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Youth Development Bureau



A STUDY OF JUVENILE PROSTITUTION: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



URSA

DRAFT

ADOLESCENT MALE PROSTITUTION: A STUDY OF SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION, ETIOLOGICAL FACTORS, AND RUNAWAY BEHAVIOR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Description of the Study

In October, 1979, Urban and Rural Systems Associates (URSA) was awarded a contract from the Youth Development Bureau to conduct a study of Adolescent Male Prostitution. The purpose of this study was to develop an in-depth knowledge base focusing on adolescent males involved in prostitution and to examine the relationship between adolescent male prostitution and adolescent male involvement in pornography and related sexual exploitation activities.

A major aim of the study was the development of a resource manual for community policy-makers and program planners which describes existing intervention strategies and programs for adolescent prostitutes, male and female.

The major products of the study include:

- An Annotated Bibliography On Adolescent Prostitution (both male and female).
- A Report on Adolescent Males Involved in Prostitution, including descriptive information based on an ethnographic study and demographic and behavioral information based on the development of individual hustler profiles and a review of relevant research. In addition, this Report contains a review of the literature on adolescent female prostitution and a comparison of data on adolescent male prostitutes to data on adolescent female prostitutes.
- A Resource Manual which reviews demographic and behavioral information on adolescent males and females involved in prostitution, describes various community efforts to

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1. The Youth Development Bureau is within the Administration for Children, Youth and Families in the Department of Health & Human Services (HHS).

coordinate services for juvenile prostitutes, and presents current programmatic approaches and intervention strategies for working with the juvenile prostitute.

These Reports were developed from five major sources. Interviews were conducted in seven cities across the country with staff of programs involved in delivering services to juvenile prostitutes and with other relevant service providers, including law enforcement officers, mental health workers and physicians.

An ethnographic study was conducted by URSA which involved an URSA ethnographer with previous experience researching sexual subcultures. He lived for several months in the Tenderloin area of San Francisco and informally observed and interviewed hundreds of adolescent male hustlers, their customers and other residents of the hustling world, including those involved in the sale of sexually explicit materials. The ethnographer also lived for four weeks in the Times Square area of New York City conducting similar research activities.

Hustler profiles were developed by URSA in order to provide demographic and behavioral data on a sample of 79 adolescent males currently involved in prostitution. Specific profile data were reported to URSA by program staff and other researchers across the country who cooperated in this research effort.

An extensive literature review was conducted which focused on both male and female prostitution, including an in-depth review of all recent research efforts in the field.

A comparison of existing information on adolescent male prostitutes (including the hustler profiles developed in this study) to existing information on adolescent female prostitutes along selected variables including demographics, lifestyles and entrance into prostitution.

A wealth of information has been generated by this research and is reported at length in the major products of the study. For purposes of this Executive

Summary, the major findings of the study are presented in three basic areas: a description of adolescent males involved in prostitution; a discussion of the relationship between adolescent male prostitution, pornography and other sexual exploitation activities; and, a description of community efforts and programmatic approaches for working with juvenile prostitutes.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- **A Description of Adolescent Males Involved in Prostitution.**

The majority of adolescent males currently involved in prostitution are gay-identified, many of whom are exploring their homosexuality, coming to terms with their homosexual identity, or struggling to find a place in the gay male subculture. The great majority of males involved in prostitution are between 16 and 22 years old; it is extremely rare for youth under 16 to be involved in prostitution. Almost without exception, these youth do not have pimps; rather, they are independent street hustlers or freelance call boys.

Adolescent males involved in prostitution can be typologized by the extent of their involvement in prostitution. The **situational hustler** describes a young man who hustles only under certain circumstances or only when he is in particular situations, and who views hustling as being a temporary activity in which he is involved. The **habitual hustler** refers to a young man involved in the "lower-class", inner-city street life for whom hustling sex has become an integral part of a street lifestyle which also includes involvement in drugs and alcohol, petty thefts, minor assaults and other acts of criminality. **Vocational hustlers** are young men who view selling themselves for sex as a job, perhaps the beginning of a career in the entertainment industry which caters to the gay male subculture, and who view themselves as professionals. **Avocational hustlers** are vocational hustlers who hustle part-time to supplement the incomes they get from other jobs.

Adolescent male hustlers have been observed working in two distinct environments--the "sex trade zone" and the "gay ghetto". The "sex trade zone" is characterized by adult movie theatres, sex-oriented bookstores, transient hotels, and seedy bars. The area is inhabited mostly by street people, including vagrants, winos, prostitutes, junkies, drug dealers and other petty criminals. The "gay ghetto" is characterized by chic clubs, discos, restaurants and bars catering to a monied clientele which is more openly gay-oriented.

