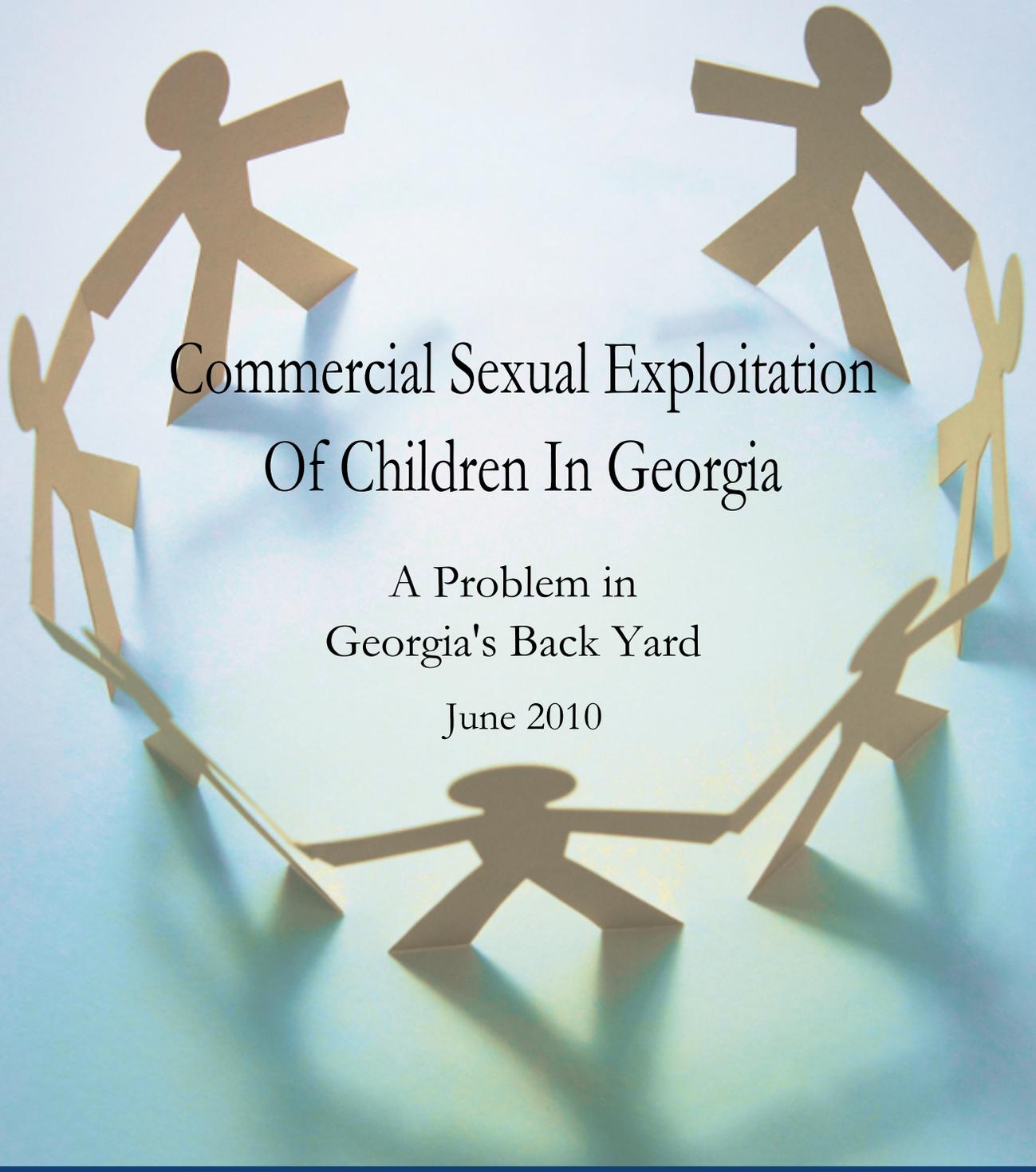




Governor's Office for

**Children and Families**



Commercial Sexual Exploitation  
Of Children In Georgia

A Problem in  
Georgia's Back Yard

June 2010

Working Together to End  
Commercial Sexual Exploitation  
of Children in Georgia

