

December 10, 2021

MEMO TO: HCP-15 File

F R O M: Tasha Kama, Chair  
Human Concerns and Parks Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tasha Kama", written in a cursive style.

SUBJECT: **TRANSMITTAL OF INFORMATIONAL DOCUMENT RELATING TO  
SEX TRAFFICKING** (HCP-15)

The attached informational document pertains to Item 15 on the Committee's agenda.

hcp:ltr:015afile01:wal

Attachment

# SEX TRAFFICKING IN HAWAI'I

PART III  
SEX TRAFFICKING EXPERIENCES  
ACROSS HAWAI'I



JANUARY 2020



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



## SEX TRAFFICKING IN HAWAI'I PART III: SEX TRAFFICKING EXPERIENCES ACROSS HAWAI'I

January 2020

### AUTHORS

Dominique Roe-Sepowitz  
Arizona State University

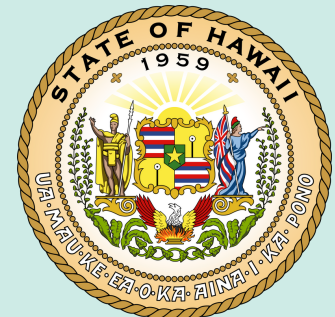
Khara Jabola-Carolus  
Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women

The authors would like to thank the outstanding staff at Child and Family Service for their commitment to their clients and their willingness to support this project through the administration of the survey. We would also like to give our thanks to the participants who took the time to share their life experiences and carefully complete the surveys included in this report.

**ASU** Office of Sex Trafficking  
Intervention Research  
Arizona State University



Child & Family  
SERVICE  
A private nonprofit serving Hawai'i since 1899





# ABOUT THE RESEARCH PARTNERS

## **ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY, OFFICE OF SEX TRAFFICKING INTERVENTION RESEARCH (ASU STIR)**

Founded in 2013, ASU STIR is a center for human trafficking research innovation. ASU STIR staff and partners includes social science researchers, survivor-leaders, and graduate and undergraduate students. The goal of ASU STIR's research is to develop human trafficking specific research and evaluation activities for data driven decision making regarding victim detection, intervention, and treatment. ASU STIR supports the development of clinical interventions, awareness programs, screenings, policy creation, and treatment/program evaluation.

Dr. Roe-Sepowitz, the Director of the ASU STIR Office, has conducted evaluation, intervention, and incidence research on human trafficking for the past 15 years. Dr. Roe-Sepowitz has presented for the U.S. State Department as an expert on human trafficking and has been invited to the White House twice for expert work groups on human trafficking. Dr. Roe-Sepowitz has been selected to participate in workgroups on human trafficking by the United Nations University, U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the U.S. Office of Victims of Crime, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Department of Justice. Dr. Roe-Sepowitz is the clinical director of Phoenix Starfish Place, is the coordinator of the Phoenix 1st Step pop-up Drop-in Center for sex trafficked and prostituted persons. Dr. Roe-Sepowitz has published 35 peer reviewed journal articles and over a dozen technical reports on human trafficking.

## **HAWAI'I COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (HSCSW)**

HSCSW is a statewide feminist government agency that works toward equality for women and girls in the state by acting as a catalyst for positive change through advocacy, education, collaboration and program development. The goal of research at HSCSW is to counteract existing oppressive gender systems that are strengthened by the commercial sex industry and to lead a just, humane transition away from this destructive industry.

Khara Jabola-Carolus is the executive director of Ka Komikina Kūlana Olakino o Nā Wāhine (Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women), a statewide feminist government agency which recently led Hawai'i to become the first and only state to allow any person with a prostitution record to vacate their conviction — except for sex buyers and pimps. Previously, Khara was the Hawai'i public affairs director at Strategies 360, the largest political strategist firm in the western United States. Khara also directed the Hawai'i Coalition for Immigrant Rights, where she passed landmark legislation that extended driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants. She earned her Juris Doctor from the University of Hawai'i with a specialization in Native Hawaiian law. She is a mother of two sons, Laguna Kekipi and Halepueo Kūpa'a. Her family is from Laguna, Philippines.



