



**MODERN  
SLAVERY**  
RESEARCH PROJECT  
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**LOYOLA  
UNIVERSITY  
NEW ORLEANS**



**Covenant  
House**

# TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATIVE LABOR AMONG HOMELESS YOUTH IN NEW ORLEANS

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**LOYOLA  
UNIVERSITY  
NEW ORLEANS**



**MODERN SLAVERY RESEARCH PROJECT** // The Modern Slavery Research Project at Loyola University New Orleans produces thoughtful, geographically-informed, data-driven, community-based collaborative research that meets the needs of survivors and community stakeholders in addressing human trafficking in New Orleans, the US, and internationally.



**COVENANT HOUSE** // For over 25 years, Covenant House New Orleans has provided a safe haven for homeless, runaway and at-risk youth ages 16-22. Located on the edge of the French Quarter, we shelter and care for neglected, abused, and exploited kids from the New Orleans area and from across the United States.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When Jim Kelly, executive director of Covenant House New Orleans, asked the faculty of Loyola's Modern Slavery Research Project if we would like to study the prevalence of trafficking and survival sex among Covenant House residents, we were honored to work with them and to be invited to talk with Covenant House's young residents about their work lives. As Covenant House New Orleans continues to enhance its care and services for vulnerable and at-risk youth, our study would inform the organization's possible expansion of outreach efforts and residential services for victims of human trafficking and those who engage in sexual labor. Moreover, our study would replicate one done in New York, providing comparative data that could be utilized across the country. We remain grateful for this opportunity and for the collaboration with Covenant House.

The Covenant House staff warmly welcomed us into their offices. We especially want to thank Isabelle Sun, Vantrelle Payton, Wyatt Hines, and David Jones for providing the support we needed and for representing our project to the clients with sensitivity and discretion.

We are lucky to have followed in the footsteps of Jayne Bigelsen of Covenant House New York and Stefanie Vuotto of Fordham University, who conducted the first of these studies. Their thoughtful and informed questionnaire inspired us and convinced us that this was a project we could invest in.

Of course, our greatest thanks go to the nearly 100 young people of Covenant House New Orleans who spoke to us despite the fact that we were complete strangers. You all entrusted us with your lives and experiences—many of which are difficult to discuss—and we are eternally grateful for that trust. We hope that this study will help to prevent others from encountering some of your worst experiences. Thanks, too, for sharing your jokes, laughter, aspirations, and curiosity along the way.

Loyola University New Orleans supported this work through a Marquette Fellowship and a Faculty Research Grant. Our student research assistants—Lanier Clement, Molly Alper, Jasmine Jackson, Kathleen Hardin, Diandra Kirk, and Mack Guillory—were integral to completing this project as well. Our sincerest gratitude goes to Randy Laumann for catching all of our mistakes and to Liz Jurey for making all this research look appealing.

Layout and design by: Liz Jurey

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

The Global Slavery Index estimates that approximately 60,000 people are currently suffering under conditions of forced labor in the United States (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, despite the recent rhetoric that locales such as New Orleans are “hubs for human trafficking,” there has been very little data collected in New Orleans or other U.S. cities on the prevalence of trafficking within those locales or even among their at-risk populations.

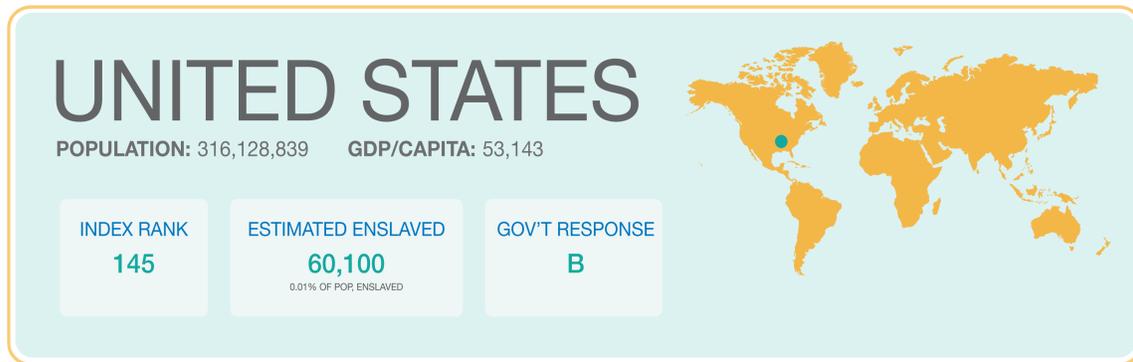


FIGURE 1: GLOBAL SLAVERY INDEX

Studies indicate risk for both sex and labor trafficking in the United States is highest when a confluence of individual risk factors collides with societal and familial pressures. Those individual indicators include poverty, homelessness, unemployment, a history of sexual abuse, and history of mental health issues.<sup>2</sup> Among young men and women, rejection by biological or foster families can increase vulnerability to sex trafficking.<sup>3</sup> Familial and societal pressures that may increase risk of trafficking include family or relatives involved in commercial sex, a prevalent local gang culture,<sup>4</sup> and socioeconomic disadvantages associated with race.<sup>5</sup> The Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council suggest that in addition to these individual and societal risk factors, a lack of awareness of trafficking and sexual exploitation endangers young people and makes them even more vulnerable to sex trafficking (Figure 2).<sup>6</sup> In terms of prevalence among certain racial groups, a Bureau of Justice Statistics report on characteristics of reported human trafficking incidents indicates that African American U.S. citizens under age 25 are potentially more likely to be victims of sex trafficking (or at least to be identified as such).<sup>7</sup>

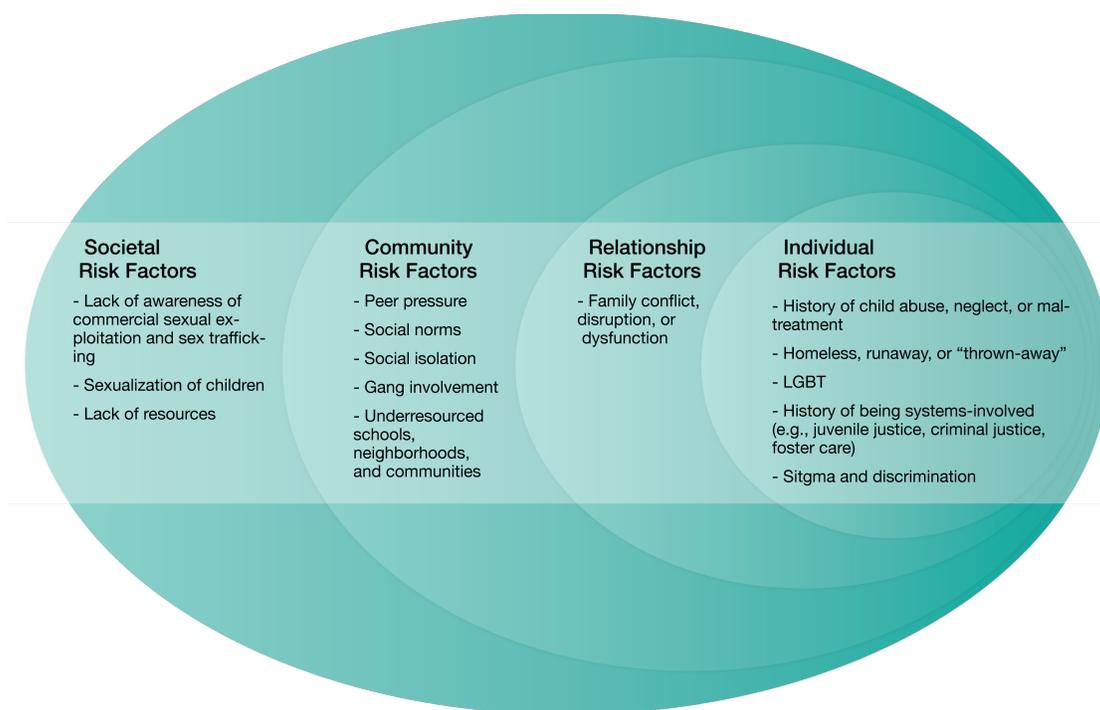


FIGURE 2: INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE AND THE NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL, "CONFRONTING COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND SEX TRAFFICKING OF MINORS IN THE UNITED STATES: A GUIDE FOR THE HEALTH CARE SECTOR" (2014)

In light of the fact that their residents typically experienced a full range of these risk factors, Covenant House New York asked Fordham University to collaborate in the creation and validation of a questionnaire (the HTIAM-14) that could assist service providers in determining if their clients were victims of trafficking and ultimately ascertain the prevalence of trafficking among their population. The HTIAM-14 determines trafficking status as defined by federal law, which includes:

**A** sex trafficking in which a commercial **sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion**, or in which the person induced to perform such act **has not attained 18 years of age**, or

**B** the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person **for labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion** for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

The Fordham study found that 14.9% of the 185 people they interviewed at Covenant House New York had experienced some form of trafficking victimization before their time at the shelter, and an additional 8% had engaged in survival sex. The study also found that, contrary to most claims that the age of entry into commercial sex is around 12–14 years old, 44% of its respondents did not begin to engage in commercial sex until after they were 18 years old.

In a replication and extension of that study, we interviewed 99 clients of Covenant House New Orleans. We administered the HTIAM-14 (Human Trafficking Interview and Assessment Measure 2014) and asked follow-up questions that allowed respondents to elaborate on their experiences of trafficking.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Human Trafficking

- **14%** of respondents were identified as **victims of some form of trafficking**, following the legal definition outlined by the 2000 U.S. Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act.
- **11%** of the total population had been **trafficked for sex**, **5%** for other **forced labor**. (Two respondents were trafficked for both sex and labor.)
- Based on the number of youth aged 16–23 that Covenant House New Orleans cares for over the course of a year (approximately 615), the findings indicate that approximately **86 residents a year are likely to be victims of human trafficking**.



### Sex Trafficking

- Of those trafficked for sex (n=11), **73%** (eight respondents) were **female**, **27%** (three) were **male**, and **21%** (three) identified as **gay, lesbian or bisexual**. Of those trafficked for labor, the gender breakdown was **60% female**, **40% male**, and **0% transgender**.
- Of the 11 people who were trafficked for sex, **seven** are considered **trafficking victims by law** because they were selling sex (either voluntarily or through force) under the age of 18. Of those respondents, **three** were then **re-trafficked as adults** by coercive pimps.
- Seven (**63%**) of those who were identified as having been trafficked would **legally be recognized as trafficked** by virtue of their being under the age of 18 when the exploitation occurred. Nonetheless, four of them also reported situations of force, fraud, or coercion that compelled them to engage in the sex work, so they would be considered trafficked regardless of their age. Only the two young men who reported engaging in sex work as children indicated that they had not been compelled to participate at all.
- Among the 13 Covenant House youth who reported engaging in commercial sex work or “prostitution,” eight (**62%**) were identified as **trafficked**—forced by someone else to engage in the trade—at least once.

**86**

residents a year are likely to be  
victims of human trafficking

\*based on the number of youth aged  
16–23 that Covenant House cares for

### Labor Trafficking

- Few respondents (**5%**) were found to have been **trafficked for labor**.
- Four of the five labor trafficking cases involved forced drug dealing, which was equally prevalent among males and females. These four cases represent **11.7%** of the 34 people who reported having **sold drugs**.
- Only **one** person reported **labor trafficking in a factory setting**, and that occurred in Mexico.

### Sexual Labor

- **25%** of participants had been involved in **sexual labor** of some form. **Thirteen** respondents (52% of sex laborers) had worked as “prostitutes” or **commercial sex workers** (8% of females, 4% of males, 1% transgender). **Ten percent** (10%) had worked in the sex industry as **exotic dancers** (nine females, one male), and **two** of the respondents had worked in the French Quarter as “**shot girls**,” who entice people to buy shots through sexual flirtation.
- **33%** of women interviewed and **18%** of males engaged in **sexual labor** of some kind.
- This finding indicates that in an average year, Covenant House serves about **154** Covenant House residents who are likely to have **engaged in sexual labor**.



### Survival Sex

- **15%** of respondents had engaged in “**survival sex**,” in which they performed a sex act in exchange for food, housing, or some other basic necessity because they believed they had no other way to access basic resources.
- Because there has been significant attention to survival sex prevalence among transgender youth, we analyzed that data and found that there were **no clear cases of trafficking among the three transgender respondents**. One reported resorting to survival sex during the occasional desperate situation. All three of the transgender respondents had experienced both sexual and physical abuse.

15%

engaged in  
survival sex

“survival sex”:

sex act performed in exchange for food, housing, or some other basic necessity because they believed they had no other way to access basic resources.

### *Illicit and Exploitive Labor Activities*

- **31%** of respondents reported having been approached by strangers on the street to **trade sex or to engage in other illegal or informal work**. The vast majority of those approached assumed or were told explicitly that they were being offered an opportunity to work in the sex trade.
- The **youngest reported age** of entry into the drug trade was **9 years old**. All of these respondents (who were 18–23 at the time of their interviews) had begun **drug dealing** in their teenage years.
- The study revealed a high incidence of other forms of labor exploitation, which indicates significant labor vulnerabilities among homeless youth. Twenty-five percent (**25%**) of respondents had encountered exploitative and/or **exceedingly dangerous labor situations**, the most significant of which was wage theft (19%).



**31%** of respondents reported having been approached by strangers on the street to trade sex or to engage in other illegal or informal work.

