

FBI Super Bowl Sex-Trafficking Sting Rescues 16 Youth

Forty-five people were arrested and 16 juveniles rescued in a two-week crackdown on prostitution in the New York-New Jersey area leading up to last Sunday's Super Bowl, Federal Bureau of Investigation officials said on Tuesday.

The bureau said some of those arrested claimed they traveled to the site because of the high-profile football game, which drew an estimated 400,000 visitors to the region. The minors rescued ranged in age from 13 to 17 and included high school students and children reported missing by their families, the FBI said.

Arrests were made and victims recovered in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, said FBI spokeswoman Barbara Woodruff.

The FBI, backed by state and local law enforcement agencies, had mounted a major crackdown on **human trafficking** and prostitution ahead of the championship game Sunday, with some 3,000 law enforcement agents and civilians trained to help spot people who might be the victims of human trafficking.

Some trafficked women reported seeing up to 50 johns a day during Super Bowl, more than double the usual traffic, said Lori Cohen, director of Sanctuary for Families, which assists victims of human trafficking.

"Many of the men were setting up football parties where they are drinking, watching football and ordering in prostitutes," Cohen said, adding that one woman she spoke with told her "it was really dangerous. If she was ... at a party where the team was losing, the men would get really drunk and really violent."

While the game has passed, the risk has not, said Michael Harpster, who heads the arm of the FBI that focuses on violent crimes against children.

“It’s easy to focus on this issue in light of a high-profile event, but the sad reality is, this is a problem we see every day in communities across the country,” Harpster said.

Globally, human trafficking—which includes not only people forced into prostitution but domestic workers and others who are transported from their homes and forced to work—is a \$32 billion industry with some 2.5 million victims, according to data from the United Nations.

The latest arrests are in addition to last week’s bust of a multimillion-dollar New York criminal operation that sold wealthy clients “party packs” of drugs and prostitutes. Some 18 people were arrested in that crackdown, New York state officials said.

One woman who was trafficked into prostitution as a teen and now works as an anti-trafficking activist, said the best way to reduce prostitution would be to arrest the men who search for it.

“I don’t blame this on the Super Bowl or Nascar events, or the Final Four in basketball,” said the woman, Theresa Flores. “I blame it on the lack of education that is happening because we are not going after the demand, that is, the men.”

Her organization, , monitored classified listings and found numerous “Super Bowl specials” in northern New Jersey offering services at \$50 for 30 minutes and \$100 for an hour.

“They don’t keep any of it, not a single penny,” she said, adding that the money is automatically turned over to pimps.

Additional reporting by Chris Francescani; Writing by Scott

Malone; editing by Gunna Dickson

© 2014 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.