

COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN A  
RURAL COMMUNITY: EDUCATION FOR COURT DEPENDENT CHILDREN  
AND YOUTH

By

Debbie Murphy

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Committee Membership

Dr. Jennifer Maguire, Ph.D., MSW, Committee Chair

Valerie Hartley, Committee Member

Dr. Ronnie Swartz, Ph.D., MSW, Committee Member

Geneva Shaw, MSW, Program Graduate Coordinator

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## ABSTRACT

### COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN A RURAL COMMUNITY: EDUCATION FOR COURT DEPENDENT CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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This project has been created as a means to address and prevent commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth who are dependents of the court in a rural community. The rising issues surrounding commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth has prompted new legislation that requires federal and state agencies to provide prevention education for “at risk” children and youth. Children and youth who are dependents of the court have been identified as being “at risk” of becoming victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. The purpose of this project was to research and analyze available commercial sexual exploitation prevention education and make recommendations on which curriculum or combination of curricula best suits the needs of a rural community.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the United States during 2014, an estimated one in six runaways were victims of sex trafficking, 68% of these victims were in the care of social services or foster care when they ran away (NCMEC, 2014). *Commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth*, referred to as CSECY throughout this paper and occurs in many neighborhoods and targeted outreach toward youth at a higher risk of exploitation is needed.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth occurs when individuals trade, buy, or sell sexual acts with a child or youth. Sex trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act (ILNI, 2013). According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, foster children have been identified as being at risk of becoming victims of commercial and sexual exploitation (NCMEC, 2016). These children and youth are subjected to human trafficking through coercion, force, and fraud (NCMEC, 2010).

Child sexual exploitation has only recently been recognized as a distinct form of child abuse. The perception has been that these young people have chosen this life style and have consented even though they are not of age to consent. Commercial sexual exploitation takes place on three levels: a) local exploitation by one or a few individuals; b) small regional networks involving multiple adults and children; and, c) large national or international sex crime networks (Albanese, 2007). There are multiple factors that increase the likelihood of human trafficking in a community.

Economic factors play a large role in human trafficking, which make rural communities prime areas to target recruitment of children and youth. According to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, poverty is an underlying issue in human trafficking. Rural communities have: a) higher rates of persistent poverty; b) decreasing workforce; c) effects of economic recession and industrial change; d) demand for low-skill, manual labor; and e) rapidly growing agriculture and tourism industries (NHTRC, 2015).

Although any child could become a victim of CSECY it is more common amongst foster children, 98% of children who are identified as survivors of sex trafficking had previous involvement with child welfare services, and many were legally in the care and custody of the state while they were being prostituted by traffickers (National Center for Persecution of Child Abuse, 2013, p. 2).

The purpose of this project was to research and identify available education curricula that would be most effective and relevant for the education of children and youth in a rural community and meet the requirements of the, "*Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014*," H.R. 4980 (*Public Law 113-183*). The researcher reviewed the currently available curricula, workshops, and trainings throughout the U.S. and found two that are being implemented in urban communities.

Raising community awareness and providing prevention education is required in communities to reduce and eventually eliminate the number of commercial and sexually

exploited children and youth. This project has identified appropriate education curriculum that would be most effective and relevant for a rural community.

The questions that drove this research were:

- 1) Are there education curricula already created to meet the needs of court dependent children and youth?
- 2) Are there curricula available to meet the unique needs of rural communities?
- 3) Have the programs been effective in reducing the number of commercial sexually exploited children and youth?
- 4) Will the programs meet the mandates for State and Federal Agencies?

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth has recently gained increased attention at an epidemic level. Commercial sexual exploitation is defined as, “crimes of a sexual nature committed against juvenile victims for financial or other economic reasons” (IOM and NRC 2013; President’s Interagency Taskforce to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons 2014). Commercial sexual exploitation occurs in many forms such as brothels, pornography, and prostitution. However, the most common forms of child sexual exploitation include child pornography, sex trafficking, and child sex tourism (Women’s Support Project, 2014). Human trafficking has become one of the largest criminal enterprises in the world (Charitysub, 2012).

