DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION ARE TWO ENTRY POINTS INTO THE CHILD WELFARE AND JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEMS THAT DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECT YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS OF COLOR. UNFORTUNATELY, WOMEN AND GIRLS OF COLOR MAY FACE ADDITIONAL BARRIERS TO RECEIVING SUPPORT AND SERVICES WHEN THEY EXPERIENCE SEXUAL VIOLENCE. SURVIVORS MAY FEAR OR DISTRUST POLICE, OR THEY MAY FIND THAT SERVICE PROVIDERS DO NOT OFFER THE CULTURALLY RELEVANT HELP THEY NEED. MANY SURVIVORS DO NOT REPORT THE CRIME TO AUTHORITIES OR SEEK HELP BECAUSE OF SOCIAL OR GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION, CITIZENSHIP STATUS, RACISM, SOCIAL STIGMA OR LANGUAGE BARRIERS. TO SUCCESSFULLY ADDRESS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS, ATTENTION TO THESE BROADER SOCIETAL FACTORS IS CRITICAL, AS IS A STRONG FOCUS ON CULTURE-SPECIFIC NEEDS.

Support Healthy Relationships and Victims of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence takes a number of forms, including intimate partner violence and family violence. Children are exposed to both sexual violence and violence between parents and other family members in their homes. Studies estimate that 10 to 20 percent of children are at risk for exposure to domestic violence. One study estimates that as many as 10 million teenagers are exposed to parental violence each year, placing them at an increased risk of being abused or neglected. Children who live with domestic violence face numerous risks, such as the risk of exposure to traumatic events, the risk of neglect, the risk of being directly abused and the risk of losing one or both of their parents. In general, girls exposed to domestic violence exhibit more internalized behaviors, such as withdrawal or depression.

Far too many young women and girls in America experience domestic violence and sexual assault, and women and girls in some communities of color face particularly high rates of these crimes. Black, American Indian/Alaska Native and multi-racial women and girls experience extremely high rates of intimate partner violence during their lifetimes. Young women and girls who are undocumented immigrants also face significant challenges, as abusers often use their partners’ immigration status as a tool of control. In such situations, it is common for a male batterer to exert control over his partner’s immigration status to force her to remain in the relationship. Furthermore, in a study of 724 adolescent mothers between the ages of 12-18, one out of every eight pregnant adolescents reported having been physically assaulted by the father of their babies during the preceding 12 months. Of these, 40 percent also reported experiencing violence at the hands of a family member or relative.

The South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS) Domestic Violence and Batterers Intervention Programs provide support and assistance for crisis intervention and prevention services for victims of intimate partner violence (including domestic violence, dating violence and sexual assault as it occurs in the context of domestic or dating violence), their dependents and abusers. The services are carried out through a network of community-based nonprofit and private service providers. SCDSS agencies provide therapy services that are appropriate to the needs of recipients with regard to their experiences with domestic violence, as well as any other issues relevant to the individuals’ particular needs. Services include emergency shelters, advocacy to victims in immediate crisis and those in need of long-term support, safety planning, support groups, counseling, client needs assessments, transportation, information and referrals, legal advocacy and assistance securing housing, employment, food stamps and other related assistance. Children are referred to the appropriate agency for individual and group counseling, age-appropriate safety planning, healthy communication, skill building, and activities for children living in the shelter. Domestic violence shelter program staff also provide education and prevention programming that emphasizes the role of society in perpetuating violence against women and the social change necessary to eliminate violence against women, including discrimination based.
on age, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, ability or disability, sexual orientation, class, veteran status, education status, citizenship status or income.69

**Prevent the Sexual Exploitation of Young Women and Girls**

The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) occurs when individuals buy, trade or sell sexual acts with a child. Vulnerable children, including runaway and homeless youth and young people involved with intervening public systems, are often targeted by pimps and traffickers. Exploiters frequently draw children into prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation using psychological manipulation, drugs and violence. It is common for girls to run away as a response to sexual abuse, yet as runaways these girls are placed at a higher risk of sexual exploitation.70 Girls are disproportionately represented in runaway caseloads, accounting for approximately 60 percent of runaway cases over the past 20 years.71 A study of 42 federally funded human trafficking task forces found that 94 percent of victims of sex trafficking are female, and roughly three-quarters are people of color.72 Children are at significant risk, as 40 percent of the 2,515 investigations opened by human trafficking task forces in a two-year period involved the prostitution or sexual exploitation of a child.73 Many youth also engage in survival sex as a means to obtain shelter, food or other protection.74 Homelessness is one of the most common drivers of this behavior, and national estimates of youth involved in survival sex range from 10 to 50 percent.75 Youth of color are significantly more likely to engage in survival sex than their White counterparts – a New York City study found that 85 percent of CSEC youth were female, 67 percent were Black and 59 percent were between the ages of 16 and 17.76

**New Jersey** was one of three states to receive a perfect rating by the Polaris Project regarding its laws to combat human trafficking. In New Jersey, child victims of sexual exploitation are immediately recognized as victims of a crime in need of protection and services, granted immunity from prosecution and diverted from juvenile delinquency proceedings. They are instead directed to child welfare services. Under New Jersey law, convictions for prostitution that were committed as a result of trafficking can be vacated from a victim’s criminal record. Victims receive state services and protection, including counseling, job assistance, housing, continuing education, legal services or a human trafficking caseworker privilege. Law enforcement receive mandated training, including courses of study on the handling, response procedures, investigation and prosecution of human trafficking cases.77