



## Many Prostituted Juveniles Treated As Offenders, Not Victims

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DURHAM, N.H. — A new national study finds that nearly a third of the prostituted juveniles taken into custody by police are treated more as criminal offenders than as victims of the pimps and customers who sexually abuse them. Study authors say this reflects controversy and confusion nationwide among criminal justice authorities about how to handle this problem.

“Increasingly, police are seeing the prostitution of juveniles as a form of child abuse and exploitation,” said the study’s lead author, Kimberly Mitchell, of the University of New Hampshire’s Crimes against Children Research Center. “But in some communities, police just view it as an extension of adult prostitution, and treat these young victims as delinquents.”

The study, “Conceptualizing Juvenile Prostitution as Child Maltreatment: Findings from the National Juvenile Prostitution Study,” identified cases through a nationwide survey of law enforcement agencies and interviews with police who had dealt with specific cases of juvenile prostitution. It appears in the February issue of the journal *Child Maltreatment*.

According to the study, prostituted juveniles are more likely to be treated as victims by police when they are younger than 16, female, frightened, dirty, or identified as runaways. They are more likely to be treated as offenders when police encounter the youth directly through community patrols and undercover operations directed at controlling prostitution in general, as opposed to coming to attention through a self-report or one made by a relative or community member.

The study also found that law enforcement in many communities is doing little to identify and deal with prostituted juveniles; although some agencies are addressing this problem directly through special task forces aimed at combating the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Mitchell said that the problem of prostituted juveniles is complicated and varied, and requires a much more coordinated set of interventions than it currently receives. Many of these youth live in dire circumstances. They are often seriously abused, and are alienated, isolated, substance addicted, homeless and have prior criminal records.

“They need police working with child protection, mental health, and medical authorities, all with specialized training in responding to the enormous needs in this population,” she said.

Created in 1998, the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC) works to combat crimes against children by providing high-quality research and statistics to the public, policy makers, law enforcement personnel, and other child welfare practitioners. CCRC is concerned with research about the nature of crimes including child abduction, homicide, rape, assault, and physical and sexual abuse as well as their impact. Associated with the CCRC is an internationally recognized group of experts who have published numerous books and articles concerning the incidence and impact of violence against children. Visit the center online at <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/index.html>.

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