



Teen Sex Slave Trade Hits Home

Sexual Predators Are Selling Young American Women Into Prostitution

Jan. 30, 2007 — - It sounds like something from a movie -- teens targeted and lured from malls and streets into prostitution.

Sadly, it's a reality for an increasing number of young women not just in foreign countries but in the United States as well. Those who end up trapped in modern-day sexual slavery call it "the life."

Mistreated, alone and living in a foster home, one young girl told ABC News her story. Sara, who asked that her name be changed to protect her identity, said she was seduced into "the life" by a man who claimed to love her when she was only 13-years-old.

"He told me things like nobody had ever told me. So I felt like a \$100 million," Sara said.

After professing his love, Sara's new friend sold her to a pimp for a mere \$100.

"I got sold. That's horrible. Like I was an animal," Sara said.

The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that between 100,000 and 3 million American kids under age 18 are involved in prostitution and they're often targeted by sexual predators.

"There are sexual predators... We call them pimps, traffickers," said Rachel Lloyd, director of GEMS, Girls Educational and Mentoring Services, an advocacy group that helps girls who have been sexually exploited. "Ultimately, they're predators who are out there specifically looking for vulnerable kids so that they can sell them,"

Lured by Big Promises

"Good Morning America" parenting contributor Anne Pleshette Murphy said the victims of teen trafficking aren't confined to any one demographic.

"These girls come from every walk of life, rich or poor, of all races," she said. "The common denominator is that they are vulnerable to these predators. An estimated 80 to 95 percent of children selling sex have a history of sexual abuse."

Often predators pose as legitimate professionals to capture their victims.

"There are girls that are literally kidnapped off the street, are thrown into a car," Lloyd said. "There are pimps who pose as model agency scouts."

Another woman, Miya, said the promise of a glamorous modeling career enticed her to leave her job at a mall when she was 18-years-old and run off with a couple who would end up exploiting her.

"He asked if it would be out of place if he said I was pretty. And I... was like, no," she said. "And he said that he was a model agent. He was looking for new models in the area. It seemed interesting."

According to Miya, the couple took her from Arizona to California, where she spent a week in the brutal world of sexual exploitation.

Ernie Allen of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children said constant moves -- a vagabond lifestyle -- is fairly common for recently abducted teens.

"They [kidnappers] move them to evade detection," he said. "The fact that they may be identified on the streets of one city, they certainly minimize, lessen the risk if they move them to another city."

Pop Culture Masks Horror of 'The Life'

While music videos, movies and magazines sometimes glorify the lifestyle of pimps and prostitutes, in reality, "the life" is far from glamorous.

"What you see in the movies...it's not like that," Sara said. "They don't tell you the part about the rapes. They don't tell you about getting beat up. They don't tell you that you might die, like, every day."

Popular culture also doesn't reveal how hard it is to escape.

"The kids are not involved in this terrible crime as a result of choice," Allen explained. "They are involved because of fear, because of force and because of actual physical and psychological harm."

According to Sara, even law enforcement officials let her down.

"I never got arrested because my pimp used to pay off cops, or I would end up having sex with the cops so that I wouldn't get locked up," she said.

Steps are being taken to protect girls from a fate similar to Sara's. President Bush recently re-authorized the trafficking victims protection law, strengthening the campaign against worldwide trafficking in people, especially the effort to combat the sex trade in the United States.

But for Sara, it took four years and numerous attempts before she finally escaped and got help. Today, she remains terrified of being discovered and dragged back into "the life." Still, she's moving ahead, one step at a time.

"I'm proud of myself because, like, at least I can go to sleep every night," she said. "At least I don't have to worry about being raped or ... being killed. I actually can go through a normal life without fear."

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