

# Analysis of Human Trafficking Cases in Rhode Island, 2009-2013

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## Abstract

This article is an analysis of law enforcement identified cases of human trafficking in Rhode Island from 2009 to 2013. Information was collected from police and court records, prosecutors' press releases, and reports in the media. During this period, there was one case of forced labor of a domestic worker and six cases of domestic sex trafficking. Many of the characteristics of the Rhode Island cases were consistent with other human trafficking cases in the United States. Discussions of key findings include (a) outcomes of a criminal case using a new human trafficking statute on fraud in foreign contracting and a civil suit, (b) how online prostitution ads are used to market victims to sex buyers using ethnicity of the victims and age and social standing of the sex buyers, and (c) how mothers of victims are involved in locating their daughters and making reports to the police that initiated investigations.

## Keywords

criminology, social sciences, court cases, law, women's studies, sex and gender, sociology, crime, law, deviance, sociology of law, criminology and criminal justice, law and courts, legal studies, political science, criminal behavior

## Introduction

This article is an analysis of law enforcement identified cases of human trafficking in Rhode Island from 2009 to 2013. It gives a summary overview of the Rhode Island cases and compares them with U.S. national statistics on human trafficking.

The analysis in this article uses only law enforcement identified cases, making the findings about human trafficking operations precisely focused on legally defined human trafficking (Wilson & Dalton, 2008). Several key findings emerged from the analysis of the seven human trafficking cases. These findings reveal insights into human trafficking perpetrators and human trafficking operations. They include (a) the outcome of a federal criminal case of forced labor in which a new anti-trafficking statute was used, and the outcome of a civil suit involving the same case; (b) an analysis of the online prostitution advertisements, including how victims were marketed to sex buyers using their ethnicity and how sex buyers of certain ages and class standing were attracted by the advertisements; and (c) how victims' mothers were involved in finding their daughters and making reports to the police that resulted in the arrests of the traffickers. This later finding introduces a previously undocumented phenomenon that calls for more research.

## Method

The federal and state anti-human trafficking laws provide definitions of human trafficking that can be used for research

as well as prosecution of traffickers. For many years, researchers had to rely on their own definitions of trafficking or make their own evaluations about whether the research populations met the criteria of human trafficking victims or perpetrators. This analysis relies on legal definitions of human trafficking and law enforcement identified cases.

## Definition of Crimes in Cases in This Analysis

The cases used in this analysis are based on violations of federal and state anti-human trafficking and trafficking-related laws. The federal anti-human trafficking law, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, defines a severe form of human trafficking as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for one of three purposes: (a) labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery; (b) a commercial sex act, through use of force, fraud, or coercion; or (c) a commercial sex act if the person is under 18 years of age (Trafficking

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Victims Protection Act, 2000). The federal statute used in charges in the cases in this analysis is 18 U.S.C. 1591 Sex Trafficking of a Child or by Force, Fraud or Coercion.

Another federal law that is closely related to the anti-trafficking law that is frequently used in federal prosecutions, but does not require proof of force, fraud, or coercion, is a "transportation offense." This crime (18 U.S.C. 2421 Transportation for Illegal Sexual Activity and Related Crimes) is defined as knowingly transporting a person for the purpose of prostitution or any illegal sexual activity.

The third federal charge in the cases used in this analysis is Fraud in Foreign Contracting (18 U.S.C. 1351). It is defined as knowingly recruiting, soliciting, or hiring a person outside the United States for purposes of employment in the United States by means of false pretenses or promises or fraud.

After the new federal law defined human trafficking passed in 2000, states in the United States followed with state anti-human trafficking laws that closely followed the federal definition of human trafficking. In 2009, Rhode Island passed a comprehensive human trafficking law: An Act Relating to Criminal Offenses (2009). It defined trafficking as whoever knowingly subjects, attempts to subject, or engages in a conspiracy to subject another person for forced labor or commercial sexual activity using the following means: (a) causing or threatening to cause physical harm to any person; (b) physically restraining or threatening to physically restrain another person; (c) abusing or threatening to abuse the law or legal process; (d) knowingly destroying, concealing, removing, confiscating, or possessing without that person's consent any actual or purported passport or other immigration document, or any other actual or purported government identification document, of another person; or (e) by using intimidation (An Act Relating to Criminal Offenses, 2009).

The state cases of sex trafficking used in this analysis involve two statutes: Trafficking of Persons for Forced Labor or Commercial Sexual Activity (RI 11-67-3) and Sex Trafficking of Minor (RI 11-67-6).

With established legal definitions and the prosecution of human trafficking cases, research can be done on precisely defined victims, traffickers, and trafficking operations.

### *Sources of Data for This Analysis*

A recent report (Surtees, 2014) evaluating the status of research on human trafficking criticized the state of empirical knowledge about human trafficking. It claimed that what was known about the perpetrators and the human trafficking operations was "rudimentary, fragmentary and relatively meager." The report attributed this deficiency to many researchers relying on victim interviews, and using their accounts to characterize human trafficking. The report recommends looking for sources beyond victim interviews. In particular, the report calls for more research on human trafficking operations (Surtees, 2014). This analysis of human trafficking uses sources other than victims.

This article analyzes law enforcement identified human trafficking cases in Rhode Island based on police and court records, prosecutors' press releases, and reports in the media. The cases are law enforcement confirmed human trafficking case which are cases in which an arrest was made, and the offender charged with one of the offenses listed in the previous section.

