# Males, Migrants, and Married Women: Dispelling Myths of Human Trafficking in Wisconsin

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Mainstream discourses on human trafficking often feature young females engaged in the commercial sex industry who are forced to work against their will. While there are, unfortunately, many documented cases of sex trafficking involving women and minors, a 2008 study conducted on human trafficking victims in Wisconsin suggests that exploitation also occurs among categories of people and in places that are not typically the focus of anti-trafficking efforts. This paper describes the Wisconsin research and some of its findings, which paint a different picture of human trafficking in the Midwest. The first part of the paper describes legal definitions used in the U.S. and provides a brief overview of geographic research conducted to date. Following this, a self-administered survey sent to more than 1800 governmental and non-governmental agencies and organizations throughout the state of Wisconsin is discussed along with data collection challenges. In the last part of the paper, findings from the study are presented. 249 individuals were identified as possible victims by respondents and detailed information on 80 of these individuals was provided. An analysis of the results demonstrates that human trafficking exploitation occurs in Wisconsin, in rural communities, in workplaces, and within homes, suggesting that place-based and other biases found in anti-trafficking policies and practices may render some categories of unfree labor less visible than others. Findings from the study support the need to investigate human trafficking activities among a wider array of individuals involved in the crime and in places that are not typically the focus of research or advocacy.

## Introduction

The U.S. government estimates that between 14,500 and 17,500 individuals are trafficked into the U.S. each year (US DOJ 2006), but in Fiscal 2008, only 394 individuals had applied for a T-1 visa, which allows victims to stay in the U.S. while their cases are being prosecuted, and only 317 individuals were certified as authentic victims by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services in order to receive services and benefits (Clawson et al. 2009; Wyler and Siskin 2010). The number of cases opened or prosecuted by the U.S. Department of Justice also stands in sharp contrast to government estimates of U.S. victims. In Fiscal 2009, there were a total of 114 indictments, 43 prosecutions, and 47 individual convictions—the greatest number in a year to date (US DOS 2010). Borrowing the title from a recent paper by trafficking experts, Farrell, McDevitt, and Fahy (2010), one has to wonder, "Where are all the victims?"

Factors that contribute to low numbers of human trafficking victims are much discussed by advocates, law enforcement, and academics: there is no single agreed upon definition of the crime of human trafficking; it is often difficult to differentiate human trafficking from other similar crimes such as solicitation, kidnapping, or forced labor; and the role of movement and transportation (i.e., those processes often associated with the term "trafficking") is debated. For the U.S. government, for example, the movement of a person is not essential to the crime;

simply enticing or "harboring" a person is sufficient. There is also a frequent conflation between human smuggling and human trafficking (HSTC 2006). In the case of smuggling, a person may consent to be transported, only to become part of the trafficking process when abuses take place. Many individuals, perhaps most, do not identify themselves as "victims of human trafficking" and are often reluctant to come forward, usually out of fear for themselves or their families. In addition to these factors, the research presented here suggests that some categories of individuals and some places of exploitation are overlooked by justice system agencies and service providers. Since popular conceptions of human trafficking portray it as an urban crime that mostly affects women and children in the sex trade, males, migrants, and married women forced to do work in unacceptable conditions and in rural areas may be excluded by anti-trafficking efforts that tend to focus on only a few categories of exploited people.

This paper describes the characteristics of individuals that respondents in the state of Wisconsin identified as likely victims of human trafficking. In 2008, a self-administered survey was sent to more than 1800 Wisconsin governmental and non-governmental agencies and organizations believed likely to have had encountered a victim of human trafficking in the past three years. These organizations included law enforcement agencies, district attorneys, immigration and labor attorneys, county health departments, domestic violence and sexual assault agencies, immigration and refugee organizations, and some faith-based institutions (hereafter "first responders"). According to survey results, 249 individuals identified as possible victims were assisted by first responders in Wisconsin. Detailed information on 80 of these individuals was provided by survey respondents. The data collected demonstrates that human trafficking exploitation occurs in Wisconsin, in rural communities, in workplaces, and within homes. The results also suggest that place-based and other biases inform current anti-trafficking policies and practices and may render some categories of unfree labor invisible. Findings from the study support the need to investigate human trafficking activities among a wider array of individuals involved in the crime and in places that are not typically the focus of research or advocacy.

**Legal Definitions**

In the U.S., the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 (P.L. 106-386) is the primary legal framework and the basis for definitions, policy, and anti-trafficking efforts. Sometimes referred to as the "TVPRA" since its reauthorization in 2003 (H.R. 2620), 2005 (H.R. 972), and 2008 (H.R. 7311), section 103(8) of the TVPA defines ''severe forms of trafficking in persons'' as:

(A) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or

(B) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

While forced prostitution or sexual slavery are clearly instances of human trafficking and often central in media portrayals, other practices as diverse as child soldiering, selling human

organs, debt bondage, forcing one's spouse to work, or withholding of drugs from an addict to compel him or her to do something against his/her will, can also be the purpose or "goal" of human trafficking (Figure 1).[2] What all of these practices have in common is the use of force, fraud, coercion, intimidation, or abuse of power by traffickers—referred to here as the "means" of human trafficking—to make someone do something against their will while generating a profit or or deriving some other benefit from the activity (Davidson 2010; Dougherty 2006; Feingold 2005; ILO 2005 and 2009; Laczko and Gramegna 2003; US DOS 2010).

| Process | Means | Goal |
|---|---|---|
| **Trafficking is the...**<br><br>▪ Recruitment<br>▪ Harboring<br>▪ Transportation<br>▪ Provision<br><br>—OR—<br><br>▪ Obtaining<br><br>**(or attempt to do so)** | **By means of ...**<br><br>▪ Force<br>▪ Fraud<br>▪ Coercion<br><br>—EXCEPT THAT—<br><br>Force, fraud and coercion are not required to show trafficking of a minor for commercial sex acts. | **For the purpose of...**<br><br>▪ Commercial Sex Acts<br>▪ Involuntary Servitude<br>▪ Peonage<br>▪ Debt Bondage<br>▪ Slavery |

**Figure 1**. Depiction of the TVPA, redrawn from the Wisconsin Dept. of Justice website, http://www.doj.state.wi.us/cvs/ trafficking.asp.

