



“Despite millions spent, human trafficking’s scope is unknown”

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“The situation was dire, police warned. The City of Atlanta was under siege by human traffickers. Some 1,000 Asian women and girls ages 13 to 25 were being “forced to prostitute themselves” in the city, a 2005 internal police email said. Many of the victims, police said, were Korean. To free them, police forged ahead with a \$600,000 task force.

Had agency leaders questioned the estimate, they would have found it defied common sense. **If it were true, one in eight of the city’s Asians would have been sex slaves.** Perhaps, then, it’s little wonder that the program had such poor results that it drew scrutiny from the U.S. Department of Justice. **An initial report said Atlanta police had found more than 200 victims, but auditors could only confirm four.**

The APD project is an example of how government officials have charged into the fight against human trafficking without a clear sense of who is being exploited and how, an investigation by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution found. While the term “human trafficking” conjures images of foreigners smuggled into the U.S. to work at brothels and sweatshops, its definition shifts, sparking complaints that public dollars are being spent the wrong way. Mexicans have been brought to Gwinnett County and forced into prostitution. Was this the area’s biggest problem? Was a case of Nigerian maids held in Suwanee a sign of a larger trend? What about gay male teen runaways pushed to have sex for money? Or homegrown girls sold by local pimps? Despite more than a decade of federal and local initiatives and millions of dollars spent, policymakers don’t have information that can answer these questions. *What does exist suggests that government officials either don’t understand the problem, or are failing victims...*

Atlanta launched its search for Korean prostitutes as hundreds of millions of dollars began to pour into anti-trafficking efforts nationwide. The federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 gave special assistance to foreign victims in the U.S. and paved the way for a 2004 Department of Justice initiative to fund local human trafficking task forces. The goal: To increase rescues of foreign victims by 15 percent each year.

City officials argued they desperately needed the money. “Human trafficking is now beginning to get a foothold in Atlanta and must be stopped before it becomes entrenched,” police told Justice Department officials... The Atlanta Police Department won a \$450,000 three-year grant, and the city chipped in an additional \$150,000. Two investigators and a sergeant joined forces with a Korean translator... At first blush, the task force seemed to be a success.

The Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Assistance reported that **Atlanta police identified 216 potential victims** from January 2005 through December 2006. But this count was later revealed to be grossly inaccurate. Auditors for the Justice Department’s Office of the Inspector General could **find documentation for only four victims**, a July 2008 report said. The Bureau of Justice Assistance **made a mistake that added 93 victims to the count. Atlanta had actually reported 123 victims. The city could not explain the 119 that auditors couldn’t track.** Police said the figures were reported by a city employee who retired before the Justice Department inquiry...

Such problems weren’t unique to Atlanta. Auditors found victim over-counts by task forces across the nation, although none was as bad as Atlanta’s. **The City of Los Angeles, for instance, identified 49 victims and the Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, D.C., found 51.** “

***Auditors confirmed none of them...*”**

<http://www.ajc.com/news/news/despite-millions-spent-human-traffickings-scope-is/nTjRn/>

WHERE ARE THE VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING?