



**Covenant
House**



**Homelessness, Survival Sex
and Human Trafficking:
As Experienced by the Youth of
Covenant House New York**

May 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Introduction

In recent years, the plight of human trafficking victims has received a great deal of attention among legislators, social service providers and the popular press. This attention is overdue, as for years, youth forced to engage in prostitution were at best ignored, but more often were treated with contempt, labeled as prostitutes and charged with crimes. Youth forced into labor servitude were routinely overlooked altogether.

As society begins to learn more about the growing problem of domestic trafficking, some questions remain, including even the most basic question: How many people are currently being victimized by trafficking right here in the U.S.? Answering this question is not an easy task, because victims are often reluctant to come forward and seek help. This reluctance is partly because perpetrators frequently convince their victims that if they attempt to seek help, no one will believe them; instead they will be thought of as criminals or prostitutes. Victims' previous experience with law enforcement often only reinforces that belief. Additionally, a lack of any central system to identify and count victims of trafficking leaves policy makers with inaccurate data on the number of domestic trafficking victims, making it difficult to budget and promote appropriate public policy. In order to prevent trafficking and assist survivors, we must first learn to identify the victims.

At Covenant House New York (CHNY), we have seen firsthand the difficulty in identifying victims. As New York City's largest provider of services for homeless youth ages 16-21, we provide comprehensive care including shelter, food, clothing, counseling, medical and legal assistance, case management, job training and education services to over 3,000 youth each year. And since we opened our doors in 1972, we have always known that traffickers and other exploiters seek out vulnerable youth to recruit and victimize. Yet young people do not arrive at the doors of our shelter stating "Help, I have been trafficked." Instead they say, "Help, I need food and a place to sleep."

Although we were certain that there were large numbers of trafficking survivors among our clients, we were having difficulty identifying them due to the reluctance of young people to disclose their experience. For this reason, we sought out the assistance of the Applied Developmental Psychology Department at Fordham University to help us develop and scientifically validate a screening tool to better identify trafficking victims among our youth. In addition to developing the tool, we hoped to learn more about the type and amount of trafficking our youth have experienced to better inform both our practice and our advocacy. Using the tool we developed, we surveyed a random sample of 174 youth between 18 and 23 years old.

Key Findings¹

- Before they arrived at CHNY, 14.9% of the youth in our random sample experienced some form of trafficking victimization, consistent with the definition under federal law, (TVPA). An additional 8%, all of whom were over the age of 18, engaged in survival sex. This means that approximately one in four of the youth either was a victim of trafficking or had engaged in survival sex at some point in his or her life. CHNY serves over 3,000 youth each year; as a result, it is possible that CHNY annually serves as many as 700 youth that have experienced trafficking or survival sex.
- Of the youth who experienced trafficking, just over a third were designated trafficking victims because they traded sex for something of value involving no apparent coercion prior to age 18. Over a third received the designation because they were victims of compelled sex trafficking, involving force, fraud or coercion, either before or after age 18. Almost 3% of the sampled youth were forced into labor servitude.
- The youth who experienced compelled sex trafficking reported experiences of violence, intimidation and/or gang rape. Four participants in this category reported being kidnapped before being forced into prostitution, and several youth described repeated unsuccessful attempts at escape. The traffickers were often family members, friends of family, or boyfriends who at first pretended to love and care for the homeless youth, but later abused them and forced them into prostitution.
- Shelter was the number one commodity traded in return for sexual activity. Of those who engaged in commercial sex activity, almost half – 48% in total - said they did it because they did not have a place to stay. Participants explained how traffickers loiter in areas where homeless youth are known to gather and then tell them that the shelters are full and offer them a place to stay in lieu of sleeping on the streets.
- Risk factors, in addition to homelessness, include prior childhood sexual abuse, the lack of any caring supportive adult in a youth's life, and the lack of education or any means to earn an income. Pimps and other traffickers specifically look to recruit youth with these risk factors.
- Although there is a significant legal distinction between sex trafficking and survival sex, our results demonstrated a great deal of fluidity between the two. What started initially as survival sex frequently turned into coercive and violent trafficking experiences. Whether it was survival sex or compelled sex trafficking, all youth regretted the experience.
- Four out of four of the transgender participants reported having engaged in commercial sex activity. Two gay male youth and one bisexual/questioning gay male youth reported commercial sex activity, with one instance being a case of compelled sex trafficking. A perceived lack of constructive employment opportunities for the transgender youth led to the belief that commercial sex activity was the only available option.
- Prior studies have found that the initial age of entry into commercial sexual activity is between 12 and 14. However, possibly due to the older age of our participants, 44% of the sampled youth who experienced commercial sex activity traded sex for something of value for the first time when they were over the age of 18. This may be because for many CHNY youth, homelessness occurred only after the age of 18 when they signed themselves out of foster care or were kicked out of a family home.
- The use of our newly developed screening tool was found to be effective in the identification of trafficking victims among homeless youth. We successfully validated the long form of the human trafficking assessment measure (HTIAM-14) developed for this study. However, the results demonstrate that despite the rigors of science and validation, trafficking survivors will only disclose their experiences when he or she is ready to do so and will only disclose them to people they feel comfortable with. We therefore urge caution that if a youth does not answer any of the questions in the affirmative, one cannot be assured that they have not experienced trafficking. Instead, when using the tool for the purposes of identification and service provision, instead of for research, the questions may need to be asked at a different time, and perhaps by a different staff member, once trusting relationships have had a chance to develop.

