

**Recommendations in Support of a  
National Strategy to  
Combat Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)  
and the  
Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)**

**Recommendation #1.           *Protect the Children***

Children are the victims of sexual exploitation and only rarely can protect themselves against sexual assaults inflicted by trusted family members and other adults, especially when children themselves fail to recognize or give credence to the coercion and deception that accompanies CSE. Thus, efforts at protecting children from sexual exploitation must emphasize prevention as the first priority.

The findings obtained from this investigation underscore the importance of the following elements in a national strategy to prevent CSE and to protect children from its devastating consequences:

- A lead Federal agency, or consortium of such agencies, must be designated and given primary responsibility for protecting children from SEC;
- Sexually offending adults and juveniles, including “opportunistic” sexual exploiters of children, must be given the unequivocal message that “it is not okay” to sexually molest children;
- Children must be empowered to report incidents of illicit sexual contact between themselves and others to law enforcement and human service authorities;
- Local and state human service and law enforcement agencies must have access to the resources needed to investigate fully all reported cases of child sexual abuse and child sexual assault;
- Local and state human service and law enforcement agencies must have access to the resources needed to adequately supervise all cases of *substantiated* or *indicated* child sexual abuse over the long term;
- Local human service and law enforcement agencies must have the resources needed to assist runaway, throwaway and homeless youth from becoming victims of CSE;
- Local human service and law enforcement agencies must have access to resources needed to serve transient runaway and homeless youth who enter their communities; and,
- States and other jurisdictions must have access to the resources needed to cooperate fully with one another in monitoring the presence, location and activities of convicted child sexual offenders.

Parents, schools, child advocacy organizations, and youth groups need to work together in the development and dissemination of messages related to the protection of children from sexual exploitation. Public media, but especially television networks and the movie and recording industries, share a heavy responsibility for disseminating age-appropriate and accurate messages concerning the nature, extent and seriousness of CSE in contemporary American society.

**Recommendation #2.**                    *Target Adult Sexual Exploiters of Children For Punishment, Not the Children*

Sexually exploited children often are re-victimized by the very agencies that have been designed to assist them. This re-victimization takes several forms: 1) the treatment of sexually exploited children as *criminals* rather than as *victims* of sexual exploitation; 2) to the extent they occur at all, arrests of juveniles involved in prostitution rather than the pimps, traffickers, customers and other adults that benefit from the sexual exploitation of children; and 3) “benign neglect” by many agencies of the complex service needs of tens of thousands of runaway and homeless street youth that enter local communities as “transients.”

We strongly recommend that the focus of law enforcement and human service agencies shift in the following ways:

- that local and state law enforcement agencies shift their priorities away from the apprehension of sexually involved street youth to the arrest, prosecution and punishment of adult perpetrators of sex crimes against children—pimps, traffickers and customers;
- that Federal law enforcement agencies become more involved in the identification and prosecution of adults involved in national sex crime rings that include child sex among their “portfolio” of services; and
- that appropriate mechanisms be found for local and state human service agencies to work more cooperatively with law enforcement authorities in the identification and apprehension of adults who commit sexual crimes against children.

**Recommendation #3.**                    *Enforce More Fully Existing National and State Laws Relating to Child Sexual Exploitation*

This investigation has confirmed a pattern of “benign neglect” on the part of many law enforcement and human service agencies vis-à-vis the needs of sexually exploited children and youth. This pattern is reflected both in the comparatively low number of CSE cases currently being served by public agencies (relative to the large number of CSE cases this investigation has confirmed to exist) and the absence of written policies and procedures for dealing with CSE cases in all but a few agencies. The pattern prevails despite the existence of strong Federal, and usually state, laws designed to protect children from sexual exploitation.

We strongly recommend that the Federal government assume a leadership position in encouraging both its own agencies and those of state and local governments to implement fully all national and state laws pertaining to the protection of children from sexual exploitation. At a minimum, such interventions should encourage:

- all Federal agencies to develop strategic plans for implementing Federal laws related to the sexual exploitation of children that affect their mission;
- the creation of financial incentives to states and local governments for implementing all laws related to the sexual exploitation of children within their jurisdictions (e.g., planning grants); and,

- the development of a system of disincentives for use with governmental agencies that fail to comply with relevant laws pertaining to the sexual exploitation of children (e.g., withdrawal funds, reassignment of responsibilities to other agencies, court supervision, etc.).

