

## Background

This training provides judicial officers with information about factors that place children at risk for being sexually exploited, ways to screen for children who are being sexually exploited, interventions and services available to assist abused youth, and additional resources.

National experts – Commissioner Catherine Pratt (Compton, CA, Juvenile Court) and Mr. Kelly Ranasinghe (NCJFJC) – will explore the idea of poly-victimization and system-involvement as substantial factors making youth vulnerable to recruitment and manipulation. Trainers will also look at the variety of ways trafficked youth may enter the juvenile court system, including through prosecution for status offenses and co-morbid substance abuse allegations, as well as the challenges to identifying trafficking victims who are coerced to inhibit disclosure. Finally, trainers will look at the basic structure of therapeutic intervention, including crafting a tailored services plan.

Victimization by domestic child sex trafficking is one of the most difficult areas for juvenile courts to address. Not only do most victims have complex trauma needs, but identification of trafficking victimization is often inhibited by indoctrination and intimidation by traffickers themselves. Victims may have powerful traumatic bonds with their exploiter, which makes intervention through child welfare difficult. In addition, traffickers manipulate victims' perceptions of family, affection, and belonging, which can lead to prolonged therapeutic interventions exceeding the design of juvenile service plans.

Minnesota is third in the nation for child sex trafficking. Child sex trafficking (aka "child prostitution," "juvenile prostitution," commercial sexual exploitation of children, survival sex) is among the most insidious abuses of children. It is estimated that there are currently 100,000 to 300,000 American children at risk of becoming victims of child sex trafficking. Most of these children are girls, and the average age of entry into commercial sexual exploitation is between 12 to 14. Victims may be abducted or lured by traffickers online, through social media and Facebook. In addition the many system-involved youth are lured from foster homes and shelters through peer contact. In public areas, traffickers have been known to recruit girls from transient areas of low-social control, including bus shelters, malls, and while they are homeless. Runaway and "thrownaway" youth, particularly those who are marginalized due to their sexual orientation are particularly vulnerable.

Sustained victimization can be accomplished through physical force such as beatings. More commonly, ritualistic and symbolic violence is part of the coercive process including sexual violence, scarification, tattooing, and branding. Victims are manipulated to believe that escape is impossible, more dangerous, or that government intervention will prosecute, deport, or arrest them for complicity. When they try to escape, they are beaten, tortured, and/or gang raped by their traffickers. Unfortunately, due to a lack of understanding and the hidden nature of this vulnerable population, survivors are often criminalized and placed behind bars when they are in fact victims of crime.