

NACo SURVEY REPORT | APRIL 2014

The Problem of Human Sex Trafficking in America



A SURVEY OF COUNTY SHERIFF & POLICE DEPARTMENTS



Executive Summary

Human sex trafficking is a problem for large, urban counties

Counties in different parts of the country and of varying sizes had expressed concern in recent months about human sex trafficking, especially as it relates to forcing children under the age of 18 to become prostitutes. In some areas, this is a growing problem that is having a devastating effect on our communities.

To determine the extent of the problem, the National Association of Counties (NACo) engaged National Research, LLC. of Washington, D.C., to conduct a telephone survey of county sheriffs' departments and county police departments. The interviews were conducted between April 9 and April 21, 2014.

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. There is no exact definition of the term, but international, federal and state laws all reflect the idea that human sex trafficking involves the recruiting, harboring, receipt or transportation of persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Large counties feeling the impact

The survey results show that human sex trafficking is a problem for larger, urban counties.

- 86 percent of the counties with populations greater than 250,000 that number 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.

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.

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.

For the larger counties, those with populations greater than 250,000, it 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 showed 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.

Help needed for children being exploited

The survey showed 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.

Survey Questions & Results by Population

1. To what extent is human sex trafficking a problem in your county?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Net: Major/Minor problem	37%	26%	53%	86%
Major problem	6%	1%	5%	48%
Minor problem	31%	25%	49%	38%
Not a problem	62%	74%	45%	11%

2. In the past year, have arrests for human sex trafficking in your county increased, stayed the same or decreased?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Increased	7%	3%	8%	34%
Stayed the same	83%	86%	83%	61%
Decreased	1%	2%	1%	---

3. By what percent has it increased? (For those who identified an increase.)

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Less than 25%	29%	21%	63%	11%
25% to 49%	19%	21%	14%	21%
50% to 74%	13%	24%	---	16%
75% to 99%	2%	---	---	5%
100% or more	18%	34%	---	21%

4. By what percent has it decreased? (For those who identified a decrease.)

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Less than 25%	12%	---	50%	---
25% to 49%	---	---	---	---
50% to 74%	12%	---	50%	---
75% to 99%	---	---	---	---
100%	76%	100%	---	---

5. What about in the past five years? Have arrests for human sex trafficking in your county increased, stayed about the same or decreased?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Increased	13%	6%	18%	52%
Stayed the same	78%	85%	72%	37%
Decreased	1%	1%	1%	2%

6. By what percent has it increased? (For those who identified an increase for the past five years.)

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Less than 25%	32%	36%	50%	11%
25% to 49%	18%	9%	32%	13%
50% to 74%	20%	37%	4%	17%
75% to 99%	1%	---	---	4%
100%	11%	9%	---	24%
>100%	2%	---	---	6%

7. By what percent has it decreased? (For those who identified a decrease for the past five years.)*

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Less than 25%	13%	---	---	100%
25% to 49%	---	---	---	---
50% to 74%	15%	---	54%	---
75% to 99%	---	---	---	---
100%	72%	100%	46%	---
>100%	---	---	---	---

* Only four counties said they had experienced a decrease.

8. In the past two years, has the trafficking of minor children under the age of 18 increased, stayed about the same or decreased?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Increased	8%	3%	11%	40%
Stayed the same	79%	83%	77%	51%
Decreased	4%	5%	5%	---

9. Who is being arrested most often as a result of the trafficking of minor children?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Sellers/pimps	13%	7%	20%	43%
Purchasers/johns	12%	8%	19%	23%
Children under 18	5%	4%	5%	13%
Other	2%	2%	2%	---
No arrests	62%	72%	50%	16%

10. To what extent is there a link in your county between human sex trafficking and minor children who have been in the foster care system, group homes or involved in abuse or neglect proceedings?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Net: Strong link/Somewhat of a link	27%	21%	35%	62%
Strong link	8%	4%	11%	30%
Somewhat of a link	19%	17%	23%	32%
Not a link	61%	69%	50%	23%
Don't know	10%	8%	14%	14%

11. Does your state have a “safe harbor” law or laws which prohibit the prosecution of minors under the age of 18 for prostitution offenses?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Yes	26%	26%	21%	45%
No	36%	32%	47%	32%
Don't know	38%	42%	31%	24%

12. To what extent do you feel that the laws in your state are effective in the following areas?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Protecting minors from trafficking	41%	42%	36%	44%
Prosecuting sellers/pimps	41%	40%	42%	46%
Prosecuting purchasers/johns	37%	36%	43%	32%

