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Abstract

Research shows that homeless youth are uniquely vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation (CSE). But what are youth perspectives on definitions and pathways of CSE? We analyze focus group data from participatory research with a homeless youth serving agency. Participants were a racially/ethnically diverse sample of twenty-four female-identifying young adults (ages 18-23) receiving services. Some perceptions of the participants were consistent with previously documented pathways into CSE. But, important novel themes emerged, including: sexual exploitation as a continuum of sexually explicit interactions (i.e. stripping, fetish, survival sex, trafficking); ever-present conversations and decision-making about CSE in homeless youth culture; and the paradoxical issue that service-seeking around homelessness and overt identification of girls as CSE victims can target them for greater victimization.