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## Defining the Problem

The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) through child prostitution is perhaps the most complex, misunderstood, and under-investigated form of maltreatment occurring against children today. Commercial trafficking and juvenile prostitution have emerged in recent years as significant problems within the national, regional, and international arenas (Estes & Wiener, 2001). Commercial sexual exploitation is defined by the sexual exploitation of a child primarily for financial or other economic reasons involving both monetary and non-monetary exchanges for activities (Estes & Wiener, 2001). In all CSEC cases, the exploiter is the main beneficiary of the commercial activities at the expense of the child's dignity, physical well-being, and mental well-being (Estes & Wiener, 2001). Similarly, Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking (DMST) is the commercial sexual exploitation of American children within the United States, and involves the recruitment, harboring, transportation, and/or the obtaining of a child under the age of 18 for the purpose of a commercial sex act (Smith, Vardaman, & Snow, 2009). DMST activities include child sex slavery, child sex trafficking, prostitution of children, CSEC, and rape of a child (Smith, et al., 2009). The term "Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking" was coined and developed in order to more accurately identify the nature of the crime being committed against a child who is sexually exploited, as well as clarify the child's status as that of the victim (Smith, et al., 2009). Disturbingly, the number one cause of death for exploited children is murder (Smith, et al., 2009).

A 2001 CSEC study estimated that between 100,000 and 300,000 American children are victimized each year, and unfortunately these numbers are growing (Estes & Wiener, 2001). More and more, these children are being recruited in increasing numbers into the commercial sex market to serve the demand that has resulted from the widespread normalization and promotion in America of commercial sex (Shared Hope International, 2008). Recent evidence has even suggested that minor children under the age of 18 years now make up the largest percentage of trafficking victims in this country today (Shared Hope International, 2008). ***The average age of entry into prostitution or the commercial sex market for children is between 12 and 14 years old, and the overwhelming majority of the victims are female (Smith, et al., 2009).*** These children are consistently given quotas that can be between 10 and 15 buyers per night, and reach as high as up to 45 buyers per night during high demand times such as sporting events and conventions (Smith, et al., 2009). ***Victims of minor sex trafficking often do not self-identify as victims, and deny victimization due to fear of the physical and psychological abuse inflicted by the trafficker and pimp, as well as because of the trauma bonds developed through the victimization process (Smith, et al., 2009).***

Experts in the field report that the high demand for CSEC created by buyers of commercial sex has created large profit margins that make the trafficking of children a well-established business (Smith, et al., 2009). Even criminal gang activity that was once primarily known for the drug

trade has now expanded to include the sex trafficking of girls (Smith, et al., 2009). These elaborate operations are almost always under the control of traffickers and pimps. ***Research has found that ninety percent of exploited children are under the control of a pimp (Smith, et al., 2009).*** Traffickers and pimps employ calculated and sophisticated methods for recruitment and control, and grooming is often a progressive, two-stage process (Priebe & Suhr, 2005). The first stage involves making the girl feel attractive and valued through special attention, validation, sexual relations, and buying gifts (Priebe & Suhr, 2005). Once trust and dependency have been established, the second phase involves the trafficker or pimp breaking the girl's will in order to prepare her for prostitution and separation from her previous life (Priebe & Suhr, 2005). Breaking the girl's will is accomplished through the use of several methods including physical and sexual violence, manipulation, isolation, coercion and threats, economic dependence, and emotional abuse (Smith, et al., 2009). The ultimate goal at the end of this process is for the trafficker and pimp to have a product from which he can garner profit. The sex trafficking of children is still considered by many criminals to be low risk, leading to an increase in highly violent criminals and criminal networks becoming more involved in the industry (Smith, et al., 2009). In the rare cases where traffickers and pimps are arrested by police, they are often not identified as such or are able to plead to lesser charges (Smith, et al., 2009). Most buyers who purchase sexual services from minors typically receive very little or no penalties, and the numbers of those prosecuted for the purchase of sex acts are extremely low (Smith, et al., 2009). This suggests that there is a very minimal risk for criminal punishment for those who buy commercial sex services from children. On the other hand, many of the child victims are arrested and charged with prostitution when in fact the crimes have been committed against them.

### Risk Factors

There are several risk factors that have been identified for victims of commercial sexual exploitation, but the primary factor of vulnerability is age (Smith, et al., 2009). Age has been identified as a primary risk factor because pre-teen and adolescent girls are often more susceptible to the calculated tactics used by traffickers and pimps. Other main risk factors that have been identified include:

- Childhood sexual abuse:
  - Children who have been sexually abused are 28 times more likely to be arrested for prostitution at some point in their lives (Smith, et al., 2009). It has also been found that the majority of girls and adult women who engage in prostitution have a history of sexual abuse in their childhood (Priebe & Suhr, 2005).
- Conflict in the home:
  - Research has demonstrated that negative home life experiences are a significant predictor for prostitution (Priebe & Suhr, 2005). Conflict in the home can be caused by parental neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse, parental drug use,

housing instability, and violence (Priebe & Suhr, 2005). This dysfunctional type of family life often provides a greater incentive for many girls to leave the home.