# ABOUT THE RESEARCH PARTNERS

## CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICE

CFS is a family-centered, full-service community-based organization and has been at work in the community since 1899. Our mission is “Strengthening families and fostering the healthy development of children”. Through nearly 50 programs statewide, CFS offers services on O’ahu, Kaua’i, Maui County, and Hawai’i Island, and welcome everyone from keiki to kūpuna (children to seniors) across the Islands. CFS helps Hawai’i families address some of life’s most serious situations including poverty, abuse, and neglect.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## **This study found nearly 100 sex trafficking victims living in Hawai'i between April and June 2019.**

Human trafficking has been found in all fifty U.S. states and is an issue that impacts both domestic and international victims. Human trafficking is defined as a crime that involves forcing, coercing, or enticing a person to provide labor or engage in exchanging sex for something of value. Victims of human trafficking are often hidden from public view because exploitation occurs in private homes, hotels, vacation rentals, massage parlors, or online. Little is known about sex trafficking victims, traffickers and sex buyers in Hawai'i. This study is only the third research report published to date to explore sex trafficking in Hawai'i. The lack of a general understanding of the scope and complexity of sex trafficking in Hawai'i has allowed the victimization of Hawai'i residents to continue. Services for juvenile and adult sex trafficking victims continue to be very limited. In both this study and our previous research in Hawai'i, sex trafficking victims have been identified in urban and rural areas, in hospitals and drug rehabilitation centers, youth attending school, and in juvenile and adult correctional settings.

This study found nearly 100 sex trafficking victims living in Hawai'i between April and June 2019. Sixty-four percent of the sex trafficking victims identified as being all or some Native Hawaiian. out of every five sex trafficking victims identified in this study had been sex trafficked as a child. Over 20 percent of the sex trafficking victims were male. Nearly a quarter of the sex trafficking victims were sex trafficked by a family member (parent, guardian, sibling, uncle, grandfather). The sex trafficking victims reported high rates of Adverse Childhood

Experiences (ACEs) including family violence and neglect, childhood sexual abuse, domestic and dating violence, having a mental health diagnosis, struggling with drug and alcohol addiction, and being homeless.

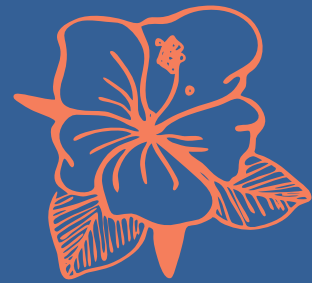
The needs of the sex trafficking victims included medical support, mental health and drug counseling, housing, and trauma-informed care in all systems. The sex trafficking victims described being in contact with many of Hawai'i's institutions of care- in some cases while they were being sex trafficked- including schools, hospitals, mental health providers, criminal justice, and child welfare services.

### **STUDY**

Working in partnership with Child and Family Service, a large statewide non-profit social service organization, this study focuses on the sex trafficking experiences of a large group of individuals receiving social services on five islands in Hawai'i. The participants were given a six-page survey to complete which included questions about abuse, substance use, family connections and dysfunction, homelessness, health and mental health issues. The survey also focused on sex and labor exploitation experiences. For three months in 2019, the survey was administered to participants by trained social workers or support staff at Child and Family Service, which serves many populations and in many locations in Hawai'i . The information shared by the participants through this survey illustrates that sex trafficking currently exists in Hawai'i in disturbing numbers.

