

RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Human Trafficking: A Comparison of National and Nevada Trends

By Alexa Bejinariu

Introduction

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery, with millions of victims, especially women and children, reported globally. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2014) estimates that criminal organizations generate approximately \$150 billion from these activities annually.

This *Research in Brief* describes patterns of human trafficking in Nevada and compares them with national trends. It begins with a definition of human trafficking and then it examines the prevalence of human trafficking, types of incidents reported, and the characteristics of its victims. Human trafficking prevention strategies enacted by the state of Nevada are also discussed.

Definition of Human Trafficking

Both the United States under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA, 2000), and the United Nations under the Palermo Protocols (United Nations, 2000), recognize that human trafficking can take many forms, including for sexual or labor exploitation purposes. These documents also stipulate that human trafficking incidents can occur either domestically or internationally, meaning that victims can be trafficked within and across country borders. Several key elements must be present for an incident to be legally recognized as human trafficking. These elements include the use of force, fraud, or coercion. While adult victims must demonstrate that their victimization included these elements, for youth victims they are not required.¹

Research Objectives

Global Overview

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Research suggests that human trafficking is a global issue with victims being reported in 124 countries around the world (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2014).
- Nationally, there have been over 40,000 human trafficking cases reported and over 170,000 human trafficking calls made since 2007. Both of these numbers have increased over time (National Human Trafficking Resource Center [NHTRC], 2017).
- Nevada tied for 9th in the nation (with Pennsylvania) for human trafficking cases reported in 2017, with 199 cases (NHTRC, 2017). The most common form of trafficking in Nevada is sex trafficking. The proportion of sex trafficking victims in Nevada (89%) is higher than the national average (71%).
- Both the Nevada Legislature and other organizations have implemented programs for the prevention of human trafficking. These include the passage of several laws and the creation of the Southern Nevada Sex Trafficking Multidisciplinary Team, which aims to put an end to sex trafficking and aid victims throughout the Las Vegas valley by providing them much needed assistance.

and Crime [UNDOC], 2014). The majority of trafficking incidents involve cross-border trafficking (37%), followed by domestic (34%), and transregional (26%). Only a small percent (3%) involve nearby sub-region incidents. Of the over 40 million victims identified by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017), nearly 25 million were exploited for labor purposes and over 15 million were living in forced marriages.

National Overview

Similar to global data, information on the prevalence of U.S. domestic or internal trafficking is also limited and varies depending on the source. For instance, the 2018 Global Slavery Index estimates that there are approximately 403,000 people in the U.S. trapped in modern day slavery. These figures equate to nearly 1.3 victims for every thousand inhabitants (Global Slavery Index [GSI], 2018).

Another estimate is provided by the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC), which offers both national and state data on human trafficking. Nationally, according to NHTRC (2017), there have been over 40,000 human trafficking cases reported since 2007, and over 170,000 calls made to the center’s hotline. In 2017 alone, there were over 8,500 human trafficking cases and over 26,500 calls made to the NHTRC. Figure 1 provides a visual breakdown of the number of human trafficking cases reported in each state in 2017.

Regardless of the source, it is important to note that these figures represent a conservative estimate of the prevalence of human trafficking in the U.S., as most human trafficking incidents remain unreported.

State Overview: Nevada

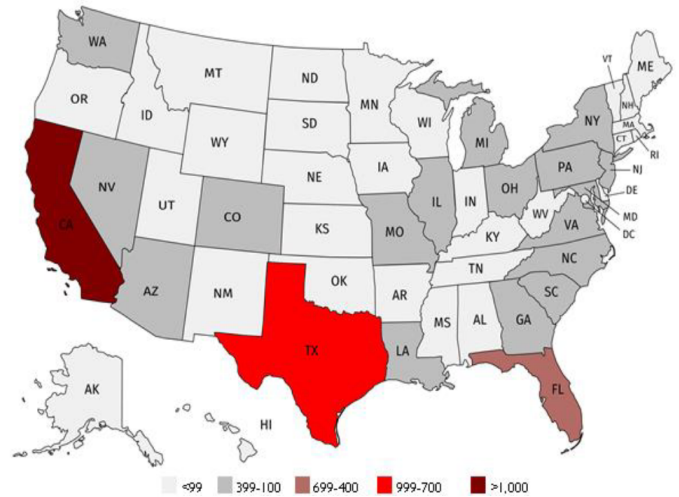
Of the cases reported to the NHTRC in 2017, nearly 200 cases were received from Nevada. As shown in Figure 2, human trafficking cases in Nevada have steadily increased over time, from 56 incidents reported in 2012 to as many as 199 cases reported in 2017. This pattern is similar to the national trend.

