



3. HOW PREVALENT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING INTO AND WITHIN THE UNITED STATES?

3.1 Trafficking into the United States

The data and methodologies for estimating the prevalence of human trafficking globally and nationally are not well developed, and therefore estimates have varied widely and changed significantly over time. The U.S. State Department has estimated that approximately 600,000 to 800,000 victims are trafficked annually across international borders worldwide and approximately half of these victims are younger than age 18 (U.S. Department of State, 2005, 2006, 2007). Additionally, the U.S. State Department has estimated that 80 percent of internationally trafficked victims are female and 70 percent are trafficked into the sex industry (U.S. Department of State, 2005). In comparison, the International Labor Organization has estimated that at any given time, 12.3 million people are in forced labor, bonded labor, forced child labor, sexual servitude, and involuntary servitude (International Labor Organization, 2005). Other estimates of global labor exploitation range from 4 million to 27 million (U.S. Department of State, 2006, 2007).

Initial estimates cited in the TVPA suggested that approximately 50,000 individuals were trafficked into the United States each year. This estimate was subsequently reduced to 18,000–20,000 in the U.S. Department of State's June 2003 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, and in its 2005 and 2006 reports, altered again to an estimate of 14,500–17,500 individuals trafficked annually into the United States.

According to official administrative data, since 2001, the U.S. Department of Justice has prosecuted 360 defendants in human trafficking cases, and secured 238 convictions (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007). Additionally, as of June 2007, 1,264 foreign nationals (adults and children) have been certified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as victims of human trafficking, eligible to receive public benefits. Of these, 1,153 are adults, with 69 percent female victims. Of the 111 minor victims certified, 82 percent were female. For some victim service providers and NGOs, these figures are not considered representative of the actual number of human trafficking victims in the country. They believe that many victims go unreported (and uncounted) because they do not want to cooperate with law enforcement and, therefore, are never reported to authorities or receive Federal assistance (Caliber Associates, 2007).

3.2 Trafficking within the United States

To date, estimates of human trafficking have focused almost exclusively on international trafficking victims (Laczko & Gozdzik, 2005), and this holds true for the United States as well. Only a recent estimate of minors at risk for sexual exploitation comes close to estimating U.S. domestic trafficking. Between 244,000 and 325,000 American youth are considered at risk for sexual exploitation, and an estimated 199,000 incidents of sexual exploitation of minors occur each year in the United States (Estes & Weiner, 2001). These figures, however, are limited estimates of youth at risk for human trafficking and do not address adult U.S. citizens trafficked into the sex industry or American children and adults trafficked for labor. We can, however, turn to estimates of other at-risk populations, such as runaway/throwaway youth, youth exploited through prostitution, and child labor, to gain a better sense of the potential prevalence of domestic trafficking, or at least the numbers of people at high risk of trafficking.

Given the correlations between runaway/throwaway youth and minors exploited through prostitution (Estes & Weiner, 2001), findings from the Second National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted,



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Runaway, and Thrownaway Children can offer additional information about the possible prevalence of minors trafficked or at risk of being trafficked domestically into the commercial sex industry (Hammer, Finkelhor, & Sedlak, 2002). For example, in 1999, 1,682,900 youth had a period of time in which they could be characterized as a runaway or throwaway youth; 71 percent of these youth were considered at risk for prostitution (Estes & Weiner, 2001).

Data reported by the runaway and homeless youth programs supported by funding from the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) within HHS provide additional information about this at-risk youth population. In 2007, 50,718 youth received services from FYSB-funded runaway and homeless programs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). Of these youth, 54 percent were female. Additionally, 770,223 contacts (distribution of written materials, health and hygiene products, and/or food and drinks) were made with youth through street outreach programs. It is unclear, however, whether these numbers include duplicate counts (e.g., youth receiving services multiple times from one or more service providers), which is a problem often inherent in administrative data (Gozdziaik & Collett, 2005). In addition, it is not known how many street youth do not come into contact with service providers.

National juvenile arrest data provide another glimpse of the potential magnitude of the domestic trafficking of youth. Nationwide in 2003, 2,220,300 juveniles were arrested, 11 percent fewer than in 1999 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004). During 2003, 1,400 youth were arrested for prostitution and commercialized vice. Of these youth, 69 percent were female and 14 percent were younger than age 15. Unlike overall juvenile arrest rates, these numbers increased 31 percent between 1994 and 2003.

Notwithstanding these general data, there is no clear consensus on the numbers of girls versus boys exploited through prostitution nationwide. The differential treatment of boys and girls, coupled with the differences in the circumstances under which they prostitute (including location), make these statistics extremely difficult to interpret.