Researchers identified cases of human trafficking in Rhode Island by searching in several places, including annual reports from the websites of the U.S. Attorney's Office and the Rhode Island Attorney General's Office, local news media archives and websites for newspaper articles, and videos related to arrests, convictions, and sentencing of human traffickers. The researchers verified the cases with the Rhode Island Attorney General's Office and the U.S. Attorney's office.

The following primary documents were retrieved from the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island and the Superior Court of Rhode Island: statements by police officers and witnesses about human trafficking crimes, indictments, plea agreements, and sentencing memoranda.

In addition, press releases from the Rhode Island Attorney General's Office and the U.S. Attorney's Office were collected. Statements in the press releases often added important information about the cases, such as historic precedents of the cases and the nature of the crimes. Media sources from newspapers, TV news, and blogs were used when they supplemented the information from the primary sources. Sometimes media sources were used as a reference when the information was not available in official documents. An example of that kind of information is a quote made by law enforcement at a news conference about an arrest.

Information from multiple sources was combined to create a detailed description of each case. Aspects of the cases were compared and analyzed to find differences and similarities among the cases. The findings from the Rhode Island cases were then compared with national statistics on human trafficking cases. Several key findings from the cases are discussed in detail.

### **General Characteristics of the Human Trafficking Cases in Rhode Island**

From 2009 until the end of 2013, there were seven cases of human trafficking in Rhode Island. During this period, there was one case of forced labor and six cases of sex trafficking.

In many ways, the Rhode Island cases are similar to other human trafficking cases in the United States. In the words of Ambassador-at-Large Luis CdeBaca, of the U.S. State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons: "The Rhode Island cases are symbolic of modern slavery" (Mulvaney, 2011c). According to data from federally funded human trafficking task forces (2008-2010), 80% of suspected incidents of human trafficking were sex trafficking, and 10% of incidents were forced labor (Banks & Kyckelhahn, 2011). The Rhode Island human trafficking cases followed

the same pattern, with six of the seven cases being sex trafficking and one case being forced labor.

The one case of forced labor was a case of domestic servitude. The perpetrator was a foreign national from the United Arab Emirates. The victim was a foreign national from the Philippines. The U.S. Attorney's Office prosecuted this case. Following the criminal case, the victim filed a civil suit against the trafficker.

### *Cases of Domestic Sex Trafficking*

All of the sex trafficking cases were domestic trafficking cases, meaning the victims were U.S. citizens, and they were not transported across international borders. This pattern of victims of sex trafficking being U.S. citizens is consistent with the findings of the Department of Justice study that found that 83% of victims of sex trafficking were U.S. citizens (Banks & Kyckelhahn, 2011). Furthermore, two of the cases were Rhode Island domestic trafficking cases, meaning both the trafficker and the victims were from Rhode Island and the victims were exploited in prostitution in the small state of Rhode Island.

Most of the sex trafficking cases involved interstate transportation of victims. In four of the six cases, traffickers brought the victims to Rhode Island from Massachusetts, New York, or Indiana. In one case of interstate transportation, two traffickers from New York stated that they brought victims to Rhode Island because of the lack of a law against prostitution (Milkovits, 2010c). In one sex trafficking case, a male trafficker traveled with the victims to Rhode Island, while his female partner remained in Indiana and organized the advertising of the victims online (Neronha, 2010b).

### *Victims of Sex Trafficking*

A number of the sex trafficking cases involved interstate transportation of victims. Two of the six cases of sex trafficking involved traffickers bringing minor girls from Massachusetts to Rhode Island. Law enforcement personnel, service providers, and researchers have known for a long time that women and girls are trafficked from Massachusetts to Rhode Island. Rhode Island strip clubs and other adult entertainment businesses were attractive places for traffickers to offer their victims to sex buyers because there was no law against indoor prostitution and no enforcement of existing sex trafficking laws in Rhode Island before 2009.

In the six cases of sex trafficking, there were eight perpetrators and 11 victims identified in the cases. Of the 11 victims of sex trafficking, all were women or teen girls. There was a wide age range among the victims. Six of the victims were minors (under the age of 18) and five of the victims were adults (age 18 or older). The youngest victim was 14 years old. The oldest victim was 45.

Many service providers, law enforcement personnel, and researchers have recognized that runaways are frequently

exploited by sex traffickers (Kotrla, 2010; Shared Hope International, 2009). The Rhode Island cases of sex trafficking fit this pattern. Five out of the six minor victims of sex trafficking were reported missing by their families or had run away from group homes. In May 2014, the Rhode Island Attorney General's Office said that it had a dozen active cases and was investigating another dozen. An agency that provides services to victims of trafficking said that it was assisting 20 trafficking victims. The Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families said that in the last year (2013-2014), 20 girls (aged 13-16) have been referred to them by investigators (Milkovits, 2014c).

The targeting of minor girls, especially girls in the child welfare system, by traffickers is widely recognized in Rhode Island by social workers and professionals in the juvenile justice system. In 2013, the Family Court of Rhode Island held a conference on sex trafficking of minors titled "Trafficking, Trauma and Exploitation of Children in the Child Welfare System."

