



MORE THAN DRINKS FOR SALE

EXPOSING SEX TRAFFICKING IN CANTINAS & BARS IN THE U.S.



SEPTEMBER 2016

ABOUT POLARIS

Polaris is a leader in the global fight to eradicate modern slavery. Named after the North Star that guided slaves to freedom in the U.S., Polaris systemically disrupts the human trafficking networks that rob human beings of their lives and their freedom. Our comprehensive model puts victims at the center of what we do — helping survivors restore their freedom, preventing more victims, and leveraging data and technology to pursue traffickers wherever they operate.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thousands of Latina or Hispanic women are prisoners of the sex trafficking industry in bars and cantina-type establishments across the United States. They are recruited and controlled by criminal networks, business owners, or individual traffickers. They are deceived and enticed with the promise of romantic relationships, good jobs, and safe passage to the U.S. Other women and girls are forced to sell sex by their parents, family members, or intimate partners.

Based on data from Polaris-operated hotlines, just over half of the sex trafficking victims identified in these bars and cantinas are minors; recruited by traffickers eager to target young girls. Both adult and minor victims face unimaginable violence. Isolated from those who could help them, burdened by high debts, physically and sexually abused, or subjected to threats of violence against their families, they live in constant fear.

This report highlights the need to eradicate the sex trafficking that flourishes in bars and cantinas in the U.S. and to support its survivors. While Hispanic or Latina women and girls are also trafficked in residential brothels or escort services, efforts to combat sex trafficking in cantinas have been more limited. From December 2007 to March 2016, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline (NHTRC) and BeFree Textline — both operated by Polaris — identified 1,300 potential victims from Latin America in 201 cases of sex or combined sex-and-labor trafficking at cantinas and similar venues in 20 U.S. states and Puerto Rico. By contrast, federal law enforcement prosecuted just a handful of such cases over the same period of time.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Business models: The report looks at several distinct business models in cantina-based sex trafficking. The first, referred to in this report as the “Houston model,” is exemplified by three landmark federal cases in Houston, Texas — the Mondragon case (2005), the Salazar case (2005), and the Medeles case (2013). Organized human trafficking networks ran these operations, from victim recruitment in Mexico or Central America through to the commercial-front establishment and criminal aspects of the business. Male and female traffickers

based in Mexico or Central America operated or cooperated with criminal networks to sustain complicated, multi-year supply lines of new victims and to ensure that the victims complied. In some cases, traffickers directly cooperated with, or were members of, cartels or U.S.-based street gangs. The victims were typically Mexican and Central American women aged 14 to 29, and the clientele was normally limited to men from local Latino communities. Cantinas adhering closely to this model also operate elsewhere in Texas, as well as in numerous other states.

Additional operating models across the country involve establishments posing as restaurants, bars, or nightclubs. They disguise their true nature by limiting their clientele and camouflaging financial transactions involving sex as bar charges — typically, high prices for drinks. Unlike the Houston model, the businesses are not necessarily owned by the trafficker, although the owners often receive a portion of the profits from the victims’ exploitation. The traffickers are usually Latin American men but more likely to be U.S. citizens than those in the Houston model. Some operations were linked to U.S.-based street gangs and in many instances, the traffickers were the intimate partners or family members of their victims.

Force, Fraud, and Coercion: Cases involving cantina-type establishments were often characterized by the use of threats, physical abuse, and sexual abuse to control the victims. Threats and intimidation were present in 38 percent of cases reported to Polaris hotlines, but the figure is probably much higher due to under-reporting. These particular tactics included threats of harm or death to the victims and/or their family members, brandishing weapons, and boasts of violence or gang/cartel



affiliations. Physical abuse, ranging from beatings to burns and attempted murder, was recorded in 15 percent of cases, and 9 percent of victims reported sexual abuse used to control them (as distinct from abuse inflicted by people paying for sex).

Sixty-two percent of victims had been isolated and confined, including women and girls who were housed in crowded apartments and monitored by traffickers and cameras during their non-working hours. In many cases, victims were rotated among different locations, to increase their isolation from surrounding communities. In at least 51 percent of records, economic abuse — including the imposition of high debts or the theft of wages — was explicitly present. Information from public cases and interviews with law enforcement indicate that the real figure may be closer to 90 percent.

Access Points: Some NHTRC data was available on the ways in which victims found access to help. For one-third of victims where this information was reported, potential buyers of commercial sex were the primary way victims found assistance. (These men had learned the victims' true circumstances upon meeting them.) Twenty-five percent had occasional access to family and friends who tried to help them escape their traffickers. The victims' families appeared to be more comfortable contacting the NHTRC, BeFree Textline, or other non-profits than law enforcement, usually because they were concerned about the victims' undocumented status or their engagement in commercial sex. Fourteen percent of victims encountered local law enforcement or immigration officials while being held by their traffickers. However, in many of these cases, that contact did not result in their identification as victims or their rescue. Nineteen percent of victims entered the health-care system, either for treatment after severe physical abuse or for pregnancy-related care. Because these cantinas, bars, and nightclubs rely on liquor licenses and restaurant inspections, local inspectors were able to identify trafficking in some businesses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While this report concerns a specific subset of sex trafficking centered in cantina-type establishments, many of the following recommendations also apply to sex trafficking from Mexico and Latin America in a broad range of venues. To eradicate all these forms of sex trafficking, there is an urgent need for bilateral cooperation between government agencies and law enforcement as well as between service providers and

community partners on both sides of the border. Please see the full list of recommendations on pp. 27–30.

U.S. Law Enforcement and Immigration Officials

- Law enforcement agents and officers need ongoing, high-quality training, support, and information-sharing to help them recognize the signs of human trafficking and effectively pursue cases.
- They should be equipped with the resources and tactical intelligence that will enable them to take a victim-centered approach when building cases and identifying victims.
- They should collaborate closely with service providers so that survivors can be quickly connected with appropriate social and legal services.

Service Providers and Community Organizations

- Service providers need access to training and tools that will help them identify potential victims and deliver assistance in a way that is informed by the complex trauma these Hispanic and Latino survivors have experienced and also honors their unique cultural background.
- They should work together to identify community resources that will give trafficking survivors the support and services they need in order to recover and rebuild their lives.

Legislative and Regulatory Recommendations

- Federal, state, and local grants should fund long-term, culturally appropriate services for survivors of human trafficking.
- Congress should increase funding for federal efforts to identify more victims and investigate and prosecute more cases.
- State legislatures should work to establish and implement robust frameworks for victims, including safe harbor, vacating convictions, and funding for survivor services.
- All states should require or encourage the posting of the NHTRC hotline number at bars and nightclubs.
- Regulatory agencies at state, county, and municipal levels should work together to prevent traffickers from registering as legitimate businesses and to identify suspicious registrations or code infringements occurring on suspicious premises.

INTRODUCTION

Thousands of women and girls from Latin America — particularly Mexico, Central America, and parts of the Caribbean — are forced into the underground sex economy in bars and cantina-type establishments across the United States. Powerful criminal networks or individual traffickers recruit vulnerable women and girls directly from Latin America, or from Hispanic or Latino communities within the United States, and exploit them for profit. Often underage, lacking legal immigration papers, isolated by language barriers, or facing threats to themselves and their families, these victims of sex trafficking are trapped in terribly violent and manipulative situations.

While Hispanic or Latina women and girls are also trafficked in residential brothels or escort services, much work has already been done to raise awareness and stop sex trafficking in residential brothels, in part thanks to high-profile federal cases prosecuted in New York and Atlanta in the early 2000s. These cases highlighted the role of violent professional trafficking families from Tenancingo in exploiting women and girls from Mexico. The traffickers would trick their victims into romantic relationships, exploit them in Mexico, and then send them to the United States to provide commercial sex out of decrepit apartments and houses in New York, Georgia, California, and other states. However, efforts to combat human trafficking in cantina-type establishments — which are just as violent and horrific in their violations of human dignity as any of the Tenancingo network-operated residential brothels — have been mostly limited to a handful of federal cases largely prosecuted in Houston, Texas.¹

From December 2007 to March 2016, Polaris-operated hotlines identified 201 cases of sex or combined sex-and-labor trafficking of Latina women and girls at cantinas and bars in twenty states from Texas to Massachusetts and Washington State, as well as in Puerto Rico. These cantina cases involved more than 1,300 victims, over 50 percent of whom were minors.²

In order to eradicate this appalling victimization of Hispanic and Latina women and girls in cantinas, bars, and nightclubs, we have to change the equation for traffickers. We need to disrupt their business model and make the crime high-risk and low-profit. Polaris has learned that a crucial element in this fight is understanding how victims are recruited and controlled, as well as how traffickers cooperate with one another and manipulate gaps in the legal system to exploit individuals for financial gain. We also recognize the importance of using available data to understand the challenges and service needs facing women who survive this victimization. Polaris's response to sex trafficking of Latina women in bars and cantinas is twofold. It focuses on helping law enforcement understand and dismantle trafficking networks while at the same time building up effective, culturally competent services for survivors on both sides of the border. We aim to create targeted, data-driven strategies for disruption, outreach, and intervention, all of them rooted in a nuanced understanding of migration, gender norms, and cultural context.

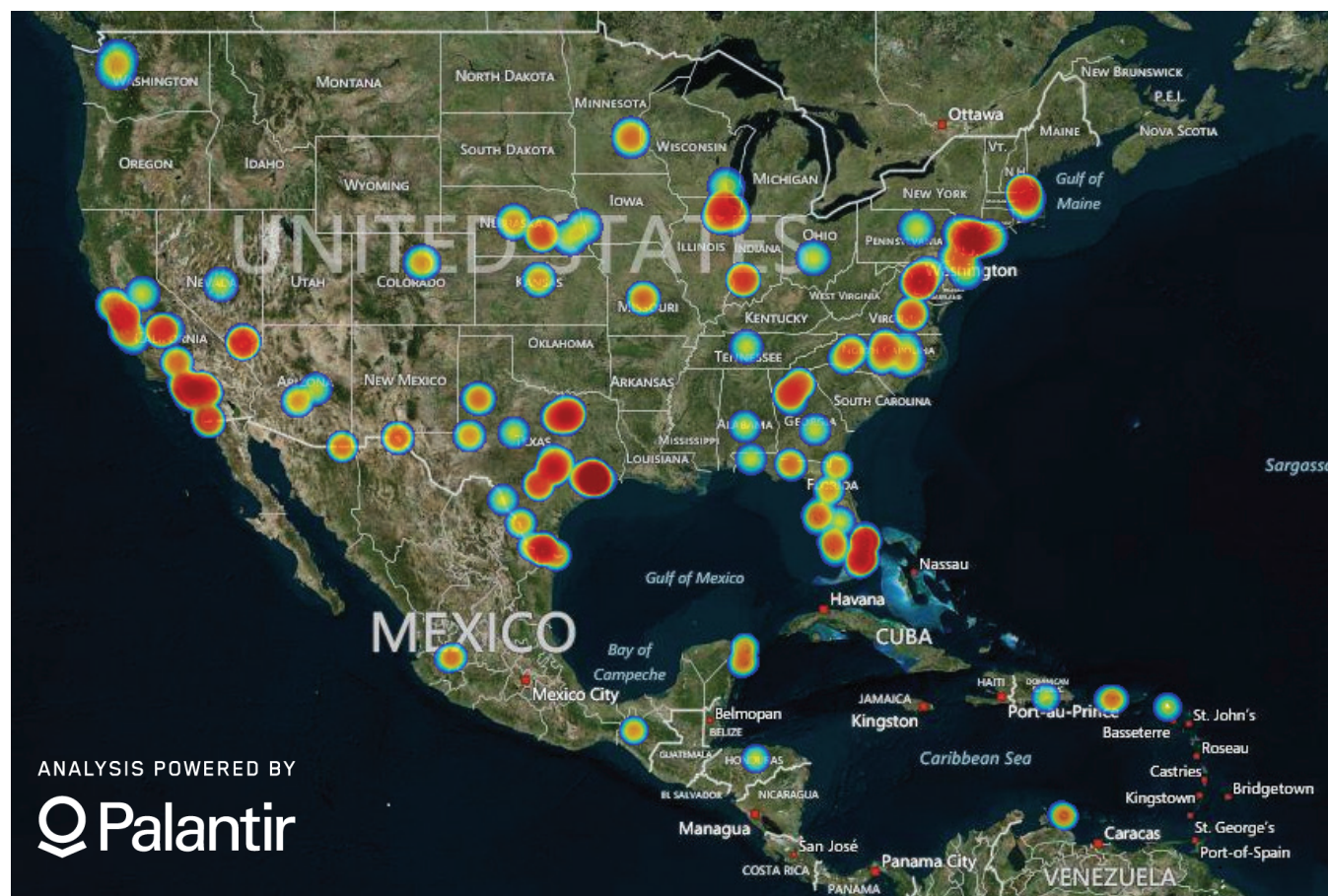


SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Between December 2007 when Polaris began operating the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) hotline and March 2016, Polaris-operated hotlines have received reports of 201 cases of sex or combined sex and labor trafficking of Hispanic or Latina women and girls occurring at cantinas, bars, and nightclubs in the United States and Latin America.³ These cases describe approximately 1,300 potential victims in bar or cantina-based trafficking.⁴ Fifty-seven percent of cases reference potential minor victims. Supplementing this case data are 116 anonymized demographic records for victims contacting the hotline and 166 anonymized records for individual traffickers reported to the hotline. These records were created from information volunteered to the hotline by callers, and were created when a victim or trafficker was individually referenced by demographic indicators in the subset of 201

cantinas cases analyzed for this report. Combined, these case, victim, and trafficker datasets provide a more comprehensive picture of the recruitment tactics used by traffickers; means of force, fraud, or coercion used to manipulate and control victims; and the types of relationships traffickers have with their victims.