### *Utilization of HTIAM-14*

- We found that the HTIAM-14 is most effective when respondents have had at least some work experience. Because the questions focus on dangerous or exploitative working conditions, those who have few work experiences (or few dangerous ones) don't have time to build a rapport with the interviewers that encourages them to open up about exploitation and sex in the latter part of the survey.
- We found that **men** were less likely to understand their work experiences as “**dangerous**” or “**forced**,” and therefore, their interviews tended to be shorter and to divulge less.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

Despite growing awareness of domestic U.S. human trafficking and the suspicion that it is prevalent among marginally-housed youth, there is little data to support efforts to assist at-risk populations. In Louisiana, no state body was mandated to collect data related to human trafficking until a law was passed in the summer of 2014 (shortly after we performed this study), and thus there are no reports on how many cases have been identified in the New Orleans area. The Louisiana Human Trafficking Report, published in March 2014 by the Modern Slavery Research Project, indicates that calls to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline are increasing, and the state has seen some prosecutions of traffickers, but little hard evidence has been collected concerning the prevalence of trafficking at the local or state level.<sup>8</sup> The lack of sufficient data on human trafficking is endemic throughout the United States. The current study is a first step toward ascertaining how trafficking affects the people of New Orleans and is part of a larger project to map the prevalence of trafficking among homeless youth in the United States.

This community-based research project, conducted by Loyola University New Orleans in conjunction with Covenant House New Orleans, is a replication and extension of a study conducted by a Fordham University research team in 2013 at Covenant House New York. Their report, “Homelessness, Survival Sex, and Human Trafficking: As Experienced by the Youth of Covenant House New York,” concluded that among the youth interviewed, approximately one in four had engaged in commercial sex, 14.9% of respondents had experienced some form of trafficking victimization by the time they arrived at Covenant House, and at least an additional 8% had engaged in survival sex.

Located on the edge of the French Quarter, Covenant House shelters and cares for neglected and abused youth ages 16-23 from the New Orleans area and across the United States.

After consulting with staff from the Covenant Houses in New York and New Orleans and lead researchers from the Fordham study, Loyola’s Modern Slavery Research Project designed the research methodology and measurement instrument for the New Orleans replication study. In February 2014, we began interviewing residents of Covenant House New Orleans. The researchers included three Loyola University New Orleans professors, Drs. Laura Murphy, Christian Bolden, and Rae Taylor. We were assisted by six Loyola student researchers.

## OBJECTIVES

- Replicate the study conducted by Covenant House New York and Fordham to understand the prevalence of trafficking among Covenant House New Orleans residents.
- Analyze the trends and contexts of trafficking, sexual labor, and labor exploitation that emerged from those interviews.
- Provide feedback on the efficacy of the HTIAM-14 as a clinical instrument to identify human trafficking in social services settings and identify best practices in using the instrument.

## DEFINITIONS

Following the lead of the original Fordham University study, we draw our definition of human trafficking from the U.S. Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000, which stipulates that

THE TERM “SEVERE FORMS OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS” MEANS

**A** sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age, or

**B** the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

When we discuss “commercial sex acts,” we also follow the TVPA of 2000’s definition, which includes “any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person.” When we discuss what is typically called “prostitution”—the professional trade of sex for money—we use the term “commercial sex work.”

“Sexual labor” takes into account commercial sex acts as well as other participation in the sex industry, including exotic dancing and stripping.

## LIMITATIONS

This study was conducted only among a convenience sample of homeless youth who were present at Covenant House New Orleans between February and June 2014. All results refer to this sample and are not representative of the national homeless population or the larger U.S. population and should not be construed as such. Though not assessed in this study, it is possible that there is a significant difference in victimization rates between homeless youth who seek shelter and those who do not.

As with much social science dealing with sensitive topics, it is prudent to assume that the numbers presented here concerning sex and labor trafficking, sex work, forced drug dealing, domestic violence victimization, and experiences with being approached for illegitimate work are underestimated. This may be due to social desirability bias resulting from respondents feeling uncomfortable disclosing their participation, even when forced, in activities considered illicit, as well as the likelihood that some may have responded “no” to questions about certain experiences because they did not view their experiences to be relevant to the researchers.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Fordham study employed a questionnaire called the Human Trafficking Interview and Assessment Measure (HTIAM-14, Appendix A). Questions on the HTIAM-14 were based on previously designed trafficking screening guidelines (including tools designed by the VERA Institute of Justice, the Department of HHS/Rescue and Restore Campaign, and Covenant House Nine Line), and additional questions were created specifically to assess trafficking victimization among the CHNY population.

The questions were designed to evoke stories from respondents regarding their work experiences that would indicate whether they had been victims of human trafficking. The questions focus on the “force, fraud, and coercion” that are the hallmarks of human trafficking and assess the age at which a respondent may have engaged in commercial sex acts (to determine if they are considered “trafficked” as a result of being under the age of 18 at the time of the transaction).

We utilized the HTIAM-14 as the foundation of our study, and we included follow-up questions that were of particular interest to the Covenant House New Orleans staff and for our New Orleans context. Our additional demographic variables included sexual orientation, mental illness, and domestic violence victimization. In addition, specific measures for sex work experience (including experiences in exotic dancing, escorting, commercial sex, selling shots, and survival sex) and a number of extended trafficking-related variables (including if/how a victim escaped, if intervention had occurred, location of the trafficking, recruiter, trafficking perpetrator, method of trafficking, and duration of trafficking) were identified throughout the interviews. Additionally, many respondents disclosed that they had been approached by someone to engage in work activities they perceived as dangerous or illegal or that otherwise made them feel uncomfortable. As this trend emerged in our very first interviews, we regularly included questions about how they were approached, though it was not in the official questionnaire.

Through the Loyola University New Orleans Institutional Review Board (IRB), we obtained approval to begin the research in the spring of 2014. In February 2014, we began conducting in-depth interviews in a private location in the Covenant House site with residents between the ages of 18 and 23. Our goal was to interview around 100 people, and our final valid total was 99 (six respondents were excluded: two selected participants were minors and thus not interviewed; three of the total scheduled were repeats who had already been interviewed; and one scheduled participant did not come to the interview).

Interviews were scheduled by Covenant House staff. Demographic data for participants were collected by Covenant House staff and coded with a “participant number” to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Prior to each interview, participants were asked to sign an informed consent form and asked for their signature. These forms were kept off-site by the research team to ensure confidentiality.

Rotating research teams comprised of one researcher and one research assistant interviewed participants on-site all day on Wednesdays from February through June. Interviews were conducted in private rooms and were recorded with a digital voice recorder for the purposes

of transcription. Participants were informed of the recording, asked if they understood the informed consent, and given a brief introduction to the purpose of the study. We emphasized that participation in the study was voluntary and could be stopped at their request at any time. Interviews lasted between 20 minutes and two hours. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were given counseling referrals provided by Covenant House staff. Each participant received a \$10 gift card to Wal-Mart.

The interview phase of the study concluded in June 2014. Between July and September, the interview recordings were transcribed and then coded and analyzed using ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software.<sup>9</sup> The original Covenant House New York variables were coded along with exploratory variables aimed at in-depth analysis of context. Pertinent findings from these additional variables are included in this report.

## FINDINGS

### SOCIODEMOGRAPHICS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMIZATION, MENTAL ILLNESS DIAGNOSIS

Covenant House New Orleans typically serves approximately 150 youths each day and 700 individuals per year. In June 2014, their youth population was 78% African-American, 19% White, and 3% Other. Approximately 82% of their population was 18 years of age and older (12% are children of youth residents, ages 0–5). About 52% were men, 46% women, and 2% transgender. According to professional staff estimates, approximately 30% of the residents are LGBTQ.<sup>10</sup>

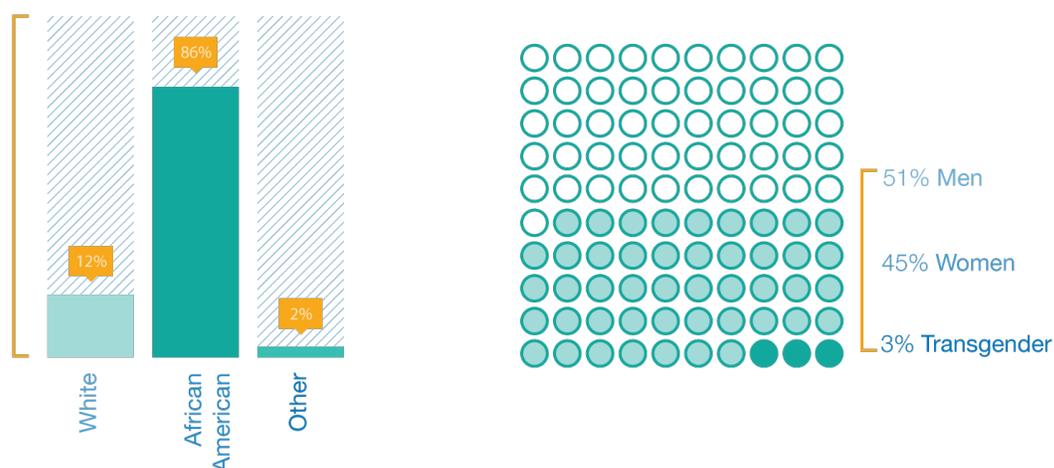
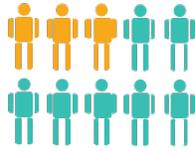
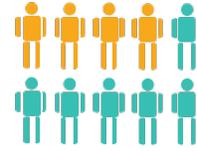


Table 1 illustrates the description of the sample of participants interviewed. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 23 years old, with most between 19 and 22 years old. Of those we interviewed, 84% were from Covenant House’s Crisis Center, 15% were in the Rights of Passage Program for transitional housing, and 1% came from Permanent Supportive Housing. The sample included 51% male, 45% female, and 3% who identified as transgender. The overwhelming majority of participants identified as African-American (86%), followed by White (12%), with Asian and Latino comprising the remaining 2%. Thus, our sample was relatively proportional to the typical demographics encountered at Covenant House New Orleans. While the Covenant House New York study had results pertaining to immigration experiences, 100% of our participants were U.S. citizens. Of the participants who disclosed their sexual orientation, 16% identified as bisexual and 9% as gay/lesbian.



Close to **30%** of participants disclosed domestic violence victimization.



Approximately **42%** of participants had been diagnosed with either developmental disabilities or mental illness.

Close to one-third (29) of the participants disclosed domestic violence victimization. This figure is likely an under-representation of actual prevalence among those in the sample, as we did not specifically ask participants about domestic violence. Finally, 42% had been diagnosed with either significant developmental disabilities or mental illness. Again, we anticipate that both the prevalence and range of mental illness are far greater, as many participants in social services and research do not disclose mental illness. As several participants were new to Covenant House (some had been there only one or two days), we know that some had not had the opportunity to be evaluated at the time of the interview.

<b>TABLE 1. DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS (n= 99)</b>	
<i>Frequency</i>	
<b>Age</b>	
18	8
19	20
20	18
21	29
22	19
23	4
24	1
<b>Sex</b>	
Female	45
Male	51
Transgender	3
<b>Race*</b>	
African American	86
Asian	1
Latino	2
White	12
<b>Citizenship</b>	
U.S.	99
Other	0
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	
Bisexual	16
Gay/lesbian	9
<b>Victim of Domestic Violence</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Mental Illness Reported</b>	<b>41</b>

\*Total exceeds 99 due to respondents identifying in more than one category.

## PREVALENCE OF TRAFFICKING

Among those interviewed, 14% reported an experience that would be classified as “human trafficking” according to the legal definition provided by the U.S. TVPA. Eleven percent of the total population had been trafficked for sex, 5% for other forced labor (two respondents were trafficked for both sex and labor). Of the 14 individuals who were identified as having been trafficked, four of them reported multiple distinct experiences that qualified as trafficking—either having been managed by multiple pimps or trading sex underage after escaping a pimp. (Individuals who reported multiple experiences of sex trafficking are counted only once in the total count. For this reason, the total is less than the sum of victims of various forms of trafficking.) Of those trafficked for sex, 73% (eight respondents) were female, 27% (three) male; 27% (three) identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Of those trafficked for labor, the gender breakdown was 60% female, 40% male. Four of the five labor trafficking cases involved forced drug dealing, which was equally prevalent among males and females.

Covenant House New Orleans serves approximately 700 individuals in the course of a year, 12% (84) of whom are babies and toddlers. From these data, we can infer that of the remaining 616 individuals, approximately 14% of the youth respondents are victims of trafficking, which indicates that Covenant House New Orleans serves approximately 86 victims of trafficking in a year, more than three-fourths of whom would have been trafficked for sex.

## HTIAM-14 QUESTION RESPONSES

We utilized Fordham’s validated HTIAM-14 questionnaire as part of the New Orleans study, and the results can be seen in Table 2. Because none of the respondents were foreign nationals, all questions in Section B regarding immigration status were unnecessary. Our questions focused on Sections C, D, and E, which inquire about psychological and financial coercion, control, and sexual exploitation (see Appendix A for questions). Section C, “Psychological/Financial Coercion,” and Section D, “Control,” measure the seven potential indicators of trafficking described below.

