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

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Trauma, Violence, & Abuse

Commercial sexual exploitation among adolescents in the United States: A qualitative systematic review

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Manuscripts

Review

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3 **Commercial sexual exploitation among adolescents in the United States: A qualitative**
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5 **systematic review**
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8 **Abstract**
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11 **Background:** Commercial sexual exploitation of youth (CSEY) in the United States (US)
12 commonly involves 16-18 year old African American females at risk due to child abuse,
13 exposure to crime, substance abuse, and running away. Research examining this phenomenon is
14 growing, but requires synthesis to allow for its use by professionals who serve CSEY. The
15 purpose of this review was to pool the qualitative evidence regarding CSE of adolescents in the
16 US. **Methods:** Published and unpublished qualitative studies published in English since 2000
17 with current or previous CSE survivors were included. **Results:** There were 19 included studies
18 with a total of 795 participants. Sixty themes were identified and grouped into three categories:
19 experiences preceding sex work entry, experiences throughout sex work involvement, and
20 experiences following exit. **Conclusions:** Understanding the barriers and facilitators of CSE can
21 inform the development of interventions that address the needs of CSEY and youth at risk for
22 exploitation. The results of this review highlight the internal and external influences involved in
23 sex work entry and exit as well as needs for services, research, and advocacy.
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43 **Keywords:** human trafficking, sex trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, adolescent, teen
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47 **Commercial sexual exploitation among adolescents in the United States: A qualitative**
48 **systematic review**
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51 **Introduction**
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55 Child or adolescent sexual abuse for financial gain is know as Commercial Sexual
56 Exploitation of Youth (CSEY), a type of human trafficking. It can include child pornography,
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Running Head: CSE AMONG US ADOLESCENTS

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3 physical abuse, or sex work (Mukasey, Daley, & Hagy, 2007). Sex trafficking has received
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5 global attention (Carling, 2008; Dottridge, 2008; ECPAT, 2002, 2006; UNICEF Pacific, 2006).
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8 The International Organization for Migration reported that 36% of human trafficking survivors
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10 were youth and 27% were sexually exploited (Serojtdinov, 2012).
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13 In the United States (US), greater than 72% of CSEY are born in the US, yet anti-
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15 trafficking legislation often focuses on international survivors (Harris, 2012). It is necessary to
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17 also examine US CSEY survivors unique risk factors and needs.
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20 CSE prevalence in the US is difficult to estimate because traffickers avoid law
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22 enforcement by frequently moving youth across borders and by using online advertising for
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24 marketing (Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), 2009). Because youth might carry false
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26 identification, appear older than their true age, and are typically recruited when they are 9-12
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28 years old and less likely to report abuse, prevalence is likely underestimated (Harris, 2012).
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32 Estes & Weiner (2002) stated that about 244,000 youth were at risk for CSE who were
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34 homeless, runaways, transgender, involved in gangs, abandoned, forced from home, lived close
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36 to Mexican or Canadian border cities, or entered the US as unaccompanied minors. The Human
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38 Trafficking Reporting System provides compiles US state and local trafficking information.
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40 Between 2008 and 2010, 82% of trafficking incidents were sexual and more than 1,000 involved
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42 CSEY (Banks & Kyckelhahn, 2011).
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45 46 47 **Risks**

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50 US CSEY survivors are commonly 16-18 year old African American (AA) (66%)
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52 females ($\geq 99\%$) with prior foster care or criminal justice system involvement (O'Malley, 2014;
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54 Varma, Gillespie, McCracken, & Greenbaum, 2015). Poverty is a consistent characteristic of
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56 survivors internationally (Carling, 2008; Dottridge, 2008; ECPAT, 2002, 2006; UNICEF Pacific,
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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

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3 perspective. The purpose of this review was to pool the qualitative evidence for use by
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5 professionals who serve adolescent or adult survivors.
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8 9 **Methods**

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11 The search for published and unpublished studies was conducted in nine databases using
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13 keywords: human trafficking, prostitution, commercial sexual exploitation, adolescent, teen, and
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15 youth. Reference lists of all retrieved studies were searched for additional studies (See Figure 1).
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19 Qualitative studies that addressed the first-hand experience of current or former CSEY
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21 conducted in the US since 2000 (the year the Federal Bureau of Investigation established the
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23 Crimes Against Children Program, FBI, 2014) were included in the review. Abuse types
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25 included, but were not limited to sex work and child pornography. Studies pertaining to survivors
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27 of human trafficking or child sexual abuse without the experience of CSE were excluded.
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31 Titles and abstracts were reviewed to exclude studies that did not meet the predetermined
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33 criteria. Full-text reports were retrieved and examined by the reviewers to: evaluate that
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35 inclusion criteria were met and to extract data. To capture the scope of experiences, themes were
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37 extracted using the investigators' findings and the participants' quotes. Quotes were identified to
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39 illustrate each theme. Broad categories were identified and the themes allocated to categories.
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43 44 **Results**

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46 The search resulted in the identification 1,290 unique references (See Figure 1). Studies
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48 were excluded if they were: 1) not conducted in the US (~43%), 2) not a qualitative study
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50 (~26%), 3) not CSEY (~24%), 4) CSE, but not youth (~4%), or 5) lacked participant quotes to
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52 validate the data (n=1). Three additional studies were identified from reviewing the reference
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54 lists of retrieved studies. A total of 19 studies were included in the review (See Table 1).
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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.

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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).

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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)

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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).

