

United States House of Representatives
Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Crime and Federal Government Surveillance
WRITTEN TESTIMONY BY

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For a Hearing Entitled: Children are Not for Sale: Examining the Threat of Exploitation of Children in the U.S. and Abroad
Wednesday, September 13th, 2023

Dear honorable Chairman Biggs, Ranking Member Jackson Lee, and the Members of the Subcommittee.

My name is Sean Wheeler; I experienced CSAM in the mid-1960s. Around that time, I was 7. There was one other boy and a girl in attendance during my CSAM. There were two men present and one woman. We were in the back room of a farmhouse in the Midwest USA, near a small town of about 5,200 people. All three adults participated. For decades after that time, I hated having my picture taken since it happened during my exploitation until I found a counselor who helped me realize it wasn't my fault.

The most significant challenges I face today are ignorance and flat-out indifference. I've been speaking publicly about biological boys and abuse since 2014. Here are some of the comments I've heard:

- Boys cannot be sexually abused since they enjoy it.
- This never happens to white boys in the USA.
- You were a boy; why didn't you just run away?
- Boys are only predators, never victims.
- Why didn't you report it?
- Sure, it happens to boys, but 98% of victims are girls, and women are never involved.
- Probably the worst comment was this: If it happened to you, serve you right, so now you know what girls experience.

No child, regardless of who they are, deserves any abuse. As a 7-year-old, I did not enjoy it; I lived in fear for many years after that day. Also, every law enforcement organization I've spoken to that fights online exploitation has told me they see a great deal of CSAM with white pre-teen boys. They tell me much of it falls into "mom-son" or "teacher-student." I've asked them why they didn't rectify the records and challenge experts who say it's only girls. I never get direct answers when I pose this question.

I couldn't escape during my CSAM Since there was nowhere to run. I was in the back room of a house in the country with no clothes on and surrounded by three adults. I also knew the two kids experiencing

child sexual abuse since they were in my school. As a young adult, the other boy, unfortunately, chose to end his own life, and I have no information on the girl's whereabouts. Why didn't I report it? What seven-year-olds know how to report something they don't understand? Besides, later, these individuals carried out the killing of a rabbit in front of me. They were conscious that if I reported them, I would yield. Threats can be influential when dealing with little kids.

Far too many groups and individuals accept the erroneous belief that a "disproportionate number of victims are women and girls." But what exactly constitutes my fair share? Both genders traded me within a network from age five until nearly ten. Every victim deserves a voice, yet many boys and later male survivors hesitate to report their experiences due to encountering indifference or outright hostility. I recall a survivor support group in Colorado abruptly ending the call when I inquired about their assistance for men and boys. Similarly, the argument that gender-based violence exclusively applies to women and girls is flawed. Why? Because victims, including boys, are selected based on their genders.

Regarding the situation at the border, I collaborate with Veterans for Child Rescue based in Tucson, Arizona. They have verified that American children are also being taken to the South, but very few voices advocate for them apart from V4CR. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children provides the following information on its website: According to the FBI, as of 2022, there were 359,094 entries in the NCIC database for missing children. In 2021, there were 337,195 entries for missing children in NCIC. While I don't have exact numbers for how many children are taken south of the border, I have conversed with parents whose children were targeted. Some missing children who are reported but never found might be taken out of the country. This suspicion arises because foreign-born children are brought into the USA. I also suspect that homeless children who have fallen off the public radar are often victims, as they are less likely to be noticed or missed.

These are my reflections and personal experiences. I hope that by sharing what happened to me and the insights I've gained since becoming a survivor leader, I can raise awareness that this is occurring to biological boys born in the USA. It's important to note that this is not meant to diminish the experiences of any other group of victims. My goal is to highlight that countless individuals who resemble me as survivors are seldom given a platform in public discussions, and I believe that all victims deserve to have their voices heard.

Lastly, in 2013, PACT (formerly known as ECPAT-USA) released a study titled "And Boys Too," highlighting that boys are likely to make up approximately half of the victims in the United States. Similar findings have emerged globally through research conducted by ECPAT-International. Furthermore, I've been informed by a former member of the President's Human Trafficking Group, who served under both President Obama and President Trump, that approximately 99% of federal funding allocated to education in this field carries a message that predominantly focuses on females. It might be worthwhile to consider changing this approach.

I want to share one more observation. Two years ago, I had the opportunity to participate in a State Department webinar on child trafficking. During the session, when I raised a question about boys and

their vulnerability to trafficking, the speaker responded with, "Most victims are women and girls, and that is where the focus needs to remain." Regrettably, this comment was made by a female survivor leader who was speaking at the webinar. Instances like this highlight a level of ignorance and indifference that needs addressing.

The individual speaking today, Lori Cohen, holds the distinction of being the initial executive director from a national organization to actively engage with me at a time when numerous others remained unresponsive. She is crucial in advocating for those who lack a voice, and I will never forget her significant contributions on my behalf. I am truly grateful for your thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully,
Sean Wheeler