



## An Analysis of Missing Male Victims of Child Sex Trafficking (CST)

### INTRO

There are many unknowns in child sex trafficking (CST), notably the exact number of child victims who exist in the United States. Male<sup>1</sup> victims of child sex trafficking have been, and remain, a bigger unknown. There is a commonly perpetuated belief that victims of child sex trafficking are almost exclusively female. Though males may comprise a smaller proportion of victims, their numbers are significant, and they frequently face other endangerments. An even smaller proportion of child sex trafficking victims include transgender females, or individuals who identify as female but were assigned male at birth.

This analysis describes a subset of male victims of child sex trafficking by analyzing males who were reported missing to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) and were at high risk of being victims or were known to be victims at the time they were missing. Furthermore, only males who were reported missing to NCMEC between 2013 and 2017 were included in this analysis. Incidents involving males made up 5% of all possible CST missing incidents reported to NCMEC during the timeframe. However, external research has increasingly found that there are more male victims of CST than previously assumed. In some cases, studies have mentioned that the number of males and females is likely similar (Development Service Group, Inc, 2014<sup>2</sup> & Walker, 2013<sup>3</sup>). In a 2016 Department of Health and Human Services study, 34.4% of surveyed males between the ages of 14 and 21 experiencing homelessness reported exchanging sex for something of value, including a place to stay, money, food, protection and drugs.<sup>4</sup>

This analysis examines 565 missing incidents involving males who were recovered endangered runaways<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Due to resource limitations, the term male as used in this analysis refers to those assigned male at birth. While we recognize the importance distinguishing cisgender and transgender youth for data purposes and strive to respect every child's gender identity, a distinction was not made for this particular analysis. We hope to improve and expand our data collection in the future to better understand and account for transgender and non-binary children.

<sup>2</sup> Development Services Group, Inc. 2014. "Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children/Sex Trafficking." Literature review. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. <https://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/litreviews/CSECSexTrafficking.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Walker, Kate. 2013. Ending the Commercial Sexual Exploitation Of Children: A Call for Multisystem Collaboration in California. Sacramento, Calif.: California Health and Human Services Agency, California Child Welfare Council. <http://www.chhs.ca.gov/CWCD/Ending%20CSEC%20-%20A%20Call%20for%20Multi-System%20Collaboration%20in%20CA%20-%20February%202013.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Whitbeck, L., Lazorit, M., Crawford, D., and Hautala, D. 2016. Administration for Children and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau Street Outreach Program: Data Collection Study Final Report

<sup>5</sup> Endangered runaway or ERU – Any missing child between 11 and 17 years of age who is missing of his or her own accord and whose whereabouts are unknown to his or her parent(s) or legal guardian.

and were likely victims of child sex trafficking<sup>6</sup>. Males who did not display indicators of likely sex trafficking victimization were included in portions of this report, as a point of reference. As this report only contains information about the child's missing incidents known and reported to NCMEC, there were many aspects of the child's victimization not described. For example, it is largely unknown how the missing males in this sample of CST victims were recruited, or even if they had an identified trafficker. Regardless of whether a trafficker is identified, any child under 18 who is involved in commercial sex where sex is traded for money, food, shelter, drugs or anything of value is a child sex trafficking victim.

## WHAT DO WE KNOW

### DEMOGRAPHICS

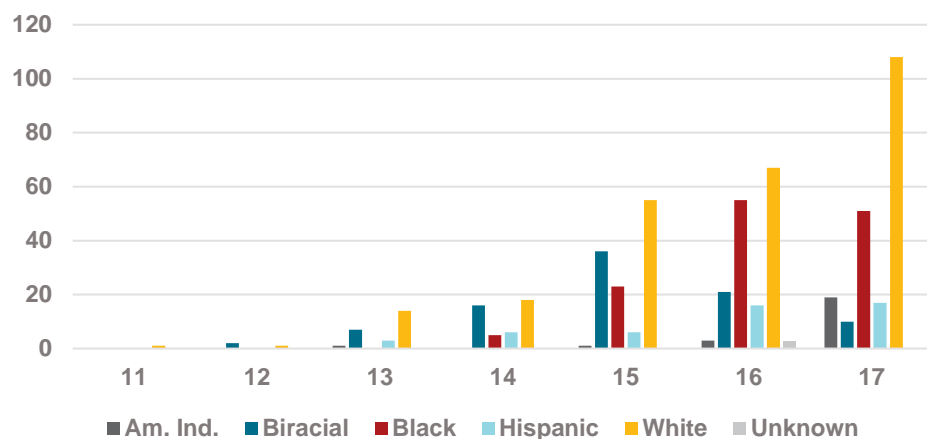
Half (50%) of all likely male CST victims were white. Black males comprised almost a quarter (24%) of all CST victims, and biracial males made up 14%. While white males made up the plurality of all non-trafficking males (39%), black non-trafficking males followed close behind at 31%, and Hispanic non-trafficking males at 19%.

