

## The Average Age of Entry Myth

January 5, 2016

polarisproject.org

NOTE: The change in the Polaris's website was a direct result of my research on the number and ages of persons arrested for prostitution from 1981 to 2014. I sent my colleague Bella R. the material which she took to a luncheon where the founder of the Polaris Project was a speaker, showed her the material and told her that there was NO possible way for the average age to be "12/ 13/ 14" and gave her the stats which I took from the FBI tables off their website and put in a spreadsheet showing the ages for those arrests over the years. It took the Polaris Project nearly a year to review the material, but after they did, they revamped their website to include the following information.



With January's focus on human trafficking awareness, the topic is sure be discussed in the news more often this month—and this exposure is incredibly important to make sure that people are aware of this crime. But statistics on trafficking can be difficult to find, and the information you hear may

not be reliable. One such datapoint deals with the sex trafficking of minors.

### Myth in Question

**"The average age of entry for girls into prostitution in the U.S. is 12-14 years old."**

Many people have used this controversial statistic. It is widely quoted by both policy makers and NGOs in an effort to bring attention to child sex trafficking. While we commend their intentions, the statistic itself may not, in fact, be true.

### The Facts

This stat is not actually supported by any data. We've looked at both our internal data and external data sources, such as open source research and media, and we don't believe that 12-14 is an accurate average age of entry into prostitution.

In May 2015 we released an issue brief on sex trafficking of U.S. citizens in the U.S. in which we analyzed reports of sex trafficking victims and survivors who called into the NHTRC hotline or we

served as clients. It's not our protocol to ask victims and survivors how old they were when they first entered into prostitution, but some volunteered this information.

123 survivors shared with us their age when they first engaged in commercial sex. Here is a breakdown of what we learned:

- 44% of these survivors estimated that they were 17 or younger.
- The average age of entry was 19 years old.

### **Did we solve the mystery?**

Not quite. Our information might be affected because more adult victims contact the NHTRC and BeFree than minors.

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) funded a study that looked at sex trafficking of minors in the U.S. The victims in this study reported a median age of 15 years old. However, just as our information is skewed because more adults contact the hotlines, this study is also skewed because it only interviewed victims and survivors who were minors.

### **How can we figure out the answer?**

We won't be able to come to an accurate and conclusive answer about the average age of entry into prostitution if we only use small data sets. Without a large, comprehensive, and methodical study, the anti-trafficking field has to rely on data that is incomplete and imperfect. We need researchers to conduct a larger new study that analyzes data from equal numbers of minor and adult participants.

### **Check out [The Facts](#) for more key statistics on human trafficking.**

Many people use one statistic to bring attention to child sex trafficking—but the statistic itself might not be true.



Foreign workers who have paid large recruitment and travel fees to labor recruiters are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

The first interview in Polaris's new series spotlighting advocates involved in the fight against human trafficking.