	<i>Frequency</i>
Risky or Dangerous Work Conditions	9
Tricked or Forced into Work	11
Not Paid as Expected	6
Prevented from Quitting	9
Money Controlled by Employer	10
Refused Contact with Others	4
Asked to Lie About Work	3

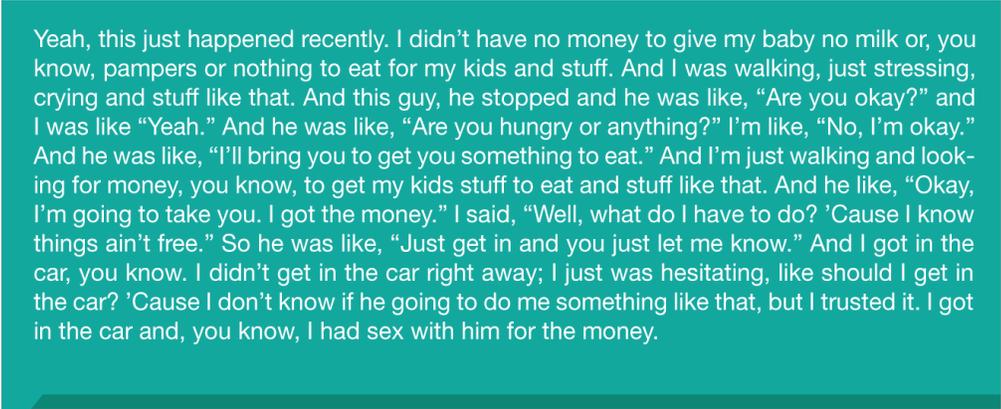
Utilizing these questions, we elicited stories from our interviewees that might reveal whether the legal characteristics of force, fraud, or coercion were involved in any of their formal or informal work experiences. Of course, an answer of “yes” to the questions in Sections C & D on the HTIAM-14 would not necessarily indicate trafficking. There are many reasons why

respondents might be paid less than they had expected or be asked to lie about their work, including participating in illegal activities that are not associated with trafficking. In many cases, however, the questions in the HTIAM-14 successfully uncovered situations of sex and labor exploitation that did indeed qualify as trafficking.

## RISKY/DANGEROUS WORK CONDITIONS

Numerous clients talked about feeling endangered in the work they performed in their jobs, even in cases of legitimate work and in informal work arrangements that would not typically be considered dangerous. We heard accounts of working late night shifts, often alone, in high-crime areas and fearing victimization, working at extreme heights where one misstep would result in falling hundreds of feet (e.g., grain elevator, animal feed plant), being expected to perform unreasonable physical labor which caused health problems, working at establishments (e.g., restaurants, construction sites) where drug dealing and other illegal activities were being conducted by supervisors and coworkers, and working in extreme temperatures (e.g., below freezing while working in a food company freezer, extreme heat while doing yard work).

Many of the respondents who had been engaged in the sex industry, especially those who were dancers and shot girls, reported feeling endangered as a result of their work. One female dancer described the variety of risk factors in this way:



Yeah, this just happened recently. I didn't have no money to give my baby no milk or, you know, pampers or nothing to eat for my kids and stuff. And I was walking, just stressing, crying and stuff like that. And this guy, he stopped and he was like, "Are you okay?" and I was like "Yeah." And he was like, "Are you hungry or anything?" I'm like, "No, I'm okay." And he was like, "I'll bring you to get you something to eat." And I'm just walking and looking for money, you know, to get my kids stuff to eat and stuff like that. And he like, "Okay, I'm going to take you. I got the money." I said, "Well, what do I have to do? 'Cause I know things ain't free." So he was like, "Just get in and you just let me know." And I got in the car, you know. I didn't get in the car right away; I just was hesitating, like should I get in the car? 'Cause I don't know if he going to do me something like that, but I trusted it. I got in the car and, you know, I had sex with him for the money.



The same respondent also indicated that people would try to recruit her for other sex-related work every night during her shifts at the club. This feeling of constant threat and risk was common throughout our interviews with young people involved in informal work, particularly those in sex work and drug dealing.

## TRICKED OR FORCED INTO WORK

"Force" is typically understood as characterized by physical violence or threats of violence. Respondents involved in illegal work, especially those engaged in the sex trade, often responded that they had been induced to perform their jobs under threat of violence.

A 23-year-old male reluctantly told us about a time when he was 12 years old and worked

in what he described as “a forced job” with other children. He was not initially comfortable disclosing what type of work he was forced to do, but he later admitted the work involved selling drugs in a gang and that he was forced to use drugs as well. When asked if he would have been free to stop the work, he replied, “No, it wouldn’t have been safe. I could have been killed if I had stopped. . . . They said if I stopped working for them they’d find me and kill me.” He escaped the situation only when his family relocated to another area.

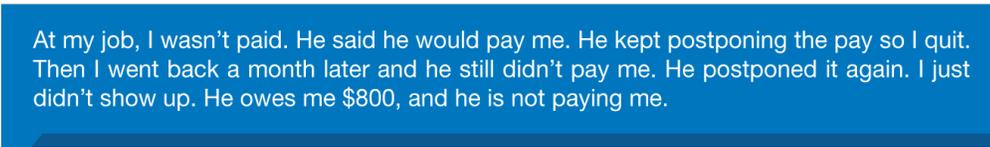
We heard from several males and females who were forced or coerced to do illegal things in the context of gang activity. As one client explained, “That’s the whole point of the gang. They evil. They rob my momma’s house and would kill her.” This use of gang-related violence to compel drug dealing constitutes a case of trafficking, one which might seem counter-intuitive but nonetheless aligns with the legal definition.

According to the interviewees, force was commonly employed in the sex industry. A longer discussion of the use of force in cases of sex trafficking is included in the section on sex trafficking below.

### NOT PAID AS EXPECTED

Several respondents reported not being paid what was promised for informal work such as mowing yards, hairdressing, or handy work. Most of these situations involved wage theft, which is exploitative, but the respondents suggested that they were easily able to walk away from the situation and that they had quit as a result of their employers’ bad behavior.

One young man we interviewed talked about his time as a barista at a new restaurant, where the owner kept putting off paying him. He told us:



At my job, I wasn’t paid. He said he would pay me. He kept postponing the pay so I quit. Then I went back a month later and he still didn’t pay me. He postponed it again. I just didn’t show up. He owes me \$800, and he is not paying me.



In the case of the one woman who had been trafficked for forced labor in a factory, the experience of not being paid constitutes the “fraud” that is characteristic of trafficking. She reported that at 15 years of age, she and her family had worked for a fabric company in Mexico, where they were promised fair wages but were never paid. The company persisted in fraudulently promising her family that if they worked longer, they would eventually be paid. Because the owners were aware that there were few other opportunities for the family and because they discriminate against workers based on their ethnic status, the employers used these kinds of tricks and promises to coerce the family into unpaid labor.

## PREVENTED FROM QUITTING

When people who are trafficked describe their desire to quit their jobs, they nearly always describe a process of “escaping” employers. Covenant House clients who reported not being allowed to leave or quit a job explained that violence or threats of violence were used to coerce them into continuing to work for the abusive employer.

One young woman told us about a pimp who said “No, I could not leave. And I attempted to leave and he stomped on my, like, he had like steel toe boots, and he stomped on my feet, and he bruised and battered me really badly, and I got really scared.” Traffickers routinely used such violence to prevent women from leaving the sex trade or from engaging a different pimp.

If a person feels he or she is unable to walk away from a work situation, it is often because of physical force or psychological coercion characteristic of trafficking cases is. The decisions to leave these dangerous situations, particularly given the threat of violence, were very difficult. One client reported that, after what would be her last shift at a strip club, she left everything at the club, came to Covenant House at 3 a.m., and sat outside the shelter for three hours, afraid to go inside. She explained that her pimp regularly beat her if she did something wrong, but he also consistently threatened her in other ways as well. “He always says ‘If you leave, don’t come back.’ I was scared of leaving. I knew I couldn’t go back. I was scared when I came here.” When asked if she ever sees him or if she hears anything from the other girls, she said “No. They didn’t leave. It is weird. It was a mind control thing.” Although the girls were “allowed” to leave, the context of fear and frequent violence made them feel as though they could not. Her pimp had conditioned her to fear what would happen to her if she left him as much as what would happen if she stayed. This kind of psychological coercion makes it difficult for people to escape, even when they have realized that they are being abused and exploited.

## MONEY CONTROLLED BY EMPLOYER

Control of money was found mostly in sex work. We heard of situations in which young women lived with their employers (sometimes in ambiguous relationships under the guise of dating) and were forced to have sex with their employers and, commonly, other men as well. They were also often required to sell and/or deliver drugs, dance, and perform other illicit activities, often under age. In these situations, the employer controlled all the money.

While some reported that employers would keep all the money they earned, others experienced control by an employer who would give them allowances for food, medicine, and other necessities. For example, one woman said, “Well, he kept all of the money. We got food and stuff that I needed too with it sometimes.” Others were given a portion of their earnings, but that amount was unpredictable and dependent on their productivity. For example, one young woman was given a quota for her earnings from sleeping with men: “In the beginning, \$500. Then it went up. I had to make \$1000 today. It kept going up.”

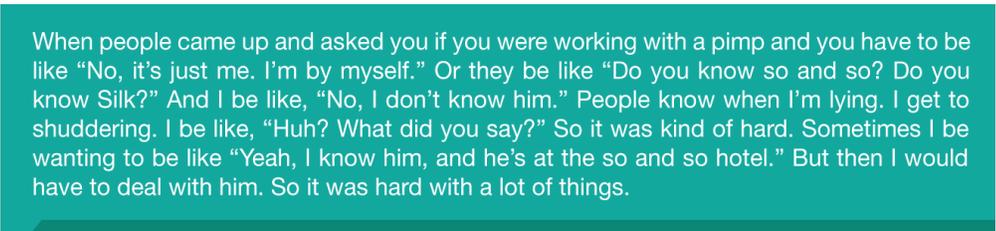
## REFUSED CONTACT WITH OTHERS

One of the many means by which traffickers control people is by isolating them from others. Often people in forced sex work situations are convinced that their families do not care about them as much as their pimps do or that there is no one who will help them now that they are in “the life.” Isolation from loved ones and restricted contact with others helps traffickers maintain these ideas. One person who had admitted to trading sex was asked if she was allowed to contact anyone while she was working for a pimp, and she answered: “I couldn’t contact any of my family members unless it was a dying emergency, and the only time I did have my phone was when I was on my phone with a trick.” When asked if the pimp was watching her phone, she replied, “He was watching everything I do. When he is not here he would take [the phone] with him. ‘Whenever I take your phone that means it’s time to go to sleep or make some money.’” She continued, “I couldn’t call no one. My grandmother was sick and . . . I was sneaking through her phone, got on Facebook, and I had a message from my cousin saying they were trying to call because my grandmother was sick, and I just didn’t know what to say. It was hard.” Unprompted, she went on to say, “And I didn’t want to cross the line and have to get pimp slapped again. Those things hurt.”

Another woman explained how cutting off contact with her family allowed her pimp to psychologically control her: “He used reverse psychology. Sometimes I could call my family. [He] would say, ‘Your family doesn’t care about you. They don’t call and check on you.’ Then it makes me not call. I felt like they didn’t care, so I wouldn’t call them.” Traffickers maintain control by putting up barriers to escape, including cutting people off from support networks that might help them leave their exploiters.

## ASKED TO LIE ABOUT WORK

Often people who are being trafficked are required by their employers to lie about the nature of their work or about their employers. For instance, the young woman who described not being allowed to contact anyone was also among those who were asked to lie about the nature of their work. She explained:



When people came up and asked you if you were working with a pimp and you have to be like “No, it’s just me. I’m by myself.” Or they be like “Do you know so and so? Do you know Silk?” And I be like, “No, I don’t know him.” People know when I’m lying. I get to shuddering. I be like, “Huh? What did you say?” So it was kind of hard. Sometimes I be wanting to be like “Yeah, I know him, and he’s at the so and so hotel.” But then I would have to deal with him. So it was hard with a lot of things.



Among our respondents, some indicated that pimps insisted on remaining anonymous and invisible, leaving the person trading sex to bear the brunt of police questioning and to feeling vulnerable to other risks such as violence.

When respondents answered “yes” to the questions in section C & D of the questionnaire, further elaboration on the experience was required to determine trafficking status. We discuss below the cases in which the respondents revealed experiences that met the legal definitions of trafficking.

## Sexual Labor, Sex Trafficking, and Survival Sex

### SEXUAL LABOR: COMMERCIAL SEX AND SEX-RELATED WORK

In addition to the formal and informal sex industry work that respondents divulged when asked about their labor histories, we also inquired about other work in the sex trade, including survival sex. Table 3 illustrates all respondents who identified as having performed some form of sexual labor. This includes all people who had engaged in commercial sex by exchanging sex for something of value and all those who worked in sex-related fields (a fairly prevalent industry in New Orleans). When a participant disclosed an experience of sexual labor performed, we asked them to elaborate about their experiences to discern the nature of the work, whether it was voluntary, coerced, or forced, and if they had chosen to perform any sexual acts because they felt they had to do it to survive (“survival sex”).