Most U.S. state statutes making human trafficking a felony derive from the TVPA. In 2007, Wisconsin passed Act 116 (§ 940.302 and § 948.051), which provides a more complex and comprehensive definition for trafficking of adults than that of the TVPA (Figure 2).[3] The TVPA as well as most state statutes differentiate between commercial sex acts and labor exploitation as the main goals of trafficking. This distinction can be another source of confusion since commercial sex acts, albeit illegal in many places, can also be a kind of labor exploitation. A practice becomes human trafficking when the labor is forced, coerced, etc. Questions about agency and consent are especially important but also create confusion. For example, coercion or denial of consent is part of what defines the practice of human trafficking affecting adults according to most experts. Recently in Minnesota, however, the state decided that it would no longer determine if consent was given in cases of adult sex trafficking since "a person can never consent to being sexually exploited" (Minnesota 2010, 4). In addition, according to U.S. law, sexually exploited minors are always victims of human trafficking since children, by definition, can not give consent.

However they are defined, the distinction between sexual and non-sexual labor categories act as a structuring mechanism for understanding the crime and can inhibit knowledge about victim and perpetrator profiles as well as where exploitation takes place. Scholars have argued that an overemphasis on sex trafficking and female victims along with neglect of exploitative

[2] Many experts divide human trafficking into "process," "means," and "goals."
[3] Wisconsin Statute §948.051 applies to children.

labor practices and male victims adds to data collection problems (Andrees and van der Linden 2005; Desyllas 2007; Feingold 2005; US GAO 2006), obscures the role of migration (Chuang 2006, 152), and changes the focus of the crime from labor exploitation (sexual and non-sexual) to moral concerns (Desyllas 2007; Skinner 2009; Soderlund 2005). In addition, because various exploitative practices are often associated with particular kinds of places and expectations about perpetrators, important geographies of exploitation may be overlooked.

| Process | Means | Goal |
|---|---|---|
| **Trafficking means knowingly...**<br><br>▪ Harboring<br>▪ Obtaining<br>▪ Recruiting<br>▪ Transporting<br>▪ Enticing<br>▪ Provision<br><br>—OR—<br><br>**An attempt to do so without the consent of the individual** | **Done by any of the following...**<br><br>a. *Causing or threatening to cause bodily harm to any individual;*<br>b. *Causing or threatening to cause financial harm to any individual;*<br>c. *Restraining or threatening to restrain any individual*<br>d. *Violating or threatening to violate a law;*<br>e. *Destroying, concealing, removing, confiscating, or possessing, or threatening to destroy , conceal, remove, confiscate, or possess any actual or purported passport or any other actual or purported official identification document of any individual;*<br>f. *Extortion;*<br>g. *Fraud or deception;*<br>h. *Debt bondage;*<br>***i.*** *Controlling any individual's access to an addictive controlled substance; or*<br>j. *Using any scheme or pattern to cause an individual to believe that any individual would suffer bodily harm, financial harm, restraint, or other harm.* | **For the purpose of...**<br><br>Commercial Sex Acts<br><br>—OR—<br><br>Labor or Services |

**Figure 2**. Depiction of Wisconsin Act 116, redrawn from the Wisconsin Department of Justice website at http://www.doj.state.wi.us/cvs/ trafficking.asp

This research indicates that the crime of human trafficking is likely more prevalent in the Midwest than is typically imagined, especially when males, undocumented workers, and married women are included as possible victims. Undocumented migrants, in particular, are a population of interest in Wisconsin because they are considered to be especially vulnerable to trafficking (FTS and HRC 2004) and because they are a growing population in the U.S Midwest: the Pew Hispanic Center estimates that between 70,000 and 100,000 unauthorized immigrants reside in Wisconsin alone (Passel and Cohn 2009, 2). While there is no clear evidence linking undocumented migrants to rural areas in Wisconsin, our data indicates that males were twice as likely to be exploited in rural areas as females, suggesting that distinctive victim and perpetrator characteristics and patterns exist in the rural Midwest.

## Geographic Research on Human Trafficking

There has been relatively little scholarship on human trafficking by geographers in the past ten years with exceptions focused mostly on the sex trafficking of women and girls in the Global South, on geographies of slavery and their associated narratives, and recently on human smuggling (Bimal Kanti and Hasnath 2000; Black 2003; Davidson 2010; Hubbard, Matthews and

Scoular 2008; Lindquist 2008; Manzo 2005; Mountz 2004, 2010; Nast 2005; Olund 2009; Richardson, Poudel, Laurie 2009; Samarasinghe 2008). Reports by several international organizations, however, suggest the importance of North America as a trafficking destination, especially for male victims (IOM 2005; UNODC 2006). Most research on trafficking in the U.S. is sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Justice, which produces high quality data, but relies on victim and perpetrator categories determined by legal, law enforcement and security concerns (Bales and Lize 2005; Farrell et. al 2008; Finckenauer and Chin 2007; Keefer 2006; Mossey 2009; Zhang 2007). Other work on North America assesses policy or laws, reviews existing literature, or provides popular accounts of human trafficking focused on moral outrage (Bales and Soodalter 2009; DeStefano 2007; Desyllas 2007; Gozdziak and Collett 2005; Ozalp 2010; Schauer and Wheaton 2006).