**Recommendation #4.                    *Increase the Penalties Associated With Sexual Crimes Against Children***

While no one can forecast exactly the net impact of greater or enhanced criminal penalties in reducing CSE, there is an important logic for doing so. Penalty enhancement broadcasts the unmistakable message that CSE is a crime, not a viable, defensible personal choice. That is an important cultural and educational statement that seems atrophied in many places in the U.S., as well as in many foreign communities in which CSE is a brute fact of life (and saddening forced option).

Some persons involved in child trafficking were quite explicit about the “cost/benefit” ledger sheets they mentally drafted; on balance, involvement in the CSEC was judged to be more profitable and less risky than involvement in felony-level crimes.<sup>1</sup> This imbalance is an incentive to make one’s illicit money from CSE rather than drugs or other felony crimes. While not all decisions to engage in one illicit crime rather than another are made quite so rationally, the existing statutory imbalance sends a powerful message to those involved or considering involvement in CSE. The message is one of legal and cultural hypocrisy. Putting both messages back on point will do no harm and, one hopes, substantial good.

For these reasons, we recommend:

- taking action to tip the balance toward making the current net of CSE-relevant statutes more consistent in severity with other acts of commensurate seriousness, like drug and arms trafficking; and,
- convening a multidisciplinary group of legal and advocacy experts to draft a model penal code to inform and shape CSE-related legislation, perhaps doing so under the auspices of the American Bar Association, which has sanctioned such initiatives in the past.

**Recommendation #5.                    *Support Local Communities in Their Efforts to Strengthen Local and State Laws Pertaining to Child Sexual Exploitation***

At the same time that work is done by governmental and nongovernmental groups to change the penalty structure and hierarchy of statutes pertaining to CSE, work also needs to be done in strengthening those statutes that already exist. There are two avenues of redress. One is simply to apply the law when it is violated. Infrequent statutory application breeds blindness if not contempt for its content and message. The second is to impose a more even, or uniform, level of legal sanction when the sanction is in fact invoked, regardless of the frequency of use. Perhaps the most viable modality for advancing this twin agenda is through advocacy and groups of victims acting on behalf of sexually exploited children.

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<sup>1</sup> Many CSE offenses, at least at the local level, trigger comparatively minor, misdemeanor (municipal) “jail” time in comparison to other related offenses, like drug trafficking or distribution, which can carry major, felony (state) “prison” time.

Thus, we recommend the following:

- apply current statutes in a more consistent manner, doing so by taking steps to adopt sentencing guidelines, such as those used at the Federal level and in many states; and,
- develop sentencing guidelines for CSE by mounting a multi-state review of actual sentences meted out.

**Recommendation #6.                    *Establish a National Child Sexual Exploitation Intelligence Center (NCSEIC)***

This investigation has demonstrated the need for a full-time intelligence gathering and strategic planning apparatus for monitoring national trends related to CSE. To that end, we recommend that a *National Child Sexual Exploitation Intelligence Center* (NCSEIC) be established.

While uniquely focused on issues related to CSE, the goals and structure of the NCSEIC would be comparable to those of the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC): 1) to support national policy makers and law enforcement decision makers with strategic domestic CSE intelligence; 2) to support national counter CSE efforts; and 3) to conduct and report on a timely basis national, regional and state CSE threat assessments.

Collaborating agencies with the NCSEIC would include at least the following Federal departments and units in addition to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children: the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section of the U.S. Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Customs Service, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Family and Youth Services Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), The U.S. National Central Bureau (INTERPOL), the U.S. Marshall's Service, the Office For Victims of Crime of the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Office of Children's Issues of the U.S. Department of State, the Forensic Services Division of the U.S. Treasury Department, the U.S. Department of Labor, the U.S Department of Transportation, the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Criminal Investigative Divisions (CID) of the U.S. Department of Defense.

In addition to other responsibilities, the recommended functions of the NCSEIC would include:

- the development of a library of pornographic images that have been accepted by Federal and state courts as evidence of sexual crimes against children (for accessing by Federal prosecutors and others working in cooperation with Federal justice agencies);
- the conduct and dissemination of timely threat assessments of changing national, regional and state trends in CSE;
- the conduct and dissemination of timely threat assessments concerning the involvement of organized crime and other criminals in the commercial sexual exploitation of children; and,
- the promotion of continuing professional education of analysts, forensics specialists and others needed to carry out on-going threat assessments and strategic planning on matters pertaining to CSE.