Sexual Labor	Number of Participants Involved*
Commercial Sex Work (trafficked)	10**
Commercial Sex Work (non-trafficked)	8 (3 were trafficked and later sold sex by choice)
Exotic Dancing	10 (6 of whom also traded sex)
“Shot girl” Employment	2 (both of whom also traded sex)
Survival Sex	15 (9 of whom engaged in some other form of sexual labor)
<b>Total number participants involved in sexual labor</b>	<b>25</b>

*\*Several individuals were involved in multiple forms of sexual labor. Overlaps are indicated in parentheses.  
\*\*One additional person was classified as having been trafficked for sex because she was “recruited” and “harbored,” but she escaped before any transaction was made for sex.*

Twenty-five percent (25%) of participants had been involved in sexual labor of some form. Thirteen (52% of sex laborers) had worked as “prostitutes” or commercial sex workers (eight females, four males, 1 transgender). Ten percent (10%) had worked in the sex industry as exotic dancers (nine females, one male), and two of the respondents had worked in the French Quarter as “shot girls,” who entice people to buy shots through sexual flirtation. Fifteen percent (15%) had engaged in survival sex (to be discussed at length later).

Respondents indicated that work in the sex industry was widely available and lucrative in New Orleans. One woman who described her experience as an “escort” said, “You can make thousands in one day,” and she broke it down: “Like if you go there and you be really, really, really nice you might get a \$300 tip, you know. You might get a \$600 tip. You know it depends on you and men are extremely easy to seduce. They are . . . men are extremely easy to seduce. It’s really easy.” In her case, she had to give her manager/pimp half of the agreed-upon price, and she was able to keep the full amount of her tip. The same respondent had worked as a shot girl, and she said her charm enabled her to make more than most other girls, but everyone made good commissions selling the shots. She said the other girls asked her, “‘You made \$700?’ Yes I did. But yeah, I don’t know. I like the money.”

This respondent described the business model through which she engaged in the sex trade. When she decided to find employment as a sex worker, she and a friend looked up “escort services” in the phone book, visited the manager who responded to her call, was interviewed by him, and was hired, after which her dates were managed through his call center. She said, “At the end of the day it’s still a business, and it’s legal, so he expected you to, yeah . . . handle yourself professional even though it’s not really a profession.” As an “escort,” she found a more professionalized environment for selling sex that avoided much of the danger others encountered and allowed her to earn a significant income.

Another respondent spoke about her own vested interest in working in the sex trade: “I have to admit I was extremely hooked. I wasn’t in it for the money. I was in it for what they could offer me. And they were like legit men.” When she escaped an exploitative pimp, she continued selling sex on her own because she enjoyed the status and luxuries that the sex trade afforded her.

Not all respondents reported such high incomes or professionalism, but some indicated that work in the sex industry was the best or only employment they could find. Excerpts from three respondents below describe a spectrum of routes to entry into sexual labor.



I had a friend named Naja at the hotel I was staying at. She said, “Your body dope. You can dance. Why don’t you come work at my strip club? I can call my friends, the owner. You can audition right now.” I was like, “Sure why not? Beats fucking for money.” I auditioned that night. The next night, they put me in the strip club. I did that for eight or nine months. The only reason why I stopped is because I had a pregnancy scare.



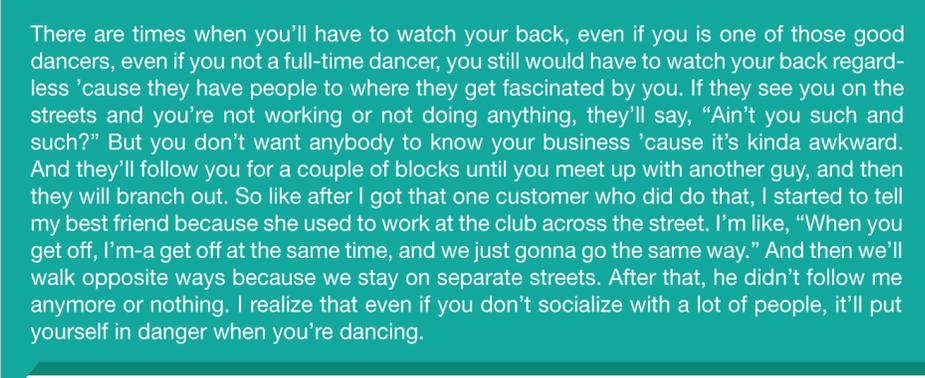
Oh God. For some reason, I don’t like 9-to-5 jobs. I know the reason—I am used to fast money. Working 9-to-5, I only get biweekly checks of \$400. Working 9-to-5 overnight at the strip club, I could make \$800 that night. Prostituting, I could make that a night. I’m thinking, “I work my ass off for a check in two weeks that I can make in a night.” Having that mentality fucks me up and messes up me with my decisions. I am a good worker. I hate slow money. I have never been fired. I up and quit. There is nothing wrong with the jobs. I can get a job real easily. I hate slow money. Like, I think the longest job I’ve ever had was when I was in [town redacted]. I worked at [hotel chain redacted] by the airport for two months before I quit. Every other job I’ve had for a month, two weeks, three weeks.



It was survival. When you are taking care of people like I was taking care of, the \$800 check didn’t do it. I was taking care of boys, girls, kids. It wasn’t enough. I went back to what I knew best. So I could take care of them. . . . For three months, I slept in Armstrong Park. I was using food stamps to eat. When that ran out, I started prostituting so I could get a hotel and shower, eat that week.

For the population we interviewed, who are largely marginalized by poverty and homelessness, sex work might represent a route to financial security, as well as a potentially more agreeable work schedule.

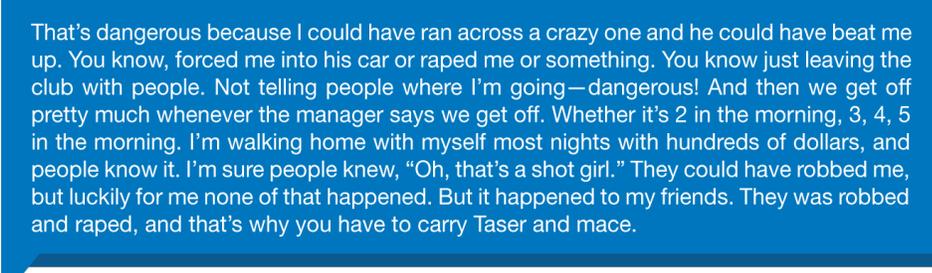
Nonetheless, many of the respondents who were employed in the sex industry said they experienced a high risk of violence in association with the work. One woman worried of predators who would try to attack her after she left the club.



There are times when you'll have to watch your back, even if you is one of those good dancers, even if you not a full-time dancer, you still would have to watch your back regardless 'cause they have people to where they get fascinated by you. If they see you on the streets and you're not working or not doing anything, they'll say, "Ain't you such and such?" But you don't want anybody to know your business 'cause it's kinda awkward. And they'll follow you for a couple of blocks until you meet up with another guy, and then they will branch out. So like after I got that one customer who did do that, I started to tell my best friend because she used to work at the club across the street. I'm like, "When you get off, I'm-a get off at the same time, and we just gonna go the same way." And then we'll walk opposite ways because we stay on separate streets. After that, he didn't follow me anymore or nothing. I realize that even if you don't socialize with a lot of people, it'll put yourself in danger when you're dancing.



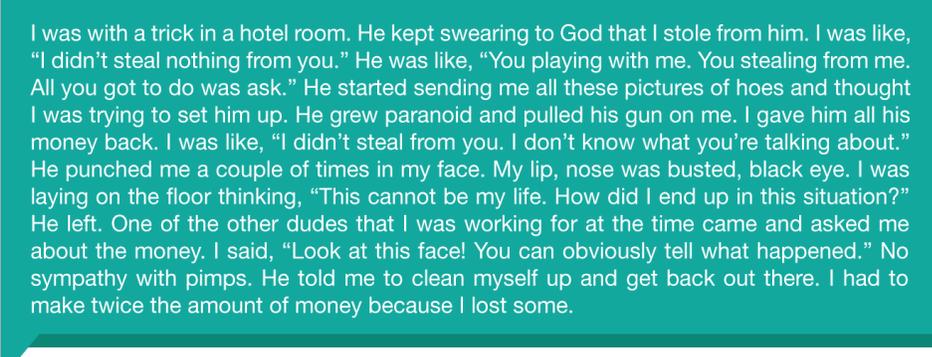
Another woman told us about similar problems encountered by “shot girls” on Bourbon Street. She described how she convinced the clients at the bars to give her money without having to exchange sex, a behavior that had risky consequences:



That's dangerous because I could have ran across a crazy one and he could have beat me up. You know, forced me into his car or raped me or something. You know just leaving the club with people. Not telling people where I'm going—dangerous! And then we get off pretty much whenever the manager says we get off. Whether it's 2 in the morning, 3, 4, 5 in the morning. I'm walking home with myself most nights with hundreds of dollars, and people know it. I'm sure people knew, "Oh, that's a shot girl." They could have robbed me, but luckily for me none of that happened. But it happened to my friends. They was robbed and raped, and that's why you have to carry Taser and mace.



One woman described a time when a client got extremely violent with her:



I was with a trick in a hotel room. He kept swearing to God that I stole from him. I was like, "I didn't steal nothing from you." He was like, "You playing with me. You stealing from me. All you got to do was ask." He started sending me all these pictures of hoes and thought I was trying to set him up. He grew paranoid and pulled his gun on me. I gave him all his money back. I was like, "I didn't steal from you. I don't know what you're talking about." He punched me a couple of times in my face. My lip, nose was busted, black eye. I was laying on the floor thinking, "This cannot be my life. How did I end up in this situation?" He left. One of the other dudes that I was working for at the time came and asked me about the money. I said, "Look at this face! You can obviously tell what happened." No sympathy with pimps. He told me to clean myself up and get back out there. I had to make twice the amount of money because I lost some.



For marginally housed youth in New Orleans, work in the sex industry is both a temptation and a threat. For many, the allure of an opportunity to make quick and substantial money encourages them to overlook the potential risks to their safety. However, many of our respondents indicated that they left the sex trade because of the dangers involved. None of our respondents admitted to working in the sex industry at the time of the interview, so it is unclear how many of them might have continued working in the trade despite the dangers they encountered. This may be a result of the fact that Covenant House strongly discourages and ultimately does not permit residents to work in the legal or illegal sex industry.

## SEX TRAFFICKING

Sex trafficking is forced sexual labor. Engaging in sex work does not necessarily mean that a person is trafficked (despite widespread confusion on this matter). Sex trafficking occurs when commercial sexual acts are performed under force, fraud, or coercion, or when commercial sex acts are performed by someone under the age of 18, regardless of coercive factors.

Of our complete pool, 11 (11%) respondents described experiences that conform to the legal definition of sex trafficking. Seven are considered trafficking victims by law because they were selling sex either voluntarily or through force under the age of 18, but three of those were also re-trafficked by coercive pimps as adults. Among the 13 Covenant House clients who reported engaging in commercial sex work, eight (62%) had been trafficked—that is, forced to perform sex work in at least one of the situations in which they engaged in the sex trade.

In terms of the methods used to compel a person to engage in sex work, eight respondents (73% of those trafficked) had experienced incidents of force/violence that compelled them to engage in commercial sex. One respondent was initially brought into the sex trade through fraudulent promises that disguised the nature of the work she would do, but she was later held captive through violent means. At least four (36%) were compelled through psychological coercion, one of whom also reported violence. Overlapping forms of compulsion are certainly likely in cases of trafficking. Of the seven who were identified as victims by virtue of their being under the age of 18, five also reported situations of force, fraud, or coercion that compelled them to engage in sex work. The two young men who reported being exploited as children indicated that they had not been compelled to participate in sex work at all. (See “Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children” below for more discussion.)

When victims described the forms of force used to compel them to perform sex work, they reported severe threats to their lives and to their family’s lives. One woman said, “He threatened to shoot up my sister’s house and he was crazy. . . . For my sister’s safety too, I had to. He threatened to shoot up the house and she had kids so I didn’t want that.” Another woman told us about the first time a pimp used violence and threats to convince her that she had to comply to his will.



“He was like, ‘No, you’re going to be having sex for money.’ I was like, ‘Oh no! I can’t do that!’ And that is when I kind of stood up, and he pushed me down. He was like, ‘You are either going to work or I am going to sell you to another pimp or kill you.’ Then I got terrified and he forced me to take pictures in lingerie.”

One young woman said of her pimp, “In the beginning, he was like a boyfriend to me. He changed. I was 17.” He forced her to sell sex, and she left him after a year. Shortly thereafter, she returned, and she found that he had been mentored by another pimp and that he had become more violent. She told us,



“His friend taught him that sometimes the girl needs to be disciplined and maybe the girl shouldn’t leave. That was not a good thing that he taught him. The first time, he wasn’t violent. He taught him bad stuff—to be more violent, less caring.”

Another woman summed it up this way: “I could have been killed if I had stopped.” One woman even reported that one of her pimps had locked her in a dog cage at night. Violence held the majority of the trafficked respondents captive in their situations of exploitation.

Those who experience what the law calls “coercion” are psychological captives of their pimps. Some respondents had been recruited through what is commonly called “finesse pimping,” in which a pimp dates or pretends to be in love with a target and then reveals that s/he is a pimp and forces the intimate partner to sell sex. When one respondent was asked how a pimp managed to keep her from running away, she admitted that he would “buy me stuff and love me like I didn’t have anybody love me before.” She continually wanted to run away because he was brutally beating her, but she was constantly manipulated by him to believe that they were in love.