Collecting human trafficking data faces a number of significant obstacles, in general, including gathering information on what is often considered a "hidden crime" and from victims reluctant to come forward (Andrees and van der Linden 2005; Brunovskis and Surtees 2010; Buckland 2008; Doezema 2002; Farrell et al. 2010; Laczko 2005; Laczko and Gramegna 2003; Loff and Sanghera 2004; Tyldum and Brunovskis 2005; US GAO 2006). And since human trafficking research funding tends to favor border regions and large international ports of entry, data collection in the U.S. is further limited. Nongovernmental and governmental service providers and law enforcement are, however, increasingly collecting data pertaining to their service areas or jurisdictions (Jones and Yousefzadeh 2006, Wilson and Dalton 2007, 2008). Some states mandate data collection on human trafficking (see for example, Minnesota 2008, 2010), or conduct research through their own state justice system agencies (WI OJA 2008).

**Prior Research on Human Trafficking in Wisconsin**

In 2006, human trafficking in Wisconsin received national attention when a couple from Brookfield, Wisconsin was convicted and charged in the first federal human trafficking case in the country. The case involved two doctors that kept a domestic employee concealed within their Brookfield home for nineteen years.[4] That same year, the Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance (WI OJA) established a human trafficking subcommittee as part of its *Violence Against Women Act* advisory committee. The subcommittee developed a survey in order to learn more about human trafficking in Wisconsin and to assess the capacity of justice system actors and social service providers to identify and assist victims. The survey was administered in three phases between March and August 2007 (WI OJA 2008). In phase I, an online survey was sent to 775 law enforcement offices and 558 service provider agencies. In phase II, a follow-up survey was sent to the 96 respondents who had indicated they encountered a victim of human trafficking. And in phase III, seven telephone interviews were conducted about specific cases reported in the phase II follow-up survey.

While the main purpose of the Wisconsin OJA survey was to determine the degree to which law enforcement and social service providers in the state had knowledge, training, or interest in human trafficking, the survey also attempted to quantify the number of victims or possible victims encountered in Wisconsin. Confusion, varying interpretations, and/or lack of training

[4] See Vikki Ortiz, "Maid lived in quiet struggle for twenty years," in the *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, January 14, 2007, for a detailed account of the case.

related to the practice of human trafficking and its definitions had a direct affect on quantifying victims. When respondents were asked if their agency had consulted on or provided services to any case involving slavery or human trafficking, 37 agencies indicated that they had encountered a total of between 114 and 161 victims since 2000. When the terms *slavery* and *human trafficking* were removed and the question was reframed to ascertain if the agency had encountered individuals exploited in specific kinds of work—commercial sex, non-sexual labor, or minor commercial sex—under conditions of force, fraud or coercion, 123 agencies indicated that between 191 and 315 victims had been encountered.[5] These responses suggest that assumptions about what constitutes exploitation and how it is related to trafficking not only affect data collection but also service provision and law enforcement response in Wisconsin.

Phase I of the Wisconsin OJA survey asked respondents to identify the geographic origin of each case handled in terms of region, country, and state or city. In phase II, another question was added, "Within the area your agency covers, please identify up to 3 specific neighborhood locations where the majority of these trafficking victims can be found." Responses to this question included a diverse list of places such as "northern Wisconsin", "south side of Sheboygan", "a farm in Dunn County", "rural areas", "middle class neighborhoods", and "motels". When I joined the Wisconsin human trafficking subcommittee in October 2007, the survey had been designed and data collected, but I agreed to review the data and produce maps where possible for the final report, published in February 2008. While I was able to produce a variety maps based on responses to some questions, it became clear to me that additional data would need to be collected in order to map geographic and demographic information at the individual level and create a more precise picture of the geography of human trafficking in Wisconsin.

**Institute on Race and Ethnicity Survey**

The University of Wisconsin System Institute on Race and Ethnicity (IRE) funded a study on victims of human trafficking in Wisconsin, which was administered in May 2008. Like the OJA project, this study included a self-administered survey sent to organizations who had or who were likely to have encountered a victim of human trafficking, but was also designed to identify types of exploitation faced in addition to demographic (e.g., gender, age, and ethnicity) and geographic information (e.g., counties where individuals were exploited). The study had originally intended to include follow-up interviews to add depth and detail to data from the survey instrument, but all monies had been spent to produce and administer the survey before interviews could take place.

The IRE study was designed to identify victim characteristics and not to "estimate" prevalence of cases, which requires a different set of techniques (see Clawson, Layne, and Small 2006; "Ohio Trafficking" 2010). In addition, the data was based on first responder *recollection* about individuals that had sought assistance. While recollection is not an ideal source of data, basing information on a case count is equally problematic. It is not unusual for service providers to either avoid creating case files or to omit essential details from them in order to prevent risks to clients. Although the data generated from the IRE survey is statistically non-

[5] Pages 18 – 22 of the OJA report provide a detailed discussion of these findings. The report can be accessed online at ftp://doaftp04.doa.state.wi.us/doadocs/Human_Trafficking_Report_Final.pdf.

representative and cannot be generalized to broader populations, characteristics of possible victims were able to be identified.