Some of the sex trafficking cases likely involved additional perpetrators and victims who were not included in the official files. According to police records, in one state domestic trafficking case, "detectives have learned that [the accused trafficker] may have had six or seven young women or teens working for her, including another 14-year-old and a 16-year-old girl" (Milkovits, 2014c). In one federal interstate transportation case, the traffickers had two or three additional women working for them in and around the state of Indiana (Neronha, 2010a).

### *Sex Traffickers*

Rhode Island sex trafficking cases were consistent with the national findings on whether traffickers worked alone or with a team. Of the eight sex traffickers involved in the six cases, six of them were men, and two were women. Two cases involved a team of two perpetrators. One of those cases involved two men working together, another case involved a man and a woman team. According to the data from federally funded task forces, 63% of incidents of sex trafficking involved only one suspect, while 32% of incidents involved two to five suspects (Kyckelhahn, Beck, & Cohen, 2009).

### *Prosecution of Sex Trafficking Cases*

Most of the cases of sex trafficking were prosecuted by the state Attorney General's Office. Of the six sex trafficking cases, four of them were state cases prosecuted by the Rhode Island Attorney General's Office, and two of them were federal cases prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office. This distribution of human trafficking cases between federal and state agencies is consistent with the findings of the Department of Justice, which found that state agencies are more likely to prosecute sex trafficking cases than federal agencies and federal agencies are more likely to prosecute

forced labor cases (Banks & Kyckelhahn, 2011). In Rhode Island, although more of the sex trafficking cases have been prosecuted by the RI Attorney General, the U.S. Attorney's office has been active in cooperating with local and state law enforcement on investigating sex trafficking cases. Most of the cases of human trafficking resulted in convictions. After prosecutions, seven of the eight sex traffickers were found guilty, and one case is still pending.

### *Involvement of Sex Buyers in Sex Trafficking Cases*

There were no sex buyers arrested in connection to any of the sex trafficking cases. In one case involving a 14-year-old girl, the trafficker had sold the teen 45 to 50 times over a 30- to 45-day period (Roscity, 2013a). When a reporter asked the officer in charge of the investigative services division if they were going to investigate the men who purchased sex from a 14-year-old victim, he replied that they "were more concerned about the trafficker than the actions of the men involved" (Angers & Campbell, 2013). This comment raises concern about law enforcement personnel's lack of interest in holding sex buyers accountable, as well as their lack of awareness of the harm that sex buyers do to victims.

Overall, the general pattern and characteristics of the first human trafficking cases identified in Rhode Island were consistent with findings of other human trafficking cases around the United States.

In the next sections, some of the key findings of the seven human trafficking cases will be discussed. Information that emerged from the analysis of the cases resulted in some insightful new findings about human trafficking and will point to new areas of research.

### **Successful Civil Suit in Forced Labor Case**

From 2009 to 2013, there was only one law enforcement identified forced labor human trafficking case in Rhode Island. It was the first case of forced labor prosecuted in Rhode Island in modern history. The actions included a federally prosecuted criminal case and later a civil suit filed against the accused trafficker by the victim. The Federal criminal case and the civil suit had different outcomes.

This forced labor case was the second time that the crime of fraud in foreign labor contracting (18 U.S.C. Sec. 1351) was used as it became an actionable offense with the passage of the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 (The William Wilberforce Act). The first successful prosecution using this federal law was in 2010, when multiple defendants were found guilty of a racketeering enterprise, involving forced labor and fraud in foreign labor contracting in Missouri. In this case, foreign workers were recruited under false pretenses and forced to work under threat doing housekeeping in hotels (U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, 2010; U.S. Department of Justice, Kansas City Division 2010).

In the Rhode Island case, criminal charges were filed by the U.S. Attorney's Office in 2011 (*United States of America v. Arif Mohamed Saeed Mohamed Al-Ali*, 2011a). The accused trafficker was a 46-year-old military officer from the United Arab Emirates, who was attending a program at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, on a student visa (Ballesteros, 2011).

The accused trafficker brought the Filipina victim to the United States under a contract that she would care for his 5-year-old son. The domestic worker was supposed to work 40 hr each week, and be paid US\$1,600 a month (Ballesteros, 2011). Instead, the accused trafficker forced her to work an average of 119 hr per week. He and his wife required the victim to maintain a five-bedroom, three-story home, as well as care for the accused trafficker's five children, cook three meals a day for the family, clean the house, launder and iron all of the family's clothes, take out the trash, wash the cars, and clean the garage and yard (Ballesteros, 2011).

The accused trafficker and his wife would not allow the victim to leave the house unless she was accompanied by someone in the family. He seized her passport and told her not to run away because with the support of the U.S. Navy he would find her (Ballesteros, 2011). While living in the United States, the accused trafficker was making US\$32,000 a month (Mulvaney, 2011e). For the first 2½ months of work that the victim did, the trafficker sent a total of US\$410.00 to her family in the Philippines as compensation for her labor (Ballesteros, 2011).

Before the criminal trial began, the man and his family tried to flee the country. They were removed from a plane at JFK Airport by U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement. His wife and children were allowed to leave the country. The trafficker was released on a US\$100,000 bond and had to wear a GPS tracker until he stood trial (Minute Entry, 2011a; Mulvaney, 2011d).

