



STOPPING SEX TRAFFICKING

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY AARON HARDIN

A recent Tennessee Bureau of Investigation study estimates that 26 to 50 cases of child sex trafficking and more than 100 cases of adult sex trafficking have occurred in Madison County in a two-year time frame,

Study estimates more than 100 cases in Madison County in two years

By Jordan Buie

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In December, a routine traffic stop on Interstate 40 in Haywood County led to the arrest of a Texas man on sex crimes involving a 16-year-old boy.

The boy was a passenger in the man's SUV, and Trooper Brad Simpson was suspicious after they appeared nervous and gave different stories about their travels. It turned out that the boy was a runaway from Dallas who may have been sexually assaulted in Memphis earlier that day.

According to a TBI study released last year, the case is likely evidence of a sex-trafficking problem that is growing across the country and in West Tennessee.

The study, based on surveys of police and social service agencies, estimated that there were between 1,500 and 4,000 cases of sex trafficking in Tennessee during 2009



This feature is print-exclusive in The Jackson Sun. It will not appear on jacksonsun.com until a later date.



AP PHOTO/STEVE HELBER

In this Nov. 22, 2011, file photo, Holly Smith, 33, looks out from her porch after talking about her experiences when she was caught up in a child sex trafficking ring during an interview in her home in Richmond, Va. Smith said a man at a mall promised her a job after she ran away from home at age 14. She said she was swiftly brought to a motel where two adults gave her a dress, put makeup on her face and dyed her hair. 'Within hours I was on the streets of Atlantic City having men forced on me,' Smith told the AP

trafficking in Tennessee during 2009 and 2010. It estimated that there were likely more than 100 cases of adult sex trafficking in Madison County during that time and up to 50 cases of child sex trafficking.

The cases often are not reflected in police statistics because the crimes go unreported or are categorized differently by law enforcement, accord-

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hours I was on the streets of Atlantic City having men forced on me,' Smith told the AP.



KENNETH CUMMINGS/THE JACKSON SUN

Tennessee Bureau of Investigation's Assistant Special Agent in Charge Margie Quin gives a presentation on a human trafficking study during a training session Wednesday at Jackson-Madison County General Hospital.

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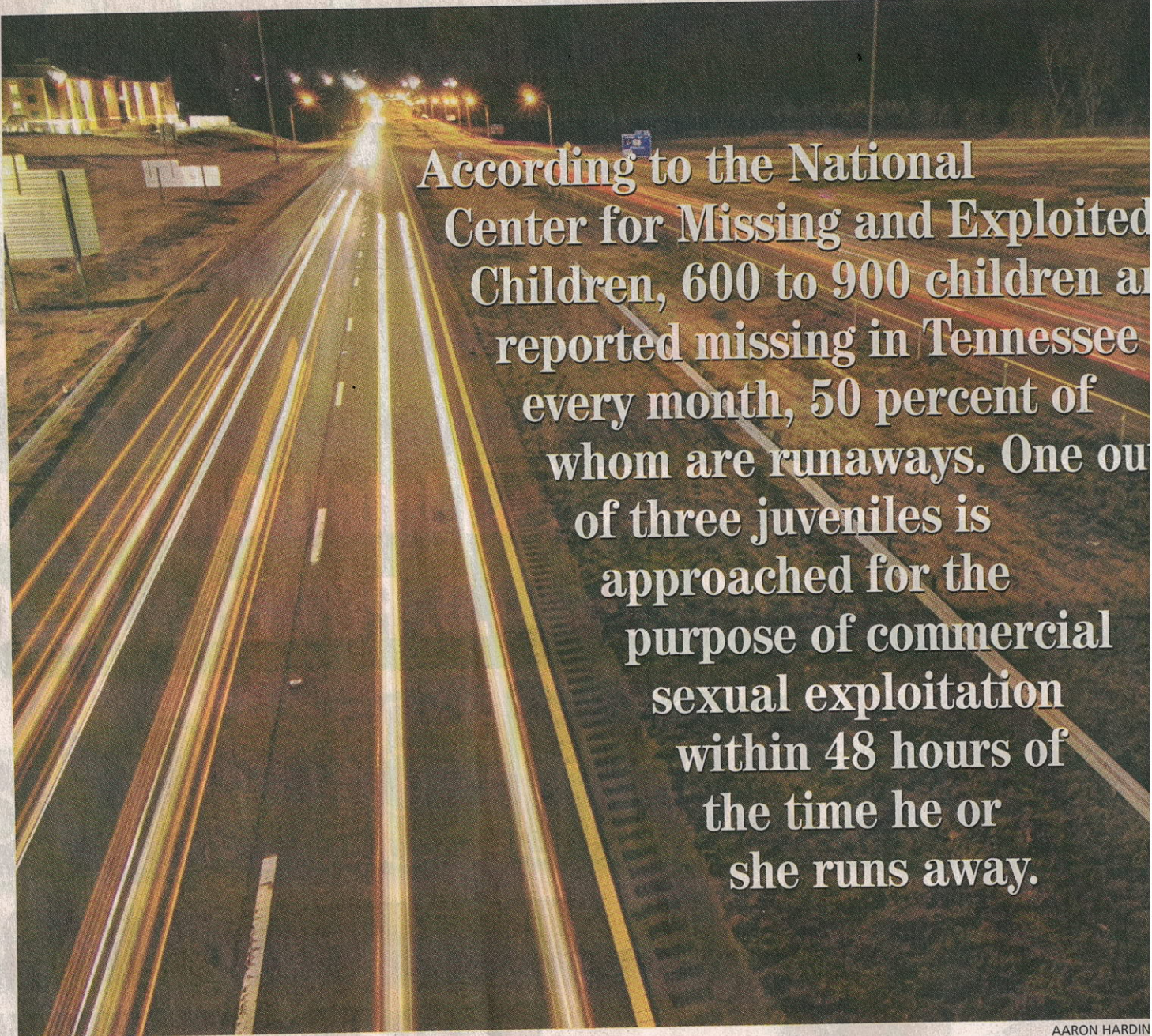


