

# Sex Trafficking of Black Women & Girls



National  
Black Women's  
Justice Institute

The public perception of sex trafficking victims and survivors often does not reflect the reality of who is actually trafficked in the U.S. This factsheet introduces the limited sex trafficking data that exists specifically related to Black women and girls, which indicates that we are disproportionately at risk of becoming victims of sex trafficking. Based on the limited available data, we aim to center the experiences of Black victims and survivors and to support calls for additional resources and research in this field.

## Race and racism directly impacts who is trafficked.

- Black women, girls, and gender nonconforming people are disproportionately represented as victims and survivors of trafficking.<sup>4</sup>
- Transgender youth of color are at particularly high risk of sex trafficking.<sup>5</sup>
- Traffickers admit that, if caught, they believe that trafficking Black women would land them less jail time than trafficking white women.<sup>6</sup>

## The sex abuse to prison pipeline leads to the criminalization of Black girls.

Black girls who are victims and survivors of sex trafficking are arrested on prostitution charges and often punished as perpetrators rather than served and supported as victims.

The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act declares that all youth under age 18 who are picked up for prostitution are considered sex trafficking victims.<sup>8</sup> Due to this and other Safe Harbor laws, arrests of minors for prostitution have decreased since 2016, although some law enforcement agencies have a long way to go.<sup>9</sup> For example, among juvenile prostitution cases, research shows that police identify Black youth as victims less often than white youth as victims.<sup>10</sup>

Black girls are overrepresented among sex trafficking victims and survivors, which means this sexual abuse to prison pipeline has an outsized impact on Black girls.<sup>11</sup>

## What is human trafficking?

Human trafficking is the act of inducing, recruiting, and/or transporting by force, fraud, or coercion a person into sexual acts or labor against their will.

## BLACK WOMEN & BLACK YOUTH ARE OVERREPRESENTED

**40%** of sex trafficking victims and survivors are Black women, the highest percentage of any race.<sup>1</sup>



**13%** of youth in the U.S. are Black.<sup>3</sup>

VS.



**51%** of all prostitution arrests for youth under age 18 are of Black youth.<sup>2</sup>

## Black girls arrested on prostitution charges are often punished as perpetrators rather than treated as victims.



**30%** of Black youth characterized as victims

VS.



**66%** of white youth characterized as victims<sup>7</sup>

## What vulnerabilities put Black women and girls at greater risk of becoming victims of sex trafficking?

The limited data available suggests that the following factors place Black women and girls at greater risk of being trafficked.<sup>12</sup>

Known Risk Factors	Disproportionate Representation of Black Women & Girls
Homelessness or unstable housing	<b>39%</b> of people experiencing homelessness are Black. <sup>14</sup>
Involvement in the child welfare or criminal legal systems	<b>23%</b> of youth in foster care are Black girls. <sup>15</sup> <b>44%</b> of women in jail are Black. <sup>16</sup>
Behavioral health concerns	Suicide death rates for Black girls ages 13 to 19 increased by <b>182%</b> from 2001 to 2017. <sup>17</sup>

Because Black women and girls are overrepresented in these systems, it means we are particularly at risk.

### Chrystul Kizer<sup>13</sup>

Chrystul Kizer is a child sex-trafficking victim and survivor who killed her adult sexual abuser in 2018. She was 17 years old at the time. She has been charged with arson and first-degree intentional homicide, which carries a mandatory life sentence in Wisconsin.

Chrystul grew up in Gary, Indiana. Her mom worked to support her children and Chrystul's interest and talent in music. In junior high, Chrystul earned a spot in Gary's performing arts academy playing violin. After her mom's boyfriend became violent, however, the family fled Indiana, left most of their belongings, and moved to Milwaukee, where they stayed in a shelter for months before they found an apartment.

Chrystul's abuser found her through Backpage.com, which Chrystul had posted on to make money for school supplies and snacks. Her abuser, a white man, was known to have abused and filmed abuse of other underage Black girls. He had been previously arrested on child sexual assault charges. However, he was released the same day, the court summons to bring him back to court never arrived, and he would go on to abuse Chrystul. After Chrystul's arrest for killing her abuser, she was eventually released from jail and is now awaiting trial.

The majority of states have laws that protect people who can show that a crime they committed happened because they were being commercially sexually exploited. Most states, including Wisconsin, also have "affirmative defense" laws, which provide trafficking victims a defense for any offense related to their victimization. Despite this, instead of being treated as a victim, Chrystul is facing life imprisonment.

Chrystul's case is currently pending with the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

# Resources



**MISSEY** envisions a world without commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). To that end, MISSEY exists to provide services to commercially sexually exploited (CSE) victims and work for systemic change on behalf of the youth it serves.



**Journey Out** is a Los Angeles-based nonprofit leading the fight for the freedom and survival of all those whose lives have been destroyed by sex trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation. Its mission is to help victims of commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking leave a life of abuse and violence, overcome their fears, and empower them to reach their full potential and achieve their goals.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Bureau of Justice Statistics, Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents, 2008–2010, (April 2011), <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/cshtio810.pdf>.
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- 4 Bureau of Justice Statistics, April 2011.
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- 6 Meredith Dank et al., *Estimating the Size and Structure of the Underground Commercial Sex Economy in Eight Major US Cities*, (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, March 2014), <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/estimating-size-and-structure-underground-commercial-sex-economy-eight-major-us-cities>.
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- 8 “Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000,” Public Law 106–386, 106th Congress <https://www.congress.gov/106/plaws/publ386/PLAW-106publ386.pdf>.
- 9 Jennifer Cole and Ginny Sprang, “Post-implementation of a Safe Harbor law in the U.S.: Review of state administrative data,” *Child Abuse and Neglect* 101, March 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104320>; ABA Commission on Homelessness and Poverty, “Safe Harbor Laws: Police in the Best Interest of Victims of Trafficking,” ABA Midyear Meeting 2013, [https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/events/homelessness\\_poverty/2013\\_Midyear\\_Meeting\\_Safe\\_Harbor\\_Laws/rich\\_hooks\\_wayman\\_powerpoint.authcheckdam.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/events/homelessness_poverty/2013_Midyear_Meeting_Safe_Harbor_Laws/rich_hooks_wayman_powerpoint.authcheckdam.pdf).
- 10 Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2010.
- 11 Malika Saada Saar, Rebecca Epstein, Lindsay Rosenthal, & Yasmin Vafa, *The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline: The Girls’ Story*, (Center on Poverty and Inequality, Georgetown Law, 2019), <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-inequality-center/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2019/02/The-Sexual-Abuse-To-Prison-Pipeline-The-Girls%E2%80%99-Story.pdf>.
- 12 National Human Trafficking Hotline, 2019 Data Report, <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/Polaris-2019-US-National-Human-Trafficking-Hotline-Data-Report.pdf>; Frederick Reese, “Sex Trafficking’s True Victims: Why Are Our Black Girls/Women So Vulnerable?” *Atlanta Black Star* June 15, 2017, <https://atlantablackstar.com/2017/06/15/sex-traffickings-true-victims-why-are-our-black-girlswomen-so-vulnerable/>.
- 13 Jessica Contrera, “He was sexually abusing underage girls. Then, police said, one of them killed him,” *Washington Post*, December 17, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/local/child-sex-trafficking-murder/>; Jessica Contrera, “Wisconsin Supreme Court will hear case of Chrystul Kizer, sex trafficking victim accused of killing abuser,” *Washington Post*, September 20, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/09/20/chrystul-kizer-wisconsin-supreme-court-trafficking-murder/>; Wisconsin State Legislature, 939.46 Coercion, <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/939/III/46>.
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