Commercial sexual abuse includes buying, selling, or trading sexual acts with a child or youth (Innocent Lost National Initiative, 2013). Sex trafficking includes recruiting, harboring, transporting, or obtaining a child or youth for the purpose of a sexual act (ILNI, 2013). The Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that in the U.S. 40% of human trafficking victims are children. Further, the National Center of Missing and Exploited Children (2010), reported that foster children are at high risk of exploitation. Due to the sensitive nature of this issue it has been difficult to determine an exact number of victims. It is estimated that 300,000 children are at risk for commercial exploitation each year in the United States (Estes & Weiner, 2001).

Sexual exploitation of a child is now recognized as a distinct form of child abuse by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP, 2014). Any child can

become a victim of CSECY however; it is most common among foster children and foster youth (NCPCA, 2013). Commercial sexual exploitation occurs on local, regional, national, and international levels (Albanese, 2007). According to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (2015), an underlying issue in human trafficking is poverty. Rural communities become prime areas for CSECY due to their high rates of poverty.

Children and youth who are in foster care are considered to be at high risk of becoming victims of commercial and sexual exploitation. Foster children are considered “high risk” because they have experienced some form of trauma and/or abuse (Walker & Quaraishi, 2014). According to Lillie, (2013), foster care is the perfect training for commercial sexual exploitation. Youth who are in foster care are used to being moved without warning and without any say, fewer people notice when they go missing or are participating in CSECY activities.

Foster children are also more likely to have been exposed to alcohol and drug abuse as well as domestic violence (Walker & Quaraishi, 2014). Traffickers seek out those who are most vulnerable because they are easier to control and manipulate (Walker & Quaraishi, 2014).

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) estimated that one in six endangered runaways were likely sex trafficking victims in 2014. This is an increase from one in seven endangered runaways in 2013 (NCMEC, 2014). A 2011 bulletin from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) cites an earlier estimate (Estes & Weiner, 2001) that 293,000 youth are at risk for being trafficked in North America

because they live on the streets or in particularly vulnerable situations (Walker-Rodriguez & Hill).

There are multiple reasons why youth runaway from foster care. Often time's youth run away from abusive foster homes or group homes, or they run as a response to feelings, trauma, victimization, reaction to imposed restrictions, being unhappy about placement, and sometimes it is the attraction of street life (NAEH, 2013). Youth homelessness is also a result of youth 'aging out' of foster care and have no safe home to return to (NAEH, 2013).

The Administration on Children, Youth and Families reported alarming statistics from several studies that showed 50 to more than 90 percent of the victims of commercial sexual exploitation had been involved with child welfare system (ACYF, 2013). These staggering percentages have prompted federal, state and local governments to mandate prevention education and early intervention services to court dependent children and youth. Research has documented a high percentage of trafficked children and youth who spent time in foster care before being exploited, and some have gone so far as to argue that the majority of trafficked youth have experienced some child welfare involvement (Human Rights Project for Girls, 2013)

A number of research and newspaper articles have pointed to the fact that traffickers target youth in foster care because of their increased vulnerability (see, for example, Menzel, 2013). Traffickers exploit the fact that youth in foster care—or those who have run away from care—may have unmet needs for family and emotional relationships. The traffickers promise to meet those needs, even using psychological manipulation and

financial incentives to woo them, and then violence or physical control to hold on to the youth and exploit them (Innocence Lost Working Group, 2010).

Prevention education and raising community awareness are essential elements to reduce commercial and sexual exploitation of children and youth. Recent efforts to locate and prosecute the perpetrators and traffickers have come up short because they are nearly impossible to prosecute (OJJDP, 2013). Prosecutors have found that trauma bonding and fear prevent the victims from testifying against their abusers (OJJDP, 2014). Prevention education and empowering children and youth have become instrumental to decreasing CSECY.