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According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 600 to 900 children are reported missing in Tennessee every month, 50 percent of whom are runaways. One out of three juveniles is approached for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation within 48 hours of the time he or she runs away.

AARON HARDIN

Traffic travels between Memphis and Nashville on Interstate 40 in Jackson.

Trafficking

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ing to those who study sex trafficking.

The Jackson Police Department had no reported cases of sex trafficking in 2009 and 2010, and Madison County Sheriff David Woolfork said he believed his department had only one case in the past two years. The estimates came from social workers, who may work with victims of sex trafficking who are reluctant to report what happened to police.

"I know sex trafficking is a growing problem," Woolfork said. "Those numbers seem high, but I can see where some people might

now in a safe place."

New legislation

In June 2010, the Tennessee General Assembly directed the Select Committee on Children and Youth to "study human sex trafficking, the improvements that should be made to existing laws relative to human sex trafficking and the impact of human sex trafficking on children and youth in this state." The Select Committee on Children and Youth asked the TBI to conduct the study.

Sex trafficking as defined by the state for the focus of the study is "a for-profit sex act that is induced by force, fraud or coercion or in which the person performing such an act is under the age of 18"

reported crimes, he said.

"Social workers tend to have more interaction with someone who is in crisis or soon after the suspicion of a crime," he said. "If an individual has recently endured victimization, then they may not feel comfortable about revealing certain things, especially those of a sexual nature. If the crime is not immediately reported to law enforcement, then it's likely to go undocumented."

He said there could be a breakdown in communication between law enforcement and social services because of a lack of understanding in how each could benefit the other in accomplishing their missions.

"Perhaps the solution is for so-

tomer.

Sex trafficker abduct their slaves for an average price other sex traffic there is little motivation for the slaves.

Smith obtained numbers about the sex trafficking from conducted alongside Broken Silence, a trafficking nonprofit in Memphis.

Operation Broken conducted an analysis of Memphis' online sex industry man trafficking by adult sex ads place that posts local advertiser's classified section was conducted betw

Woolfork said he believed his department had only one case in the past two years. The estimates came from social workers, who may work with victims of sex trafficking who are reluctant to report what happened to police.

"I know sex trafficking is a growing problem," Woolfork said. "Those numbers seem high, but I can see where some people might be willing to go to social workers if they were a victim, rather than turning to law enforcement."

Lost children

Margie Quin, the special agent in charge of the TBI study, spoke at a training session on sex trafficking for law enforcement and social service workers in Jackson last week. She said she knew some in the audience would be skeptical of the estimates.

