FACT OR FICTION

Decoding Human Trafficking Statistics

Amelia Rubenstein, LCSW-C
Prevention of Adolescent Risks Intiative,
University of Maryland School of Social Work

IMPORTANCE OF DATA

Why is high-quality data on human trafficking important? Why is high-quality data so hard to find?

DATA CREDIBILITY

How do we evaluate data on human trafficking? Are the stats we often use accurate or credible?

TIPS FOR IMPROVING

How can we do better with accuracy and credibility in the anti-trafficking field?

IMPORTANCE OF DATA

LEARNING FROM THE HIV/AIDS CRISIS

IMPORTANCE OF DATA

ESTIMATES RANGE FROM

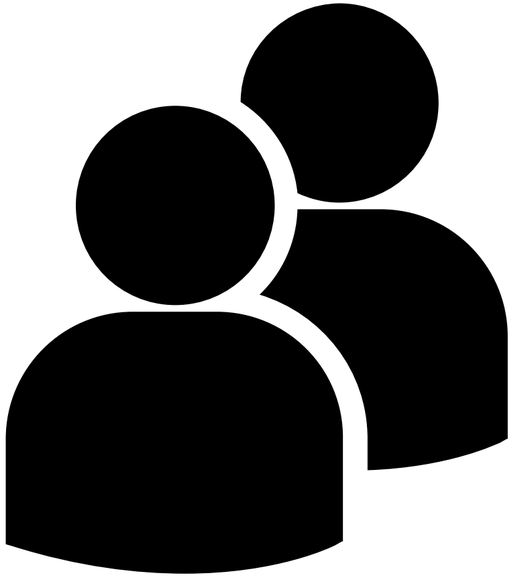
1,400 to 2.4 million

There is no true esitimate of these crimes in the United States

National Research Council. (2013). Confronting commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking of minors in the United States. National Academies Press.

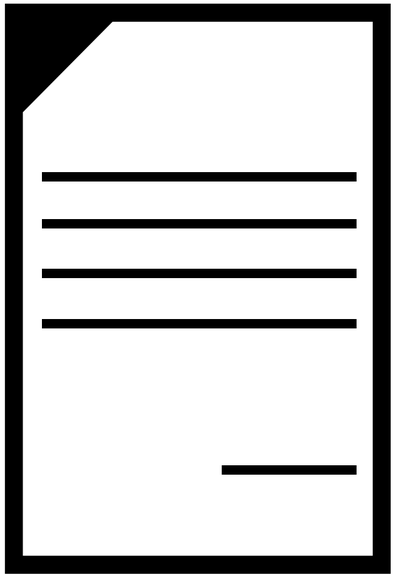
IMPORTANCE OF DATA

TYPES OF RESEARCH NEEDED FOR EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE



VICTIM DEMOGRAPHICS

INTERVENTION EFFICACY



POLICY ANALYSIS

DATA CREDIBILITY

"100,000-300,000

children become victims of sexual exploitation every year."

"There are upwards, according to the Justice Department, of 300,000, mostly young girls, at risk for this."
–Rep. Ann Wagner (R-Mo.), remarks at a congressional hearing, May 14

"In the U.S., some 300,000 children are at risk each year for commercial sexual exploitation."

–Rep. Joyce Beatty (D-Ohio), statement, May 19, 2015

DATA CREDIBILITY

The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children In the U. S., Canada and Mexico

Full Report

(of the U.S. National Study)

Richard J. Estes

and

Neil Alan Weiner

University of Pennsylvania
School of Social Work
Center for the Study of Youth Policy
4200 Pine Street, 3rd floor
Philadelphia, PA 19104-4090
Telephone: 215-898-5531
Fax: 215-573-2099
E-Mail: restes@ssw.upenn.edu

the average age of entry
into prostitution
is 12 years old
3:08 / 5:08

2020 BALTIMORE STUDY, JOURNAL OF URBAN HEALTH

The mean age of entry into the sex trade was 24.7 (range 11–61). 21.2% of women entered < 18 years, 39.2% entered between 18 and 25, and 39.6% entered at older age groups

HIGH SAMPLE SIZE

RECENT

PEER REVIEWED

Table 1

Demographics, current structural vulnerabilities, and sexual health of SAPPHIRE cis-women by age first sold sex ($n = 250$)