**Recommendation #7.                    *Expand Federally Funded Multi-jurisdictional Task Forces on Child Sexual Exploitation Into All Major Federal and State Jurisdictions***

Federally-initiated multi-jurisdictional task forces on CSE have demonstrated great promise in the communities in which they are located (Whitcomb, 1995; Whitcomb & Eastin, 1998).<sup>2</sup> They have, for example, succeeded in several critical respects:

- sensitizing local communities to the dangers of sex crimes against children;
- promoting multi-jurisdictional cooperation in identifying, apprehending and prosecuting perpetrators of sex crimes against children;
- promoting new public-private partnerships in combating child pornography, juvenile prostitution, and trafficking in children for sexual purposes;
- strengthening local laws designed to protect children from sexual abuse, sexual assault and sexual exploitation; and,
- serving as focal points for promoting increasingly higher levels of public and continuing professional education concerning CSE both locally and nationally.

On the basis of their apparent effectiveness in combating sexual crimes against children, we recommend that Federally-funded *Multijurisdictional Task Forces on Child Sexual Exploitation* be established and systematically evaluated in all major Federal and state jurisdictions.

**Recommendation #8.                    *Expand Federally-Funded Internet Crimes Against Child (ICAC) Units Into All Major Federal and State Jurisdictions***

Federally-initiated *Internet Crimes Against Children* units have demonstrated great promise in the 30 communities in which they have been implemented.<sup>3</sup> They have succeeded, for example, in:

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<sup>2</sup> The current number of these task forces is unknown and their names vary from one jurisdiction to another, i.e., *Sexual Assault and Exploitation Felony Enforcement Team (SAFE)*, *Task Force on Child Sexual Exploitation*, etc. In all cases, these task forces are multi-jurisdictional and consist of a standing team of CSE experts who are representatives of federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. The task forces are dedicated to proactive and reactive investigation and prosecution of cases involving child sexual exploitation.

<sup>3</sup> In FY 2001, Congress appropriated \$6.49 million for the Internet Crime Against Children (ICAC) Task Force Program for state and local law enforcement to continue specialized cyber units to investigate and prevent child sexual exploitation. The ICAC program encourages communities to develop regional, multi-jurisdictional, and multi-agency responses to Internet crimes. Since their inception in 1998, ICAC Task Forces have arrested 420 offenders, identified hundreds of investigative targets, seized 825 computers, provided training to 10,000 prosecutors and law enforcement officers, and reached thousands of children, parents, and educators with information about safe online practices for children and teenagers. With the addition of 20 new regional task forces in FY 2000, the ICAC program is now providing forensic, investigative, and prevention services in 31 States (OJJDP, 2001:47).

- sensitizing local communities to the dangers of internet sex crimes against children;
- promoting multi-jurisdictional cooperation in identifying, apprehending and prosecuting perpetrators of internet sex crimes against children;
- promoting new public-private partnerships in combating electronically promoted sex crimes against children, including partnerships with internet service providers (ISPs);
- strengthening local laws designed to protect children from involuntary exposure to electronic pornography, sexual solicitations and sexual harassment; and,
- serving as focal points in the promotion of increasingly higher levels of public and continuing professional education concerning CSE both locally and nationally.

On the basis of their apparent effectiveness in combating electronic sex crimes against children, we recommend that Federally-funded *Internet Crimes Against Children* units be established and systematically evaluated in all major Federal and state jurisdictions.

**Recommendation #9.**                    *Enlarge the National Pool of Child Sexual Exploitation Experts and Specialists*

A serious shortage exists nationally in the number and types of specialists in CSE. These shortages are most apparent in the forensics area but also are manifest in judicial and prosecutorial agencies. An urgent need also exists for more social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, educators, physicians, lawyers, police officers, coroners and others with special expertise in CSE.

We recommend that the Federal government:

- expand significantly its current programs of continuing education focused on increasing the national pool of legal, correctional and human service professionals with specialized expertise in the nature, extent, dynamics and impact of sexual exploitation on children and their families;<sup>4</sup>
- promote increased attention to CSE content and practices in the curricula and training programs of all professional disciplines that share responsibility for assisting sexually exploited children and their families; and,
- promote increasingly higher levels of interdisciplinary education and cooperation in the field of CSE.

**Recommendation #10.**                    *Promote Effective Public/Private Partnerships For Combating Child Sexual Exploitation*

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<sup>4</sup> Existing efforts include those sponsored by selected federal agencies for their own staff engaged in the investigation of CSE cases (e.g., U.S. Customs Service, U.S. Postal Inspection Service) and those provided by private organizations through contractual arrangements with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to other federal and private agencies--the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Fox Valley Technical College (Connelly & Laney, 2001).