The information contained in this document was obtained through Polaris's regular interactions with individuals contacting the NHTRC hotline and BeFree Textline and is not the result of a systematic survey. As these individuals told their own stories or relayed the experiences of their friends and family members, Polaris staff noted key elements of each account. This information constitutes the basis for this document. Individuals contacting the NHTRC and BeFree Textline were asked to share only as much information as they were comfortable providing. The NHTRC and Polaris BeFree Text-

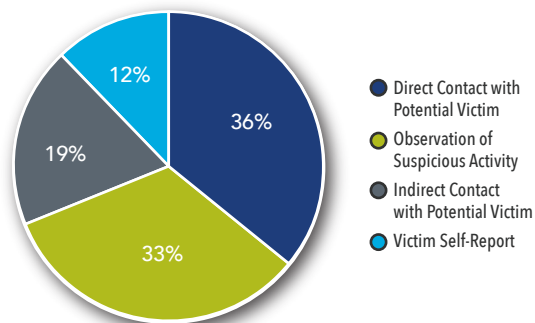


Location of cantina cases and operating sites reported to the NHTRC and BeFree Textline from December 2007 to March 2016. No cases were reported in Alaska or Hawaii. This map only reflects cases where the locations of the potential trafficking were known.

line are not research-oriented programs. Instead, the staffs of these programs are focused on helping survivors of trafficking access critical support and services to get help and stay safe. Victims and third parties reporting these situations were not asked a set of standardized questions and only provided information that they felt comfortable sharing with Polaris's staff to get the help they needed. As such, the data points in this document represent only what those contacting the NHTRC and BeFree Textline chose to disclose and should not be considered a comprehensive statement on the total number of survivors of a particular type of trafficking. The number of survivors in each category would likely have been significantly higher if Polaris staff had systematically asked a standardized set of questions to each individual contacting the NHTRC and BeFree Textline. Furthermore, since awareness of both human trafficking and the existence of a victim service hotline

is still limited, this data set should be interpreted as a sample of actual incidences of sex trafficking in bar or cantina-type venues, rather than a representation of all extant cases.

CALLER PROXIMITY TO TRAFFICKING SITUATION BY CASE
N=201



DATA SOURCES AND DATA CLASSIFICATION DEFINITIONS

The data in this report comes primarily from the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) hotline and the BeFree Textline, both operated by Polaris. The NHTRC hotline is a 24-hour, confidential, multi-modal hotline and resource center available to answer calls from anywhere in the U.S. in more than 200 languages. Its mission is to provide human trafficking victims and survivors in the U.S. with access to critical support and services to get help and stay safe, and to equip the anti-trafficking community with the tools to effectively combat all forms of human trafficking. The NHTRC is operated by Polaris, and funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and other private donors. The following terms are used by Polaris and the NHTRC to help classify the data received through these hotlines.

CASE

A case is a unique report, situation, or request for resources that originated as a signal to the NHTRC hotline or BeFree Textline. Each case has at least one call, SMS text, webform or email associated with it. Cases may have multiple hotline calls and multiple callers depending on the nature of the case.

VICTIM RECORD

A case may be associated with one or many victim records, or may have no linked records if insufficient information is available. Where provided, they include basic demographic information and/or information on the specific recruitment tactics, means of control, and access to potential assistance. These records are then analyzed anonymously to gain more insight into demographic trends and patterns in the various ways trafficking systems are operated.

TRAFFICKER RECORD

Cases may also be associated with one or more trafficker records, which include basic demographic information and/or information on recruitment tactics and means of control. These records are analyzed anonymously to gain more insight into demographic trends and patterns in the different ways trafficking systems are operated.



This report additionally focuses on trafficking occurring within the United States to female potential victims, since cases fitting these criteria form the bulk of the data.⁵ However, of the 201 cases examined, 14 cases did reference potential male victims and 3 cases referenced potential victims from Eastern Europe occurring in Latin America. In 12 cases, the primary trafficking situation occurred outside the United States: 7 in Mexico, and 5 in other countries in Latin America.

DEFINING THE VENUE: THE HOUSTON CANTINA MODEL AND SIMILAR ESTABLISHMENTS

Three landmark federal cases based out of Houston, Texas — the Mondragon case (2005), the Salazar case (2005), and the Medeles case (2013) — have highlighted the salient

characteristics of the Houston cantina model. In all three cases, distinguishable, organized human trafficking networks ran the operation from the point of victim recruitment in Mexico or Central America to the operations of the commercial-front and criminal aspects of the business. Traffickers were originally from either Mexico or Central America, victims were typically females from Mexico and Central America between the ages of 14 and 29, and clientele was normally limited to male members of local Latino communities. Women and girls working in the venue were expected to flirt with male patrons, encourage them to buy over-priced beers, and then accompany would-be buyers either to upstairs rooms or annexes onsite, or travel offsite to hotels or apartments to engage in commercial sex. Any reluctance from the victims would be met with threats, physical violence, and other forms of abuse.

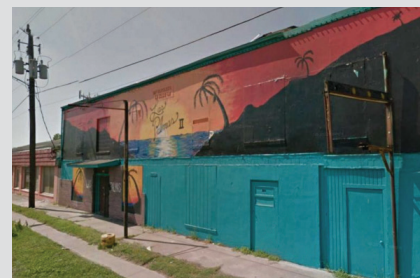
HORTENCIA MEDELES TRAFFICKING RING CASE: HOUSTON, TX

In late January 2016, 68-year-old Hortencia Medeles-Arguello — the owner of Las Palmas II cantina and several other cantinas in Houston and head of a large sex trafficking ring — was sentenced to life in prison. Medeles received \$20,000 a week from the managers of the cantina while personally overseeing the operations of the “VIP room” in the back of the cantina, where trusted customers were allowed to choose girls in their mid-teens for commercial sex at a rate of \$500 an hour.⁶ Other ring members helped supply new women and girls — whom Medeles referred to as “fresh meat” — to work at the cantina, acted as lookouts for law enforcement, monitored female workers, and assisted Medeles in laundering the proceeds from the illicit activities occurring at the cantina.⁷

Twelve survivors of the cantina agreed to testify in the case. Their testimony revealed that traffickers in this network recruited the women at young ages by convincing some that they were in love, and giving oth-


ers false promises of a better life in the United States. Upon arriving in the United States, they discovered that they would be housed in crowded, closely monitored quarters with other victims and forced into prostitution at Las Palmas II. Traffickers told victims that law enforcement in the United States would not help them because they had no legal documents, and threatened that if they tried to escape, their families in Mexico and Central America would be harmed. The victims were forced to have sex as many as 50 times a day in a hidden upstairs brothel at Las Palmas II. Rule-breaking could result in beatings or sexual assault by traffickers. One witness described being only 14 at the time of her recruitment, and being forced at gunpoint to engage in prostitution when she arrived at the cantina. Her unwillingness to cooperate with her traffickers led to her being locked in a room at the cantina for days until she was impregnated by a customer.⁸

Despite manifold evidence of systematic abuse, lasting as long as 13 years for some



Snapshot of Las Palmas II from Google Maps Street View.
Image credit: Map data ©2016 Google.

victims, Medeles plead not guilty to charges of sex trafficking. Medeles’ defense used an argument that is frequently attempted by owners of such establishments — namely that while she knew that prostitution was occurring at her business, she had no way of knowing that it was forced, and thus was not guilty of the serious federal charge of human trafficking. Medeles had been running the ring since at least 1999, when she began operating at Las Flores cantina in East Houston. Thirteen other members, including several of Medeles’ children, entered plea deals while one remains at large.⁹

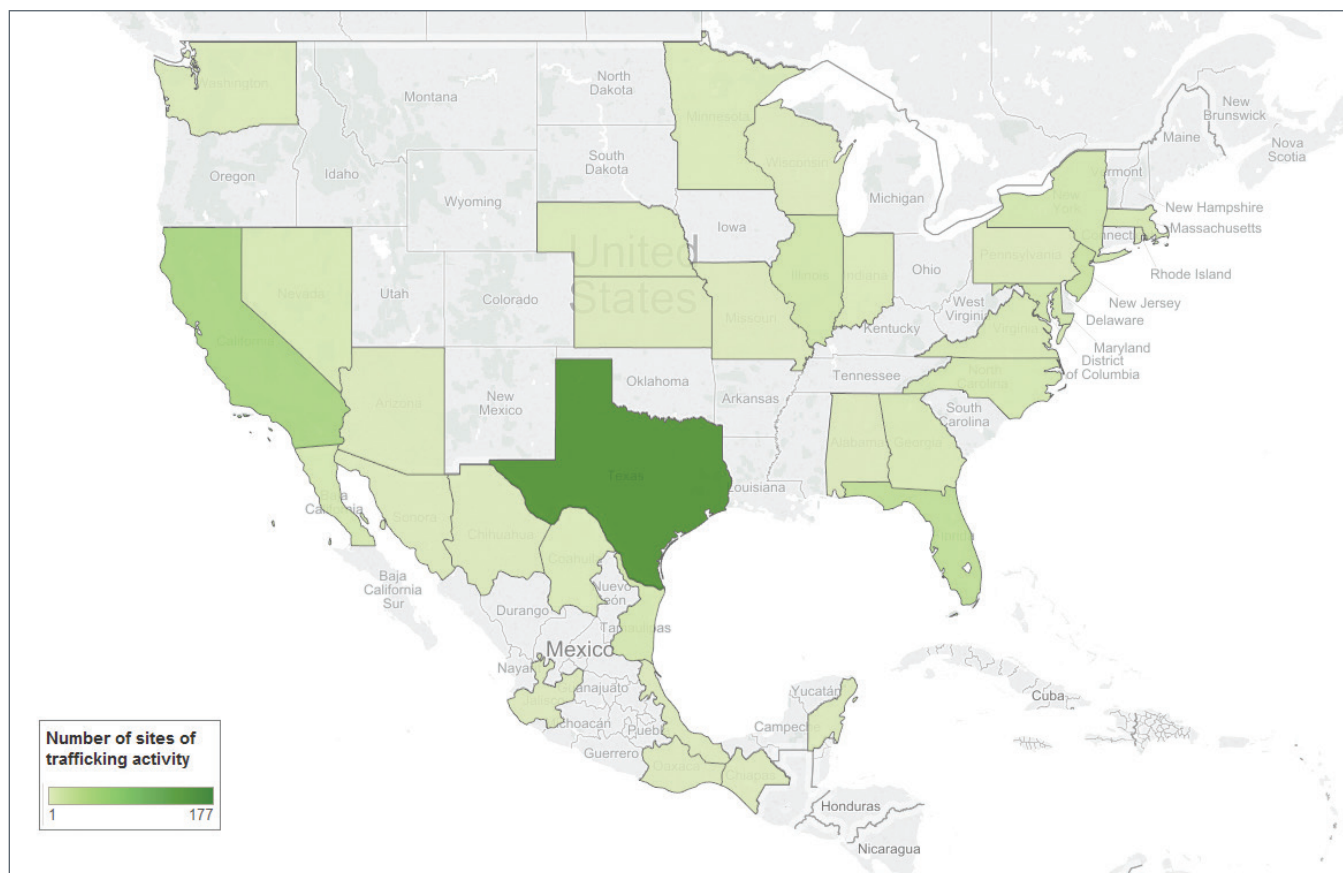


This model of trafficking is prevalent in, but not exclusive to, Texas. NHTRC and BeFree data indicates that the model seen in the three Houston cases is extremely common at other locations in Houston, as well as in Texas towns near the Reynosa border crossing. However, cantinas adhering closely to this business model also occur elsewhere in the United States. Notable locations seen in hotline data include Southern California, the Seattle area, and parts of North Carolina and Florida, but cases have come from other parts of the United States as well. It is highly likely that cantinas exist in other parts of the country which do not show up in the hotline data.

In other parts of the United States, hotline data shows that the operating model of most bars and nightclubs varies based on local business regulations and cultural differences that affect how buyers learn about and frequent commercial sex establishments. These types of locations are distinct from strip clubs, since their legal, registered business type is not sexually oriented (although stripping and lap dances may occur unofficially or in back rooms of the establishments). The businesses typically pose as bars, restaurants, or dance clubs. Like the Houston cantinas, they control the exposure of commercial sex occurring on the premises by limiting the clientele they target and disguising financial transactions with patrons as normal bar charges (typically excessively high fees for drinks). Within the subset of these businesses that primarily exploit Hispanic and Latina women and girls, other similarities to cantinas arise, with traffickers primarily originating from Latin America themselves and offering commercial sex almost exclusively to Latino clientele.