Another respondent reported that when she was very young, her mother had given her up to be sexually abused so they could have a place to live. Though she would be considered a victim of sex trafficking because of her age, there was psychological coercion involved as well. She said the owner of the house (also a relative) made her feel “that I had done something wrong and I was being punished. I didn’t know . . . I just felt like I was being punished for something and to me I didn’t do anything wrong so it was very confusing what was I being punished for.” The idea that she had brought the sexual abuse upon herself haunted her and made her vulnerable to other forms of sexual assault and trafficking later in her life. Indeed, these forms of psychological coercion can be just as entrapping as the physical threats that others experienced.

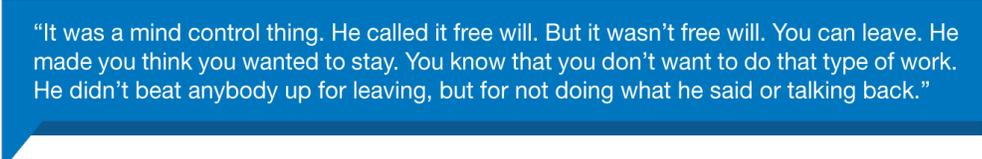
In the one case of fraud that we encountered in the sex trade, a female recruiter tricked a 21-year-old into thinking they were simply moving to New Orleans to have fun, but instead turned her over to a brutal pimp.

Traffickers were often people the respondents knew, including family members and intimate

partners. One woman said her mother “gave me to this man so that way we could spend the night with him.” Because the family needed a place to stay, her mother traded her for sex. Later, when she was only 11 years old and a runaway from group homes, the same respondent reported engaging in survival sex in exchange for places to stay and so that she would have enough money to eat.

At least one of the respondents was recruited from the Covenant House shelter. She recalled, “Yeah, it was my first time going to a Covenant House. I was 18, and I came here, and I didn’t like the rules, you know, and one of his girls came at me.” A young woman recruited her from within the shelter and brought her to a pimp, for whom she was forced to sell sex. Covenant House has a Child Protection System which works to ensure the safety and security of its residents, which is no doubt necessary, as our study showed that homeless youth in New Orleans are targeted by predators everywhere they turn.

One respondent was recruited to be a sex worker while she was dancing in a strip club. She was forced to hand over all her money to her boyfriend, who managed her work and forced her to continue selling sex even after she refused. She said of him:

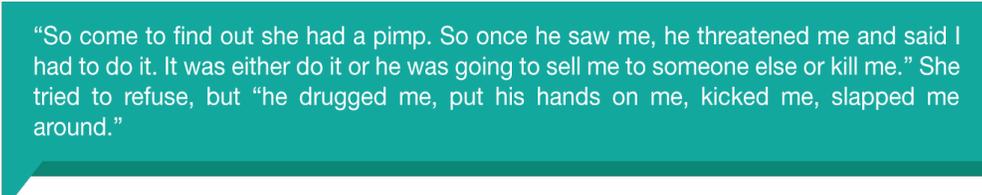


“It was a mind control thing. He called it free will. But it wasn’t free will. You can leave. He made you think you wanted to stay. You know that you don’t want to do that type of work. He didn’t beat anybody up for leaving, but for not doing what he said or talking back.”



Many others reported that pimps often attempted to recruit girls who were dancing in clubs, but that they had resisted the entreaties. One respondent said that the pimps often turned mean if they refused: “Usually pimps . . . they are going to approach the women they want to work with them very nicely. They did approach me when I first started working [as a stripper]. They talked to me very nicely; they told me that I can make this money, and they were going to take care of me, and I wanted to want for nothing. That’s how they do it. They come at you nice and then the mean side come out.”

Two respondents had been abducted by strangers or recent acquaintances who intended to sell them for sex. One respondent had only arrived at Covenant House days before the interview, after she escaped from a captor who was forcing her to sell sex out of a local hotel room. Just before her 21st birthday, she met a young woman in her hometown who quickly convinced her to move to New Orleans. When she arrived in New Orleans, she was introduced to the new friend’s pimp and was told that she would have to sell sex. She recalled,



“So come to find out she had a pimp. So once he saw me, he threatened me and said I had to do it. It was either do it or he was going to sell me to someone else or kill me.” She tried to refuse, but “he drugged me, put his hands on me, kicked me, slapped me around.”



Like this person, three other respondents reported being tricked by a “recruiter” into a relationship with a pimp who forced her to have sex. Those recruiters were other women who worked for the pimp. Five were recruited directly by pimps. (See “Approached for Work” below for examples of unsuccessful recruitment.)

Another respondent was 18 years old when she was abducted off the streets of New Orleans, after she accepted a ride from a stranger while walking home. When she got into the car, she was introduced to several other young women who told her they were prostitutes. The respondent said she was not interested, but she was not allowed to leave. The pimp took pictures of her nude and partially clothed to post online. Though the young woman claims that she escaped before the pimp was able to make her have sex with a client, she is technically considered “trafficked” because she was recruited, harbored, and transported for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude.

## CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING

Engaging in commercial sex under the age of 18 is considered a severe form of human trafficking by the U.S. TVPA and by Louisiana law. The commercial sexual exploitation of children includes both sex trading and other work in the sex industry. Among our 99 respondents, seven of them had either commercially traded sex or engaged in survival sex under the age of 18. The majority of those young people who were forced to engage in the sex trade later engaged voluntarily. In addition, two worked as exotic dancers under legal age. Four of those who traded sex were forced into commercial sex work; five voluntarily sold sex commercially (including three who had previously been forced); and four were involved in survival sex (including three who had previously been forced). It became clear that being forced into the sex industry at a young age meant that trading sex became a more likely option after they escaped the situation of force.

Despite the fact that, by definition, “trafficking” does not require that a child be induced to trade sex through the means of force, fraud, or coercion, all the women who reported trading sex as a minor indicated at least one sex work experience that involved systematic force or coercion. One young woman told us about the first of many people who trafficked her as a child:

A: In the beginning it wasn't by choice. Took me and another girl from a shelter and he put us in a hotel room that we can't get out.

Q: How old were you?

A: Ten.

Q: Ten years old—you were living in a shelter by yourself or with your family?

A: No, I ran away from a foster home because my parents [unintelligible].

Q: Your foster parents did what?

A: They loved me too much.

Q: What do you mean by that?

A: They touched me.



Vulnerable as a runaway and as a survivor of sexual abuse in the foster system, she was targeted when she was only 10 years old by a pimp who beat her and locked her up so she couldn't run away. After she managed to escape, she ran to another pimp because she didn't know how to protect herself on the street otherwise.

The risk factors chart produced by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council (above in "Introduction") describes many of the same risk factors that made this respondent vulnerable to a trafficker, and we found these risk factors to be common throughout our interviews, both with those homeless youth who had been trafficked and those who had not. Any one of these factors presents heightened risk for trafficking, but we commonly see multiple factors present as well.

Previous sexual assault victimization was particularly common among those who reported sex trafficking—some within the family, some by strangers or acquaintances, and some both. One young woman reported being beaten and raped by four men in a McDonald's parking lot shortly after being abandoned by her mother when she was 15 years old. She was hospitalized for three weeks. Her mother called her in the hospital to tell her "I don't want to have nothing to do with you. You do what you got to do to survive and stand on your feet." Her mother had previously refused to believe her when she told her she had been molested by family members. It was only a short time later that she was targeted by a pimp and kidnapped to be sold for sex.

In another case, we learned about a child sex trafficking victim who was raped by a police officer, leading her to feel that the police could not be trusted: "That's why I don't talk to the police. I don't care if I got raped. I don't care if I get stabbed. I don't care if I saw something. I don't get involved with the cops. And I don't trust the cops. I don't trust anybody. Even if I saw something, I won't tell nobody. It gets you in situations you don't want to be in." Indeed, though she was in her mid-20s at the time of her interview, she had never reported her experience to the police.

One young woman described being raped by a man who took her in off the streets when she was 14. After describing a lifetime of abuse and neglect that led to her homelessness, she summed up her experiences with rape by saying, "When you live a risky lifestyle like that, shit going to happen." Her experiences of being excluded from her family for her sexuality, her resultant homelessness, and her experience of abuse left her incredibly vulnerable to a pimp, who sexually and physically abused her.

## YOUNG MEN AND SEX TRAFFICKING

Young men accounted for one-third (three out of nine) of the reported cases of child sex trafficking in our study; in fact, all of the reported cases of sex trafficking of males happened when the respondent was a minor. Two of the boys were engaged in regular trading of sex, and one reported doing so only out of necessity. Young men described their experiences much differently than young women. They never described being forced or tricked into selling sex. Instead, the two who were engaged in regular sex work described their experiences with great pride. When asked if he ever sold sex as one of the many "hustles" he was describing, one respondent smiled and replied:



Yes indeed! What?! All my life, you heard me. Alright. I broke my virgin with a 24-year-old when I was 11. Yeah, so all my life I've been fascinated with older females—having another female that was my age or even 5 years older than me. So when you selling dope or doing your thing out there, hustling, you meet a lot of older women. You know and that comes to play. All the time they might not give me money. But they might let me stay there for a week or two, or they might let me hustle out their house. Let me drive their car, buy me clothes. So, oh yeah. That's like a must.

Because he was under 18 when he was exchanging items of value for sex, he is considered a victim of trafficking. He expresses a great deal of agency in the decision, and he even worked as a pimp later, but he demonstrates clearly the fact that young men are being exploited for sex in commercial ways, though male trafficking is not as widely studied or discussed. One of the respondents did not necessarily consider himself a sex worker. He described his commercial sexual encounters more in terms of survival sex—he simply embraced the opportunity when he was in need.



**Q:** Girls did try to buy sex from you?

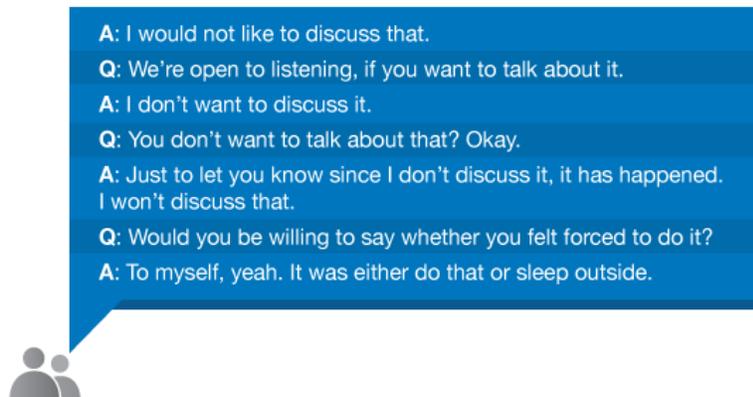
**A:** Yes. A lot. Older women. They ask me if I want to have sex with them for money? All I need to do is get a condom or two. Why not? The first time was [when I was] 17. Some of them approach me on the Internet, some in the street, some drunk.

**Q:** You go with it?

**A:** I go if I am hurting or need it. I am already taking a chance. Condoms don't protect you from everything. I need the money. It will be quick money rather than breaking into someone's car or robbing someone. It will be a good way to get me out of trouble. Sometimes it is right and sometimes it is wrong.

One respondent, who said that he voluntarily engaged in commercial sex with women, also mentioned that members of his gang took his earnings. When asked whether he got to keep the money he earned, he said, "When I was 15, 16—it was for them. When I was older, it was for me." This was the only gang-related sexual exploitation that was reported by men, but it seems that there may be more to learn on this issue.

We suspect that male child sexual exploitation is under-reported, as men were less likely to discuss selling sex. Several male respondents implied that they may have sold sex, but they were unwilling to discuss it at length. For instance, one respondent was asked if he had ever engaged in trading sex for shelter or other needs. He replied:



Another avoided any detailed discussion of trading sex by saying, “I’m not going to say it but, yeah, I’ve been approached. That’s it. I’m not going to say ’cause they’re still doing it.” Then he added, “I’m not going to say it. That’s it. Next.” When asked if he had any other experiences he would like to share along those lines, he interrupted the interviewer and said, “No. I’m not going to say it. I was tricked. I was tricked, you know, a couple of times. I will say that. But I’m not going to say who exactly. So next question.”

When respondents are hesitant to discuss intimate experiences in this way, it is difficult to discern the nature of the experience, the level of force, or often even the age at which the experience took place. This leads us to suspect that engagement in the sex trade is likely more under-reported among men than among women.

In general, the language men used to describe their sexual encounters was markedly different from women’s, and men required significantly more time with the interviewer before they would discuss sexual matters. Typically, if a respondent had little or no experience in dangerous employment, he or she would answer the questions with a very simple “no,” leading to a very brief interview which did not allow time to build the rapport necessary for them to begin to describe sexual exploitation or sexual labor when those questions were asked at the end of the questionnaire. Men, in particular, were less likely to see their work as having been dangerous or forced, and therefore they shared less over the course of the interviews than women. (See “Utilizing the HTIAM-14” for more discussion of interviewing challenges and discoveries.)

## SURVIVAL SEX

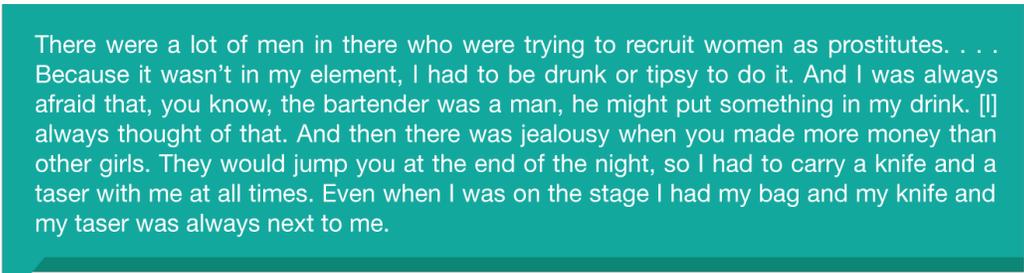
“Survival sex” is a form of commercial sexual exchange engaged in by people in situations of extreme economic vulnerability. They trade sex for food, shelter, or other basic needs—and sometimes drugs—out of necessity or desperation. It is a practice that is more prevalent among homeless youth, though it is not a form of sex trafficking unless the person is under the age of 18.<sup>11</sup> Among Covenant House New York respondents, 13.8% had engaged in survival sex (8% over the age of 18).