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...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

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3 who reported no known reason for entering sex work. It is included to acknowledge that
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5 pathways into sex work varied and some were unexplained (Monheit, 2010).
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9 I wasn't abused. I had wonderful parents growing up. And I don't know what happened
10 ...I mean other women have good reasons. You know, they're like 'Oh, I was raped when
11 I was seven. You know my parents abused me. My mom was a drunk. My father was a
12 creep. I was fostered and my foster family put me to work like Cinderella.' I don't have a
13 good reason that I can look back and say that's why. (Monheit, 2010, p. 171)
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15 **Theme 11: Lacking options for traditional work.** Sex work was identified as the only
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17 option for youth to earn a livable wage because they lacked education and job skills. Transgender
18 youth discussed the conflict between the desire to live one's true gender identity and the need to
19 live according to one's biological gender in order to maintain a job (Ashley, 2008; Bruhns, 2014;
20 Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004).
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27 ...if there's another way for a kid my age to make this much money, tell me 'cause I'll do
28 it. (Curtis, et al., 2008, p. 103)
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30 **Theme 12: Lacking parental supervision/engagement.** Participants described parental
31 supervision and engagement were lacking at home. Even when basic needs were met, the lack of
32 an attentive adult was described as a contributing factor to CSE. For some, the lack of attention
33 was due to the parent's need to work, while others expressed feeling neglected (Bruhns, 2014;
34 Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit,
35 2010; Robinson, 2004; Stevens, 2012; Williams & Frederick, 2009).
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45 Well, I was the type of child that never got any attention. I just always spent time by
46 myself, whether it be playin' by myself or different stuff...like, I never got beat with a
47 belt or nothin'. I just didn't get anything. I didn't get verbally abused. I just didn't get
48 anything and that's worse than gettin' anything...(Hurst, 2013, p. 103)
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50 **Theme 13: Lacking services before sex work entry.** Participants identified unmet needs
51 and the inability to access support services prior to sex work entry. One participant specifically
52 discussed a lack of knowledge about what abuse is and how to report it (Cavazos, 2014; Cimino,
53 2013; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Rees, 2010; Williams & Frederick, 2009).
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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,

2013; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Rothman, et al., 2015; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

...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. (Robinson, 2004, p. 119)

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.

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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).

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...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)

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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).

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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)

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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).

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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

1
2
3 why. He started driving and then I jumped out of the car. Some guy helped me, and the
4 paramedics were asking me what kind of drugs I took...(Cecchet, 2012, p. 55)

5
6 **Theme 4: *Belonging to a community of sex workers.*** The sense of community that
7
8 fellow sex workers experienced was reported as a positive aspect of sex work. They shared
9
10 resources, helped one another emotionally, to obtain customers, and to feel safe. (Ashley, 2008;
11
12 Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010).
13
14

15
16 ...I knew who my people were, where I belonged, who I belonged to...The good parts
17 was the sense of belonging. I knew I belonged to that group of ghetto hustlers. (Monheit,
18 2010, p. 212)
19

20
21 **Theme 5: *Coping with mental health/illness.*** Participants reported problems with
22
23 concentration and focus, intimacy and interpersonal relationships, depression, suicidality, and
24
25 psychosis. Experiences with therapy, medications, and self-care to manage symptoms were
26
27 described (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Hurst, 2013; Meister, 2014; Monheit,
28
29 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Stevens, 2012).
30
31

32
33 ...at any moment that I sat still, just like flashbacks and memories, and just horror would
34 happen. So I tried to keep my mind distracted at all time. (Bruhns, 2014, p. 132)
35

36
37 **Theme 6: *Dealing with customers.*** Youth described typical customer experiences. They
38
39 identified customer characteristics, types of services, and financial transactions (Cecchet, 2012;
40
41 Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Oselin, 2014;
42
43 Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).
44

45
46 Most of the people I kind of mess with are married and they have like careers...And you
47 can see in their face when they have, like a troubled marriage or something like that.
48 They always talk about their wife or kids and the temptation...(Dank, et al., 2015, p. 31)
49

50
51 **Theme 7: *Earning fast money.*** The ability to earn money quickly was seen as another
52
53 positive aspect of sex work. Youth reported that earning large sums of money in a short time was
54
55 exciting. On the other hand, a long wait for a low wage paycheck was seen as a deterrent to
56
57 leaving sex work (Ashley, 2008; Bruhns, 2014; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al.,
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3 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Holger-Ambrose, et al., 2013; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010;
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5
6 Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

7
8
9 I was addicted to getting the money. It's like I couldn't live without turning a date,
10 everyday turning a date. Two, three, four, five dates and the money. So I was attracted to
11 it. You get accustomed to it...(Robinson, 2004, p. 113)

12
13 **Theme 8: Experiencing loss.** Losses associated with sex work were both abstract and
14 concrete. They included: innocence, identity, jobs, or children (Cecchet, 2012; Curtis, et al.,
15 2008; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Stevens, 2012).

16
17
18 At 17 somebody had given me an STD...and didn't let me know about it and it made me
19 sterile and I was never able to have children...And for part of that story I'm grateful
20 because I wouldn't have been able to survive taking a child through what I went through
21 But that's another piece of me that...was taken. (Monheit, 2010, p. 23)

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25
26 **Theme 9: Experiencing obstacles to exit.** Participants identified conditions that made
27 exiting sex work complicated. Addiction, regular customers who increased payment for returning
28 to sex work, ambivalence about exiting (readiness), and the failure to act by persons who witness
29 CSE, but do not report it (Cimino, 2013; Dank, et al., 2015; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

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

40
41
42 **Theme 10: Experiencing safe/unsafe places to work.** To avoid assault and arrest, many
43 perceived online was safer for meeting customers. Sex work occurred in cars, hotels, customers'
44 or their own homes, or on the street (Cecchet, 2012; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015;
45 Holger-Ambrose, et al., 2013; Rees, 2010; Stevens, 2012).

