. You can’t look at them. You can’t talk to them. You can’t step on the same sidewalk as them...(Williams & Frederick, 2009, p. 52)

**Theme 25: Liking/not liking aspects of sex work.** There were aspects of sex work described as enjoyable and detestable. While there were rare reports of enjoying sex acts, most were described in neutral or negative terms including numbness, repulsion, malodorous or unattractive customers, sexually transmitted infections, performing odd sex acts, verbal abuse, and violence (Cecchet, 2012; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Robinson, 2004).

How the way people treat you, how degrading it is, emotionally disturbing it is...They talk down, they get physical, they hit you...(Dank, et al., 2015, p. 58)

**Theme 26: Needing services/conditions to exit.** Participants identified what they needed to be able to consider exiting sex work. In addition to basic needs and job skills, participants stated that getting out of the environment away from sex work was important to a successful exit. Psychological needs included non-judgmental support, role models, self-esteem building, and services to transition youth to independent living (Ashley, 2008; Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Stevens, 2012; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

The first thing that would have helped me...housing would have been wonderful. And the second thing that they need is to see a survivor that can talk to them. A person who has been through what they’ve been through and made it out of it. (Cavazos, 2014, p. 85)

**Theme 27: Negating/gaining sense of self.** Participants who discussed developing a negative sense of self labeled themselves as victims, drug addicts, and prostitutes. They mentioned that validation was derived from others and self-worth was associated with sex. For those who reported gaining a sense of self, pride in survival, identification as a mother, self-love, value in one’s body, and gratitude were described (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012;

We’re victims. We were victims should I say, even if we victimized ourselves. But we are survivors, and we’re overcomers. It’s one thing to survive, it’s another to overcome...But when you can overcome all of that, then you can produce good seeds, good fruit, out of something that was so bad. (Cecchet, 2012, p. 76)

**Theme 28: Obtaining material possessions.** Many youth desired non-essential material goods. Clothing, cars, and/or electronics were described as ways to achieve status and enjoyment and sex work was a means to obtain them (Ashley, 2008; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

A lot of people see girls' name-brand clothes, shoes, and all that and they say, 'Why can't I have all that?' And some people's parents don't have all the money for that, so, they don't know what to do. So, they just get the idea of having sex...they don't know it's like a serious thing. So, they just have sex for money. And then they buy all the clothes and shoes and everything that they wanted... (Ashley, 2008, p. 29)

**Theme 29: Providing a service to others.** Some participants viewed sex work as a marketable skill. They described feeling a sense of pride in providing a service to others (Bruhns, 2014; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

I think the sex trade is more about humans fulfilling humans...Kinda like I'll give you this if you give me that...it's not the healthiest way to go about it I don't think but, you know, sometimes you don't know any better. (Bruhns, 2014, p. 26)

**Theme 30: Recognizing moral dilemmas.** Conflicting feelings about remaining in sex work were discussed. On one hand, sex work was seen as a lesser evil than selling drugs. They also felt disgust and voiced concerns about their lifestyle being exposed to others (Ashley, 2008; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010).

There are many positive things for trading something of value. You can trade sex for the life of your kids, you can trade sex to keep your apartment, you can trade sex to feed yourself...some people think that sex trade is the worst thing to do cause you're selling yourself, who people believe God gave you but it’s like when it boils down to it, if you have no food in your stomach...but you have a man in your face willing to give you
Theme 31: Recognizing race. Some participants mentioned a preference for or bias toward customers based on race. Black or AA participants commented on the impact of dark versus light complexion and racial bias in their personal lives and in sex work (Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Robinson, 2004).

Theme 32: Surviving. Unmet basic needs created the vulnerability and ongoing financial insecurity perpetuated the need for sex work like a vicious cycle. Housing and food were persistent needs (Ashley, 2008; Cavazos, 2014; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Holger-Ambrose, et al., 2013; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

Theme 33: Using drugs to cope with sex work. Many participants used drugs to cope with sex work. They were used to function, escape, and as a form of self-destructive behavior. Regular use progressed to addiction with alcohol, marijuana, methamphetamines, and crack-cocaine (Ashley, 2008; Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004).

