

# NON-FATAL STRANGULATION EXPERIENCES AMONG VICTIMS OF SEX TRAFFICKING IN LAS VEGAS, NEVADA



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## **Non-fatal Strangulation** noun

**non·fa·tal stran·gu·la·tion** | \ ,nän-'fā-təl \ ,stran-ɡyə-'lā-shən

The external compression of the neck in a way that obstructs or inhibits the victim's airway and blood flow in and out of their head that does not result in the death of the victim.

Injuries from strangulation can include:

- asphyxia (blocking of an airway)
- cerebral hypoxia (blocking jugular vein or carotid arteries)
- strokes
- cardiac arrest
- aneurysm
- damage to the structure of the throat

Strangulation can be perpetrated using hands, legs, or ligature strangulation using an object (rope, cord, belt) around the neck or to hang the victim with, or postural strangulation which is done by sitting or holding a person in a position that prevents blood flow to the head or breathing (Pritchard, Reckdenwald, & Nordham, 2017).

It is a “live demonstration of power and control over another individual's life or death” (Pritchard et al, 2015, p. 407).

Researchers (Mittal et al, 2018) found that victims of non-fatal strangulation were more likely to also experience:

- More severe experiences of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse by their perpetrators.
- Higher rates of depression.

Because non-fatal strangulation does not often leave visible scars or injuries, it is rarely prosecuted (Volochninsky, 2012).

# The Study



**This study explores police case reports on 795 sex trafficking situations with information about the experience of the victim including physical violence from the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Vice Unit.**

The case data was collected:

**2011** ○ ————— ○ **2019**

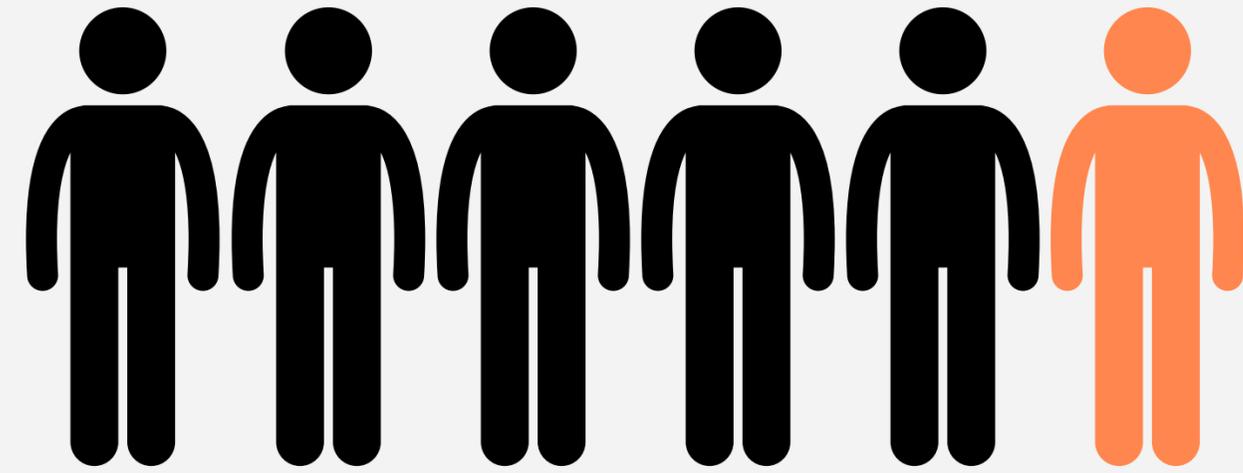
Data Included:

- police reports
- interviews
- evidence reports
- criminal records of the sex traffickers

**Analysis:** Independent t-test, chi square, and odds ratio.

# The Findings

N = 128



**1 OUT OF 6**  
(n = 128, 16.1%)

of the sex trafficking case reports in this study included a victim report of non-fatal strangulation by the sex trafficker.

# The Findings

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N = 128

## AGE

The victims reporting the non-fatal strangulation were slightly **older** than the victims that did not report non-fatal strangulation.