46
47
48 I have a profile set up on the internet for escorting...2 days ago I met this dude online
49 who wants to pay me \$150 for sex and...I'll be leaving here to go meet up with him...I
50 don't even do that now [street] because I don't want to get arrested...(Rees, 2010, p. 76)

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55 **Theme 11: Experiencing discrimination, stigma, and guilt.** Participants described self-
56 loathing and guilt feelings. They also felt discrimination and stigma from family members, the
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3 community, and police (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011;
4
5 Curtis, et al., 2008; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010; Stevens, 2012; Williams &
6
7 Frederick, 2009).

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

12
13 **Theme 12: Feeling exhausted.** Participants reported overwhelming emotional and
14
15 physical fatigue at times. Sex work became intolerable at these times (Cecchet, 2012; Cobbina &
16
17 Oselin, 2011; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004).

18
19 When I was arrested I was so sick...and tired that they had to arraign me from the
20 doorway. My drug of choice was heroin. I couldn't even walk to stand in front of the
21 judge so they arraigned me from the doorway...(Oselin, 2014, p. 326)

22
23 **Theme 13: Feeling fear.** Participants described fear and its sources. Potentially violent
24 customers, death, the dark, arrest, and being exposed as a sex worker were common themes
25
26 (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Curtis, et
27
28 al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014;
29
30 Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

31
32 It was just really bad, like there was no beds [at shelter]; there was nothin but roaches on
33 the floor...I was like the only girl there and it was a whole bunch of like older men. Some
34 of these men are like pedophiles and ex-convicts and murderers and stuff like that...and I
35 was...sleepin on the floor like next to all these men and...they're like masturbating
36 and...ya, it was really bad. (Williams & Frederick, 2009, p. 20)

37
38 **Theme 14: Getting customers.** Strategies to obtain customers were discussed. At times,
39 sex work was organized by pimps around major events, on call, or by referrals from friends or
40
41 fellow sex workers, online advertising, and street solicitation (Cavazos, 2014; Curtis, et al.,
42
43 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Holger-Ambrose, et al., 2013; Rees, 2010).

44
45 ...It makes it faster to meet someone online and find out what they do and then just go
46 straight to their place or a hotel. (Holger-Ambrose, et al., 2013, p. 333)

47
48 **Theme 15: Glamorizing the life of sex work.** For some, the life in sex work was
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2
3 described as glamorous Shopping, travel, and parties were enjoyable aspects of the life (Ashley,
4
5 2008; Bruhns, 2014; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin,
6
7 2014; Rothman, et al., 2015)..
8
9

10
11 ...from 18-24 it's pretty crazy but fun. I mean this is the time where I'm being flown to
12 Miami, flown to New York, flown to Chicago...I have lots of money. I'm playing with
13 high rollers, people in sports. I was...Cute, I made quite a bit of money. Did it feel good
14 inside? No, but superficially, you know, it was exciting...(Monheit, 2010, p. 186)
15

16 **Theme 16: Going in and out of sex work.** Leaving and returning to sex work repeatedly
17
18 was reported in several studies. Returns involved unsuccessful attempts to leave a pimp due to
19
20 stalking or inability to meet survival needs, or leaving one and going to another (Cavazos, 2014;
21
22 Dank, et al., 2015; Robinson, 2004).
23
24

25
26 I was 12. And I met him and just like nobody at that point in time cared...about me so it
27 was like he was there...see we have this episode where I'll leave him and he'll find me
28 and snatch me up...and you know he'll be like why do you keep trying to leave me,
29 because like I'm trying to change but...he's not a bad guy. (Dank, et al., 2015, p. 53)
30
31

32 **Theme 17: Having conflict with others.** Participants complained of fights in shelters that
33
34 led to youth choosing to sleep on the street or to rely on pimps or customers for shelter instead.
35
36 Some also complained of conflicts with other sex workers and pimps over territory (Curtis, et al.,
37
38 2008; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).
39
40

41
42 ...where we work at and all the places you go, you can't just be out there and don't have
43 no man. Cause it be other women out there who gone tell they man you ain't got no man
44 and they'll try to take your money...(Robinson, 2004, pp. 156-157)
45

46 **Theme 18: Having faith.** Some participants described that faith in a higher power gave
47
48 them strength to survive the difficulties involved in sex work. They reported feeling protected
49
50 (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Meister, 2014; Robinson, 2004).
51
52

53
54 ...I feel like he [God] keeps me away from a lot of things. I feel like he saved my life in a
55 lot of situations...he was also like a shield for me...I went to church a lot. You know, to
56 kind of get me away from life sometimes. So he's kind of like, a rock that I can lean on.
57 Since I didn't really have a rock, but I always had him...(Meister, 2014, pp. 33-34)
58
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3 **Theme 19: Having individual protective factors.** Participants in three studies discussed
4
5 personal strengths that helped them survive. Others identified strengths they developed as a
6
7 result of sex work (Cavazos, 2014; Meister, 2014; Monheit, 2010).
8
9

10
11 And you know, it's not been easy with the [criminal] record that I have, but I think you
12 prove yourself...And you reinvent yourself...you know, you knock on a front door and
13 they don't let you in. You knock on the side, they don't let you in. I'm coming through the
14 window, you know? I'm really tenacious, yeah. And I think those are some of the
15 transferrable skills that come from the life that I led...(Monheit, 2010, p. 216)
16

17 **Theme 20: Identifying transgender specific themes.** Transgender youth viewed sex work
18
19 as a means to express their gender identity. It was a way to achieve a feminine appearance (male
20
21 to female transgender) and to “date.” Transgender youth opted for black market hormones and
22
23 procedures due to the lengthy process associated with transitional care in a healthcare setting. In
24
25 addition, “passing” presented danger when customers were unaware that the sex worker was
26
27 transgender (Ashley, 2008; Cavazos, 2014; Curtis, et al., 2008; Rees, 2010).
28
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31

