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# Understanding the Determinants of Police Identification of Human Trafficking Cases

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## **Understanding the Determinants of Official Identification of Human Trafficking Incidents**

**Amy Farrell, Northeastern University**

The passage of new laws criminalizing the trafficking of persons for labor and sexual services has raised public awareness about the problem of trafficking. In response, we expect local law enforcement to learn about the problem, identify trafficking victims and make arrests. The numbers of victims identified by the police, however, has paled in comparison to official estimates, leading some to question the existence of a trafficking problem. Missing from this debate is information about how frequently police encounter situations involving human trafficking and how well prepared officers are to deal with these cases. Analyzing survey responses from a national sample of over 3,000 police agencies in the U.S., this study find that 10 percent of agencies have identified human trafficking cases since 2000. While larger agencies are more likely to identify cases of trafficking, agency leader perception about the prevalence of the problem in the local community and the adoption of concrete steps to prepare officers to identify and respond to the problem are the most important factors to increase human trafficking identification by the police. This study provides much needed information about why U.S. officials have identified so few human trafficking victims. By understanding how often and under what conditions police find, investigate and prosecute cases of human trafficking, we will be in a better position to identify and overcome barriers to police responses to trafficking and understand the limitations of official statistics about human trafficking. Data from national survey also provides a baseline measure of police identification of human trafficking against which we can gauge the progress of future anti-trafficking efforts.

# Understanding the Determinants of Police Identification of Human Trafficking Cases

Presentation for the First Annual Interdisciplinary Conference on Human Trafficking  
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## Why Research on Police Identification and Response to Human Trafficking is Important?

- Various estimates of the problem in U.S. and internationally
- Little known about extent of trafficking in U.S. or how often police come into contact with trafficking victims
  - Small number of officially identified victims
    - *1,000 investigations of human trafficking by federally funded anti-trafficking task only 10 percent confirmed as human trafficking (Kyckelhahn, Beck and Cohen, 2008).*
    - *881 federal human trafficking prosecutions (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009)*
    - *1,696 "T" Visa certifications(U.S. Department of Justice, 2009).*
  - Questions raised about the legitimacy of expenditures on trafficking problem as a result of low numbers of officially identified victims
- Lack of information not unusual for new or hidden crimes
  - Agencies responsible for counting crime (generally the police) must:
    - *Know about the problem and know how to identify it*
    - *Know what to do when they identify it*
    - *Have some way to report information about the incident for counting*

# Potential Challenges of Identifying and Investigating Human Trafficking

- Identification and Response to Trafficking May Pose Additional Challenges
  - New crime, limited information
  - Federal initiative, trafficking may not be local community concern
  - Nature of the crime itself
    - *Characteristics of victims*
    - *Immigration issues*
    - *Regulation of exploitation not a traditional police role*
- Research on police response to trafficking limited (Shively, 2007; Clawson et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 2006).
  - Small samples
  - Do little to illuminate the challenges agencies face identifying victims, investigating cases and prosecuting trafficking offenders.

## Research Questions

- 1) How often does law enforcement identify and investigate cases of human trafficking?
- 2) Are there community or organizational factors that predict police identification of human trafficking cases?
- 3) What challenges do local, county and state police face identifying and investigating cases of human trafficking?

## Research Methodology

- National Law Enforcement Human Trafficking Survey
  - Sample
    - National random sample of 3,000 local, county and state law enforcement agencies conducted in 2007
    - Supplemental sample of all medium to large agencies serving populations over 75,000 (approximately 450)
  - Two questionnaires design
    - short questionnaire on agency perception, preparation and identification of human trafficking cases between 2000 and 2006
    - detailed questionnaire for those agencies who investigated a case of human trafficking about nature of cases and their experiences
- Case studies of Multi-Agency Law Enforcement Task Forces

## Findings: Law Enforcement Perception & Preparation

- Law enforcement is minimally prepared to identify and respond to HT cases:
  - 18% of all agencies have had some type of human trafficking training
  - 9% have a protocol or policy on human trafficking
  - 4% have designated specialized units or personnel to investigate human trafficking
- 75% of local law enforcement agencies think human trafficking is non-existent in their community
- Bigger agencies are more likely to perceive trafficking to be a problem in their local communities and take steps to prepare their officers to identify cases



## Perception of Problem, Preparation and Investigation of Human Trafficking

Agency Type/ Population Size	Perception of HT Problem **	Have Specialized Unit/ Personnel**	Have Training**	Have a Protocol**	Investigated a HT Case (2000-2006)**	Total N
Municipal						
4,999 and below	2.8%	3.1%	13.0%	8.9%	3.0%	618
5,000 – 9,999	3.3%	4.8%	19.1%	7.4%	5.7%	219
10,000 - 24,999	1.9%	2.8%	20.9%	9.3%	5.3%	234
25,000 - 49,999	2.8%	5.4%	21.1%	5.7%	10.1%	102
50,000 - 74,999	1.0%	5.3%	17.5%	7.5%	14.6%	41
75,000 - 99,999	6.5%	8.6%	38.0%	7.4%	18.6%	104
100,000 - 249,999	3.3%	7.1%	29.0%	8.1%	25.2%	134
250,000 and above	15.2%	50.8%	65.6%	32.8%	52.4%	65
County Non-MSA	2.7%	1.6%	16.5%	9.6%	7.0%	221
County MSA	9.2%	10.1%	16.5%	12.5%	8.9%	128
State Police	11.1%	17.6%	47.1%	18.8%	34.3%	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>21.0%</b>	<b>9.8%</b>	<b>9.8%</b>	<b>1,904</b>

