

Human Trafficking

Consider the domestic minor sex trade – this is a form of human trafficking.

Often begins with someone “grooming” a minor – seduction vs. abduction.

Target a minor, and begin “selling the dream” – going to have a significant relationship, give them whatever it seems they’re missing, take them away. However, first money is needed to start the new life, and, without any skills, the minor is convinced to engage in prostitution. Prostitution can start as survival sex – for basic life needs. After the first trick, it becomes business only, minor is controlled by both physical and psychological threats.

Pimp controls who they talk to, where they sleep, and often plays the victims against each other.

They will take the victim away from her home town, take away ID, cell phone, and money.

The victims consider the whole situation their fault, they don’t want to incriminate the pimp; they have a lot of shame, and they believe that they got themselves into this situation.

In the Washington area, there has been a growth (or perhaps increased recognition) that minors have become victims of the sex trade. 81 minors in Seattle rescued from the sex trade in 2010; vs. 41 the prior year, and 31 the year before that. There is a corridor of this trade across the interstate highways in our state, in areas such as Bellingham, Sedro-Wooley, and Tri-Cities.

On patrol, we get the annoying call of the runaway juvenile – this call irritates the patrol officer, because now the officer is stuck for several hours trying to figure out what to do with the kid. When we get the call of the runaway, or juveniles involved in a disturbance at a mall or transit center, we want to look for indications of trafficking. A child who is a runaway 3 or more times in a calendar year has a large likelihood of being sucked into illegal sex trade.

When we see an apparent runaway on the street or a possible drug dealer across the street, we usually go after the drug dealer, because it is an arrest where we can put someone in jail. However, in this situation, the runaway could be being controlled by the drug dealer as part of the sex trade, and we may want to consider contacting the runaway. First time drug offenses can get no jail time, but first time offense for “pimping” a minor can carry an eight year sentence.

Sometimes cops don’t focus on the “Johns” in prostitution cases. However, with minors, this is a felony for the Johns. Arresting them as well could lead to a decline in this type of prostitution.

Also, victims may get involved in “masking” offenses, such as shoplifting, to make money for the pimp. Look at their history, and the types of items they are stealing.

The bottom line: do not get annoyed at the runaway call, do some investigating; there are resources to help you and take over the investigation if you think you have a trafficking case. The Innocence Lost Task Force – joint task force with the FBI and local agencies. They will respond.