32 ...and one girl I knew, she got shot over it...got shot in the eye because the guy didn't
33 understand and he was freaked out because he didn't, you know, know how people would
34 respond to it...I mean, she was passable, you know...if you walked down the street, you
35 would be like, 'she's beautiful', you know, but this guy destroyed her...now what's she
36 supposed to do when she got shot in the eye...(Rees, 2010, pp. 145-146)
37

38 **Theme 21: Interacting with the health system.** Health provider interactions involved
39
40 case managers, emergency medical technicians, physicians, therapists/psychologists, and
41
42 residential counselors. They accessed services in the community, clinics, psychiatric and drug
43
44 rehabilitation facilities, residential care, and acute emergency services. The quality of interaction
45
46 ranged from highly supportive to unresponsive. They also discussed a tendency to reject
47
48 assistance initially due to lack of trust (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino,
49
50 2013; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Williams & Frederick, 2009).
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55 At first I rejected everybody, I didn't want nothing to do with them. I wasn't ready yet.
56 But they always went beyond...they always would encourage you to live up to yourself,
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1
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3 love yourself. They just helped build your self esteem...So they was just like really
4 supportive. 'If you need someone to talk to, I'll be there'...(Bruhns, 2014, p. 138)

5
6 **Theme 22: Interacting with law enforcement.** There were police interactions that were
7
8 positive: being rescued by an officer, receiving help to exit, being spared from arrest, or being
9
10 shown kindness. However, negative and even abusive interactions were reported as commonly:
11
12 failure to assist when asked, harassment, entrapment, rape, quid pro quo sex acts, or forced
13
14 informing to avoid arrest. Participants described lacking trust in police and feeling frustrated
15
16 when police intervention interfered with the ability to make money (Ashley, 2008; Cavazos,
17
18 2014; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Meister,
19
20 2014; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

21
22 They thought we were the cute ones out there, so we unfortunately ended up doing all the
23
24 police parties. They pay you a whopping \$5.00 for a blow job. Yeah. Yeah and the police
25
26 know. They knew who I was. They knew I was there. They knew I was underage. I told
27
28 them I wanted to go home. They didn't help me. (Hurst, 2013, p. 114)

29
30 **Theme 23: Interacting with the criminal justice system.** Repeated arrests were common
31
32 for those involved in sex work over time. Incarcerations and attempts to achieve justice for
33
34 victimization were also discussed (Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011;
35
36 Curtis, et al., 2008; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Stevens, 2012).

37
38 I had been to the penitentiary twice, one more arrest and I would have gone away for a
39
40 long, long time. I became so scared of getting in a car with an undercover cop...that was a
41
42 big fear for me. Because when you go to prison, you don't really know if you'll get out
43
44 alive. (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011, p. 327)

45
46 **Theme 24: Learning the rules.** Sex work required learning a set of rules. Novices were
47
48 mentored by experienced sex workers. Learning rules was necessary to avoid conflicts regarding
49
50 territory, money, and the hierarchy (Cavazos, 2014; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst,
51
52 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

53
54 ...It's called 'The Game'... it's like the pimp has female or multiple females and when he
55
56 has multiple females there's always his number one girl, the girl that, you know, brings in
57
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3 the most money. And his number one sits up front in the front seat when he's drivin'...It's
4 called the track and when you're on the track you have to stay in the street...when other
5 pimps walk by, like when other guys walk by that have...other girls you have to put your
6 head down. You can't look at them. You can't talk to them. You can't step on the same
7 sidewalk as them...(Williams & Frederick, 2009, p. 52)

8
9
10 **Theme 25: Liking/not liking aspects of sex work.** There were aspects of sex work
11 described as enjoyable and detestable. While there were rare reports of enjoying sex acts, most
12 were described in neutral or negative terms including numbness, repulsion, malodorous or
13 unattractive customers, sexually transmitted infections, performing odd sex acts, verbal abuse,
14 and violence (Cecchet, 2012; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Robinson, 2004).

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

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25 **Theme 26: Needing services/conditions to exit.** Participants identified what they needed
26 to be able to consider exiting sex work. In addition to basic needs and job skills, participants
27 stated that getting out of the environment away from sex work was important to a successful exit.
28 Psychological needs included non-judgmental support, role models, self-esteem building, and
29 services to transition youth to independent living (Ashley, 2008; Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014;
30 Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit,
31 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Stevens, 2012; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

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

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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;

1
2
3 Cimino, 2013; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin,
4
5
6 2014; Robinson, 2004; Rothman, et al., 2015).

7
8
9 We're victims. We were victims should I say, even if we victimized ourselves. But we
10 are survivors, and we're overcomers. It's one thing to survive, it's another to overcome
11 ...But when you can overcome all of that, then you can produce good seeds, good fruit,
12 out of something that was so bad. (Cecchet, 2012, p. 76)

13
14 **Theme 28: Obtaining material possessions.** Many youth desired non-essential material
15
16 goods. Clothing, cars, and/or electronics were described as ways to achieve status and enjoyment
17
18 and sex work was a means to obtain them (Ashley, 2008; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Hurst,
19
20 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

21
22
23
24 A lot of people see girls' name-brand clothes, shoes, and all that and they say, 'Why can't
25 I have all that?' And some people's parents don't have all the money for that, so, they
26 don't know what to do. So, they just get the idea of having sex...they don't know it's like
27 a serious thing. So, they just have sex for money. And then they buy all the clothes and
28 shoes and everything that they wanted...(Ashley, 2008, p. 29)

29
30 **Theme 29: Providing a service to others.** Some participants viewed sex work as a
31
32 marketable skill. They described feeling a sense of pride in providing a service to others (Bruhns,
33
34 2014; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

35
36
37
38 I think the sex trade is more about humans fulfilling humans...Kinda like I'll give you this
39 if you give me that...it's not the healthiest way to go about it I don't think but, you know,
40 sometimes you don't know any better. (Bruhns, 2014, p. 26)

41
42 **Theme 30: Recognizing moral dilemmas.** Conflicting feelings about remaining in sex
43
44 work were discussed. On one hand, sex work was seen as a lesser evil than selling drugs. They
45
46 also felt disgust and voiced concerns about their lifestyle being exposed to others (Ashley, 2008;
47
48 Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010).

