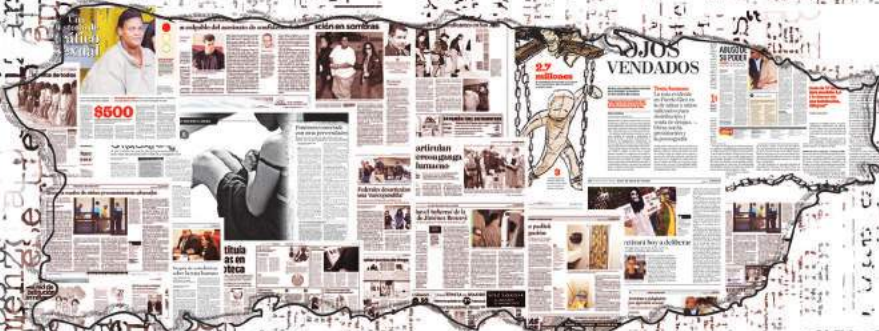


# Human Trafficking: Modern Slavery in Puerto Rico.

"De manera dramática, el 4 de enero, antes del Día de Reyes donde tradicionalmente los menores en Puerto Rico reciben regalos de los magos una niña de 14 años fue obligada por su madre biológica a sostener relaciones sexuales con su padrastro con el fin reproductivo ya que la madre de la niña no podía tener más hijos."



"Yo le dije a mi mamá que si había escuchado que mi hermano estaba involucrado con drogas, que si no iba a decirle o hacer algo, y ella me dijo que no me metiera en eso, que eso era problema de él, que después que trajera dinero a la casa, no había problema", destacó Rebeca, quien admitió que perdonó a su padre, pero a su madre "le intentado, pero todavía estoy sentida".

**Dr. César A. Rey Hernández**  
**Dra. Luisa Hernández Angueira**

## **Human Trafficking: Modern Slavery in Puerto Rico**

## **Human Trafficking: Modern Slavery in Puerto Rico**

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Edited by Oscar Mendoza  
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Graphic Design by ideático Group  
Covers and Photos: Courtesy GFR Media  
ISBN: 978-0-9914635-0-3

As an advocate for the rights of our nation's children and youth, I am honored to present the second social research investigation on human trafficking in Puerto Rico, directed once again by Dr. César Rey-Hernández, sociologist and Member of the Ricky Martin Foundation Board of Directors. With this project, we reiterate the Foundation's commitment to continue researching this onerous crime for the purpose of supporting our mission. We express our gratitude to Dr. Luisa Hernández-Angueira and to the remarkable team of students from the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus who, in order to carry out this endeavor, counted on the unconditional support of Brenda Cardona, Norman Morales, and Bibiana Ferraiuoli, Executive Director.

This historical publication solidifies our principal project, People for Children, which will continue to raise awareness about human trafficking and enslavement with education as a prevention strategy. The findings of this investigation include victim case reports, public policy recommendations, and a series of large-scale education initiatives, all of which are positive actions to benefit our society.

With the upcoming inauguration of *Centro Tau*, the Foundation crystallizes its comprehensive strategy. Our guiding principles are to raise awareness, conduct research, and implement community initiatives that use these findings in the service of one of the most vulnerable sectors of our population.

Lastly, I thank all the friends who have supported us in this great effort since our inception: United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), Save the Children, RTL Foundation, Ambassador Luis C. de Baca from the TIP Office, *Nuestra Escuela*, *Iniciativa Comunitaria*, *Ser de Puerto Rico*, P.E.C.E.S, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and *Centros Sor Isolina Ferré*. Thanks, as well, to all the survivors who inspire me each day to keep on fighting the battle against human trafficking. Last but not least, I thank Delta for being our corporate ally and continuing to strengthen our research branch both in Puerto Rico and beyond.

This research will enable us to abolish modern slavery in Puerto Rico, and I am grateful that, today, you join our cause.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ricky Martin', enclosed in a faint circular watermark.

Ricky Martin

President and Founder

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## Acknowledgements

Teamwork is the only formula to successfully carry out a project that addresses the complexities of an investigation about human trafficking in Puerto Rico. Therefore, before this work is published and read by the general public, it is imperative to acknowledge a group of people who, with utmost selflessness and generosity, made this project central to their professional and personal commitments.