There are three curriculums that are currently being implemented in urban communities that were evaluated for the purpose of this project. Brief descriptions follow:

- 1) Word on the Street: Educating and Empowering Young Women and Girls
- 2) MY Life My Choice: Preventing the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Girls
- 3) iEmpathize: Empower Youth Pro

*Word on the Street* (CWDA, 2015) was developed by the Los Angeles Probation Department and it is an interactive workshop designed for a group of 3-12 female youth between the ages of 14 – 18. The training sessions are designed for foster youth (both child welfare and juvenile-justice youth), delivered by co-facilitators, covering sensitive material which can be a trigger for youth attendees. The curriculum can be delivered through 6 one-week sessions (lasting 90 minutes each), or in a one-day (5 hour)

conference or abbreviated for youth in juvenile halls (County Welfare Directors Association, 2014).

*My Life My Choice* (JRI, 2015) was developed by the Justice Resource Institute. This is a ten-session program created to prevent children and youth from becoming victims of exploitation. My Life My Choice Curriculum is used in schools, group homes, juvenile justice facilities, and community based agencies.

*Empower Youth Program* (iEmpathize, 2012), was developed by iEmpathize. This is a program that is used to facilitate prevention-focused conversation about empathy and vulnerabilities in their lives that put them at risk of exploitation. This program is designed for mixed group's boys/girls and can be used with pre-teens and youth.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

In 2003, The Federal Bureau of Investigation teamed with the Department of Justice Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children to create task forces and working groups throughout the U.S. aimed at addressing the growing problem of domestic sex trafficking in United States called The Innocence Lost Initiative (NCMEC, 2003). There are now 73 task forces and working groups throughout the United States dedicated to reaching and providing information assistance law enforcement investigating CSECY cases (ILI, 2014).

The Innocence Lost Initiative (2014), found that children and youth who are dependents of the court are especially vulnerable and are targets for perpetrators. Children and youth who are or have been involved in the child welfare system have experienced some form of trauma which makes them more susceptible to manipulation. Children and youth who have been in foster care are often targets for exploiters due to their accessibility and vulnerability. They often have a history of frequent family disruptions, exposure to alcohol and substance abuse, witnessing domestic violence, community violence, and/or loss of a parent. Children and youth in foster care often lack a sense of safety, belonging, affection, and are often runaways. Perpetrators prey on them with promises of love, acceptance, shelter, food, and clothing (Walker and Quaraishi, 2014).

Table 1 illustrates the different types of foster care placements and the percentages of children in each type (Kids Count Data, 2014). Foster Family Agency Homes maintain the largest amount of foster children followed closely by placement with a relative. These statistics indicate that prevention education is largely needed in Foster Family Agency Homes and in relative placement homes. However it is important to consider the age of the children in foster care as the curriculum is not appropriate for children under 11 years of age.

Table 1 Court Dependents (Kids Data, 2014)

Type of Placement	Number of Children	%
County Foster Homes	97	16
Foster Family Agency Homes	185	30
Group Homes	23	4
Guardian Homes	78	13
Relative Homes	182	29
Adoptive Homes	19	3
Other Homes	30	5
Total Number of Placements in Shasta County	624	

Table 2 illustrates the age percentages of children currently in foster care. A large majority of foster children are between the ages of 0 and 10. The target audience age for CSECY prevention education is between 11 and 18 years old. After reviewing the statistics this researcher wanted to find out what types of placements children and youth ages 11 through 18 were placed. Foster Family Agency Homes house most of the Court dependent children and youth that fall within the age recommendations for the available curriculum.

Table 2. Age of Children and Youth (Kids Data, 2014)

Age of Foster Children	%
Under 1	38.0
Ages 1-2	9.7
Ages 3-5	8.3
Ages 6-10	4.6
Ages 11-15	2.3
Ages 16-17	1.9

Efforts to reduce and eliminate CSECY victims is on the rise however, the focus has been on heterosexual girls and boys. The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth have been overlooked. LGBTQ youth are disproportionately represented in the CSEC population (Brown, 2012). A recent survey documented that

about 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ which has made data collection difficult (Brown, 2012).