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51
52 There are many positive things for trading something of value. You can trade sex for the
53 life of your kids, you can trade sex to keep your apartment, you can trade sex to feed
54 yourself...some people think that sex trade is the worst thing to do cause you're selling
55 yourself, who people believe God gave you but it's like when it boils down to it, if you
56 have no food in your stomach,...but you have a man in your face willing to give you
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3 money for a half hour. You put your pride to the side...(Dank, et al., 2015, pp. 56-57)

4
5 **Theme 31: Recognizing race.** Some participants mentioned a preference for or bias
6
7 toward customers based on race. Black or AA participants commented on the impact of dark
8
9 versus light complexion and racial bias in their personal lives and in sex work (Cavazos, 2014;
10
11 Cecchet, 2012; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013; Robinson, 2004).

12
13
14
15 ...and I also think it needs to be very clear...that this is culturally disproportionate. I see a
16
17 lot of PSAs [prostitute serving agencies] with White girls in them and quite frankly that's
18
19 not the most sexually exploited youth...you're talking about an African-American child, a
20
21 Latina child...and it almost feels like as soon as the White community knew this was
22
23 happening to their children it became a national epidemic...it didn't mean shit before
24
25 that...and...that is an unfortunate reality...(Cavazos, 2014, p. 90)

26
27 **Theme 32: Surviving.** Unmet basic needs created the vulnerability and ongoing financial
28
29 insecurity perpetuated the need for sex work like a vicious cycle. Housing and food were
30
31 persistent needs (Ashley, 2008; Cavazos, 2014; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al.,
32
33 2015; Holger-Ambrose, et al., 2013; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

34
35 I worked sometimes...but that's on call, so sometimes it doesn't add up and...if you're
36
37 trying to get housing. Housing out here is a lot of money. (Dank, et al., 2015, p. 35)

38
39 **Theme 33: Using drugs to cope with sex work.** Many participants used drugs to cope
40
41 with sex work. They were used to function, escape, and as a form of self-destructive behavior.
42
43 Regular use progressed to addiction with alcohol, marijuana, methamphetamines, and crack-
44
45 cocaine (Ashley, 2008; Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino, 2013; Cobbina &
46
47 Oselin, 2011; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004).

48
49 I wanted more drugs, more alcohol. I just wanted a lot more. Just I couldn't deal with it. I
50
51 couldn't deal with the prostitution and I couldn't deal with bein' sober. So I had to have
52
53 the drugs to help me escape. The prostitution was what supplied it. (Hurst, 2013, p. 106)

54
55 **Theme 34: Using the vocabulary of sex work.** In the course of interviews, participants
56
57 explained terms used within the sex work community. Terms used were labels for: customers/sex
58
59 workers/pimps, locations, and sex acts (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Curtis, et
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3 al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Holger-Ambrose, et al., 2013; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010;
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6 Robinson, 2004; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

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8
9 I used to go on Queens Plaza [shopping mall], and I used to see other females out there,
10 workin'. And then I became real curious about the lifestyle of prostitution and pimpin
11 and ho'in. And, like, I met my first john at 13...(Curtis, et al., 2008, p. 52)

12
13 **Theme 35: Working relationship with pimp.** Pimps controlled sex work activities and
14 youth by arranging interactions with customers, and collecting money. Using violence and
15 emotional attachment maintained compliance as well (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet,
16 2012; Cimino, 2013; Curtis, et al., 2008; Dank, et al., 2015; Edinburgh, et al., 2015; Hurst, 2013;
17 Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Stevens, 2012; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

18
19
20 ...I would get slapped almost everyday for something. Even just sayin' something that he
21 didn't want to hear...My name was 'bitch.' He would beat me up really bad. Or hit me
22 with a pimp stick. It's a wire hanger knotted up...I had welts and bruises on my backside
23 all the time...He did a lot of humiliating us...(Cecchet, 2012, pp. 51-52)

24
25
26 **Theme 36: Working without a pimp.** Participants in four studies reported working
27 without a pimp. Transgender youth, those involved in survival sex, and those approached directly
28 by customers navigated sex work independently, but also reported previous involvement with a
29 pimp at some point (Ashley, 2008; Bruhns, 2014; Monheit, 2010; Rees, 2010).

30
31
32 I was what they call like a renegade, which is where you do it for yourself. I mean, on
33 occasions, I've been snatched up by a pimp and they forced me to do it, but soon as I
34 found the opportunity to run away, I would...(Bruhns, 2014, p. 134)

35
36
37 **Category 3: Experiences leading to and following sex work exit.** The themes in this
38 category were limited. Participants described turning points leading to and following exit from
39 sex work, the psychological sequelae, and the services needed following exit.

40
41
42 **Theme 1: Experiencing post-traumatic response.** Participants described intense
43 psychological symptoms following sex work exit. Rage, flashbacks, fear of the dark, aversion to
44 responses, emotional fatigue, guardedness, and relationship problems (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos,
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2014; Cecchet, 2012; Hurst, 2013; Monheit, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Stevens, 2012).

...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).