The alleged trafficker elected to have a bench trial, meaning that the judge ruled on the case and not a jury. In the criminal trial, there were complications resulting from poor translation of the victim's testimony. The judge dismissed the victim's original testimony because the court interpreter used a different dialect than the witness and she admitted to not translating the victim's testimony verbatim (Minute Entry, 2011b; News Staff, 2011). This misinterpretation of testimony led to confusion and conflict between the prosecutor and the defense about whether the victim should be allowed to testify again. Ultimately, the judge ruled that the victim could testify again.

At the conclusion of the trial, the judge decided to put more credence in the defendant's version of events based on his 30-year career in the Navy of the United Arab Emirates and the prestige of his position at the U.S. Naval War College (Lisi, 2011). The judge declared that the victim's testimony "... doesn't have a ring of truth," and ruled that the accused trafficker was not guilty (Lisi, 2011; Mulvaney, 2011b; *United States of America v. Arif Mohamed Saeed Mohamed Al-Ali*, 2011b).

Later, the victim, with the support of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), filed a civil suit against the trafficker (*Elizabeth Cabitla Ballesteros v. Arif Mohamed Saeed Mohamed Al-Ali and Samah Alharmoodi*, 2011; I. Suriyopas, personal communication, April 1, 2015). Three of the charges for violation of civil rights were related to crimes of trafficking; they are forced labor, trafficking with respect to peonage, slavery, involuntary servitude, or forced labor, and involuntary servitude (Ballesteros, 2011).

A representative of the AALDEF's Anti-Trafficking Initiative stated, "Our client was a recent immigrant with little knowledge of her rights" (Administrator, 2011). The trafficker took advantage of the victim's unfamiliarity with employment laws and customs of the United States and used it as a means to maintain control over the victim and exploit her labor.

The civil suit judge made a different judgment about the credibility of the victim's testimony than the Federal judge. He recognized the control the trafficker had over the victim and the harm done to her. A representative of the AALDEF's Anti-Trafficking Initiative said,

Ms. Ballesteros finally had the opportunity to give unfettered testimony in a court of law. The judge said that the victim suffered "outrageous, illegal, and inhumane conduct" at the hands of the defendant. Her experience as an immigrant domestic worker is all too common, and we are committed to helping her recover and seek justice. (Sehgal, 2012)

In contrast to the criminal court judge, who did not believe the victim was credible, the civil court judge did believe she was credible. The civil suit judge stated,

This court, after hearing [the victim's] testimony, and observing her demeanor on the witness stand, determines that [the victim] was a highly credible witness . . . her testimony about the conditions of her employment and her treatment at the hands of the accused trafficker was compelling and believable. (*Elizabeth Cabitla Ballesteros v. Arif Mohamed Saeed Mohamed Al-Ali and Samah Alharmoodi*, 2012)

The accused trafficker was ordered to pay the victim 1.2 million dollars in civil damages (*Elizabeth Cabitla Ballesteros v. Arif Mohamed Saeed Mohamed Al-Ali and Samah Alharmoodi*, 2012). According to the AALDEF's representative, as of spring 2015, the accused trafficker has not paid the victim any of the 1.2 million dollars in damages. He fled the country and left behind no assets that could be confiscated (I. Suriyopas, personal communication, April 1, 2015).

To date, there have been no summary reports about civil suits for human trafficking in the United States. A recent report by Levy and Vandenberg (2014) described the "failure" of criminal cases to obtain legally required restitution, although forced labor cases were more successful than sex trafficking cases. Between 2009 and 2012, the authors found that restitution was awarded in just 36% of the cases, and the

amounts awarded were called "paltry" (Levy & Vandenberg, 2014). It is not known how much of the court ordered restitution is actually paid to the victims.

At this point, the outcomes of the criminal and civil cases on forced labor human trafficking in Rhode Island cannot be put in a national context. However, the difference in findings in the criminal case and the civil suit point to areas of interest for future research.

## The First Case of Sex Trafficking

In 2010, one year after the passage of the Rhode Island human trafficking law, the first State case of human trafficking was identified. Two 23-year-old men from Yonkers, New York, were charged using the 2009 human trafficking law (Rhode Island Code § 11-67-3; *State of Rhode Island v. Joseph DeFeis*, 2011b; *State of Rhode Island v. Andy Fakhoury*, 2011b).

The men brought women from their home neighborhood in Yonkers, New York, to Rhode Island in 2008 because, at that time, there was no law against indoor prostitution (Kilmartin, 2011). They pretended to be "gangsters" by giving themselves the street nicknames of "Kash" and "Jemz," and made rap music videos of themselves driving around Providence in a black SUV, flashing fistfuls of US\$100 bills. In one video, they filmed a woman dancing on a stripper pole and rapped: "I keep a couple of hoes from around my way," referring to the women they recruited from their neighborhood in New York (Milkovits, 2011).

The two men recruited the victims through deception. One man promised a 19-year-old victim love, friendship, and a waitressing job (Mulvaney, 2011c). According to the Assistant Attorney General, the men "preyed upon [the victims'] vulnerabilities" (Mulvaney, 2011c).

The Providence Police initiated an investigation into the sex trafficking operation following a tip from police in Yonkers, New York, that a 19-year-old woman was being forced to engage in commercial sex acts (Milkovits, 2010a; Ruggiero, 2010). Police set up a sting operation, in which a law enforcement officer posed as a sex buyer by calling an online prostitution advertisement known to be associated with the victim. He arranged to meet the victim at an apartment. Upon his arrival, the traffickers were arrested and the victims were rescued (Ruggiero, 2010).