## Findings: Police Identification of Human Trafficking

- 10% of all local law enforcement agencies investigating at least one human trafficking case between 2000-2006
  - Translates into nearly 1,000 local agencies that have encountered a case
  - Larger agencies more likely to have investigated a case of human trafficking
    - *27 percent of large agencies serving medium to large populations identified and investigated at least one case of human*
  - Approximately 6% of county agencies and 34% of state police agencies investigated a case
- Law enforcement agencies in 43 out of 50 states indicate having at least human trafficking investigation.
- Number of cases identified by law enforcement going up.
  - The average number of cases investigated by each agency more than doubled from 3 cases in 2000 to 8 cases in 2006.

## Finding: Determinants of Local Identification of Human Trafficking

- Characteristics of cities does not predict police identification
  - Contrary to common beliefs, census characteristics such as % foreign born, % in poverty, transient housing, crime rates, proximity to border *do not* predict police identification of trafficking.
  - State laws do not significantly predict identification – *though may predict things that lead to identification.*
  - Local media coverage of trafficking does increase identification of cases
- Agency readiness and preparation are strongest predictors of identifying trafficking
  - *Training*
  - *Protocols and policies*
  - *Specialized personnel*

	Model 1: Local Context		Model 2: Full Model	
	B(SE)	Odds	B(SE)	Odds
<b>Population Size</b> ( <i>logged</i> )	<b>.752 (.196)***</b>	<b>2.12</b>	.390 (.244)	1.47
Region				
Northeast <sup>a</sup>	-.747 (.729)	.47	-.959 (.815)	.38
Midwest	.020 (.446)	1.02	-.082 (.759)	.92
Southeast	.046 (.687)	1.04	-.096 (.788)	.91
Southwest	-.417 (.736)	.66	-.281 (.877)	.75
West	-.199 (.678)	.93	-.314 (.797)	.73
Border	.024 (.392)	1.02	.131 (.564)	1.14
Foreign Born	.009 (.013)	1.01	-.103 (.489)	.90
Structural disadvantage	-.071 (.179)	.91	-.034 (.204)	.97
Early State Legislation	.528 (.432)	1.69	.376 (.494)	1.45
<b>News articles</b>	<b>.049 (.015)***</b>	<b>1.05</b>	<b>.036 (.016)**</b>	<b>1.04</b>
<b>Training</b>			<b>1.175 (.355)***</b>	<b>3.24</b>
<b>Protocols</b>			<b>1.710 (.507)***</b>	<b>5.50</b>
<b>Special Unit</b>			<b>.931 (.503)**</b>	<b>2.53</b>
Constant	-10.411 (2.392)***	--	-6.606 (2.916)**	
* p<.10 ** p<.05 ***p<.01				

## What Helps Police Identify Human Trafficking?

- Less than half of investigations end in an arrest.
- Police learn about human trafficking during the course of other investigations (e.g., drug raids, domestic violence).
  - 92% of law enforcement agencies who identified HT cases reported a connection between trafficking other and existing criminal networks
- 81% indicated that one of the most important indicators of human trafficking was the victim's appearance,
  - Particularly whether the victim appeared fearful and non-cooperative.
  - Non-cooperative victims also one of the biggest challenges to investigations. (70% of agencies indicated lack of victim cooperation made investigations more difficult).
    - *One-quarter of the victims received T-visas and about an equal amount were deported.*
- Collaboration with other law enforcement agencies identified case very important by law enforcement who identified cases.

## Implications for Practice

- Findings victims requires police agencies to invest in trafficking
  - Need training, protocols and special units or specially trained personnel
- Necessity of routinizing or structuring response to human trafficking into the normal activities of local law enforcement.
  - Requires dialogue in professional law enforcement community about harm of human trafficking in local communities
  - Trafficking must be seen as a local police priority if we want local police embrace mission to identify and investigate these crimes.
- Even under best circumstances, investigation of human trafficking incredibly challenging
  - Develop intelligence about illicit criminal behavior for which we have historically paid little attention
  - Navigate ambiguous legal terrain
  - Overcome departmental and ideological obstacles related to immigration
  - Receive cooperation from traumatized victims, many of whom resist police interventions.

## Implications for Research

- Arrest statistics will be poor measure of true rates of victimization until police response to trafficking improves.
- Lack of preparation by law enforcement masks city variation in human trafficking victimization.
- Understanding extent of victimization necessitates moving beyond officially reported data.