The most consistent difference between Houston-style cantinas and other venues considered here is that the bars and nightclubs are not necessarily trafficker-owned. Houston-style cantina owners are typically directly involved in the clandestine side of business operations. They are typically linked directly to recruiters and smugglers in the victims' home countries and have their own systems of drivers to transport victims between commercial front businesses and the apartments and hotels where commercial sex occurs. Other venues by contrast may operate either with or without the direct involvement of business owners. However, trafficking rarely occurs without business owners' knowledge and de facto consent, due to the fact that the "house" gets a significant cut of the profits derived

from the victims' exploitation. In some cases, business owners are as involved as the Houston cantina operators. In other cases, business owners will simply open up the premises to individual traffickers not directly affiliated with the business on the condition that they give the house a cut of the money earned by the victim. In trafficking situations, this typically means that the potential victim's money will be split between the pimp and the business owner. The pimps themselves may operate independently and opportunistically, or may be part of a larger, semi-formal trafficking network that relies on a group of recruiters or smugglers to supply victims and house managers to monitor the potential victims' living situations.



U.S. and Mexican states in which cantina-based traffickers are operating, based on NHTRC and BeFree Textline cases. Darker green = higher prevalence; no color = no reported activity. This map only reflects cases where the locations of the potential trafficking were known.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND OPERATIONAL DATA

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

Case Data

In total, approximately 1,300 potential victims were described in the 201 cases which Polaris-operated hotlines encountered from December 2007 to March 2016, for an average of seven victims per case. This number is highly likely to be a modest estimate of the real scale of trafficking at cantina-type establishments. This is partly due to Polaris's standard conservative practice of taking the lower-end estimate of the number of victims in a situation when a range of numbers is reported. Additionally, many callers — particularly members of the general public or service providers — were only willing or able to speak about one or two specific potential victims working at specific establishments, due to gaps in their knowledge or to concern for potential victims' privacy.

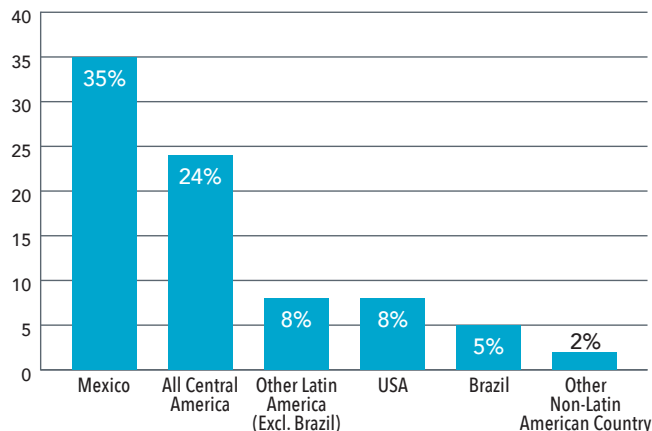
In cases where callers were able to describe suspicious business operations in more detail, they typically describe between 15 and 30 women and girls working at each business location at a given time.¹⁰ Some cases describe as many as five cooperating cantina-type businesses with 15 to 30 women at each location. The highest number of described victims on a single case is 84, which in that case averaged out to 17 potential victims per business.

In addition to a count of the number of potential victims in each case, each record for an NHTRC or BeFree case may capture basic demographic information. This includes data on the nationality, gender, and ages of potential victims, where available. Based on this data, Latina victims of sex or sex and labor trafficking in cantinas and bars are overwhelmingly female, often minors, and are primarily from Mexico and Central America. Ninety-three percent of cases involved only female potential victims, four percent involved male and female potential victims, and three percent involved only male potential victims. Fifty-six percent of cases referenced potential minor victims. Over a third of cases (35 percent) involved potential victims from Mexico, while another quarter (24 percent) involved victims from Central America.¹¹ The United States and Brazil were also notable sources of potential victims, appearing in eight and five percent of cases respectively.

GENDER OF POTENTIAL VICTIMS BY CASE
N=201



NATIONALITIES OF POTENTIAL VICTIMS BY CASE
(Non-Cumulative) N=201



These statistics are non-cumulative. Cases may reference multiple victims of different genders and nationalities or may not provide this type of information.



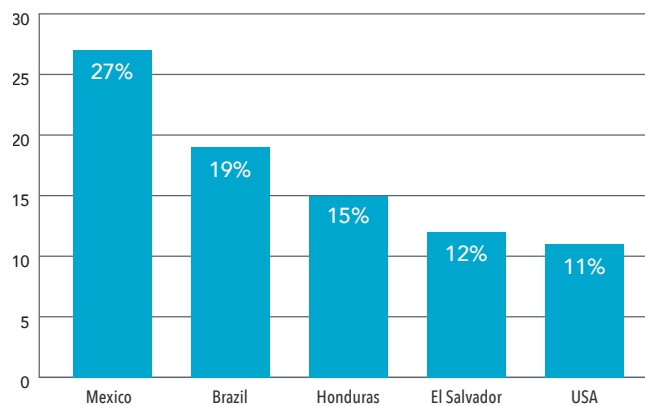
Anonymized Victim Data

As a supplement to the above generalized data for the 1,300 potential victims associated with the 201 cases, Polaris has analyzed a sample of 116 anonymized victim records in more detail.¹² This more detailed analysis allows for a deeper dive into demographics, recruitment, and means of control. Potential victims were overwhelmingly (96 percent) female, with male potential victims making up only four percent of this subset. Ninety-five percent of these 116 potential victims were identified as ethnically Hispanic or Latino/a.

Nearly 65 percent spoke Spanish as their first language while 13 percent spoke Portuguese. An additional three percent were U.S. nationals of Hispanic and Latino descent and spoke English as their first language. First language data was unavailable for 15 percent of potential victims. Where individuals' country of origin was known, the majority, at 27 percent, were from Mexico. Nineteen percent were from Brazil, 15 percent from Honduras, and 12 percent from El Salvador. However, individuals from all Central American countries accounted for 31 percent of the total, a significant finding since the total population of all Central American countries is roughly one-third of that of Mexico.¹³ The large geographic range of recruitment suggests that long term efforts against trafficking in these venues will require engagement with source countries on factors contributing to the risk of trafficking and inhibiting a return to security for potential victims who have family remaining in their home countries.

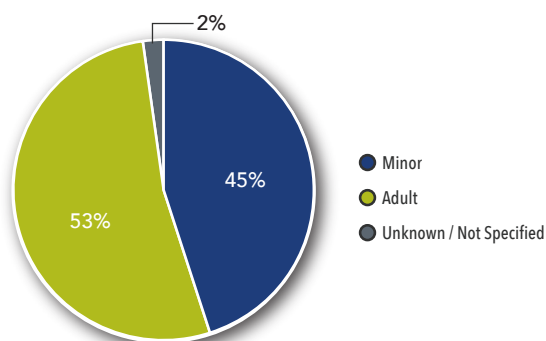
TOP 5 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN FOR POTENTIAL VICTIMS

N=85



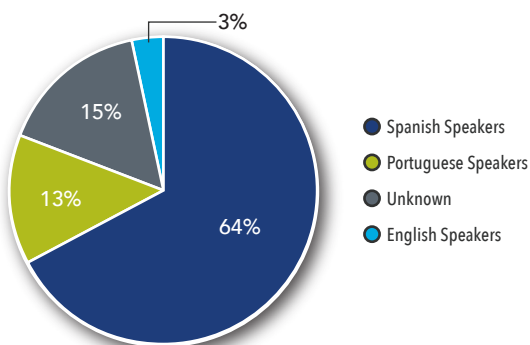
ADULT/MINOR AT FIRST CONTACT WITH POLARIS

N=116



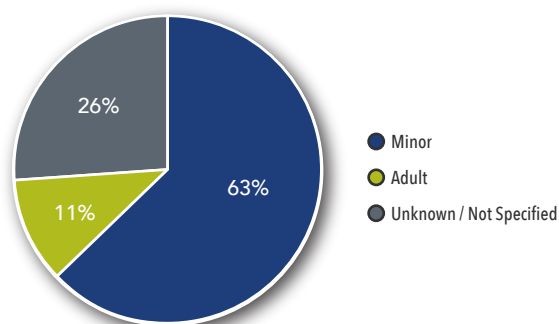
FIRST LANGUAGES OF POTENTIAL VICTIMS

N=116



ADULT/MINOR AT START OF EXPLOITATION

N=116



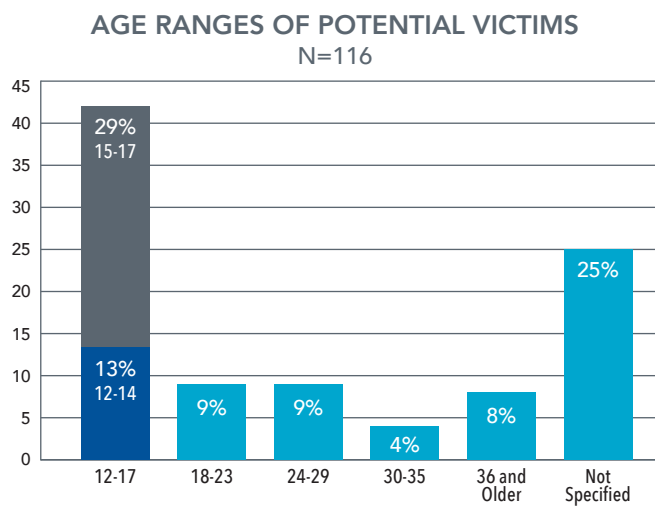
While 56 percent of the 201 cases analyzed featured potential minor victims, a slightly lower percentage (53 percent) of the 116 victim records derived from these cases featured minors.¹⁴ This reflects the fact that adult callers were more likely to volunteer demographic information or information about recruitment and means of control than minors were. Minors were also less likely to call the hotline on their own behalf, which led to less detailed information being conveyed to hotline specialists. Also partly explaining the discrepancy is the fact that while 53 percent of potential victims in this subset of records were adults at their first contact with Polaris, 63 percent of them were minors at the time of their entry into trafficking. This latter fact is particularly important: it can be difficult to prove force, fraud, and coercion in court for adult trafficking victims, but minors engaged in commercial sex are automatically considered trafficking victims by the federal definition found in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000. A minor engaged in commercial sex is also significantly more vulnerable to other means of control, such as intimidation or threats. Younger victims are also more likely to feel that they have no control over the situation or to be unaware of where to look for help. This lack of awareness of how to access assistance is partially reflected in the fact that the majority of survivors contacting the hotline are adults, despite the fact that a majority of victims overall are minors. Looking at age data in more detail, the largest single age range of potential victims at their first contact with Polaris was 15-17 years old, accounting

for approximately 30 percent of records, while victims between the ages of 12-14 were the second largest category at about 13 percent. It was significantly more common to learn the exact ages of minor potential victims than those of adult potential victims. Callers rarely volunteered information on potential victims' exact ages at entry into their trafficking situation, but where offered, this data shows that the age of recruitment varied from preadolescent to 40.

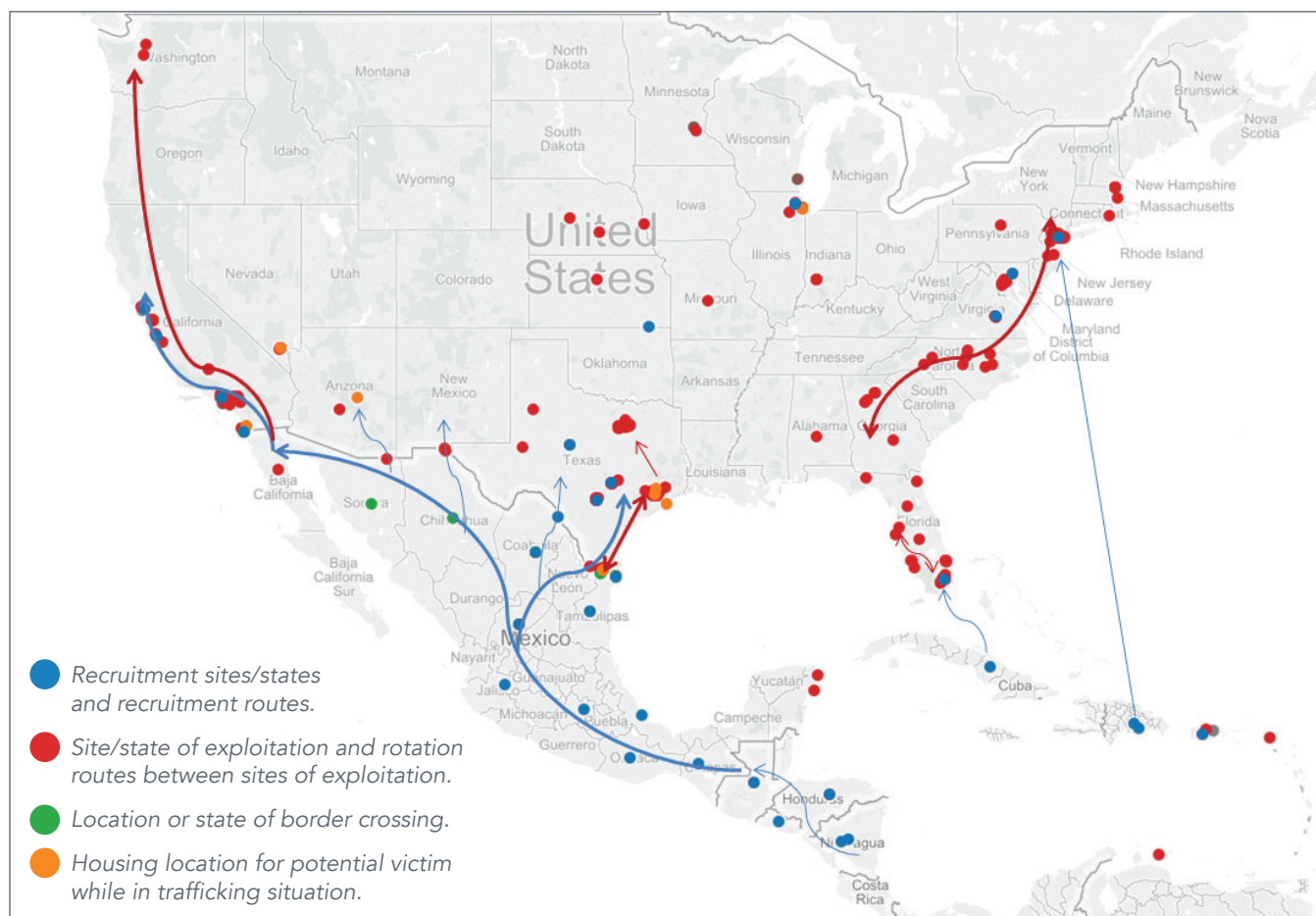
Victim age data provides several key insights for prevention and service provision. The single most notable highlight is the prevalence of minors working in cantinas. Traffickers recruiting potential victims for cantinas in Mexico, Central America, or in the U.S. have shown a tendency to deliberately target young girls, since buyers will typically pay more for younger victims. However, traffickers know that law enforcement is able to act much more readily when potential victims are sexually exploited minors, and will typically only advertise that a victim is a minor to trusted repeat buyers. Minors working at cantinas will also often be coached to give ages above 18 when asked by non-trusted buyers. This bears implications for investigators, in the sense that law enforcement should be trained to recognize that very young victims may initially give false ages because they have been threatened by their traffickers. It also has implications for service providers, who need to be able to connect victims and survivors to health care, immigration services, and shelter for minors. Of particular importance is the need for minors and adult survivors who entered into their trafficking situation as minors to be provided with the opportunity to make up for months or years of interrupted education.