After being arrested and charged with sex trafficking, both perpetrators pleaded guilty to Trafficking of Persons for Forced Labor or Commercial Sexual Activity [RI 11-67-3] (Department of the Attorney General of the State of Rhode Island, 2011; *State of Rhode Island v. Andy Fakhoury*, 2011; *State of Rhode Island v. Joseph DeFeis*, 2011a). The Rhode Island Attorney General described the senior partner in the trafficking operation as ". . . a manipulative, violent, dangerous predator who has little regard for basic human rights" (Kilmartin, 2011, press release). This man was sentenced to the maximum 20 years with 10 years to serve and 10 years

suspended with probation (Department of the Attorney General of the State of Rhode Island, 2011; *State of Rhode Island v. Andy Fakhoury*, 2011). The second man was sentenced to 10 years with 1 year to serve and 9 years suspended with probation (*State of Rhode Island v. Joseph DeFeis*, 2011a). Restitution was granted to one victim for out of pocket medical bills (*State of Rhode Island v. Joseph DeFeis*, 2011a). At sentencing, the Superior Court Judge said that traffickers were guilty of “one of the most despicable crimes known to mankind.” The judge spoke as a Black man and made a comparison of the crimes of trafficking with slavery: “You can tell by the color of my skin I differ in complexion from you . . . People of my skin color, many of them were not brought here voluntarily . . . What you did in this matter is nothing less than being a slave owner in the United States of America” (Mulvaney, 2011a, p. A1).

The first case of sex trafficking in Rhode Island showed the connection between previously decriminalized indoor prostitution in Rhode Island and the sex trafficking of victims to the state. As the first arrests and charge for sex trafficking, the proceedings garnered a lot of media coverage in the local media. The judge’s comment at sentencing clearly connected the actions of the traffickers to slavery.

## Federal Case of Interstate Prostitution

In 2009, a report of an assault at a hotel in Rhode Island led to a federal investigation into an interstate prostitution operation that stretched from Indiana to Rhode Island and Connecticut (Bothelo, 2010; *United States of America v. Nathaniel G. Pope*, 2009). The case involved two pimps—a 47-year-old man and a 45-year-old woman—from Indianapolis, Indiana, who exploited two victims on a road trip from the Midwest to the Northeast. They ran their interstate prostitution operation for about 3 years, and had at least three additional victims in Indiana (Bothelo, 2010).

The female pimp, known as “Big Mama,” recruited an 18-year-old girl from Indiana by befriending her on the Internet and acting as a friend and confidant (Neronha, 2010a; *United States of America v. Jan Wales*, 2010). The second victim, a 45-year-old woman from Indiana was recruited by the male pimp in an online “interracial chat room” (Neronha, 2010a). The victim said that she was propositioned to be a prostitute for the pimp, at which time he “promised her that he doesn’t beat his girls, and promised her that she would be safe” (Bothelo, 2010).

The male pimp, known as “Rah, Rah,” transported the two victims to New England while the female pimp stayed in Indiana and ran the administration of the prostitution ring. She posted online prostitution advertisements and set up meetings with sex buyers (Neronha, 2011). When the 18-year-old victim did not want to engage in prostitution, the pimp threatened and assaulted the young woman. He stole her money, confiscated her cell phone, and abandoned her in a hotel room in Warwick, Rhode Island (Neronha, 2011).

The male senior partner of the team was arrested and charged with a violation of federal law Transportation in Interstate Commerce for Purposes of Prostitution (18 U.S.C. 2421). A few days later, the female junior partner, who had fled to Arizona, was apprehended (Neronha, 2010a).

Both traffickers pleaded guilty to transporting victims across state lines for the purpose of prostitution (*United States of America v. Jan M. Wales*, 2010b; *United States of America v. Nathan Pope*, 2010). During the sentencing process, the female pimp claimed that she had participated in a “victimless crime.” The United States Attorney said that she had knowingly recruited women to engage in commercial sex acts and played a key role in organizing appointments with sex buyers. He said, “The defendant was a madam, not a victim” (Neronha, 2010a). “Big Mama,” the female pimp, was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment and 3 years supervised release (*United States of America v. Jan M. Wales*, 2010a).

During the sentencing process, the senior pimp, “Rah Rah,” said that his role was misunderstood, he was merely responsible for “paying bills and getting groceries” in a “happy” home for wayward prostitutes and their artistic pimp. He too argued that prostitution was a victimless crime. The U.S. Attorney responded that “this is not a victimless crime. It is tawdry, dangerous and degrading” (*United States of America v. Nathan G. Pope*, 2011). He was sentenced to 24 months in prison, and 3 years of supervised release (*United States of America v. Nathan G. Pope*, 2011).

This case was the first federal prosecution of a trafficking-related crime after Rhode Island passed a law criminalizing prostitution, which enabled the offense of transportation across states lines for purpose of prostitution to be charged. The claim by the defendants that they were engaged in a “victimless crime” was clearly rejected by the prosecutor and the evidence in this case demonstrated the violence used against the victims in this interstate prostitution operation.

## Online Advertising of Sex Trafficking Victims

From the early years of the Internet, traffickers have used online advertising to market victims to sex buyers (Farley, Franzblau, & Kennedy, 2014; Hughes, 2001, 2002, 2004; Mitchell, Jones, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2011). Sex traffickers’ use of online advertising has enabled them to reach a wider market of potential sex buyers, which has led to the growth of prostitution and sex trafficking (Farley et al., 2014; George, 2012). In addition, sex traffickers utilize social media on the Internet to contact vulnerable women and teens and groom them to be victims (George, 2012).