Theme 34: Using the vocabulary of sex work. In the course of interviews, participants explained terms used within the sex work community. Terms used were labels for: customers/sex workers/pimps, locations, and sex acts (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Curtis, et
al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Holger-Ambrose, et al., 2013; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

I used to go on Queens Plaza [shopping mall], and I used to see other females out there, workin’. And then I became real curious about the lifestyle of prostitution and pimpin’ and ho’in. And, like, I met my first john at 13…(Curtis, et al., 2008, p. 52)

**Theme 35: Working relationship with pimp.** Pimps controlled sex work activities and youth by arranging interactions with customers, and collecting money. Using violence and emotional attachment maintained compliance as well (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Stevens, 2012; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

…I would get slapped almost everyday for something. Even just sayin' something that he didn't want to hear…My name was 'bitch.' He would beat me up really bad. Or hit me with a pimp stick. It's a wire hanger knotted up…I had welts and bruises on my backside all the time…He did a lot of humiliating us…(Cecchet, 2012, pp. 51-52)

**Theme 36: Working without a pimp.** Participants in four studies reported working without a pimp. Transgender youth, those involved in survival sex, and those approached directly by customers navigated sex work independently, but also reported previous involvement with a pimp at some point (Ashley, 2008; Bruhns, 2014; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010).

I was what they call like a renegade, which is where you do it for yourself. I mean, on occasions, I've been snatched up by a pimp and they forced me to do it, but soon as I found the opportunity to run away, I would…(Bruhns, 2014, p. 134)

**Category 3: Experiences leading to and following sex work exit.** The themes in this category were limited. Participants described turning points leading to and following exit from sex work, the psychological sequelae, and the services needed following exit.

**Theme 1: Experiencing post-traumatic response.** Participants described intense psychological symptoms following sex work exit. Rage, flashbacks, fear of the dark, aversion to responses, emotional fatigue, guardedness, and relationship problems (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos,
…it was becoming too much. I was tired of condoms, the smells, the people touching me…I watched a situation with a bikini barista- I saw this man handing a lady an unusually large tip, and I’m thinking, ‘oh I know what they’re doing,’ and then all of a sudden a flashback of stuff that happened when you’re in the life. I think I’ve shut down so many things emotionally…just because of the trauma. (Cecchet, 2012, pp. 70-71)

**Theme 2: Having future goals.** Participants who achieved exit described a shift from a moment-to-moment survival mindset of to one that focused on goals for education and career (Bruhns, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Stevens, 2012).

...I wanted a good life, one that included a career with a good salary. I knew I would need to graduate from a respectable college to achieve my dream. If it required a few more years living with my parents, I was willing to make the sacrifice. My drive to succeed, coupled with a desire to avoid my house, turned out to be a recipe for achievement… (Stevens, 2012, p. 228)

**Theme 3: Leaving relationship with pimp.** Participants who were successful in exiting sex work revealed opportunities for exit. They were able to leave when the pimp traveled, was incarcerated, or they received help from service agencies (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004).

…I ended up getting pregnant by [my pimp]. A long time before that I just realized, this isn’t the life that’s meant for me. I just knew it wasn’t. I was starting to miss home more and I had been gone from home probably almost three years at that point. I was 16. He left me money to pay the rent and he was going back to California to get a car, and I just took the money and came home...I decided that was it, I was done. (Cecchet, 2012, p. 68)

**Theme 4: Needing services post sex work exit.** There were a broad range of services needed to facilitate a sustained the exit from sex work. Participants who were successful, were able to obtain assistance with money, housing, and relocation. They were able to work on education goals and obtain health care such as: drug rehabilitation and mental health care services (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Meister, 2014; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Rothman, et al., 2015; Stevens, 2012).
I struggled with the GED over the math portion and I finally passed that portion. So now I have to take the test on science and that's it. Then I'm done with the GED. I managed to pass the state law exam in order to become a loan officer. That's a tough task. I'm also currently taking justice classes at a community college. (Oselin, 2014, p. 155)

**Theme 5: Thinking about prevention of sex work involvement.** Participants in three studies suggested ways to prevent youth from entering sex work. They included: educating youth at risk about strategies used for recruitment, mentorship, and providing transgender youth with services beyond safe sex education (Cavazos, 2014; Curtis, et al., 2008; Rees, 2010).

