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Chapter 1

Introduction

This study of youth engaged in the sex trade in Miami, Florida included 264 interviews with young people, ages 13-24. This report captures the findings from these interviews, conducted between December 2010 and July 2011. In their interviews, respondents discussed their backgrounds, how they entered the sex trade (referred to as “the life”), how they make and spend money, how they work with customers, how they work with pimps and market facilitators, their health issues, their interactions with law enforcement, and their outlook for the future.

Needless to say, the responses to these questions include compelling and tragic stories. This report provides a qualitative discussion of the common themes and findings, while also painting a picture of these respondents’ varied experiences. There is certainly consistency in some responses, and trends emerge across the many interviews. However, it is difficult to typecast a quintessential experience based on these interviews. For instance, as indicated in the various segments of this report, these young people entered this lifestyle for different reasons. Many of these young people were not forcibly dragged into this work by pimps. In many cases, circumstances led them into the life, and recognition of the opportunity to generate income keeps them in the life.

Many of the respondents want to change the path they have been following and have hopes and dreams about the future. However, as detailed below, external circumstances and barriers keep them on their path. Many of these young people are low income and African American (typical of the diversity found in Miami) and struggling to survive. The world of exchanging sex for money, for many of these young people, while incredibly risky, is a manner of survival.

The study in Miami, Florida is part of a larger study, funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and overseen by the Center for Court Innovation, to fill the current gap in scientific knowledge regarding the size, needs, and characteristics of youth in the sex trade. Based on original research in six sites, including Atlantic City (NJ), the Bay Area (CA), Chicago (IL), Dallas (TX), Las Vegas (NV), and Miami, the larger study aims to estimate the size of the population of youth in the sex trade; to describe their characteristics, experiences, and health and service needs; to explore what services are available; and to

