



Service Providers' Perspectives on Sex Trafficking of Male Minors: Comparing Background and Trafficking Situations of Male and Female Victims

Jennifer Cole^{1,2}

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Abstract

Even though it is documented that sex trafficking of male minors occurs, limited research has focused on this type of commercial sexual exploitation. Data was collected via telephone interviews from 323 professionals who worked with at-risk youth and/or crime victims/offenders in all counties in a mostly rural state in the U.S. Half of the respondents had worked with at least one victim of child sex trafficking, and of these 161 respondents, 57.8% had worked with at least one male victim. To contextualize the data on male minor victims, quantitative analysis was conducted comparing the close-ended and themes identified in open-ended responses of professionals who reported they worked exclusively with male victims ($n=26$) versus professionals who worked exclusively with female victims ($n=81$) to examine how sex trafficking of male minors may differ or be similar to sex trafficking of female minors. Many similarities in victims' vulnerability factors, the systems victims encountered, and their greatest needs were found by gender. Familial sex trafficking was one of the typical pathways into commercial sexual exploitation for minors. There were some differences in the pathways in sex trafficking by gender. There is a need for greater awareness, training, and resource-building for identifying and appropriately responding to male minors who are trafficked in commercial sex.

Keywords Youth · Child · Child maltreatment · Commercial sexual exploitation of children · Child welfare services/child protection · Gender/sex differences

Introduction

Sex trafficking of minors is not a new social problem but it is one that has undergone an evolution in its conceptualization. Known by other terms (e.g., teen or juvenile prostitution, prostitution of children, commercial sexual exploitation of children; Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2010), the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 provided the legal foundation that shifted societal understanding of youth exploited in commercial sex as victims of a crime and not as juvenile delinquents. Sex trafficking is defined in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 as “the

recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act... in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age” (22 USC § 7102; 8 CFR § 214.11(a)). To be clear, the federal law, TVPA (2000) defines a commercial sex act as “any sexual act for which something of value is given or received.” Unlike other forms of human trafficking, no proof of force, fraud, or coercion is needed when the person in commercial sex is under age 18 because children cannot consent to commercial sex, and this is what is referred to as a sex trafficking of minors (STM; Boxill & Richardson, 2005). Along with the federal law, as of 2015, 45 states and the District of Columbia had eliminated the requirement to prove force, fraud, or coercion when the victim of sex trafficking is a minor (Shared Hope International, 2015).

Even though there is evidence that sex trafficking of male minors or commercial sexual exploitation of boys occurs (Curtis, Terry, Dank, Dombrowski & Khan, 2008; Gragg,

✉ Jennifer Cole
jecole2@uky.edu

¹ University of Kentucky Center on Drug & Alcohol Research, 333 Waller Avenue, Suite 480, Lexington, KY 40504, USA

² University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children, Lexington, KY, USA

Petta, Bernstein, Eisen, & Quinn, 2007; McIntyre, 2009), research on male minors is scarce (Lutnick, 2016; Reid, 2012). In a systematic review of the literature on global commercial sexual exploitation of boys (which the authors refer to as sexual exploitation of boys, leaving out the term “commercial”), Mitchell, Moynihan, Pitcher, Francis, English, and Saewyc (2017) identified serious methodological problems that prevented them from examining the state of the research literature on commercial sexual exploitation of boys: inconsistent definitions of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE), lack of distinction of CSE as a type of child sexual abuse, failure of study findings to present data separately for minors versus adults, and by genders, and limited epidemiological studies. In fact, only two epidemiological studies in the U.S. were identified. First, in a nationally representative probability sample of adolescents in the U.S. in 1995–1996, 4.8% of boys reported they had ever exchanged sex for money or drugs (Edwards, Iritani, & Hallfors, 2005). Second, in a national study on prostitution of juveniles, 31% of the juveniles were male and 69% were female (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2004). Other research studies on child sex trafficking victims has found a sizeable minority of victims are male (Gragg et al., 2007), or in one study, about half of victims were male (Curtis et al., 2008). For example, in a respondent-driven sample (RDS) of current or former child sex trafficking victims recruited in five cities in one Midwestern state ($n = 115$), 21.7% were male (Fedina, Williamson, & Perdue, 2016). Analysis of National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) in 2000, when NIBRS data represented about 14% of the U.S. population, 38% of the juvenile victims identified in pornography crimes were male (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2004). In analysis of sex trafficking cases involving U.S. citizen victims which were provided to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline, BeFree Textline, or Polaris’s Client Services between 2011 and 2014, 4.2% of survivors were male (Polaris Project, 2015).