- Being a runaway or throwaway:
  - Each year, there are approximately 1.7 million runaway/throwaway episodes in the U.S., and about 90% of runaways become involved in the sex trade industry (Priebe & Suhr, 2005). In most cases of girls who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation, there was an extensive history of running away (Priebe & Suhr, 2005). These children are often running away to escape a negative home environment, but unfortunately land into the arms of a pimp or trafficker posed as a protector and caretaker (Smith, et al., 2009).
- Psychological or emotional problems:
  - Victims who have experienced emotional and psychological difficulties are at a greater risk for being sexually exploited (Priebe & Suhr, 2005). These girls often experience isolation from peers and have problems in school (Priebe & Suhr, 2005).

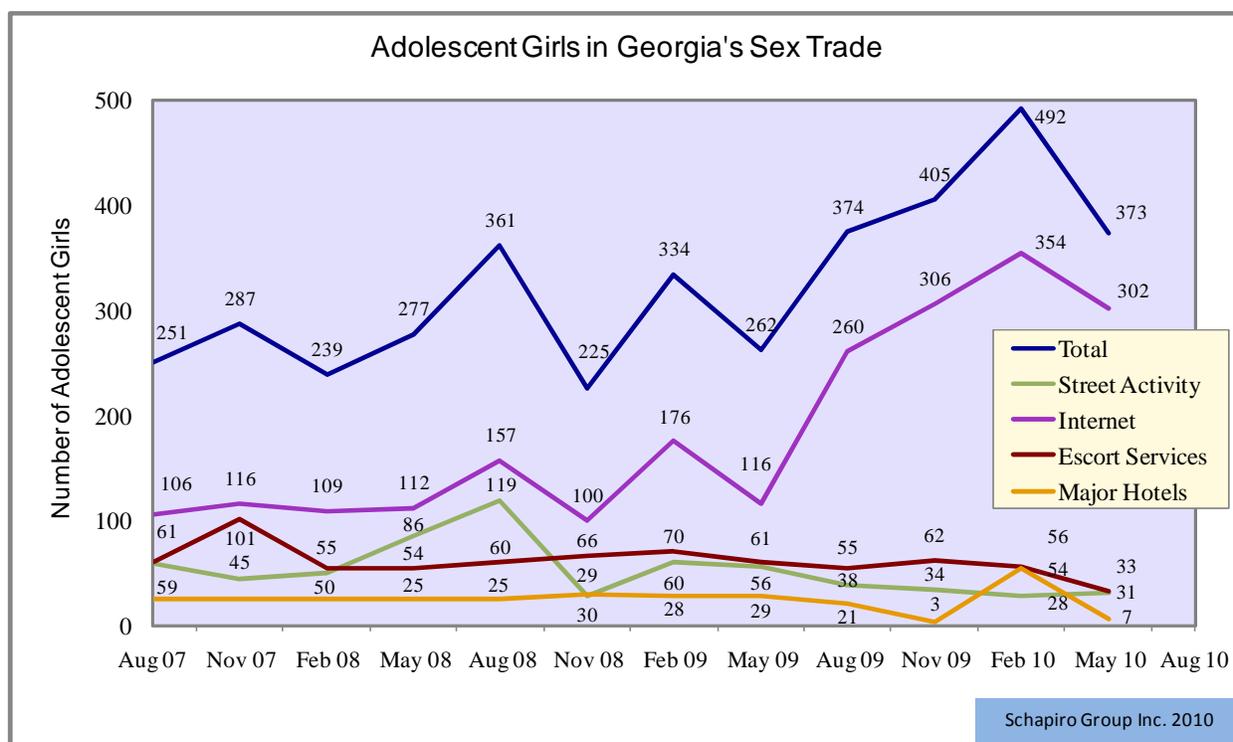
### Consequences and Outcomes

Commercial sexual exploitation produces a variety of negative consequences and outcomes for the children caught in its trap. The first unfortunate consequence is that many of exploited children end up in the juvenile justice system. States needlessly spend billions of dollars a year on incarcerating nonviolent youth that could be managed safely in the community. Imprisoning youth can have severe detrimental effects and negatively impact their long-term economic productivity, as well as the economic health of communities. Youth who are imprisoned have higher recidivism rates and criminal behavior, lower educational and economic opportunities and an increased association with delinquent peer groups. ***An unfortunate fact is that entry into the juvenile justice system may actually disqualify commercially exploited children from accessing victim of crime funds and specialized mental health services to address exploitation issues.***