## PROJECT FRAMEWORK

The framework for this project is an *Ecological System's Theory* perspective (Siporin, 1980). Prevention education is the key tool that must be introduced on the micro, mezzo, and macro level to fully counter commercial and sexual exploitation of children and youth. Prevention strategies must take into consideration the complexities that interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors (CDC, 2002).

Ecologically oriented approaches to prevention of CSECY target a broad range of sociocultural and individual factors that may affect CSECY risk and protection and emphasize primary prevention and risk reduction strategies (Harper, 2013).

There are factors on the individual level such as; biological and personal history that increase the likelihood of becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence. Poverty, education level, substance use and a history of abuse are complex and inter-related factors that increase the vulnerability of children and youth (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002).

On the relationship level, social circles, peers, partners, and family experiences contribute to the likelihood of becoming victims. Children who experience violence within their family unit and/or their social circles may have a decreased ability to problem solve, reduce conflict, obtain living skills, and promote healthy relationships. Prevention strategies at this level include parenting, family focused prevention programs, mentoring, and peer programs reduce conflict, foster problem solving skills, and promote healthy relationships (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002).

On the community level, schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods contribute to the likelihood of becoming a victim. Social isolation, economics, climate, and policies within these settings all impact the vulnerability of a child. Prevention strategies at this level are typically designed to impact the social and physical environment by reducing social isolation, improving economic and housing opportunities in neighborhoods (Siporin, 1980)

On the societal level, factors include climates that encourage violence and support violence as an acceptable way to resolve conflict. In larger societal levels, factors include health, economic, educational and social policies that help maintain economic or social inequalities between groups in society that increase the likelihood of victimization (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002).

## METHODS

The National Academy of Science (2013), reported that commercial sexual exploitation of children in United States is commonly overlooked, misunderstood, and unaddressed forms of child abuse. Due to the sensitive nature of this issue it has been difficult to determine an exact number of victims. These types of crimes are often overlooked and underreported because they commonly occur in the margins of society (Clayton, 2013). The research was conducted by interviewing a CSECY victim who has become a victim advocate and prevention educator throughout the state of California. The research also included an in-depth search of internet resources on the topic of CSECY.

The literature used in this paper was identified through online databases accessed through Humboldt State University Library, in addition to peer reviewed articles, information from narrative and journalistic sources was accessed through public online search engines. Keyword searches included “commercial sexual exploitation of children,” and “child sex trafficking.” Research was selected based on relevancy to CSEC prevention education. The data was then analyzed to identify which programs would be successful as a prevention education curriculum for children and youth who are dependents of the court. I will be researching available curriculum on CSECY, selecting the appropriate curriculum for the needs of children and youth in a rural community. The curriculum I will be evaluating is: a) "Word on the Street" Educating and Empowering Children and Youth (Los Angeles County Probation

Department, 2015); b) "My Life, My Choice" Empowering Youth Ending Exploitation (Justice Resource Institute, 2002); and, c) "The Empowerment Youth Program" Exploitation Prevention Program for Youth (iEmpathize, 2012). I will make recommendations to the CSECY steering committee of a rural community.

## RESULTS

A rural community located in Northern California has 624 children in foster care (Local Child Care Planning Council, 2009). Providing prevention education to a rural communities children and youth who are court dependents could have a substantial impact on reducing the number of CSEC victims. In this section I review the answers to my research questions and summarize the CSECY curriculums I identified with potential to be adapted for a rural community outreach education. While many of these curriculums can be modified to fit the needs of rural communities, none of them specifically address rural communities. The researcher found that the CSECY prevention education that is currently available would meet the Federal and State requirements for the education and prevention of commercial sexual exploitation for court dependent children and youth. The CSECY prevention education curricula reviewed focused on risk reeducation strategies, recruitment tactics, attitudes and perception of the commercial sex industry, builds self-esteem, and empowers children and youth to protect themselves from commercial sexual exploitation.