I think if...people went into the high schools and talked about and educated about prostitution at that time...I don't think I would have did it. (Cavazos, 2014, p. 84)

**Theme 6: Turning points in decision to exit sex work.** Several participants reported distinct turning points in the decision to exit sex work. For some, the shift occurred as an epiphany or spiritual experience. For others, involuntary commitments (incarceration or hospitalization) facilitated exit. Pregnancy or children, fear, or no longer finding sex work tolerable inspired the exit from sex work (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004).

...You got to have a downfall...Dealing with these people, all these different individuals, all these different personalities. I knew once if I stopped the drugging, everything else was gone have to stop. I was just tired of it...All the men that I have been involved with...I abused my body (Robinson, 2004, pp. 114-115)

**Discussion**

Nineteen studies were included in this review that examined the experience of CSEY in the US. The participants were primarily non-White (74%) females (58%). This is similar to other published studies (Bounds, Julion, & Delaney, 2015; Varma, et al., 2015). The 60 themes identified were grouped into three categories representing the experiences associated with sex work entry, its continuation, and exit. In 2008, Byrne & Trew examined the experiences of 18 offenders in Ireland and identified characteristics that led to the participants’ orientation toward
crime or desistance. Because the characteristics were consistent with those of the participants in the reviewed studies, it is used as the context for interpreting the results. (Note that the term criminal offense is used because it was associated with Byrne & Trew’s work and should not be interpreted to mean that CSEY should be viewed as criminals).

According to the model, a positive orientation toward offending behavior was facilitated by: negative informal social bonds, bonds to offending friends, opposition to formal social institutions, personal problems, financial problems, and low self-control. Conversely, a negative orientation and desistance was achieved when those characteristics and problems were addressed, i.e. personal development and changes in social bonds, lifestyle, personal problems, and financial circumstances (See Tables 2 & 3 for definitions of each model characteristic).

Experiences preceding sex work entry

In this category, the 18 themes aligned with four of six Byrne & Trew (2008) characteristics (See Tables 2): personal problems, financial problems, negative informal social bonds, and bonds to offending friends. They also aligned with previous research. Reid’s (2014a) study identified the methods pimps used to recruit. Romance, flattery, assistance with meeting survival needs, and normalizing sex work were effective strategies that resulted in the girl’s adherence and loyalty. Running away from home, childhood abuse, and truancy were consistent with Basson, et al. (2012), Cole, et al. (2016), and Salisbury, Dabney, & Russell (2015) and collectively contributed to developing a positive orientation toward sex work.

Experiences throughout sex work involvement

For category two, the 36 themes aligned with all six of Byrne & Trew’s (2008)
characteristics (See Table 2) and previous literature supported several of the challenges experienced by the participants. In Varma, et al.’s (2015) study of CSEY who were treated at a pediatric emergency department, 31% reported violence associated with sex and 75% reported violence inflicted by police. These reports are troublesome to acknowledge, but a recent scandal within several Northern California law enforcement agencies supports the validity of these reports (McKirdy & Sidner, 2016). Several officers were terminated after charges were filed for crimes involving an adolescent sex worker after the suicide note of a police officer implicated himself and other officers within the departments. Gibbs, et al.’s (2015) study of a case management program for CSEY survivors supported the persistent needs for food, housing, and assistance with benefits.

For transgender youth, gender expression related to opposition to formal institutions. Burke, et al.’s study (2015) acknowledged the need for specialized services for transgender youth involved in sex work. Though they engage in sex work to meet basic needs, they also use it as an opportunity to live a life more closely aligned with their gender identity.

The development of the emotional connection to the pimp has been explored in previous research (Reid, 2014a), but there has been less attention given to the bond with friends and even customers in the sex work community. Although force and coercion were substantially involved in sex work, it is important to acknowledge that for some (or at some times), self-determination created a barrier to sex work exit. The intermittent reinforcement of relatively positive experiences might explain why youth could be reluctant to report CSE. Bandura’s (1971) social learning theory suggests that intermittent rewards effectively reinforce behavior.