Based on data compiled by the National Human Trafficking Resource Center [NHTRC] (2017), Nevada tied with Pennsylvania, ranking as 9th in the nation for human trafficking cases reported in 2017 (see Table 1). This represents an increase from the previous year, when it ranked 12th in the nation with 168 cases. The highest number of trafficking cases in 2017 were reported in California (1,305) and Texas (792).

Types of Human Trafficking Reported

Global data suggests that trafficking for sexual exploitation (53%) and forced labor (40%) are the two most common types of trafficking activities (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2014). Organ removal and other forms of human trafficking (i.e., armed combat, petty crime, or forced begging)

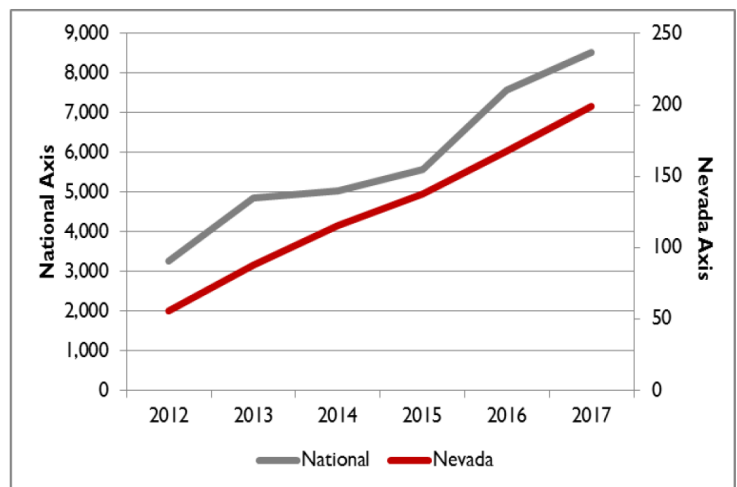
Figure 1: Number of Human Trafficking Cases Reported in 2017 per State



Source: National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC), 2017

are far less common, representing less than 10% of these activities. However, UNODC (2014) recognizes that there are significant regional differences regarding types of exploitation. For example, trafficking for sexual exploitation is more prevalent in Europe and Central Asia, whereas forced labor is more common in East Asia and the Pacific.

Figure 2: Human Trafficking Cases Reported in the U.S. and in Nevada, 2012-2017



Source: National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC), 2012-2017

Data compiled by the National Human Trafficking resource center (NHTRC, 2017) suggests that the vast majority of human trafficking victims in the U.S. were forced to engage in commercial sex (71%), whereas labor trafficking was less common (15%). State data from this same source reveals that the

Table 1: Top 10 U.S. States for Human Trafficking Cases Reported in 2017

Rank	Location	Cases
1	California	1,305
2	Texas	792
3	Florida	604
4	Ohio	365
5	New York	333
6	Michigan	305
7	Georgia	276
8	North Carolina	221
9	Nevada	199
9	Pennsylvania	199

Source: National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC), 2017

most common form of exploitation reported in Nevada was also sex trafficking (89%). In particular, 177 of the 199 human trafficking cases reported in Nevada in 2017 were for sex trafficking, whereas labor trafficking was far less common in Nevada than nationally (see Figure 3).

Characteristics of Trafficking Victims

Global data suggest that the majority of human trafficking victims are adult women (49%), followed by children (33%) (UNODC, 2014). Among the child victims, 64% were girls and 36% were boys. From 2004 to 2011, research shows an increase in the number of child trafficking victims; in some regions (such as Africa and the Middle East), child trafficking is reported as the most prevalent type of trafficking activity (UNODC, 2014).

According to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC, 2017), the vast majority of victims in the U.S. were also women. In fact, of the 8,524 human trafficking cases in the U.S. in 2017, 83% were female victims (93% of victims in Nevada were female during the same time period).

