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NACo survey reveals that human sex trafficking is a problem for larger, urban counties

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A survey released today by the National Association of Counties (NACo) reveals that human sex trafficking, especially as it relates to children under the age of 18, is a problem for large, urban counties, defined as those counties with populations of 250,000 or greater.

The survey results, which were released at a news conference at the National Press Club, show:

- 86 percent of the counties with populations greater than 250,000 said it is a major/minor problem.
- 48 percent of the large counties with populations greater than 250,000 said it is a major problem.
- 53 percent of the counties with populations of 50,000 to 249,999 said it is a major/minor problem.

Sex trafficking of children under the age of 18 is a greater problem for larger counties.

- In the past two years, 40 percent of the counties with populations greater than 250,000 said it has increased, while 51 percent said it has stayed the same.
- Counties with populations from 50,000 to 249,999 reported an 11 percent increase, while 77 percent said it had not changed.

“This is a difficult problem for many of our larger counties,” said Matthew D. Chase, NACo executive director. “Counties like Los Angeles County and others are making a major effort to help the victims and deal with this problem. It is a community, economic and moral issue that has long-term effects on the children that are impacted by it.”

The telephone survey of county sheriffs’ and police departments was conducted between April 9 and April 21, 2014 by National Research, LLC. of Washington, D.C. A total of 400 counties provided responses. The data were balanced to reflect the make-up of the 3,069 counties in the U.S. based on population and geography. Results were split into three population categories: greater than 250,000; 50,000 to 249,999 and under 50,000. Seventy percent of the counties in the U.S. have populations under 50,000.

Human sex trafficking involves individuals profiting from the sexual exploitation of others. International, federal and state laws all identify human sex trafficking as recruiting, harboring, receipt or transportation of persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation.
For the larger counties, those with populations greater than 250,000, sex trafficking is a problem that is not going away. For 34 percent of the larger counties, arrests for human sex trafficking in the past year have increased, with an additional 61 percent saying that the number of arrests stayed the same in the past year.

Arrests in mid-sized and smaller counties have stayed about the same. Eighty-three percent of the mid-sized counties said arrests stayed the same and 86 percent of the smaller counties said the number of arrests has not changed.

The trend of arrests is similar for the past five years.

- For 52 percent of the counties with populations greater than 250,000, arrests have increased, while 37 percent said the number of arrests stayed about the same.
- 18 percent of the mid-sized counties said they have experienced an increase in arrests, while 72 percent said the number of arrests stayed about the same.
- For smaller counties, 6 percent said arrests have increased and 85 percent said they stayed about the same.

The survey shows that sellers and purchasers of sex are the groups most often arrested for sex trafficking. In the larger counties, 43 percent of the sellers and 23 percent of purchasers are being arrested, while only 13 percent of the minor children are being arrested.

The survey shows that there appears to be a link between sex trafficking and minor children who have been in the foster care system, group homes or involved in abuse proceedings.

- Sixty-two percent of the large counties, those with populations greater than 250,000, said there was a strong/somewhat strong link.
- Thirty-five percent of the mid-sized counties said there was a link and 21 percent of the small counties said there is a link.

A safe harbor law to prohibit prosecution of minors for prostitution also appears to be needed. Thirty-six percent of all the counties surveyed said their states do not have a law and 38 percent said they do not know if there is a law.

The counties surveyed believe that providing a safe shelter or transitional housing is needed to combat sex trafficking and to help children who are victims.

- To combat human sex trafficking, 62 percent of all the counties said that funding to provide a safe shelter where victims can receive comprehensive support and rehabilitation services is what is most needed.
- 48 percent said stiffer penalties for sellers are necessary.
- 33 percent said stiffer penalties for purchasers should be instituted.

Human sex trafficking is less of a problem for smaller counties that have populations under 50,000. Twenty-five percent of those counties said it is a minor problem and 1 percent said it is a major problem, while 74 percent said it is not a problem. Click [here](#) to read the full survey.

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The National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States. Founded in 1935, NACo assists America’s 3,069 counties in pursuing excellence in public service to produce healthy, vibrant, safe and resilient counties. NACo promotes sound public policies, fosters county solutions and innovation, promotes intergovernmental and public-private collaboration and provides value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money. More information at: [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org).