	Age first sold sex		
	< 18	≥ 18	*p* value
	$n = 53$	$n = 197$	
Demographics			
Age (years), mean (SD)	33.1 (8.4)	36.4 (9.0)	0.02
Race/ethnicity			0.15
White	30 (56.6)	136 (69.0)	
Black	14 (26.4)	43 (21.8)	
Hispanic or other	9 (17.0)	18 (9.1)	
Relationship status			0.73
Single	36 (67.9)	129 (65.5)	
In a relationship	10 (18.9)	48 (24.4)	
Married	6 (11.3)	20 (10.2)	
Childhood abuse			
Childhood abuse, any	30 (56.6)	96 (48.7)	0.28
Childhood abuse, sexual	24 (45.3)	58 (29.4)	0.02

▲ A street outreach supervisor in Cleveland, Ramses Clements '10 works closely with homeless and runaway youth.

RESCUING YOUTH *from the streets*

RAMSES CLEMENTS '10
Street outreach supervisor
Homeless and Missing Youth Program
Bellefaire JCB, Cleveland, Ohio

WE IMAGINE WHAT SEX TRAFFICKING LOOKS LIKE. Shadowy, dark transactions—perhaps in Cambodian bars or Thai brothels. Somewhere very far away.

Ramses Clements '10, street outreach supervisor for Bellefaire JCB's Homeless and Missing Youth Program in Cleveland, knows exactly what it looks like in Cuyahoga County. It begins with a youth running away or becoming homeless. Within 47-72 hours of being on the streets, chances are very high that a young person will become abused—either coerced into survival sex or assaulted.

He knows where to look and what to look for: gas stations, malls, and motels; teens with lots of cash and no IDs, wearing backpacks stuffed with unlikely contents—perhaps a pillow and toiletries. He is both educator and caseworker and knows that it takes a city to save a kid. He partners with many community organizations—the police, homeless shelters, schools, libraries, the Public Transit Authority.

Chances are very high that a young person will become abused within

47-72 HOURS *of being on the streets*

72-HOUR MYTH

A U.S. Department of Health and Human Services webpage reporting "The Numbers" relevant to runaway and homeless youth states, "Children, both boys and girls, are solicited for sex, on average, within 72 hours of being on the street" (Department of Health and Human Services, 2015)

JOURNAL OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING
2018, VOL. 4, NO. 1, 89–91
https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2018.1423450

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

Anti-trafficking's Sensational Misinformation: The "72-hour Myth" and America's Homeless Youth

Laura T. Murphy

Modern Slavery Research Project, Loyola University New Orleans, New Orleans, LA USA

ABSTRACT

Media representations of sex trafficking among homeless youth typically and needlessly contain sensationalized images and unsupported false statistics regarding the issue. One of those factoids: that runaway and homeless youth are likely to be trafficked for sex within 72 hours of leaving home is particularly pervasive despite being completely unfounded. This article tracks down the sources of this misinformation. Then, using a study of over 600 homeless youth conducted by Loyola University's Modern Slavery Research Project, the article provides a more nuanced and survivor-centered portrait of the human trafficking – both sex and labor – that affects the homeless youth population.

KEYWORDS

Runaway and homeless youth; human trafficking; sex trafficking; modern slavery; homelessness

"It is impossible to find any credible source for this claim."