To the extent that young male hustlers work in the "gay ghetto" and to the extent these hustlers are gay identified, they are less likely to be involved in violence and exploitation than those hustlers who work primarily in the "sex trade zone" and tend to be less gay-identified. Adolescent males hustling primarily in the "sex trade zone" often have severe personal and societal problems and are therefore more apt to become habitual hustlers. They often have and pose the most problems of all males involved in prostitution.

There appears to be an increasing number of adolescent males involved in prostitution and this increase appears to be related to the growth of the gay sub-culture and the liberation of gay attitudes. Although apparently on the increase, it is extremely difficult to estimate the number of male youth involved in prostitution because of a variety of factors, including their mobility, the fact that most are between the ages of 16 and 22, the fact that few are arrested for prostitution, and the fact that many hustle only occasionally and for a relatively short period.

There are significant differences between adolescent males and females involved in prostitution. While most males are gay-identified, most females are not. While most males are independent, freelance hustlers, most females have pimps, or work out of organizations such as massage parlors and escort services. While most males involved in hustling are situational hustlers, many young women hookers tend to become much more committed to prostitution as a lifestyle. Adolescent males involved in hustling often form a close-knit social network marked by mutual support and camaraderie, whereas female prostitutes are character-

ized more by feelings of isolation and competitive attitudes toward other female prostitutes.

Another area of major difference between adolescent male and female prostitutes involves their self-image and their attitudes toward hustling. While a significant percentage of males indicate they enjoy hustling, including its sexual aspects, most women indicate a strong dislike for hustling and a disdain for the sexual activity involved. Many adolescent males involved in hustling exhibit positive self-images, imagining themselves to be entrepreneurs, entertainers, and sexually desirable partners. Many also see hustling as an appropriate way of exploring their homosexuality.

Prior research on female prostitution indicates that most female prostitutes have very negative self-images. These negative feelings of self-worth often originate in childhood as a result of sexual abuse. These feelings are often reinforced by the negative labeling of the youth as promiscuous, a runaway, or a delinquent. This labeling usually occurs informally by family and peers and formally by the educational and criminal justice systems. This negative feeling of self-worth allows a young woman to drift into a more active involvement in prostitution and makes her more vulnerable to the affections of a pimp. Once actively involved in prostitution, many young women feel they have lost all opportunities for a "normal" and "decent" life. They become dependent upon their pimp and their drugs and increasingly more depressed. This feeling of hopelessness, combined with an aversion to the sexual aspects of prostitution, strongly reinforces their negative self-image (James, 1980).

● **A DISCUSSION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
ADOLESCENT MALE PROSTITUTION, PORNOGRAPHY AND
OTHER SEXUAL EXPLOITATION ACTIVITIES**

In recent years, numerous crusaders and journalists have indiscriminately lumped adolescent male prostitution with female prostitution, pornography, child abuse, pedophilia, rape and other sexually oriented phenomenon. All of the research conducted by this

study, including interviews with staff from dozens of juvenile prostitution programs, researchers on male and female prostitution, law enforcement officials, historians of pornography, and operators of sexually explicit movie houses and bookstores, as well as contacts with literally hundreds of adolescent male hustlers across the country, strongly suggests that there is very little relationship between adolescent male prostitution and other sexual exploitation activities.

As noted in our findings on the adolescent male involved in prostitution, most male hustlers, whether gay-identified youth hustling occasionally in the "gay ghetto" or habitual hustlers working in the "sex trade zone", operate as independent free-lance hustlers. They do not have pimps and the vast majority do not work out of organized agencies such as escort services, massage parlors or houses of prostitution.

Most customers of male hustlers--called johns, tricks or clients--are men exploring their homosexual feelings, coming to terms with their homosexual identities, struggling to find fulfilling gay male relationships or convinced that the relationships they enjoy with hustlers are perfectly appropriate and mutually satisfactory. Since most hustlers and johns are gay-identified, most adolescent male prostitution takes place in the context of attitudes and customs characteristic of the gay male subculture. As a result, relationships between most adolescent male hustlers and their johns are less likely to be exploitive, that is, less likely to involve a clear "exploiter" and an identified "victim."

Sexual exploitation involving adolescent males is more likely to occur in the context of the habitual hustler and the "sex trade zones." It is in this environment that most violence and economic exploitation involving adolescent male hustlers occurs. Here, however, both hustler and john are equally as likely to be the exploiter. These are the youth who are more likely to rob their victims or assault them and these are the johns who tend to be more isolated, more conflicted about their sexuality, more disturbed and more violent.

