

# Sex Trafficking a Scourge

## Arizona Republic

Phoenix, Arizona - 5 December 2009

Rich Davis, CEO, ARTIS Research (rdavis@artisresearch.com)

Visiting Scholar, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Arizona State University

A photographer snaps photos of poverty stricken families in a foreign country. He shows the photos of the families' young girls to prostitute seeking men. These men identify a girl that appeals to them and pay the photographer, who assures the delivery of the young girl. Through coercion and money, the girl, now a prostitute, becomes a regular if she is popular with clientele. The photographer, often with the assistance of drug traffickers, gets her addicted to drugs and looks to sell her new skills. The buyer takes her to a new region with burgeoning demand for illicit sex while the traffickers tell the family some phony story and give them money.

This story is deplorable but is an example of how traffickers prey upon poor families. In Arizona, we have young women who find their way here through a similar process. Most are American runaways who get involved in prostitution and become victims of sex trafficking out of a need for survival.

Human trafficking has become the third largest criminal activity in the world, surpassed only by drugs and arms trafficking. According to the UN, 70% of those trafficked are women, most under the age of 18. Other studies indicate that 3.2 million women, girls and boys are trafficked globally for sex each year.

In October 2000, the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act was signed into law. At the time, federal officials stated that 50,000 young women were trafficked annually in the U.S. and that organized crime was the culprit. Prosecution statistics show another story. According to a recent National Institute of Justice study, between 2000 and 2007, 298 individuals were charged with federal human trafficking violations. Of those, 138 were charged with sex trafficking. In a study of 40% of those cases by Rutgers Professor Finkenauer, only one showed indications that the trafficking network had any semblance with the hierarchy of organized crime. In that case, 52 individuals from a taxi and tour operator in California were charged with trafficking, most were cab drivers.

Over the past few years, the number of prosecutions in Arizona for sex trafficking is in the dozens – most are pimps of under aged girls, many are prosecuted using other laws. So why hasn't organized crime been tied to the sex trafficking cases?

Evidence suggests that sex traffickers are less hierarchical, more opportunistic and more entrepreneurial than organized crime. At best, the few convictions indicate that the problem was overstated by federal officials or that other laws are used to prosecute offenders. At worst, the trafficking networks may be more diffuse and difficult to disrupt than expected. Traditional law enforcement tools used for organized crime, like wire tapping and informants, needs to make way for a third party approach.

New research from Central Asia and Turkey provide additional insight for law enforcement officials. In 493 cases of sex trafficking in Turkey (2004-07), 42% of the women/girls were kept in apartments, 39.4% were kept in motels, and 9.8% were kept in houses. In general, crimes tend to cluster in particular areas and these concentrations are related to physical and social features which are more permissive of illicit sexual activity. In these locations, law enforcement may consider engagement with third party participants like, motel and apartment managers, postal delivery workers, and utility service providers. These 3<sup>rd</sup> party participants have been critical in disrupting sex trafficking rings elsewhere, which means that they can serve a valuable role for federal, state, and local law enforcement in Arizona.

The most important tool available to law enforcement officials is the collaboration between federal, state and local agencies and the engagement with non-profit groups that are working to rid our society of this ill. The Phoenix Sex Trafficking Task Force and groups like Street Light, an Arizona non-profit, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have brought resources, attention and leadership to the problem. As collaboration between law enforcement, prosecution, NGOs and 3<sup>rd</sup> party participants grow, the number of sex traffickers arrested and prosecuted will increase.

Now is the time to help these young women by applying the lessons from the international, national and state data to further detect and disrupt sex trafficking in Arizona.