1 Please refer to the text box on the subsequent page for the definitions of legal and technical terms.

APPENDIX-HTIAM-14¹¹

Human Trafficking Interview and Assessment Measure

INTERVIEWER CODING INSTRUCTIONS

Read through measure thoroughly before administering. Only administer Section B to individuals who do not hold U.S. Citizenship. Carefully read introductory comments as well as “Definition of Work” and “Definition of Sexual Activity” statements written in bold typeface to individual. Ask questions in bold typeface and follow item-response instructions listed beneath each question. Carefully read italicized “Notes to Interviewer” comments that follow each item, and use to guide further probing as necessary. Many questions include a “Please explain” prompt that may be substituted with similar phrases (e.g. “Could you tell me more about that?”). As many questions address sensitive subjects, use clinical judgment in deciding when to preface a question or prompt with appropriate phrasing (e.g. “If you feel comfortable, could you please provide an example?”). Use line space provided to record individual’s response to open-ended questions, including as much detail as possible. At the end of each item, code for the likelihood that item response indicates evidence of that item variable. Responses that indicate trafficking activity should receive a minimum score of 2.

e.g. Evidence of unsafe/coercive work environment: ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

0 = No evidence

1 = Slight evidence

2 = Moderate evidence

3 = Strong evidence

Introductory Comments:

This is an interview about your experiences that have led you to Covenant House. I ask that you be as honest as you can in answering questions. I understand that some questions may be very sensitive and difficult to answer, and you are under no obligation to answer anything you do not want to. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you can take a break from the interview or withdraw from the study. Everything you say during the interview will be kept completely confidential, and nothing you say here will be disclosed without your permission, unless you describe a scenario where you or someone else is in immediate danger, including a scenario where a child is at risk for abuse or neglect. Whether you have experienced any of the things we will ask you about or not, by answering the questions honestly, you are helping us help others who have experienced exploitation and trafficking. Before we begin, you should know that we are grateful that you are sitting down and taking the time to answer our questions. Remember that everything you say is voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Do you have any questions?

¹¹ The HTIAM-14 was the measure designed and used for the presented research study. For use in applied settings to identify victims, the coding scheme and introductory comments may be modified and the scoring boxes on the last page may be deleted. Any client who receives a score of 2 or more on any question and any client for whom the interviewer believes there is a potential of trafficking victimization, should be seen by someone with expertise in working with trafficking survivors. As stated in the report, negative responses do not necessarily mean that the individual is not a victim of trafficking, but rather that the questions may need to be asked again at a later time once relationships have had a chance to develop further.

Section A – Personal Information

- A1. [PI_AGE] Age _____
- A2. [PI_GEN] Gender _____
- A3. [PI_ETH] Race/ethnicity _____
- A4. [PI_EDU] Highest level of education _____
- A5. [PI_USCIT] U.S. Citizen _____
- A6. [PI_CHLD] Children _____

Section B – Immigration Status [Mig]

Only administer Section B if individual is not a U.S. Citizen.

B1. [Mig_FORCMIG]

Did you arrange your own travel to the United States?

If YES → Score 0.

If NO → **Did anyone force you to migrate or travel to the United States? Or was there a time during your journey where you didn't want to continue and wanted to return home but weren't allowed to?**

If NO → Score 0.

If YES → **Who brought you? Can you describe your journey?**

Notes to Interviewer: Look for signs of fear or involuntary participation in migration process. If migrated as infant/ young child, not a sign of forced migration. If sought migration or migrated willingly; not a sign of forced migration.

Notes: _____

Evidence of forced migration: ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

B2. [Mig_MISLED]

Sometimes young people travel to the United States because they are promised work or an education, only to find out when they get here that they won't be doing what they expected. Did you come to the United States because you or your parents were promised work or an education?

