

Child Trafficking and the Child Welfare System

Every year, children are compelled into labor and sex trafficking in the United States. Children may be trafficked by caregivers, intimate partners, or others who use violence, threats, debt bondage and other manipulative tactics to victimize children. Without proper intervention, the trauma of human trafficking can have a profound impact on children and their long-term developmental success. It is imperative that child welfare professionals learn best practices to effectively serve trafficked children involved with the child welfare system.

The below statistics are from January to December 2014. The data is based on information received by the National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline and Polaris's BeFree Textline that specifically reference child trafficking in the United States. The data is not intended to represent the full scope of human trafficking, but to help identify trends.



Cases of trafficking involving minors

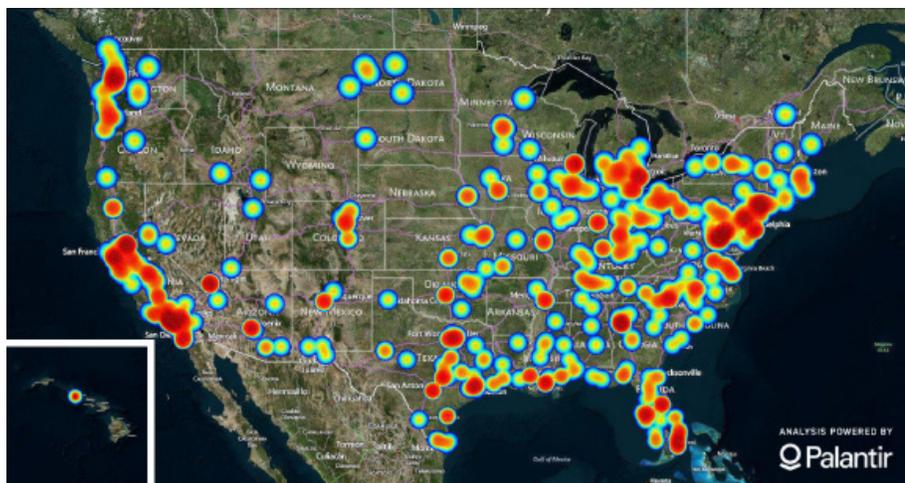
1,607



Cases referencing child welfare system

121

Potential Human Trafficking Cases Involving Minors*



TYPE OF TRAFFICKING

Sex Trafficking

84%

Labor Trafficking

9%

Sex and Labor Trafficking

3%

TOP 5 NATIONALITIES OF MINOR VICTIMS*

1. U.S.A.

2. Mexico

3. China

4. Guatemala

5. Russia

TOP 3 SEX TRAFFICKING VENUES

1. Hotel/Motel-Based

2. Online Ad, Venue Not Specified

3. Street-Based

LABOR TRAFFICKING VENUES

1. Traveling Sales Crews

2. Begging Rings

3. Peddling Rings

DEMOGRAPHICS (CASES)*

Gender

Female (1,393)

Male (231)

Transgender (<10)

Citizenship

US Citizen (626)

Foreign National (247)

* These statistics are non-cumulative. Callers do not always provide demographic information, nationality, or the location of potential trafficking.

Polaris provides consultation and tailored services to child welfare institutions seeking to improve responses to child trafficking, including protocol review, workforce training, and resource development. For more information, visit www.polarisproject.org/childwelfare or contact us (advisoryservices@polarisproject.org).

KEY FACTS

1 in 6 runaways in 2014 were likely sex trafficking victims. 68% of these likely victims were in the care of social services or foster care when they ran. (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children)

978 allegations of human trafficking in Florida's child welfare system were made in 2014, involving 775 victims. This figure is up from 480 allegations in 2011. (Florida Department of Children and Families)

130 victims of sex trafficking were identified in Connecticut in 2014. 98% of these victims were involved with the child welfare system in some manner. (Connecticut Department of Children and Families)

74% of Child Advocacy Centers in the Midwest region have served Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) victims. However, only 13% had policies and procedures in place specific to CSEC needs and 91% of respondents reported having no funding for CSEC victims. (Midwest Regional Child Advocacy Center)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Note: All recommendations should be inclusive of sex and labor trafficking.

- 1 Implement mandatory training for all child welfare personnel on human trafficking.
- 2 Establish a mandatory human trafficking screening process through the integration of trafficking into existing screenings or the development of unique screening tools.
- 3 Designate human trafficking specialists within each service unit to consult on case management, policies, and procedures.
- 4 Partner with anti-trafficking professionals and evaluate contract service providers based on their ability to provide culturally-sensitive services to child trafficking survivors.
- 5 Identify appropriate, specialized housing placements for trafficked youth in kinship care, foster care, or congregate settings with trained, trauma-informed caregivers.

KEISHA'S STORY OF SEX TRAFFICKING*

After running away from her foster family due to sexual harassment, Keisha met an older man who offered to help her find her biological family. Then he forced her into commercial sex to pay him back for the travel costs.

He physically assaulted her and told her she would never see anyone in her family if she did not make money for him through commercial sex. With no money or other options, Keisha complied.

A year later, Keisha was arrested for a second time on solicitation charges. Keisha learned about sex trafficking during an outreach group at the detention center and reached out to Polaris. Polaris helped Keisha talk to her probation officer to understand the options for supportive services instead of detention or returning to her abusive foster family.

Keisha now has a protection order against her trafficker and was able to go to an out-of-state residential program for young girls who were victims of sex trafficking. Keisha is doing well in her program and is almost finished with her GED.

* To protect the identity of those we serve, Polaris has changed the name of the girl in this story.

TRAFFICKING INDICATORS

SEX TRAFFICKING

- Is under the age of 18 and engaged in commercial sex, regardless of force, fraud, or coercion
- Feels they must provide commercial sex in exchange for money, housing or other necessities
- Frequently stays at or is seen at hotels/motels
- Has tattoos or markings indicating the ownership or control by another individual
- Photos of the youth have been placed online for advertising purposes

LABOR TRAFFICKING

- References employment scams or physical/sexual/psychological abuse by employers
- Works unusually long hours or works instead of attending school
- Was required to pay a recruitment fee for his/her job
- Is not paid or paid very little

SEX AND LABOR TRAFFICKING

- Demonstrates mental health concerns such as self-destructive behavior, exhaustion, depression, or PTSD
- Suffers from untreated medical issues such as STIs, occupational injuries, or exposure
- Physical or sexual abuse, neglect, malnourishment, or poor hygiene
- Has frequent absences/truancy or is not allowed to enroll in school
- Has a history of running from care; record of arrests related to commercial sex, gang activity, or other status offenses
- Lives with "parents" that are not biological or legal guardians
- Pays family for rent/basic needs or is relegated to isolated, inadequate living quarters
- Has received threats of harm to self/friends/family, deportation, or reports to law enforcement
- Provides scripted responses or is hesitant to speak on own behalf
- Has a debt they cannot pay off