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## Human trafficking

### Chicago is one of the leading cities in this global epidemic

by Ashley Griffin

In July 2010, Corey Allen Lockett, 23, of Springfield was arrested on federal prostitution charges after he placed ads on Craigslist to solicit sex with minors and admitted to pimping other girls. In October 2009, Cook County sheriffs, officers broke up a sex trafficking ring that involved three women from Thailand. In the three weeks the women spent in America, they were shuffled between New York, Dallas, San Francisco and Chicago for prostitution. Passports were taken from the women, who did not speak English. Threats toward their families from an unknown woman kept them in Chicago.

In August 2010, police officers observed a 15-year-old girl dressed in fishnet stockings and a bra and identified Cornelius Mondane, 45, and Shermille Patterson, 41, of Chicago as her pimps. The girl informed officers that she had been recruited to prostitute for the pair, and they were charged with felony crimes: involuntary sexual servitude of a minor and trafficking in persons for forced labor or services. If convicted, they could face up to 30 years in prison.

The list of human and sex trafficking crimes in Illinois goes on. In recent years, much attention has been drawn to the issue of human trafficking, not only in Illinois but across the country. Countless news stories have been published, and at least 40 state laws addressing the issue were passed in 2011, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Human trafficking has become a global epidemic that plagues almost every country and is one of the world's fastest-growing crimes. The U.S. Department of Justice estimates the sex trafficking industry brings in approximately \$9.5 billion a year.

Globally, it has reached an all-time high. The United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking estimates that 2.5 million people are forced into labor, including sexual exploitation, at any given time. It also reports that victims are trafficked from 127 countries to be exploited in 137 countries, affecting every continent and every type of economy.

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**The situation of helplessness and abuse in which traffickers keep their victims makes it difficult for them to break away and hard for them to adjust when and if they gain freedom.**



But have public outcry and tougher laws made a difference for victims? Many have spent much of their lives in a violent cycle. How do they adjust to life after freedom?

When trying to gauge progress against an illicit activity marked by the oppression and silencing of its victims, often it's difficult to tell. Human trafficking is the illegal trade in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor and is often referred to as modern slavery. Forced labor often involves unsafe working conditions and long hours for little or no pay spent on manual work, such as agricultural labor, manufacturing or textile production.

With regions such as Asia and eastern Europe experiencing some of the highest rates of trafficking, some may assume that sex trafficking only happens in Third World countries, but new research shows that human trafficking occurs in the United States, and Chicago is one of the leading cities.

The U.S. Department of Education has noted that cases of human trafficking have been reported in all 50 states, and in Illinois, the state Department of Human Services reported that from December 2007 to June 2009, 257 calls were made from Illinois to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, making Illinois the fifth-highest state for calls, after Texas, California, New York and Florida.

The FBI labeled Chicago as one of 13 locations of "High Intensity Child Prostitution," and a 2003 *New York Times* report deemed Chicago as a national crossroads for human trafficking. With about 26 miles separating two international airports, major interstates and a high number of tourists who visit the city each year, Chicago can be considered a pimp's dream for trafficking women into sexual acts or forced labor.

According to the Center for Impact Research, in metropolitan Chicago, 16,000 to 25,000 women and girls are involved in commercial sex trade annually, with one-third of them first getting involved in prostitution by the age of 15, and 62 percent by the age of 18.

Illinois took steps to address its human trafficking problems with the Illinois Trafficking of Persons and Involuntary Servitude Act, which took effect in 2006. The law was touted as one of the most aggressive in the nation.

The act aimed to prosecute human trafficking offenders and assist victims of sex crimes. The act was also meant to empower the attorney general to crack down on human trafficking crimes and to make it easier for the Department of Human Services to assist victims and offer them any social services they may need.

But to date, Illinois' law on involuntary servitude has only been used against 29 defendants, according to End Demand Illinois, a campaign that focuses on turning law enforcement's attention to the people who solicit sex and the customers who buy it.

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"We need to do more to make the statute more effective. What we are seeing is traffickers and pimps able to get away with crimes with little to no consequence," says Daria Mueller, associate director of state affairs for the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, a partner of End Demand Illinois.

A recent study from DePaul College of Law, *From Victims to Victimizers: Interviews with 25 Ex-Pimps in Chicago*, painted a picture of the sex-trafficking world while also giving insight into why the problem is so difficult to address. The study looked at the pimps who abuse, cajole and sometimes even hold hostage girls and young women for the purpose of selling their bodies.

Cycles of abuse stretching across generations are also common tales in the sex trade.

DePaul researchers Jody Raphael and Brenda Myers-Powell found that most pimps themselves have been victims of sexual violence, come from homes where prostitution was in the family and often were recruited into the role of pimp.