**Methodology**

In order to answer the research questions (i.e., had first responders encountered victims?; what were the demographic and ethnic characteristics of those individuals?; and where did exploitation occur?), entire populations of first responders in several categories were surveyed. Because so little is known about the sorts of agencies and organizations that might or might not have encountered a potential victim of human trafficking, I opted to survey total populations instead of using a sampling frame. One goal of the study, too, was to determine which responders were most significant in encountering possible victims. Sampling strategies associated with hidden populations such as relying on respondent-driven sampling were not an option in this research, given the fact that so few victims had been identified to date (see Salganik and Heckathorn 2004).

A respondent list was initially developed along the same lines as the one used in the WI OJA survey, described above. Justice system agencies, including law enforcement and associated service providers, were identified from the Wisconsin Office of Crime Victim Services Victim/Witness directory, the Wisconsin Refugee Service Provider list, and the Wisconsin Mutual Assistance directory. In addition, two sets of addresses were purchased: an attorney list from the Wisconsin Chapter of the Association of American Immigration Attorneys and a list from the Labor and Employment section of the Wisconsin State Bar. Several types of firms and organizations were removed from these lists if their work seemed beyond the scope of assisting human trafficking victims or if the organization was out of state.

Self-administered surveys were designed and produced according to the Dillman's "Total" and "Tailored" techniques (Dillman 1978, 2007) in order to gather high quality data. A packet that included a printed four-page survey, cover letter, and insert defining human trafficking according to the U.S. Department of State, was mailed to respondents in May 2008. An internet option was described in the cover letter to encourage those agencies that preferred to take the survey online to do so. The survey was completely anonymous without identifying marks of any kind. A postcard reminder was sent two weeks after the initial mailing. Multiple mailings, monetary incentives, and other techniques advocated by Dillman to maximize response rates were not feasible due to both budget constraints and the types of data being collected.

**Response**

Respondents were asked to recall encounters with individuals that they had positively identified as victims of human trafficking as well as those that in their estimation might be victims. Data collected through the survey instrument included basic demographic information on the victim (e.g., age, gender, country of birth); county(ies) where exploitation had occurred; very general descriptors of the places at which the exploitation occurred (e.g., rural or urban/suburban); and the main type as well as any and all types of exploitation faced by the individual (e.g., commercial sex acts, nonsexual labor, debt bondage, etc.). Demographic information on the respondent was also requested.

In total, 1,837 surveys were mailed (Figure 3). 16 surveys were returned unopened, 336 hard copy surveys were completed and mailed back, and 18 surveys were taken online. 19.4% responded in total (354/1821) with a good deal of variability depending on the population surveyed. Although it is difficult to precisely quantify which populations responded since many organizations provide multiple services and indicated this on the survey, a rough estimate shows the following groups responded: 8.6% of attorneys; 16% of immigration attorneys; between 16 and 26% of law enforcement; 23% of social service providers; 27% of victim/witness assistance agencies; and 32% of churches affiliated with the Green Bay Diocese. Of all those who did respond (n=354), 56 organizations (15.8%) indicated that they had encountered one or more possible victims of human trafficking. There were no controls for duplicate reporting.

| | |
|---|---|
| Wisconsin police departments | 596 |
| District Attorneys | 72 |
| Victim/Witness Assistance programs | 91 |
| Social Service providers | 162 |
| Wisconsin Chapter of the Association of American Immigration Attorneys | 79 |
| The Labor and Employment section of the Wisconsin State Bar | 730 |
| All Parish Churches in the Diocese of Green Bay | 107 |
| TOTAL | 1837 |

**Figure 3**. Distribution of surveys to categories of organizations likely to have encountered a victim of human trafficking.

**Who is a Victim of Human Trafficking?**

During pretesting of the surveys, reviewers recommended that complex definitions and legalistic language on human trafficking be avoided, even where such information might clarify categories. In initial drafts of the survey, I provided a definition of human trafficking according to the U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act. In the final version, I included a separate insert showing a chart similar to Figure 1, along with a description of human trafficking, developed by the Solidarity Center and the International Catholic Migration, and published by the U.S. Department of State (2008).

Since there is an ongoing debate as to who or who is not a trafficked person, described above, I provided three options for respondents to select in response to the question, “In the past 3 years, has anyone in your local office encountered a victim of human trafficking?”

- Yes. I or someone in my office has encountered a victim.
- Possibly. I am not sure if this person(s) qualifies as a victim of human trafficking, but I can provide information about this individual.
- No. To my knowledge, no one in my office has encountered a victim.

56 respondents out of the 354 who returned the survey indicated that they had encountered someone that was or might have been (i.e. "possibly") a victim. Since a major concern was how much information to request from each respondent given the fact that many governmental and non-governmental agencies are short on staff and over-surveyed, I attempted to maximize response by minimizing the amount of time necessary to take the survey and requested, therefore, detailed information on only two victims. Respondents provided information for 80 individuals. In a separate question, respondents were asked to provide the number and gender of any additional victims encountered, and indicated that, in total, 249 victims or possible victims were encountered. The characteristics described below pertain only to the initial 80.

**Gender and Age**

Respondents were asked to identify a male victim first, if one was known, in order to counter anticipated "female victimization" bias, i.e., that females are more likely to be identified as victims. The purpose of the request was to make clear that counting male victims was of primary interest. While many human trafficking victims may be males, cultural expectations associated with masculinities (e.g., men as providers or able to "take" harsh treatment) along with the notion that females and minors require protection and assistance, is a likely part of the reason that unfree male laborers are disinclined to seek help and that first responders are less likely to identify them as needing assistance (Bouris 2007; Connell 2005; Fregoso 2006; Howard 1984; Mascini and van Bochove 2009; Rutvica 2007; Schwenken 2008; Weiss 2009). Although a wide variety of biases are discussed in survey design and analysis literature, introducing bias in this way is somewhat unusual (see for example, Tortolani 1965; Tull 1975). And although results from research employing techniques to reduce "automatic stereotyping" is mixed (Stewart and Payne 2008), this approach seemed advisable given the dominant discourse of human trafficking in the U.S. at this time.

