

# Child Trafficking and the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Sierra Leone:

*A Mixed Methods Community-Based Study Establishing Baseline Prevalence, Understanding Stakeholder Perspectives, and Identifying Gaps in Policies and Services to Prevent and Address Child Trafficking*



## STUDY OVERVIEW AND AIMS

A baseline mixed-methods, community-based research study conducted in Sierra Leone by APRIES at the University of Georgia's Center on Human Trafficking Research & Outreach (CenHTRO), in partnership with continent-based research partners ResilientAfrica Network and Conflict Management and Development Associates between 2019-2020.

The study aimed to:

- 1. Estimate baseline prevalence of child trafficking** in Eastern Province hotspots, Kailahun, Kenema, and Kono, using both direct estimation and the Network Scale-Up Method.
- 2. Describe the nature of the child trafficking problem as well as the service and policy gaps** in addressing child trafficking in Sierra Leone.

Data was collected in Kailahun, Kenema, and Kono using:

- 1. Household surveys of 3070 randomly sampled households.**
- 2. Qualitative interviews with 23 young people** who had experienced child trafficking, **17 parents/guardians** of young people who had experienced child trafficking, and **15 key informants.**
- 3. 24 focus group discussions** with community members.

## KEY FINDINGS

### STUDY AIM 1: PREVALENCE

- 1. The overall rate of child trafficking, based on direct prevalence estimates, was 33.0% in the Eastern Province** among the household sample of children aged 5 – 17 years old. The highest rates of child trafficking were found in Kono (45.7%), followed by Kailahun (32.9%), and Kenema (26.6%).
- 2. The overall rate of child labor, based on direct prevalence estimates, was 36.2% in the Eastern Province** among the household sample of children aged 5 – 17 years old. The highest rates of child labor were found in Kono (52.3%), followed by Kailahun (34.7%), and Kenema (28.8%).
- 3. Across the Eastern province 19.26% of child trafficking victims experienced force, fraud or coercion while being trafficked.** The three most commonly reported experiences were: forced to work outside the home [Kailahun (26%), Kenema (24%), Kono (32%)], forced to work for someone [Kailahun (39%), Kenema (24%), Kono (33%)], forced to work to pay for school [Kailahun (31%), Kenema (20%), Kono (15%)].

## KEY FINDINGS, CONT.

4. **Portering, Fishing, Mining and Construction were found to be the most prevalent labor sectors for child trafficking in all three hotspot areas.** Sex work and Manufacturing were found to be the least prevalent labor sectors for child trafficking, with 1-2% prevalence among the households surveyed in the hotspots.
  - Portering: Kailahun (12%), Kenema (20%), Kono (20%)
  - Fishing: Kailahun (4%), Kenema (9%), Kono (12%)
  - Mining: Kailahun (4%), Kenema (7%), Kono (7%)
  - Construction: Kailahun (4%), Kenema (7%), Kono (7%)
5. Comparative to the non-victim children, **children who are between the ages of 12-17, children who have lost one or both parents, and children who are not enrolled in school have a higher rate of experiencing trafficking** and labor with odds ratios of 2.28, 1.77 and 1.77, and thus represent particularly vulnerable populations.
6. **Male and female children experience trafficking at relatively the same rate, among sampled households in the study.** Overall, there were slightly more male children who experienced trafficking than female children, with an overall odds ratio of 1.14 across the three regions.

### STUDY AIM 2: SERVICES AND GAPS

1. Survivors described being turned away from services due to their age, or gender, or because of perceptions that they were untrustworthy or not well-behaved. Our data indicates that **survivors are often not able to get help from formal/informal systems until after the trafficking experience has ended.**
2. **Survivors reported unaddressed needs post-trafficking which could increase their vulnerability to re-trafficking or exploitation.** For example, survivors described lacking resources to pay school fees, having unmet medical and psychosocial needs, as well as housing needs post-trafficking. Key informants reported a lack of basic resources (such as staffing, funding, and transportation) to support survivors in their recovery. Comprehensive reintegration services do not appear to be present in local communities.
3. Reports from key informants and community members who participated in focus groups indicate that **there is a lack of sustainable collaboration and trust between local authorities (such as paramount chiefs) and governmental authorities** which results in an uncoordinated response to child trafficking, difficulty in reporting child trafficking incidents, and disruptions in prosecutions of traffickers.
4. **Survivors' involvement is critical for developing appropriate and well-matched community level and individual level interventions to prevent and address trafficking.** Our data revealed that survivors' were often not taken seriously when they asked for help, were not consulted by family members prior to being sent to live as a menpikin (which often increase vulnerability to trafficking), and were left without support or faced discrimination upon their return to their home communities.

## IMPLICATIONS

Our data indicates that a significant proportion of children in these hotspots will experience trafficking or engage in child labor at some point within their childhood. Our research suggests that:

- 1. Policy makers should strengthen initiatives which target programs for children at increased risk of trafficking**, such as school aged children and children who have lost one or both parents. Increasing access to schooling and vocational programs and developing safeguards for children in the informal fostering systems should be prioritized to reduce trafficking.
- 2. NGOs and governmental service providers should be supported and resourced adequately** to provide comprehensive services to children and families and also strengthen local prevention efforts.
- 3. Building systems supportive of sustainable collaboration** between community stakeholders (survivors, parents, paramount chiefs, councils of elders, local child welfare committees, mothers clubs) and government stakeholders **is critical for effectively responding to and preventing child trafficking**. For example, community stakeholders should be meaningfully included in policy development. NGOs and local child welfare committees should hire survivors and parents as peer supporters and leaders. Paramount chiefs should appoint survivors and parents as sub chiefs and advisors.

As one local council member interviewed for this study suggested, *“We need all hands-on deck, [for] every Sierra Leonean this issue should be a concern to all of us...can we join hands to make sure we eradicate child trafficking?”*



Sanford Hall  
317 Herty Drive  
Athens, GA 30602  
(706) 542-0067

[cenhtro.uga.edu](http://cenhtro.uga.edu)  
[cenhtro@uga.edu](mailto:cenhtro@uga.edu)  
[linktr.ee/cenhtro](http://linktr.ee/cenhtro)



UNIVERSITY OF  
**GEORGIA**



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**LIVERPOOL**



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