Reid (2012) applied the life course theory to examine the gendered and developmental vulnerabilities of individuals to sex trafficking victimization in a review of the literature on human trafficking in North America. Many similar vulnerabilities were identified in research for male and female victims including: histories of sexual abuse, physical abuse, involvement with child welfare and/or foster care, family conflict, rejection by family, homelessness, and alcohol or drug use (Azaola, 2000; Chase & Statham, 2004; Curtis et al., 2008; Estes & Weiner, 2001; IOM & NRC, 2013; McIntyre, 2009; Reid, 2012; Saewyc, MacKay, Anderson, & Drozda, 2008; Tyler, Hoyt, Whitbeck, & Cauce, 2001). Some gendered differences revealed in the literature review were that males were more likely to: attribute their entry into commercial sex as “customers” approaching them, having sexual identity issues, leaving home at younger ages, and

more likely to operate independently of a trafficker/pimp (Clawson, Dutch, Solomon, & Grace, 2009a; Curtis et al., 2008; Reid, 2012; Saewyc et al., 2008; Spangenberg, 2001).

A significant challenge to identifying and providing services to boys is that service providers and law enforcement often fail to recognize male juveniles engaged in commercial sex as STM victims (Gibbs, Walters, Lutnick, Miller, & Kluckman, 2014). Because most victims of sex trafficking of minors are female (International Labour Organization, 2012), service providers may overlook identification of STM among males (Friedman, 2013). In fact, in the National Juvenile Prostitution Study law enforcement personnel were more likely to charge male juveniles involved in commercial sex with prostitution-related offenses than female juveniles involved in commercial sex (Mitchell et al., 2010). Characteristics of commercial sex exploitation among males may contribute to the misperception that STM rarely involves male victims. For example, in an evaluation of three OVC-funded programs, providers noted that compared to trafficked females, trafficked males were more likely to be runaway youth engaged in “survival sex” and without a third-party facilitator (i.e., pimp)—all of which are less likely to be recognized as sex trafficking than other situations. Further, male victims may be less likely than females to define what they do as commercial sex, instead describing their activities as ‘hanging out’ with older men who gave them things (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2004; Fong & Cardoso, 2010; Gibbs et al., 2014). Service providers who work with STM victims report that an added barrier to boys not reporting their exploitation is the fear they will be perceived of as homosexual (Friedman, 2013). The assumption that sex trafficking of male minors rarely occurs is common among professionals and may only exacerbate the stigma and shame victimized boys experience and decreasing opportunities for identification of the exploitation (Friedman, 2013; Fong & Cardoso, 2010; Lillywhite & Skidmore, 2006; McIntyre, 2009).

As scarce as services are for female victims of sex trafficking, they are even more limited for male victims (Clawson, Dutch, Solomon, & Grace, 2009b; Curtis et al., 2008; Reichert & Sylwestrzak, 2013). Because many specialized programs for STM victims have developed gender-based programming and interventions, service providers from potentially referring organizations and youth may perceive of males as not being appropriate clients (Gibbs et al., 2014; Shared Hope International, 2013). Of the 33 operational residential programs for trafficking victims identified in 2011–2012, only two reported they accepted male victims into their facilities, for a total of fewer than 28 beds for male trafficking victims (Reichert & Sylwestrzak, 2013). In 2012, a survey of 41 provider organizations providing direct care to STM victims that was conducted for the National Colloquium found that none of the programs were exclusively for

boys, 36% were for female clients only, 6% were for male and female clients, and 58% reported they provided services to males, females, and transgender youth (Friedman, 2013).

There are also gaps in the literature about the occurrence of STM/CSEC in non-metropolitan communities. Most research conducted on STM has focused on large metropolitan communities, such as New York City, New Orleans, Dallas-Fort Worth, Las Vegas, and Portland, OR (Curtis et al., 2008; Raphael & Ashley, 2010; Smith, Vardaman, & Snow, 2009). It is true that larger metropolitan communities have more commercial sex venues than smaller communities and thus a greater likelihood for sex trafficking. Nonetheless, the exploitation of minors in commercial sex does occur in non-metropolitan communities including suburban and rural communities (Bletzer, 2005; Bortel, Ellingen, Ellison, Phillips, & Thomas, 2008; Brewster, 2003).

Because the focus of this analysis was on understanding sex trafficking of male minors, about which the literature is scant in comparison to the literature on sex trafficking of female minors, the decision was made to contextualize the data on male victims by comparing with data on female victims. The purpose of this analysis is to better understand service providers' perspectives on sex trafficking of male minors and how systems interact with male victims.

