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# Child prostitution problem in Jefferson County examined in study

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By Jeremy Gray -- The Birmingham News

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BIRMINGHAM, Alabama The sexual exploitation of children for money, whether it's pornography or prostitution, is an often unseen but very real problem in Jefferson County, according to a study being released today.

The study, funded by the Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham, is based on surveys of 56 county social service providers. In addition, the study also conducted seven interviews with officials from the FBI, the state Department of Human Resources and local social service organizations.

All seven of those interviewed reported encountering child prostitution in the course of their work and 47 percent of the social service providers who completed the survey stated they had as well.

"So often this is an invisible crime. This study shows it's really happening in Jefferson County," said Sara Jane Camacho, program director of Freedom to Thrive, an anti-human trafficking organization, and co-author of the study.

Tammy Hopper, a contributor to the report and CEO of Youth & Family Services Network, a nonprofit that assists organizations serving youth and families, said those surveyed and interviewed were asked to only consider recent cases of child exploitation in their responses. She said the group did not have an estimate on the number of such cases because they often go unreported.

"Invisibility: A Study of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Jefferson County" also reports:

- 87 percent of survey respondents said children who are sexually exploited in Jefferson County are working for a pimp or are being pimped by a parent.

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- Of the social service providers surveyed, 47 percent said the pimps identified by their organization were members of the child's family.
- Of the identified victims, 79 percent are local to Jefferson County and consist of an equal number of blacks and whites -- 38 percent each.
- 53 percent of young people identified as victims of commercial sexual exploitation in Jefferson County were homeless youth.
- 65 percent of survey respondents said they had not been trained to recognize children who were being sexually exploited and 76 percent said they did not know what questions to ask to find out if a child had been the victim of such a crime.
- 82 percent of those surveyed said there were no programs in place designed to specifically help the victims and 45 percent said there wasn't a safe place to take them.

The problem, in Jefferson County and nationwide, comes in many forms, Camacho said, from a family member pimping out a child to buy drugs or pay rent, to highly organized criminal operations that constantly move child prostitutes between states.

The majority of the cases identified by the county's child advocacy centers involve the use of children in pornography, the report stated.

The report referenced two recent cases prosecuted in Birmingham's federal court:

- D'marcus Ward, of Minden, La., also known as "Boss," was charged in March 2010 with bringing two teenage girls from Atlanta to Birmingham for prostitution and advertising them online. Federal court records show Ward pleaded guilty and in February was sentenced to nearly eight years in prison.
- Nathaniel Russell Glass in February pleaded guilty after being arrested for attempting to entice a teenage girl to engage in prostitution for \$75 at a Hoover hotel. The 14-year-old girl Glass expected to meet was really a federal agent. On May 10, Glass was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

Since the report was completed, other cases have ended up in Jefferson County courtrooms.

In one case, Tracy Shawn Guthrie, 34, of Chickamauga, Ga., was sentenced to 10 years in federal prison on May 6 after he pleaded guilty to attempting to entice a child to engage in illegal sexual activity.

Guthrie was arrested in 2010 when he walked into the restroom of Arby's in Vestavia Hills expecting to meet a 14-year-old boy for sex. Instead, Guthrie was greeted by officers from Homeland Security Investigations and the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force.

Guthrie had offered to pay "enough money for food" in exchange for sex, court records show.

Two weeks after Guthrie's sentencing, a Jefferson County district judge sent a case of alleged child prostitution to a grand jury.

In that case, Amber Michelle Abram is accused of pimping her 11-year-son to Cleveland Andre Jointer in exchange for cash and crack cocaine. The child's grandmother, Alesha Abram, is also charged in that case.

Jefferson County District Attorney Brandon Falls said the Abram investigation marks the first time his office has prosecuted a case under a human trafficking law passed by the state in 2010.

While there was already a federal law banning human trafficking in place, Barry Matson, deputy




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director of the Alabama District Attorney's Association said the state law was needed because, before its passage, such acts could only be prosecuted on the state level under charges such as "promoting prostitution" or kidnapping.