WHO ARE THE TRAFFICKERS?

In addition to the 201 case records and 116 in-depth victim records used for this analysis, NHTRC and BeFree hotline data on this topic includes 166 trafficker records. These records were created using volunteered information from callers whenever data was clear and distinct enough to justify creation of the record. Accordingly they provide a sample, rather than an exhaustive accounting, of data on traffickers in this venue. While the majority (67 percent) of traffickers in this sample were male, nearly one-third were female, contrary to typical assumptions about trafficker demographics.



Polaris's default age ranges have been widened in this image to preserve potential victim confidentiality. Due to a very low number of victims younger than 12, these have been omitted from the graph.

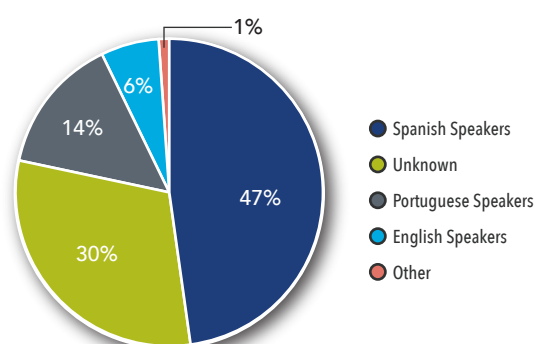


Common movement routes for victims of trafficking at cantinas, based on geographic data reported to the NHTRC.

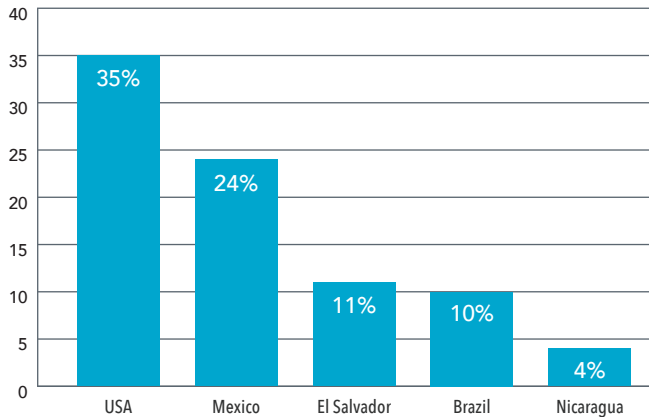
Traffickers' first languages were less frequently specified than victims' first languages. However, 47 percent of traffickers spoke Spanish as their first language, and 14 percent spoke Portuguese. Traffickers were on the whole more likely to be fluent English speakers than their victims, but English was the first language of only 6 percent of known traffickers in this subset of cases. Trafficker nationalities are also more likely to be unknown than potential victim nationalities, with a full 39 percent of recorded traffickers being of "Unknown" national origin. This is partly due to the fact that callers who were more distant from the situation (observers or those in contact with potential victims) often were only able to specify that the traffickers were Latino (70 percent) and to speculate at a region of origin based on accent. However, where trafficker nationalities were known, they were significantly more likely to be either born in the U.S. or to have gained U.S. citizenship than potential victims were; traffickers who were

U.S. citizens account for 35 percent of trafficker records where nationality was known. Twenty-four percent of traffickers whose nationality was known were from Mexico, while 20 percent were from Central America.

FIRST LANGUAGES OF POTENTIAL TRAFFICKERS N=166

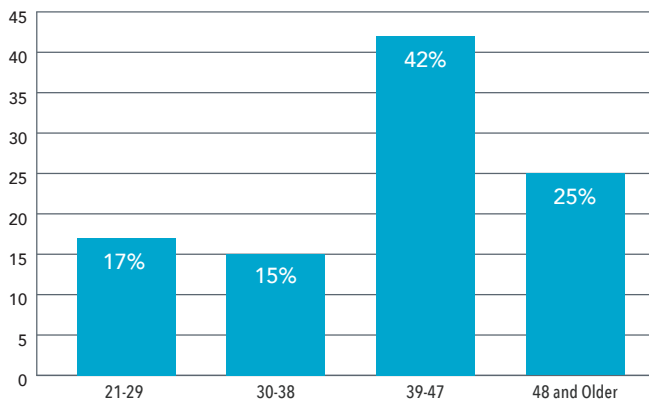


TOP 5 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN FOR POTENTIAL TRAFFICKERS N=101



Data from the NHTRC and BeFree hotlines includes specific age information only for 30 percent of all trafficker records. However, among the records that do have age data, the 39-47 age range is by far the most common, accounting for 12 percent of all trafficker records or 42 percent of trafficker records with specified ages. The remainder are scattered across age ranges, with the youngest traffickers being in the 18-20 age range and the oldest being over 66. Interviews with law enforcement confirm the findings of this analysis, noting that traffickers are rarely minors and can range in age from 18 to nearly 70.¹⁵ However, law enforcement in Houston have encountered several traffickers in the 17-19 age range. These younger traffickers typically take on junior roles in traf-

AGE RANGES OF POTENTIAL TRAFFICKERS N=48



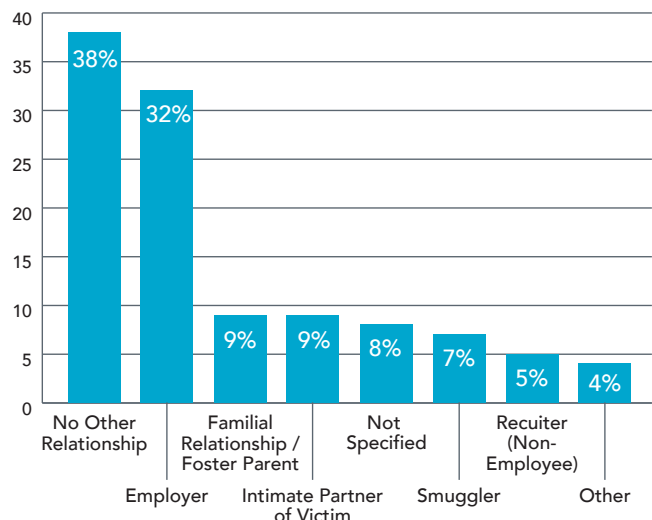
Polaris's default age ranges have been widened in this chart for confidentiality reasons. No potential traffickers in this dataset were younger than 18. The 18-20 age range is excluded due to a very low number of traffickers in this range.

ficking networks, performing easier tasks such as driving women between cantinas, apartments, hotels, and other locations rather than running recruitment, smuggling, or commercial operations.

The majority (38 percent) of traffickers had no other identified relationship with their victims beyond that of trafficker/victim.¹⁶ Thirty-two percent of all traffickers logged were also the legal or unofficial employers of the potential victims, meaning that the traffickers were the legal business owners of a bar or cantina while the victims were either formal employees or were employed under-the-table at the establishment. The high prevalence of the employer-employee relationship type has significant impact for investigations, as it reinforces the finding, observed in the Houston cases, that employers frequently do have a direct link to the trafficking situation despite their attempts to hide their knowledge of trafficking activities at their businesses. Less frequently, traffickers were family members or intimate partners of victims (nine percent for each category). In seven percent of records, traffickers were *coyotes* or smugglers who decided to traffic their clients either opportunistically (for instance, to pay back the smuggling debt) or as part of an ongoing criminal enterprise.

In 21 cases, traffickers were reported as being affiliated with gangs or organized crime groups. These criminal networks range from the Tenancingo-based family networks to Mexican

TRAFFICKER RELATIONSHIP TO POTENTIAL VICTIM N=282





drug cartels Los Zetas and La Familia Michoacana and Latino street gangs in the US such as MS-13 (Mara Salvatrucha) and the Latin Kings. Data on organized crime involvement comes with several caveats. First, many callers, especially those who have merely observed the suspicious activity, may not be aware of the involvement of organized crime in a potential trafficking situation, and therefore, the 21 cases may reflect an undercounting. Second, many additional cases feature groups of traffickers carrying out their criminal activities under some type of formalized structure. This is technically sufficient to classify them as organized crime groups by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) definition even if they are unnamed, have minimal hierarchical structure, and are not affiliated with the more well-known groups such as those listed above.¹⁷

Finally, the involvement of cartels and gangs with a human trafficking enterprise may be occasional and indirect — what has been termed “gang-influenced” trafficking by a number of law enforcement officials and service providers.¹⁸ Gangs or cartels may influence the trafficking situation by performing quid pro quo actions for traffickers such as intimidating local law enforcement in exchange for a cut of trafficking profits, or facilitating movement of victims across international borders in exchange for fees for crossing their territory. Current or former gang or cartel members may also engage in human trafficking as individuals, using their organized crime affiliations to intimidate victims without the main hierarchy of the group ever being involved with or directly profiting from the trafficking situation.

By contrast, trafficking is “gang-controlled” when the victims are considered to “belong” to the gang or cartel, and profits from the trafficking are distributed throughout the gang or cartel hierarchy. This type of trafficking has been less frequently substantiated, but hotline data and some law enforcement experience indicate that MS-13 and Los Zetas are prominent practitioners of gang-controlled trafficking.¹⁹ Bar owners will sometimes continue to rely on the cartel for intimidation of victims and enforcement of rules, contacting cartel members to discipline women who are persistently uncooperative. In other cases, the cartel has no apparent link to the trafficking situation after selling the women.

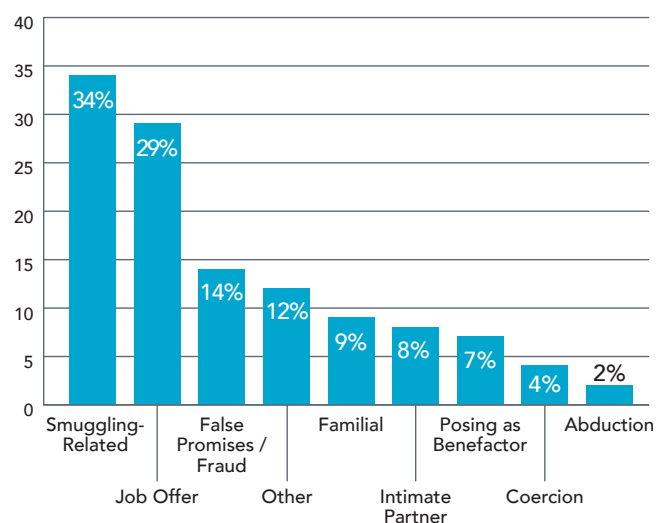
RECRUITMENT TACTICS AND MEANS OF CONTROL

In order to run their trafficking operations effectively, traffickers have to be “expert at identifying vulnerability” — able to recognize which men, women, and children will be most likely to be successfully lured into a trafficking situation and which will be most easily controlled once in the situation.²⁰ Conversely, anti-trafficking efforts need to have adequate data both on the recruitment methods and the means of control traffickers commonly use, in order to assess how these methods can be best countered.

Recruitment Tactics

Recruitment data was collected for both victim and trafficker records. Recruitment data was not known for all potential victims, and not all traffickers played a role in recruitment, so this data exists for the subset of records for which these details were both known and relevant. Recruitment information is divided into data on recruitment tactics and data on recruiter types. Recruitment tactics were described for 191 of the victim and trafficker records, and recruiter types were detailed for 187 records.