Method

Sampling

This study was a cross-sectional survey of service providers administered via telephone interviews. A dual sampling frame was used. First, a purposive sample was created by obtaining the names of attendees of Human Trafficking Task Forces throughout the state and by contacting administrators in key agencies (e.g., juvenile justice, family and juvenile court, child welfare, and public defender) to secure permission to contact workers within these agencies and to obtain contact information for the workers. Also, online searches were used to obtain contact information for behavioral health providers, agencies that serve at-risk youth, rape crisis centers, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner programs, child advocacy centers, domestic violence shelters, homeless shelters, and school personnel (including guidance counselors, psychologists, and social workers). Second, snowball sampling was used. Specifically, each respondent was asked to provide the names of other professionals in the community they believed had information on the topic, which were added to the sampling frame.

A total of 587 potential respondents were identified using these recruitment strategies. Out of the respondent pool, 80 were ineligible for the survey because the person no longer worked at the agency, had no working phone

number, or the contact person referred the interviewer to someone else within the same agency as being more appropriate for completing the survey. Twenty-six individuals (4.4%) declined to complete the survey when they were contacted, and about one-fourth (26.7%, $n = 158$) of the individuals did not complete the survey because they were never successfully contacted or scheduled for a survey. Of these 158 individuals, 63 had a coworker within their agency who completed the survey. Out of the eligible persons who also did not have a coworker who completed the survey ($n = 449$), 323 individuals completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 71.9%.

Participants

Personnel ($N = 323$) in agencies that provided services to at-risk youth or crime victims throughout the state completed telephone surveys between July 2012 and April 2013. Because the focus of this study was on understanding sex trafficking of male minors as it compares to sex trafficking of female minors, analysis examined the close-ended and open-ended responses of professionals who could be classified as working with male victims exclusively and female victims exclusively. Each open-ended question did not ask professionals to identify the genders of each victim about which they were discussing because this would have been too burdensome and time consuming. Including the responses of professionals who worked with both genders would have made it impossible to tell if the responses pertained to male or female trafficking victims and situations. Thus, this analysis focused on individuals who could be classified as working with male victims exclusively ($n = 26$) or female victims exclusively ($n = 81$).

Procedures

All research procedures were approved by the university Institutional Review Board. Telephone surveys took on average 29 min. The interviewer documented respondents' responses to close-ended and open-ended questions, taking detailed notes. The study data are the interviewer's documentation of participants' responses without verification through an audio recording. Because of time constraints, the interviewer was not able to document verbatim respondents' lengthier responses to open-ended questions. When this occurred, the interviewer noted the summarized response in brackets. After surveys were completed, the study interviewer sent respondents national and state information and resources on human trafficking, if they were interested.

Measures

The survey was developed with input from two experts on human trafficking in the state. Survey items were a combination of close-ended and open-ended questions.

The Number of Victims of STM with Whom Respondents Had Worked

A series of close-ended and open-ended questions about respondents' experiences working with individuals who had been trafficked in commercial sex as minors began with the question, "To your knowledge how many victims who were trafficked as minors for commercial sex have you worked with in your current position?" Two entries permitted the interviewer to record the number of definite victims and suspected victims. A follow-up question provided the legal definition of a child sex trafficking victim and then the interviewer asked respondents if they would like to revise their estimate of the number of definite and suspected victims with whom they had personally worked, and if so what their revised estimates were. The number of definite and suspected victims was summed; the revised estimates were summed if the respondent gave revised numbers, otherwise the original estimates were summed. Suspected victims were included because during the piloting phase the interviewer and PI learned that some respondents were hesitant to classify youth as victims of STM if there were no criminal charges.

Demographics and Types of CSE of Victims with Whom Respondents Had Worked

Referring to the estimate of the total number of victims with whom they had worked, respondents were asked to give the number of victims who had different characteristics (e.g., male, female, U.S. citizen/permanent residents, recruited in the state, residing in the state when trafficked, trafficked in non-metropolitan communities) and the number of victims who were involved in three major types of commercial sex: prostitution, pornography, and strip dancing. For these variables, an estimate of the percent of victims with whom professionals had worked that had the previously mentioned characteristics (e.g., male, exploited in prostitution) was calculated from the number provided divided by the total number of victims with whom they had worked multiplied by 100.