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3 ...I struggled with the GED over the math portion and I finally passed that portion. So
4 now I have to take the test on science and that's it. Then I'm done with the GED. I
5 managed to pass the state law exam in order to become a loan officer. That's a tough task.
6 I'm also currently taking justice classes at a community college. (Oselin, 2014, p. 155)

7
8 **Theme 5: Thinking about prevention of sex work involvement.** Participants in three
9
10 studies suggested ways to prevent youth from entering sex work. They included: educating youth
11
12 at risk about strategies used for recruitment, mentorship, and providing transgender youth with
13
14 services beyond safe sex education (Cavazos, 2014; Curtis, et al., 2008; Rees, 2010).
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18 I think if...people went into the high schools and talked about and educated about
19 prostitution at that time...I don't think I would have did it. (Cavazos, 2014, p. 84)

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21 **Theme 6: Turning points in decision to exit sex work.** Several participants reported
22
23 distinct turning points in the decision to exit sex work. For some, the shift occurred as an
24
25 epiphany or spiritual experience. For others, involuntary commitments (incarceration or
26
27 hospitalization) facilitated exit. Pregnancy or children, fear, or no longer finding sex work
28
29 tolerable inspired the exit from sex work (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Cecchet, 2012; Cimino,
30
31 2013; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Monheit, 2010; Oselin, 2014; Rees, 2010; Robinson, 2004).
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36 ...You got to have a downfall...Dealing with these people, all these different individuals,
37 all these different personalities. I knew once if I stopped the drugging, everything else
38 was gone have to stop. I was just tired of it...All the men that I have been involved with...
39 I abused my body (Robinson, 2004, pp. 114-115)
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42 Discussion

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45 Nineteen studies were included in this review that examined the experience of CSEY in
46
47 the US. The participants were primarily non-White (74%) females (58%). This is similar to other
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49 published studies (Bounds, Julion, & Delaney, 2015; Varma, et al., 2015). The 60 themes
50
51 identified were grouped into three categories representing the experiences associated with sex
52
53 work entry, its continuation, and exit. In 2008, Byrne & Trew examined the experiences of 18
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55 offenders in Ireland and identified characteristics that led to the participants' orientation toward
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3 crime or desistance. Because the characteristics were consistent with those of the participants in
4
5 the reviewed studies, it is used as the context for interpreting the results. (Note that the term
6
7 criminal offense is used because it was associated with Byrne & Trew's work and should not be
8
9 interpreted to mean that CSEY should be viewed as criminals).
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14 According to the model, a positive orientation toward offending behavior was facilitated
15
16 by: negative informal social bonds, bonds to offending friends, opposition to formal social
17
18 institutions, personal problems, financial problems, and low self-control. Conversely, a negative
19
20 orientation and desistance was achieved when those characteristics and problems were
21
22 addressed, i.e. personal development and changes in social bonds, lifestyle, personal problems,
23
24 and financial circumstances (See Tables 2 & 3 for definitions of each model characteristic).
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28 29 **Experiences preceding sex work entry**

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32 In this category, the 18 themes aligned with four of six Byrne & Trew (2008)
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34 characteristics (See Tables 2): personal problems, financial problems, negative informal social
35
36 bonds, and bonds to offending friends. They also aligned with previous research. Reid's (2014a)
37
38 study identified the methods pimps used to recruit. Romance, flattery, assistance with meeting
39
40 survival needs, and normalizing sex work were effective strategies that resulted in the girl's
41
42 adherence and loyalty. Running away from home, childhood abuse, and truancy were consistent
43
44 with Basson, et al. (2012), Cole, et al. (2016), and Salisbury, Dabney, & Russell (2015) and
45
46 collectively contributed to developing a positive orientation toward sex work.
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51 52 **Experiences throughout sex work involvement**

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55 For category two, the 36 themes aligned with all six of Byrne & Trew's (2008)
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3 characteristics (See Table 2) and previous literature supported several of the challenges
4
5 experienced by the participants. In Varma, et al.'s (2015) study of CSEY who were treated at a
6
7 pediatric emergency department, 31% reported violence associated with sex and 75% reported
8
9 violence inflicted by police. These reports are troublesome to acknowledge, but a recent scandal
10
11 within several Northern California law enforcement agencies supports the validity of these
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13 reports (McKirdy & Sidner, 2016). Several officers were terminated after charges were filed for
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15 crimes involving an adolescent sex worker after the suicide note of a police officer implicated
16
17 himself and other officers within the departments. Gibbs, et al.'s (2015) study of a case
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19 management program for CSEY survivors supported the persistent needs for food, housing, and
20
21 assistance with benefits.
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28 For transgender youth, gender expression related to opposition to formal institutions.
29
30 Burke, et al.'s study (2015) acknowledged the need for specialized services for transgender
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32 youth involved in sex work. Though they engage in sex work to meet basic needs, they also use
33
34 it as an opportunity to live a life more closely aligned with their gender identity.
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39 The development of the emotional connection to the pimp has been explored in previous
40
41 research (Reid, 2014a), but there has been less attention given to the bond with friends and even
42
43 customers in the sex work community. Although force and coercion were substantially involved
44
45 in sex work, it is important to acknowledge that for some (or at some times), self-determination
46
47 created a barrier to sex work exit. The intermittent reinforcement of relatively positive
48
49 experiences might explain why youth could be reluctant to report CSE. Bandura's (1971) social
50
51 learning theory suggests that intermittent rewards effectively reinforce behavior.
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55 **Experiences leading to and following sex work exit**