Very few johns are attracted to prepubescent or pubescent boys. URSA's research efforts confirm the findings of others in the area of pedophilia. These findings suggest that pedophilia, i.e., a sexual interest in young children, is a distinct phenomenon unrelated to adolescent male prostitution. In fact, most pedophiliacs exhibit a sexual interest in both male and female children, and focus on the youth of the child rather than the gender. The extent to which pedophilia is organized, and the numbers of adults and children involved, was outside the focus of this study. It appears, however, from our study of adolescent male prostitution that reports suggesting a well-organized, nationwide traffic in younger children for sexual purposes are exaggerated. It is clear, though, that this area bears very little relationship to the phenomenon of adolescent male prostitution.

Historically and at present, male prostitution has been only tangentially associated with the production of sexually explicit materials directed at gay men. Only a small percentage of these materials involve male teenagers. Furthermore, after the passage of federal legislation on the protection of children against sexual exploitation in 1977, most sexually explicit commercial materials involving adolescent males appear to be produced and distributed outside the United States. In this country, the production and distribution of sexually explicit materials involving adolescent males appears to be limited to small-scale, non-commercial activities by individuals. In addition, these materials have been and are a very different genre from sexually explicit materials directed at pedophiliacs and involving younger children.

- **A DESCRIPTION OF COMMUNITY EFFORTS AND PROGRAMMATIC APPROACHES FOR WORKING WITH JUVENILE PROSTITUTES.**

Community Efforts

Almost every metropolitan community in the country has some adolescents, male and female, involved in prostitution. However, most communities fail or refuse to recognize the existence of this hustling population,

particularly to the extent that it involves adolescent males. Thus, very few communities have organized significant efforts to deal with this problem or to provide services to this population. Where services have been provided, they most often focus on the adolescent female prostitute. Only in a few communities have services been developed for adolescent male hustlers as well.

In most communities, law enforcement intervention has been seen as the appropriate response to juvenile prostitution, as it is to adult prostitution. Law enforcement intervention, however, has usually not been successful in deterring individual youth from further acts of prostitution nor has it successfully reduced the incidence of juvenile prostitution generally.

A few communities have, however, coordinated efforts to address the problem of juvenile prostitution. While each of these community's approach has been unique and reflected its own conditions and limitations, there are a number of characteristics which are shared by all. These include:

- A social service emphasis which focuses on serving the needs of juvenile prostitutes and de-emphasizes a punitive, law enforcement approach.
- An approach which specifically targets juvenile prostitutes as the client population and recognizes the special needs and problems of this population.
- A community-wide effort which includes a coalition of agencies, involving runaway youth shelters, community-based mental health programs, adolescent medical clinics and gay-identified community-based social service agencies. In only the rare case has law enforcement also been a significant part of the coalition.
- A significant effort to educate the community generally on the problems of juvenile prostitution and the needs of individual juvenile prostitutes. Additionally,

significant efforts to provide professional training to a wide variety of service providers who have contact with juvenile prostitutes.

Program Approaches

There are relatively few agencies which serve juvenile prostitutes given the size of the population and the notoriety they receive from the media. Among existing programs, there is no single type which is most effective in serving the juvenile prostitute. Successful programs known to this study have included runaway youth projects, community-based social service agencies, medical clinics, community-based mental health programs and community-based, gay-identified social service programs.

A comprehensive multi-service approach to working with juvenile prostitutes is considered to be the most effective response to the problem. The single most important component of any program designed to serve juvenile prostitutes is outreach and the most effective outreach strategy is streetwork. In addition, program services should include careful intake and needs assessment as well as emergency short-term and long-term residential services. Additionally, a full range of emergency support services should be provided, including skills training for independent living, employment counseling and job development. Comprehensive programs must also offer counseling services designed to assist youth in dealing with issues of sexuality, sexual identification and family dynamics.

There are two phases of a juvenile prostitute's involvement in prostitution which appear to provide the most effective opportunities for significant program intervention. The first is during the early phases of the youth's involvement in prostitution, prior to becoming an habitual hustler (if male) or prior to "assimilation and commitment" if a female (James, 1980).

A second opportunity for intervention occurs when the youth is in crisis. Juvenile prostitutes may be in

crises related to drug or alcohol use, violence, arrest and/or severe depression. A juvenile prostitute may also be in crisis when he or she has a strong desire to exit prostitution but is unable to do so. These events provide a significant opportunity for the program to assist the youth in exiting from prostitution.

Program interventions should also be designed to distinguish "high-risk" juvenile prostitutes from those that can be termed "low-risk." Programs should attempt to focus resources on those youth likely to become addicted to the life of hustling, and not on those youth whose hustling patterns are likely to remain situational. In addition, programs serving the juvenile prostitute must allow for a good deal of flexibility in their intervention techniques. Exiting from the hustling lifestyle is difficult for young males and females involved in prostitution. Many programs have come to expect some of their clients to return temporarily to hustling and do not make such "failure" a barrier to continued eligibility and continued support and services.