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STATEMENT OF
ROBERT A. PETERSON,
SENIOR ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
HUMAN RESOURCES DIVISION
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SELECT EDUCATION
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON
TEENAGE PROSTITUTION AND CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

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SUMMARY OF GAO TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON SELECT
EDUCATION, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR,
REGARDING TEENAGE PROSTITUTION AND CHILD PORNOGRAPHY,
JUNE 24, 1982

GAO's work has not led to a reliable estimate of the extent of teenage prostitution or child pornography; however, teenage prostitution has increased over the past five years, and despite a drop in commercial child pornography few believe the number of children involved in pornography has decreased.

Many sexually exploited children have run away from unhappy homes, been abused and neglected, been underachievers in school and become involved in prostitution and/or pornography either in search of fulfillment or simply to survive. Sexually exploited children suffer emotionally and/or physically from their experiences.

While services such as crisis intervention, counseling, food, shelter, medical care and job training may be available through several sources, children who want to change their way of life generally must seek out these services on their own.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee.

I am pleased to be here today to discuss the information we developed at the Subcommittee's request on teenage prostitution and child pornography and the programs that exist to help sexually exploited children.

Studies performed by others coupled with the information we gathered, primarily through questionnaires to the States and the 22 largest cities and their police departments, provide a reasonable basis to conclude that

--teenage prostitution has increased over the past

five years and

--despite a drop in commercial child pornography,

few believe the number of children involved in pornography has decreased.

Studies show that sexually exploited children are not a homogeneous group. At the same time, however, many exploited children are runaways who have had an unhappy home life, been neglected or abused by their parents, been underachievers in school and become involved in prostitution or pornography either in search of fulfillment or simply to survive. There is general agreement that sexually exploited children suffer emotionally and/or physically from their experiences.

Finally, while an array of programs exists that can help exploited children, those who want to change their way of life must, for the most part, seek out the services available.

THE EXTENT OF TEENAGE PROSTITUTION
AND CHILD PORNOGRAPHY IS UNKNOWN

A literature search produced a wide range of estimates on the extent of teenage prostitution and child pornography, but identified no estimate that could be considered a reliable gauge of the problems nationwide. The estimates of the number of teenage prostitutes ranged from the tens of thousands to 2.4 million. Several estimates were based on "gut hunches" or an assumption that teenage prostitutes comprised a given percentage of all prostitutes. The bases for other estimates were not stated.

Estimates we obtained from officials of States, cities, and police departments from the questionnaires, while of value in providing reliable information for several jurisdictions were not sufficient to allow us to estimate the extent of the problem nationally because some of the most populous jurisdictions did not provide estimates. Officials from States, cities, and police departments generally believed the number of teenage prostitutes had increased during the last 5 years. We think it significant that none of the 54 respondents believed the number of male or female teenage prostitutes had decreased.

Regarding child pornography, our literature review identified only one estimate of the number of children who participate in pornographic productions. The president of an organization providing drug rehabilitation, educational programs and health care to youths estimated that as many as 3,000 children nationwide participate in such productions. The basis for this estimate was not explained.

State officials responding to our questionnaire generally believed that the number of children who were the subjects of pornography had increased over the past 5 years. While some expressed the view that the number remained constant, none believed there had been any decrease. City and police department officials generally believed that the number of children in pornography had remained fairly constant. A few city and police officials expressed the view that the number had increased and a lesser number believed there had been a decrease. None, however, believed the number of children involved in pornography had decreased greatly.

Our literature search and discussions with Federal, State, and local officials indicated that commercially produced pornography, i.e., pornography produced for profit, had declined. The factors cited for the decline were: (1) the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation Act of 1977 (Public Law 95-225), (2) tougher State laws on child pornography, (3) stricter enforcement of obscenity laws involving child pornography, (4) media attention, (5) the tendency of juries to convict child pornographers as opposed to adult pornographers, and (6) the banning in 1979 of child pornography in Sweden and Denmark which had been the major overseas suppliers of child pornography.

Studies and law enforcement officials agreed that much of the child pornography today is produced and distributed underground through an informal but close-knit network of pedophiles (adults with an abnormal sexual desire for children).

Their pornography is homemade, rather than commercially produced, and is traded rather than sold.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SEXUALLY EXPLOITED CHILDREN

The literature indicates that many teenage female prostitutes are products of a poor home environment characterized by violence, lack of parental love and affection, and drug and alcohol abuse. Many have been the victims of sexual abuse, including incest and rape, and have experienced physical abuse and neglect at home. They often see prostitution as a life of adventure, glamour, and excitement, and as an easy way to earn money. Many have run away from home and are dependent on their income from prostitution for survival. Studies show that many teenage female prostitutes have low socio-economic backgrounds, have done poorly in school, have a poor self image, have limited job opportunities and do not enjoy their lives as prostitutes.

