



LGBTQ YOUTH AND SEX TRAFFICKING



IOFA and Courtney's House | Fact Sheet 2018

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Traffickers often exploit vulnerabilities of youth to compel them into sex trafficking.¹ LGBTQ² youth without a strong support system are trafficked at a higher rate than their straight peers.³ LGBTQ youth are more vulnerable as they are more likely to leave or be forced to leave home as a result of family not understanding their gender identity or sexual orientation. Transgender and other gender nonconforming youth have additional issues receiving access to shelters separated by binary gender making them even more vulnerable to trafficking.

LGBTQ HAVE INCREASED VULNERABILITIES. SOME INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

- Lack of familial and social supports
- Homelessness (one report found that 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ)⁴
- Discrimination and misconception by family members, peers, community, social service agencies, and law enforcement
- Higher rates of abuse and sexual violence (LGBTQ youth are 7.4 times more likely to experience acts of sexual violence)⁵
- Feelings of hopelessness or shame
- Lack of safe shelter and fewer resources/employment opportunities
- Difficulty or fear in reaching out for assistance due to concerns that they will be mistreated or not believed
- Need for hormone treatments that youth cannot afford on their own or before they reach the legal age of 18 (Traffickers may offer to provide youth with these treatments)

Traffickers seek to meet the youth's needs and offer a sense of family protection or love to build rapport and loyalty, potentially preventing the youth from speaking out. Accordingly, it is also important to acknowledge that LGBTQ youth may be trafficked in circumstances different than traditional pimp-controlled⁶ or gang-controlled⁷ sex trafficking. Some LGBTQ youth report being coerced into commercial sex or labor trafficking under the control of a house parent (ie. "Mama" or "Godmama") or engaging in sexual acts in exchange for place to stay and other basic needs.

¹ Sex trafficking is the "recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act" for remuneration in the form of money, food, shelter, or another valued entity. Evidence of force, fraud, or coercion is not a necessary for youth under the age of 18. Youth under the age of 18 who trade a sex act for something of value is automatically considered a victim of a crime under the U.S. Federal Trafficking of Victims Protection Act of 2000.

² This includes Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer identifying individuals; also encompasses transexual, transgender, genderqueer/gender non-conforming, cisgender, intersex, pansexual, asexual and two-spirit identifying individuals

³ Polaris, "Breaking Barriers: Improving Services for LGBTQ Human Trafficking Victims." 2015

⁴ The Palette Fund, True Colors Fund, and the Williams Institute, "The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Homeless Youth Provider Survey", 2012

⁵ Sutter Health Palo Alto Medical Foundation, "High Risk of Homelessness," 2016

⁶ Reference Pimp-Control Sex Trafficking Fact Sheet

⁷ Reference Youth Sex Trafficking and Gangs Fact Sheet

Furthermore, traffickers do not care about a victim's sexual orientation or identity and may force youth to have sex commit sex acts outside of the youth's sexual preferences. This may cause an additional level of shame for the youth.

WORKING WITH LGBTQ WHO MAY HAVE BEEN TRAFFICKED FOR SEX

- Do not assume that all youth are heterosexual and/or gender-conforming
- Ask all youth which pronouns they prefer to use for themselves
- Understand that youth may have differing levels of comfort in disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity
- Do not assume that youth's sexual practices in the "life" match their sexual orientation and preferences outside the "life" (i.e. do not assume that a male who had sexual encounters with other men identifies as gay)
- Do not assume that LGBTQ youth are identifiable by stereotypical habits, mannerisms, or behaviors
- Build rapport and provide continued support
- Convey a consistently non-judgmental attitude
- If a youth does disclose their identity, review confidentiality and case tracking procedures to ensure that the individual feels safe and comfortable
- Respect the privacy pertaining to their gender identity or sexual orientation as this may have not been disclosed to a parent or primary caretakers
- Create safety plans⁸ for youth that accommodate to the youth's specialized needs;
- Offer the youth support to meet specialized needs and/or referrals to vetted LGBTQ resources and organizations in the community



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⁸ Reference IOFA and Courtney's House Safety Planning and Youth Sex Trafficking Fact Sheet