This analysis of sex trafficking cases identified in Rhode Island between 2009 and 2013 found that sex traffickers relied heavily on online prostitution advertising sites as a means to connect with sex buyers. In each of the sex trafficking cases, traffickers paid for advertisements on online prostitution sites.

## Disguise of the Victims

The most common element of the advertisements was the disguise of the victim's age and identity. The traffickers used fake names and false ages for the victims. The traffickers concealed their use of minor girls by always claiming they were above 18 years of age. The minor victims, who were aged 14 to 17, were advertised as being 19 or older. A 17-year-old victim in a Rhode Island domestic trafficking case was advertised as being 20 (Rosciti, 2011a). A 14-year-old victim in a Rhode Island domestic trafficking case was advertised as being an adult (Milkovits, 2013a; Rosciti, 2013b). A 15-year-old victim in a Massachusetts interstate trafficking case was advertised as being an adult (Kantorski, 2013). A 17-year-old victim in a Massachusetts interstate trafficking case was advertised as being 19 (Neronha, 2014).

## Sexually Explicit Photos of the Victims

The traffickers often photographed victims in sexually explicit poses. In one case, a man trafficked a 17-year-old developmentally delayed victim across state lines. After being arrested, the trafficker admitted that during his online conversations with the girl, he knew that there was something not quite right with her and that she may have some mental deficiencies (Donaghy, 2013). The trafficker took photos of her in her underwear standing in a hotel room, then posted them in an online advertisement (Steimle, 2013). In another case, the victim stated the trafficker took pictures of her on a couch when she was in her sister's apartment before posting them online (Rosciti, 2011a).

## Means of Using the Internet in the Trafficking Operation

Details of the cases revealed how traffickers operate using the Internet. In an interstate transportation case, a man and a woman operated as a trafficking team (this case is described in more detail previously in this article). The female trafficker remained in Indiana and did the online work. She uploaded prostitution advertisements for the victims and set up a time and place for her male accomplice to deliver the victim to the sex buyer (Neronha, 2010b). The man in the team drove the victim across the Midwest and into the north-eastern states, including Rhode Island (*United States of America v. Nathan G. Pope and Jan M. Wales*, 2010).

After posting ads for the women, the traffickers transported the victims to meet sex buyers, even when the victims were old enough to drive (Neronha, 2011). In three of the sex trafficking cases, the traffickers delivered the victims to the sex buyers in hotel rooms or apartments. In one case, the victim was instructed to walk to a nearby empty apartment to meet a sex buyer (Comella, 2011). In another case, the victims were kept in an apartment with the two male traffickers and the sex buyers came to the apartment to use the women

(Ruggiero, 2010). In another case, the sex trafficker took the teen victim to a strip club where she was used as an exotic dancer and used by sex buyers in the private booths in the club (Kantorski, 2013). One female trafficker used online prostitution advertisements to set up between 45 and 50 meetings with sex buyers for a 14-year-old victim within a span of 30 to 45 days (Rosciti, 2013a). When the police confronted the 21-year-old trafficker, she said, "That's [victim's nickname], I knows she's young, I don't do anything, I just post info and take the calls" (Rosciti, 2013a).

## Exploitation of Race and Ethnicity of Victims

In the advertisements, the traffickers exploited the victims' race and ethnicity. The traffickers used the victims' physical attributes to market them to sex buyers. For example, there is a small population of people from the Cape Verde islands in Rhode Island (Fox Point Cape Verdean Project, n.d.). The trafficker exploited the 17-year-old Cape Verdean victim's ethnicity in the prostitution advertisement. "Capverdian [*sic*] Paradise \$50 Special—Hello, My name is Jessica . . . I am 20 years old and willing to make your night wild . . . hit me up if u down to handle what I got" (*State of Rhode Island v. Brandon Frails*, 2011).

In another case, the trafficker emphasized that the victim was white with blond hair.

A pretty and petite blond, age nineteen, available all day for upscale gentlemen looking to spend some time together. (Ruggiero, 2010)

Traffickers exploiting their victims' ethnicity is not unique to Rhode Island. In a study of prostitution advertisements in Las Vegas, ethnicity was specified in 92% of the ads (Farley et al., 2014). The researcher wrote that the inclusion of race and ethnicity in the ads reflected their importance to sex buyers.

## Targeted Marketing of Victims

The traffickers also wrote the advertisements to target certain populations of sex buyers by using slang or different wording and language style. In some advertisements, the traffickers marketed the victims to sex buyers of a certain age and economic background. In two of the advertisements, the traffickers targeted older, wealthier men. One advertisement requested "upscale gentlemen" (Ruggiero, 2010). Another trafficker requested that sex buyers be middle-aged or older "gentlemen." "Sweet girl next door-19. Hey everyone! I'm the new girl in town. I am your sweet cute girl next door. So come see me. Older gentlemen only. 45 years of age and older" (Neronha, 2014).

The advertisements listed prices for the commercial sex acts. In one case, two traffickers sold the victim for US\$150 for a half hour and US\$250 for an hour of oral sex and intercourse

with the victim (Ruggiero, 2010). And, in another case, a male and female trafficking team sold the victims to sex buyers for US\$250 an hour of sexual intercourse (Neronha, 2010a). And in the case where the victim was a developmentally delayed teen, the trafficker negotiated a price with a sex buyer for US\$40.00 and two packs of cigarettes (Donaghy, 2013; Steimle, 2013).