*“Word on the Street”* is a CSECY education curriculum that was created by the Los Angeles County Probation Department. This curriculum goes through six sessions; what is CSECY, risk factors, recruitment tactics, survivor stories, healthy relationships, and empowerment. The curriculum can be taught in a six session group, one day workshop,

or two day workshop. It is designed to be co-facilitated to a group of three to 15 female youth ages 14-18.

*“My Life My Choice”* is a CSECY education curriculum that was created by the Justice Resource Institute. This curriculum is designed to reach girls who are at high risk of being exploited. The program is a ten-session workshop that is relevant for girls between the ages of 12-18. The focus of this curriculum is to alter behavior through a shift in participants’ attitudes about the commercial sex industry, knowledge about exploitation vulnerability, and skills to empower girls about recruitment tactics.

*“The Empower Youth Program”* is a tool that helps those already working with youth to facilitate prevention-focused conversations about empathy and exploitation in their schools and neighborhoods. This is a five-part series of short films, activities, and discussion questions to empower youth to navigate the vulnerabilities in their lives in order to stay safe from exploitation.

*Word on the Street, My Life My Choice, and The Empower Youth Program, all recommend similar group size, age, and gender for their curriculums however; The Youth Empowerment Program is designed for both boys and girls. The curriculums all have reduced session options. Word on the Street, My Life My Choice, and The Empower Youth programs are designed to educate, equip, and empower participants by providing them with tools and opportunities for discussion to prevent them from unknowingly becoming victims of commercial and sexual exploitation. These curricula aim to assist children and youth in identifying recruitment tactics, recognizing warning signs, creating bonds amongst peers, identify community resources, and to educate about victims that are survivors; not*

criminals. The My Life My Choice curriculum has an added piece about changing the mind set on the perceptions of children and youths about the commercial sex industry, as well as building their self-esteem. There is also an added piece in The Empower Youth program that focuses on empathy and vulnerabilities.

In rural communities' have challenges with availability and accessibility of transportation, information, and resources. Providing CSECY prevention education in Shasta County will provide much needed education and resources to the community.

Table 3 shows the currently available CSECY curriculums and the demographics they service.

Table 3 CSEC Education Curriculum (Kids Data, 2014)

<b>Curriculum</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sessions</b>	<b>Modified</b>	<b>Option for Children</b>
Word on the Street	Females	13-18	6	Yes	No
My Life My Choice	Females	12-18	10	Yes	No
The Empower Youth Program	Male and Female	11-18	5	Yes	No

The researcher found that the CSECY prevention education that is currently available would meet the Federal and State requirements for the education and prevention of commercial sexual exploitation for court dependent children and youth. There are several curricula's already developed and being implemented in urban communities. The CSECY prevention education curricula reviewed focused on risk reeducation strategies, recruitment tactics, attitudes and perception of the commercial sex industry, builds self-esteem, and empowers children and youth to protect themselves from CSECY.

There is limited evidence based research related to prevention strategies for CSECY as it is an issue that only recently gained National attention. In order for programs and practices to be considered evidence-based, their effectiveness has to be demonstrated through one or more outcome evaluation. Further, there needs to be evidence that an activity or intervention did meet its intended outcome which is currently lacking for CSEC prevention education (Clayton, 2013).

While many of these curriculums can be modified to fit the needs of rural communities, none of them specifically address rural communities. Community factors play a role in perpetuating the CSEC problem in part due to the lack of resources available, collective trauma passed down to children, and attitudes and perceptions in the community.

This researcher found that the curricula's have gaps in addressing CSECY issues that are specific to children and youth who identify as LGBTQ+ and males.

## DISCUSSION

The number of children in foster care is substantial and all of these children are at risk of becoming victims of CSECY. Poverty and homelessness have been identified as key indicators that put children and youth “at risk” of commercial and sexual exploitation. According to Chamberlain, (2014), poverty and homelessness is at an all-time high in Shasta County which means there are children “at risk” who have not been identified through the child welfare system. This makes awareness and prevention programs all the more vital to ending commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth. The California Child Welfare Council (2013), reported that the success of intervention and prevention programs rely on the identification of risk factors and facilitating intervention programs to reach at risk children and youth before traffickers do.