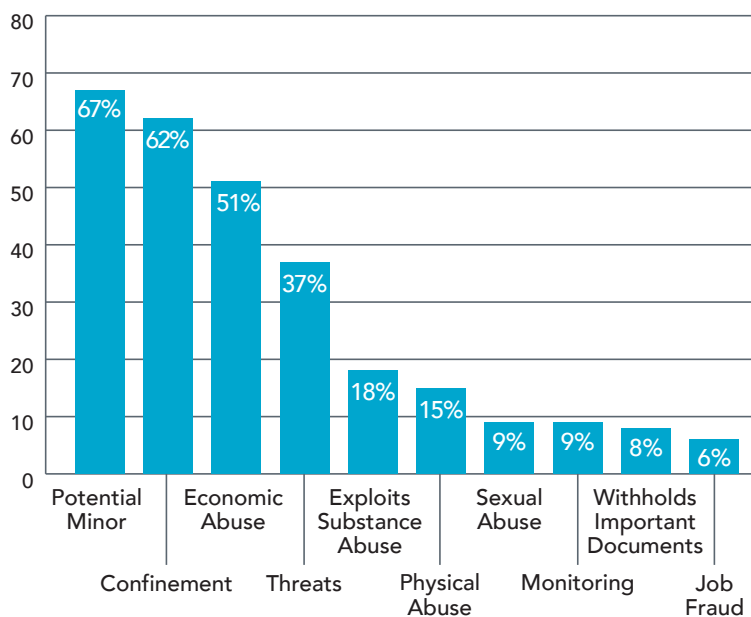
RECRUITMENT TACTICS USED
N=191



These statistics are non-cumulative. Cases may reference multiple recruitment tactics or may not provide this type of information.

TOP TEN FORCE, FRAUD, OR COERCION METHODS USED

N=248



These statistics are non-cumulative. Cases may reference multiple methods of force, fraud or coercion, or may not provide this type of information. "Potential Minor" indicates that the potential victim was a minor or that the trafficker was exploiting minors; while this is not in itself a form of force, fraud or coercion, it may coexist with other forms of control and when other forms are not present is sufficient to classify a case as trafficking based on the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act.

Smuggling-related recruitment methods were present in 34 percent of these records. This method includes instances in which the potential victims entered into a trafficking situation over the course of being smuggled over the U.S.-Mexico or other border, typically either by being abducted by smugglers and sold into trafficking or by accumulating debt to smugglers. Women and children fleeing violence or abuse in their home countries or families were particularly at-risk for this recruitment type. Traffickers were frequently able to take advantage of pre-existing vulnerabilities, the danger of the journey, and the hope of a better life in the future to ensure that victims would rely on them to escape one highly violent situation only to end up in a highly abusive trafficking situation. The smuggling category also accounts for situations where the promise of safe passage over the border was used, often in conjunction with other promises, such as the promise of a job or reunification with family members, to lure potential victims into a trafficking situation. In these cases, the recruiters were either the smugglers themselves or other recruiter types, such

as informal labor recruiters. This accounts for the fact that while 34 percent of records had smuggling-related recruitment methods, only 20 percent had smugglers as the recruiters. In this latter type of situation victims may not even know that they are crossing the border illegally, as in a number of cases traffickers allegedly would use forged documents for the potential victims or had standing deals with corrupt border officials.

Fraudulent job offers were also commonly used for recruitment (29 percent of records), with survivors or witnesses reporting that victims were offered jobs in restaurants only to discover the real nature of the job after arriving at the location. Other types of false promises and fraud were also common, including situations where victims were promised reunification with their families in the United States or were lured to the United States by means of unspecified promises (14 percent). In nine percent of these records family members forced potential victims — typically minors — into the trafficking situation, while in eight percent the potential victim's intimate partner was the recruiter.



Means of Control

Callers to the NHTRC frequently detailed the various means of control used by traffickers to keep victims compliant. Based on these accounts, it was possible to log data on the means of force, fraud, or coercion used for 248 of the 282 victim and trafficker records. In many of these cases traffickers used multiple means of control, from isolation and confinement to forced abortions and manipulation of victims' children. Isolation or confinement was used to control victims in 62 percent of records. Frequently, women and minors were housed in crowded, dirty apartment buildings and monitored by traffickers and cameras during their non-working hours. Women and minors were also isolated from the surrounding community and potential assistance by being rotated between different working and housing locations every few weeks, keeping them disoriented while providing clients with a steady stream of new victims to choose from. Economic abuse, including the imposition of high debts to the business owners or the smugglers in the trafficking ring, as well as the theft of wages was explicitly present in at least 51 percent of cases. However, based on public cases and interviews with law enforcement, it is highly likely that the real prevalence of this means of control is closer to at least 90 percent.²¹ In a minority of pimp-controlled trafficking cases at non-Houston-model bars, potential victims may be allowed to keep a small portion of the money earned, though most of it goes to the bars and the pimps.

Threats, physical abuse, and sexual abuse are rampant in federal court cases involving cantina-type establishments in Houston, New York City, and New Jersey, as well as in the 36 percent of hotline cases reported by potential victims. However, the fact that a number of cases were reported by callers who did not have complete information about the potential trafficking situation suggests that these means of control are likely underrepresented in the NHTRC and BeFree data available. Despite these caveats, threats and intimidation of potential victims were present for 37 percent of victim and trafficker records. These threats and intimidation tactics included threats of harm or death to the victims and/or to their family members, the practice of harming non-compliant victims in front of other potential victims, use of weapons in front of victims, and boasting about past violent activities or gang/cartel affiliations. Physical abuse, ranging from beatings to burns and murder attempts, was logged for 15 percent of

records, and sexual abuse (solely as a means of control, not including the abuse encountered while with buyers of commercial sex) for nine percent.

Of particular concern from a recovery perspective is the fact that in cantinas women and minors are typically expected to drink with customers, often over ten beers or other drinks in a single night. This can lead to severe alcohol dependence in both adults and minors, which traffickers are then able to further manipulate to control their victims.²² Drug use is also frequently forced on both adult and minor victims, although this is more common in bars and nightclubs than in Houston-model cantinas. Some form of trafficker-induced substance abuse, whether alcohol- or drug-related was logged for 18 percent of records.

REGIONAL CASE STUDIES: VARIATIONS ON THE VENUE

HOUSTON-MODEL CANTINAS

Houston is notable for having had three federal human trafficking cases result from investigations of sex trafficking rings operating cantinas. In addition, an astonishing 50 percent of all NHTRC and BeFree cases referencing cantinas originated in Houston. The heightened profile of Houston when considering this venue can be partially explained by the large size of the city, its proximity to the border, and its large Latino population. However, it is both notable and to a degree puzzling that other large population centers sharing similar characteristics, such as Phoenix, San Diego, or Los Angeles, are not proportionally represented in the data. Potential explanations for this phenomenon vary from lower awareness of the venue or of the NHTRC hotline in these areas to a genuinely lower prevalence of these venues outside of Houston, but none of these potential explanations can be fully justified using existing data.

What is clearer is that the Houston model serves as a distinctive paradigm for what Polaris and others define as cantinas both in the area and in areas as widespread as New York City, New Jersey, Florida, Washington state, and California. These Houston-model cantinas bear the hallmark of excessive psychological or physical brutality in all aspects of their operations, from recruitment to travel to work at the venue.

Traffickers running these venues are typically from Mexico, Honduras, or El Salvador. They are relatively organized, often by family unit, with some members running the recruitment side in Mexico or Central America and others managing the process of smuggling victims across the Mexico-U.S. border. The U.S.-based side of the organization or family has traffickers who own locations, managers who direct operations at individual establishments, enforcers who ensure compliance with the rules by means of threats, monitoring, and physical violence, and drivers who transport women from their places of residence to the cantinas, and sometimes rotate them between cantinas, residential brothels, and hotels.²³ Others connected with the trafficking network may be responsible for laundering

the proceeds of illicit activities from the cantina, which are well beyond reasonable earnings for a legitimate bar.²⁴

In some cases cantina operators may contract with local pimps to directly control the cantina workers, in which case the pimps and the business split the victims' earnings.²⁵ As already seen in the Hortencia Medeles case (see p. 6), owners attempt to distance themselves from the trafficking occurring at their businesses by having managers and these local pimps deal most directly with the day-to-day operations of the trafficking business. This can make investigations that seek to dismantle an entire network challenging and lengthy, and as observed in the following case study, can result in having individual locations shut down for alcohol license or prostitution violations while connected businesses and business owners continue to operate untouched.²⁶

These networks almost exclusively target women and girls between 14 and 30 from Mexico and Central America. Historically, Houston law enforcement has seen a tendency for traffickers to recruit women by manipulating them into



a romantic relationship with one of the traffickers. These intimate partner traffickers will often become close to their victims' families, have children with them, and over time will begin to persuade them to engage in commercial sex in Mexico. When the victim is sent to the U.S. to continue working in the more lucrative venues there, this recruiter may remain in Mexico or accompany the victim to the U.S. If the victim does not remain compliant while working at the cantina, the recruiter will threaten to have the victim's children and/or family harmed or killed.²⁷ While this trend has been observed in NHTRC cases, these show a higher prevalence of both smuggling-related and fake job offer means of recruitment (See Recruitment Tactics, pp. 14–15). Recruiters in these cases are typically acquaintances, friends, or other victims, who often are familiar enough with the potential victim's hometown to make future threats against families plausible.

Case Study One: Maria Bonita/La Costeñita — Houston, TX

State liquor license inspectors arriving on site in 2004 were the first public officials to notice signs of potential human trafficking occurring at Maria Bonita cantina in Houston. Over the next few years, federal investigations, raids, and arrests followed; however, it was not until 2011 that the final operating locations were shut down and most of the affiliated traffickers arrested. The extradition of one of the key members of the ring, Gerardo Salazar, from Mexico would not occur for another three years.



Google Street View Imagery of Maria Bonita cantina in March 2011, shortly after the indictment of Maria and Jose Luis Rojas. Image credit: Map data ©2016 Google.

In February 2005, an undercover police operation at Maria Bonita resulting from the liquor license inspectors' tip revealed that the women's bathroom mirror doubled as a door that led to a fenced-in backyard and another building. Women working at the cantina would enter through the hidden door while buyers of commercial sex would enter the second building from the outside. However when investigators attempted to close the business, the women working at the cantina, fearful of retaliation against their families in Mexico, refused to testify against the bar owners — David Salazar and his mother, Gregoria “Blanca” Salgado-Vazquez. Vasquez was a former sex worker and the business partner of another local cantina operator, Maria “Nancy” Rojas, who ran La Costeñita, a few blocks down the street from Maria Bonita on Clinton Drive.²⁸

Although investigators had to put the case on hold for lack of evidence, that same summer they were able to reopen it due to a domestic violence hotline call from a teenage girl who was being held at one of David Salazar's addresses and reported having been beaten and forced to work at Vasquez's and Rojas' cantinas along Clinton Drive. Investigators were now able to build cases against five traffickers in the ring, including the notorious supplier, Gerardo Salazar from San Luis Teolocholco, Tlaxcala, Mexico and several of his family members.²⁹ However, neither Rojas nor Vasquez were indicted, and David Salazar and recruiter Gerardo Salazar were able to flee the country.³⁰

Gerardo “El Gallo” Salazar's recruitment and smuggling operation based in Mexico was a crucial supply line for Maria Bonita and La Costeñita. Originally from Tlaxcala, Mexico, Salazar modeled his recruitment operation after human trafficking networks from Tenancingo, San Luis, and other towns in Tlaxcala that supply women to residential brothels throughout Mexico and the United States for years. Salazar and his accomplices would roam rural Mexican towns, schools, and festivals in search of girls and young women whom they could romance into the first stages of the trafficking situation. Once in the situation, women would be alternately treated well and then threatened, raped, and beaten. Eventually Salazar would smuggle the women to Houston, house them in an apartment complex, brand the “best” with a rooster tattoo after his own nickname, and send them to work at Rojas' and Vasquez's cantinas.³¹

Following the 2005 operations, the Salazar-Rojas-Vasquez network continued to function without interference for several years until in mid-2008 the Jacinto City police department responded to a 911 call from another minor victim who was being confined in the house David Salazar shared with his mother.³² The girl was also being forced to work at another of David Salazar's cantinas, El Club Guerrero. David Salazar and Vasquez were finally arrested, but were only charged with harboring an alien. Maria Bonita continued to operate for at least another year after the arrests. Although Houston tried to shut it down in 2009 using public nuisance laws, authorities were notified that the bar had — at least on paper — changed ownership.³³

In the meantime, La Costeñita and its affiliated cantina, El Club Restaurante, continued to exploit women and girls supplied by Gerardo Salazar for three more years under the direction of Maria Rojas, her brother, Jose Luis Rojas, and Maria's husband and co-owner of La Costeñita and El Club Restaurante, Javier Belmontes of Tamaulipas, Mexico.³⁴ Rojas and her associates recruited women from Mexico by promising them restaurant jobs and used *padrotes*, or pimps, such as Gerardo Salazar to supply additional victims.

