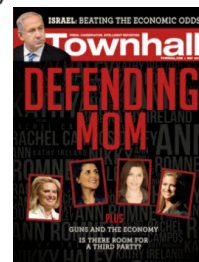


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# Crimes in Your Own Backyard: Shocking Human Trafficking Statistics



Elisabeth Meinecke | May 09, 2013

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Some aren't old enough to drive a car, or vote, or have even reached the designation of teenager. One survivor told of how girls were shown a horrific act perpetuated on one victim who tried

to escape.

Yet it's likely less than 1 percent of an estimated almost 21 million human trafficking victims worldwide are identified, according to Capitol Hill testimony given Tuesday by Bradley Myles, executive director and CEO of Polaris Project, a



non-profit that combats human trafficking.

That was just one of several shocking statistics that came up in the hearing held by the Committee on Foreign Affairs, which focused on local and private sector initiatives to combat human trafficking.

Chairman Ed Royce said in his opening statement that some estimates put the number of American citizen children

who are such victims within U.S. borders at 100,000.

“These are not just faraway problems affecting the developing world,” Royce said.

Another witness at the hearing was Don Knabe, who is the Los Angeles County Supervisor for the Fourth District and has worked extensively on this issue. He talked about the average age of prostitution being between 12-13. He told the story of a probation officer who received word that a 10-year-old girl was taken into custody at 6 pm on a Tuesday for prostitution.

For gangs, explained Knabe, human trafficking ends up being more lucrative than the trafficking of drugs or guns, and safer—for the criminals.

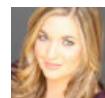
The real-life horrors of forced human labor take many forms—from forced conscription of child soldiers to sexual servitude, as Royce discussed in his opening statement.

Fixing the problem requires overcoming multiple challenges in all facets of the process:

--One pressing difficulty is housing the victims. According to Knabe, the pimp is often waiting for a trafficked child, usually faced with a misdemeanor, outside the court after the minor is released. Finding safe housing for these children, however, is difficult. Sometimes the children end up in the juvenile hall, where another victim who still wants to be involved in the prostitution ring may snitch on their location. Poe mentioned a statistic from Myles’ organization which said last year there were only 1644 beds for trafficking victims in the U.S.

--Legislative hurdles: A key component revolves around treating children who have been trafficked as victims, rather than criminals because of the acts committed. Myles said certain states are looking at changing laws to do just that, but he believes something such as a Sense of the Congress resolution would help the situation. Another legal hang-up is that prosecutors have to prove the sex trafficker knew the victim was a child.

--Public awareness: People have not yet comprehend such things are happening in their own communities. While Knabe mentioned Los Angeles’ two major ports, airport, and proximity to the border, Rep. Adam Kinzinger of Illinois mentioned St. Louis and Chicago. Myles said communities need to be saturated with awareness of what trafficking is, how to spot it, and what to do when it’s discovered. Sometimes, law enforcement members are no more aware of this issue than the public.



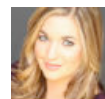
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--Federal problem: According to Royce and Rep. Chris Smith of New Jersey, there is also a struggle with the State Department to get them to accurately label some countries where trafficking may be a major issue. "In the past 13 years, international peer pressure and the potential threat of U.S. sanctions have pushed many nations to try to avoid the stain of a 'Tier 3' designation in the State Department's annual report, and more than 130 countries have enacted anti-trafficking laws," Royce said. "The struggle that Chairman Chris Smith and I have had over the last few years is with the State Department and their lack of willingness - their lack of honesty in naming names and in putting on the Tier 3 list those countries that are involved."

As the spotlight intensifies on these problems, however, there is also good work being done to combat the evils of human trafficking:

--One focus of Myles' group has been anti-trafficking hotlines. One which they operate, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline, has "fielded over 75,000 calls and played a role in identifying nearly 9,000 survivors of trafficking to date." Myles explained making sure people know about the anti-trafficking hotlines are a good way to reach victims (number available [here](#)). One such hotline, a local one, was used by two Midwest girls who were conned to D.C. and forced into sex trafficking. A police officer saw them, thought something was amiss, and gave them the hotline number the girls then used when the pimp was asleep. Law enforcement was able to extract the girls from the situation, and they're now doing well, according to Myles.

--There have also been successful collaborations with private enterprises. Knabe mentioned how Clear Channel and Lamar Advertising gave over 100 billboards and 50 digital displays as part of a campaign in Los Angeles to raise awareness of sex trafficking.

--Another creation Knabe detailed was the Collaborative Court: "Through the Court, we are able to provide the young girls with a victim-centered response team to help them with their physical and mental health issues, and to support them with housing, education and training services." This was done through a federal grant.

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**Elisabeth Meinecke**

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