Exploitation in Commercial Sex

A series of open-ended questions asked respondents to give information they had on (a) how victims were trafficked in commercial sex, (b) in what types of communities victims

were living when recruited, (c) the relationship between the victim and trafficker (in the three most recent cases), (d) how traffickers maintained control over victims, (e) the nature of the bond the victim had with the trafficker(s), (f) three factors that contributed to making victims more vulnerable to being trafficked, and (g) their perception of the greatest needs of victims with whom they had worked. In addition, a close-ended question was asked about respondents' knowledge of traffickers' use of the internet to facilitate commercial sex activity (in the cases of STM they had worked).

Community Responses

In addition, close-ended questions were asked about respondents' knowledge of criminal charges being filed against minors, traffickers, and buyers in the cases of STM they had worked. Interviewers also asked respondents a list of community agencies/systems and if victims had encountered those agencies during or after their exploitation in trafficking occurred.

Data Analysis

Responses to open-ended questions in the surveys were theme-coded in several phases, using NVivo to organize the data. First, during the data collection phase, the author read all the responses. Second, the author did line-by-line coding of a randomly selected sample of cases, creating memos to capture emerging ideas from the data (Creswell, 2003). Third, the author identified the most frequent or significant codes that were created in the line-by-line coding, i.e., "themes" (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Fourth, a research assistant conducted line-by-line coding, using the identified themes. Fifth, a randomly selected 20% of cases were coded independently by the author and research assistant. For any question that yielded reliability < .90, the process was repeated until intercoder reliability was .90 or higher.

To contextualize the data on male minor victims, quantitative analysis was conducted comparing the close-ended and themes identified in open-ended responses of professionals who reported they worked exclusively with male victims ($n = 26$) versus professionals who worked exclusively with female victims ($n = 81$) to examine how sex trafficking of male minors may differ or be similar to sex trafficking of female minors. Additionally, open-ended responses were searched for masculine terms (e.g., boy, male, he, his, guy, son) to uncover any information about the exploitation of male victims of STM. However, the only quotes presented from this search of masculine terms are from two respondents who had not worked with any victims of STM and pertain to difficulty detecting STM with boys.

Because there was no expectation about the proportion of respondents who would report they had worked with male

victims a priori power analysis for the bivariate statistical tests was not conducted. G*Power, a software program for power analysis, was used to examine power analysis for a chi square test of independence with an alpha of .05 and a sample size of 107, which had power exceeding .85 to detect a medium effect size ($w = .30$) (Cunningham & McCrum-Gardner, 2007; Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). Using G*Power to conduct a power analysis, a student's t test comparison of two group means with an alpha of 0.05 and a sample size of 26 in one group and 81 in the second group had power of .71 to detect a medium effect size ($d = .5$) (Faul et al., 2007).

Results

Experience Working with Victims of STM

About half of the 323 respondents (49.8%, $n = 161$) reported they had worked with a definite and/or suspected victim of STM. Specifically, 41.8% ($n = 135$) reported they had worked with a definite victim and 36.5% ($n = 118$) reported they had worked with a suspected victim. Only 8.0% ($n = 26$) of respondents reported they had worked with suspected victims only. Of the 161 respondents who had worked with a definite or suspected victim of STM, 57.8% ($n = 93$) had worked with at least one male victim of STM. In other words, among the total respondents ($n = 323$), 28.8% had worked with at least one male victim. Dividing the number of male victims that respondents reported they had worked with by the total number of victims they had worked with and multiplying by 100 revealed that 20.1% of the minor victims they served were male. Cases that included missing values for either of those variables were not included in this computation.

Among the 161 respondents who had worked with a definite or suspected victim of STM, 8.7% ($n = 14$) could not provide estimates of the number of victims with whom they worked and/or the number of victims of different genders. Of the remaining 147, 55.1% ($n = 81$) had worked exclusively with female victims, 27.2% ($n = 40$) had worked with a mixture of female and male victims, and 17.7% ($n = 26$) had worked exclusively with male victims.

Comparisons of the Gender of Victims

Among the subset professionals who reported they had worked exclusively with male victims ($n = 26$), almost all of the male victims were U.S. citizens/residents (96.6%) and lived in the state where the professional worked when they were trafficked/exploited (97.6%). Among the subset of professionals who reported they had worked exclusively with female victims ($n = 81$), most of the female victims were

U.S. citizens/residents (92.4%) and lived in the state where they professional worked they were trafficked/exploited (92.9%). The majority of male victims (62.3%) and a little more than half of female victims (55.1%) were trafficked in a non-metropolitan community. Most of the male victims were exploited in prostitution (84.3%) and about one-third (34.7%) were exploited in pornography. Most of the female victims were exploited in prostitution (73.9%) and a minority (22.9%) were exploited in pornography. There were no group differences in any of the aforementioned variables.

