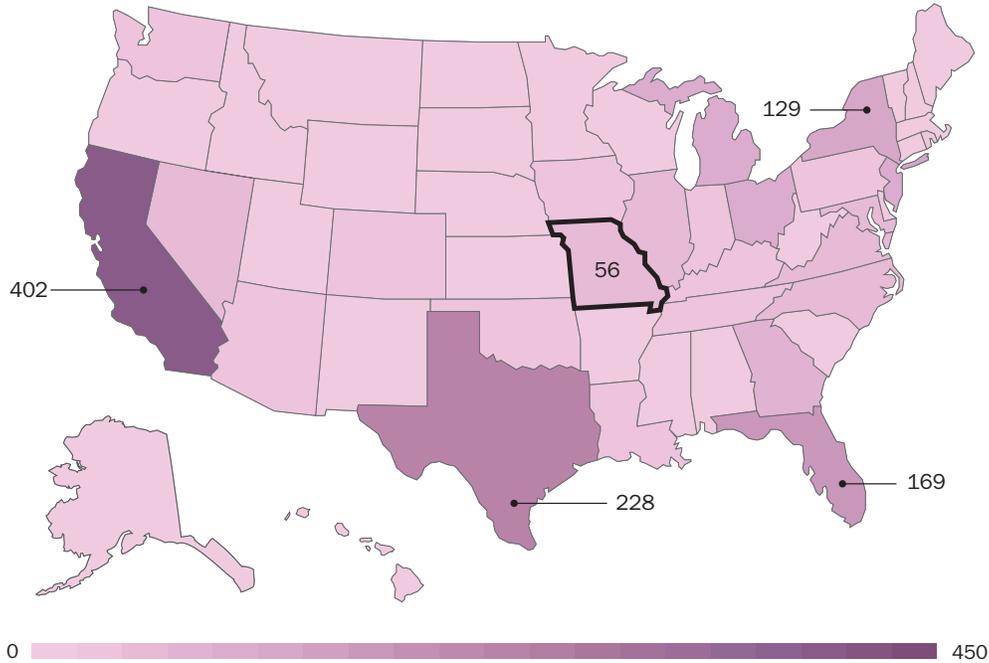


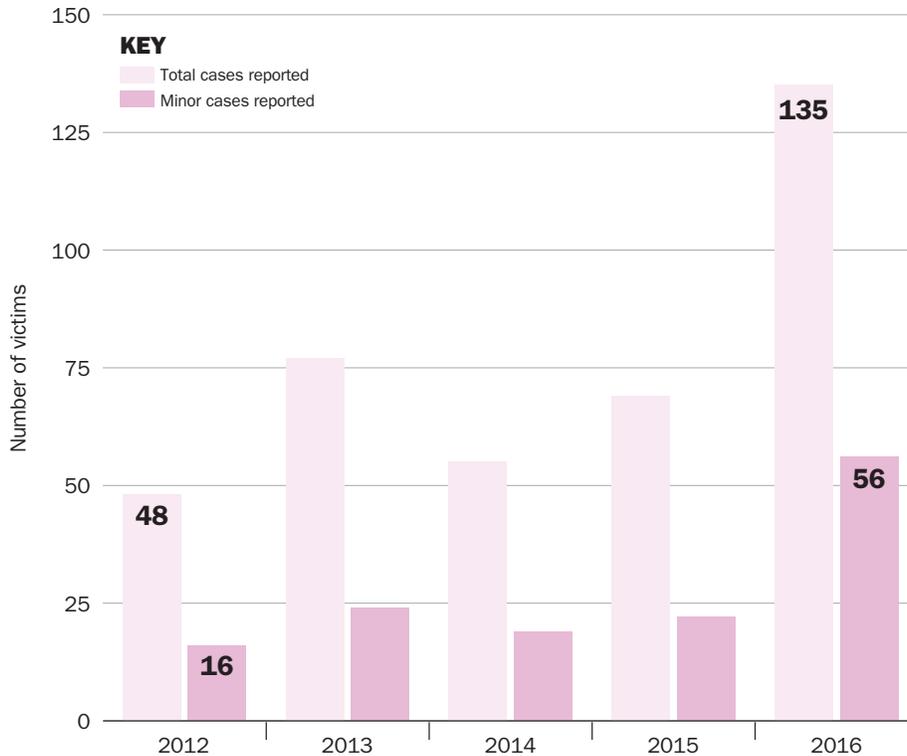
# In 2016, human trafficking cases involving minors increased in Missouri

