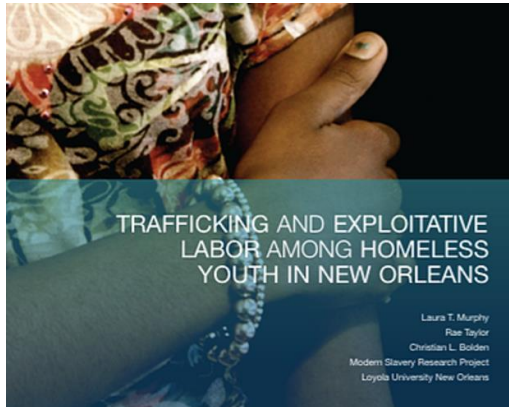


http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2015/03/human_trafficking_in_new_orlea.html#incart_related_stories

Human trafficking in New Orleans and how to curb it: Group makes pitch to City Council



A newly released Loyola University study of human trafficking among clients at Covenant House New Orleans looks to outline the prevalence of the practice in the city. (*Loyola University*)

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The New Orleans Police Department must be better trained to recognize and aid [victims of human trafficking](#), the authors of a Loyola University study on the city's shadowy sex trade told the City Council last week.

There must also be a shift among law enforcement officers away from criminalizing sex workers and a focus on going after the pimps and traffickers that prey on them, said Laura Murphy, one of the study's principle authors. She described during a Wednesday (March 25) public meeting a recent bust in October that authorities had heralded at the time as a crackdown on human trafficking.

"They were arresting the sex workers," she said. "They were not the people doing the exploitation, so I think we have the focus in the wrong place."

Murphy and Jim Kelly, the executive director of the homeless youth advocacy center Covenant House, pushed the council to pressure the city's public safety agencies to coordinate better with social service organizations

"We don't seem to have put it together: The resources, the capital, the human effort, to say 'Enough,'" Kelly said.

Loyola and the Covenant House had teamed up to interview 99 homeless youth last year and discovered 14 percent of them reported they had been victims of trafficking.

Kelly pleaded with the council to chase federal grants designed to unite police and social workers to curb the practice. He and Murphy also asked that law enforcement agencies work to divert sex trade victims into programs designed to help them rather than arresting them.

City lawmakers appeared willing to support the recommendations from Kelly and Murphy.

"At a time when we don't have resources in the police department and are undermanned, the idea of police officers spending time focusing on profiling this, when it could just be a touchpoint in which they transfer these individuals to a social worker," Williams said. "It doesn't just make sense, but you're talking dollars as well. It's fiscally responsible."

Kelly also pointed out that city prosecutors often find themselves in a hard place: They often need sex workers to testify in order to convict pimps, and they use possible jail time as a bargaining chip to get prostitutes on the stand.

In the long run, creating more jobs will give these teenagers more options toward a better life and cut into the sex trade that supports human trafficking, Kelly said, explaining that many of the victims were lured into prostitution as they searched unsuccessfully for work.

"It's really heart-wrenching that we know they're out there with no support at all," Councilwoman LaToya Cantrell said.