

WHY DEFINITIONS MATTER

Eliminating the Third Party Control Barrier to Identifying Juvenile Sex Trafficking Victims

Shared Hope International's JuST Response Policy Paper: Eliminating the Third Party Control Barrier to Identifying Juvenile Sex Trafficking Victims explains how incomplete definitions of sex trafficking harm victims and undermine the fight against sex trafficking.

Misidentification is a primary barrier to services for juvenile sex trafficking victims. To help close this gap, all commercially sexually exploited children must be identified as sex trafficking victims, whether they have been sold **or bought** for sex.

Failing to include the conduct of buyers as a crime of sex trafficking narrows the definition of juvenile sex trafficking to exclude the victimization of minors who are not controlled by a trafficker. The best way to ensure juvenile victims, with or without a trafficker, are not blamed for their own exploitation—but instead have access to services—is to hold buyers accountable as sex trafficking offenders.

Federal law was recently clarified to ensure that all victims are recognized, whether a trafficker is identified or not; now state legislatures—and state and federal agencies—need to eliminate this requirement to promote identification of all commercially sexually exploited minors as juvenile sex trafficking victims and ensure provision of appropriate services.

WHO DOES THIS IMPACT?

The victims most adversely impacted by requiring identification of a trafficker or third party are often the most vulnerable—severely trauma-bonded youth who do not recognize their own victimization and runaway and homeless youth who may exchange sex without the involvement of a “trafficker.”

Societal perceptions influence response to sex trafficking. A key component of changing the culture that perpetuates sex trafficking is challenging stigmatizing perceptions of victims and shifting the stigma to their exploiters, including buyers.

Survivors, service providers, first responders, social workers, and anyone working with juvenile sex trafficking survivors are affected by how the federal government and states define juvenile sex trafficking. Eligibility and access to services through state and federal agencies, as well as funding streams stand to benefit from reaching a consensus definition that incorporates all juvenile victims.

For advocates, availability of victim rights and benefits may be tied to the criminal definition of sex trafficking. Some victims may be denied rights provided to others if they cannot or will not disclose a third party trafficker.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Implement protocols that ensure proper identification of juvenile sex trafficking victims.

Advocate for needed legislative and regulatory changes.

Promote correct identification of sex trafficking victims in training for first responders, medical personnel, teachers, social workers, service providers and the community.

Read the full report at www.sharedhope.org/3rdpartypolicypaper