In 2016, Missouri ranked 17, in regards to human trafficking cases in the U.S., according to the National Human Trafficking Hotline. When it comes to cases involving minors, Missouri ranked 14th with 56 cases. The rising number mainly results from the use of internet among teenagers, according to Detective Andrew Evans with the Boone County Sheriff's Department Cyber Crimes Task Force.

## An overview of human trafficking cases involving minors



## Missouri's human trafficking total cases and cases involving minors



## **Human trafficking education for teenagers and parents is in need as cases keep increasing**

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As the number 17th state in the nation for the most human trafficking cases, Missouri held the record of 135 cases in 2016. This has almost doubled the number of cases in 2015, according to National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTRC).

The rapid increase reflects on not only the total number of cases, but also cases involving minors. In 2016, there were 56 minors in Missouri getting involved in human trafficking, reported by NHTRC; while the number was 22 in 2015.

Detective Andrew Evans with the Boone County Sheriff's Department Cyber Crimes Task Force, found the majority of human trafficking cases involving minors is directly connected to cybercrime due to the accessibility of the internet to children.

“The average age that a child goes online is seven, but it is getting younger and younger now,” said Evans.

Also, the growing popularity of smart phone and social media has exposed more teenagers to the dangers of human trafficking.

“I had my cell phone when I was 12,” said Kaitlyn Hartnagel, a sophomore at Hickman High School in Columbia.

Hartnagel said Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram are the regular social apps she uses every day.

“In the world of internet, traffickers always research about their targets through their social media before they action,” said Nanette Ward, a member of Missouri Attorney General’s new human trafficking task force and the chair of Central Missouri Stop Human Trafficking Coalition.

In order to raise the awareness of human trafficking among teenagers, the Boone County Sheriff's Department Cyber Crimes Task Force currently offers education programs in seven counties in Missouri for middle schools and high schools, according to Evans. Until now, they have spoken to approximately 39 different organizations where over 5,200 people in total were in attendance.

However, the education for teenagers is still in great need.

Hartnagel first knew about human trafficking through a brief presentation at her school. “It was the only introductory about human trafficking in my school life.”

Meanwhile, for advocates and non-profit organizations, it could be difficult to get into middle schools and high schools for educating because of age and decision making capabilities of the

students, according to April Rothweiler, a volunteer trainer against human trafficking with Be the Light.

And sometimes education may not be as effective as it should be.

“Everyone has the ‘it won't happen to me’ mentality,” Rothweiler said. “Education is only good if people really listen and act on it. You can't go to a training and then file the information away in the ‘when I'm ready’ file in your brain.”

Rothweiler also pointed out that parents should educate their children about human trafficking as well.

“Parents don't want to be over protective to their kids because it makes them look bad or uncool,” Rothweiler said. “But it (being knowledgeable) could save your child's life.”

Robin Flemming, a victim of what she thought was domestic violence, was eight months ago that her case actually fell under human trafficking.

“I wish I would have known this (human trafficking) earlier,” Flemming said. “Now I have taught a lot to my kids.”

Rothweiler said education is absolutely not enough until every single person has heard and is aware, even if they don't want to hear.

“If all the organizations and individuals with a passion to fight human trafficking will work together, we can make a huge difference,” Rothweiler said.