Respondents were asked to provide the victim-trafficker relationship in the three most recent cases of STM they had worked. Exploitation by family members was the norm for male and female victims as reported by respondents who worked with male victims only and female victims only (see Table 1). Nonetheless, significantly more of the respondents who worked with male victims only reported at least one of the three most recent cases of a minor being trafficked had been exploited by a stranger when compared to respondents who worked with female victims only. Compared to respondents who worked exclusively with girls (30.8%), significantly fewer respondents who worked exclusively with boys (0.0%) had been trafficked by an intimate partner.

Two of the more typical pathways into commercial sex for boys were (1) to be exploited in prostitution or pornography by a family member, or (2) to engage in prostitution to support oneself or to pay for drugs. The former pathway is represented in the following descriptions provided by respondents: "With one boy, there were no drugs involved. He just had a father with a sex addiction who forced him to have sex with others," "Mothers on drugs allowing men to sleep with their boys for drugs." Examples of the latter pathway, which is sometimes referred to as "survival sex" or "sex exchange for drugs" pathway are: "Teen boy was doing it on his own for drugs," and "One boy was bisexual and confused. He learned he could make money prostituting himself." Even so, there were descriptions of initial pathways into commercial sex that were outside of these two more common pathways; for example, "One boy was lured by a couple, locked in their home and they made porn."

Table 1 presents the most commonly reported tactics used by traffickers to maintain control over victims were *force or coercion*, *fraud/emotional manipulation*, *alcohol and/or drugs*, *dependency*, and *material possessions* by group. There were no statistically significant differences on reported tactics provided by respondents who worked exclusively with male victims versus respondents who worked exclusively with female victims. Examples of how adults exploited boys in commercial sex using force/coercion include: "Grandparents told brothers, 'If you want a place to live, do what we want,'" "Threats, gang rape of one boy." The following is the interviewer's documentation of a respondent explaining how a young boy was bribed into

Table 1 Among respondents who had worked with victims of STM exclusively of one gender ($n = 107$), characteristics of the trafficking situation as reported by service providers^a

	Worked with male victims only, $n = 26$ (%)	Worked with female victims only, $n = 81$ (%)	p value
Relationship of trafficker-victim (in the three most recent cases) ^a			
Family member	65.4	58.8	.548
Intimate partner	0.0	30.0	.001
Stranger	30.8	12.5	.031
Partner of parent ^b	11.5	10.0	.823
Other known person (e.g., friend, drug dealer)	23.1	31.3	.426
How the trafficker maintained control over the victim ^a			
Force or coercion	69.2	60.0	.399
Fraud (inc. trafficker made promises to victim)	19.2	26.3	.470
Alcohol or drugs	19.2	26.3	.470
Victim dependent on trafficker ^b	7.7	22.5	.094
Strong bond between victim and trafficker			
Yes	61.5	67.5	.577
Internet-facilitated trafficking activities			
No	57.7	22.5	
Yes	30.8	45.0	
Don't know	11.5	32.5	

^aStatistical significance tested with chi square test of independence

^bMore than 20% of cells have an expected frequency < 5 , therefore, the chi square statistic may not be stable

complying with the adult family friend: A male adult family friend forced a young boy to perform oral and anal sex. The boy was taken on trips, given large material items like a video game system and the adult began to involve other men. The interviewer's documentation of a respondent's explanation of how alcohol and/or drugs were used to maintain control over male victims stated boys did not have a pimp. Instead, they were lured in on drug end—had a strong drug addiction. They were coerced, told what they were doing was illegal. They had a lot of shame because they did not identify with actually being gay or bisexual. Further, a typical description of the theme, *dependency*, is found in this quote, "He was little. He did what he was told [by his parents]."

There were no differences in respondents' perceptions of the bond between the victim and trafficker or respondents' perceptions of victims' vulnerability factors (see Table 1). The majority of respondents in both groups reported minors had a strong bond with their traffickers, which given the prevalence of family relationships and other known relationships between victim and trafficker, is expected. For example, a description of the strong bond between victim and trafficker provided by a respondent who worked with male victims exclusively was: "The trafficker was his mother. It was very confusing. He had continued visitation after removal [from the home]. He wanted to see her but he was also frightened." Significantly more of the respondents who had worked exclusively with female victims reported that the internet was used to facilitate the commercial sex activity

when compared to respondents who had worked exclusively with male victims (45.8 vs. 30.8%).