In the New Orleans study, 15 respondents (15%) indicated they had engaged in “survival sex.” Of the 11 who engaged in survival sex as adults, only one of them related another experience that involved trafficking. Thus the vast majority of adults who engaged in survival sex reported doing so because of significant need and desperation, and they had not otherwise been victims of forced sex work.

The reasons for engaging in survival sex ranged from practicality (“They ask me if I want to have sex with them for money. All I need to do is get a condom or two. Why not?!”) to exhaustion (“You get tired of having to ask people for stuff and me having to go from home to home to home to home. You have to have sex with some dudes to stay with them.”) to desperation (“[I do that] only in desperate situations. Like I know that I’m going to go hungry or if I know that I’m going to starve or I have no other option left, then I feel as though I’m left with no choice.”).

Vulnerable young people who are marginally housed look for any kind of work that might help them support themselves and their families. One woman used the Internet to engage in survival sex. “I met a guy online who said he would help me. He forced me, you know, to do it. I met him on Facebook. I was thinking about the money and about my kids. I was not thinking he was going to be a boyfriend or anything like that.” She concluded that “Jobs don’t pay enough or give you hours, and that’s what you have to do.”

In other cases, engaging in survival sex is simply an opportunity that a homeless young person finds difficult to refuse when it provides an avenue for meeting one’s basic needs:



There were a lot of men in there who were trying to recruit women as prostitutes. . . . Because it wasn’t in my element, I had to be drunk or tipsy to do it. And I was always afraid that, you know, the bartender was a man, he might put something in my drink. [I] always thought of that. And then there was jealousy when you made more money than other girls. They would jump you at the end of the night, so I had to carry a knife and a taser with me at all times. Even when I was on the stage I had my bag and my knife and my taser was always next to me.



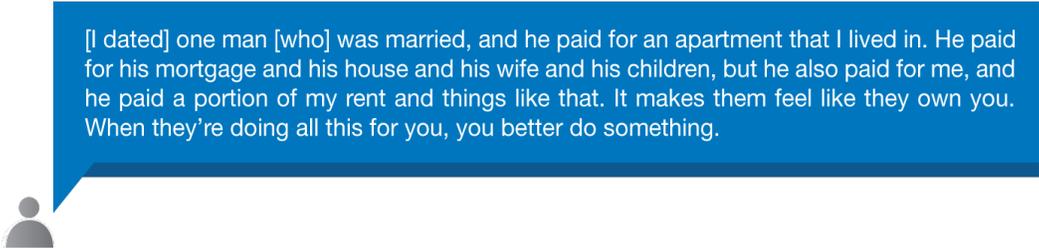
Many of the young people who described engaging in survival sex indicated that they hesitated the first (or first few) times that they encountered the opportunity, but several participants reported engaging in survival sex on multiple occasions when they had exhausted other options because they knew that sex could provide them with the quick income they needed in an economy that provided little else in the way of employment.

## TRANSGENDER EXPERIENCE OF SEXUAL LABOR

Only three of our respondents identified as transgender. Few conclusions can be drawn from such a small sample. However, because research has focused on the question of transgender engagement in sexual labor and especially survival sex,<sup>12</sup> it is useful to note what we found in this study.

Of the three transgender respondents, none reported experiences that would be categorized as human trafficking. However, one respondent's experience was what we considered a borderline case of trafficking, and another engaged in commercial sex work as well as survival sex as an adult.

The one transgender youth whose story was considered potentially indicative of trafficking did not provide clear evidence that would meet the legal definition of trafficking. She was, however, in a series of extraordinarily abusive relationships that bordered on trafficking. She told us:



[I dated] one man [who] was married, and he paid for an apartment that I lived in. He paid for his mortgage and his house and his wife and his children, but he also paid for me, and he paid a portion of my rent and things like that. It makes them feel like they own you. When they're doing all this for you, you better do something.

She said she did drugs to please him and provided sex to him and to other men. This arrangement made her feel “owned” because she suspected that if she hadn’t had sex with them, “It would have turned out very ugly because they were very built men. They were strong.” Nonetheless, the respondent resisted the notion that she was acting under duress in these relationships, insisting that she had lived with her abusive partner by choice, but she also indicated that it would have been very dangerous for her to leave. This is a borderline case that we did not include in the count for trafficking, in part because the respondent considered these to be consensual relationships.

Though there were no clear cases of trafficking, one of the transgender respondents had engaged in—and indicated that she enjoyed—voluntary commercial sex work, but she also reported resorting to survival sex that provided her with basic food and short-term shelter in the occasional desperate situation.

All three of the transgender respondents had experienced both sexual and physical abuse.

## LABOR TRAFFICKING

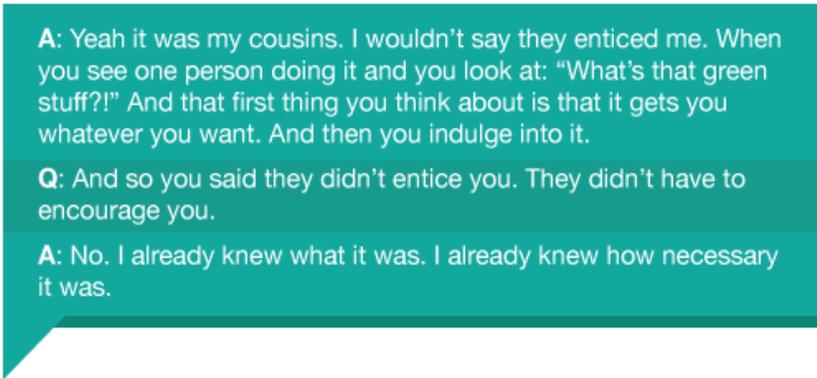
Of the 99 respondents, five (5% of total, 38% of trafficked) described experiences of labor trafficking.

### FORCED DRUG DEALING

Four of those cases (80%) reported being forced to sell drugs. Of those forced to sell drugs, half were male and half were female. These four cases represent 11.7% of the 34 people who reported having sold drugs. Similarly, in the Covenant House New York report, forced drug selling accounted for four of their five cases of labor trafficking as well.

The questionnaire did not include questions that specifically inquired about work in the drug trade. Nonetheless, when asked about dangerous work, respondents often recounted stories related to their time dealing drugs before entering Covenant House. The youngest reported age of entry into the drug trade was 9 years old. All of our participants who had been engaged in the drug trade (and who were 18–23 at the time of their interviews) had begun drug dealing in their teenage years. Young people engaged in drug dealing for a number of reasons, with a similar range of responses to those provided for trading sex—from desperation to the simple desire to find steady paid work to the sheer thrill of the work. Several people indicated that drug dealing simply allowed them to make a lot of money and live a lavish lifestyle.

One young man was asked how he got into the trade, and he said:



A: Yeah it was my cousins. I wouldn't say they enticed me. When you see one person doing it and you look at: "What's that green stuff?!" And that first thing you think about is that it gets you whatever you want. And then you indulge into it.

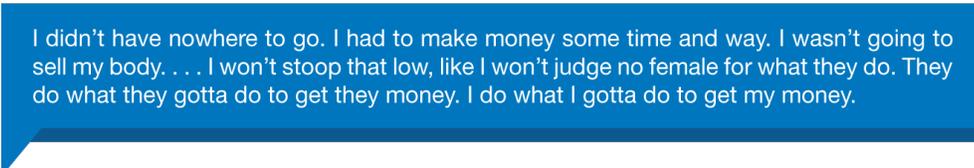
Q: And so you said they didn't entice you. They didn't have to encourage you.

A: No. I already knew what it was. I already knew how necessary it was.



One young man recounted how selling weed was an easy way to help him support his family's needs: "I ran across this guy who sold weed. I sold with him. When you get your money, get out of it and go about your business. He was trying to help me out. He knew it wasn't for me."

One young woman chose drug dealing over trading sex when she was homeless and looking for ways to make money. She told us:

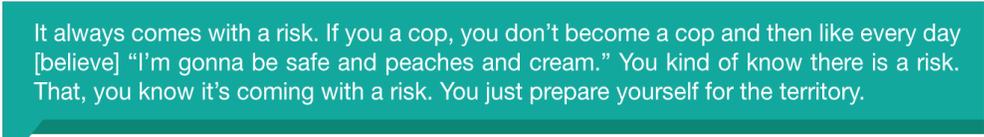


I didn't have nowhere to go. I had to make money some time and way. I wasn't going to sell my body. . . . I won't stoop that low, like I won't judge no female for what they do. They do what they gotta do to get they money. I do what I gotta do to get my money.



Many suggested that they had no trouble leaving the drug trade. When asked whether he was afraid of his supplier, one young man replied: “No. I went to him and I said, ‘Dude, I can’t do this no more.’ He said he understood. And I said, ‘Dude, you need to stop doing this too.’”

Another explained that the violence involved in the work was something dealers take on knowingly. It is simply an occupational hazard.



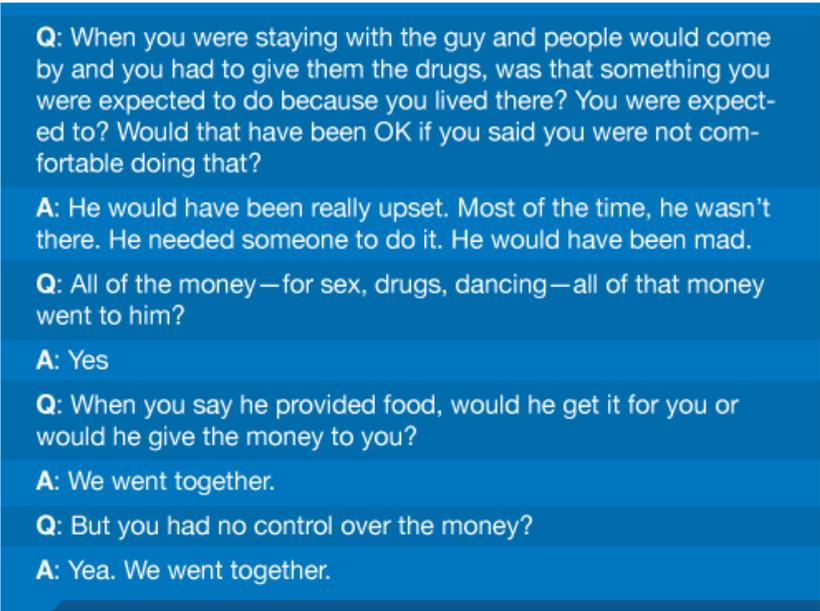
It always comes with a risk. If you a cop, you don’t become a cop and then like every day [believe] “I’m gonna be safe and peaches and cream.” You kind of know there is a risk. That, you know it’s coming with a risk. You just prepare yourself for the territory.



Those who voluntarily sold drugs said they negotiated or agreed to a set cut of the income made on sales, and while they reported that there was always the risk of violence involved in the work, they largely felt free to disengage from the business as they chose.

We considered an experience “forced drug dealing” when the requisite “force, fraud, or coercion” was clearly involved. The cases involved people who considered themselves as not making an individual choice in pursuing that line of work. Three of the four people who reported being forced to sell drugs also discussed times when they did so voluntarily, marking a clear contrast between the times when they felt compelled to do so and other times when they made the choice for themselves. The fourth was forced to sell drugs in connection with being the victim of a brutal pimp, and while she sold sex voluntarily when she was not with the pimp, she did not report selling drugs voluntarily otherwise.

The woman who was forced to sell drugs when she was under pimp control told us about how he forced her to sell drugs and he controlled all of the money:



**Q:** When you were staying with the guy and people would come by and you had to give them the drugs, was that something you were expected to do because you lived there? You were expected to? Would that have been OK if you said you were not comfortable doing that?

**A:** He would have been really upset. Most of the time, he wasn’t there. He needed someone to do it. He would have been mad.

**Q:** All of the money—for sex, drugs, dancing—all of that money went to him?

**A:** Yes

**Q:** When you say he provided food, would he get it for you or would he give the money to you?

**A:** We went together.

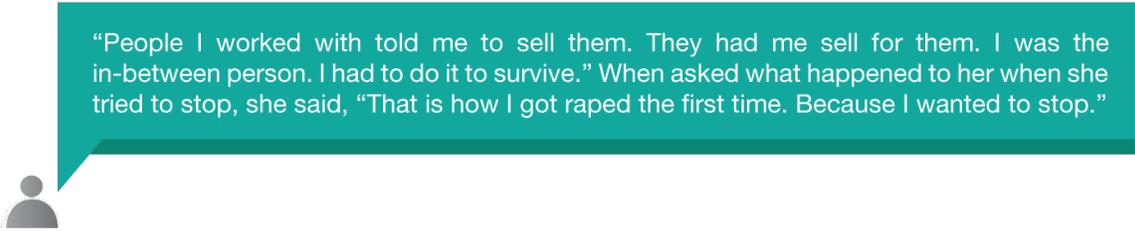
**Q:** But you had no control over the money?

