

# HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT FOR GIRLS

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## DOMESTIC SEX TRAFFICKING OF GIRLS IN THE UNITED STATES

**THE PROBLEM:** *“Some of our most vulnerable children also face the threat of being victimized by commercial sexual exploitation. Runaways, throwaways, sexual assault victims, and neglected children can be recruited into a violent life of forced prostitution.”* –Deputy Attorney General James Cole at the National Strategy Conference on Combating Child Exploitation on May 17, 2011.

**THE FACTS:** Sex trafficking is now widely recognized as human rights issue worldwide and the abuses suffered by foreign victims have been well documented both here in the U.S. and abroad. However, when it comes to the commercial sexual exploitation of American children, the victims fall under the radar and the perpetrators escape with impunity.

- The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) reports that between 2008-2010, 83 percent of sex trafficking victims found within the U.S. were U.S. citizens, and 40 percent of those cases involved the sexual exploitation of children.<sup>1</sup>
- Moreover, the FBI estimates that about 293,000 American youth are currently at risk of commercial sexual exploitation.<sup>2</sup>
- The average age at which children become victims of commercial sexual exploitation in the U.S. is between the ages of 12 and 14.<sup>3</sup>
- The vast majority of these victims are runaway, throwaway, or homeless youth—those caught in between the child welfare and juvenile justice system.<sup>4</sup>
- The number of children being sold for sex has increased in recent years because both traffickers and criminal enterprises have discovered that it is more profitable and less risky to sell girls than it is to sell drugs.
- Punishment is minimal—buyers and sellers of girls are rarely charged or tried.
- Demand has also increased because sales can be executed quickly, conveniently, and anonymously over the Internet — particularly due to Backpage.com, an online classifieds website whose Adult & Services Sections serves as “the biggest forum for sex trafficking of under-age girls in the United States.”<sup>5</sup>
- Despite these findings and although authorized, historically miniscule funds have gone towards domestic victims of trafficking.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Justice. Office of Justice Programs. Bureau of Justice Statistics. April 28, 2011. <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/newsroom/pressreleases/2011/BJS11093.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigations. FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin: Human Sex Trafficking. March 2011, available at: [http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/law-enforcement-bulletin/march\\_2011/human\\_sex\\_trafficking](http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/law-enforcement-bulletin/march_2011/human_sex_trafficking)

<sup>3</sup> FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin. Human Sex Trafficking. March 2011. [http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/law-enforcement-bulletin/march\\_2011/human\\_sex\\_trafficking](http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/law-enforcement-bulletin/march_2011/human_sex_trafficking)

<sup>4</sup> Testimony of Ernie Allen, President and CEO of NCMEC for the Victims' Rights Caucus Human Trafficking Caucus, U.S. House of Representatives, July 19, 2010.

[http://www.missingkids.com/missingkids/servlet/NewsEventServlet?LanguageCountry=en\\_US&PageId=4312](http://www.missingkids.com/missingkids/servlet/NewsEventServlet?LanguageCountry=en_US&PageId=4312)

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas D. Kristof, “Financers and Sex Trafficking.” The New York Times. March 31, 2012.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/01/opinion/sunday/kristof-financers-and-sex-trafficking.html?\\_r=2&smid=fb-share](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/01/opinion/sunday/kristof-financers-and-sex-trafficking.html?_r=2&smid=fb-share)

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**THE SOLUTION:** The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) is the major federal statute designed to protect and support victims of human trafficking.

- Trafficking definition includes the exploitation and prostitution of underage girls.
- Domestic victims of sex trafficking, *i.e.* American girls purchased and sold for sex, are protected under the TVPA.
- **Despite these facts and numerous reauthorizations, domestic victims have repeatedly been denied appropriate funding for much needed services.**
- Programs serving domestic victims report difficulty indentifying funding streams for effective services.
- TVPA funds authorized to the Department of Health and Human Services are routed through the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), where they only go to serve foreign victims of trafficking in the U.S.<sup>6</sup>
- Moreover, TVPA funds authorized to DOJ that serve victims are routed to the Office of Victims of Crime, which focuses almost exclusively on foreign victims of trafficking.<sup>7</sup>
- The consequence of little to no TVPA funding for domestic victims is a serious and tragic oversight. The situation is so dire that when a girl is by chance rescued from her trafficker, she is often placed in juvenile detention rather than provided necessary services, because there is nowhere else for her to go.
- It is crucial that Congress appropriate the funds authorized to domestic victims of trafficking so that survivors may finally begin to receive the services and supports necessary to rebuild their lives.

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<sup>6</sup> In order for trafficking victims to receive services through ORR, they must complete a two-step certification process. This process only contemplates foreign victims and does not currently allow for domestic victims to receive similar services afforded to foreign victims through this office. There is currently no counterpart office or entity like ORR to serve domestic victims of trafficking.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Justice, *Assessment of U.S. Activities to Combat Trafficking in Persons: FY2008*, p. 24, 27. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/125840.pdf>