

JPIC Corner

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Coordinator's Note

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Prostitution

Several years ago our JPIC Corner focused on human trafficking. Most of these victims are forced into a career of prostitution. Some are as young as 12 years of age. Unfortunately, in some countries prostitution is necessary for survival. It provides income for poor families.

Prostitution, whether by free choice or by force, degrades the dignity of the human person. First, prostitution is sexual abuse and exploitation. The prostitute is seen simply as an object for sexual recreation and gratification. Second, prostitutes are often victims of violence from their pimps or from their clients. The pimps require a quota which must be met; otherwise the prostitute is punished. Clients inflict violence on prostitutes during the sexual encounters. In extreme cases, the prostitutes become victims of homicide. Third, drug and alcohol addiction is common among prostitutes, especially among the young. Fourth, prostitution is a practice where sexually transmitted diseases are prevalent.¹ Fifth, prostitution stems from a domino effect, in which many are following the same path of their parents in the prostitution lifestyle. Indeed, prostitution is a quagmire of power and control, a prison of sexual abuse with little chance of escape.

Most prostitutes wish for a better life, but it is not easy for a female prostitute to quit. Males have a better chance of quitting because they usually operate independently. Females must worry about the power and tyranny their pimps have over them.²

1. Prostitution Statistics, <http://sex-crimes.laws.com/prostitution/prostitution-statistics>
2. Prostitution Statistics
3. Child Prostitution, <http://sex-crimes.laws.com/prostitution/child-prostitution>
4. Covenant House, Youth Outreach Programs Helping Homeless Kids, <http://www.covenanthouse.org/youth-homeless-programs/street-outreach>



*Photo depicts model
For illustration only*

Did You Know?

- **Many street prostitutes in the United States enter prostitution before they turn 18.**
- **Only 10% of prostitution-related arrests in the United States are of the person purchasing sex.**
- **Since June 2003, more than 1,600 children who were victims of domestic sex trafficking have been rescued through the FBI's Innocence Lost National Initiative.**
- **Currently, about 293,000 American youth are estimated to be at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation.**

Coordinator's, Continued...

Prostitution is a tragedy, especially for our children. Many children are forced into prostitution by their parents. A good number of child prostitutes are runaways from home escaping from sexual abuse. They become homeless and use the streets as their dormitories.³ In most cases, the children cluster in the most dangerous parts of a city, thus creating greater chances for becoming victims of further abuse and violence. Covenant House, an outreach program for homeless youth reports that, "A child who spends more than 24 hours living on the streets has an 80% greater chance of being trafficked"⁴ for prostitution services.

Prostitutes need our compassionate response. We are reminded of the woman caught in adultery in the Gospel of John, Chapter 8. There are three key messages that come from this story. The first is "Let the one among you cast the first stone."⁵

Jesus' words remind us of our own sinful nature, in need of forgiveness and healing. Second, after those who were ready to stone the woman walked away, Jesus say to the woman, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? She replied, 'No one sir.' Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you.'⁶ Jesus cautions us to be careful of casting judgment upon the one who is in error. Lastly Jesus' final words to the adulteress is "Go, from now on do not sin any more."⁷ Here Jesus provides a clear message for us. As Christians, we can never accept objective moral evil. Jesus did not approve the woman's act of adultery; he clearly stated that she should not sin again. Jesus' compassion and forgiveness of the woman, however is equally affirmed. Here we see that the Heart of God is mercy. Compassion and forgiveness come before the rule of punishment before the law.

We need to protect the inviolable dignity of each human being. Children especially are the vulnerable ones being placed in sexually exploiting situations. In this issue of JPIC Corner, we will provide resources for getting involved and raising awareness of prostitution and sex trafficking. We will also provide information about runaway youth (who are more likely to become victims of sex trafficking) as well as links to resources.

Let us pray daily for the protection and safeguarding of our young.

[See article online](#)

What is prostitution?

Prostitution is defined as "the act or practice of engaging in sexual activity indiscriminately esp. for money."

(Source: Dictionary.com)

Street Prostitution in the United States



Photo for illustration only

Prostitution does not respect the dignity of the human person, because the person who is prostituted is seen simply as an object for sexual recreation and gratification.

Street prostitution is estimated to account for possibly only 10-20% of all prostitution in the United States, yet it still has a large impact on not only the individuals involved, but also the community. Most prostitutes are women, and almost all of their clients are men.

Precise and authoritative statistics regarding prostitution in the United States are often difficult to find. However, research has uncovered some important information. For instance, while there are varying estimates of the average age of entry into prostitution, there is considerable evidence that women who engage in street prostitution often start at a young age. According to the website of the National Institute of Justice, women who engage in street prostitution often started to do so as minors.



Photo depicts a model and an actress. For illustration only.