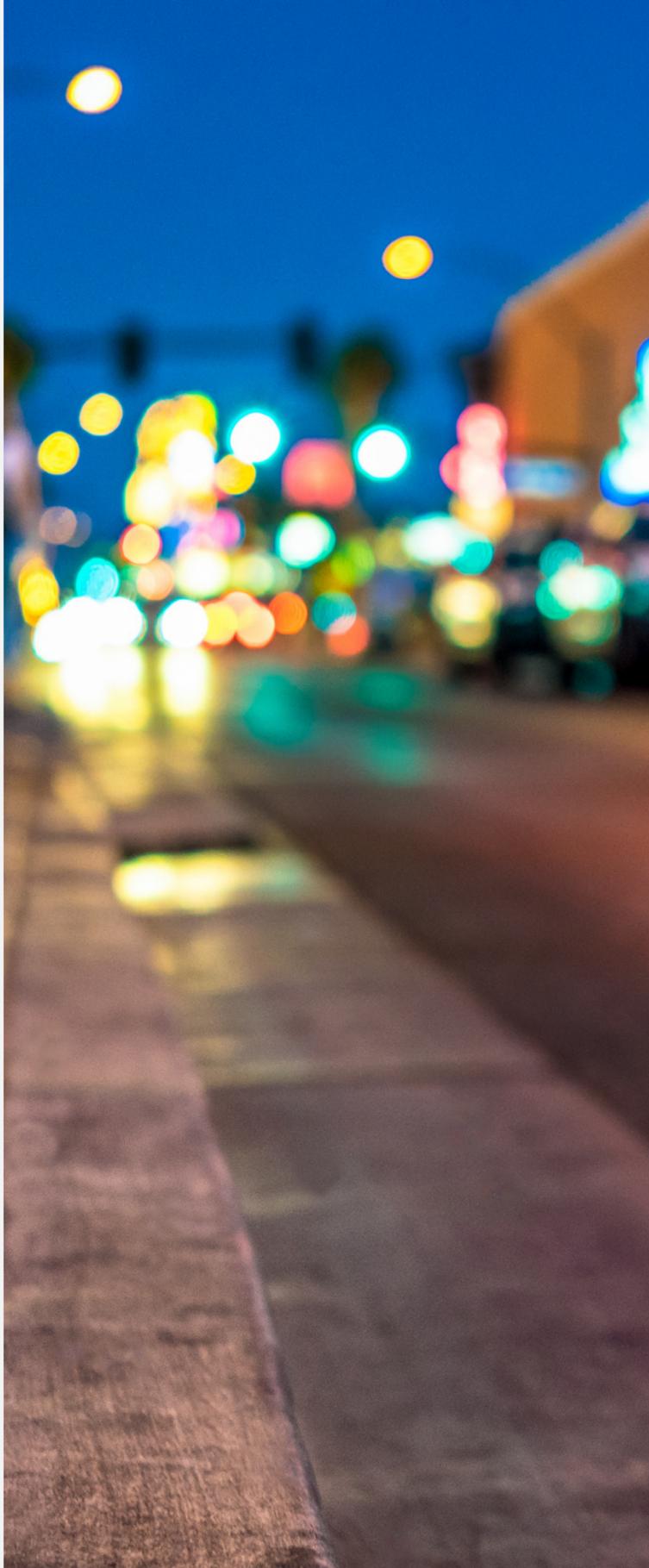


Reporting non-fatal  
strangulation

VS.



No report of non-  
fatal strangulation



# The Findings

N = 128

Victims that reported non-fatal strangulation were significantly more likely to report being **sex trafficked on the street** rather than in casinos, hotels, john boards or strip clubs.

$$\chi^2 = (1, N = 550) = 4.99, p = .025.$$



# The Findings

N = 128

Victims of sex trafficking who reported non-fatal strangulation were:



**2x**

more likely to report being **threatened with a weapon** (gun or knife) by their trafficker.  
 $\chi^2 = (1, N = 586) = 9.47, p = 002,$   
OR = 2.04, 95% CI [1.29, 3.24]



**2x**

more likely to report being **brought across state lines** for prostitution.  
 $\chi^2 = (1, N = 660) = 11.3, p = 001,$   
OR = 2.05, 95% CI [1.34, 3.12]



**2.8x**

more likely to be reported by victims who were **recruited by their trafficker using romance** rather than through social media, friends, or promises of money.  
 $\chi^2 = (1, N = 580) = 20.87, p = 000,$   
OR = 2.85, 95% CI [1.8, 4.53]

# The Findings

N = 128

Victims of sex trafficking who reported non-fatal strangulation were:



**3.5x**

more likely to be contacted by law enforcement during a **domestic violence call** than a vice sting.

