

A Six-year Analysis of Sex Traffickers of Minors: Exploring Characteristics and Sex Trafficking
Patterns
April 2017

Arizona State University Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research
Dr. Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, Cmdr. James Gallagher, Kimberly Hogan, Tiana Ward, Kristen
Bracy, Nicole Denecour

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Sex trafficking is a pervasive national problem in the United States. Media reports indicate that sex trafficking occurs in both rural and urban areas with victims who are children and adults, of any gender, race, and sexual orientation. Sex trafficking, defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000, is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act. For persons over the age of 18, the TVPA (2000) requires the demonstration that force, fraud, or coercion was used by the sex trafficker(s) to be considered a sex trafficking victim. Persons under the age of 18 (minors) are not required to demonstrate force, fraud, or coercion related to the commercial sex act to be considered a victim of sex trafficking.

Due to the covert nature of sex trafficking activities, creating reliable statistics on prevalence, frequency, geography, and particulars of sex trafficking have been difficult to develop (Clawson, Layne, & Small, 2006). Over the past decade, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has reported that they have assisted in the arrest of more than 2,000 human traffickers of both sex and labor trafficking (Human Trafficking/Involuntary Servitude, 2016) but sex trafficker-focused research primarily has relied on small convenience samples with limited ability to compare across time. This study uses a systematic search method to determine the incidence of arrests for sex trafficking of a minor in the United States from 2010 to 2015.

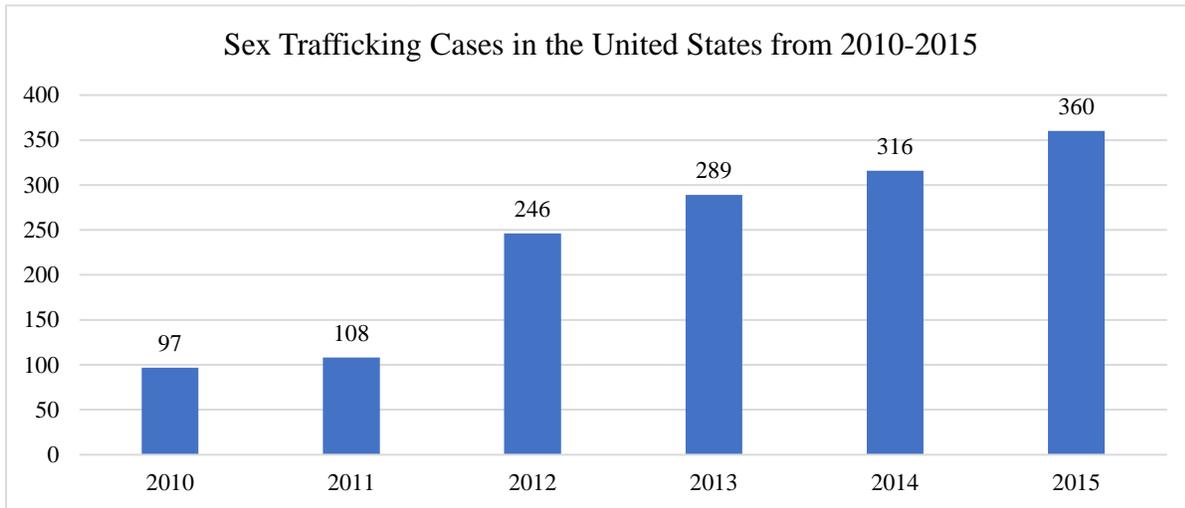
Research and Methods

This report uses data collected through a structured online search that produced a six-year picture of the arrests in the United States of the specific charge of *sex traffickers of minors* from 2010 to 2015. The findings from this report include individual and case details including characteristics of the sex traffickers (age, gender, race, professions, and gang involvement),

details about how they recruited and victimized their minor victims, and information about their case resolution. A web-based information dashboard was developed to visualize the six-year data and to allow for visual comparisons by state and over time. This dashboard is available at (<http://ssw.dtn.asu.edu/sextrafficker>).

Findings

The research team identified 1,416 persons arrested for sex trafficking of a minor in the United States from 2010 to 2015.