"I have been in law enforcement for about 20 years, and I know I was shocked by the results of the study," she said. "But if you start looking at other statistics, these numbers make sense."

She said that according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 600 to 900 children are reported missing in Tennessee every month, 50 percent of whom are runaways. Quin said that according to National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, one out of three juveniles is approached for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation within 48 hours of the time he or she runs away.

Quin said that 75 percent of those surveyed for the TBI study reported that they were not adequately trained to deal with sex trafficking. She insisted that better training would lead to more arrests.

David McGriff, director of the West Tennessee Drug Task Force, credited Trooper Simpson's instincts for leading to the arrest after the I-40 traffic stop last month.

"We train our officers to look for suspicious activity, and when something just doesn't seem quite right, to keep investigating," he said in a news release. "That's what happened in this case. Today a suspect is in jail on sexual assault charges, and the victim is

and the impact of human sex trafficking on children and youth in this state." The Select Committee on Children and Youth asked the TBI to conduct the study.

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Quin said local law enforcement counts of sex-trafficking cases are generally lower across the state because the cases are often part of federal investigations or because victims do not want their cases to be reported to law enforcement because they fear they will be arrested.

According to the TBI definition, Quin said, many crimes that fall under other classifications, such as prostitution, should actually be considered sex trafficking.

The sex trafficking study was completed in May 2011. In June, Gov. Bill Haslam signed a series of bills that protect minors who are victims of sex trafficking and punish those who have exploited them.

One of the bills Haslam signed changed state law so minors can no longer be prosecuted for prostitution, but are returned to their parents or guardians, and their pimps and customers are arrested.

Quin said she believes one reason for the lack of communication between social workers and law enforcement relates to a fear that those who have been subjected to the sex trade could be prosecuted. Although Haslam signed this victim-protection bill into law, Quin said there is a good chance the communication gap between social workers and law enforcement has not been fully mended.

A local perspective

Lt. Tyreece Miller, with the Jackson Police Department's violent crimes division, said he was surprised by the high number of cases estimated in the study. The disparity between the number of cases recorded by local law enforcement and those estimated in the TBI study is likely due to un-

crime is not immediately reported to law enforcement, then it's likely to go undocumented."

He said there could be a breakdown in communication between law enforcement and social services because of a lack of understanding in how each could benefit the other in accomplishing their missions.

"Perhaps the solution is for social work organizations and law enforcement to sit down and build a consensus on how, together, we can best serve victims who have been subjected to human trafficking," he said.

Nonprofits fight slavery

Derri Smith is the executive director of End Slavery Tennessee, a nonprofit organization based in Nashville that fights sex trafficking.

"The important thing to remember is that anyone who is being forced into prostitution or into performing a sexual act is a slave," she said. "The other thing to remember is that any minor under the age of 18 participating in prostitution is a victim of sex trafficking, even if they are willing, because they are being exploited by an adult."

Smith said part of the mission of End Slavery Tennessee is to inform people of the problem of sex trafficking, and that people are often shocked by the magnitude of the problem. She said there are 100,000 children trafficked for sex within the United States each year.

Sex trafficking is one of the world's most lucrative businesses, Smith said, earning more than \$32 billion annually.

"Over 2.2 million children are sold into the sex trade every year," she said. "And there are more slaves today than any other time in history." She said many people find that hard to believe, but when they understand the business model of sex trafficking, it makes more sense.

Unlike most products that are sold once and consistently lose value, Smith said a sex slave can be sold hundreds of times for an average price of \$150 to \$200 each time he or she is sold to a cus-

conducted alongside Broken Silence, a trafficking nonprofit in Memphis.

Operation Broke conducted an analysis' online sex in man trafficking b adult sex ads place that posts local ads per's classified sect was conducted betw Dec. 31.

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The trafficker

Ryan Dalton, the ing director for Op Silence, said he did much the problem ing is growing in W but he believes res the TBI study, the I and a similar stud conducted by End S see helps people u magnitude of sex Tennessee.

"I believe it is in academic rigor to lyze problems like 1 "We can't fight tha not know, and being edgeable about a lead to more arre freed victims."

