

COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND SEX TRAFFICKING OF MINORS



Criminal Investigations and Network Analysis
A DHS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE



IDENTIFYING VICTIMS

- Unlike sex abuse, which tends to be identified via victims' own disclosures, discovery of trafficking tends to occur via law enforcement investigations (Fig. 1).
- Adults in the community often fail to recognize trafficking, seeing minors, especially older teens, as prostitutes partly responsible for their situation.
- Clinic and emergency room staff often miss signs of exploitation, even though victims report visiting clinics or emergency rooms while being trafficked.
- Fire fighters and EMTs rarely recognize minor sex trafficking in emergency field situations and report that intervening with high-risk youth is not their responsibility.

LEGAL QUESTIONING OF VICTIMS

- Evasiveness, mistrust of authorities, and denials by minor victims increase when victims hold romantic feelings for or fear their trafficker, and when they have prior social service or juvenile justice involvement.
- Law enforcement endorse suspect interrogation tactics with hostile uncooperative minor victims across age, but victim centered approaches with cooperative younger minors.
- Law enforcement often lack adequate training in adolescent development, tactics traffickers use to induce complicity, and why adolescents mistrust and are evasive, all of which can contribute to challenges in interview contexts.

Figure 1. Trafficking Discovery vs CSA Discovery



PROSECUTING TRAFFICKERS

- In the past 20 years, while federal prosecution of trafficking has increased, prosecution of other crimes, including sex crimes like pornography, have leveled off or decreased (Fig. 2).
- Victims' delinquent behavior and seeming complicity with the sexual activity are featured far more prominently in criminal cases of trafficking than sex abuse of teens (Fig. 3).
- Despite prosecutors' concerns that uncooperative victims will undermine their case, many successfully prosecuted cases contain uncooperative trafficked minor victims (Fig. 3).
- Electronic and physical evidence and experts who explain common trafficking victim behavior and uncooperativeness facilitate successful prosecution of traffickers.

Figure 2: Number of Federal Criminal Cases Filed Annually by Type of Crime

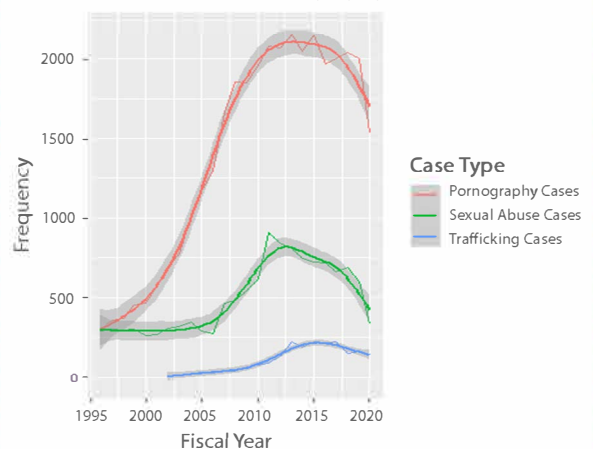
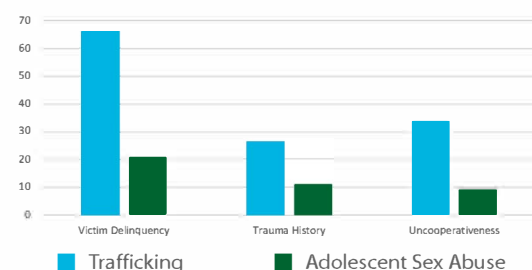


Figure 3: % of Time Each is Mentioned in Successfully Prosecuted Criminal Cases



Author Information:

Jodi A. Quas, PhD, University of California Irvine, CA
Allison D. Redlich, PhD, George Mason University, VA

Acknowledgment: This material is based upon work partly supported by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security under Grant Award Number 17STCIN00001-05-00 and the National Science Foundation Grant Award 1921187

Disclaimer: The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied, of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.