$\chi^2 = (1, N = 809) = 28.89, p = .001$

OR = 3.54, 95% CI [0.24, 0.52]



**3.6x**

more likely to also report their **trafficker used psychological abuse** such as threats and demeaning language during the sex trafficking experiences.

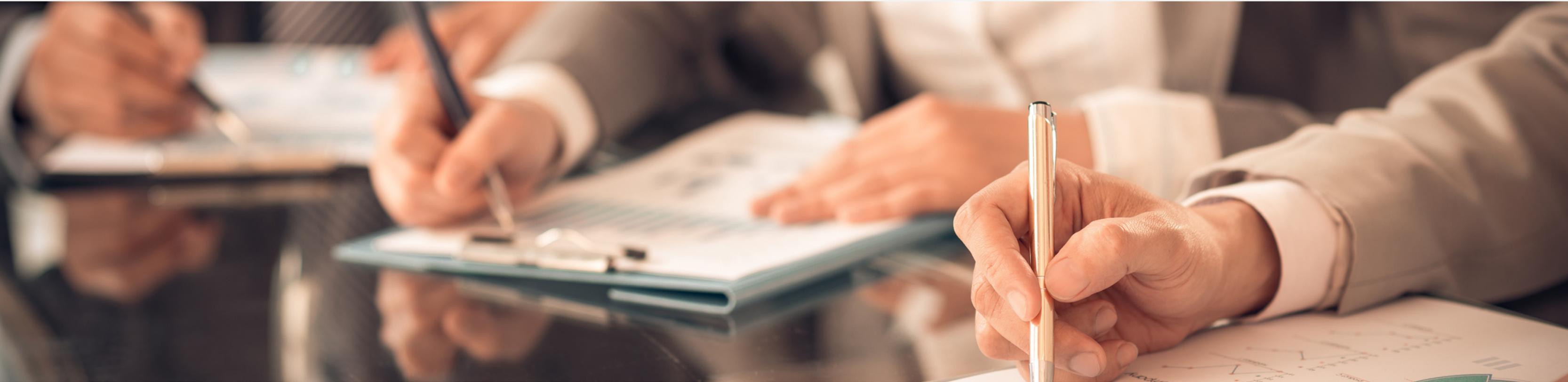
$\chi^2 = (1, N = 689) = 16.99, p = .001,$

OR = 3.62, 95% CI [1.9, 6.93]

# Discussion



-  *1 out of 6 victims of sex trafficking reported non-fatal strangulation perpetrated by their sex trafficker.*



Additional education and training of law enforcement, medical staff, and agencies providing services to sex trafficking victims about the importance of screening for non-fatal strangulation among victims of sex trafficking.

# Discussion



- *Victims were older and more likely to have been identified as a sex trafficking victim during a domestic violence call to law enforcement.*



Contact with sex trafficking victims is primarily through vice stings where law enforcement is looking for persons involved in prostitution and interview them to determine if they are a sex trafficking victim. These stings are notoriously high stress settings during which victims infrequently disclose information about the sex trafficking experience.

# Discussion



- *Victims that reported strangulation experiences were more likely to be recruited through a romantic relationship and were in a romantic relationship with their trafficker.*



Highlights the co-occurrence of interpersonal violence and sex trafficking. Strangulation was also found to co-occur with sexual violence by the sex trafficker. Previous literature linked strangulation by an intimate partner and strangulation and sexual violence, this study linked sex trafficking, sexual violence, and interpersonal relationships.

# Recommendations



This study confirms that non-fatal strangulation is also present in sex trafficking situations and used by sex traffickers against their victims. Strangulation is potentially a lethal form of assault that can result in long term physical trauma as well as death. Recommendations for future practice include:

- Trainings on sex trafficking for law enforcement, medical staff and social service agencies to include the use of strangulation as a means of force, control and violence against victims of sex trafficking.
- Implementation of screening for presence of sex trafficking when law enforcement responds to domestic violence and sexual assault calls.
- Implementation of screening for occurrence of strangulation when law enforcement interacts with sex trafficking victims, and protocol for immediate medical attention should be set in place.
- Implementation of screening for occurrence of strangulation when medical professionals interact with sex trafficking victims, whether there is external physical evidence or not.

# Thank you!

Questions?

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## Reference

Pritchard, A. J., Reckdenwald, A., & Nordham, C. (2017). Nonfatal strangulation as part of domestic violence: A review of research. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 18(4), 407-424.