Once at Rojas' bars, women and girls were told that they were in debt for their smuggling fees and would be forced to work in commercial sex until they had paid off their debt.³⁵ Starting in 2005, Rojas and her associates decided that it was too difficult to directly control their victims, and began to rely on pimps who were allowed to use whatever methods necessary to intimidate victims into complying.³⁶ One 21-year-old woman later described having been abducted in Mexico by a *padrote* who offered her a ride and brought her to La Costeñita where he repeatedly raped and beat her while forcing her to work at the cantina and give her earnings to him and to Rojas.³⁷

The larger trafficking network finally began to collapse with the arrest of Gerardo Salazar in Mexico in 2010 and a three-year joint investigation involving federal and local authorities.³⁸ Rojas, Belmontes, and eight other defendants were indicted in February 2011. Maria and Jose Luis Rojas were both sentenced to a total of 26 years in prison for sex trafficking related charges. Two bars, one restaurant, and several additional properties used to facilitate the trafficking were forfeited, and

proceeds were used to aid survivors.³⁹ Gerardo Salazar was finally extradited to the United States in 2014 and pleaded guilty in October 2015 to four counts of harboring aliens for the purpose of prostitution.⁴⁰

The Maria Bonita/La Costeñita case illustrates how difficult it can be for law enforcement to ensure that the commercial fronts of these trafficking operations are put out of business. This difficulty stems largely from traffickers' operational models, which rely on network redundancy to continue gaining profits when one node is shut down or one trafficker arrested. Business owners also took advantage of regulatory loopholes, changing the legal ownership of cantinas and using relatives' names on liquor licenses in order to make their direct involvement less obvious to investigators and less provable in court.⁴¹

Another key element is the extreme intimidation of victims, who are often unwilling to testify against arrested traffickers because of the fear that traffickers still at large both in Mexico and in the U.S. will retaliate by harming their families. The incremental successes law enforcement had in their investigations resulted in part from the gradual building of trust between survivors and FBI agents and local detectives who were able to persuade survivors that U.S. law enforcement was willing to protect their rights and to explain the importance of court testimony in stopping traffickers.⁴²

Houston-Model Cantinas Elsewhere in the U.S.

Houston-model cantinas have also been reported in other parts of the U.S., including northern Texas, California, Washington State, Florida, North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, and the Washington D.C. area. NHTRC cases and the few public cases available indicate that these Houston-model cantinas operate much like those seen in the federal Houston cases, with similar levels of brutality and violations of human dignity. However, interviews with law enforcement and service providers in most of these areas, with the exception of northern Texas and Seattle, revealed a low level of awareness of cantinas as a potential trafficking venue outside of Houston. Respondents who were aware of the venue noted that potential investigations in their areas were held up by a lack of resources for investigations of suspicious businesses.⁴³

Law enforcement contacts interviewed in the Seattle area specified that while intelligence indicates that human



trafficking occurs at local cantinas, local task forces faced many difficulties in infiltrating these operations. One serious challenge was the lack of native Spanish speakers on the human trafficking task forces in the Seattle area: most native Spanish speakers were assigned to drug trafficking task forces, and potential traffickers found it easy to keep non-Latino law enforcement from executing a sting by having bouncers who excluded all customers without a perfect Spanish accent.⁴⁴ Task forces faced similar problems when Portuguese-speaking task force members were needed to investigate potential human trafficking at several Brazilian bars and nightclubs towards the north of Seattle. Service providers working with law enforcement in Southern California by contrast simply noted a lack of resources to work on human trafficking cases that fell outside current investigative priorities.

There have been several smaller federal cases involving bars run by Latino traffickers and victimizing Hispanic and Latina women in New York City and New Jersey. The New Jersey case, *U.S. vs Rosales Martinez*, was prosecuted in 2006 as a labor trafficking case, illustrating how elements of forced labor inherent in cantina trafficking may be easier to prove in court than sex trafficking would be. In this particular case, victims from Honduras were “encouraged to prostitute themselves” at the bar by traffickers from Honduras and El Salvador, but prosecutors were not able to prove that women were forced to engage in commercial sex.⁴⁵ The situation was no less abusive than other cantina trafficking situations, however. Women and girls as young as 14 were frequently raped soon after being recruited by the coyote who worked to smuggle women and girls from Honduras to the bars in Hudson County, and once at the bar were beaten and threatened with deportation or harm to their families if they tried to leave.⁴⁶ At least one woman who became pregnant was forced to have an abortion so that she could continue to work.⁴⁷

Another notable case from the area was prosecuted as both a sex trafficking and forced labor case by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of New York in 2011. This case centered around Antonio Rivera, the owner of two Brooklyn bars who worked with Jason Villaman and John Whaley to rotate and monitor female workers from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico. The women in this case were lured to the bars by means of advertisements for waitressing jobs

distributed in Spanish language newspapers and businesses frequented by Latino immigrants in New York City businesses. Rivera and his co-defendants forced them to consume enormous quantities of alcohol with patrons and engage in commercial sex and then prevented them from leaving by means of physical and sexual abuse, economic abuse in the form of a fraudulent savings scheme instead of payment, and threats of deportation.⁴⁸

However, beyond these successful prosecutions in the New York City and Houston areas, there has been little evidence of success in addressing trafficking at cantina-type establishments in most of the United States. In order to reduce the profitability of this business model and to prevent the exploitation of women and girls at cantina-type establishments, law enforcement, political leaders, and service providers need to bring greater attention and resources to bear on the venue and those it exploits.

Case Study Two: Unnamed California Cantina⁴⁹

The following case exemplifies a pattern of victim demographics, trafficking network structure, and control methods seen frequently in cantinas cases reported to Polaris-operated hotlines, both in California and elsewhere in the United States. A caller to the NHTRC described a cantina bar that was exploiting female minors and young adults from Baja California. Fifteen of these potential victims, who were between the ages of 16 and 21, had entered the U.S. from Mexico on temporary visas. The bar at which the potential victims were being forced to work catered only to Hispanic or Latino clientele, but was run by U.S. citizens who were aware of the activity occurring at the bar and profiting from it. The traffickers who directly controlled the potential victims were from a border town in Mexico. As in the Houston case, these traffickers would normally remain in the U.S. to monitor and transport the potential victims, but would occasionally travel to Mexico to manage visa paperwork and transport more potential victims across the border.

The girls and women who were working at the cantina were housed in a single location near the bar, and the traffickers would use vans and local taxi services to move them from the residence to the bar. While at the bar, the potential victims were monitored at all times by security cameras and guards, and were usually directly monitored by one of the two traffickers. Every time a new girl was brought to the cantina, the

traffickers would force her to take drugs and then bring her to the potential buyers and arrange prices for commercial sex. The girls and women at the bar would be given drugs and large amounts of alcohol frequently, and sometimes forced by means of threats and physical violence to consume them when they did not want to do so. Several of the women at the cantina had become pregnant and had been forced to have abortions or beaten until they miscarried, another form of violence which is not uncommon in this venue.

BARS AND NIGHTCLUBS

The loose collection of additional business types that fall under the purview of this research include bars, night clubs, dance clubs, and even some restaurants, all of which ostensibly operate as drinking and eating or recreational establishments without being registered as sexually oriented businesses (in contrast to, for instance, strip clubs, New Jersey's Go-Go clubs, or Nevada's legal brothels). These venues differ from the cantina model in that they are typically open to the general public. Trafficking operations there may also be hidden even from the owners and legitimate employees. In the latter case, traffickers are typically less organized and operate either as individual traffickers, or as loosely cooperating gang members.

Dance Bars/Bailarina Bars

So-called "dollar dance bars" or *bailarina* bars are particularly common in New York City, especially in Queens and Brooklyn. These bear similarities both to cantinas and to *teibol*⁵⁰ (table dancing) establishments in Mexico. Victims of human trafficking at these venues are typically Hispanic and Latina women, mostly from Mexico, but also from South America and Central America.⁵¹ Traffickers are also usually from Latin America, but are typically more diverse than traffickers in the Houston-model cantinas, and have included Puerto Rican, Honduran, Guatemalan, Ecuadorian, and U.S. citizen traffickers along with many traffickers from Mexico.⁵² Unlike traditional cantinas, these bars prominently feature entertainment for customers in the form of dancing, and women are often recruited from within immigrant communities in New York with the promise of dance or restaurant jobs.⁵³

Once recruited, women find that instead of simply being expected to dance or serve food and drinks at the bar, they are also expected to drink and flirt with customers and engage

in commercial sex with would-be buyers. According to New York-based service providers, these venues vary in whether or not business owners are directly complicit in trafficking. Nonetheless, in all known cases these businesses get a cut of the profits from onsite commercial sex.⁵⁴

Restaurant Bars

A number of cantina-type establishments in the Washington DC area and in northern Texas have the peculiar characteristic of operating as restaurants open to the general public during the day and transforming into bars where entrance is typically restricted to Latino males. After hours, the business will often host "dance parties" featuring stripping or erotic dancing. Women and minors (rarely younger than 17) working there are expected to flirt and drink with potential customers, as in other cantina-type establishments. Due to the fact that these businesses have an ostensibly legitimate restaurant business, they are typically registered as restaurants and all sexually-oriented activity, such as stripping or erotic dancing, happens off the books and after normal restaurant hours. Some of these businesses rely on pimps to engage in all trafficking-related activity while taking a cut of the profits. In other cases, hotline callers report direct involvement by the business owners and managers, who rotate women through several informally-franchised bars or nightclubs.

In one case emblematic of many reported to the NHTRC, a caller described a restaurant bar in the Midwest that was likely facilitating human trafficking.⁵⁵ The bar operated as a restaurant during the day, but on Friday and Saturday nights would stay open late and hire private security to ensure that only Latino male customers were admitted. Patrons could not enter the bar unless they were able to speak Spanish fluently without an accent. Potential victims from Mexico and the U.S. ranging in age from 17 to 40 were expected to flirt and drink with male customers during this time. Customers who expected commercial sex were able to leave the main rooms with the women. The bar owner and several potential controllers monitored the women closely throughout this process, and the owner appeared to be intimidating workers. The bar was also frequented by local gangs, and the bar owner would use his connections with gang members to threaten the women.



Nightclubs and 41 Clubs

A number of nightclubs specifically targeting Latino buyers and using Latina workers also appear in hotline data. Many of these can be difficult to distinguish from other types of bars and strip clubs based on hotline data alone, but additional research generally reveals that they are primarily registered as bars, restaurants or entertainment businesses. While activities combining dancing and stripping are common at these venues, businesses are rarely registered as sexually-oriented, so these activities are likely happening under the table, similarly to those occurring at dance bars, restaurant bars, and Go-Go bars. As with these other establishments, the more visible sexually-oriented activity is typically marketed to casual customers, while frequent buyers of commercial sex will go to back rooms. Unlike the Houston-model cantinas, women working in commercial sex at these locations are frequently there of their own volition; however, many other women and minors are directly controlled by traffickers.

One variation on this model that appears to be common in Chicago is the “41 Club.” These are typically nightclubs or bars with a reputation for being sites where buyers can find commercial sex (normally) for 41 dollars, 20 of which goes to the club, 20 of which goes to the woman or the pimp, and 1 of which pays for the linens for the club’s back or upstairs rooms. As far as is known, these venues typically have Caucasian, Latina, and African American workers, and it is unclear how frequently they serve as sites of trafficking. Law enforcement has struggled to find evidence of trafficking at these locations due to the fact that they have not successfully found witnesses who will admit to being trafficked.⁵⁶ However, there are sporadic reports to the NHTRC hotline in which Latina women are being trafficked at this type of venue by pimps from Mexico or Central America.

Go-Go Bars

“Go-Go bars” are strip club-type establishments where dancers are dressed in bikinis instead of being nude or topless. They are particularly prominent in New Jersey due to the fact that New Jersey law prohibits the sale of alcohol in topless or nude clubs. As an enormous amount of strip club revenue comes from the sale of alcohol, most such businesses in New Jersey are Go-Go bars. The culture of these bars tends to be highly conducive to exploitation of dancers, since many have little

to no regulation of dancer-to-customer contact and have back rooms where exploitation and trafficking may occur with or without the knowledge of management. These venues have typically appeared in hotline data featuring both Brazilian and Eastern European potential victims, as well as traffickers from Brazil and Eastern Europe. This raises a strong possibility that criminal organizations from both parts of the world are cooperating to manage the recruitment, smuggling or migration, and exploitation of women in these venues.

Case Study Three: El Rancho/El Alacran Clubs — West Palm Beach, FL

Several West Palm Beach nightclubs known to the NHTRC came under media scrutiny in 2009-2010 for their role in the trafficking of two women from Honduras. Accounts from the *Palm Beach Post* highlight the questionable business registration practices of the nightclub owners, which strove to obscure the connections between owners and any illegal activity occurring onsite. Details also emerge from the media investigation that reveal a failure of regulatory safeguards to effectively counter basic detection-avoidance measures used by the network operators - most notably one that would prevent felons from applying for liquor licenses.⁵⁷ The case also bears a notable resemblance to the early stages of the Maria Bonita/La Costeñita investigation in Houston, in that only one trafficker was arrested and multiple bars owned by the chief business associates in the case remained operational.