The percentages of males (26%) and females (74%) in the sample (n=80) is similar to those found in recent studies on human trafficking and gender. When respondents were asked about additional victims, 66 females and 103 males were indicated, making the total number of males (n=124) and females (n=125) identified by respondents almost equal. This is strikingly dissimilar from data collected by the Human Trafficking Reporting System (HTRS), which found that between 8% and 9% of victims were male according anti-trafficking task forces that reported on cases investigated between 2007 and 2010 (Kyckelhahn et. al 2009; Banks and Kyckelhahn 2011).

Although gathering data on the ages of victim was not a particular focus of this research, respondents indicated that 15 individuals (19%) were minors, i.e., either "under 14" or between 15 and 17 years old. When this data is disaggregated by gender, the percentage of female minors is slightly higher than it is for males (Figure 4). Interestingly, more male children were exploited in rural areas than were female children (see discussion below). In addition, anecdotal information from respondent comments suggests that caretakers were frequently involved in the abuse of children.

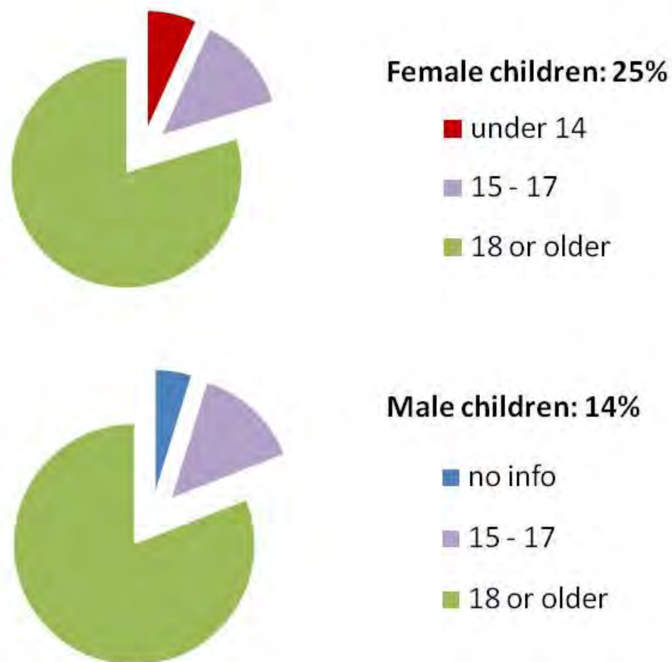


**Figure 4**. Ages of trafficked children as reported by respondents.

**Ethnic Identities**

Categories of identity are fraught with ambiguity, confusion, and error, as recent debates about the U.S. census can attest. In this project, respondents were asked to indicate a victim's country of origin if known as well as their ethnicity or "race" according to a predetermined list, shown here:

- African - American
- African
- Caucasian - American
- Native - American
- Latina/o
- Central/South American
- Russian/Eastern European
- Southeast Asian (Hmong, Laotian, Filipino, Thai, Vietnamese)
- East Asian (China, Koreas, Japan)
- Other (*please write in)*

There were several challenges related to collecting data on ethnic identity: the terms *ethnicity* and *race* are contested and confusing; respondents may not know how to identify the ethnicity of an individual they have encountered; an individual's ethnic identity may involve multiple categories or those unknown to researcher or respondent. In the survey, both categories "Latina/o" and "Central/South American" were included, although the term *Hispanic* was not since there was concern that it would worsen confusion among respondents (see Hitlin, Brown, and Elder 2007).

**Countries of origin**

- China
- Mexico
- Russia
- U.S

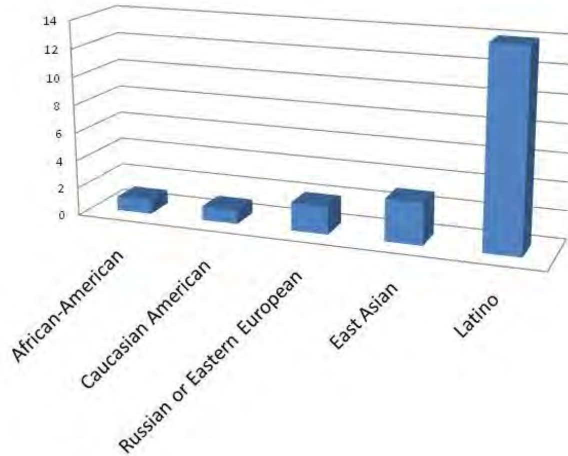


**Figure 5**. Ethnicities and countries of origin for males, according to respondents.

**Countries of origin**

- Brazil
- China
- Columbia
- Laos
- Lithuania
- Mexico
- Nigeria
- Peru
- Philippines
- Russia
- Rwanda
- U.S.