All CST males were reported to NCMEC as endangered runaways, with their ages at the time of the missing incidents between 11 and 17, and a plurality being 17 years old. These CST victims had an average age of 15. White males tended to be older with higher proportions consisting of 17-year olds. Black males were also older as the majority were 16 and 17 years old.

Biracial males were slightly younger with the highest proportion being 15 years old. In comparison, the plurality of non-trafficking males were 16 and 17 years old with the same average age of 15. There was less variation for non-trafficking males

when looking at age and race; non-trafficking males were more often 16 and 17 years old regardless of race.

CST Males - Age Missing By Race of Child



### THE MISSING INCIDENT

The majority (86%) of male victims were in the care of Social Services when they ran away and

76% went missing from home.<sup>7</sup> Fewer non-trafficking males were in Social Services custody when they

<sup>6</sup> Likely victimization through sex trafficking is determined based on information provided to NCMEC by law enforcement, the child's parent/guardian, or social worker that may include indicators, risk factors, the child's behavior, activities, and known facts. In this report, the phrase "CST victims" refers to likely CST victims.

<sup>7</sup> Home can include a residence with a biological parent or guardian but also a foster home, group home, or other substitute care setting.

went missing (77%), but like CST males, most went missing from home (75%). Of note, *the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014*, P.L. 113-183 requires states to report each missing or abducted foster child to law enforcement and to NCMEC, which could account for these relatively high percentages of reported missing foster children. An additional small percentage of CST males (5%) went missing from school. Just over half (51%) of male victims were recovered at a place of residence, and 18% were recovered while on the street. Similarly, 48% of non-trafficking males were recovered in a place of residence, and 23% were recovered while on the street.

Male victims came home on their own (46%) more often than recovery through a police investigation (39%). Most male victims were recovered in the same state from where they went missing (91%), though only 60% of CST males were recovered in the same city from where they went missing. Non-trafficking males did not differ on where they were recovered.

About half (49%) of all CST males were recovered within seven days; the longest time between missing and recovery date was almost two years. The average number of days missing was 37. These figures are nearly identical among non-trafficking males, though the average was slightly longer (41 days) and the longest time missing for a non-trafficking male was 43 years.

Out of the 565 incidents of missing male CST victims, 37% included males who had run away on at least two occasions between 2013 and 2017. By comparison, 25% of non-trafficking males had run away at least twice. One CST victim male had gone missing 29 times in the studied timeframe and on each occasion the child had run away from foster care.

## OTHER ENDANGERMENTS

Children who go missing are inherently more at risk for dangers because they are not under appropriate adult supervision. Missing male victims of CST are already in unsafe situations. However, additional endangerments that are not directly related to child sex trafficking can occur simultaneously. The reported endangerments include the child carrying a weapon, using drugs and/or alcohol, being enticed online, being involved in a gang, having a mental health diagnosis, running away before, having self-harm tendencies, having other special needs, and having suicidal tendencies. Almost all (98%) CST incidents involving males had at least one of the additional endangerments listed. This compares to 87% among non-trafficking males. The average number of reported endangerments for all incidents involving CST males was three, while two was the average number of reported endangerments for non-trafficking males.