The most frequently mentioned vulnerability factor was *compromised parenting/unstable home* followed by *material need*, and *substance misuse* (by the minors' parents or the minor), *developmental issues* (e.g., the child's age), and *the child's mental health and feelings about self* (see Table 2). There were no significant differences in mentioned vulnerability factors between respondents who worked exclusively with male victims and respondents who worked exclusively with female victims. Descriptions of *compromised parenting/unstable home* provided by respondents who worked exclusively with male victims include many examples of inadequate parental supervision: "Boy who had little family support. No one would notice if he was coming home late or spending time with an adult," "He did not have adequate supervision," "He really had no parent support: a single mom who wasn't interested and his dad wasn't around," and "Parents unwilling or unable to protect them."

There were no differences in respondents' perceptions of victims' greatest needs by group (see Table 2). Most respondents in both groups mentioned mental health care as the greatest need of the victims with whom they had worked. The next most frequently mentioned need was *safety, protection, security* followed closely by *basic living needs*. The finding of no statistically significant difference between respondents who worked exclusively with female victims and male victims about the greatest needs of victims

Table 2 Among respondents who had worked with victims of STM exclusively of one gender ($n = 107$), vulnerability factors, greatest needs, and systems encountered as reported by service providers^a

	Worked with male victims only, $n = 26$ (%)	Worked with female victims only, $n = 81$ (%)	p value
Vulnerability factors			
Unstable home/compromised parenting	57.7	63.8	.580
Material need	50.0	42.5	.504
Substance abuse (parents', victim's)	38.5	30.0	.422
Developmental issues (e.g., age)	30.8	33.8	.779
Victim's mental health and feelings about self	19.2	25.0	.547
Perceived greatest needs			
Mental health care	76.9	69.6	.475
Safety, protection, security	42.3	33.3	.405
Basic living needs (e.g., housing, financial support)	38.5	34.2	.692
Systems/agencies victims encountered			
Behavioral health providers ^b	100	93.5	.191
Court system (inc. juvenile or adult) ^b	96.2	81.5	.068
Child welfare ^b	85.2	84.6	.943
School ^b	84.6	87.2	.740
Child advocacy centers	62.5	62.0	.963
Victim services	57.7	55.6	.849
Runaway/homeless shelters or outreach programs	50.0	57.9	.484
Faith-based programs	43.5	40.6	.807
Criminal charges filed against			
Minor (i.e., victim)	72.0	41.3	.008
Trafficker	84.2	62.5	.076
Buyer ^b	23.5	15.8	.462

^aStatistical significance tested with chi square test of independence

^bMore than 20% of cells have an expected frequency < 5 , therefore, the chi square statistic may not be stable

is further complicated by the challenge voiced by more than one respondent, "Services for boys are almost nonexistent." Smaller percentages mentioned the themes of *health care, positive social support, guardianship, education/job training, and substance abuse treatment* (not shown in Table); however, chi square tests of independence were not conducted because more than 20% of cells had expected values < 5 .

There were no differences in the systems or agencies victims encountered as reported by service providers (see Table 2). The most commonly reported systems/agencies victims encountered during and after the trafficking occurred were behavioral health providers, the court system, child welfare, and schools. More than half of respondents in both groups reported that victims encountered child advocacy centers, which are sites where children who are suspected of having experienced sexual abuse receive a forensic interview and medical exam, as well as runaway/homeless shelters or outreach programs.

Significantly more of the respondents who worked exclusively with male victims reported a victim had

been charged with a criminal offense when compared to respondents who worked exclusively with female victims (72.0 vs. 42.9%; see Table 2). The majority of respondents in both groups reported a trafficker had been charged with a criminal offense in at least one of the cases they had worked, with no difference by group. A small percentage of both groups reported a buyer had been charged with a criminal offense, with no difference by group.

Within open-ended questions about other topics, respondents who had not worked with a victim of STM (and were not included in the comparison of analysis in Tables 1, 2) offered explanations of reasons why awareness and detection of boys as victims of STM is so low. For example, "I primarily work with boys and they rarely admit what is going on," and "With boys it is very difficult to get information about abuse."

Discussion

The research literature on sex trafficking of minors has focused on the exploitation of girls because most victims are female. Nonetheless, sex trafficking of male minors is more common than the public and service providers typically assume. This study's findings contribute to filling this gap in the literature. In this sample of professionals who worked with at-risk youth and crime victims, a little over half of the professionals who had worked with at least one victim of STM had worked with one or more male victims. Even though the majority of victims of STM with whom respondents had worked were female, 21.0% were male, and more than half of male victims were trafficked in non-metropolitan communities.