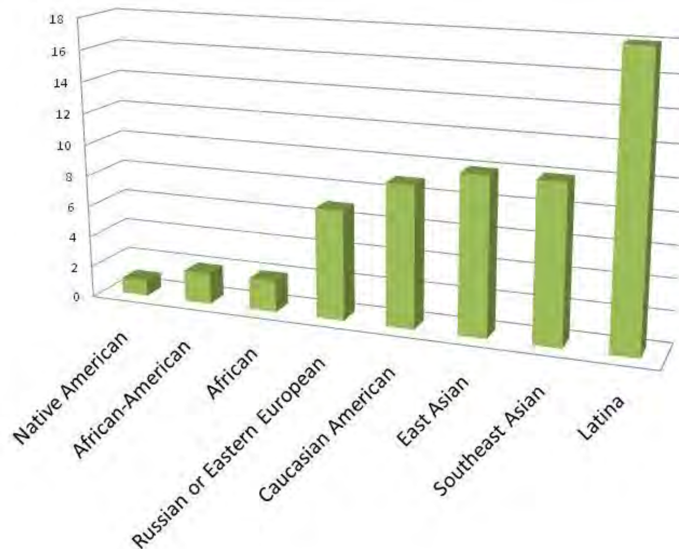


**Figure 6**. Ethnicities and countries of origin for females, according to respondents.

Disclosures of ethnicity can also be problematic for migrant communities that face discrimination or vulnerability in a host society. In addition, those assisting people in need may have a professional obligation to ensure their anonymity and so will be reluctant to disclose any identifying characteristics. According to most service provider protocols, ensuring a person's safety and well-being is a priority; gathering details about identity is not. I felt that it was reasonable, nevertheless, to encourage respondents to describe their knowledge about victims, and to assure them that data from this study would only be shared in aggregate form.

While the immediate goal of the study was to gather as much information as possible about victim characteristics, there were concerns that harm could be caused just by identifying particular communities facing exploitation. This view was also expressed by advocates from ethnic communities at anti-trafficking meetings I attended on several occasions. In addition, immigrants and refugees spoke with me privately about these concerns after I had presented preliminary findings from the project. Labeling an individual as a victim, survivor, or even someone in need of help can, potentially, be perceived as an inadequacy by family or community to care for its members. The view that revealing problems and needs might bring shame to a community is a strong disincentive for people to come forward about abuse. Furthermore, in some communities, preserving family and community harmony is essential to expectations related to women's roles and gendered responsibilities. For men, disclosing vulnerability may be especially onerous (Batnitzky, McDowell and Sarah Dyer 2009; Walter, Bourgois, and Loinaz. 2004).

Among anti-trafficking advocates in Wisconsin, the point that native-born people are trafficked as well as migrants is often stressed. The data here, however, strongly suggests that migrants are especially vulnerable to trafficking. Reporting errors and preconceptions about victims could affect data, however: some respondents may imagine that trafficking victims are mostly migrants, others that they are likely to be native-born. In total, respondents indicated that 70% of female victims and 76% of male victim were foreign-born, i.e., that their country of origin was not the U.S. (Figures 5 and 6). Information pertaining to immigration status was not requested because service providers as well as governmental agencies may desire or be required to not ask individuals about their immigration status. Individuals identified in this study as foreign-born could be naturalized U.S. citizens, refugees, legal permanent residents, or unauthorized residents.

**Types of Trafficking in Wisconsin**

Respondents were asked to indicate *all* types of trafficking as well as the *main* type of trafficking activity faced by individuals identified as victims. Since it is not uncommon for people to think of trafficking activities according to the most widely known *goals* of trafficking, i.e., "sex trafficking" or "labor trafficking," our intent was to give respondents an opportunity to identify more precise categories of exploitation, along with write-in options.

The types of trafficking indicated by respondents varied considerably by gender (Figures 7 and 8). Survey data showed that males were exploited primarily in agricultural and restaurant work. Surprisingly, the main type of exploitation for nearly 1/3 of possible female victims (n=19) was identified as brokered or servile marriage. Countries of origin for women and girls in brokered and servile marriages, according to respondents, included Rwanda, China,

Philippines, Mexico, Russia, Nigeria, Brazil, Laos, "Eastern Europe," and the U.S. Among all such marriages (n=23), females were also exploited in restaurants and factories, and as domestics, exotic dancers, and prostitutes. It is important to keep in mind that "brokered marriage" is a complex category that is currently being studied and debated by scholars and anti-trafficking advocates (see for example, Constable 2006). Such marriages may be implemented through commercial brokers (aka mail-order brides) or through family and community members and may or may not be exploitative, although there are reports of abuse (Tahirih Justice Center 2007; Vue 2002). Servile marriage, on the other hand, is defined as one in which a girl or woman does not have the right to refuse the marriage, typically arranged for the financial or other benefit of her family (Bokhari 2009; Dabby and Poore 2007).[6] How to regard cultural practices associated with servile and early marriages, particularly among Southeast Asian communities in the Midwest, is hotly contested.

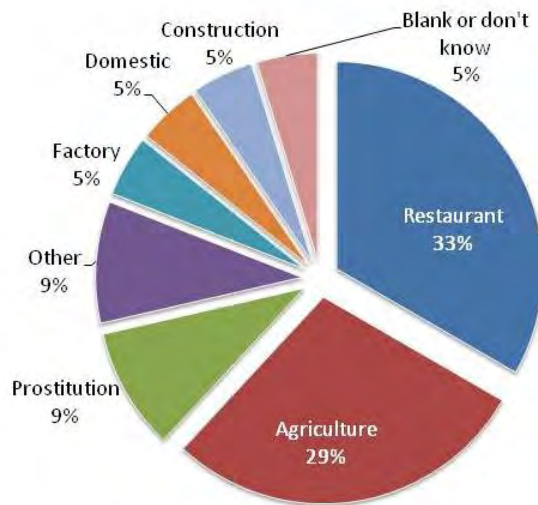


**Figure 7.** Main type of trafficking activities for males according to respondents.

**Perpetrators**

The relatively high percentage of married women identified as trafficking victims in this study suggests that exploitation within families may be an important area for further research and eventual policy development. While familiar public order crimes such as prostitution and related commercial sexual activities are often the focus of anti-trafficking efforts, data from this study confirms that trafficking occurs within the context of intimate relationships and calls into question the role of intimacy and how it may affect whether or not an individual seeks assistance from service providers or law enforcement. What the data makes clear is that the family and domestic sphere are arenas for trafficking activities and exploitation. While more

