

Parents Beware: Your Child May Be Next

If a **prostitute** shared her story, the preconceived notion may change from an **addict** choosing the lifestyle to a vulnerable child tricked into the industry. And it's happening in your backyard.

"Florida is in the top three states for **human trafficking** in America, where the average age of prostitution is 12 years old," says Bonnie Jo Daniels, project coordinator for Hope for Freedom at Christ Fellowship.

With the oversexualization of our culture and its blatant attack on our men, you maybe surprised how **sexual addiction** begins. Here is one example: A young boy gets a glimpse of pornography; his heart is stirred and body excited. Over the years, he secretly returns to this habit until one day the addiction leads him to a strip club. Eventually, he pays for sex with what he thinks is an 18-year-old. But she's really 16—and not prostituting of her own free will.

She's working because her pimp beats her and threatens to harm her family if she doesn't. **Trafficking**, where people control and exploit others, generates billions of dollars each year. It's considered one of the fastest-growing criminal industries in the world—and it's driven by greed. Due to easy and private access to the Internet, **escort services** flourish. But what most don't realize is that it's often a front for the **commercial sex trade industry** (trafficking).

Lysa McMillan of Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale's Outreach Ministry says, "Human life has been reduced to a mere commodity. There are two motivating factors: Men fuel the demand side by buying sex, and traffickers [men/women] make large sums of money selling a woman or child over and over again."

"It's not just touching one demographic," McMillan says. "You

might have a girl in a middle-class home, where everything on the outside would appear to be OK, but you don't know what's going on with her interaction on Facebook, who she's texting and if she battles with low self-esteem."

There are children on every level and socioeconomic category affected, especially if they have been abused.

"If you take that girl in that home who's already enduring sexual abuse, or maybe there's domestic violence, perhaps drugs in the home, she automatically becomes a more vulnerable candidate to target. She's broken, she's looking for love, attention and affirmation," McMillan explains.

There are many angles and schemes that are used to lure girls in. Here is one scenario:

Boy (we'll call him Mike) meets an insecure 12-year-old girl (we'll call her Olivia) at the arcade. They exchange numbers. Mike texts, calls and pretends to like Olivia. Soon Olivia thinks she's in love. Mike has played his part perfectly by buying her gifts and telling her how special she is to him. After weeks, maybe months, they start having sex. Then one night he coerces her into having sex with one of his friends, just once, if she really loves him.

Olivia complies.

Mike explains how they can make good money doing this (just for a little while, and then he will take care of her forever). Mike texts her appointments and picks Olivia up in the middle of the night, then drops her back home. Olivia catches on and wants out, but Mike beats her and threatens to harm her little brother. She's trapped, embarrassed and now brainwashed to feel she is worthless.

Mike tempts Olivia with less work if she befriends another young girl at school. Olivia takes the bait and grooms a new 11-year-old prospect (we'll call her Jill). Olivia takes Jill shopping, out for ice cream and invites her for sleepovers. After trust is built, she asks Jill to sleep over at her aunt's house (we'll call her Sue).

At this different location, an older woman portraying Aunt Sue builds Jill's trust by playing the part of the fun aunt. During one visit, Aunt Sue takes them to the salon and pays for haircuts and manicures. That night, Olivia and Jill play dress up and snap pictures of each other. All the while, Aunt Sue is posting these photos on her website.

The next innocent trip for ice cream takes them to a strange location.

The threats and beatings start; Jill is trapped. She becomes lethargic; her grades drop; she's uninterested in friends, loses weight and starts missing school. Jill has all the signs of a drug addict. Sadly, she's too humiliated and afraid to tell anyone what's been done to her in private.

It's a sick, twisted game. Pimps are smart, sometimes good looking, and they are no longer just men. Women and families are in it for the money too.

An estimated 100,000 to 300,000 children a year become victims of sex trafficking in America. Many runaway children are approached by a pimp within 48 hours after leaving home or foster care. Traffickers stroll bus stops, malls, airports, parking lots and schools in search for young recruits.

If these predators can track down the destitute, then why can't Christians intercept these girls? If we are going to protect our children, then parents, teachers and family members need to "be the eyes and ears in our community for our law enforcement," Daniels says.

If you are a parent and you are concerned about this issue of trafficking, then now is the time to be proactive. Ask your child questions, get involved in their life, and find out who they are hanging with and where they are spending their time. Your love and caring concern can be the exact thing that can save them from being another statistic.

For more information on this issue, contact Lysa McMillan

at *Lysa@* from Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale (Broward) or Bonnie Jo Daniels at *bonniejod@* from Christ Fellowship (Palm Beach). If you think you have come into contact with a victim of human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 888-3737-888 to get more information or begin the process of helping the victim.

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