The professionals described two more common pathways into commercial sexual exploitation for male minors. First, respondents discussed cases in which boys were coerced/forced into commercial sex by family members to support the family and/or to fund the family member's substance use problem. Second, male youth, who were often runaway or homeless, were involved in commercial sex to support themselves and/or their own substance abuse problem. The second pathway is commonly described in the literature on commercial sexual exploitation of male minors; the first one is less often described. Even so, other pathways into sex trafficking were described for male victims. Recognizing and understanding the variability in youths' experiences in sex trafficking is needed to ensure effective detection and appropriate service provision for all victims (Fedina et al., 2016).

Exploitation by known traffickers/exploiters was the most common relationship-type for the three (or fewer) recent cases of STM on which survey respondents had worked. The strong bond many victims have with their traffickers underscores the role of emotional manipulation and psychological coercion that occurs, particularly when one considers the physical and emotional dependence many children have on their traffickers. Somewhat unexpectedly, familial sex trafficking of minors was the most commonly mentioned victim-trafficker relationship. This finding is unexpected given other research studies on STM that have found a minority of STM cases involving family members as traffickers. For example, in the National Juvenile Prostitution Study that surveyed nearly 2600 law enforcement agencies about cases of juveniles involved in prostitution in 2005, among the randomly selected agencies that reported at least one arrest or detention in cases of a juvenile involved in prostitution, 12% were exploited by a family member, caretaker, or acquaintance, 57% of the cases involved a third-party exploiter (i.e., pimp), and 31% were classified as a juvenile who offered themselves

for sexual services (Mitchell et al., 2010). Of 314 cases of child trafficking reported to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center's hotline from 2007 to 2012, 49 cases (15.6%) involved allegations that the minor was trafficked by a parent or legal guardian (Polaris Project, 2013).

Familial exploitation may not be identified as sex trafficking, even when it is detected, but instead may be treated as a type of child sexual abuse or child neglect (Smith et al., 2009). Limited attention has been given in assessments to the possibility that the trafficker may be a parent/caregiver. For example, in a comprehensive assessment provided by Polaris Project (2011), questions about the sex trafficker were clearly based on the assumption the trafficker is a boyfriend/pimp and not a parent. Proper identification of cases involving sex trafficking of minors by family members is needed to ensure appropriate interventions (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016).

There were no statistically significant differences by gender of victims in terms of perceived vulnerability factors, the tactics traffickers used to maintain control over victims, perceptions of victims' greatest needs, and the systems/agencies youth encountered during or after the trafficking occurred. Even though there are important gendered aspects of commercial sexual exploitation of children (Reid, 2012), for the smaller number of boys who are exploited in this manner, their vulnerabilities, the ways in which they are manipulated and exploited, and the impacts on their health and mental health may have significant similarities to girls who are exploited in commercial sex. Children are vulnerable to exploitation simply by being children; they are dependent on adults and are still developing emotionally, socially, and physically.

Although not systematically queried, multiple respondents discussed the challenge of identifying boys as victims of STM, which was due to a lack of awareness in their communities that boys can be trafficked in commercial sex and an even greater hesitance on the part of boys, as compared to girls, to admit their involvement in commercial sex out of concerns about their sexuality because most of the commercial sex involved male "buyers" and a greater hesitance to admit being victimized. ECPAT-USA identified several factors that contribute to under-identification of male victims of STM, including some that were mentioned by this study's respondents: unwillingness of boys to discuss their exploitation in commercial sex due to shame about being identified as homosexual, lack of awareness among law enforcement and service providers that boys can be trafficked in commercial sex, and the mistaken belief that the absence of a third-party exploiter (i.e., pimp) means that boys are not being exploited in commercial sex (Friedman, 2013). The current study's finding that there was evidence of more male minors being charged with a criminal offense than female minors is consistent with existing literature that law enforcement

and service providers may not identify boys' exploitation in commercial sex or may be more likely to perceive of boys' involvement in commercial sex as not exploitation or trafficking because a third-party exploiter may not be involved (Friedman, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2010; Shared Hope International, 2015). Even though the federal human trafficking law, the TVPA, and most state laws clearly delineate any person under the age of 18 who engages in commercial sex as a sex trafficking victim, some state statutory provisions require that a third-party trafficker be identified before an exploited minor can be identified as a sex trafficking victim. The third-party control requirement creates significant problems: failure to hold buyers of commercial sex with children accountable for committing serious criminal offenses, and failure to identify all minors involved in commercial sex as sex trafficking victims and prohibiting them from receiving appropriate therapeutic interventions (Shared Hope International, 2015).