[6] Servile marriages differ from arranged marriages, in that females do have the right to refuse an arranged marriage.

work is needed on the relationship between family, migration, and vulnerability (see for example, Jayaweera and Anderson 2008), this study suggests that dwellings should not be overlooked in anti-trafficking efforts. Interestingly, most government reports as well as academic work focus on transnational gangs, organizations, and networks whose members are sometimes portrayed as "close to the family of victims" but not family (Farr 2005; O'Neill Richard 1999; Salt and Stein 1997; US DOS 2010). It is fairly rare to encounter an investigation of family members that exploit one another for profit except in the case of trafficking in children where parents are sometimes knowingly complicit but more often tricked by unscrupulous actors (Rogers and Swinnerton 2008). In fact, Bales and Lize (2005) have found that families were often involved in recruitment and influential in trafficking to the U.S. And in the OJA survey on human trafficking in Wisconsin, respondents reported that 46.5% of the 200 to 300 possible victims identified were exploited by family members (WI OJA 2008).

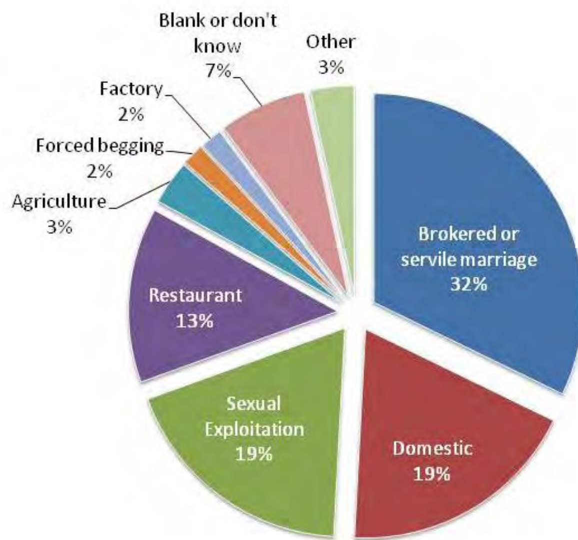


**Figure 8.** Main type of trafficking activities for females.

## Geographies of Trafficking in Wisconsin

Information from respondents about the geographies of exploitation is interesting but limited, especially since systematic sampling techniques were not used. Still, human trafficking-type activities occurred in more than half of all Wisconsin counties as reported by respondents. Counties where exploitation took place differed significantly according to gender, but the sample size was extremely small (Figures 9 and 10). In some cases, respondents indicated that victims were "moved around," and so exploitation of one individual took place in multiple counties. Of the 80 victims described in detail, respondents indicated that they did not know either the county or type of area where exploitation occurred (e.g., rural, urban/suburban) in 9% (n=7) of the cases. The U.S. cities or states that the victim travelled through before coming

**Figure 9.** Wisconsin counties where exploitation of males occurred.

**Figure 10.** Wisconsin counties where exploitation of females occurred.

to Wisconsin was unknown for 64% (n=51) of individuals identified. As already mentioned, questioning a victim about details of the crime is always secondary to ensuring victim security and providing basic assistance. Unless individuals choose to press charges, detailed information about such things as trafficking routes may not be disclosed. Respondents also appeared to have difficulty providing geographic information about their own work in the survey. This was especially apparent when agencies were asked to mark their service area or jurisdiction on a map of Wisconsin. To address this in future research, questions about geographies could be asked verbally to allow researchers the opportunity for probing and clarification.

Some useful geographic information was, nevertheless, provided about the sorts of locales where trafficking activities took place. Respondents were asked, “Where did these [trafficking

types of exploitation] activities mostly occur? Check box options were: “In a city or suburbs,” “In a rural area,” or “Don’t know.” While these categories were not defined for respondents, and are not statistically representative, there are interesting differences for various categories of victims suggesting further study is warranted: males were nearly twice as likely to be exploited in rural areas than females; children were more likely to be exploited in rural areas than adults; sexual exploitation occurred twice as frequently in urban areas as compared to rural areas for both males and females; and servile marriages occurred equally in rural and urban areas (Figures 11a – c). More rigorous sampling and data collection is required, however, before firm conclusions can be drawn from this thought-provoking data.

**Conclusion: Dispelling Myths**

Placed-based and other biases in research, advocacy, service provision, and law enforcement, produce dominant and subordinate victim, perpetrator and geographic categories in anti-human trafficking discourses resulting in the invisibility of certain categories of affected persons and the types of exploitation they face (Figure 12). The conventional assumption is that most trafficking activities take place in urban areas, which are then addressed by urban law enforcement (usually a vice or sensitive crimes units in metropolitan areas) whose focus is on public order crimes (e.g., prostitution). Investigating trafficking in persons in the Midwest, in Wisconsin, and in rural areas is an important step that needs to be taken in order to dispel those myths that urbanize, feminize, and sexualize the crime and shape trafficking policies. Data collected in this project has identified demographic and geographic attributes of victims that provide evidence for the need to include less likely groups and places in research projects so that a more accurate picture of populations affected by human trafficking can be developed.

