

Letter from Alesia Adams Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and the Culture of Pornography to the Salvation Army Community

Dear Salvation Army Family,

For a little over four months now, I've been with the Southern Territory, working at the Evangline Booth College against human injustices known as the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). But I've been talking about these issues for 10 years and have dealt with these children hands-on for seven years.

I am tired of *talking* about it.

In March, I watched the Oscar award for "Best Achievement in Music Written for Motion Pictures" go to a musician who sang a song called "It's Hard out Here for a Pimp." I've listed some of the lyrics below:

*You know it's hard out here for a pimp (you ain't knowin)
When he tryin to get this money for the rent (you ain't knowin)
For the Cadillacs and gas money spent (you ain't knowin)
That's the way the game goes, gotta keep it strictly pimpin
Gotta have my hustle tight, makin change off these women, yeah*

There is something wrong when the Oscar goes to a song that says, "It's hard out here to be a pimp." I was so outraged about the notoriety and acceptance of this song.

It's hard out here for women and children who suffer from the violence they encounter on the streets. It's hard out here for child prey in the United States to receive appropriate services; it's hard out here on children who were first victimized in their own homes by being sexually abused and then revictimized by the juvenile justice system, law enforcement, therapist, the media, and rap culture. It's hard out here on children who don't have safe places to run to or a place to recover from the abusive streets. It's hard out here on women and children who have to watch their exploiters get a "slap on the hand" and continue to do business as usual. It's so very hard out here for women and children who suffer from post traumatic stress disorder, Stockholm Syndrome, HIV and STDs, unwanted pregnancies, malnutrition, tuberculosis, broken limbs, and death. Who sings for the brutalized victims?

What is so disheartening is that we have an abundance of sympathy and resources for foreign, immigrant women and men who are trafficked here, but we have very few resources for children trafficked across state lines. They are heinously abused, and we do not have the resources that are focused on this population. I want people to understand that this is slavery, that this is not the child's fault. If we can see this in children overseas, why can't we see it in our backyard?

We must end the demand for children. We must put pressure on law enforcement to stop arresting children and arrest the real criminals: the pimps, johns, the enslavers. It should

be taught that men don't violate children. Saying that "she looked 18" is not an excuse. We have to stop glorifying prostitution. We as a society and Christians are going to pay for the way that God's most precious gifts are being dehumanized, degraded, and destroyed. We will pay for this in a female's unwanted pregnancies, her lack of job skills, and her lack of education. It's a vicious cycle.

We must increase The Salvation Army's and public awareness about the true nature of girls being prostituted, to understand that they are casualties, and to press for reform on their behalf, especially in the areas of prevention and services that will assist them to exit "the life" as it is called.

These girls are literally hidden behind closed doors in escort services, massage parlors, dance clubs, and other "legal" establishments where sex is bought and sold. They are often abused or rejected by overwhelmed families, unseen by their schools, and face contempt from their schoolmates and contemporaries. When arrested, many slip through the adult system overnight with false IDs and/or bail paid by their pimps. Girls held in the juvenile justice system are often returned to abusive home situations, released back on the street, or mandated to group homes or facilities that neither recognize nor address their problems.

The evidence and my experience suggest that the average age of entry into prostitution is between 13 and 14. The youngest victims I have worked with were two sisters ages 10 and 11. But the majority of prostituted girls are in their teens.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) occurs in every part of the country and whatever the girls' racial and ethnic origins, the vast majority, at least of those who are arrested, are from poor families.

Pimps are entering "the game" much younger. Many of the pimps are 17, 18, and 19 years old because the rap culture says it's acceptable to objectify women and children. The lyrics are degrading. We need to have a groundswell outrage about this.

We need each other to fight this battle; these children are coerced, lured, kidnapped, and indoctrinated; they are not criminals. We must help everybody see these children as children of God. Will you join me in the fight for those who cannot fight for themselves?

Sincerely,

Alesia Adams
Coordinator for Youth Development and Sexual Trafficking Prevention