There were sex trafficking of minor arrests in all states except Alaska, Hawaii, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

Other key findings included:

- Three-quarters of the cases involved only minor victims.
- The average age of the sex traffickers of minors was 28.5 years old and the average age decreased significantly from 2010 to 2015.
- 24.4% of the sex traffickers were female and they were younger than the male sex traffickers.
- 75% of the sex traffickers were African American.
- 1.2% of the sex traffickers were non-U.S. citizens.
- Nearly one out of five arrests for sex trafficking of a minor involved a person who was gang involved.
- 55.5% of the females arrested were identified in the report as the role of a “bottom” which is the most trusted sex trafficked person by the sex trafficker who may also be prostituted, may recruit victims, give rules and trainings, and may give out punishment.
- 24% of the arrested sex traffickers had a previous criminal history, the most common previous crime was a violent crime.
 - 4% had a previous arrest for sex trafficking of a minor.
- The minor victims were transported to up to 17 states for the purpose of being prostituted with the average of 2.7 states.
- The majority of the sex trafficking activities (sex acts) were in hotel rooms.

- 67.3% of the cases used technology (email, online ads, smart phones) in the sex trafficking activities.
 - Backpage.com was used by the sex trafficker in 592 cases (41.8%).
- Recruitment tactics focused on runaways; friendship, romance, giving a place to stay to the victim, and promises of money and wealth.
- During recruitment, 15.7% provided their minor victims with drugs and/or alcohol.
- To condition the victims during recruitment, 18% of the sex traffickers sexually assaulted and 19.8% physically assaulted their minor victims.
- Victim control tactics included:
 - 36.7% threats of harm and psychological abuse.
 - 36.3% sexual violence.
 - 26.7% physical assault with a weapon.
 - 20.7% drugs to control their minor victim.
 - 11.1% threatened the victim with a firearm.
- Details about 941 victims were identified from the 1,416 cases:
 - Female (98.9%) with only nine male and one transgender victim.
 - The victim's age at exploitation ranged from age 4 to 17 with an average age of 15 years old.
 - The average age of the victim when their sex trafficker was arrested was 15.5 years old.
 - 45.1% knew their sex trafficker.
 - More than half of the victims were runaways.
- Case identification and sex trafficker arrest:
 - Most cases were reactive cases with a report being made to law enforcement by the victim (18%), their family (10.5%), or an anonymous caller (3.3%).
 - 20.8% of the cases were identified through police stings.
- Trafficker case resolution:
 - 10.6% of the sex traffickers were denied bond.
 - Indicted on an average of 3.78 criminal charges. .
 - Convicted on an average of 2.13 criminal charges.
 - 60.5% of the cases resulted in a plea agreement.
 - 24.4% of the sex trafficking cases went to trial.
 - 5% had their charges dropped completely.
 - Sentences ranged from no time in prison to life in prison with an average minimum sentence of 13.5 years in prison and 30 sex traffickers were sentenced to life in prison.
- Trends over the six years (2010 to 2015):
 - Significant increase in sex trafficking cases from 97 cases in 2010 to 360 cases in 2015.
 - Steady increase in female sex trafficker involvement.
 - Age of the sex traffickers dropped over time.
 - Gang involvement of the sex traffickers dropped over time.
 - Sex traffickers were increasingly likely to have a history of a violent crime over time.

- Increase in sex traffickers providing their minor victim with shelter as a recruitment tool.
- Steady increase over the six years of sex traffickers being involved in renting the hotel rooms used in the sex trafficking activity.
- More sex traffickers were found to exclusively victimizing only minor victims over the six years.

Implications

The findings of this study indicate that arrests for the sex trafficking of minors is increasing. These cases are complex and include the use of technology, exploitation of the vulnerabilities of youth in our communities, involve gangs, women, and sex traffickers are persons often known to the victims. There are four states in the U.S. (Alaska, Hawaii, West Virginia, and Wyoming) that have no arrests for this crime. There are unique features of each case which collectively developed a typical profile of a person arrested for sex trafficking of a minor in the U.S.

The increased prominence of female sex traffickers has implications for public perception, as sex traffickers are stereotyped as being only males. The involvement and the unique roles in the sex trafficking activity of the female sex traffickers, as well as their previous sexual exploitation experiences, are necessary next steps to explore and to gain a greater understanding of evolving sex trafficking trends. The majority of the sex traffickers had only minor victims, which indicates a type of ‘specialty’ offender. The level of violence used by the sex traffickers to recruit and sell the minor victims should be considered when law enforcement investigates crimes and during the prosecution of the sex traffickers. Future research and training should be focused on the areas of the country with no or few arrests for sex trafficking of a minor as well as the hospitality and transportation industries, which in most cases were found to interact with a minor sex trafficking victim.

This study is product of an ongoing research partnership between Arizona State University, Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research and the McCain Institute for International Leadership.

Contact Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, 602-496-0093 or Dominique.roe@asu.edu for any questions.