Women who engage in street prostitution often started to do so as minors, which can hardly be considered a truly “free choice.”

Did you know?

Men who visit prostitutes are significantly less likely to visit again if they are arrested. Yet only 90% of prostitution arrests are of the prostitute, not the client.

Street Prostitution, Continued

Why do women turn to prostitution?

The most prevalent reason that street prostitutes give to explain why they are working on the street is their “inability to find adequately paying work elsewhere.” Some become involved in prostitution because they need money to support themselves or their children while others use prostitution as a way to pay for their drug habits. Street prostitution is related to a lack of education and job skills (which makes it difficult to find and keep a job), abuse and drugs. In addition to often starting prostitution as minors, many women who are prostitutes are running away from an abusive situation. Many street prostitutes have a history of abuse and suffered physical abuse, sexual abuse, or both as children. Furthermore, many women are forced, tricked, or coerced into prostitution.

Leaving Prostitution

Many women who are street prostitutes do try to leave prostitution, but leaving can be very difficult. Often, women who leave street prostitution return at some point and then leave again. Women who return to street prostitution often do so because they have limited education and job skills, making it difficult to find other employment.

The Demand Side of Prostitution

When addressing the issue of prostitution, it can be easy to focus only on the people who work as prostitutes. So it is important to remember that demand drives prostitution and that prostitution continues because people are willing to pay for commercial sex.

Don't Be So Quick to Judge! Working with Prostitutes in Colombia: A Reflection

In Colombia, the MSC have a long history of volunteering at Fundación Vida Nueva (New Life Foundation), which works with prostitutes and their children to help them break the cycle of prostitution. Below is an excerpt from a reflection by Fr. Joseph Jablonski, MSC on his experience with Fundación Vida Nueva.

I worked for awhile in a center for the rehabilitation of prostitutes in Bogotá called Vida Nueva. When I was first invited to help in that ministry, I was afraid.

That emotion was a red-flag for me to accept the challenge and not to trust in myself alone, but in God. When I first went to the street corners with other volunteers, I found women who were ashamed to even enter a Church building and even more ashamed to talk to a priest. Sitting and talking with the women of the street, I learned about their reality. I learned that those I had judged as sinful were really victims of sin. I listened to their terrible stories of abuse and humiliation,

often from a very young age. I was shocked by the way they had been lied to and tricked into a life of slavery on the streets. They were so like the Samaritan woman. That Gospel, as well as other Gospels in which Jesus was so kind to people like them, came to my mind. Stop and listen. Don't be quick to judge!

The above text originally appeared as part of a reflection on the Third Sunday of Lent. Fr. Joseph writes a reflection for each Sunday, [available online](#).

The Link Between Abuse, Running Away and Prostitution

Many youth who run away suffered abuse at home before they left:

- A third (34%) of runaway youth (girls and boys) reported sexual abuse before leaving home.
- One in four runaway youth (43%) percent reported physical abuse before they left home.
- 80% of runaway and homeless girls reported having ever been sexually or physically abused.

Youth who are on the street are at risk of becoming involved in prostitution:

- Each year, 1.6 to 2.8 million youth run away.
- About half (55%) of street girls engage in formal prostitution.
- Most girls involved in formal prostitution (75%) work for a pimp.
- Both boys and girls become victims of prostitution. The average age of boys who become victims is 11-13.

Child Abuse, Runaway Youth, and Prostitution

“The majority of American victims of commercial sexual exploitation tend to be runaway or thrown away youth who live on the streets who become victims of prostitution.” (Source)

Most children who become victims of prostitution are runaway or thrown away youth who live on the streets. Often these children suffered abuse or abandonment at home and became involved in prostitution after they left home as a way to support themselves. While there are a few known instances of teenagers from stable homes becoming involved in prostitution, most minors who become involved in prostitution are not from stable homes.

Like many street prostitutes in the United States, children and teenagers who become victims of prostitution often have a history of abuse. According to the website of the National Runaway Switchboard, “80% of runaway and homeless girls reported having ever been sexually or physically abused.” However, it isn’t just runaway and homeless girls who are at risk; both boys and girls are exploited for commercial sex. The average age of children who become victims of prostitution in the United States is between 12 and 14 for girls and between 11 and 13 for boys and transgender youth.

Children and teenagers are vulnerable, especially those who have been abused or neglected or who are homeless and on the streets. Criminals take advantage of this vulnerability to lure minors into prostitution, often by promising to take care of them. Currently, it is estimated that 293,000 American youth are at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

Getting Involved: Report Child Abuse

In many cases, issues of justice and human dignity are interrelated. As we have seen in this edition of *JPIC Corner*, the problem of child abuse and neglect is very much related to the problems of runaway and homeless youth, street prostitution and the exploitation of minors for commercial sex. So working to prevent and end child abuse and neglect will likely also have an impact on these other areas. If you know or suspect that a child is being abused, or if you feel stressed or out of control with your child and need help, please call the National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-4-A-CHILD. The hotline is open 24/7 and all calls are anonymous.