"My mother was my first pimp. She used to sell me to the landlord and other men who wanted a young girl. She was a junkie," one pimp was quoted in the report. After the girl ran away, she was picked up by a pimp and held against her will, and later was held captive by another. "I thought that was normal."

Pimps often force prostitutes under their control to have their children and also use those children for future forced labor, according to Lynne Johnson, policy and advocacy director for the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (CAASE).

Although there is no standard formula on how a pimp may recruit a victim, some experts believe most pimps seek out young girls who are in need.

Mueller says some pimps may go to bus stations, homeless shelters and group homes to find victims who are looking to escape from something.

Often, victims who are runaways can be the perfect targets because they are looking for stability, safety and someone to look up to.

"[Pimps] may say, 'You look like you are in trouble; I will give you the things you need,'" Johnson says. "It's all a grooming process, where young people who are in need, and someone much older than them offers them kindness and care at first, but gradually the relationship shifts, and they are going to have to sell sex. It is a system of power and control and a lot of violence."

According to the DePaul study, "Pimps used various deceptive strategies to recruit needy young girls. One subject told researchers: "It's impossible to protect all girls from guys like I was because that's what we do. We eat, drink and sleep thinking of ways to trick young girls into

doing what we want them to do.” The report found that pimps would manage anywhere from two to 30 women at a given time.

The situation of helplessness and abuse in which traffickers keep their victims makes it difficult for them to break away and hard for them to adjust when and if they gain freedom. “Survivors say that they think they cannot live a day without [their pimps],” Johnson says.

Judy Shipp, executive director of the Counseling Center and Student Support Services at the University of Illinois Springfield, says survivors may always have to deal with the traumatic experience of being in the sex trade.

“Some victims can have flashbacks of the abuse, depression, anxiety and intense fear. They may have been forced to use alcohol or illicit drugs as part of the abuse, or now use that as a coping mechanism,” Shipp says. “Those are some of the issues we tend to see in someone.” Victims can also suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Not only can a victim of a sex crime suffer from various health problems, it can also be hard for a victim to gain financial stability. Some victims of sexual trafficking reach freedom only to find themselves with a criminal record and few options.

States, including Illinois, New York and Maryland, enacted laws to help child victims clear their names.

“For too long, exploited children have been treated as criminals, while the adults who stole their innocence go free,” said Gov. Pat Quinn at a news conference when the bill was signed into law in 2010. “Illinois does not tolerate exploitation of our children.”

Illinois became the first state to enact legislation that allows victims of a sex trafficking crime to seek to clear their arrest record. State law also aims to protect anyone under 18 who has been involved in the sex trade by making a child immune from prosecution and also by raising penalties against pimps and customers who buy sex. The law requires that victims under the age of 18 be presumed abused or neglected, and they can be placed in temporary protective custody. Law enforcement officers now have to report an incident of trafficking to the Department of Children and Family Services, and an investigation must be conducted within 24 hours of the incident.

But some advocates would like to see more changes for adult survivors who are trying to get back on their feet. “What about the job that won’t hire her because it says prostitution on her rap sheet?” says Myers-Powell, co-founder and chief operating officer of the Dreamcatcher Foundation. “They won’t hire prostituting women and girls because they have a background.”

Lawmakers are currently considering a bill that sponsor Rep. Kelly Cassidy of Chicago says would create more tools for law enforcement to combat human trafficking and funnel more money toward helping

victims. Advocates hope that if the bill becomes law, it would lead to more prosecutions of sex traffickers.

“**[House Bill 5278]** makes it easier for forfeiture to take away the profits, and those profits can then be taken and used to provide services to victims of human trafficking. It creates better definitions of the method that traffickers use to control their victims, to better reflect what is really happening out on the streets,” Cassidy says. As of press time, the measure had passed in the House and was awaiting consideration in the Senate.

Meanwhile, several organizations in the state are working to address the problem. Advocacy groups such as End Demand Illinois, Illinois Rescue and Restore Coalition, CAASE and the Dreamcatcher Foundation have programs to raise awareness of human trafficking. Some offer services to former victims.

The Chicago-based Dreamcatcher Foundation offers programs such as the Youth Empowerment Project, which gives women preventive approaches to avoid sexual exploitation, and My Life, My Choice, which is a 12-week program that helps victims who have been in the sex-trade industry.

CAASE interviewed people who had bought sex in the Chicago area for a 2007 study and found that their average age was 39. The majority had attended some college or obtained a college or graduate degree and earned more than \$40,000 a year.

Johnson says many victims are forced to fill a quota. She says the average sex-trafficking victim makes about \$500 a day to give to her pimp.

“Can you picture a 16-year-old girl having to sleep with 20 men a day?” asks Johnson, who has advocated for law enforcement to focus more on the people who buy and sell sex than on the prostitute, who is often being treated as a commodity. “Now wrap your head around the 20 men who bought sex from a 16-year-old.”

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