A successful national campaign to combat CSE will require active participation and coordination of efforts between and among all public and private stakeholders committed to the prevention of CSE and to the protection of its victims. Among others, these stakeholders include:

- governmental agencies and units charged with leadership responsibility in combating CSE at the local, state and Federal levels;
- nongovernmental organizations and agencies that provide direct services to sexually exploited children and their families;
- associations and networks of sexually exploited children and youth;
- associations and networks of parents and guardians of sexually exploited runaway, throwaway, homeless and otherwise missing children;
- nongovernmental organizations engaged in advocacy, research, and educational activities on behalf of sexually exploited children nationally and internationally;
- nongovernmental organizations engaged in advocacy, research, and educational activities on behalf of adult victims of domestic violence and CSE;
- primary and secondary school educators;
- businesses and other commercial organizations that profit from the commercial sexual exploitation of children (e.g., internet service providers, hotel/motel chains, transportation vendors, travel agencies);
- foundations and other public benefit fiduciary organizations that provide financial support to programs serving sexually exploited children and their families; and,
- representatives of the public media (including news print, television, radio, the film industry, etc.).

We recommend that the Federal government give programmatic and fiscal leadership to:

- the development of local, state and national councils (coalitions and task forces) of public and private stakeholders committed to the elimination of CSE;
- the development by these councils (coalitions and task forces) of multi-year strategic plans that include specific goals and timetables for measuring and reducing the prevalence of CSE within their communities; and,
- the development of nationally linked coordinating mechanisms whereby local and state strategic plans for the elimination of CSE can be integrated into a comprehensive national plan of action.

**Recommendation #11*****The Need For More Specialized Studies of Perpetrators of Child Sexual Exploitation and Their Victims***

The present investigation represents a unique “first generation” inquiry into the nature, extent, dynamics and seriousness of CSE in the U.S.. This investigation has uncovered many surprising, and unsettling, facts about the near epidemic nature of CSE in contemporary American society. We have reported these findings in considerable detail. Even so, much more needs to be understood about the causes and extent of CSE, especially among those sexually vulnerable populations of children and youth that are hidden from public view.

We recommend that additional research be undertaken in the following areas:

- understanding more fully those aspects of American collective life that appear to contribute directly to the CSEC—including changing societal values and mores; weakening family structures; the persistence of male dominance over females; the apparent unclarity on the part of many adults concerning the right of children not to be physically, emotionally or sexually violated;
- the development of more detailed profiles of adults who we have identified as either “transients” (i.e., military personnel, long haul truck drivers, conventioners, members of motorcycle gangs, sex tourists) or “opportunistic” sexual exploiters of children—a significant number of whom are married men with children of their own;
- the development of more detailed profiles of juvenile sexual offenders (i.e., older siblings, neighbors, children of family acquaintances) who exploit younger children already are known to them;
- the development of more detailed profiles and modes of operation of “pimps” and others (both older juveniles and adults) who systematically promote the commercial sexual exploitation of juveniles;
- the development of more detailed profiles and modes of operation of national and international “traffickers” of children for sexual purposes;
- the nature and extent of the CSEC among youth who self identify as sexual minorities--including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth;
- the nature and extent of the CSEC among girls in gangs, especially those in male-controlled gangs, ethnically organized gangs, and Native American tribal gangs;
- the nature and extent the CSEC among American youth who cross international borders (especially into Mexico) in pursuit of cheaper drugs, alcohol and sex with child nationals of those countries;
- the nature and extent of commercial sex among middle income and other comparatively “well-off” youth living in their own homes who prostitute themselves for money in order to purchase more expensive clothing, jewelry and drugs;
- the nature and extent of the CSEC among youth living in poverty, particularly those living in public housing;

- the international dimensions of the CSEC with a U.S. nexus, including American youth who are trafficked outside the U.S. for sexual purposes and the foreign age-dependent children and youth who are trafficked into the U.S.;
- the near- and long-term impact of sexual exploitation on children and youth as they mature into adults; and,
- cost (and profit) estimates associated with the CSEC.

The road ahead to protect America's children and youth from CSE and the CSEC is long, and success is uncertain. After having concluded this *first generation research* effort, however, what is clear to us is the need for collateral *first generation policy development* and *strategic planning* in dealing with CSE and the CSEC at the local, state, national, and, because of the great human mobility involved, international levels. These developments must engage the talents and resources of all those persons and organizations working to protect children from CSE and these efforts must be adequately financed. Nothing short of a comprehensive and well-coordinated approach to enhancing the nation's capacity for preventing and protecting children from the horrors of CSE will succeed.

**Source:** Estes, Richard J. and Neil Alan Weiner. 2001. The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the U.S., Canada and Mexico (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work).

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