Prevention Policies/Programs

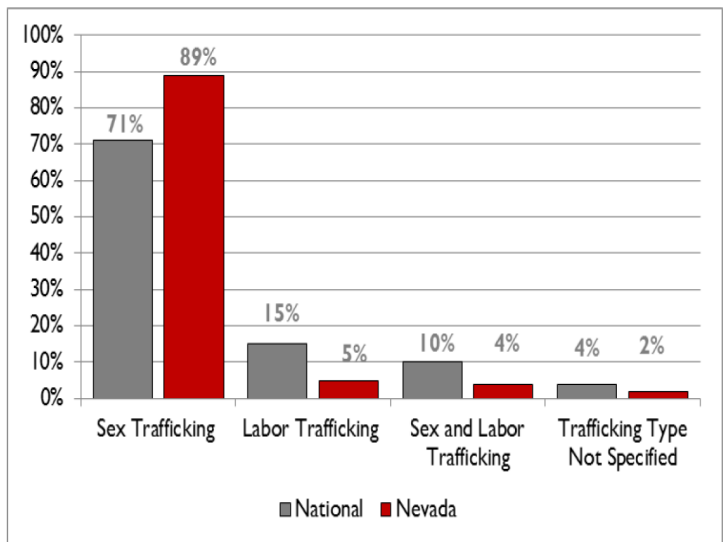
Nevada has enacted several prevention strategies to combat human trafficking. For example, by 2013, the Nevada Legislature passed several laws criminalizing sex trafficking of minors and adults, allowing trafficking victims to sue their traffickers and to seek state assistance.

As another preventative measure in 2013, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC), in collaboration with the Polaris Project, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD), and an advertising corporation (i.e., Clear Channel Outdoor), launched a billboard campaign to bring awareness to the issue of human trafficking in Las Vegas. As part of the campaign, several billboards were placed throughout the Las Vegas area that displays a 24-hour phone number to the National Human Trafficking Hotline where victims can call for help (1-888-373-7888 or text BeFree to 233733). According to Polaris Project’s Director of National Programs:

“These billboards will tell victims of human trafficking that there is a safe place for them to call and get help. It also reminds residents and visitors that sex and labor trafficking are rampant in communities across the United States, including in Las Vegas.” (Polaris Project, 2013)

More recently, in 2019, a wide range of partners from law enforcement and advocacy centers around the Las Vegas valley (i.e., LVMPD, Embracing Project, Rape Crisis Center, FBI, Children’s Advocacy Center, among others) established the Southern Nevada Sex Trafficking Multidisciplinary Team. This team aims to put an end to sex trafficking and aid victims throughout the valley (Shoro, 2019).

Figure 3: Type of Human Trafficking Cases Reported in the U.S. and Nevada, in 2017



Source: National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC), 2017

Data Sources and Limitations

Data for this report were obtained from two sources: (1) the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and (2) the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC). Although these sources provide comprehensive data on human trafficking, they have several limitations.

First, despite being one of the most extensive data sources on human trafficking in the United States, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) only includes aggregate information received via hotline in the form of phone calls, emails, and online tips. Thus, only trafficking information reported to the hotline is available.

Second, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) only includes human trafficking cases that have been detected and reported to national authorities. Given the secret and illegal facets of these crimes, a substantial amount will not be detected.

Third, jurisdictional differences in how human trafficking is recorded and reported might affect (1) the accuracy of these data and (2) seriously underestimate the prevalence of this problem.

As a result of these limitations, we advise some caution in interpreting the findings of this report.

END NOTES

i. Under U.S. law (Trafficking Victims Protection Act, 2000), human trafficking involves:

(a) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age;

(b) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, and coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.”

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CENTER FOR CRIME AND JUSTICE POLICY
STATE DATA BRIEF SERIES

This report is part of the “Research in Brief” series produced by the Center for Crime and Justice Policy at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The Center is housed in the Department of Criminal Justice, which is located in the Greenspun College of Urban Affairs. Research in Briefs are modeled after the Bureau of Justice Statistics’ Special Reports and Bulletins.

The Briefs provide summaries of various criminal justice system practices in Nevada over time, and highlight differences between Nevada and other states. These reports cover all aspects of the criminal justice system, including trends in crime and arrests, police practices, prosecution, pretrial activities, adjudication, sentencing, and corrections. Although Research in Briefs typically focus on criminal justice issues within Nevada, these reports may focus on national issues as well.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

Questions or comments about the information contained in this report, data used to generate this report, or about other resources available related to this topic should be addressed to:

Terance D. Miethe, Ph.D.
Research in Brief Project Coordinator
Center for Analysis of Crime Statistics
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
4505 Maryland Parkway - Box 5009
Las Vegas, NV 89154-5009

Phone: 702-895-0236

Fax: 702-895-0252

Email: miethe@unlv.nevada.edu

Center for the Analysis of Crime Statistics

Department of Criminal Justice
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
4505 S. Maryland Pkwy - Box 5009
Las Vegas, NV 89154-5009

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