National Child Abuse Hotline
1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)

Website: www.childhelp.org



Photo depicts model. For illustration only.

Getting Involved: Helping Protect Children



Photo depicts a model. For illustration only.

Currently, it is estimated that 293,000 American youth are at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation.



Photo for illustration only.

In the United States, about half of girls living on the street are involved in formal prostitution.

Runaway Youth: Resources for Parents Runaway Prevention

Building a healthy relationship with your child is one of the most important things you can do. Check out these resources for more information and tips:

- [Runaway Prevention Tips for Parents](#) (from the National Runaway Switchboard)
- [Signs My Teen Might be Thinking of Running Away from Home](#)
- Get parenting support. Parenting is not an easy job, but it is worth it. Check out the links below for tips, information, resources and support.
 - [OneToughJob.org](#) - an online resource for real-live parents
 - [KidsHealth.org](#) - for children's health and development
 - www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting - positive parenting tips

What to do if your child runs away

Check out the links below for resources about what to do in case your child does run away.

- [What To Do If Your Child Runs Away From Home](#)
- [What To Do When Your Child Returns Home](#)
- [Resources for parents of missing children](#)

Resources for Youth

Are you thinking about running away or concerned that you're going to have to leave your home? Have you run away from or left home and need help? Do you need to talk to someone who will listen? You can call the National Runaway Switchboard at 1-800-RUNAWAY any time of day, any day of the year. All calls are free and confidential, and live chat is available on their website: www.1800runaway.org.

1-800-RUNAWAY

Other resources

- [Tips and articles](#) from the National Runaway Switchboard
- Are you being bullied? Visit www.stopbullying.gov for information and resources.
- If you are being abused, call the Childhelp National Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD.
- If you need a safe place, visit www.nationalsafeplace.org to find a Safe Place Program in your state or text the word SAFE and your current loca-

tion to 69866 to receive the address of the Safe Place site nearest you as well as the contact number for the local youth shelter.

- If you are pregnant and need help, visit the [Pregnant? Need Help? MSC webpage](#) for a list of resources and phone numbers.
- [10 Things to Ask Yourself Before Running Away](#)

Human Trafficking and the Commercial Sex Industry

“The United Nations defines human trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons by improper means (such as force, abduction, fraud, or coercion) for an improper purpose including forced labor or sexual exploitation.”
(Source)

Human trafficking is a global problem, affecting over 12.3 million men, women and children in 161 countries, including the United States. Victims of trafficking are used for commercial sex or forced labor. Within the USA, domestic sex trafficking of children is a growing problem.

The good news is that there are resources available for victims of trafficking and many steps you can take to help overcome sex trafficking in the United States. Please see the box to the right for some ideas and resources. To report a tip or to connect with anti-trafficking resources in your area, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline at:

1-888-3737-888

The Catholic Church is very involved in the work to fight human trafficking. For instance, many women’s religious organizations sponsor the [Stop Trafficking!](#) newsletter and the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops administers a program](#) to provide services to survivors of human trafficking. One way we can all help fight human trafficking is to patronize companies that are committed to the protection of children from exploitation when we travel within the US or abroad. For instance, sexual exploitation often occurs in hotel rooms but some hotels have joined in the effort to overcome human trafficking. (See article: [Hotels Enabled Child Trafficking](#), page 7.) Look for companies that have signed the [Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism](#).

Related news:

- [Women religious to combat human trafficking for 2010 sporting events](#)
- [Visibility aids the fight against human trafficking](#)
- [Human trafficking remains largely in the shadows across the US](#)



Photo is for illustration only. Human trafficking is estimated to be a \$32 billion industry.

Get Involved: Resources

Get informed and be prepared

- [Learn more about Human Trafficking and ways to get involved on the USCCB website](#)
- [Tools for Service Providers and Law Enforcement](#)
- [Human Trafficking in the United States: A Fact Sheet for Schools](#)
- [A Parent’s Guide to Internet Safety](#)
- [Know the signs - Recognizing the Signs](#)

Take action

- [20 Ways You Can Help Fight Human Trafficking](#)
- [Resources for Child Victims of Prostitution](#)
- [If you have information about a potential trafficking situation, report a tip at the National Human Trafficking Resource Center.](#)
- [When traveling, patronize companies that have signed the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism \(see list of code members\)](#)

Please Join Us in Prayer

Please join us in prayer for the safety of children and teenagers, especially those experiencing difficult situations at home or who are homeless or far from home.

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