Dalton, who atten ing in Jackson on W he believes that th fight sex traffickin one to work togethe

Smith emphasize of her organization Tennessee, is not o the public, but to of

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Response to Gene Davenport

for by Samuel Teague

As usual, Mr. Geno mixes a little fact with a lot of horse manure. If you want to know the truth about Islam/Muslims, read the Koran. It is relatively small, easily found at a bookstore or the library. Davenport is correct that there are two major divisions of Muslims, Sunni and Shia. I have never heard of the many sub cultures he refers to, but that is the case there is only one Koran. I could give you several quotes but I don't think the Sun would publish them. To get the truth don't listen to Davenport, Don't listen to Gene. Read the Koran. As Mohamed is quoted "the only sure way to heaven is to die in the way of Allah. That alone should start you on the correct path to understanding this religion.

Samuel Teague, P.O. Box 12461, setvok@earthlink.net

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victims of sex trafficking and warn others how to avoid the trap.

She described sex traffickers as some of the "most brilliant child psychologists in the world," who have even put manuals online instructing others how to spot individuals who might be easier targets to coerce and how to manipulate them once they are captured.

Smith said sex traffickers look for people in vulnerable situations, such as runaways or children with little adult supervision. She said they also look for characteristics such as low self-esteem or someone who is a loner. These characteristics give a trafficker a better chance of enticing a victim to come with them.

"A trafficker will take advantage of one's vulnerabilities, by showering a victim with compliments and making them feel special," she said. "Often times they will tell them how beautiful they are and offer to help them to build a career as a model or make them feel like they care for them and want to support them."

A victim's story

Holly Smith, now a 34-year old biologist, writer and public speaker living in Virginia, once found herself in a vulnerable place that allowed her to be coerced by a sex trafficker.

Holly said she was born and raised in a middle-class home in New Jersey, and that her experience with sex trafficking came at the age of 14.

"It was the summer between middle school and high school, and I was feeling really nervous about going to high school," she said. "I had really low self-esteem at that time, I wasn't getting along with my parents, and I felt like I was drifting away from my group of friends."

She went to the mall one day with some friends and was lagging behind. A man watched her and called her over to talk to him.

"I talked to him, and he told me he thought I was beautiful, and he thought he could get me a job as a model," she said. "He told me he thought I was too mature for high school."

Holly agreed to meet the man

and run away with him. He introduced her to a woman who said she would help her. The woman acted like an older sister, talking to her about fashion, MTV and music.

The woman dyed Holly's hair and dressed her nicely. The man and the woman made her think she was going to a club.

"When the man took me to the hotel and left me there and the other men came, I realized then what was happening," she said. "I didn't know what to do and I didn't know how to get out of the situation."

Holly said she was lucky that a policeman saw her the day after she was abducted. He got her out of the situation and arrested the man who had been her trafficker. But that one day affected the rest of her life and took years for her to overcome.

"I was not OK for a long time," she said. "I didn't know that what happened to me also happened to other girls, and I had a hard time accepting that what happened was not my fault."

Holly said she was in her late 20s or early 30s before she could overcome what happened to her. She has written a memoir she hopes to have published that describes her encounter with sex trafficking and how she has overcome the pain of being a victim.

"My memoir is about what I learned about my body and my rights to my body and my sexuality," she said. "I also talk about how I had learned about who I should be from the media and how I had a lack of guidance, and how these early factors set me up to be the perfect victim."

Jamie Blurton, a Union University student who is a volunteer with End Slavery Tennessee, said it is important for everyone in a community to watch for possible sex trafficking. End Slavery Tennessee will begin a student chapter at Union in February, and the Union School of Social Work will host a conference about Human Sex Trafficking Awareness on March 1.

"At the conference we will be filling people in on what they should look for in their community that might be signs of sex trafficking," Blurton said. "We will also be teaching others about how to train youth about how to avoid being a victim."

— Jordan Buie, 425-9782

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In this Nov. 22, 2011, file photo, Holly Smith, 33, talks about her experience with sex trafficking ring. Holly said she was born and raised in a middle-class home in New Jersey, and that her experience with sex trafficking came at the age of 14. "It was the summer between middle school and high school, and I was feeling really nervous about going to high school, and I was feeling really nervous about going to high school with some friends and was lagging behind at that time, I wasn't getting along with my parents, and I felt like I was drifting away from my group of friends."