### ***Law Enforcement's Use of Prostitution Advertisements in Investigations***

In two of the six cases, police used the online advertisements to set up a sting that resulted in the rescue of victims and the arrest of traffickers. In one case, after a call from a worried mother, the Yonkers, New York, police identified the young woman in an online prostitution advertisement. They contacted Providence Police, who initiated an investigation into the report that a 19-year-old woman was being forced into prostitution (Mulvaney, 2014). Providence Police located the online prostitution advertising with a photo of the victim. A police officer, posing as an undercover sex buyer, made an appointment to meet with the victim (Ruggiero, 2010). The arranged meeting place was at an apartment in Providence where the victim was being held by the traffickers (Milkovits, 2010c).

This analysis of online advertisements for victims of sex trafficking is consistent with findings of other researchers, law enforcement personnel, and service providers' reports that online prostitution sites are commonly, even exclusively, used to market victims of sex trafficking. Recently, the Massachusetts Attorney General stated that the majority of sex traffickers in human trafficking cases prosecuted in her office have used online prostitution advertisements to exploit the victims (Healey, 2015; Landergan, 2015). Social networking sites, advertising websites, message boards, and dating sites all provide platforms for prostitution marketing with relative anonymity and impunity (Farley et al., 2014).

### ***Mothers Involved in Recovering Victims***

One of the key findings of this analysis of human trafficking cases in Rhode Island is that family members, particularly mothers, were often involved in the recovery of their daughters. In half (three of six) of the sex trafficking cases, mothers played active, even central, roles in locating their daughters. Mothers initiated investigations on their own, made police reports, and even contacted the traffickers in attempts to recover their daughters.

The analysis of sex trafficking cases in Rhode Island found that some of the victims were not completely isolated from their families. Although the traffickers controlled the victims and limited or monitored their communication, the victims were still able to communicate with family members. Several victims in two cases of sex trafficking maintained contact with their mothers using their cell phones. In these cases, the

victims talked to their mothers but did not communicate openly with them about all the details of how they were being trafficked. One crucial piece of information they often did not reveal to their mothers was their locations.

In the first case of human trafficking prosecuted in the state of Rhode Island, two men conspired to gain the confidence of at least four victims from their old New York neighborhood (Milkovits, 2010b). The traffickers ensnared the victims with false promises of love, a job, and a sense of family. They used the victims' familiarity with them as neighbors to gain their trust (Milkovits, 2011). In this case, one mother knew the man who persuaded her daughter to leave with him, although she did not know that he intended to exploit her (Milkovits, 2011).

In the same case, one victim told her mother that she was leaving with the trafficker because he loved her, and he knew where there was a job for her as a waitress. Soon after the victim left, she called her mother and said, "Mom, I wish I'd never come" (Milkovits, 2011). Her mother's suspicion that her daughter was in danger intensified when, over a period of months, her phone calls with her daughter were always interrupted. As the mother knew the man her daughter was with, she tried to contact him repeatedly to find her daughter. On one occasion, the trafficker answered his phone and told the victim's mother that he did not know where her daughter was (Mulvaney, 2011a).

Another mother in the same case was not aware of her daughter's situation until she received a phone call for help from her daughter as she hid in a bathroom of the apartment where she was being held captive (Milkovits, 2014a). The mother called the police to get help for her daughter. When police showed up at the apartment, this victim left with the police. Another victim who was present denied that she was in danger and stayed at the apartment with the trafficker (Milkovits, 2014a). She would not be rescued until months later when her mother contacted local Yonkers Police in New York for help to locate her daughter (Milkovits, 2011).

As the victimization of teen girls and young women by traffickers becomes more widely known, more family members are turning to online prostitution sites to try to find their missing daughters. In a Rhode Island domestic trafficking case, a mother recognized her missing 14-year-old daughter in a prostitution advertisement. Although the girl kept in touch with her mother every 2 to 3 days by cell phone, she never disclosed her location (Milkovits, 2013b). After the mother recognized her daughter, she called the number on the advertisement and confronted the trafficker. The trafficker hung up, but her daughter called her back and told her mother that she loved her. Still, the girl would not reveal her location. The mother then called the Pawtucket Police, which led to the victim being rescued, and the trafficker being arrested (Milkovits, 2013b).

In an interstate transportation case, a trafficker befriended a 17-year-old girl with a developmental disability online. He then met her at a public library in Massachusetts and took her

with him. When the victim's mother could not find her daughter, she immediately called the police and reported her as missing (Hager, 2012). In the library's surveillance video, the girl was seen leaving with a man (Saladna, 2013). The family participated in a press conference asking for the return of her daughter and asked the community to become involved in finding her. With tears in her eyes the mother pleaded to the man who abducted her daughter: "Whoever you are could you please just bring her home to us today. I want her to sleep in her own bed tonight" (Hager, 2012). As a result of the news conference and media attention on the abduction of the teen, the victim was identified by a Rhode Island citizen while she was with the trafficker on the street (Milkovits, 2014b).

