

**A Research-to-Practice Summary:  
Sex trafficking of minors:  
How many juveniles are being prostituted in the US?**

**January 2019**

Prepared by Chris Newlin, MS, LPC

**ARTICLE:**

Finkelhor, D., Vaquerano, J., & Stranski, M. (2008 – Revised 2017). Sex trafficking of minors: How many juveniles are being prostituted in the US? Durham, NH: Crimes Against Children Research Center. Retrieved from [http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV279\\_Revised\\_Sex\\_Trafficking\\_Bulletin.pdf](http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV279_Revised_Sex_Trafficking_Bulletin.pdf)

**SUMMARY:**

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this manuscript is to review some of the estimates of sex trafficking of minors and highlight their weaknesses.

**Design:**

Numerous studies which are widely cited in the literature were evaluated by the researchers at the University of New Hampshire's Crimes Against Children Research Center.

**Findings:**

1. Estes and Weiner
  - a. Authors suggest about 326,000 children were “at risk for commercial sexual exploitation”
  - b. “at risk” does not equate to # of trafficked minors
  - c. Some of these “at risk” estimations are “crude guesses”

- d. There is clearly duplication of individuals identified in the various subgroups, but the extent of this is unknown
  - e. *“In sum, no one should cite the 326,000 number from Estes and Weiner as a scientifically based estimate of the number of prostituted juveniles.”*
2. National Juvenile Prostitution Survey
- a. Questionnaires completed by a representative national sample of 2,598 state, county, and local law enforcement agencies asking them whether they made arrests or detentions of youth engaged in prostitution – “In the calendar year 2005, did your agency detain or arrest any juveniles for crimes involving prostitution?”
  - b. Estimated 1,450 arrests/detentions of juveniles for prostitution (95% confidence interval ranging from 1,287-1,614)
  - c. This is a scientific estimate, but many youth involved in prostitution may not be arrested/identified, so this estimate is likely somewhat low.
3. Youth Involvement in the Sex Trade
- a. Interviewed 949 youth in six sites which were considered high-risk locales
  - b. Youth involved other youth whom they knew to be involved
  - c. Found that 10-13% of the youth engaged in prostitution had been arrested
  - d. Combining this with the National Juvenile Prostitution Survey, they estimate that about 10,500 youth were engaged in prostitution nationwide in 2009.
4. “Average age of entry into prostitution for juveniles is 12-14”
- a. *“There is no credible source in the research literature for this estimate”*
  - b. Polaris Project has disavowed this statistic, saying “this stat is not actually supported by any data”
5. “1 in 6 runaways are *likely* sex trafficking victims”
- a. This estimate came 18,500 runaway cases reported to NCMEC in 2016
  - b. However, not all runaway cases are reported to NCMEC, and an estimated 357,000 youth are considered runaways each year.
  - c. NISMART data suggests that less than 1% of runaways were thought to have engaged in commercial sex
6. *“Unfortunately, there are no credible or supported estimates about the size of the problem”*

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Preferred citation: National Children’s Advocacy Center. (2019). Sex trafficking of minors: How many juveniles are being prostituted in the US? Research to Practice Summary. Huntsville, AL: Author.

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This project was supported by Grant No. 2017-CI-FX-K001 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.