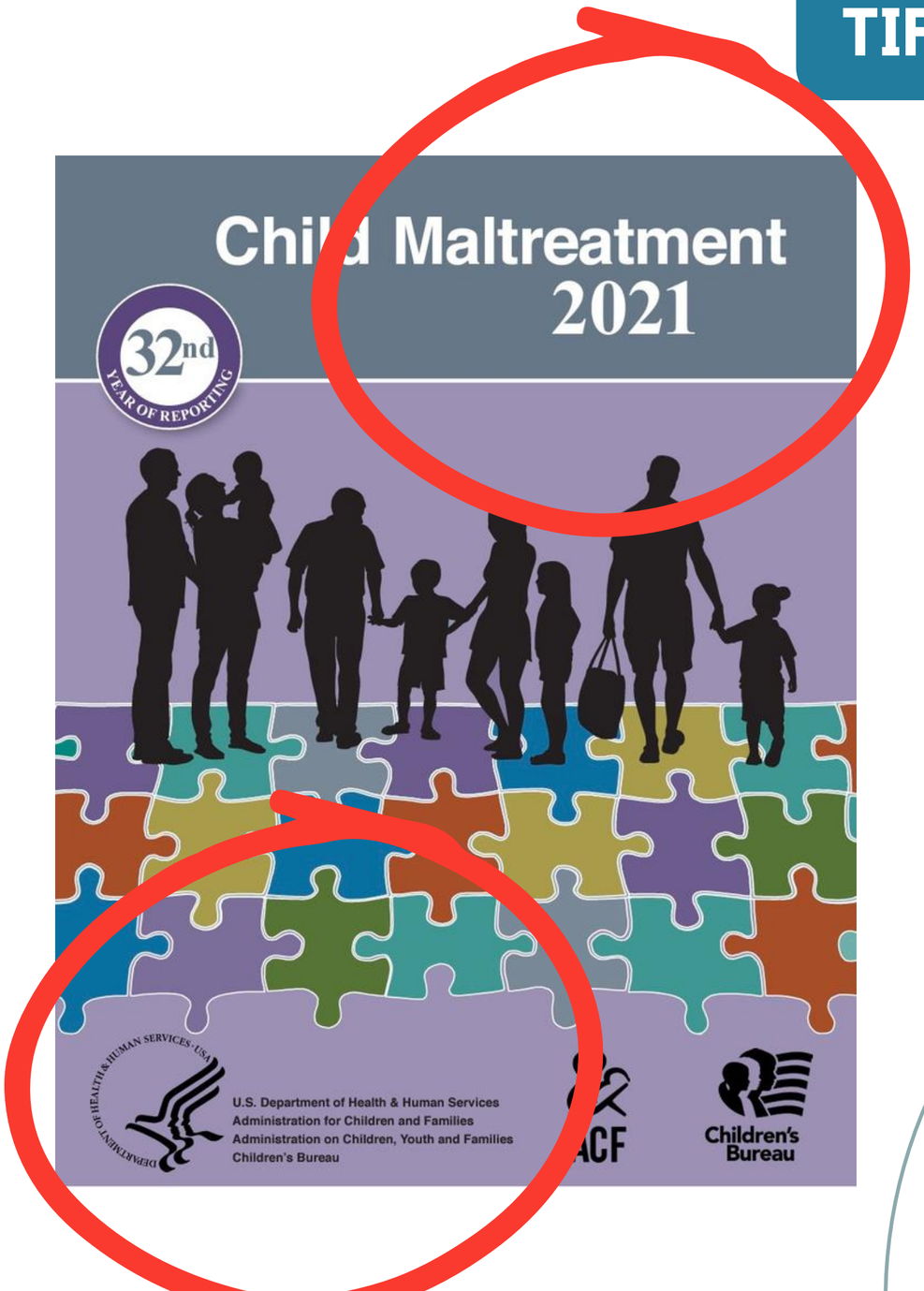
YOUTH HOMELESSNESS & TRAFFICKING

Youth who are homeless are put at increased risk of being trafficked. For example, a 2018 study involving a sample of 131 homeless youth aged 12 to 25 years old experiencing homelessness were surveyed and indicated that 41.2% of the homeless youth were victims of sex trafficking.

Middleton, J. S., Gattis, M. N., Frey, L. M., & Roe-Sepowitz, D. (2018). Youth experiences survey (YES): Exploring the scope and complexity of sex trafficking in a sample of youth experiencing homelessness. Journal of Social Service Research, 44(2), 141-157.

LET'S PRACTICE!

TIPS FOR IMPROVING



TIPS FOR IMPROVING

"THERE ARE 1,086 VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING."

Table 3–8 Maltreatment Types of Victims (Categories), 2021 *(continues next page)*