**A:** Yea. We went together.



In her case, she was under a pimp’s complete control because he was violent with her and because she felt she had no funds to help her escape or live on her own. As a result, whatever kind of work he decided she had to do for him—whether it was legal or illegal—was his decision to make. She felt entirely enslaved to him.

One young woman who reported being forced to sell drugs spoke of the risk of trying to quit dealing:



“People I worked with told me to sell them. They had me sell for them. I was the in-between person. I had to do it to survive.” When asked what happened to her when she tried to stop, she said, “That is how I got raped the first time. Because I wanted to stop.”

The use of or perceived threat of force was the primary way forced drug dealing was enforced.

Another young man reported that he was forced to join a gang at the age of 12. He was forced to sell drugs, and he told us, “They said if I stopped working for them they’d find me and kill me.” He was explicitly told that he had no choice but to do their bidding if he wanted to stay alive. Luckily for him, his family moved six months later, and he was able to escape the control of the gang. Later, when he was 16, he began dealing drugs again, but this time he was self-employed and he seemed to suggest that he was a supplier for other drug dealers.

Much like those who were forced into sex work, the young people who were forced to sell drugs were victims of serious violence and persistent threats of violence to themselves and to their loved ones. They felt that if they tried to walk away from the work, their very lives would be in danger.

Despite the fact that there are some clear distinctions that can be made between work in the drug trade that is voluntary and work that is performed because of force, people who are forced to sell drugs are typically not counted among trafficking victims. However, these cases indicate a need for further research into forced labor in the informal and illicit sectors of the U.S. economy.

## **INTERNATIONAL FACTORY LABOR TRAFFICKING**

Only one respondent reported a more familiar case of factory labor trafficking. She was an American born of Mexican descent and lived in Mexico with her parents for several years when she was a teenager. When she was 15, she worked in a fabric factory where she was not paid for her labor. She remembered the discriminatory practices of her employer: “The people that are minorities in Mexico City, we don’t have a lot of good work, so we look for other alternatives. And we get small jobs in fabric or something of that fashion, and they say they are going to pay us the salary but we wait three weeks, three more weeks, three more weeks—and they are very behind or they will just give us a part.” The respondent indicated that this was not unusual in the town where she lived, and therefore she did not find it remarkable enough to discuss at length in the interview. Hers was the only interview conducted in Spanish through an interpreter. It is hard to determine from the interview what level of coercion was involved to force her to remain at the job, but as she indicates, she and her family continued to work for extended periods of time without being paid.

## OTHER FORMS OF LABOR EXPLOITATION

Very few Covenant House New Orleans respondents had experienced full-fledged labor trafficking. However, the study revealed a high incidence of other forms of labor exploitation, which indicates significant labor vulnerabilities among homeless youth.

Nineteen percent (19%) of respondents reported incidents of wage theft. In these cases, clients had worked for an employer who promised to pay them an agreed-upon wage (which was sometimes less than minimum wage but nonetheless agreed upon), but when it came time to collect payment, the employer did not make good on the promise.

One respondent worked for a major entertainment and sporting venue in the city, and she reported that “The workers met there and no one showed up to pay us. We were slaving” for the employer and “working nonstop till the time we leave. They cut off the faucets for water.” Unpaid and not allowed to take breaks or use bathrooms, the respondent refused to return to the job.

Other respondents were promised certain wages but were shortchanged. One interviewee told us about a job where “you never got checks [because] everything was paid under the table. And I did get shortchanged many a times and that’s why I left.” All of the respondents quit their jobs because of this abuse, but they remained vulnerable to such fraud because they faced incredible difficulty in locating legitimate paid jobs.

Because of their vulnerability in the labor market and the high rate of unemployment, many young people reported experiences where they performed extremely dangerous work as well. An additional 6% reported working in excessively dangerous work situations. One had been hit by the garbage trucks on which he worked; another had a fingertip cut off in a restaurant job. Others felt compelled to do work that exceeded their physical limits, including one petite woman who took on heavy lifting jobs to support her family. One person reported, “I had a shift at the brick yard. I was working in the heat. Because of my head injury, I was coughing up blood. He said, ‘Work faster.’ I was getting sick and was working slow. So he said you will either get fired or go home. I tried to work. I didn’t get no break. I worked all day. I worked on the rail cart. No breaks.” For fear of losing his only source of income, he had to continue working far beyond what his physical strength allowed.

## APPROACHED FOR WORK OR SEX

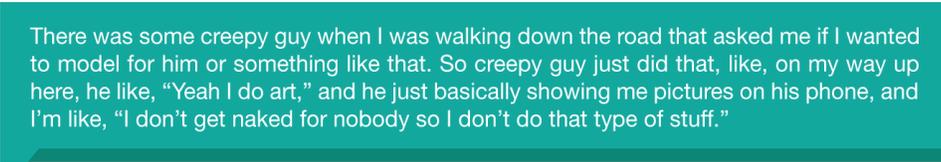
In the very early stages of our interviewing, a concerning trend emerged in the stories of the young people with whom we spoke. In addition to the typical recruitment techniques that people in the sex trade reported, many of our respondents described being approached, typically by strangers or new acquaintances who offered them opportunities for sex work, sales work (e.g., magazines, phone cards, children’s books, etc.), drug dealing, and a variety of other work situations. Thirty-three percent (31%) of the participants reported having been approached in this way. Many of them described being approached in or directly outside Covenant House, in and around Armstrong Park (located next to Covenant House), in the French Quarter, along Bourbon Street, and all over the downtown New Orleans area. They disclosed being approached in other areas of the city and in other cities as well, but we

found it interesting that young people were regularly approached by people who offered them opportunities that ranged from suspicious legitimate work to illegal activities. The vast majority of that work, however, centered on sex work.

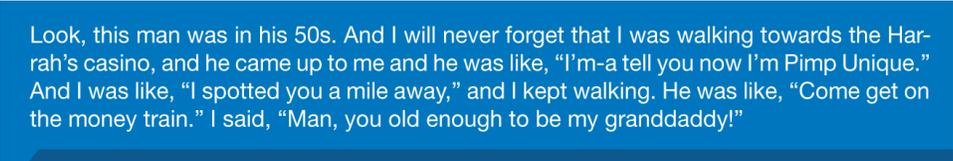
One person was approached at Covenant House by a young man who wanted to take her out of town with him. “There was this guy. I don’t know why he came here. He was here for one day. He tried to convince me to leave with him. One girl left with him. She came back one month later. I tried to convince her to stay too. That was the second day I was here. He stayed here one night. Then he left.” Though the reason for leaving town was unclear, the implication was that he might have been recruiting women to work in the sex trade within the shelter, though the respondent didn’t indicate what precisely had happened to her friend while she was away.

Another woman said she had been offered several escort jobs by strangers who “made it seem like it was something simple, legal.” Another pimp encouraged a young woman by insisting, “Y’all are missing out on money. Y’all are young and don’t know no better. This is good money that y’all could be having.”

Women reported being approached by strangers who want to recruit them into the sex trade regularly. When asked what the strangers offer her, one woman said, “They say they will take care of me and my baby” — certainly a difficult offer to turn down. Others described the techniques pimps had used to recruit them right off the street:



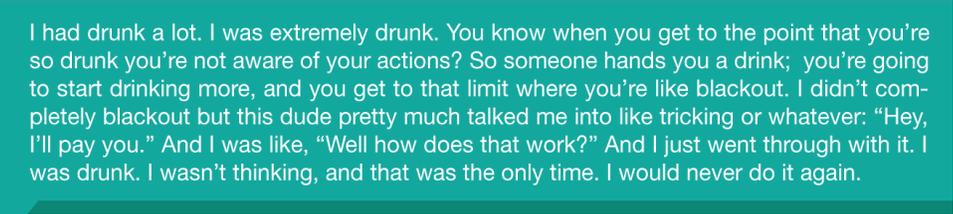
There was some creepy guy when I was walking down the road that asked me if I wanted to model for him or something like that. So creepy guy just did that, like, on my way up here, he like, “Yeah I do art,” and he just basically showing me pictures on his phone, and I’m like, “I don’t get naked for nobody so I don’t do that type of stuff.”



Look, this man was in his 50s. And I will never forget that I was walking towards the Harrah’s casino, and he came up to me and he was like, “I’m-a tell you now I’m Pimp Unique.” And I was like, “I spotted you a mile away,” and I kept walking. He was like, “Come get on the money train.” I said, “Man, you old enough to be my granddaddy!”



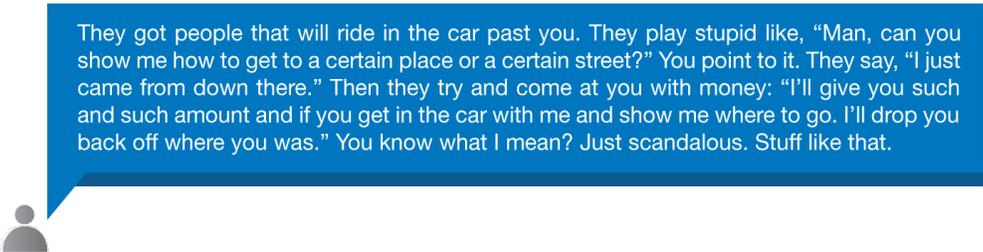
One male respondent discussed a recent episode in which he was drunk and encountered a complete stranger on the street who convinced him to trade sex for quick money while he was homeless:



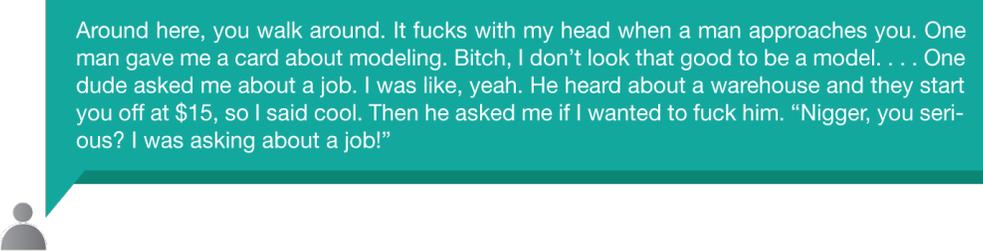
I had drunk a lot. I was extremely drunk. You know when you get to the point that you’re so drunk you’re not aware of your actions? So someone hands you a drink; you’re going to start drinking more, and you get to that limit where you’re like blackout. I didn’t completely blackout but this dude pretty much talked me into like tricking or whatever: “Hey, I’ll pay you.” And I was like, “Well how does that work?” And I just went through with it. I was drunk. I wasn’t thinking, and that was the only time. I would never do it again.



Because he perceived that his sexual identity was at stake in the experience, the respondent felt great deal of anxiety talking about using sex to make money. He indicated that he is offered many opportunities like this, though, because he often encounters a man “in the Quarter that always tries to [convince him to trade sex], but I’m like, ‘Dude, my mind’s sharp. You’re not going to manipulate me into doing this, you know.’ He tries and he tries and I’m like, ‘I’m not going to do it.’” Several male respondents explained that people approach young men for “scandalous” reasons all the time:



They got people that will ride in the car past you. They play stupid like, “Man, can you show me how to get to a certain place or a certain street?” You point to it. They say, “I just came from down there.” Then they try and come at you with money: “I’ll give you such and such amount and if you get in the car with me and show me where to go. I’ll drop you back off where you was.” You know what I mean? Just scandalous. Stuff like that.



Around here, you walk around. It fucks with my head when a man approaches you. One man gave me a card about modeling. Bitch, I don’t look that good to be a model. . . . One dude asked me about a job. I was like, yeah. He heard about a warehouse and they start you off at \$15, so I said cool. Then he asked me if I wanted to fuck him. “Nigger, you serious? I was asking about a job!”

Many of our informants described the kind of “creepy” encounters we’ve seen above. As a result of the persistent predatory behaviors they encountered while walking around alone, the clients at Covenant House expressed a great deal of anxiety about the risks involved in staying out at night downtown.

At the same time, the residents consistently described many of the mechanisms that made Covenant House a safer space for them than living on the streets. Many of them had turned to Covenant House for protection from just these sorts of dangers. As part of the case management structure at Covenant House, residents follow a curfew of 6 p.m. on weekdays and 8 p.m. on weekends. When respondents discussed being approached, they repeatedly indicated they knew they needed to avoid talking to strangers on the street altogether, and they often concluded that it was best for them to remain indoors at Covenant House as much as possible to avoid these situations.

## UTILIZING THE HTIAM-14

The HTIAM-14 is a brief questionnaire that allows service providers, medical professionals, or law enforcement to determine if a person is a victim of trafficking in as little as 20 minutes.

We found that typically, the first question regarding “dangerous work” would elicit a story from the respondent, which would then allow us to ask more specific questions about exploitative work situations. However, the HTIAM-14 is most effective when respondents have had at least some work experience. Because the questions focus on dangerous or exploitative working conditions, those who have few work experiences (or few dangerous ones) don’t have the time to build a rapport with the interviewers that encourages them to open up about exploitation and sex in the latter part of the survey.