If NO → Score 0.

If YES → **Was the work and payment that you received the same as you were originally promised?**

If YES → Score 0.

If NO → Please explain what was different than expected?

→ **Did you feel forced or threatened to do the work anyway?**

If NO → Score 0.

If YES → **Please explain.**

Notes to Interviewer: Look for evidence that work or payment was different than expected, probe for how it was different. Look for fraud, deception, compulsion or fear in doing work. Note that needing to do work simply for money is not necessarily an indication of trafficking.

Notes: _____

Evidence of misleading work expectations: ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

B3. [Mig_DEBT]

Sometimes when young people travel to the United States, they make an agreement with the person or people who organized their travel. Did you or your family owe something to the person or people who helped you come to the United States?

If NO → Score 0.

If YES → **Were the services or the amount of time it took to repay the debt different than what you expected?**

→ **Were you or your family threatened or told that if you did not repay the debt you or your family would be harmed?**

If NO to both → Score 0.

If YES to either → **Please explain.**

Notes to Interviewer: Look for signs of forced work as a means of repaying migration debt, and for signs that exploiter added to/extended original terms debt (e.g. debt bondage).

Notes: _____

Evidence of debt bondage: ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

B4. [Mig_DOC]

Has anyone ever held your ID or other legal documents without your consent?

If NO → Score 0.

If YES → **Please explain.**

Notes to Interviewer: Look for signs indicating that ID/documents are being kept from them against their will. Does not include parents holding documents for their children.

Notes: _____

Evidence of withholding documentation against will: ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

Total Score Section B: _____/12

"Definition of Work" Statement:

Many of the questions I will ask you involve work situations. When I say "work", this means anything you have done where you or someone else received something of value, such as money, food, clothing, a place to stay, protection, drugs or gifts in exchange for your work or efforts. Using this definition, "work" could mean a more typical job such as working in a store or restaurant, but it could also mean stripping, prostitution, shoplifting, running drugs, or anything where your efforts were exchanged for something of value. Aside from a typical employer, someone you worked for could include a family member, a friend, boyfriend or girlfriend, or anyone you lived with or were in a relationship with.

Section C – Psychological/Financial Coercion [Coer]

C1. [Coer_WRKENV]

It is not uncommon for young people to stay in work situations that are risky or even dangerous, simply because they have no other options. Have you ever worked in a place that made you feel scared or unsafe?

If NO → Score 0.

If YES → **Were you, your family, or coworker(s) ever threatened by the person or people you worked for?**

→ **Did you ever witness another employee being hurt or threatened?**

→ **Did the person or people you work for ever threaten to report you to the police or authorities?** [If immigrant; to immigration].

If YES to any of the above → **Please explain.**

Notes to Interviewer: Look for a response of “yes” to any of these questions, and an indication of a threat to their personal safety or well-being, or the personal safety or well-being of others.

Notes: _____

Evidence of unsafe/coercive work environment: ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

C2. [Coer_FORCE]

In thinking back over your past experiences, have you ever been tricked or forced into doing any kind of work that you did not want to do?

If NO → Score 0.

If YES → **Please explain.**

Notes to Interviewer: Look for signs of external pressure or coercion, where individual felt obligated to comply. Fear of getting fired and/or needing money do not qualify as “force.” Gently probe with “who” questions.

Notes: _____

Evidence of forced work/labor: ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

C3. [Coer_EXPEC]

Sometimes people agree to work/payment arrangements only to find out that what they are being asked to do, or what they are being paid, is very different than what they expected. Have you ever been promised work where the work or payment ended up being different than what you expected?

If NO → Score 0.

If YES → **Aside from needing the money, did you feel forced or pressured to continue with this job?**

If NO → Score 0.

If YES → **Please explain.**

Notes to Interviewer: Look for a response of “yes” to last question, and an indication of external coercion, lack of agency or involuntariness in continuing with work. Misleading expectations alone and/or needing the money are not enough to indicate trafficking.

Notes: _____

Evidence of continued work despite misleading work/payment expectations: ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

C4. [Coer_QUIT]

Sometimes people are prevented from leaving an unfair or unsafe work situation by their employers. Have you ever been afraid to leave or quit a work situation due to fears of violence or other threats of harm to yourself or your family?

If NO → Score 0.

If YES → **What did you think would happen if you tried to leave?**

→ **Did you ever see anyone who tried to leave or quit harmed or threatened?**

If YES to either → **Please explain.**

Notes to Interviewer: Look for a response of “yes” to either question, and an indication of a coercive or unjustified threat to the personal safety and well-being of themselves or their friends and family upon leaving. Probe with “who” questions to learn who was pressuring or preventing the individual from leaving. If needed, remind individual that a work situation can involve a boyfriend or significant other who is earning money off their work.

