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## Human-trafficking hotline calls show 'groundswell of interest'

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By [Chuck Neubauer](#)

The Washington Times

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Human trafficking has been described by the Justice Department as "a big moneymaker for criminals and a scourge to society" and a group that seeks to help those caught in its grips says the number of callers to its national hotline identifying themselves as victims is increasing — and that's good.

"This is really significant," said Sarah Jakiel, deputy director of the Washington-based Polaris Project. "It is such a hidden and isolated crime. ... The message is getting out."

The Polaris Project, the largest group focused on human trafficking in the United States, says its hotline calls from those who identified themselves as victims jumped by nearly 61 percent last year. The group describes the increase in a report to be released Tuesday as "encouraging," given the covert nature of the crime and the historic reluctance of victims to come forward.

The number of calls from people identifying themselves victims shot up from 471 in 2010 to 756 in 2011, the report says. The total number of calls to the hotline also increased by 64 percent from 11,874 in 2010 to 19,427 in 2011. In addition to potential victims, the hotline receives calls from family members and friends as well community members and others.

"This issue is getting traction," Ms. Jakiel said. "There is a real groundswell of interest."

As a result of the calls, the report says, the hotline connected 2,945 potential victims of human trafficking to services and support in 2011. Callers also provided detailed information on 848 unique cases of potential human trafficking.

The report said truckers "are one of the main sources of information for the hotline about situations of sex trafficking involving minors." Truckers, who often are approached by minors at truck stops, made 185 hotline calls in 2011. The report notes that many truckers are aware of the hotline because of a campaign by a group called Truckers Against Trafficking.

Ms. Jakiel said there is a "significant presence" of human trafficking in the D.C. area, adding that D.C. ranks fifth, Virginia seventh and Maryland 13th on the list of states with the highest number of reports of potential human trafficking cases or victims in 2011.

"In Northern Virginia, there have been several child sex-trafficking rings involving gang members targeting high school girls using social media and other techniques for recruitment," she said.

Many crime groups have turned to trafficking, including the Crips, one of the largest and most violent street gangs in the United States. It has spread its network of crime into Virginia high schools, where gang leaders recruit girls as prostitutes with promises of "lots of money" and then maintain their allegiance through beatings, threats, assaults and an endless supply of drugs.

One of the groups involved was the Underground Gangster Crips, five of whose members were charged in Fairfax County with running a prostitution business that recruited high school girls and threatened them with violence if they attempted to leave. Most of the girls involved were 15 and 16 and, according to court records, were afraid to report their "pimps" to police after what authorities described as violent and frequent beatings and threats.

Last March, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told a meeting of the president's task force on human trafficking that the Polaris hotline was "really making a difference in reaching out to survivors and helping us prosecute abusers."

Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. has announced plans to designate a person to oversee all Justice Department activities concerning human trafficking, enabling the department to be even more effective in its efforts to combat such crimes and reach victims.

Polaris operates the National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline which is funded by the Department of Health and Human Services. The nationwide hotline is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.