State	Victims	Medical Neglect	Neglect	Other	Physical Abuse	Psychological Maltreatment	Sexual Abuse	Sex Trafficking	Unknown	Total Maltreatment Types
Alabama	11,840	79	5,061	-	6,125	19	2,144	7	-	13,435
Alaska	2,733	101	2,028	-	570	901	228	2	-	3,830
Arizona	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Arkansas	9,616	-	6,865	214	1,751	146	1,781	14	-	10,771
California	55,503	56	49,050	297	3,602	4,503	3,827	61	-	61,396
Colorado	11,147	179	9,176	-	1,097	224	1,178	-	30	11,884
Connecticut	5,570	153	4,853	-	261	1,497	391	3	-	7,158
Delaware	1,131	8	280	129	215	376	218	-	-	1,226
District of Columbia	1,647	-	1,518	-	205	-	35	12	-	1,770
Florida	27,394	966	16,266	10,933	2,231	348	2,563	-	-	33,307
Georgia	9,643	191	6,311	-	1,110	2,299	720	62	-	10,693
Hawaii	1,322	11	249	1,187	74	4	73	22	-	1,620
Idaho	2,268	6	1,714	6	435	-	230	6	-	2,397
Illinois	35,841	649	28,445	45	5,667	81	4,280	-	-	39,167
Indiana	21,556	-	18,621	-	1,373	-	2,560	30	-	22,584
Iowa	11,271	98	9,824	-	1,206	107	673	20	-	11,928
Kansas	2,140	43	951	-	528	307	488	9	-	2,326
Kentucky	14,963	255	13,791	-	1,081	60	831	-	-	16,018
Louisiana	6,422	-	5,747	4	630	6	331	4	-	6,722
Maine	4,228	-	2,536	-	1,026	1,619	303	1	-	5,485
Maryland	6,303	-	3,574	-	1,193	4	2,066	-	-	6,837
Massachusetts	22,654	-	21,383	5	1,614	-	793	357	-	24,152
Michigan	24,515	515	21,081	-	3,669	187	1,371	16	-	26,839
Minnesota	5,544	-	3,866	-	616	118	1,444	12	-	6,056
Mississippi	8,526	372	6,043	23	1,249	1,410	1,222	10	-	10,329
Missouri	4,262	112	2,275	-	1,298	582	1,342	7	-	5,616
Montana	3,077	12	2,981	3	154	34	90	-	-	3,274
Nebraska	2,471	1	2,034	-	355	25	224	12	-	2,651
Nevada	5,547	59	4,698	-	961	11	397	-	-	6,126
New Hampshire	985	32	840	-	102	40	80	-	-	1,094
New Jersey	3,188	65	2,297	-	368	27	608	2	-	3,367
New Mexico	5,964	197	4,889	-	716	1,773	218	-	-	7,793
New York	56,760	2,902	55,514	1,794	4,208	474	2,167	20	-	67,079
North Carolina	21,242	817	18,427	95	1,040	735	1,084	1	211	22,410
North Dakota	1,349	22	1,063	-	106	289	63	-	-	1,543
Ohio	24,267	418	11,220	-	11,167	1,632	4,357	16	-	28,810
Oklahoma	13,719	312	10,068	-	1,762	4,427	751	11	-	17,331
Oregon	10,573	-	4,582	6,158	1,209	183	956	-	-	13,088
Pennsylvania	4,683	148	499	13	2,093	55	2,103	47	-	4,958
Puerto Rico	4,753	556	3,178	46	848	2,442	175	2	-	7,247
Rhode Island	2,588	38	1,564	32	311	939	130	-	-	3,014
South Carolina	15,308	356	9,179	-	6,709	848	793	81	-	17,966
South Dakota	1,459	-	1,314	-	139	57	81	1	-	1,592
Tennessee	7,739	110	1,761	-	4,446	297	2,380	111	3	9,108
Texas	65,253	956	54,585	1	7,077	331	7,566	34	-	70,550
Utah	9,233	48	2,418	96	3,791	3,561	1,331	10	-	11,255
Vermont	392	11	4	-	292	2	105	-	-	414
Virginia	4,944	114	3,368	5	1,239	66	747	5	-	5,544
Washington	3,487	-	2,657	-	684	-	516	25	-	3,882
West Virginia	6,094	281	2,672	-	4,732	3,959	245	-	-	11,889
Wisconsin	4,229	51	2,818	-	554	44	1,022	53	-	4,542
Wyoming	886	3	700	6	18	312	47	-	-	1,086
National	**588,229**	**11,303**	**446,838**	**21,092**	**93,907**	**37,361**	**59,328**	**1,086**	**244**	**671,159**
Reporting States	**51**	**40**	**51**	**21**	**51**	**46**	**51**	**35**	**3**	**51**

"IN THE UNITED STATES, THERE ARE 1,086 VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING"

TIPS FOR IMPROVING

"IN THE UNITED STATES, THERE ARE 1,086 VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING"

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2023). Child Maltreatment 2021. Available from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-maltreatment.

