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FACULTY'S RESEARCH ANALYZES CHILDHOOD ADVERSITY IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING

A USF St. Petersburg professor teamed up with four researchers to recently publish a study in the [American Journal of Public Health](#). The study compares the levels and types of childhood adversity faced by boys and girls that are exploited in human trafficking to those experienced by similar children of the same race/ethnicity, household income level, and locality.

[Dr. Joan Reid](#), assistant professor of Criminology, said the study is the first to examine the childhood histories of more than 900 girls and boys detained by the Florida juvenile justice system who had been the subject of an official abuse report and child protective investigation related to human trafficking. Much of Reid's professional research focuses on human trafficking, child abuse, sexual violence and victimology.

"We found that girls and boys exploited in human trafficking experienced more childhood adversity—including childhood sexual abuse, emotional abuse, emotional and physical neglect, and family violence—than the matched sample of similar youths," said Reid. "Most disturbing, we found that boys who had experienced childhood sexual abuse were 8.2 times more likely to be exploited in human trafficking than boys without a history of sexual abuse. Similarly, sexually-abused girls were 2.5 times more likely to be exploited in human trafficking than similar girls who did not report childhood sexual abuse."

Florida consistently is identified as one of the states with the highest number of reported incidences of human trafficking. [The Human Trafficking Hotline](#) ranks it third highest in the U.S.

"Resources necessary to identify children at risk and to provide services for survivors of human trafficking are scarce," said Reid, a licensed mental health counselor who previously served as the rape crisis counselor in Pinellas County. "Even with such limited resources, law enforcement and social service providers in the Tampa Bay area are making heroic efforts to educate, train, and mobilize the public—especially health and social services providers—to respond to this terrible problem harming our most vulnerable kids."

The findings support concerns raised by child advocates that children who are sexually abused at home are more vulnerable to future sexual exploitation. Because an abusive environment is familiar, they may not know how to leave or avoid similar circumstances with human traffickers.

"The study findings provide a clearer depiction of the childhood circumstances that lead certain children down a treacherous pathway into the dark and exploitative crime of human trafficking," said Reid. "We hope that our findings will prompt policy makers to ensure that our most vulnerable children receive the care and protection that they deserve."

"In this new publication, Dr. Reid and her colleagues have zeroed in and shed new light on one of the most important issues affecting children and adolescents," said Dr. Frank Biafora, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. "It is my sincere hope that publishing in the nation's flagship public health journal will bring necessary attention and much needed resources to eliminate human trafficking in our region once and for all."



Dr. Joan Reid

Faculty's Research Analyzes Childhood Adversity in Human Trafficking

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