# SUMMARY

## OF FINDINGS



### SEX TRAFFICKING EXPERIENCES ACROSS HAWAI'I

#### PARTICIPANT PROFILE

N = 97

- The victims were identified in a cross-sectional survey study of 363 participants served by Child and Family Service.
- Sixty-four percent of the sex trafficking victims identified as being all or some Native Hawaiian.
- More than a quarter (n = 97, 26.7%) of the clients surveyed during a three-month period in 2019 identified as having experienced sex trafficking as defined by federal law.
- The sex trafficking victims were identified on O'ahu (45.4%), Maui (23.7%), Hawai'i Island (20.6%), Kaua'i (6.2%), and Moloka'i (3.1%).
- The victims age at first sex trafficking experience ranged from 4 to 55 years-old, with an overall average age of first sex trafficking experience being 21.4 years.
- Twenty-three percent of the sex trafficking victims were first sex trafficked before they turned 18 years old.
- Of those participants first trafficked under the age of 18, the average age of 1st sex trafficking victimization was 11.3 years old.

# 1 in 4

n = 97, 26.7%

clients served during 3-month time period reported being sex trafficked.



# 11.3

years

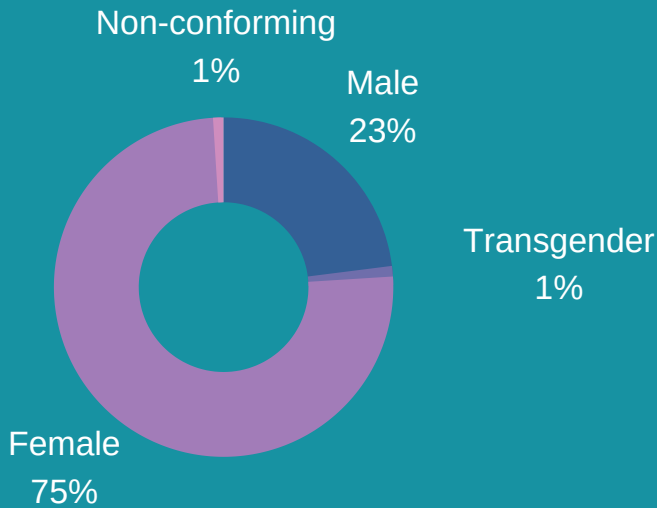
Average age of 1st sex trafficking experience of those first trafficked before age 18.

# 23%

sex trafficked before age 18

# SEX TRAFFICKING IN HAWAI'I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

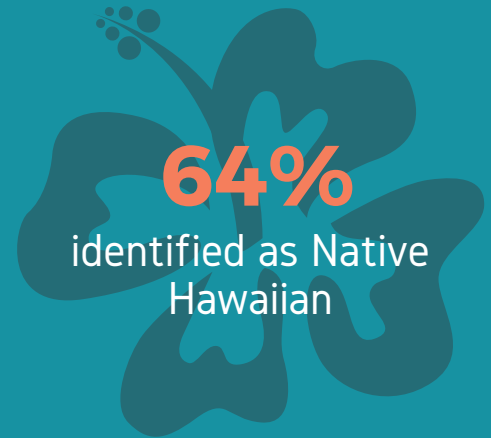
## GENDER



### KEY POINT

Twenty-three percent of the sex-trafficked participants identified as male.

## ETHNIC IDENTITY



### KEY POINT

Eleven (11.3%) of the sex trafficking victims identified as Native Hawaiian and another 51 (52.6%) reported being part Native Hawaiian.

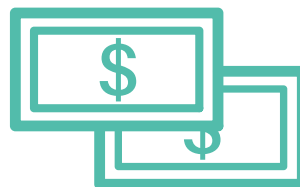
## SEX TRAFFICKING EXPERIENCES

The most common reason identified by the sex trafficking victims for their being forced or coerced to exchange sex was for:



### DRUGS

26.8%



### MONEY

24.7%



### PLACE TO STAY

24.7%



# SEX TRAFFICKING IN HAWAI'I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

## RELATIONSHIP TO SEX TRAFFICKER

A family member was identified as the sex trafficker by a quarter (25.8%) of the participants followed by friend (24.7%) and boyfriend (24.7%). The most common sex trafficker identified by the sex trafficking victims who were under age 18 when they were first sex trafficked was a family member.



