



## Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth (CSECY)

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth affects communities at worldwide, national and local levels. CSECY is defined as a sexual act by a minor in exchange for anything of value, including food, shelter or payment of money. It can include being bought or sold for a sexual act in person, photographs, video or online exploitation.

**CSECY is a form of human trafficking.** Human trafficking is a worldwide, billion-dollar-a-year industry. According to the State Office of the Attorney General, human trafficking is the world's second most profitable criminal enterprise, with drug trafficking holding the topmost rank.

**CSECY is a rampant and fast-growing problem:** Three of the nation's 13 high-intensity child sex trafficking areas as identified by the FBI are located in California: Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Diego metropolitan areas.

### Victims

ALL CHILDREN (girls, boys, transgender youth) from any background can be targeted and exploited. Average age victims enter trafficking is 12-14 years old.

### Victimization - How It Happens

- Victims are often hidden from view, often going unnoticed.
- Pimps and other exploiters scout bus stations, arcades, malls and social networking websites, honing in on girls/boys who appear to be runaways without money or skills, or who may be experiencing trouble at home.
- They befriend the youth by showing them affection; buying them clothes, meals, jewelry, beauty/grooming (i.e., manicures) and/or offering shelter in exchange for sex.
- False promises of a "better life" are an important recruitment tool. Reality: All money is turned over to the pimp/trafficker and children are exploited for monetary gain and sexual gratification of the exploiters and their clients.
- The pimp/trafficker creates a seemingly loving and caring relationship with the child in order to establish trust and loyalty.
- Pimps and exploiters eventually (as little as 2 weeks) use the child's emotional and financial dependency to coerce them into selling sex for money.
- The manipulation tactics used by the exploiter ensures that the child will remain loyal to him/her despite acts of violence and severe victimization against the child.
- Children are threatened or may be assaulted to guarantee obedience and prevent their escape.

Not all youth have a trafficker. Some youth must trade sexual acts to meet their basic needs, i.e. food, clothing or shelter, or to meet other financial needs.

### Perpetrators (Exploiters, Traffickers or Pimps)

- Predators who seek out vulnerable victims.
- Can be anyone, including family members, boyfriends or other trusted adults.
- Although exploiters often target children outside of their family, a family member may also exploit a child.

### CSEC Indicators - Who Is At Risk?

- Homelessness/runaway youth
- Children with sexual abuse histories
- Kids with history of violations (i.e., truancy, curfew violations or involvement with juvenile justice system)
- There is a presence of an older "boyfriend" or adult who is controlling in the youth's life
- Youth has tattoos, brandings or markings
- Signs of violence (i.e., cuts, bruises or burns on child's body)

### Psychological Impact

Abused and exploited, the child is then left traumatized, alone and without support. In addition, the victim may experience a range of emotional or psychological distress, including:

- Trauma (complex trauma/trauma-bonding)
- Depression
- Isolation
- Thoughts of suicide or self-destructive behavior
- Guilt
- Anxiety
- Anger control issues
- Difficulty forming positive relations with others
- Difficulty managing moods
- Attention deficit/impulse control issues

## Department of Mental Health Responds to CSECY

- LACDMH was involved in the development of the Los Angeles CSEC First Responder Protocol (2014).
- Participation by DMH in Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings in specialty courts:
  - Succeeding Through Achievement and Resilience (STAR) court.
  - Dedication to Restoration through Empowerment, Advocacy and Mentoring (DREAM) court.
- Over 2,000 LACDMH providers have been trained on “CSEC 101,” and on choice treatment interventions for working with CSECY.
- Over 75 provider agencies have been trained in one or more Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) addressing specific mental health symptoms, trauma or emotional issues presented by the youth.
- LACDMH participates in interagency collaborations in ensuring effective collaboration in the prevention, identification, prosecution, and provision of services for CSECY in Los Angeles County—Key partners include law enforcement agencies, such as Probation and Sheriff Department; DCFS; service providers; community organizations; advocacy agencies and other key stakeholders.

## Rethinking the Perception of Victims

An important part of taking action against CSECY is reframing perceptions about its victims and fighting the stigma that surrounds this issue.

### Here are some facts:

Many victims of sex trafficking have been molested, raped and/or sexually assaulted by a family member or close family friend. 95% of CSEY youth have experience with childhood abuse or trauma.

- Given the few choices some youth have, when he/she sells sex at the hands of an exploitative adult, it is largely a means of survival.
- Commercial sexual exploitation also includes survival sex, where youth trade sex to meet their basic needs - like food, clothing or shelter.
- There is not always an exploiter. No third party exploiter or trafficker is required.
- Many youth continue to face the same vulnerabilities and continue to be exploited over the age of 18.

## Shifts in Legislation

SB 855 (2014):

- Makes the commercial sexual exploitation of a minor a mandatory child abuse report.
- Clarified that a child who is sexually trafficked and whose parent or guardian has failed or is unable to protect him or her, can be served through child welfare as a victim of abuse and neglect.

SB 1322 (2017): changed the penal code so that minors can no longer be arrested and charged with prostitution and loitering with intent to commit prostitution (Penal Code 647, 653.22).

- Peace officer who encounters a child involved in a commercial sex act pursuant shall report suspected abuse or neglect of the minor to the county child welfare agency.

## Resources

**LA Metro Taskforce:** 800-655-4095

**National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 888-373-7888

**California Human Trafficking Legislation:** <https://oag.ca.gov/human-trafficking/legislation>

**Shared Hope International:** <http://sharedhope.org/x>

## Special Reports

U.S. Department of Justice (OJJDP)

National Institute of Justice Special Report, December 2007, “Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: What Do We Know and What Do We Do about It?” <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/215733.pdf>.

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2015) <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/trafficking.pdf>.

For more information on CSECY and additional resources, please visit our Transition Age Youth website at <https://dmh.lacounty.gov/our-services/transition-age-youth/cseecy>. Contact [CSECinfo@dmh.lacounty.gov](mailto:CSECinfo@dmh.lacounty.gov) regarding information on the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health efforts or to become involved.