A CST victim with a previous reported missing incident (92%) was the most common endangerment listed, and 85% of all missing incidents included at least one of the other endangerments. The second most

commonly reported endangerment was a child using drugs and/or alcohol (75%). Excluding those two most common categories of endangerment, 67% of CST Victims had at least one of the other endangerments mentioned above. More than half of all male CST victims reportedly had a mental health diagnosis (58%). Non-trafficking males had less of each type of endangerment listed with the exception

Endangerments	CST Males	Non-Trafficking Males
Previous Run	92%	72%
Drugs/Alcohol	75%	53%
Mental Health Diagnosis	58%	35%
Suicidal Tendencies	35%	13%
Gang Involvement	14%	15%
Self-harm Tendencies	15%	7%
Carrying a Weapon	11%	8%
Special Needs	6%	4%
Online Enticement	2%	0%

of reported gang membership. Fourteen percent of male CST victims had reported gang membership compared to 15% of non-trafficking males.

## TRANSGENDER FEMALES

Twenty-one percent of all missing incidents involving male CST victims included transgender females—victims of CST who identified as female but were assigned male at birth. It is unknown how many total transgender female victims exist in the United States as there is no consensus among studies and service providers.

Among transgender females reported to NCMEC, black children were the most prevalent at 58% with white children following at 17%, and both biracial and Hispanic children at 11%, respectively. This is unique in the dataset, as higher proportions of the victim children were white. Comparable to the overall data, biracial transgender females tended to be younger than other racial groups at 15, while black children were more often 16 years old, and the last three groups, American Indian, Hispanic, and white more often 17 years old.

Almost all transgender female CST victims were missing from care (91%) and tended to return home on their own (60%). This compares to 42% of cisgender<sup>8</sup> male CST victims coming home on their own. Ninety-five percent of transgender females were recovered in the same state from which they went missing, while 90% of cisgender males were recovered in the same state. The difference between both groups being recovered in the same city was slightly larger. A higher proportion of transgender females were recovered in the same city (68%), whereas 58% of cisgender males were recovered in the same city. Slightly more transgender females were recovered within a week (53%), while 47% of cisgender males were recovered within a week. Out of all missing incidents that included a transgender female, 32% were reported missing at least two times between 2013 and 2017. Thirty-seven percent of cisgender males had more than one missing incident reported during the same time period.

Transgender CST females had fewer other reported endangerments than cisgender CST males. On average, transgender females had two reported endangerments compared to three reported endangerments for cisgender males. For most endangerments, cisgender males had higher proportions of each endangerment except for drug and/or alcohol use (both were at 75%), previously running away (transgender females, 95% and cisgender males, 91%), and online enticement (transgender females, 3% and cisgender males, 2%).

Endangerments	Transgender Females	Cisgender Males
Previous Run	95%	91%
Drugs/Alcohol	75%	75%
Mental Health Diagnosis	51%	59%
Suicidal Tendencies	19%	39%
Gang Involvement	0%	18%
Self-harm Tendencies	13%	15%
Carrying a Weapon	1%	14%
Special Needs	3%	6%
Online Enticement	3%	2%

## CHARACTERISTICS OF CST

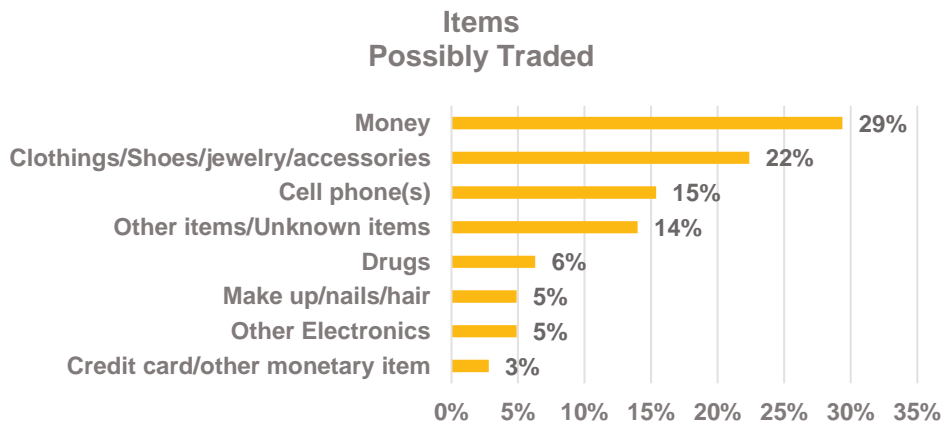
When a child is reported missing to NCMEC, any known information that can aid in recovering the child becomes part of the child's case. However, the reporting person may not know the exact details that led