**FAMILY**  
25.8%



**FRIEND**  
24.7%



**BOYFRIEND**  
24.7%

## TECHNOLOGY

Nearly one third of the sex trafficked participants reported that technology had been used as part of their sex trafficking experience.

Participants reported the following technology was used to recruit them into a sex trafficking situation:



**WEBSITES AND  
SOCIAL MEDIA**  
17.5%



**SMART  
PHONE**  
16.5%

# SEX TRAFFICKING IN HAWAI'I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

## HOMELESSNESS

**69.1%**

reported experiencing homelessness

Sex trafficking victims were

**2.6x**

more likely to report experiencing homelessness than non-sex trafficked participants.

## ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES)

The sex trafficking victims had a significantly higher rate of reported Adverse Childhood Experiences (4.65 compared to 2.43) than the non-sex trafficked participants.

**66%**

of sex trafficking victims reported experiencing 4 or more ACEs.

## CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING

Of the participants that were first sex trafficked as children:

**39%** had experienced homelessness.

**44%** reported addiction to drugs.

**70%** reported having a mental health diagnosis.

## LABOR TRAFFICKING

More than half (55.7%) of the sex trafficking victims also identified as labor trafficking victims.



# SUMMARY

OF FINDINGS (N = 97)



## Comparing Sex Trafficked and Non-Sex Trafficked Participants

When comparing the sex trafficked participants with the non-sex trafficked participants, the sex trafficked group were:

- 2.5 times more likely to report having witnessed domestic violence between their parents.
- Three times more likely to report having experienced physical abuse.
- Three times more likely to report having experienced emotional abuse.
- 2.5 times more likely to report having run away before the age of 18 years old.
- More likely to report negative law enforcement experiences.
- More likely to report a history of involvement in the juvenile justice system.
- More likely to report gang affiliation.
- 3.2 times more likely to report having experienced teen dating violence.
- 2.6 times more likely to have been in special education classes.
- Four times more likely to report a drug addiction.
- Five times more likely to report using heroin.
- Two times more likely to have attempted suicide.
- The child sex trafficking victims were significantly more likely to have child welfare involved with their children than the non-sex trafficked participants.

# HIGHLIGHTS



In this study we found that sex trafficking victims identified as female, male, transgender, and non-conforming. Seventy-five percent of the sex trafficking victims identified as female. The life experiences of the female and male sex trafficking victims were found to be different. Male victims were more likely to be in a gang and been expelled from school. More than a quarter of the male sex trafficking victims reported being sex trafficked by a girlfriend. Female sex trafficking victims were more likely to report childhood and adolescent sexual and emotional abuse.

The majority of sex trafficking victims in this study were first trafficked as adults, but twenty-three percent reported that they were children when they were first sex trafficked. While an average age for first sex trafficking victimization has not been established in the U.S., the age range in this study, from four to 55 years old is broad and emphasizes that sex trafficking victimization can occur at nearly any time during the lifespan. This finding demonstrates the need for universal awareness, prevention, and screenings for sex trafficking in Hawai'i.

## **Native Hawaiians made up 64 percent of the sex trafficking victims identified in this study.**

Native Hawaiians made up 64 percent of the sex trafficking victims identified in this study. This is the second body of peer-reviewed empirical research to show disproportionate representation of Native Hawaiians among sex trafficking victims in Hawai'i. The commercial sex industry in Hawai'i is dependent on a convenient, low cost supply of nubile human beings for high volumes of sexual activity with strangers. The overutilization of Native Hawaiians to meet sex buyer demand may be directly linked to structural economic coercion and vulnerabilities connected to land dispossession, exposure to sexual violence, hypersexualization, incarceration, cultural dislocation, intergenerational trauma, mental and emotional distress, racism, poverty, and going inequities.