We found that men were less likely to perceive their work experiences as “dangerous” or “forced,” and therefore, their interviews tended to be shorter and to divulge less. We found it useful to ask about work experience in general before launching into questions that required respondents to admit their vulnerability. We also found that asking young New Orleans men if they perceived their work as dangerous would typically result in a negative response, at least in part because of the bravado required of men in our culture. However, when asked whether an outside observer might find some of their work experiences dangerous, they often began to describe incredibly hazardous work, in a wide variety of occupations, but including sex work and drug dealing. This indicated to us that men in particular were less likely to reveal their fear and vulnerability and were aided in opening up if they were allowed to project that fear onto an observer or interviewer.

We also found that respondents often disclosed relevant experiences when, at the end of the interview, we asked if they had experienced anything else they felt we could learn from in our study. In several cases, it was in response to this question that the young women and men would reveal experiences of exploitation that they did not feel were appropriate responses to any of the more work-related questions in the HTIAM-14. We suspect that this indicates reluctance in some interviewees to understand what we would consider “informal labor” as “work.”

We found it useful to ask questions about being “approached” for work or other activities because it not only allowed us to understand the environment in which the youth were living, but it also sometimes allowed us to shift the conversation to illicit activities. When they admitted that people had approached them for illegal or informal work, it gave us an opportunity to ask if they had ever accepted that kind of work. This line of questioning is likely most useful for shelters that are attempting to lower the risk factors for their clients who are attempting to extract themselves from these activities. The prevalence of strangers approaching youth to engage in sex work leads us to believe that youth are vulnerable to ubiquitous temptations to engage in potentially dangerous work and that they may be under-reporting their acceptance of such offers.

This discussion might also be useful to those who are utilizing the short version of the recently released Vera Institute of Justice Trafficking Victim Identification Tool, as it is quite similar to the HTIAM-14 in its questions and methods, approaches to trafficking in all its forms, and sensitivity to the way victims frame their experiences.<sup>13</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

### I. SERVICES AND CARE

- **Covenant House and similarly qualified shelters should increase the number of beds and space available for homeless youth, especially those involved in the sex trade.** Given that young people reported that they are persistently approached by strangers presenting them with opportunities to engage in illicit activities when they are sleeping on the streets and also noted that shelters provide the protection they seek, it is imperative that we offer them the shelter and resources they need. Predatory pimps and other potential exploiters haunt our city's streets and prey upon vulnerable youth. Respondents believed that these predators recognized them as homeless and admitted they were often particularly susceptible to pie-in-the-sky offers because of their desperate situations. Increased shelter space, beds, and resources for youth when they are most vulnerable will help safeguard them against acquiescing to such offers.
- **Covenant House, their service partners, and other qualified service providers should continue to increase the availability of specialized services for victims of sex trafficking.** With more than one in 10 of Covenant House's residents reporting incidents of sex trafficking, it is clear that impoverished youth in our city are particularly vulnerable to sex traffickers. Some of the young people were victimized by desperate family members who used them to make money, while others were held captive by intimate partners who made money from their labor. At least two of the respondents were even kidnapped into the sex trade. Despite the fact that all of the women who had been trafficked indicated a high level of emotional trauma, many of them admitted that they had not spoken openly to counselors about that experience. We recommended counseling services for them during the interview, but there is little specialized counseling offered to victims of human trafficking to meet their particular intersection of needs, and there are only three shelters dedicated to care for victims of trafficking in all of Southern Louisiana, offering a total of only 30 beds. We need to invest in specialized care for people who are exploited for sex to address the complex of traumatic responses unique to that population.
- **Covenant House, their service partners, and the New Orleans community in general should continue to increase work opportunities and job skills training for young adults.** Lack of work opportunities encourages young people to perform any kind of work that provides an income. Providing a living wage, increased jobs, and greater opportunities for job skills training is likely the most important step we can take in preventing sex trafficking and survival sex as well as voluntary engagement in the sex trade that results from economic desperation. The vast majority of the people who were trafficked or exploited in other ways for their labor indicated they were compelled to take jobs that they suspected could be harmful or dangerous because they had no other work opportunities. Nationally, there are more than 5.6 million youths age 18–34 who are unwillingly unemployed.<sup>14</sup> In New Orleans, at least 10% of youth (and 16% of African-American youth) age 18–24

are “disconnected”—both unenrolled in school and unemployed.<sup>15</sup> If we are going to take the issue of human trafficking seriously in our region, we have to take unemployment seriously.

- **Service providers and others interacting with at-risk populations should increase attention to male youth who engage in trading sex.** The two men who indicated they had engaged in trading sex under the age of 18 bragged about their experiences and seemed proud of them. While we must acknowledge their agency and their confidence, we should also be aware of the potential needs of this population, who may not be as comfortable discussing the ways they were harmed by those experiences. Many young men were hesitant to talk about work in the sex trade, and a more comprehensive approach to male sexuality and male sexual labor will be required if we are to identify young men who are being victimized.

## II. POLICY AND ADVOCACY

- **Legislators and service providers must collaborate to address the problem of “aging out” of foster care.** “Aging out” refers to the process by which young people no longer receive services through the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) or through the foster care system after they turn 18. In 2013, the Louisiana DCFS eliminated their Young Adult Program that helped foster youth who aged out of the system to pay for transitional housing and other services. As a result, 18 and 19-year-olds are especially vulnerable to homelessness, informal and exploitative labor arrangements, and predatory offers. Many of our respondents suggested that they only participated in survival sex or the sex trade once they found themselves homeless as a result of aging out. DCFS should provide greater long-term care and transitional opportunities for those young people who age out of their system.
- **Legislators must remedy the problem of “aging out” from legal protections.** “Aging out” can also refer to the way the law protects people who engage in the sex trade if they do so before the age of 18, but after which, they are considered to be engaging in criminal activity. Among those child victims of sex trafficking interviewed for this study, nearly half were re-trafficked when they were of adult age. Currently, however, if a person is arrested at the age of 18 (or older) for trading sex, their age of entry is not a consideration. This aging out leaves young adult trafficking victims vulnerable to criminalization (and re-traumatization) through the criminal justice system. Legislation should address this issue so that law enforcement and judges can consider the context in which a person entered the sex trade as part of his or her defense.
- **Community activists, legal professionals, and service providers should raise awareness of Louisiana’s new law to vacate convictions of trafficking victims.** As a result of being treated as criminals instead of victims, survivors of human trafficking often have extensive arrest records and even felony convictions. In 2014, Louisiana passed HB 1025 that allows people who are found to be victims of sex trafficking to have prostitution and “crimes against nature” charges removed

from their records. Though this law is in place to assist survivors, few people have been made aware of its remedies. We need to actively disseminate this information so that people who have been wrongfully convicted will be able to have these violations removed from their records.

- **The legislature and local police departments should fund and require law enforcement training for identification of victims of trafficking.** Of the 15 people who reported being forced to work—whether in the sex trade, the drug trade, or factory work—not one of them had been identified by law enforcement or the legal system as a victim of trafficking. Nearly half of them had been arrested for offenses related to dealing drugs or trading sex, but none of them were identified at that time as having been forced to engage in the work—and of course that means likely none of them were provided specialized services that could have aided their escape. A 2010 study showed that 40% of juveniles allegedly involved in commercial sex work were treated as criminals by law enforcement rather than as victims of a crime.<sup>16</sup> The HTIAM-14 and the new Vera Institute Trafficking Victims Identification Tool are validated instruments that allow not only service providers but also law enforcement officers to ascertain whether a person has been trafficked or not. We need to fund mandatory training for law enforcement and legal professionals to utilize this tool in their work so that we do not continue to criminalize people who are in need of support, legal defense, and specialized services.
- **Researchers need to study the existence and realities of forced drug dealing, and our communities should pursue a more informed approach to this form of trafficking.** New Orleans has invested enormous resources in uncovering illicit gang activity and understanding violent crime rates in our city. However, there is little research at the local, national, or international level about the experience of being forced into drug dealing.<sup>17</sup> Though drug dealing occurs as part of an informal economy, those who participate in it can nonetheless be victims of the “force, fraud, and coercion” that we use to characterize trafficking. We need to respond better to the force factors that encourage gang involvement and work with young people to understand the context within which they have engaged in such dangerous, criminalized activities.

## FOOTNOTES

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<sup>1</sup>"The Global Slavery Index 2014" (2nd ed., report by the Walk Free Foundation; West Perth: Hope for Children Organization Australia, 2014).

<sup>2</sup>Heather J. Clawson, Nicole Dutch, Amy Solomon, and Lisa G. Grace, "Human Trafficking Into and Within the United States: A Review of the Literature" (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2009). Online: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/07/HumanTrafficking/LitRev/index.shtml>; Ric Curtis, Karen Terry, Meredith Dank, Kirk Dombrowski, Bilal Khan, Amy Muslim, Melissa Labriola, and Michael Rempel, "The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in New York City" (report by the National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice, 2008). Online: [http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/CSEC\\_NYC\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/CSEC_NYC_Executive_Summary.pdf); Sharon Cooper, Angelo P. Giardino, Brad Russ, Cherry Kingsley, and Faye Battiste-Otto, *Psychosocial Context Leading Juveniles to Prostitution and Sexual Exploitation* (St. Louis: STM Learning, 2005).

<sup>3</sup>Clawson, "Human Trafficking"; Michel Dorais and Peter Feldstein, *Rent Boys: The World of Male Sex Workers* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup>Michel Dorais, Patrice Corriveau, and Peter Feldstein, *Gangs and Girls: Understanding Juvenile Prostitution* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup>Lisa A. Kramer and Ellen C. Berg, "A Survival Analysis of Timing of Entry into Prostitution: The Differential Impact of Race, Educational Level, and Childhood/Adolescent Risk Factors," *Sociological Inquiry* 73, no. 4 (2003): 511–28.

<sup>6</sup>Ellen Wright Clayton, Richard D. Krugman, and Patti Simon, eds., "Confronting Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States" (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies; Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2014). Online: [http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record\\_id=18358](http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=18358).

<sup>7</sup>Duren Banks and Tracey Kyckelhahn, "Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents, 2008–2010" (Publication No. NCJ 233732; Bureau of Justice Statistics; Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2011).

<sup>8</sup>Laura T. Murphy and Brian Ea, "The Louisiana Human Trafficking Report" (report; New Orleans: Modern Slavery Research Project, 2014).

<sup>9</sup>Atlas.ti Version 7.1 (computer software; Berlin: Scientific Software Development, 1999).

<sup>10</sup>"Demographics for Fiscal Year 2013, 2014" (internal document; Covenant House, November 2014).

<sup>11</sup>N. E. Walls and Stephanie Bell, "Correlates of Engaging in Survival Sex among Homeless Youth and Young Adults," *Journal of Sex Research* 48, no. 5 (2010): 423–36; Kimberly A. Tyler & Katherine A. Johnson, "Trading Sex: Voluntary or Coerced? The Experiences of Homeless Youth," *Journal of Sex Research* 43, no. 3 (2006): 208–216.

<sup>12</sup>Walls and Bell, "Correlates"; "Sel Julian Hwahng and Larry Nuttbrock, "Sex Workers, Fem Queens, and Cross-Dressers: Differential Marginalizations and HIV Vulnerabilities among Three Ethnocultural Male-to-Female Transgender Communities in New York City." *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 4, no. 4 (2007): 36–59; Brandon D. L. Marshall, Kate Shannon, Thomas Kerr, Ruth Zhang, and Evan Wood, "Survival Sex Work and Increased HIV Risk Among Sexual Minority Street-Involved Youth," *JAIDS: Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes* 53, no. 5 (2010): 661–64; Lydia A. Sausa, Joanne Keatley, and Don Operario, "Perceived Risks and Benefits of Sex Work among Transgender Women of Color in San Francisco," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 36, no. 6 (2007): 768–77.

<sup>13</sup>"Guidelines for Administering the Trafficking Victim Identification Tool (TVIT)" (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2014).

<sup>14</sup>Catherine Ruetschlin and Tamara Draut, "Stuck: Young America's Persistent Job Crisis" (New York: Demos, 2013). Online: [http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Stuck\(uploaded\)\\_3.pdf](http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Stuck(uploaded)_3.pdf).

<sup>15</sup>Susan Sellers, Andre Perry, Petrice Sams-Abiodun, Allison Plyer, and Elaine Ortiz, "Building an Inclusive, High-Skilled Workforce for New Orleans' Next Economy" (report, 2012). Online: [https://gnocdc.s3.amazonaws.com/reports/GNOCDC\\_BuildingAnInclusiveHigh-SkilledWorkforceForNewOrleansNextEconomy.pdf](https://gnocdc.s3.amazonaws.com/reports/GNOCDC_BuildingAnInclusiveHigh-SkilledWorkforceForNewOrleansNextEconomy.pdf).

<sup>16</sup>S. Halter, "Factors That Influence Police Conceptualizations of Girls Involved in Prostitution in Six U.S. Cities: Child Sexual Exploitation Victims or Delinquents?" *Child Maltreatment* 15, no. 2 (2010): 152–60; Amy Farrell and Jack McDevitt, "Improving Law Enforcement Identification and Response to Human Trafficking," in *Human Trafficking: Exploring the International Nature, Concerns, and Complexities* (ed. John Winterdyk, Benjamin Perrin, and Philip L. Reichel; Boca Raton, Fla.: CRC, 2012), 181–206.

<sup>17</sup>Brief references to forced drug dealing as a form of human trafficking can be found in the following sources: Farrell and McDevitt, "Improving Law Enforcement"; Banks and Kyckelhahn, "Characteristics"; and "Combating Trafficking as Modern-Day Slavery: A Matter of Rights, Freedoms and Security" (Vienna: OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, 2010).





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