Helping victims recover, punishing those responsible and preventing other children from being sexually exploited will take the combined efforts of police, social workers and the community at large, those interviewed for the report said.

Phil Cain, associate director of Family Connection, said those who battle homelessness are in the early stages of starting a shelter for teenagers in downtown Birmingham, a project he said is desperately needed. He's not sure when the shelter will open.

Shelter is just one of the many needs of young people who are victims of sexual exploitation, Cain said.

"They need to know they're safe; they need trauma counseling. It's intensive work, and those needs need to be filled more than they are right now," Cain said.

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**smauggy**

June 08, 2011 at 8:32AM

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And the county grows less equipped to deal with this train wreck daily. Thanks again, Beason.

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**mrsrobinson**

June 08, 2011 at 9:35AM

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You would think we would be smart enough to separate kids that are exploited by predators

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from consenting adults looking for adult entertainment in private. Until we separate the 2 and decriminalize the consenting adults in the adult industry nothing will change.

The predators who prey on this teens are laughing as the know law enforcement can't police even 1% of the adult industry on a good day.

We are also creating these stupid laws that GIVE PREDATORS PERMISSION TO EXPLOIT OUR YOUTH, Utah just passed law giving the parents who exploit their kids ONLY 2 YEARS, why they wouldn't get 25 years for human trafficking, or 5 years for child endangerment is ironic, and how about if you get caught with a underage escort you can just pay a 10,000 fine.

Until we start handing out 25 years to ANYONE WHO EXPLOITS OR TRIES TO ENGAGE IN A SEX ACT WITH A MINOR, we are not protecting these kids.

WE can't keep enabling these UNGOVERNABLE TEENS who runaway with their boyfriends,who then end up exploiting them, and why are the parents not being held reasonable for the COST OF RESCUING THEIR UNGOVERNABLE TEEN, and why do we just send the teens home to run off again. Isn't this why we have reform schools, boot camps, Foster homes, dept of child protective services and juvenile courts? These teens are not trying to ESCAPE POVERTY like the middle aged escorts, these kids have every FREE SERVICE AVAILABLE TO THEM, housing, health care free education, and counseling. Try getting any of these services once you turn 18.

We spent 250 million last year to arrest 80,000 people for prostitution, and we could have housed and fed 80,000 women and children for over 10 years with 250 million. This is a BIG BUSINESS for law enforcement, it is creating JOBS FOR THEM,many new privately run jails and medical providers make BILLIONS each year, and meanwhile we are letting 40,000 violent offenders out early in CA and remember the guy who held the girl captive in his backyard for 17 years while he was on parole and a registered sex offender, they claimed they did not have THE MAN POWER TO MONITOR HIM, now if they went after PREDATORS with the same zest that they stalk online middle aged escorts, maybe we would then have the right group in custody. The USA has more people in jail than any other country in the world and 65 % are non violent crimes, and these laws are also applied differently depending on ones gender, race and social status. Its the worst form of discrimination I have ever seen and we use to treat GAY peoe just as badly.

These kids are not the only victims we have a man who has buried the bodies of 8 escorts in Long Island and they think he is an ex cop.

The cops are int he new daily for abusing women, some are opening their own escort services and forcing women to give them their hard earned money, we had a Boston Courthouse clerk threaten 3 women for sex acts in a holding cell, and he was only given 2 years even thought he violated these womens civil rights, we had the chief of police in PA who engaged in sex acts with 13 women and then arrested them.

Its time we start looking at how we are going to PROTECT ALL WOMEN & CHILDREN and why have we taken the right away form escorts to dial 911, as if they do all the cops do is take them to jail and not even investigate what claims they have reported.

Your tax dollars are being badly misused, Law enforcement already has way too much money their budgets to be stalking people online.

YOUR TAX DOLLARS AT WORK.

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**mark910BannedAgain2** June 08, 2011 at 9:46AM

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Great, another thing we can lead the nation in. Gonna be hard to convict these folks and help their victims with the cuts that are a coming.

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**WestPointHumble** June 08, 2011 at 10:25AM

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If you boiled the perpetrators in oil, it would cut down on this problem.

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**Hunter** June 08, 2011 at 11:40AM

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