Two victims' mothers spoke at the traffickers' sentencing hearings about the harm that they did to their daughters. One mother said, "You manipulated a very trusting young girl. She trusted you and went with you" (Mulvaney, 2011a). She continued by stating her daughter had been drugged, enslaved, and denied food and water (Mulvaney, 2011a). Another victim's mother addressed the trafficker as she said, "You will do your time and get out and rebuild your life in no time, for my daughter it will probably take a lifetime" (Mulvaney, 2011a).

Although mothers played a significant role in locating and recovering their daughters, in one case, a family member—a sister—played a more complicit role in her sister's victimization. She knowingly allowed her minor sister, who had run away from a group home, to have contact with a known pimp and involve her in prostitution. After the trafficker was arrested, the sister indicated that she knew the trafficker had "put her sister to work" (Silva, 2011). In a police statement, the victim's sister wrote, "I . . . knew that [the trafficker] put girls on the Internet so he would have money in his pocket and gas in his car" (Roscity, 2011b). She claimed that when she learned the trafficker was selling her sister on the Internet, she confronted him (Silva, 2011). However, a social worker from a group home was responsible for contacting the police and initiating an investigation, which eventually led to the arrest of the trafficker (Roscity, 2011a).

One of the most notable findings from this analysis of cases of human trafficking in Rhode Island is the role that mothers played in recovering their daughters. The police acknowledged the significant effort of the mothers. At the end of one case, a Sergeant from the Providence Police Department commended the mothers for their involvement in the case. He said the mothers kept looking for their daughters until they were found: "The mothers never gave up on their daughters" (Mulvaney, 2011a). The mother's involvement was a key factor in the discovery of these trafficking cases.

Much of the human trafficking literature discusses how victims are often runaway girls, who are fleeing abuse at home or throwaway girls who are no longer wanted by family members (Hanna, 2002). The analysis of these Rhode Island cases raises another possibility, and that is that mothers continue to look for their missing daughters and even take an active role in their recovery.

There are anti-trafficking organizations, movies, and books that emphasize in their names that the victims are daughters. Examples include, *Captive Daughters* (<http://www.abolishsexslavery.org/captive-daughters>), *Somebody's Daughter* (Sher, 2013) and *She's Somebody's Daughter* (<http://www.shesomebodysdaughter.org/>). In England in 1996, a mother, whose daughter was controlled by a pimp and murdered by a sex buyer, founded an organization called Coalition for the Removal of Pimping (CROP). The organization continues today under the name of Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation (PACE). PACE offers support to parents whose children are actively being sexually exploited by people outside the family, including traffickers.

Before her death, Norma Hotaling, survivor and founder of SAGE (Standing Against Global Exploitation) in San Francisco, said she wanted to work on family reunification for victim/survivors and their families, particularly between mothers and daughters. In her work with victims of prostitution and sex trafficking, Hotaling had discovered that often mothers still loved their daughters and were concerned about them, but their families had become broken, often due to domestic violence or drug abuse. Hotaling saw the possibility of rebuilding damaged relationships, and considered that an important way to assist victims to recover and find stability in their lives.

However, there is no research on the continuing relationship between victims of sex trafficking and their mothers (or other relatives) after the daughter is under the control of a trafficker. The analysis for this article introduces this as an area for future research. Understanding continuing relationships between mothers and their victim daughters could provide insight into how to break the traumatic bonding that occurs between perpetrators and victims.

## Conclusion

This article is an analysis of law enforcement identified cases of human trafficking in Rhode Island from 2009 to 2013. It looked at and evaluated seven cases of human trafficking, including one case of forced labor of a domestic worker and six cases of sex trafficking.

Although the number of cases in this analysis is low, significant information about human trafficking in Rhode Island emerged, including several topics for further research.

Overall, the Rhode Island cases were similar to human trafficking cases in other states in the United States. The forced labor case involved the trafficking of a foreign national woman by a foreign national trafficker. The sex trafficking cases were domestic sex trafficking. A few of the cases involved interstate transportation of victims, and there were cases that involved sex trafficking within the state of Rhode Island. The victims were often runaways who were vulnerable to recruitment by sex traffickers.

Some notable findings that are worthy of further study emerged from the analysis. In the forced labor human trafficking case, there were different findings in the criminal and civil cases, which seemed to be a difference in the judges'

opinions on the credibility of the victim. To date, there has been no analysis of human trafficking civil suits in the United States. This is an important topic for further study, including the damages levied and whether the traffickers ever paid the damages to the victims.

Due to a history of decriminalized prostitution in Rhode Island, traffickers perceived the state to be tolerant of prostitution and therefore a low-risk destination and environment for exploitation of victims. More research is needed on the role that state toleration of prostitution plays in creating a low-risk environment for sex trafficking.

Although the use of the Internet and prostitution advertising sites have been researched, this analysis revealed a need for more detailed analysis of advertisements known to offer victims of trafficking, including the role race and ethnicity play in marketing the victims and the cues in the ads for the type of sex buyers the victims are being marketed to.

Finally, the most previously un-researched topic to emerge from the analysis was the role that mothers played in locating their daughters and how their reports to police initiated investigations. In two of the cases, the mothers contacted the traffickers in an effort to find their daughters. This is an entirely new area of research for understanding the dynamics of stopping human trafficking.

Overall, this analysis of law enforcement identified cases of human trafficking in Rhode Island found that these seven cases were consistent with other cases in the United States. The detailed analysis of the cases revealed important topics for further research in this field.

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