Experiences leading to and following sex work exit
For category three, the six themes aligned with each of five characteristics of Byrne & Trew’s (2008) desistance model (See Table 3). Gibbs, et al.’s (2015) study of four CSEY service agencies reported that 57-91% of youth required crisis or mental health service intervention, 29-73% family reunification or counseling services, 17-78% benefits assistance, and 80% housing services. For participants in this review, relationships with professionals or personal support networks served as a means to disrupt negative social bonds when they coincided with sex work fatigue, and an opportunity for escape.

This review is limited in that qualitative research, by design, is not intended for generalizability. However, the pooled sample was large and represented a broad cross-section of CSEY in the US. The quotes for each theme provided credible evidence to support the data.

Implications for Practice


In Burke, et al.’s., (2015) collaborative care model, services were delivered by a FBI victim specialist. Specialists facilitated service delivery including legal, health, and basic needs across systems of care. Though the case studies presented demonstrated successful outcomes, the level of training and ability to work across systems might be difficult to achieve without FBI resources and training. Gibbs, et al.’s (2015) case management program provided holistic
services for crisis management, health, food, clothing, education, housing, employment, family reunification, legal services, and substance use. The challenges for the program included a lack of available services or reluctance on the part of the participants to use them due to fear or mistrust.

Regarding screening, currently there are no valid and reliable tools that are recommended to identify youth who might be involved in sex trafficking. Salisbury, et al. (2015) implemented a pilot intervention to identify CSEY in a juvenile court system. Of 535 youth who participated in screening interviews, 47 were identified with risk factors common to CSEY, and six were confirmed as CSEY survivors and referred to services. This approach has the potential to identify survivors, but its use would require expansion beyond criminal justice to other service settings in which CSEY present such as schools, social service, and health organizations.

Implications for research and advocacy

To identify and intervene with exploited youth, funding is required for research and to create infrastructure for a coordinated, inter-disciplinary response. Agencies involved in CSEY response require specialized training for staff and protocols for supervision including anonymous reporting systems to protect youth from further victimization.

Conclusions

Sex work involvement can be fraught with experiences that both repel (violence, jail, fear) and reinforce the activity (attention, acceptance, fast money). Understanding the barriers and facilitators of sex work can guide CSEY service development for all disciplines. For a summary of the review’s critical findings and implications for practice, policy, and research, see Tables 4 and 5, respectively. CSEY and youth at risk encounter professionals in education, law
enforcement, criminal justice, social service, and health care. Legislation and policies that allow for collaboration can ensure continuity of care. Intensive case management with providers trained in health, legal, and social service provision is a model of care that is promising.

References


End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes


Children and Youth Services Review, 54, 1-7. doi:

