

<<

HOME > NEWS > LOCAL

San Diego Gangs Cash In on Sex Trafficking

Investigators say gang members are targeting young girls between 12 and 14 years old in this thriving criminal activity

By Omari Fleming and Monica Garske | Wednesday, Jan 29, 2014 | Updated 6:54 PM PST



NBC 7's Omari Fleming speaks with FBI Special Agent Robert Howe about how street gangs have turned to sex trafficking as their primary source of income, above drugs and other crimes.

#endcardShareBtns div.gig-button-container-facebook-like .fb-like span, #endcardShareBtns div.gig-button-container-facebook-like .fb-like span iframe {vertical-align:top!important;}

advertisement

Drug dealing and gun running both used to be big business for streets gangs. However, these days, authorities say gangs are making the bulk

of their money from sex trade – targeting young, unsuspecting victims.

According to law enforcement officials, 12 to 14-year-old girls are the sex trafficking targets sought by street gangs. These girls aren't runaways or from another country, they're from right here in San Diego, and could be the girl next door or possibly one's own daughter.

FBI Special Agent Robert Howe says gangs use a number of tactics in order to grow their criminal enterprise. This includes using homemade music videos and social media and to lure their victims.

Howe says this technology is now helping gangsters grow into CEOs of a thriving sex trafficking industry.

"It's all a very dark secret. Utilize social networks sites to advertise and communicate," explained Howe.

The victims on the other end of those recruiting efforts could be anyone, according to Howe.

"You may have a daughter that could easily get pulled into that environment if you're not very careful with the relationship you have with your daughter," said Howe.

On Jan. 8, authorities busted a [major sex trafficking ring involving two dozen suspected gang members](#) and their associates in San Diego's North Park community.

Officials said the team made three arrests and seized 10 cell phones, 200 photos

Officials said the large-scale, cross-country sex trafficking ring spanned 46 cities across 23 states and involved more than [60 victims from San Diego](#). A total of 11 of those victims were minors.

In that sex trafficking ring, investigators said gang members from the local group, “BMS,” allegedly acted as pimps, luring women and girls into a life of prostitution by using rap videos posted on social media that promised the women a glamorous, lavish lifestyle.

Once the victims became prostitutes, the suspects would allegedly “brand” their recruits [with tattoos](#) of gang symbols, bar codes or even a pimp’s name, and exchange the women among themselves as needed.

Lindsey Clark heads [Coast to Coast Central](#), a non-profit organization that helps victims of trafficking overseas.

Clark says that recently, someone tried to lure her into the sex trade as officials say gangsters often do, with the promise of big money.

Clark says an alleged sex trafficking suspect told her he’d give her \$1,000 if she slept with multiple men.

“It was bold and really intense,” she recalled.

With brazen recruitment tactics like this happening every day, sex trafficking has become a major focus of the FBI. Three task forces have been established to combat the problem.

Earlier this month, following the big bust in North Park, San Diego District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis said the number of human trafficking cases convicted and prosecuted locally has [more than tripled over the past four years](#).

The DA said that under the state’s sex trafficking statutes, a total of 40 human trafficking cases were prosecuted in San Diego in 2012 – a big jump from nine cases prosecuted by the DA’s office in 2009. In 2013, [46 human trafficking cases](#) were submitted to the San Diego County DA’s office, with 43 defendants charged in those cases.

Dumanis also said 50 local victims of human trafficking were identified in 2013, including nine minors.

[Follow NBC 7 for the latest news, weather, and events: iPad App | iPhone App | Android App | Facebook | Twitter | Google+ | Instagram | RSS | Text Alerts | Email Alerts](#)

RELATED STORIES

- [Feds: Alleged Pimps Branded Prostitutes With Tattoos](#)
- [DA: Human Trafficking Prosecutions on Rise](#)
- [Victim's Father Works Against Gang Violence](#)
- [Sex Trafficking Victim Empowering Others](#)

Find this article at:

<http://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/San-Diego-Gangs-Cash-in-On-Sex-Trafficking-242683571.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.