The reasons identified by the sex trafficking victims for being sex trafficked varied but the top reason was for drugs, followed by a place to stay and money.

*1 Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Haumea: Transforming the Health of Native Hawaiian Women and Empowering Wahine Well-Being, 2018*

# HIGHLIGHTS



Sex trafficking victims involved in the juvenile justice system were more likely to report being sex trafficked for drugs. Male victims were more likely to report being sex trafficked for drugs than female victims. Sex trafficking victims who had experienced residential treatment as a child were more likely to report being sex trafficked for money and drugs. Sex trafficking victims who had runaway as a child were likely to report they were sex trafficked for money, drugs, protection, and a place to stay. Sex trafficking victims who reported that they were in special education classes were more likely to report that they were sex trafficked for food, clothing, and drugs. Sex trafficking victims who reported being harassed by peers as a youth were more likely to report that they had been sex trafficked for money, food, and protection. Sex trafficking victims who reported childhood sexual abuse were more likely to report they were sex trafficked for protection and a place to stay.

Homelessness and sex trafficking were found to be connected, with more than two thirds of the sex trafficking victims reporting that they had experienced homelessness in their lifetimes. Sex trafficking victims who reported being homeless were more likely to report also having been in foster care or a group home as a child.

## **One out of every four participants reported having experienced sexual abuse.**

Sex trafficking victims who also reported having experienced homelessness were also more likely to report having witnessed domestic violence in their childhood homes.

The overall rate of sexual abuse reported in this study was that one out of every four participants reported having experienced sexual abuse. While the participants from this study come from a social service agency, the high rate of sexual abuse should cause community concern. Among the sex trafficking victims, sexual abuse was reported by nearly one out of every two (43.3%) participants. Childhood sexual abuse has long been linked as a risk factor to sex trafficking (McClanahan, McClelland, Abram, & Teplin, 1999; Varma, Gillespie, McCracken, & Greenbaum, 2015).

Sex trafficking victims in this study reported experiencing significantly more challenging life experiences than the non-sex trafficked participants. These challenging life experiences included higher scores on the Adverse Childhood Experiences survey with the sex trafficking victims reporting an average

# HIGHLIGHTS



score of 4.46 (out of 10 items) compared to an average score of 2.43 of the non-sex trafficked participants. In the research literature, a score of four or above has been found to be associated with the increased odds for binge and heavy drinking, risky HIV behaviors, diabetes, heart attacks and heart disease, stroke, depression, health-related disabilities, and risky behaviors (Cambell, Walker, & Egede, 2015). In this study, a score of four or above for the sex trafficking victims resulted in being more likely reporting of negative contact with law enforcement, having been in foster care or a group home, having run away from home, and being a victim of bullying. The long-term impact of the childhood abuse and maltreatment on the sex trafficking victims in this study is of grave concern and providing targeted trauma-informed treatment including addressing the sex trafficking victimization is indicated by these findings.

Sex trafficking victims were more likely to report that they were also victims of dating violence. The victims of sex trafficking and dating violence were more likely to report having a parent in prison, negative contact with law enforcement, involvement in the juvenile justice system, experiencing academic difficulties, running away from home, being bullied by school peers, being gang members, and report physical, emotional, and sexual abuse during childhood.

**The long-term impact of the childhood and maltreatment on the sex trafficking victims in this study is of grave concern.**

The sex trafficking and dating violence victims were also more likely to report being addicted to drugs and having participated in self-harm behaviors.

Involvement in juvenile justice and law enforcement was more likely for the victims of sex trafficking including being on juvenile probation and having negative contact with law enforcement. School issues were prevalent among the sex trafficking victims when compared to the non-sex trafficked participants in this study including having academic difficulties, being expelled, and experiencing bullying and harassment from peers. Being in special education services was reported by twenty-four percent of the sex trafficking victims.