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3 For category three, the six themes aligned with each of five characteristics of Byrne &
4 Trew's (2008) desistance model (See Table 3). Gibbs, et al.'s (2015) study of four CSEY service
5 agencies reported that 57-91% of youth required crisis or mental health service intervention, 29-
6 73% family reunification or counseling services, 17-78% benefits assistance, and 80% housing
7 services. For participants in this review, relationships with professionals or personal support
8 networks served as a means to disrupt negative social bonds when they coincided with sex work
9 fatigue, and an opportunity for escape.
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21 This review is limited in that qualitative research, by design, is not intended for
22 generalizability. However, the pooled sample was large and represented a broad cross-section of
23 CSEY in the US. The quotes for each theme provided credible evidence to support the data.
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29 **Implications for Practice**

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32 To address the needs of CSEY, Bounds, et al. (2015) presented a practice-oriented set of
33 recommendations based upon the Illinois child welfare system's implementation of the United
34 States' first Safe Harbor law. The recommendations pertained to assessment, improved service
35 delivery, building awareness, addressing gaps in the law that prevent effective service delivery,
36 and specialized training for service providers. Studies by Burke, et al. (2015) and Gibbs, et al.
37 (2015) evaluated intensive case management care models for CSEY service delivery.
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48 In Burke, et al.'s., (2015) collaborative care model, services were delivered by a FBI
49 victim specialist. Specialists facilitated service delivery including legal, health, and basic needs
50 across systems of care. Though the case studies presented demonstrated successful outcomes, the
51 level of training and ability to work across systems might be difficult to achieve without FBI
52 resources and training. Gibbs, et al.'s (2015) case management program provided holistic
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3 services for crisis management, health, food, clothing, education, housing, employment, family
4 reunification, legal services, and substance use. The challenges for the program included a lack
5 of available services or reluctance on the part of the participants to use them due to fear or
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10 mistrust.

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

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

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47 Sex work involvement can be fraught with experiences that both repel (violence, jail,
48 fear) and reinforce the activity (attention, acceptance, fast money). Understanding the barriers
49 and facilitators of sex work can guide CSEY service development for all disciplines. For a
50 summary of the review's critical findings and implications for practice, policy, and research, see
51 Tables 4 and 5, respectively. CSEY and youth at risk encounter professionals in education, law
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3 enforcement, criminal justice, social service, and health care. Legislation and policies that allow
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5 for collaboration can ensure continuity of care. Intensive case management with providers
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7 trained in health, legal, and social service provision is a model of care that is promising.
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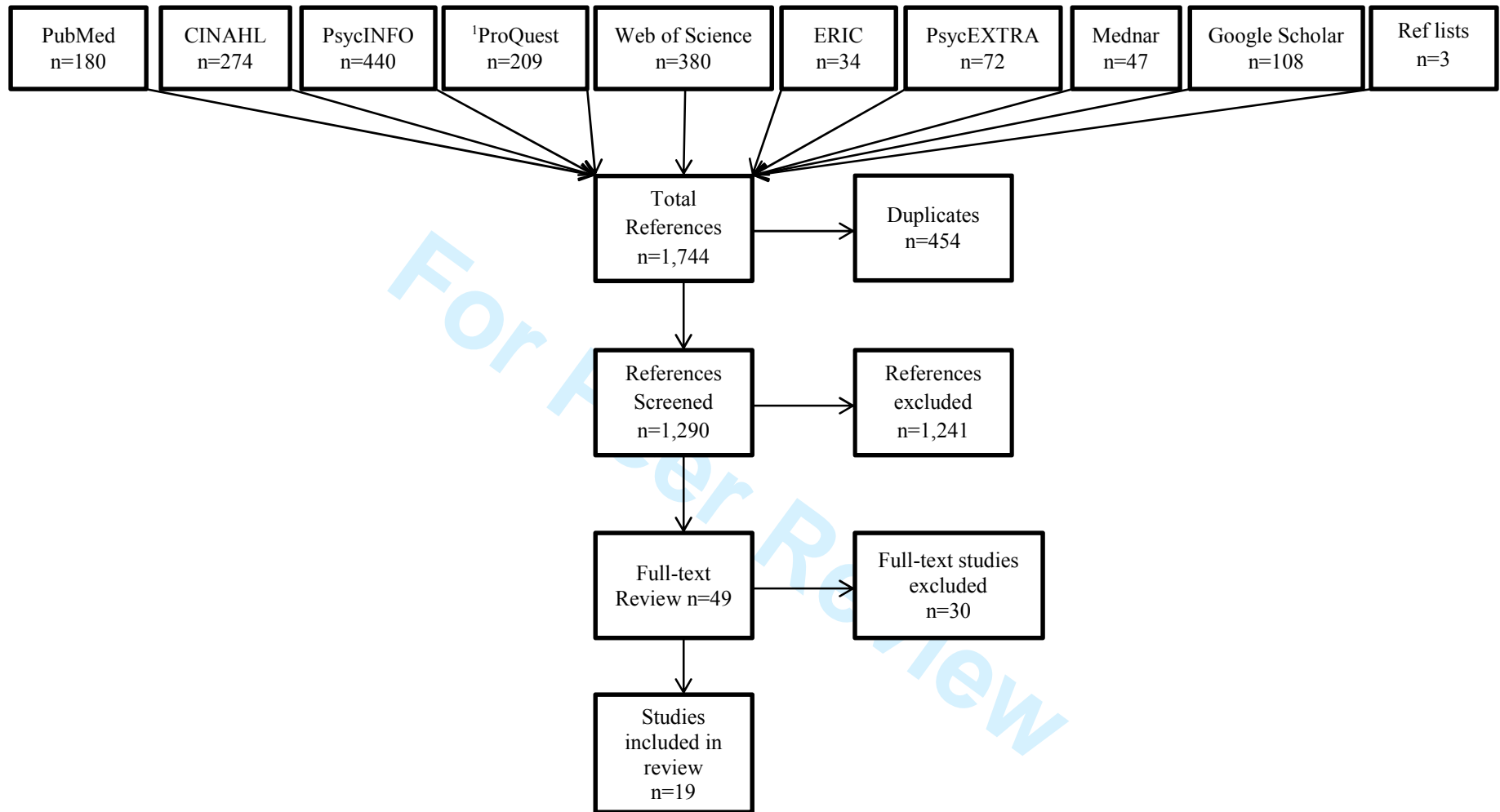
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Figure 1. Study Selection Flowchart