13. To what extent do you feel that the laws in your state are effective in protecting minors from trafficking?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
10 – Completely effective	9%	11%	5%	11%
9	9%	9%	7%	13%
8	22%	22%	25%	21%
7	18%	16%	22%	22%
6	10%	11%	6%	10%
5	18%	19%	20%	13%
4	3%	2%	6%	3%
3	2%	2%	1%	---
2	1%	1%	3%	---
1 – Completely ineffective	2%	2%	1%	3%

14. To what extent do you feel that the laws in your state are effective in prosecuting sellers/pimps?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
10 – Completely effective	13%	16%	7%	9%
9	6%	5%	7%	11%
8	22%	19%	28%	27%
7	16%	15%	19%	11%
6	9%	9%	9%	6%
5	18%	20%	11%	18%
4	4%	3%	3%	14%
3	3%	3%	5%	2%
2	1%	1%	3%	---
1 – Completely ineffective	1%	1%	2%	---

15. To what extent do you feel that the laws in your state are effective in prosecuting purchasers/johns?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
10 – Completely effective	12%	15%	7%	5%
9	7%	6%	9%	11%
8	18%	15%	28%	16%
7	17%	17%	17%	13%
6	6%	4%	8%	14%
5	19%	22%	11%	20%
4	5%	6%	3%	3%
3	3%	1%	7%	4%
2	2%	1%	1%	5%
1 – Completely ineffective	2%	2%	2%	2%

16. Which of the following is needed to assist law enforcement efforts to combat trafficking?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Funding to provide a safe shelter or transitional housing where children that are victims of trafficking can receive comprehensive support and rehabilitation services	62%	61%	64%	61%
Stiffer penalties against sellers/pimps	48%	51%	43%	36%
Stiffer penalties against purchasers/johns	33%	35%	30%	26%
Funding to give trafficking victims an alternative path outside the criminal justice system	24%	20%	30%	32%
Funding to establish or sustain special courts specific to trafficking	15%	13%	15%	24%

17. Which of the following is most needed to assist law enforcement in efforts to combat trafficking?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Funding to provide a safe shelter or transitional housing where children that are victims of trafficking can receive comprehensive support and rehabilitation services	40%	40%	43%	34%
Stiffer penalties against sellers/pimps	30%	32%	24%	23%
Stiffer penalties against purchasers/johns	9%	8%	10%	11%
Funding to give trafficking victims an alternative path outside the criminal justice system	7%	6%	9%	12%
Funding to establish or sustain special courts specific to trafficking	6%	6%	6%	10%

18. Which of the following is the second most needed to assist law enforcement in efforts to combat trafficking?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Stiffer penalties against purchasers/johns	25%	27%	20%	15%
Funding to provide a safe shelter or transitional housing where children that are victims of trafficking can receive comprehensive support and rehabilitation services	22%	22%	21%	27%
Stiffer penalties against sellers/pimps	18%	19%	19%	12%
Funding to give trafficking victims an alternative path outside the criminal justice system	16%	14%	21%	20%
Funding to establish or sustain special courts specific to trafficking	9%	8%	9%	15%

19. Does your county have any programs that were created to reduce human trafficking?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Yes	15%	7%	25%	55%
No	82%	90%	73%	41%
Don't know	2%	2%	2%	4%

20. What agency carries out the program? (For those that answered yes to having a program.)

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Sheriff or police department	18%	33%	13%	7%
Family services	3%	---	8%	---
Charitable organization	3%	---	5%	3%
Prosecutor's office	3%	---	5%	3%
Social services	2%	---	2%	3%
Probation	1%	---	--	3%
Some combination of these agencies/groups	53%	35%	59%	66%
Some other department	15%	24%	8%	15%

21. What county agency takes the leadership role on assisting minor victims of trafficking?

	Total	Less than 50,000	50,000 – 249,999	250,000 +
Sheriff or police department	10%	12%	7%	11%
Social services	8%	9%	7%	7%
Child advocacy centers	4%	3%	9%	5%
Juvenile affairs/services	1%	1%	1%	---
Children protective services	1%	1%	---	---
Family services	4%	3%	4%	7%
Human services department	1%	1%	---	---
Probation	1%	1%	1%	2%
Prosecutor's office	1%	1%	1%	---
District Attorney's office	1%	---	1%	2%
Some combination of these agencies	66%	66%	67%	66%
Another agency	2%	2%	1%	---

ABOUT NACO

The National Association of Counties (NACo) assists America's counties in pursuing excellence in public service by advancing sound public policies, promoting peer learning and accountability, fostering intergovernmental and public-private collaboration, and providing value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money. Founded in 1935, NACo provides the elected and appointed leaders from the nation's 3,069 counties with the knowledge, skills and tools necessary to advance fiscally responsible, quality-driven and results-oriented policies and services to build healthy, vibrant, safe and fiscally resilient counties.



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