Drug use has been previously linked to sex trafficking experiences in the literature and often has numerous roles in the sex trafficking situations. These include being used as a recruitment tool, a way to establish dependency on the sex trafficker, to ease the victim's inhibitions, and to help the victim numb their distress during their victimization (Brawn & Roe-Sepowitz, 2008; Edwards, Iritani, & Hallfors, 2006; Reid, 2011; Wilson, Butler, & Gold, 2014).

# HIGHLIGHTS



Among the sex trafficked participants in this study, 81.4 percent (n =79) reported that they had used drugs. Specific drugs were significantly more likely to be used by the sex trafficking victims including marijuana, methamphetamines, heroin, and vaping. Twenty-two of the sex trafficking victims reported that they were forced to use drugs by their sex traffickers during their sex trafficking experience.

The sex trafficking victims were more likely to report having a mental health diagnosis than the non-sex trafficked participants. The sex trafficking victims were more likely to report experiencing Anxiety, Depression, Bipolar Disorder, and ADD/ADHD. The sex trafficking victims were also more likely to report participating in self-harm behaviors including cutting, risk taking, having sex with strangers, and not eating for long periods of time.

More than twenty percent of the traffickers of the sex trafficking victims in this study were family members. This disputes the traditional anecdote that most sex traffickers are strangers that kidnap the victim or are boyfriends who then trick their victims into prostitution.

## **More than twenty percent of the traffickers of the sex trafficking victims in this study were family members.**

Intrafamilial sex trafficking victims were significantly more likely to report being first victimized before the age of 18. They were also more likely to report that someone else in their family had also been a sex trafficking victim. Sex trafficking victims of family member sex traffickers were also more likely to report that they were afraid to leave or quit the sex trafficking situation due to fear of violence or threats to harm them or their family.

How the sex trafficking victims were sex trafficked included being recruited through websites and social media and one out of every six sex trafficking victims (n = 17) were sold online through social media, dating websites, and sites like Backpage.com and Craigslist.com.

# SEX TRAFFICKING IN HAWAI'I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

## DISCUSSION

The discovery of so many sex trafficking victims in Hawai'i is extraordinary. This study identified ninety-seven victims of sex trafficking and was able to collect data about their life experiences. Using the information from this study, we aim to provide support and evidence for the development of innovative programs to revolutionize prevention and healing for Hawai'i's sex trafficking victims. Sex trafficking is not purely an issue of poverty. Hawai'i residents with a history of childhood abuse, disconnections and violence within their families, pervasive lifetime abuse and Native Hawaiian ancestry are most vulnerable to sex traffickers. This information should be used to gain awareness of who is sex trafficked in Hawai'i, who they are sex trafficked by, and what systems should be on alert to screen, prevent, and detect sex trafficking victimization.

All of the sex trafficking victims found in this study participated in acts of prostitution- the exchange of sex for something of value, but their minor age status or being forced, coerced, or enticed to prostitute themselves determined their identification as a sex trafficking victim. To clarify, sex trafficking was the means, prostitution was the end. Acts of prostitution without a trafficker are not reviewed in this study.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This information should be used to encourage the development of the following in Hawai'i:

- Creating a statewide coordinator to develop an infrastructure of detection, intervention and treatment for victims and to address the underlying causes of sex trafficking.
- Sex trafficking awareness trainings that are victim-centered and trauma-informed
- Sex trafficking specific screening protocols for children and adults
- Sex trafficking specific clinical treatment interventions
- Sex trafficking specific programs for adults
- Sex trafficking prevention programs in schools (7-12th grades)
- Social policies that provide funding support and services for adult and child victims of sex trafficking



## CONTACT INFORMATION FOR THE AUTHORS

**DOMINIQUE ROE SEPOWITZ**

dominique.roe@asu.edu

**KHARA JABOLA-CAROLUS**

kjabola-carolus@dhs.hawaii.gov