¹ProQuest Dissertations and Theses

Table 1. Description of Included Studies

Study	Methods	Participants ¹	Phenomenon	Location/Setting	Conclusions
Ashley, 2008	Mixed Methods	12 F, 5 T	CSEY in Illinois	Illinois/CSEY service setting	School prevention, family violence reduction, and screening needed.
Bruhns, 2014	Consensual qualitative research	11 F	CSEY lived experience, exit and recovery	Oakland, California/CSEY service setting	Exiting is facilitated by: social support, consistent relationships, and support in meeting basic needs.
Cavazos, 2014	Feminist	13 F, 3 T	Experiences of CSEY	Midwest and west/national online recruitment	Trauma-informed, substance use and medical care, education, housing, and family reintegration needed.
Cecchet, 2012	Narrative interviews	6 F	CSEY resilience	Seattle/ Trafficking service setting	Pregnancy, stress, and forming caring relationships led to sex trade exit.
Cimino, 2013 ²	Mixed methods	2 M, 4 F (+10 adult-entry participants)	Examination of intentions to exit prostitution	Phoenix/Sex worker service setting, flyers, and internet	Exiting sex work is influenced by attitudes, agency, self-efficacy, skills, and environmental constraints.
Cobbina & Oselin, 2011 ^{2,3}	Qualitative	20 F (+20 adult-entry participants)	Events preceding sex work entry and outcomes	Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Chicago, Hartford/Non-profit	Sex workers' needs vary depending on age of entry: adolescent vs. adult
Curtis, et al., 2008	Qualitative	N=249: 53.5% M, 42% F, 4.5% T	CSEY characteristics, experiences, & service needs	New York City/street youth service agencies	CSEY survivors were largely born in the US and did not have pimps. Housing was the most significant service need.
Dank, et al., 2015	Mixed methods	N=283: 47% M, 36% F, 16% T	LGBTQ involved in survival sex	New York City/street youth service agencies	Youth worked both under trafficker's control or independently. Most expressed a desire to stop sex work.
Edinburgh, et al., 2015	Mixed methods, retrospective	55 F, 7 M	CSE meaning and experiences	Midwest/Child advocacy center	Access to trauma-informed care is recommended for treatment.
Holger-Ambrose, et al., 2013	Qualitative	12 F and 1 T	Exploration of homeless CSEY service needs	Minneapolis & St. Paul/Youth shelters and street corners	Basic needs and health and safety education recommended for youth prior to CSE exposure.
Hurst, 2013	Mixed methods,	40 F	Relationship of	Midwest, west,	Prevention efforts are recommended

¹ M=male, F=female, T=transgender

²These studies included both adult- and adolescent-entry participants. Only the data pertaining to adolescent-entry participants were considered for this review.

³There 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

	retrospective		childhood emotional abuse and CSE entry	northeast, and south/ internet survivor networks	and identifying children at risk based upon history of childhood abuse could be a way to identify youth at high risk.
Meister, 2014	Photovoice	5 females	Exploring current health and safety of former CSEY	Miami-Dade County/ CSEY service agency	Youth distrusted law enforcement. Engagement between police and CSEY is needed.
Monheit, 2010 ¹	Phenomenology	7 F (+8 adult-entry participants)	Lived experience of sex work	2 large northeast and southwest cities/sex work service agency	Entered sex work for money, housing, drugs, and to feel loved. Lack of self-agency made complicated exit.
Oselin, 2014 ^{1,2}	Ethnography/ Grounded theory	14 F (+26 adult-entry participants)	Sex work exit/sex worker-serving organizations	Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Chicago, Hartford/Non-profit	Sex work service organizations can support and improve quality of life for those who are/are not ready for exit.
Rees, 2010	Constructivist, grounded theory	18 T	Lived experience of transgender CSEY	New York City/ Youth service agency	Mentorship, employment support, and advocacy for transition-related healthcare delivery.
Robinson, 2004	Feminist case study	3 F	Lived experience, high school dropouts involved in sex work	Chicago/Sex work service agency	Common experiences included: limited or no supervision, pregnancy, substance use, sexual abuse, truancy, high crime, and untenable home life.
Rothman, Bazzi, & Bair-Merritt, 2015	Constructivist grounded theory	4 females	Exploration of abusive dating relationships prior to CSE	Location undisclosed/ Violence advocacy agency	CSEY leaving violent relationships is similar to intimate partner violence. Opportunities to exit are brief and complicated by emotional attachment.
Stevens, 2012	Auto-ethnography	1 F	Personal experience	New York City/self-reflection	Shame contribute to mental illness for survivors. Need validation to heal.
Williams & Frederick, 2009	Qualitative	24 F, 3 M, 1 T	Factors leading in and out of CSE	Boston, Washington, DC/Youth shelters and service agencies	Complex trauma can elicit behavior that makes it difficult for teens to request or accept the help

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²These studies included both adult- and adolescent-entry participants. Only the data pertaining to adolescent-entry participants were considered for this review.

³There 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

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

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

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

Table 4. Summary of Critical Review Findings

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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. <i>In addition to</i> the needs of cisgender CSEY, transgender youth also require safe psychological and medical care throughout the transition process and mentorship.
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Table 5. Summary of Practice, Policy, and Research Implications

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