To obtain first hand information on teenage prostitution we interviewed four female teenage ex-prostitutes enrolled in rehabilitation programs. All of the girls had a troubled home life and had been taken into custody for running away or for prostitution. They learned of the rehabilitation program either through the police or the group homes in which they were placed. These young girls ranged in age from 13 to 16 when they became prostitutes. Three had been involved with pimps who took most, if not all, of the girls' earnings of from \$200 to \$500 per night. All three were beaten by their pimps.

Studies have shown some women felt there were both positive and negative changes in their lives as a result of having been juvenile prostitutes. The positive effects consisted of general changes such as becoming "more experienced" and "more mature". The negative effects include emotional damage, a loss of self respect, feeling of shame or guilt, and difficulty in adjusting to a life outside of prostitution.

A recent study of juvenile prostitution stated that many male teenage prostitutes are gay-identified and become prostitutes as a means of exploring their homosexuality. They consider themselves entrepreneurs, entertainers, and sexually desirable partners. Most are not dependent on their prostitution income for survival. Some male prostitutes, according to one study, claim to enjoy prostitution and have a positive self image.

Other studies say male prostitutes are often runaways who, while not necessarily gay, have to sell their bodies as a means of survival. One study characterized male prostitutes as usually 8 to 17 years of age, underachievers in school and at home, without previous homosexual activity, underdeveloped physically, from a low-income background and lacking parental supervision.

Reports disagree as to how children become involved in pornography. Some claim that children enter into pornography as a means of survival after they have run away from home to the big cities seeking excitement, adventure, and escape from abusive parents or from an emotionally deprived home life. Other reports state that children are enticed into pornography

by neighbors, other children involved in the business, relatives, and, in some cases, even parents.

Literature shows that children involved in pornography generally range in age from 8 to 16, although some reports say that children younger than eight have been the subjects of pornography. Studies add that many children who are the objects of pornography often come from unstable or broken homes, have been underachievers in school and at home, lack a loving and attentive home environment, and have been subjected to abuse and neglect. These children lack parental supervision and are often runaways who spend much of their time in public places such as parks, theaters, arcades, etc.

One study stated that in many, if not most instances, the children involved in pornography are "willing" participants. The reason pornographers are able to find "willing victims" is because they offer friendship, interest and a concerned attitude the child is unable to find elsewhere. Children involved in pornography can be psychologically scarred and suffer emotional distress for life. They may feel dirty and unwanted and see themselves as objects to be sold rather than people who are important. They often become bitter toward adults.

SERVICES FOR SEXUALLY EXPLOITED CHILDREN

Many of the services--such as counseling, crisis intervention, shelter, and job training--which sexually exploited children need if they are to leave a life of prostitution or pornography are often available through special programs

or social service agencies. A majority of the officials of cities and counties that responded to our questionnaire reported a wide variety of social services available to serve exploited children. Social services provided by local agencies are available to anyone, including youths involved in prostitution and pornography, meeting the relevant eligibility criteria.

Youths involved in prostitution and/or pornography may receive social services from three primary sources:

--shelters exclusively for teenage prostitutes;

--shelters not exclusively for prostitutes but

which are frequently used by teenage prostitutes; and

--social service agencies.

The services are designed to meet the physical and emotional needs of the youths. Funding to support these programs may come from Federal, State, county, and private sources.

Shelters intended exclusively to serve teenage prostitutes offer, at a minimum, food, shelter, medical care directly or through referral, and counseling. Other services commonly provided include legal assistance, schooling, and job training.

Teenage prostitutes can also use other shelters which are available to a wide range of troubled youths, not only those sexually exploited. Services provided by these other shelters are often the same as services provided at shelters exclusively for teenage prostitutes.

All of the shelters we contacted offered, at a minimum, counseling and emergency shelter. In addition, most offered medical services, schooling, vocational training, and hotlines.

A few children are referred to service providers as a result of their contact with police or by special program outreach workers who mingle among prostitutes with the hope of talking them into seeking services aimed at helping them leave the life of prostitution. Those children who do not come into contact with the police or outreach workers and want services must seek them out on their own.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. We will be happy to respond to any questions you or members of the Subcommittee may have.