

DOMESTIC MINOR SEX TRAFFICKING

MEDIA RELEASE



For Release on March 24, 2008
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U.S. Children are Victims of Sex Trafficking: Assessments of Service Delivery and Provision Reveal Gaps and Challenges

Washington DC – Shared Hope International (SHI) has identified a startling trend: **American children are victims of the sex trade and they are being trafficked within the United States.** SHI research reveals that Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking (DMST) is a critical problem in many locations across the U.S.

Human rights investigations by SHI have verified that disturbing numbers of American children are lured and forced into prostitution. These innocent victims are supplying a demand for paid sex, a human commodity that SHI investigators find horrifyingly easy to buy.

"If you pay the price you can get what you want, and I can get it for you. Now if you want something really young, that \$200, it's just going to cost you a little bit more than that." A trafficker says to an undercover SHI investigator.

American children are prostituted by pimps on the streets, sold over the Internet, and exploited through pornography and strip dancing. The federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act provides that any minor exploited in the commercial sex market is a trafficking victim... yet SHI has identified trafficked children incarcerated across the country for prostitution and related charges.

"I always felt like a criminal. I never felt like a victim at all," says "Tonya", a teenage trafficking victim who was lured into prostitution by a pimp at age 12. *"Victims don't do time in jail, they work on the healing process. I was a criminal because I spent time in jail."*

SHI has found that these children are often labeled as "child prostitutes". In the few instances they are properly identified as victims, there are no protective shelter options and they are often placed in detention facilities with juveniles who have committed serious offenses.

"At an average age of 12 these children are lured and snatched by traffickers. It is a severe injustice when American girls are held in physical and mental slavery and then punished for the crime that is committed against them" said SHI President and Founder U.S. Congresswoman Linda Smith (1994-1998).

SHI was awarded funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance (DOJ/BJA) to conduct field assessments in 10 U.S. locations examining two critical issues: the identification of DMST victims and the service delivery to these victims. The assessments will be released starting the last week of March. The locations include: Las Vegas, NV; Clearwater, FL; New Orleans/Baton Rouge, LA; Dallas, TX; Independence, MO; Ft. Worth, TX; The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; San Antonio, TX; Salt Lake City, UT; and Buffalo, NY.

About Shared Hope International

Shared Hope International rescues and restores women and children in crisis. For almost a decade, SHI has worked diligently around the world in partnership with local groups to prevent trafficking and to rescue and restore the victims of sexual slavery, bringing hope to women and children everywhere. For more information visit www.sharedhope.org.

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