Notes: _____

Evidence of fear of quitting/leaving: ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

Total Score Section C: ____/1

Section D – Control [Ctrl]

D1. [Ctrl_FIN]

Some employers think that in exchange for the work their employees do, they can pay them in other ways even though they’ve never gotten their permission. Has someone you worked for ever controlled the money you earned, or kept money you earned in exchange for transportation, food or rent without your consent?

If NO → Score 0.

If YES → **Please explain.**

Notes to Interviewer: Look for evidence that the individual was not provided proper payment and that the provision of housing, meals, etc. at unjust rates was offered as an excuse for keeping their earned money.

Notes: _____

Evidence of improper payment: ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

D2. [Ctrl_ISOL]

Have you ever worked for someone who did not let you contact your friends or family, or the outside world, even when you weren’t working?

If NO → Score 0.

If YES → **Please explain.**

Notes to Interviewer: Look for signs that employer/trafficker kept individual isolated, deprived of social support or external resources, and/or fostered dependency on employer/trafficker.

Notes: _____

Evidence of isolation: ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

D3. [Ctrl_LIE]

Sometimes employers don't want people to know about the kind of work they have young employees doing. To protect themselves, they ask their employees to lie about the kind of work they are involved in. Have you ever worked for someone who asked you to lie when speaking to others about the work you do?

If NO → Score 0.

If YES → **Why did they ask you to lie? Please explain.**

Notes to Interviewer: Look for signs that indicate that lies are used to cover illegal work, to protect employer/trafficker, to or prevent individual from getting caught/leaving.

Notes: _____

Evidence of concealed work: ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

Total Score Section D: _____/9

"Definition of Sexual Activity" Statement:

These last few questions I will ask you about have to do with earning something of value in exchange for sexual activity. "Sexual activity" could mean dancing, stripping, posing for photos, or having any kind of sex, including oral sex, with someone in exchange for something of value such as money, food, clothing, a place to stay, protection, drugs, gifts or favors. Remember, an employer could be anyone who you worked for, including a family member, a friend, boyfriend or girlfriend, or anyone you lived with or were in a relationship with.

Section E – Sexual Exploitation [SxExpl]

E1. [SxExpl_COMMSEX]

Sometimes young people who are homeless or who are having difficulties with their families have very few options to survive or fulfill their basic needs, such as food and shelter. Sometimes they are exploited or feel the need to use their sexuality to help them survive. Have you or anyone else ever received anything of value, such as money, a place to stay, food, drugs, gifts or favors, in exchange for your performing a sexual activity?

YES ☐ (3 points)

NO ☐ (0 points)

If NO → Stop; score 0 on both E2 and E3.

If YES → **If you feel comfortable, could you provide an example of this?**

→ Ask E2 & E3

Notes: _____

E2. [SxExpl_LEGALDEF]

Did you feel that someone was encouraging, pressuring, or forcing you to do this?

Notes to Interviewer: Look for evidence of involuntary / nonconsensual sexual activity in exchange for something of value. Probe for presence of coercive boyfriend/trafficker in example provided. Note degree of force (e.g. "encouraging" yields a score of 1, threats to physical safety yields a score of 3).

Notes: _____

Degree of force, fraud or coercion in commercial sexual activity: ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

E3. [SxExpl_AGE]

How old were you at your first encounter? _____

☐ V (Under18)

☐ Legal Adult (18 or older)

Total Score Section E: _____/6

If "YES" with score of "0" on E2 and at least 18 years of age, check here: **SURVIVAL SEX**

INTERVIEWER NOTES: NONVERBAL INDICATORS

SCORING BOX

**If Section B Administered
(Non U.S. -Citizens):**

Total Score Section B: _____/12

Total Score Section C: _____/12

Total Score Section D: _____/9

Total Score Section E: _____/6

Total Score: _____/39

**If Section B NOT Administered
(U.S. Citizens):**

Total Score Section C: _____/12

Total Score Section D: _____/9

Total Score Section E: _____/6

Total Score: _____/27 ☐ V

Do you believe this person is a victim of human trafficking? ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

Type of trafficking: (Check all that apply)

☐ Non-Victim

☐ Victim: Labor

☐ Victim: Sex (all ages; force, fraud, coercion)

☐ Victim: Sex (under 18; no force, fraud, coercion)

☐ Survival Sex (over 18; no force, fraud, coercion)

☐ Other _____