Ecologically based education and training programs that are developmentally appropriate can address issues at all ecological levels. Societal, community, interpersonal and personal factors must be addressed to effectively prevent children and youth from becoming victims of CSEC (Kruger, 2012).

The strength of the curricula’s on an individual level are that they focus on reducing vulnerability, improving resilience, disrupting and preventing perpetrators, and reducing tolerance are key elements of the curriculum. A gap in all the curricula’s is the lack of addressing the needs of children and youth who identify as LGBTQ+.

The strength of the curricula on the relational level are that they challenge ideas and influence attitudes and beliefs that support violence; impulsive and anti-social behavior; childhood history of abuse or witnessing violence; alcohol and drug use (Garcia-Moreno, 2002).

The strength of the curricula's on the community level is the connections to resources in the community and collaborations between Agencies to provide this education.

The strength of the curricula's on the societal level are the bringing awareness about CSECY and providing prevention strategies that will reduce the number of victims.

All of the curricula researched are meant for the facilitator to be engaged with the participants throughout the workshop. This proactive approach focuses on prevention and intervention. Preventative action is the key to safeguarding children and youth from sexual exploitation.

Commercial sexual exploitation education curriculum is a tool that will be used to empower children and youth with education that is specific to their risks in a rural community. The curriculum will also be used as a resource to arm communities with insight so that individuals can identify victims, risk factors, and action steps to take against exploitation of children and youth.

Children who have been removed from their homes and placed in foster care are considered to be at high risk of sex trafficking because of their lack of stability in their living situation, physical distance from friends and family, and emotional vulnerability (ACYF, 2013). Traffickers prey on these vulnerable children and youth with promises of having their basic physical needs met such as; food, clothing, shelter. Traffickers also

prey on the emotional needs of children and youth with promises of love, support, and acceptance. The goal of this project is to empower children and youth by providing education that will reduce their risk of becoming victims of exploitation and abuse.

The purpose of this project is to implement a workshop that will be presented to court dependent children and youth ages 10 to 17. It will include information about commercial and sexual exploitation as it relates to the rural community of Shasta County. The workshops will incorporate rural community knowledge into the discussions of recruitment tactics, available local resources, and family exploiting. The workshop will result in its members being empowered and equipped to protect themselves against exploitation and the unique risks of rural communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This project examined Commercial Sexual Exploitation prevention education curriculums and the needs of children and youth in Shasta County. The recommendations follow an Ecological Systems framework that address interpersonal, community, and institutional level factors.

This project was severely limited by the lack of evidence based programs available for education children and youth about CSECY. Many of the directions that I wanted to examine were limited by the lack of exposure and resources regarding CSECY. In preparing to implement a Commercial and Sexual Exploitation Prevention Education Program this researcher has the following recommendations:

1. It is recommended that the workshop be portable to enable the facilitators to come together in settings that are familiar and comfortable for the participants. A portable workshop will also be useful in rural community where geography and limited public transportation can significantly reduce resource access.
2. It is recommended that the facilitators use the modified options for a one day workshop as children and youth typically will not commit to attending weekly meetings and therefore they would not receive all the information.

3. My Life My Choice appears to be the best option for groups with female participants. There are several workshop options to choose from and there is a focus on recruitment tactics with peers which is crucial piece of education in a rural community as they are more isolated. It is further recommended that groups for males and children and youth who identify as LGBTQ+ be implemented using The Empowering Youth Program that is designed for mixed group's boys/girls and can be used with pre-teens and youth. This curriculum utilizes a less restrictive format to allow for more conversation between facilitators and participants on a more individualized level.

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Innocence Lost Initiative National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

FBI Headquarters – Crimes Against Children Unit

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