Another unfortunate outcome for victims of commercial sexual exploitation is the negative impact it has on their health. Studies have found that there is a correlation between sexual and physical violence and negative health behaviors such as substance abuse, risky sexual practices, depression, and suicide attempts (Priebe & Suhr, 2005). A girl who has been a victim of commercial sexual exploitation has an increased risk for unplanned pregnancies, STD/STI infection, and HIV infection (Priebe & Suhr, 2005). ***CSEC has also been found to have a negative impact on mental health, and victims often suffer from many psychological disorders including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), conduct disorder, and borderline personality disorder (BPD) (Priebe & Suhr, 2005).***

### CSEC in Georgia

The city of Atlanta is reported to be a major hub for CSEC in the Southeast United States (Finn, Blackwell, Jackson, Wolk, & Oakley, 2009). In 2005 the Federal Bureau of Investigation named Atlanta as one of 14 cities in the nation for the highest incidence of children used in prostitution, and Georgia is the first state to develop a sustainable statewide response to this tragedy. A recent statewide study conducted in February 2010 of the commercial sexual exploitation of adolescent girls indicated that an increasing number of girls in Georgia under the age of 18 are being exploited. These results are part of a larger, multi-year quarterly tracking study which began in 2007. Recent results have suggested that the number of girls who are being sexually exploited in Georgia per month potentially range from 234 up to 831, although that number is most likely in the 400s (Shapiro Group, 2010). This number was based on the count of commercially exploited girls when they were encountered through street activity, internet ads, and escort services. The numbers did not include girls encountered through organized, underground commercial sex rings.



The use of technology has also been instrumental in assessing the frequency of commercial sexual exploitation in Georgia. A spatial data software technology known as the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) was used in a 2005 study for the purposes of geographically determining the main problem areas in Atlanta. The data found that there is a strong correlation between areas with adult prostitution activities and areas with juvenile-related prostitution activities (Priebe & Suhr, 2005). Another finding was that juvenile runaways often occupy areas

with heavy prostitution activities, and that these activities are near most public schools in Atlanta (Priebe & Suhr, 2005). GIS data obtained also determined that juvenile-related prostitution activity is well established in the following areas: Metropolitan Parkway, Moreland Avenue, Vine Street, Peachtree and North Avenue, and Pharr Road (Priebe & Suhr, 2005). It is obvious that this problem is firmly nested within the state of Georgia, particularly in the Atlanta area, and continues to increase rather than decline.

### **Federal Response to CSEC**

In recent years, the United States has adopted powerful federal legislation criminalizing trafficking and providing for assistance to victims (Shared Hope International, 2008). The passing of the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPA) in 2005 called on government to eliminate the need to prove force, fraud, or coercion for a minor involved in a commercial sexual act. The TVPA also states that these minor children should not be held accountable for prostitution crimes committed as a result of their condition of being trafficked and under the control of a pimp or trafficker (Smith, et al., 2009). Finally, the TVPA authorized funding for programs to provide shelters and services to CSEC victims. The PROTECT act, passed in 2003, is another important act that criminalizes child sex tourism and establishes jurisdiction over U.S. citizens and residents who travel abroad to exploit children.

### **Georgia's CSEC Statewide Response**

In response to this escalating form of abuse, Georgia is leading the way in the national effort to protect our children. The purpose of the National Plan to Prevent the Sexual Exploitation of Children is to keep prevention and intervention efforts at the forefront in a powerful way. Such work in Georgia began at the grassroots level nearly 10 years ago and eventually cultivated into a systemic, state-level response in 2008. The Governor's Office for Children and Families (GOCF) has led the response by establishing a state-wide task force to address the need for a single unified protocol which serves children that have been commercially sexually exploited. This task force is comprised of representatives from state and local government agencies, service providers, and advocacy organizations. Several of the task force representatives include:

- GOCF (task force chair)
- Sandy Springs Police Department
- Georgia Baptist Children's Homes
- Department of Family and Children Services
- Interfaith Children's Movement
- Department of Juvenile Justice

- Barton Child Policy and Law Clinic;
- FBI MATCH Task Force
- Juvenile Justice Fund, A Future Not a Past
- Office of the Child Advocate
- Juvenile Court Judges
- Anderson Family Foundation
- Child Advocacy Centers of Georgia
- Prevent Child Abuse Georgia
- Wellspring Living
- Street Grace (faith-based coalition of advocates supporting victims of exploitation)
- Atlanta Police Department Commercial Sexual Exploitation Task Force

In 2009, GOCF received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding pursuant to HB 990 and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding through the Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) to support a statewide response. Shortly after, GOCF launched a statewide System of Care approach to address the needs of CSEC victims through the establishing of the Georgia Care Connection Office (GCCO). Located in Decatur, the GCCO offers a single point of contact for anyone who seeks assistance for a commercial sex trafficking victim, as well as anyone who needs information or technical assistance. Those served by the GCCO include victims, family members, community members, law enforcement, medical personnel, and service providers.

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