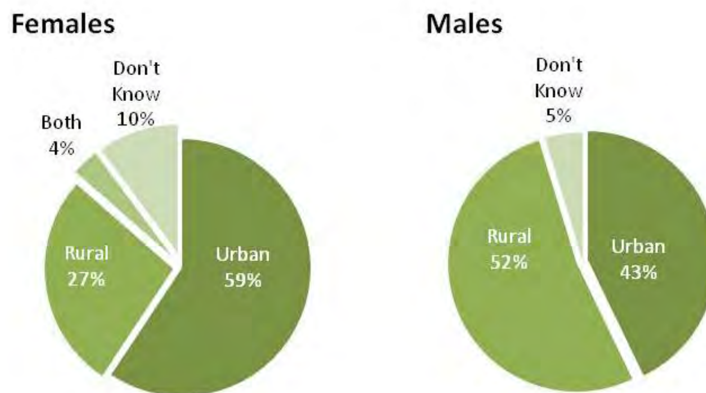


**Figure 11a**. Location of exploitation according to gender.

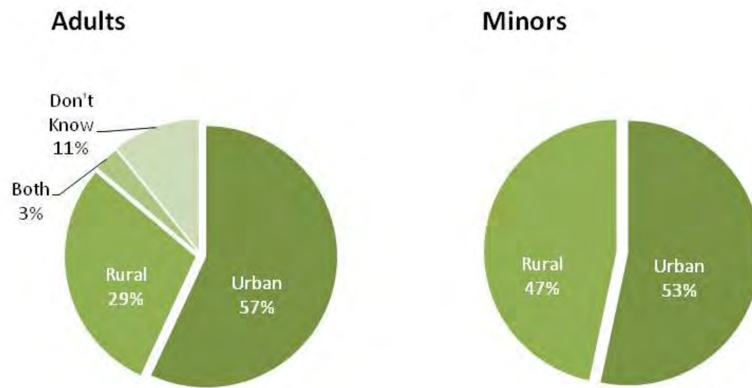


**Figure 11b**. Location of exploitation of adults and minors.

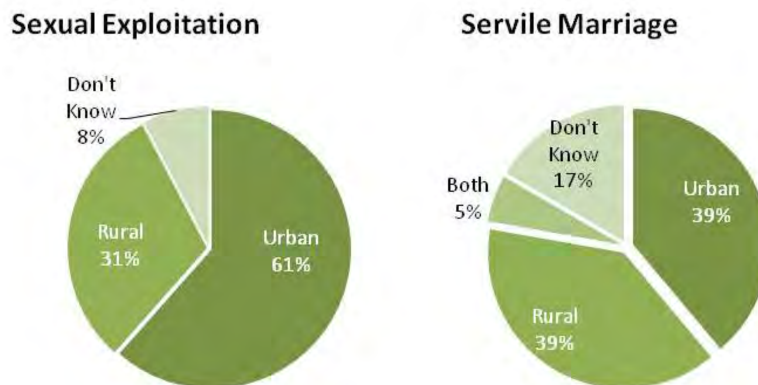


**Figure 11c**. Location of sexual exploitation and servile marriage.

Cultural norms appear to constrain discourses on victims and categories of individuals found in advocacy, research, and policy. When respondents were encouraged to identify males that had been exploited in the IRE survey, the numbers were much higher than those percentages found in official counts. In fairness, government agencies are working to adjust best practices and data collection to identify more male victims, but ideal victim categories (e.g., single females and minors) as well as expectations about masculinities, likely perpetuate myths about those affected by human trafficking.

Place-based biases may also contribute to these myths. Dominant discourses of rural life and their associated ideologies obscure exploitative practices as many scholars have documented (see for example, Cloke 1996, 2004; Woods 2010; Yarwood 2001). Myths of the rural (i.e., as idyllic and uncomplicated) have disguised oppressive conditions faced by rural people in a multitude of times and places (Woods 2011, 18; see also Bell 2006; Hart, Larson,

and Lishner 2005). Data from this study shows that crimes with elements of human trafficking do occur in rural locales, and also appear to disproportionately affect certain categories of people in those areas (e.g. males and children).

This project also highlights risks faced by migrants in Wisconsin. While reporting errors about ideal victims may impact the data collected, the number of non-native individuals affected by human trafficking is noteworthy especially so in light of anecdotal accounts of the reluctance of some groups to identify exploitation within their communities. Policymakers and practitioners should consider the possible failure of systems to respond to victims in underserved communities (e.g., unauthorized migrants). More sensitive mechanisms for collecting data from the wide variety of ethnic and national communities identified in this survey could be developed as well as ways to reduce the stigma that can result from disclosing that human trafficking is happening.

Finally, this project suggests that researchers need to look more carefully at relations of exploitation in the domestic sphere. While dominant representations of human trafficking tend to exclude intra-family exploitation, both Wisconsin studies described in this article reveal the importance of rethinking the household as a site where forced labor can occur. While one must be mindful of the problematic and sensitive arenas of family and marriage, particularly as a source for scientific data collection, anti-trafficking efforts must be targeted wherever individuals are forced or coerced into doing something against their will for another's profit, by a family member or someone else, and acknowledge that in these cases, too, human trafficking has occurred and needs to be addressed.

| | **Dominant** | **Subordinate** |
|---|---|---|
| **Victims** | Female | Male |
| | Single | Married |
| | Individuals engaged in commercial sex | Individuals engaged in non-sexual labor |
| **Perpetrators** | Transnational gangs | Family members |
| | Pimps; sociopaths | Legitimate enterprises; rational economic actors |
| **Places** | International | National |
| | U.S. border states and coastal regions | U.S. non-border states and inland areas |
| | Major metropolitan areas | Rural and smaller urban areas |
| | Public spaces (e.g. "the street") | Private spaces (e.g. homes, small businesses) |

**Figure 12**. Dominant and subordinate categories found in anti- trafficking discourses.

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