As noted by the *Palm Beach Post*, when 33 year-old Anthony Genovese opened El Rancho, El Toro Loco 1, and El Toro Loco 2 along Military Trail in West Palm Beach, Florida, he already had a felony conviction for fraud and conspiracy charges related to his role in a violent takeover of another West Palm Beach nightclub in 1998.⁵⁸ This conviction should have prevented nightclubs under his ownership from obtaining liquor licenses for 15 years after the conviction. Instead Genovese’s mother, brother, and a friend formed shell companies to apply for state liquor licenses, and this basic evasion measure was sufficient to get them the licenses, despite the fact that Genovese’s ownership was openly acknowledged on county, municipal, and regulatory papers as well as on social media.⁵⁹

Other actors in the case include Veronica Martinez, a *coyote* (human smuggler) from West Palm Beach, and Roselito Pimentel, the owner of El Alacran nightclub where the victims

in this case were initially trafficked. As alleged by the *Palm Beach Post* and the *Sun Sentinel*, Martinez and Pimentel were not initially directly linked with Genovese, but developed a business relationship with him over the course of the trafficking case, illustrating the informal manner in which these trafficking networks often begin. In 2009, Pimentel hired two sisters whom Martinez had recruited in Honduras and smuggled through Mexico into the United States to work as dancers at El Alacran.⁶⁰ The two women were forced to drink excessive amounts of alcohol and to turn their earnings over to Martinez, who claimed they owed her a debt for being smuggled into the country. When one of the women asked to pay back the debt by working in another job, Martinez threatened that they would be punished by management and hinted that the sisters' mother would also be harmed.⁶¹

El Alacran closed in February 2010 in the course of a drug trafficking investigation shortly after it opened. Martinez proceeded to Genovese's clubs to find a new site for trafficking the two sisters, and allegedly ended up making an arrangement with El Rancho, where the sisters continued to work until one of them became pregnant. Soon after the pregnant sister was fired from the club, the FBI arrested Martinez on human trafficking charges. Martinez entered a plea deal.

Neither Pimentel nor Genovese were charged, and both continued to run additional clubs after the investigation.⁶² Genovese persistently denied any wrongdoing when interviewed by the *Palm Beach Post*, claiming that it was normal to have as many as 40-50 women dancing for money at "Mexican bars," and that these women were acting of their own free will. By contrast, experts from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and Florida Coalition Against Human Trafficking noted that while some women likely do work at these clubs voluntarily, it is highly unlikely that the two sisters were the only women forced to work by traffickers at the locations.

This example highlights the fact that careful cross-examination of business paperwork filed at state, county, and municipal levels can raise red flags for key regulatory agencies. It also underscores the potentially critical role of state liquor license inspectors (also observed in the Houston cases) in detecting the presence of fraudulent activity associated with these business registrations, which can be a warning that human traf-

ficking or other illegal activities are occurring on the premises. Finally, it illustrates that it is relatively easy for business owners to distance themselves from human trafficking occurring at their businesses when the direct controllers maintain informal, difficult to track agreements with the owners or managers.

Case Study Four: Northeast Go-Go Bar

This case study is an example of a criminal network operational model that has been reported to the NHTRC on multiple occasions. The experience of the survivor recounted here is typical of victims in these situations.⁶³ As is the case with a number of victims who choose to make a risky trip to the United States in hopes of a good job, one caller to the NHTRC recounted having been aware of some of the downsides of accepting a bartending job in a major U.S. city. Her recruiter acknowledged that she would accumulate a small debt from accepting the job, but the caller decided that this relatively small cost was an investment worth making. She left by airplane for the U.S. in hopes of finding a better life and making enough money to send to family members, who lived in a rural area where it was difficult to find work. However, instead of landing in the U.S. the plane landed in Mexico, and she and several other women were smuggled across the border. On the way, the women were stopped and held for a time by U.S. immigration officials, but agents ended up simply dropping them at a bus station near the Mexican border, where traffickers immediately picked them up. Upon arrival she found that she would be working as a stripper in a Go-Go club and owed twice the amount she had originally agreed to pay. The caller recounted how she begged her controllers to let her work elsewhere, but eventually capitulated when the controllers began to threaten her family in her home country.

During the time she worked in the club, the caller never kept any of the money she earned from tips while dancing or from engaging in commercial sex with buyers. Her debt kept increasing, as employers told her she needed to pay exorbitant prices for the housing that she shared with other victims and several controllers, and that interest was building up on the original debt. She worked every day of the week, for 12-20 hour long shifts. After several years, she was able to escape and reached out to the NHTRC for help connecting to services and law enforcement contacts. She was also able



to apply for a T visa (a specialized visa available to victims of human trafficking). However, her traffickers remained at large and she reported being fearful that they could find her again at any time.

Beyond its utility as an example of trafficking in Go-Go clubs, this case illustrates several key points. First, this case is not the only one in the NHTRC's data set where victims of trafficking from Latin America were stopped by U.S. immigration officials, only to be released back into the hands of traffickers. As noted in the section on recruitment methods, victims may or may not know that they are being smuggled into the country, and even when they do know, they are largely at a loss when dealing with immigration enforcement agents. Usually unaware at this point that they are being trafficked, distrustful of law enforcement, or intimidated by their traffickers, they rarely self-identify as victims. Overwhelmed by cases and often having low resources to devote to each situation, immigration officials reportedly will often simply take fingerprints, make a record of victims' entry, and leave them at a border bus station, where traffickers can easily access them again. Traffickers also frequently change their border crossing tactics, making it challenging for officers to maintain up-to-date intelligence. In some cases, traffickers are even able to produce adequate fake documents to convince officials that victims are entering the country legally. In order to address these challenges, U.S. immigration officials should enhance the capacity of officers to identify potential trafficking victims and others with potential international protection needs, particularly minors, by means of increased staff, a clear referral process for assessment and service provision, and strengthened collaboration and information sharing between government agencies.

Secondly, when victims escape trafficking situations, they often remain vulnerable to being harmed or re-trafficked even when they have been identified as potential victims and started to receive services. Survivors need safe housing, ideally in a different city from their traffickers, where they can begin to rebuild their lives without the threat that their trafficker could easily find them at any time. In addition, victims seeking an appropriate immigration remedy (ex: Continued Presence, T visa, etc.) should be assured that law

enforcement will make every effort to protect them from retaliation if they cooperate with reasonable requests for assistance in the investigation or prosecution of traffickers.⁶⁴

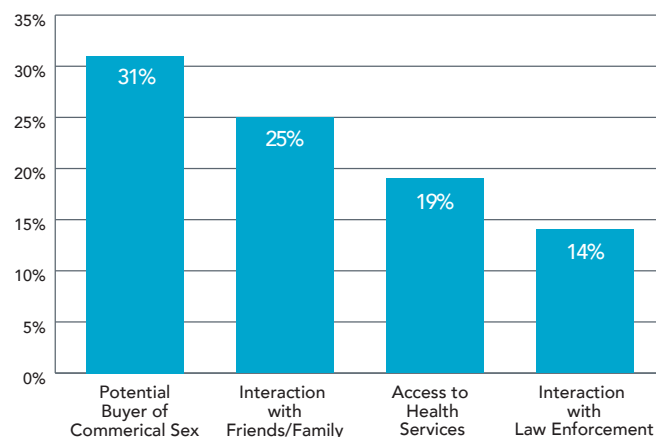
ACCESS POINTS

Data on potential victims' points of access to the outside world exists for 72 of the 116 victim records. Several takeaways from the case studies in this report and interviews conducted with law enforcement provide additional information on ways that victims come into contact with the external environment while still in their trafficking situations. This information gives critical insight into how to strategically target hotline advertisement, trainings, and prevention and disruption-oriented campaigns.

NHTRC data indicates that for nearly one-third of victims, potential buyers of commercial sex were a primary point of access to assistance. This may seem counter-intuitive, since buyers are technically complicit in abuse of victims; however, in many cases, buyers only realized that women at these bars were sex trafficking victims after coming to the location and noticing signs of abuse or indications that allegedly adult sex workers were actually minors. This fact points to the potential benefit of educating buyers about the fact that women engaged in commercial sex at cantinas and other locations may not be there of their own volition.

Twenty-five percent of the 72 victim records indicated that victims had access to family and friends who knew of their trafficking situation and tried, often repeatedly, to help them get away from their traffickers. Families of victims appear to be more comfortable contacting the NHTRC, BeFree, or other non-profits than reaching out directly to law enforcement, often due to concern over the victims' undocumented status or status as sex workers. These concerns about law enforcement are partially validated. Fourteen percent of victim records indicate that cantina victims interacted with law enforcement while in their trafficking situations. However, in the majority of these cases, the interaction did not lead to their identification as victims. (See "Potential Victim Interactions with Law Enforcement," p. 26). Nineteen percent of victim records also indicated that victims had come into contact with the health care system, either for treatment after severe physical abuse or for pregnancy-related treatment. The current push

**FOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT POINTS
OF ACCESS TO POTENTIAL HELP**
N=72



to educate health care providers on indicators of trafficking should continue and extend to include signs that are specific to this subtype of trafficking. Hospitals, especially those in areas with large Hispanic or Latino communities, should ensure the provision of interpreters to help Spanish-speaking victims communicate their situation.

Because cantina/bar establishments rely on liquor licenses and restaurant inspections for the commercial front portion of their business, local inspectors could play an important role in identifying potential trafficking activity at bars and cantinas. This strategy has proven effective in the past in Houston,



where the Harris County office of the Texas Alcoholic Beverages Commission played an important role supporting federal investigators in the Maria Bonita/La Costeñita and other cases. As seen in the El Rancho case in Florida, there have also been cases where liquor licensing agencies could potentially have played a pivotal role if more effective data sharing structures existed between different levels of government.

A number of victims also do have access to cell phones while working, but will almost never use these to try to get help because they are afraid for their families, believe that law enforcement will not help, or do not know what resources are available to them.⁶⁵ Better relationships between law enforcement and Latino communities within the U.S., or increased publicity of the national hotlines may result in more calls from victims. However, it is likely that in many cases the concreteness and severity of traffickers' threats will prevent many victims from proactively seeking assistance.

POTENTIAL VICTIM INTERACTIONS WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT

The recorded number of interactions between victims and law enforcement or immigration officials during trafficking cases is too small for quantitative analysis, but is deserving of comment nonetheless. Within the sample available, potential victims had a range of interactions with law enforcement. In some cases, potential victims were charged with misdemeanors for prostitution or public intoxication (due to the high number of beers they were forced to consume by traffickers). In others, law enforcement was present to assist the victim as the victim of another crime, such as assault or theft, but did not identify them as victims of trafficking.

Interactions with immigration enforcement were more common than interactions with criminal law enforcement. In a number of cases, victims were apprehended by immigration officials and released either to their traffickers or to smugglers or relatives who handed them off to traffickers. Also notable is the fact that several minor victims encountered immigration enforcement officials and went through the Office of Refugee Resettlement before being placed in a situation of trafficking or a situation that led to their being trafficked. In both situations, traffickers appeared to find it relatively easy to retrieve victims who came into contact with U.S. immigration enforcement. However, there were also several cases where immigration officials were able to extract victims from their situation and refer them to caseworkers who contacted the NHTRC seeking resources for survivors. Due to the low amount of data on victim-immigration enforcement interactions, it is impossible to estimate which outcome is more common. It is nonetheless important to recognize that the outcomes of these interactions can be either highly negative or highly positive, and to develop strategies to tip the balance in favor of positive outcomes for victims of trafficking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While this report is concerned specifically with sex trafficking in cantina-type venues, many of the following recommendations also apply to the needs of sex trafficking victims from Mexico and Latin America across a broad range of venues. Obviously efforts to eliminate sex trafficking from Mexico into the U.S. will require bilateral cooperation between government agencies and law enforcement, as well as between service providers and community partners on both sides of the border.

Domestic and cross-border partnerships must be established among law enforcement, business regulators, Hispanic and Latino community organizations, service providers, and consulates in the United States and in key countries. Through these partnerships, trafficking networks can be more effectively identified, disrupted, and successfully prosecuted, and survivors can be better protected through long-term, culturally competent, and trauma-sensitive services.

The following points focus on: increasing the identification of trafficking victims and operations from, or related to, Mexico and

Latin America; strengthening law enforcement's investigations of these operations; and supporting the creation of appropriate services for survivors. More work is needed in the future to find effective ways of preventing this type of trafficking and reducing the demand for commercial sex with this victim population.

U.S. LAW ENFORCEMENT AND IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS

Law enforcement agents and officers need ongoing, high quality training, support, and information sharing to recognize potential signs of human trafficking and effectively pursue cases.

- When building cases, law enforcement should seek to identify the larger formal and informal networks of human traffickers who operate in several locations. To support this process, collaboration and tactical intelligence sharing should be strengthened between federal and local authorities to ensure that identification of potential traffickers is disseminated to all relevant audiences.
- Large, well-funded drug trafficking task forces should receive advanced training on recognizing the signs of human trafficking at cantinas, due to the frequent intersections between drug trafficking and human smuggling routes, as well as the relative frequency with which illicit substances are used as a means of control at certain cantinas and nightclubs.
- Immigration officials should increase the capacity of their agents to identify potential human trafficking of women

THE NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING RESOURCE CENTER

The National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) hotline connects survivors of all forms of human trafficking to nationwide services to get help and stay safe, and shares actionable tips and insights with the anti-trafficking community. Regional specialists can also provide training and technical assistance on cases and offer referrals to law enforcement entities and service providers anywhere in the country. Through these activities, the NHTRC hotline is uniting local efforts into a national movement that is restoring freedom to survivors and eradicating human trafficking at scale. Contact the NHTRC at 1-888-373-7888, or nhtrc@polarisproject.org.



and girls apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border through enhanced staff training.