<sup>8</sup> Cisgender males are children who were reported as males and were not known to identify as female.

to the child going missing or what happened to the child while he was missing. In addition, when the child is recovered, he may not disclose any victimization or provide exhaustive information. As a result, there are often many details of the children’s likely CST victimization that remain unknown, and there may be many missing children reported that were actually CST victims but whose victimization was never identified.

Out of 565 missing incidents of male victims of CST, only one incident included information about how the child was recruited. In that case, the child was recruited in person by his family’s pastor, who became the child’s trafficker. Similarly, there were a small number of reports which included information about whether the child had a trafficker. Only five males who were involved in 10 missing incidents, were reported as having a trafficker. Four of those incidents included males who were arrested with their trafficker. In 16 cases involving 14 males, the child specifically indicated that he did not have a trafficker. Two males in five incidents were being trafficked by a member of the child’s family.

Twenty-two (4%) CST missing incidents included males who were in an advertisement posted online, soliciting buyers for sexual acts. Some male victims were in advertisements posted on multiple websites daily, such as social media, dating, and escort websites. Fourteen of the 22 missing incidents included a transgender female.



It was reported that in 10% of all incidents the male was trading sex for things of value other than money, such as drugs, shelter, electronics, etc. In 15% of all cases, the child’s caregiver reported the child gaining new possessions

without explanation or from an unknown source. When it was known, money (29%) was the most common item, followed by clothing and accessory type items (22%), and cell phones (15%).

Children may have experiences in their pasts that increase their vulnerability to being targeted and victimized through sex trafficking. Seven percent of all males were known to have been CST victims during a past run. Of all transgender females, 24% were known to have been a previous CST victim. In some cases, it was not known if the child had been a CST victim, however the child’s behavior or characteristics were similar to those of known victims. Half (50%) of all males had indicators they may have been victims of CST in a past missing incident, while a slightly higher proportion of transgender females (58%) had such indicators in a past run. Twelve percent of cisgender male CST victims had a history of sexual abuse compared to 8% of transgender female CST victims who had a history of sexual abuse. The majority of all male victims of CST did not have a history of being thrown out or being homeless; only 1% had such a history that was reported to NCMEC.

## CONCLUSION

An analysis of the victimization of males in child sex trafficking is challenged by a number of factors, but also yields several interesting data points. We may not know the exact number of male victims of child

sex trafficking, but it does clearly seem to be under-reported. There are many possible reasons for the underrepresentation of males in the child sex trafficking data. For one, it is important to note that while some victims are reported missing, there may be many more victims who are never reported missing, such as youth who have been kicked out of their home or are homeless.

Furthermore, a child does not need to be missing to be victimized through sex trafficking. Child sex trafficking can happen at home, school, or other environments that are part of a child's daily life, without ever triggering a missing child report. It is possible that many underage male victims may belong to this category.

Additionally, there are more unknowns in this dataset arising from the nature of second-hand accounts. For example, it is unknown whether males are truly less likely to have a trafficker, if children are protecting the trafficker as a result of trauma bonds, or if the trafficker-victim dynamic in general is different with males than females.

One particularly interesting point arising from this analysis is a higher than expected prevalence of transgender females, which could result from several possible explanations. There may be a relationship between the stress on children, and their relationships with supportive adults in such situations that drives this. It is also conceivable that the number of transgender CST victims is higher, since many transgender children face stigma regarding their gender identification alone. Adding another layer of sexual victimization, most often by adult male perpetrators, increases the likelihood of these victims not reporting their abuse. The number of transgender children may also be higher due to their gender identity itself not being reported.

Child sex trafficking is a difficult subject to analyze empirically. Data is lacking and is subject to many inconsistencies, but it is clear this crime happens to both males and females. It is our hope that exploring unique characteristics of male victims might help reduce the overall level of victimization.