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2015.04.003


Figure 1. Study Selection Flowchart

1 ProQuest Dissertations and Theses

PubMed
n=180

CINAHL
n=274

PsycINFO
n=440

1 ProQuest
n=209

Web of Science
n=380

ERIC
n=34

PsycEXTRA
n=72

Mednar
n=47

Google Scholar
n=108

Ref lists
n=3

Total References
n=1,744

Duplicates
n=454

References Screened
n=1,290

References excluded
n=1,241

Full-text Review
n=49

Full-text studies excluded
n=30

Studies included in review
n=19

http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tva
Table 1. Description of Included Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Phenomenon</th>
<th>Location/Setting</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cimino, 2013</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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobbina &amp; Oselin, 2011</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>
</tr>
<tr>
<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>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurst, 2013</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>40 F</td>
<td>Relationship of</td>
<td>Midwest, west,</td>
<td>Prevention efforts are recommended</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 M=male, F=female, T=transgender
2 These studies included both adult- and adolescent-entry participants. Only the data pertaining to adolescent-entry participants were considered for this review.
3 There were 13 mutual participants between these studies and 7 additional in Cobbina & Oselin (2011). Mutual participants were counted only once in overall counts.
Table 1. Description of Included Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Setting/Service Agency</th>
<th>Results/Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meister, 2014</td>
<td>Photovoice</td>
<td>5 females</td>
<td>Miami-Dade County/CSEY service agency</td>
<td>Youth distrusted law enforcement. Engagement between police and CSEY is needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monheit, 2010</td>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>7 F (+8 adult-entry participants)</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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oselin, 2014</td>
<td>Ethnography/ Grounded theory</td>
<td>14 F (+26 adult-entry participants)</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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rees, 2010</td>
<td>Constructivist, grounded theory</td>
<td>18 T</td>
<td>New York City/Youth service agency</td>
<td>Mentorship, employment support, and advocacy for transition-related healthcare delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinson, 2004</td>
<td>Feminist case study</td>
<td>3 F</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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rothman, Bazzi, &amp; Bair-Merritt, 2015</td>
<td>Constructivist grounded theory</td>
<td>4 females</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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stevens, 2012</td>
<td>Auto-ethnography</td>
<td>1 F</td>
<td>New York City/self-reflection</td>
<td>Shame contribute to mental illness for survivors. Need validation to heal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams &amp; Frederick, 2009</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>24 F, 3 M, 1 T</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

M=male, F=female, T=transgender

1 These studies included both adult- and adolescent-entry participants. Only the data pertaining to adolescent-entry participants were considered for this review.

2 There were 13 mutual participants between these studies and 7 additional in Cobbina & Oselin (2011). Mutual participants were counted only once in overall counts.
Table 2: Byrne & Trew (2008) Development of a Positive or Negative Crime Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Category#:Theme#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Informal Social Bonds</td>
<td>Poor ties with family, friends, or intimate partners. Problems with school, work, or community.</td>
<td>C1:7-9,12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C2:16,17,22,23,31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonds to Offending Friends</td>
<td>Family or social ties with persons involved in offending.</td>
<td>C1:2,4,15-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C2:2,4,6,9,14,24,29,34-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition to Formal Social Institutions</td>
<td>Risks of offending viewed as less costly than conformity</td>
<td>C1:n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C2:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Problems</td>
<td>Traumatic experiences, alcohol or drug use, health problems.</td>
<td>C1:1,5,18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C2:1,3,5,8,10-13,18-21,25,27,30,33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Problems</td>
<td>Lacking money for basic needs: individual or family.</td>
<td>C1:3,5,11,13,14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C2:26,32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Self-Control</td>
<td>Thrill-seeking or reactionary decision making.</td>
<td>C1:n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C2:7,15,28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Byrne & Trew (2008): Desistance from Criminal Offending

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Category#:Theme#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal development</td>
<td>Changes in identity and maturation.</td>
<td>C3:2,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in social bonds</td>
<td>Repair of family and social ties.</td>
<td>C3:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in lifestyle</td>
<td>Severing ties with offenders.</td>
<td>C3:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in personal problems</td>
<td>Resolution of drug or health problems.</td>
<td>C3:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in finances</td>
<td>Resolution of financial challenges.</td>
<td>C3:4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Summary of Critical Review Findings

1. Layers of psychological, physical, and environmental traumas preceded CSE.
2. Deterrents to reporting abuses involved: non-action, repercussions by traffickers, family separation, or a need to return to sex work because of unmet needs.
3. Abusive interactions with police were described frequently and led to mistrust.
4. Aspects of sex work viewed as positive create barriers to exiting sex work.
5. Service coordination is needed. CSEY who are caring for others might require more.
6. In addition to the needs of cisgender CSEY, transgender youth also require safe psychological and medical care throughout the transition process and mentorship.

Table 5. Summary of Practice, Policy, and Research Implications

1. Need to build the infrastructure for services that allow for information sharing and collaboration between agencies that serve CSEY.
2. School, health, social service, criminal justice, and law enforcement settings require research for the development and implementation of routine screening programs.
3. Professionals in each discipline require specialty training appropriate for their roles.
4. Law enforcement personnel require policies and procedures that hold officers accountable who abuse power and create a safe setting for youth to seek assistance.
5. Potential opportunities to facilitate exit include: emotional fatigue, internal shift in life goals, absence of trafficker, and engagement with a service agency.