- The Department of Homeland Security should ensure that foreign nationals at border crossings are appropriately screened for all relevant international protections including human trafficking, refugee and asylum claims, and other unique protections afforded to unaccompanied or separated children. In particular, DHS should employ child welfare professionals with training in child- and trauma-informed interview techniques to screen children as required by the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 (TVPRA).

Law enforcement agencies should be equipped with resources and tactical intelligence to effectively take a victim-centered approach when building cases and identifying victims.

- Women and girls engaged in commercial sex at cantinas should be offered access to services, screened for human trafficking, and should not be arrested for prostitution.
- Law enforcement agents and officers should have access to language resources — including Spanish, Portuguese and relevant indigenous dialects — as well as up-to-date, specific training on human trafficking operations at these venues.
- Law enforcement and immigration officials should ensure that they have culturally and linguistically competent agents and officers to build trust with potential victims from Hispanic and Latino communities. Locally, law enforcement should invest in strengthening relationships with Latino communities in order to ensure that law enforcement is seen as a resource to those experiencing exploitation.⁶⁶

Law enforcement should collaborate closely and routinely with service providers in order to quickly connect survivors with appropriate social and legal services.⁶⁷

- Officers and agents should be equipped with appropriate referrals to service providers, mental health professionals, legal advocates, consulates, and other resources, particularly for minors in high-risk situations.

SERVICE PROVIDERS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Service providers should have access to training and tools that allow them to identify potential victims and adopt an approach to service delivery that is informed by the complex trauma experienced by these Hispanic and Latino survivors and honors their unique cultural background.

- Latina- and Hispanic-serving agencies that aim to serve human trafficking survivors should collaborate with existing anti-trafficking service providers to exchange and infuse expert knowledge into each other's work.
- Service providers should ensure that they prioritize a survivor-centered approach that ensures safety, confidentiality, and the well-being of survivors and victims, while recognizing symptoms of trauma and coping mechanisms manifesting in the victim's life and interactions with service providers.
- Sensitive, confidential Spanish, Portuguese, and relevant indigenous language services are particularly necessary for these survivors.

HOTLINE PARTNERSHIPS: POLARIS AND CONSEJO CIUDADANO

Polaris and Consejo Ciudadano operate the national anti-trafficking hotlines for the U.S. and Mexico, respectively. The two organizations entered into a partnership in 2015 to create a safety net of coordinated protection and services for trafficking victims and survivors between the US and Mexico. Polaris works closely with Consejo Ciudadano to increase its capacity to respond effectively to all forms of trafficking in Mexico. This includes supporting Consejo Ciudadano to develop a national multidisciplinary response to human trafficking involving civil society first and foremost, alongside law enforcement and government. Polaris also consults with Consejo Ciudadano to enhance its data collection and analysis systems to diagnose the prevalence of trafficking in Mexico. Through this partnership, the two organizations will share intelligence to increase coordinated responses to cross-border trafficking cases and to support evidence-based bilateral efforts to harmonize policy and network disruption strategies.

- Healthcare providers should be trained on potential indicators of human trafficking that characterize networks from Mexico and Central America. They should also have access to sensitive and confidential language resources instead of relying on a patient's friends or family members for interpretation.

Service providers should work together to identify community resources to ensure that this population of trafficking survivors can access the support and services necessary to recover and rebuild their lives.

- This endeavor should aim to build a geographically comprehensive network of partner organizations who can provide legal, mental health, and social service support to survivors throughout the United States and Mexico. The NHTRC hotline has referrals for appropriate resources in communities across the United States at www.traffickingresourcecenter.org.

LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY RECOMMENDATIONS

Federal, state, and local grants should fund long-term, culturally appropriate service provision for survivors of human trafficking.

- Due to the complexity of many survivors' needs over the years following their exploitation, local, state, and federal grants for human trafficking survivors should fund long-term service provision without time restrictions. A client-centered approach within grant guidelines should allow service providers to meet client needs on a case-by-case basis, without posing time limit restrictions on service provision.

Congress should increase financial resources for federal efforts to increase the identification of victims as well as the investigation and prosecution of cases.

- Congress should enact the SOAR to Health and Wellness Act (S. 1446), which provides funding to the Department of Health and Human Services to expand their pilot-tested training initiative for key healthcare personnel.
- Congress should appropriate sufficient funding to the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, including cases from cantina networks.

State legislatures should work to implement robust victim assistance frameworks including safe harbor, vacating convictions, and funding for survivor services. Of particular importance is the need to provide protection for juveniles forced to engage in commercial sex and to ensure access to vacating convictions for victims of trafficking.

- Every state should take steps to ensure that youth engaged in commercial sex are identified and treated as victims of crime. Polaris recommends that states provide immunity for juveniles under the age of eighteen for prostitution, promoting prostitution, or other non-violent offenses if the offense was committed as a direct result of being a victim of human trafficking.
- States should enact statutes that authorize courts to vacate convictions for survivors that were the result of being trafficked. Survivors who were forced to commit crimes during the course of their exploitation or were arrested for prostitution offenses should be afforded the opportunity to clear criminal records that could otherwise impede access to housing, employment and healthy reintegration into families and communities due to criminalization and stigmatization.

All states should require or encourage the posting of the NHTRC hotline number at bars and nightclubs.

- According to a recent study on effective anti-human trafficking practices by Northeastern University, "Requiring the National Human Trafficking Hotline number to be posted in public places is the most important provision for increasing the number of human trafficking arrests."⁶⁸ Currently, thirty states require or encourage a hotline number to be posted or promoted within the state. Texas in particular mandates the posting of the NHTRC hotline number at bars and nightclubs, which may explain the disproportionately high number of hotline cases regarding cantinas from that state.

Regulatory agencies at the state, county, and municipal levels should cooperate to prevent registration of businesses by traffickers and to proactively identify suspicious registrations. In particular, regulators should be aware of and work to mitigate the fact that traffickers' abilities to operate legitimate cantina businesses frequently rely upon



regulatory loopholes and limited communication between varying levels of government.

- State business licensing authorities, code compliance officers, and relevant regulators should establish a standard practice to cross-reference regulatory paperwork filed at all levels of government that dictates the establishment or ownership transfer of high-risk venues including liquor license applications, business registrations, criminal histories of owners, and any health inspection paperwork in order to look for red flags of worker exploitation or human trafficking.
- Local task forces can play a role in ensuring that liquor license and health inspectors receive training on indicators of human trafficking at bars, nightclubs, and cantinas.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Houston is not the only city where there have been federal cases involving cantina-type establishments, but the Houston cantinas have been by far the most well-publicized. Other cases include the Antonio Rivera case (2013) in Long Island, and the Rosales-Martinez case (2006) in New Jersey.
- ² The exact breakdown of how many potential victims are minors and how many are adults is unknown, since calls and texts to Polaris-operated hotlines will often discuss one specific victim for whom demographic details are known, while referring to a number of other victims in the same situation without providing demographic details for them.
- ³ A “case” may represent one or more calls, all related to a specific situation of trafficking. Cases may reference multiple victims, traffickers, and locations, as well as situations that may have occurred over a number of years.
- ⁴ When reporting on a call, Polaris uses the minimum reasonable estimate of the number of victims in a situation based on the callers’ accounts. This means that estimates of the number of victims are likely to be lower than the actual number.
- ⁵ The NHTRC, from which the bulk of this data comes, is a domestic human trafficking hotline that is primarily promoted within the U.S.
- ⁶ Glenn, M. and Carroll, S. (11 October 2013). Feds: Houston sex trafficking ring prostituted undocumented girls. *Houston Chronicle*. Retrieved from <http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Feds-Houston-sex-trafficking-ring-prostituted-4886010.php> ; U.S. Attorney’s Office, Southern District of Texas. (12 December 2014). Four more enter pleas in sex trafficking, harboring, and money laundering investigation. Retrieved from <https://www.fbi.gov/houston/press-releases/2014/four-more-enter-pleas-in-sex-trafficking-harboring-and-money-laundering-investigation>
- ⁷ *Houston Chronicle*. (24 April 2015). Houston woman convicted in sex trafficking case. Retrieved from <http://www.chron.com/houston/article/Houston-woman-convicted-in-sex-trafficking-case-6221893.php> ; U.S. Attorney’s Office, Southern District of Texas. (12 December 2014). Four more enter pleas in sex trafficking, harboring, and money laundering investigation. Retrieved from <https://www.fbi.gov/houston/press-releases/2014/four-more-enter-pleas-in-sex-trafficking-harboring-and-money-laundering-investigation> ; U.S. Attorney’s Office, Southern District of Texas. (20 January, 2016). Houston sex trafficking ring leader gets life in federal prison. Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/houston-sex-trafficking-ring-leader-gets-life-federal-prison>
- ⁸ U.S. Attorney’s Office, Southern District of Texas. (20 January, 2016). Houston sex trafficking ring leader gets life in federal prison. Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/houston-sex-trafficking-ring-leader-gets-life-federal-prison>
- ⁹ U.S. Attorney’s Office, Southern District of Texas. (20 January, 2016). Houston sex trafficking ring leader gets life in federal prison. Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/houston-sex-trafficking-ring-leader-gets-life-federal-prison>
- ¹⁰ Given that these more detailed calls typically come directly from potential victims or relatives of either potential victims or traffickers, these reports should also be considered more credible than those of the general public.
- ¹¹ These percentages are non-cumulative. For some cases, the precise nationality of potential victims was unknown. For other cases, multiple victims of different nationalities appeared on the same case.
- ¹² See p.10 for details on Victim/Trafficker records.
- ¹³ <http://www.indexmundi.com/map/?r=ca> ; <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>



- ¹⁴ Fifty-three percent of potential victims were adults at the time of their first direct or indirect contact with Polaris through the NHTRC or BeFree hotlines. 45 percent were minors, and 3 percent had no ages specified.
- ¹⁵ Perez, R., US Attorney's Office, Houston. (2016, Jan 21). Phone interview; Tribble, A. Houston FBI. (2016, Jan). Phone interview.
- ¹⁶ Both victim and trafficker records included data on the nature of the relationship between the victim and the trafficker(s), but this data is recorded in this section alone, since its primary purpose is to identify and count various types of traffickers. Because this data is collected on both victim and trafficker records, percentages are out of 282 records. This data is also non-cumulative, since there may be multiple types of relationship between a victim and his or her trafficker(s).
- ¹⁷ The FBI definition of organized crime is broader than the more formal "Criminal Enterprise" type of crime group, and applies the term to "any group having some manner of formalized structure...whose primary objective is to obtain money through illegal activities." <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/organizedcrime/glossary>
- ¹⁸ Longhitano, L. State Attorney's Office, Chicago, IL. (2016, Feb 1). Phone interview.
- ¹⁹ Silva-Avalos, H. (2015, July 22). The MS-13's prostitution rings in the United States. *Insight Crime*. Retrieved from <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/ms13-prostitution-rings-in-united-states> Noble, A. (2016, March 21). Eight D.C.-area homicides linked to MS-13 street gang. *The Washington Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.washington-times.com/news/2016/mar/21/ms-13-gang-killings-linked-to-immigrant-surge/>
- ²⁰ Simmons, C. (2012, December 30). 'The Cantinera' exposes human trafficking niche. *The Courier of Montgomery County*. Retrieved from http://www.yourhoustonnews.com/courier/news/the-cantinera-exposes-human-trafficking-niche/article_1c562ee5-3b80-5227-ab33-c6140c93e278.html
- ²¹ See cases in New Jersey, New York, Houston; interviews with law enforcement in Seattle and Houston; input from service providers in New York.
- ²² Simmons, C. (2012, December 30). 'The Cantinera' exposes human trafficking niche. *The Courier of Montgomery County*. Retrieved from http://www.yourhoustonnews.com/courier/news/the-cantinera-exposes-human-trafficking-niche/article_1c562ee5-3b80-5227-ab33-c6140c93e278.html
- ²³ Perez, R., US Attorney's Office, Houston. (2016, Jan 21). Phone interview. Tribble, A. Houston FBI. (2016, Jan 14). Phone interview.
- ²⁴ The US Attorney's Office in Houston estimated the profits over a 19 month period for the Hortencia Medeles case as hovering around 1.6 million dollars.
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- ⁵⁰ Table dancing establishments, commonly called *teibols*, are frequently sites of human trafficking and/or labor exploitation in Mexico. For more information, see Consecuencias invisibles del rescate: *El caso del "Table Dance" from Colectivo contra la Trata de Personas*, available at: http://ctdp.org.mx/descargas/CONSECUENCIAS_INVISIBLES_TDP_AC.pdf
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- ⁶⁴ This cooperation is required of T visa applicants by law except where there is an exception for physical or psychological trauma experienced by the survivor. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/victims-human-trafficking-other-crimes/victims-human-trafficking-t-nonimmigrant-status>
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- ⁶⁶ For excellent resources on building task forces to facilitate cooperation between law enforcement, regulatory agencies, service providers, community organizations, and other relevant actors, see the Office of Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center, particularly: <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/>
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