All the themes identified in the surveys with respondents across this largely non-metropolitan state are consistent with the existing literature, which is based predominately on research in large metropolitan communities, about factors that contribute to juveniles' vulnerability to being trafficked in commercial sex and tactics traffickers use to maintain control over juvenile victims. The majority of male minors with whom respondents had worked among those who had worked exclusively with male victims were trafficked in non-metropolitan communities. Research indicates that law enforcement and service providers in these communities have lower awareness, training, and are less likely to have experience working on STM cases (Cole & Sprang, 2015; Newton, Mulcahy, & Martin, 2008). Further, most of the infrastructure in place for responding to STM exists in metropolitan communities (IOM & NRC, 2013). Therefore, greater investments in training and resource development are needed in non-metropolitan communities to increase awareness and identification of STM and to improve community responses (Cole & Anderson, 2013).

Study Limitations

One of the difficulties of researching victims of sex trafficking, particularly minor victims, is gathering data from victims. Interviewing professionals who have worked with victims is one method of gaining information about victims without the ethical and logistical difficulties of interviewing the minors. However, the information that can be gathered from these data have some limitations. For example, professionals did not have knowledge of some of the details of the day-to-day operations of traffickers. Further, because it would have been burdensome on the participants, the interviews did not gather demographic information on all the victims with whom the respondents had worked. Despite

the limitations, it is still valuable to determine what these professionals can tell us about male victims of STM.

The inclusion of open-ended questions allowed access to more details and aspects of the problem than anticipated, however this information was necessarily limited by the telephone survey administration. Even though the interviewer took extensive notes during the interviews, some of the lengthier responses were documented as closely to what the respondents said as the interviewer could but it is possible those documented statements missed an element of the actual response. These documented responses were noted in brackets to differentiate them from the interviewer's noting of the actual responses stated by respondents.

A better understanding of the similarities and differences of sex trafficking of boys versus girls would have been possible if the surveys had included questions to probe about gender differences of minors who had been trafficked in commercial sex. However, the finding of 1 in 5 victims with whom respondents had worked being male was unexpected; therefore, exploration of gender differences was not identified in the planning phase of the study as an important topic to include in the interview instrument. Furthermore, because it was not possible to determine the gender of victims in many of the open-ended responses, analysis was necessarily limited to respondents who had worked exclusively with males or females to allow examination of differences in background and the trafficking situation by gender of the victims. Therefore, generalizability of the findings is limited and may not apply to service providers who would be more likely to work with a mixture of male and female minors of sex trafficking.

Implications

There is a great need for education and training to raise public and professionals' awareness and to improve professionals' knowledge and capabilities to respond effectively to minors trafficked in commercial sex, in general, but in particular, to male minors because of the common misperception that STM of males is rare. Correctly identifying male minors exploited in commercial sex as sex trafficking victims is needed to decriminalize the response to exploited victims, provide appropriate therapeutic interventions, and maximize penalties against exploiters including buyers (Shared Hope International, 2015). This training should include information about points of entry into commercial sex for children and youth, including the varied pathways into commercial sexual exploitation of male minors, as well as indicators of involvement that might be detectable by different service systems. Continual staff turnover in agencies means that training must be repeated and ideally integrated into program training curricula (Piening & Cross, 2012).

This study's findings, along with the bulk of the existing research, finds that minors who are exploited in commercial sex often have histories of neglect and abuse, highly conflicted relationships with family, and unstable family environments. More prevention efforts must focus on reprocessing cognitions and emotions children have of normalizing abusive and coercive social interactions (which they have learned in their families of origin) and the belief that they are unworthy of healthy relationships (Reid, 2012). Moreover, familial exploitation was more common than expected and likely requires a distinct community response. Labeling familial sex trafficking of minors as child sexual abuse without acknowledging the commercial element may allow perpetrators to be charged with offenses that carry less severe penalties (Smith et al., 2009). Child welfare agencies have a critical role in identifying children and youth who have been or are at risk of being exploited in commercial sex (Walker, 2013), but first, education, training, and the inclusion of sex trafficking in screening algorithms in child protection agencies is needed. Other organizations, such as juvenile court and justice, must also increase training and screening for familial sex trafficking of minors, including boys.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The sole author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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