

Human Trafficking Awareness Month

January is National Human Trafficking Awareness Month, a designation that aims to raise awareness of sex and labor trafficked victims. Because San Diego is one of the FBI's 13 U.S. cities designated as a "high intensity child prostitution area", it is important to focus attention on this subject when possible. A recent study funded by the National Institute of Justice estimated that San Diego County has approximately 3,400 to 8,100 victims/survivors of sex trafficking a year, of which around 1,700 come into contact with law enforcement.¹ While the numbers of actual victims/survivors are estimates, the trauma and complex needs of these individuals are well documented.

Over the past decade, SANDAG's Criminal Justice Research Division has partnered with local stakeholders to learn and do more about human trafficking in San Diego County. In 2007, SANDAG conducted a needs assessment of sexually exploited youth², and also added questions to its Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) instrument about solicitation of sex among individuals recently booked in local detention facilities. Six months of a year, SANDAG enters these facilities (three adult and one juvenile) to interview arrestees about their alcohol and drug use and other risky behavior. The SAM results provide an ongoing mechanism to better understand the scope, characteristics, and needs of this high-risk population. Of the 611 adults interviewed in 2015, 12 percent (more women 18%, than men 10%) reported ever exchanging sex/sexual favors for money, drugs, etc. While the data do not indicate if any of these individuals were also victims of human trafficking, when compared to those arrestees who reported never exchanging sex/sexual favors, the depth and severity of issues facing this population become abundantly clear. The majority had a criminal history, been homeless, attended substance abuse treatment, and thought about killing themselves at one time. These comparisons echo what is known about the victims/survivors of human trafficking and highlight the encompassing approach required to support their healing (Table 1).

Table 1
Adult Arrestees Who Never Exchanged Sex Compared To Those Who Had Done So

	Never Exchanged Sex	Exchanged Sex
Previously been to jail	76%	93%
Ever homeless	60%	78%
Ever received substance abuse treatment	41%	69%
Ever thought of killing yourself	24%	59%
Ever injected drugs	24%	47%
Ever stayed overnight in mental health facility	21%	39%
Ever tried to kill yourself	15%	35%
Ever involved in foster care	13%	22%
TOTAL	532 - 537	72 - 74

Awareness of human trafficking has prompted changes in policies that are aligned with a victim-centered (rather than criminal-centered) intervention approach. As part of Human Trafficking Awareness Month, the Office of Victims of Crime has highlighted its resource guides (ncjrs.gov/humantrafficking/publicawareness). Locally, the San Diego County District Attorney's office provides information and resources for those interested in learning more about this issue (sdca.org/preventing/human-trafficking/human-trafficking).

¹ Carpenter, A. C. and Gates, J. (2016). *The Nature and Extent of Gang Involvement in Sex Trafficking in San Diego County*. San Diego, CA: University of San Diego and Point Loma Nazarene University.

² Burke et. al. (2007). *Child and Youth Sexual Exploitation in the San Diego Region: A community Assessment for the ACTION Network* available at http://www.sandag.org/uploads/publicationid/publicationid_1316_7196.pdf.