

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The groundbreaking study, “*Measuring the Nature and Extent of Gang Involvement in Sex Trafficking in San Diego*”<sup>1</sup> focused narrowly on one of the most understudied aspects of human trafficking in the United States: the relationship of street gangs as facilitators of sex trafficking. Researchers gathered and analyzed data from hundreds of current and former gang members, schools, law enforcement agencies, and victim service providers. **In all, data was collected from 1205 individuals, making it one of the largest, most comprehensive human trafficking case studies in the United States to date:** 156 gang affiliated persons, 702 first-time prostitution offenders, 189 survivors from eight victim services programs, and 140 County School administrators and staff. **The study is a large-scale model of collaborative research to impact policy and practice, and serves as a national model for future research on human trafficking more broadly.**

### KEY FINDINGS

- **Sex trafficking is San Diego’s 2<sup>nd</sup> largest underground economy after drug trafficking.** The underground sex economy represents an estimated **\$810 million** in annual revenue
- **Our methodology has produced San Diego County’s first credible estimate of sex trafficking victims/survivors per year: 8,830 - 11,773** of whom 1,766 came into contact with law enforcement
- **At least 110 gangs are involved in commercial exploitation of people (CSEP).** 85% of pimps/sex trafficking facilitators interviewed were gang involved
- **Pimps/sex trafficking facilitators are not primarily African American.** Our sample of traffickers in prison contained roughly an equal number of white, black and Hispanic facilitators.
- **15 years old** is the average age of entry into child commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC)
- **Sex trafficking facilitators control 4.5 victim/survivors on average**
- **42% of first-time prostitution arrests are in fact cases involving sex trafficking**
- **Domestic trafficking** accounts for the majority of CSEP
- **Transborder criminal networks** are involved in trafficking minors and adults between Mexico and the United States. **20% of trafficking victims referred to service providers come from Mexico and 10 other countries**

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter “*Gang Sex Trafficking in San Diego*”

- **Female recruiters and pimp/sex trafficking facilitators** are perceived to be a significant and growing feature of the underground sex economy
- **Significant CSEC recruitment is happening on high school and middle school campuses**

## METHODS

This 3-year study reports on three major sets of findings: (1) the scope and nature of gang involvement, (2) the scope of nature of victimization, and (3) estimates of the regional commercial sex economy. It was designed to address seven shortcomings in human or sex trafficking research thus far:

1. Inability to produce credible estimates of sex trafficking (and the dearth of reliable statistics on the extent of sex trafficking)
2. Conflation of commercial sexual exploitation with sex trafficking
3. Lack of primary data on sex trafficking (studies rely instead on secondary sources - newspaper reports and media investigations, or interviews with intermediaries: social service providers, counselors, law enforcement, victim advocates, pro bono attorneys, and others working with trafficking victims)
4. Inability to identify networks of sex traffickers
5. Understudied extent of gang involvement in sex trafficking
6. Over-reliance on qualitative methods
7. Small sample sizes

We used mixed-methods to collect and synthesize data (qualitative and quantitative) from five major sources: (1) a Survivor Services Dataset from a prostitution first offender diversion program, (2) a Survivor Services Dataset from surveys conducted by eight service providers, (3) Law Enforcement Incident Reporting (combined Police arrest records and Sheriff booking datasets), (4) School Focus Groups, and (5) In depth interviews with individuals involved in – or knowledgeable about – sex trafficking.

From these five datasets, we report quantitative and qualitative findings that shed light on the scale and complex challenges associated with Commercial Sexual Exploitation of People (CSEP), Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC), and Commercial Sexual Activity (CSA) broadly defined.<sup>2</sup>

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## GANGS AND SEX TRAFFICKING

Sex trafficking is San Diego's 2<sup>nd</sup> largest underground economy after drug trafficking. The underground sex economy represents an estimated \$810 million in annual revenue and involves 110 area gangs. **The study estimates the minimum number of CSEP at between 8830 and 11,773 per year with an average age of entry between 14 to 15 years old. This represents the first credible estimate of sex trafficking victims/survivors per year in San Diego County. 85% percent of facilitators are gang-involved.** Facilitators fall into four main categories, with associated characteristics and preferred strategies:

- *Traditional Pimps* are the most likely to use the term 'pimp' to describe themselves, and to take pride in this identity. The traditional facilitator's identity as a pimp is tied to the desire for social recognition and status. Traditional pimps manage between 1-10 individuals on average. They keep all, or the vast majority, of money made in each sexual encounter
- *Vicious-Violent Pimps* are a subcategory of 'Traditional Pimps' who use the greatest coercive force with CSEP and CSEC. They use extreme tactics of physical and psychological control. They control every aspect of commercial sexual exploitation, use psychological and physical violence to force high financial quotas. They are willing, and perhaps prefer, to recruit minors because of the malleability and vulnerability of young people.
- *Protector/Business Partners* reject the label 'pimp' describe, and themselves as contracted by adult sex workers, primarily as drivers or to provide security against rape or violence. Facilitators in this category say that they do not impose quotas. They often describe being approached or recruited by women. The interviewees describe it as a 'business partnership'. The revenue is split, making this one of the main differences between Protector/Business Partners and Traditional facilitators. 92% of Hispanics belong to the Protector/Business Partner category, however they make up only 32% of the entire population who describe themselves this way. 22% are Black, and 52% are White.
- *Organized Crime Groups* differ from gangs in their hidden or 'underground' nature, and how they are structured. They were often described as *rings*, closed groups where members are concerned with secrecy. Very few of the people we spoke to admitted to being involved at this level, but many were friends with, or had direct knowledge of, people who were.

Examples included a devil worshipping ring, a child protection ring in a beachside community, and a transborder child sex trafficking ring.

**Even though ‘pimping’ is commonly associated with Black gangs, we encountered roughly equal numbers of White, Black and Hispanic facilitators of sex trafficking during interviews in prison.** In fact, the ratio of white to minority facilitators may be higher than is reported here given that our data does not account for the over-representation of Blacks and Hispanics in California jails and prisons.

Nor does the relatively even split between Black, Hispanic and White facilitators represent a complete picture - in the past 10 years, Somali gangs and Iraqi Chaldean groups have been indicted on sex trafficking charges, and Asian American and Native American gangs were under-represented in our dataset. It is likely that our data underreports the nuances of facilitator ethnic/racial background.

## CHILD COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (CSEC)

### *Recruitment, Risk Factors, Scope*

Recruitment into CSEC is happening at San Diego County high schools. We held conversations with 140 County School administrators and staff from 20 schools in North County, South County, East County and Central San Diego. **All schools confirmed that recruitment was happening on their campuses.** 18 of the 20 Schools confirmed CSEC cases on their combined campuses; all 20 confirmed suspected cases. Our findings confirm previous studies showing that young people most vulnerable to CSEC are those who experience abuse and neglect in the home, are runaways or homeless, identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and /or Questioning, and experience mental health issues and/or trauma. Gang members actively recruit by “swooping in” on newcomers to school; enticing vulnerable kids with material and emotional support. In addition, many youth are recruited explicitly by family members who force them into CSEC, or implicitly by family members who are themselves pimps/facilitators or prostituted individuals and for whom “the life” is a way of life.

## DEMAND

According to interviews, clients of commercial sex come from all socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnic backgrounds. The demand for commercial sex is widespread, buoyed by cultural acceptance and perceived impunity.

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