As with most other data related to human trafficking, there are huge gaps between estimates of “prevalence” or populations “at risk” and individuals actually identified as trafficking victims or enrolled in government programs. Better data and research are needed to begin distinguishing among possible reasons for the gaps between prevalence estimates and administrative data.

In addition to domestic sex trafficking, American minors and adults are likely trafficked for forced labor; however, children are generally preferred to adults in the labor world as they are more easily controlled, cheaper, and less likely to demand better working conditions (Herzfeld, 2002). Unfortunately, we know even less about labor trafficking, both into and within the United States, than we do about sex trafficking. There is evidence that forced child labor exists in the African and Latin American regions and also in more developed countries such as the United States (International Labor Organization, 2002). An International Labor Organization study indicated that girls are more likely to be trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation and domestic services, and boys tend to be trafficked for forced labor in commercial farming, petty crimes, and the drug trade.

A review of the data on child labor, however, provides some insight into the potential for labor trafficking within the United States. Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97) show substantial work activity among 14- and 15-year-old children (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001).

Employment among 14- and 15-year olds was concentrated in a small number of industries, with restaurants and supermarkets the most common industries in which youth were employed.

Babysitting and yard work were by far the most common freelance jobs youth reported having worked. NLSY97 figures and those of the Child Labor Coalition (CLC) indicate that youth employment



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is growing in the United States. The CLC estimated there are 5.5 million youth between the ages of 12 and 17 employed across the United States. This estimate was derived from the NLSY97 data. The CLC (2007) also estimates there are 500,000 U.S. children working in various agricultural settings, with most being members of minority groups. In addition to agricultural work, the CLC estimates 50,000 children are involved in street peddling, including peddling magazines, candy, and other consumer goods. Many teens become involved, believing peddling is a good way to make money, and do not realize the dangers associated with these activities. The CLC indicates that youth peddlers work long hours with little pay, in extreme temperatures, and with no access to bathrooms, water, or food; work for activities or prizes they never receive; and work alone in strange neighborhoods or cities. Youth peddlers also may be abandoned or deserted if they do not meet their quota for the day, or may be forced to walk home for angering the crew leader. Many parents are also unaware of these dangers and believe they are allowing their children to work for respected and legitimate companies.

In FY 2004, the U.S. Department of Labor found 1,087 minors employed in violation of Hazardous Occupation Standards. During the same period, the Wage and Hours Division reported 5,840 children were employed in violation of child labor laws. Both sets of figures represent reductions from prior years; however, advocates contend that the reductions are the result of reduced Federal enforcement, not declining use of child labor. This assumption is partly due to the fact that there are only 34 Department of Labor employees assigned to monitor this area, or one per every 95,000 child laborers. The advocates' contention is supported by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2002). These child labor estimates represent a proportion of the population that may be at risk for labor trafficking within the United States, and should be explored further from the perspective of domestic labor trafficking.

Despite these various estimates, we are still uncertain about the actual prevalence of human trafficking into and within the United States for several reasons. First, given the covert character of the crime, accurate statistics on the nature, prevalence, and geography of human trafficking are difficult to calculate (Clawson, Layne, & Small, 2006). Trafficking victims are guarded closely by their captors, many victims lack accurate immigration documentation, trafficked domestic servants remain "invisible" in private homes, and private businesses often act as a front for a back-end trafficking operation. These factors make human trafficking a particularly difficult crime to identify and count. Additionally, available data are often non-comparable and contain duplicate counts, are limited to information on women and children trafficked for sexual exploitation and not other forms of human trafficking, and are often inconsistently or inaccurately recorded due to differing definitions and beliefs among service providers and law enforcement about who is a victim of human trafficking (Clawson, Layne, & Small, 2006).

Despite these challenges, steps are being taken to improve the methods used to estimate human trafficking (Clawson, Layne, & Small, 2006) and improve the reliability and validity of the data. For example, Massachusetts created the Child Sexual Exploitation Database through the SEEN Coalition (formerly the Teen Prostitution Prevention Project) in Suffolk County. Through increased awareness and a new reporting system, better data are available on the number of prostituted teens in the area. In 2003, for example, only five prostituted teens were recorded by Suffolk County, but by September 2005, the number jumped to 59. Of those 59, 58 were female, one was male, and none identified as transgender. Providers in Boston believe this jump may be attributed to increased awareness by those coming in contact with youth (including law enforcement, health care, and child protective services) as well as a more effective identification and referral mechanism, particularly of female minors exploited through prostitution. However, to date, there has been no analysis that documents whether these increasing numbers reflect improved awareness and identification, or an actual increase in the incidence of minor prostitution (Teen Prostitution Prevention Project, 2006).



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Obtaining more stable and reliable estimates is key to helping Federal, State, and local governments appropriately allocate resources and develop programs and strategies to prevent human trafficking, prosecute traffickers, and protect and serve victims of this crime.