TIPS FOR IMPROVING

"IN THE UNITED STATES, 35 STATES REPORTED A TOTAL OF 1,086 VICTIMS OF SEX TRAFFICKING IN 2021"

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2023). Child Maltreatment 2021. Available from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-maltreatment.

TIPS FOR IMPROVING

"IN THE UNITED STATES, 35 STATES REPORTED A TOTAL OF 1,086 VICTIMS OF SEX TRAFFICKING AGE 24 AND UNDER IN 2021"

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2023). Child Maltreatment 2021. Available from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-maltreatment.

TIPS

CHECK YOUR WORK

Set a good evidence-based example! Make sure your trainings and presentations **always** include citations and reference lists are available for participants.

QUESTION EVERYTHING

Question sources of human trafficking statistics and go read the original research yourself.

BE SPECIFIC

Instead of “Hundreds of 1000s of kids trafficked each year!”, tell participants “In 2019, Maryland identified ___ youth as victims of trafficking, according to _source_”

INSTITUTE AGENCY CHANGES

Create a sustainable way for your agency, task force, etc. to stay up to date on the latest research.

ACKNOWLEDGE THE UNKOWN

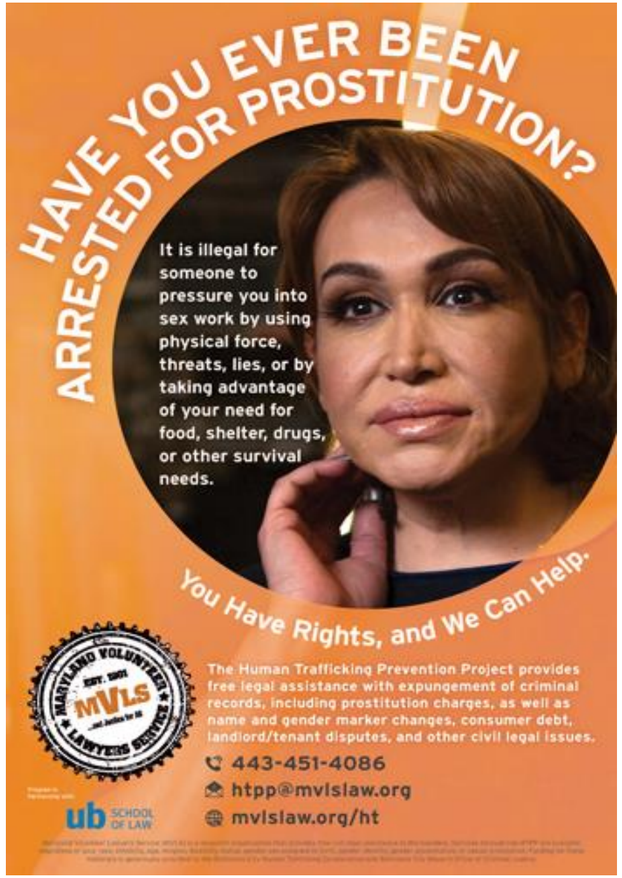
1Account for what we don’t know by avoiding generalizations or guessing. Remember we can never see the entire population.

QUESTIONS?

Amelia Rubenstein, MSW, LCSW-C
Director, Prevention of Adolescent Risks Initiative
University of Maryland School of Social Work
amelia.rubenstein@ssw.umaryland.edu

https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/pari/

Request Outreach Materials or Make a Referral to the HTPP Today!



For general information about the HTPP or to make a referral, please visit: **htprevention.org**

To request a package mailed to your organization, please email: **htpp@ubalt.edu**

FREE Upcoming Trainings

Go https://mvlslaw.org/mvls-events/ for more info!

- **February 15 – REDEEM Act Training Part II**
- **May 16 – The Legal Process for Name Change with Practice Tips**

Past HTPP and MVLS Webinars are available at
www.mvlslaw.org/ht/resources

Thank you!

To follow up with our guest speaker, please reach out to:

Amelia Rubenstein

amelia.rubenstein@ssw.umaryland.edu

To learn more about the Human Trafficking Prevention Project, please contact:

Jessica Emerson

Jemerson@ubalt.edu

Interested in taking a case through or learning more about Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Services? Reach out to:

Heather Heiman

hheiman@mvlslaw.org