The philanthropist Ricky Martin, President and Founder of the Foundation, has always supported the dedication and enthusiasm behind this crusade. We also genuinely thank the Ricky Martin Foundation Board of Directors for their hard work and unconditional support. In particular, we acknowledge Bibiana Ferraiuoli Suárez, Executive Director of the Foundation, for her solidarity, commitment, and dedication to this cause, and for taking this project as her own personal mission. We also thank Brenda Cardona for providing her administrative expertise, which efficiently and professionally facilitated the processes; her support made a world of difference. Our gratitude also goes to Norman Morales who supported us in managing and presenting the project. A very special thanks goes out to all the Foundation team members for their solidarity and support when it was most needed.

In keeping with this spirit of gratitude, we acknowledge the support provided by the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, particularly the Dean's Office, College of Social Sciences, the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies, the Graduate School of Public Administration, and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. They all trusted the intellectual and social efforts of this investigation and facilitated our work through the university. We want to expressly thank Juanita Meléndez, may she rest in peace, and Laura Sánchez for assisting us with administrative tasks from their positions at the University.

For the past two years, our research assistants have been the cornerstone of this investigation. Namely, Sheila Pérez López, who has collaborated since the beginning of the investigation; Stephanie Gonell Peña; Kareline Díaz Negrón; Angely Bousono; and Héctor Reyes Baerga all ventured out with us in this expansion of our initial research. Moreover, we acknowledge Irene Lafarga Previdi, Nishma N. Ramos González, Yineza Vargas Caraballo, and Israel Medina whose volunteer work has been crucial to this effort. Their intellectual curiosity, dedication, and commitment to Puerto Rico have reignited our faith in pursuing a better and safer Puerto Rico for our children.

In this phase, we want to express our gratitude to the *Centros Sor Isolina Ferré* for their help and availability. The executive director, José Luis Díaz, and the regional directors were our principal allies during the research phase. Thanks to the P.E.C.E.S. organization, particularly to our friend José Oquendo who, armed with his team, optimistic smile, enthusiasm, and insight into this humanitarian journey, offered a helping hand since the beginning.

Assembling this puzzle required a group of visionaries, of people whose commitment to Puerto Rico makes us proud of their work. To them, we express our gratitude. But above all, we owe an eternal debt to the young people who had the courage to offer their testimony and reclaim their painful and horrific past, the result of wounds and abuse inflicted by adults. We express our respect and admiration to them because their revelations are an epiphany for Puerto Rico.

The authors

## Foreword

Puerto Rico is currently at a crossroads where, as a society, we are challenged by a reality that we refuse to acknowledge. We are facing high levels of poverty among children, teenagers dropping out of school at the most critical stages of their adolescence, and an unscrupulous illegal market that uses children as cheap labor. All of these factors are part of our social reality. Illegal activities facilitated by money laundering and corruption, which constitute approximately 30% of our economy, are the breeding ground of our nightmarish social context. Violence levels are disproportionately high and the homicide rate, in particular, is comparable to that of some Central African countries, the Republic of Congo, and Ethiopia; even surpassing homicide rates in Tanzania. These are all countries in the midst of civil wars and international conflicts. As if this were not enough, inequality levels in Puerto Rico are comparable to those of the early 1950s, ranking us second in inequality among Latin American countries.

Our second research investigation on human trafficking in Puerto Rico was motivated by an astounding finding that attests to the urgency of understanding and documenting the everyday lives of our children and youth with the purpose of disseminating this information. For the last three years, the Foundation has shared its work in hundreds of lectures, workshops, conferences, and presentations in Puerto Rico and the United States. Teachers, social workers, judges, doctors, lawyers, engineers, counselors, students, scholars, diplomats, legislators, cabinet secretaries, non-governmental organizations, government agencies, and citizens alike were shocked by our findings. The free PDF version of the first study's report has been accessed by hundreds of users online as well. Actually, the more we elaborated on the topic, the more unawareness we discovered and the greater the desire to learn and study it more deeply. The general response at each of those events was disbelief that such a crime occurs in Puerto Rico and, much less, to the extent we described.

Motivated by these efforts and with the committed support of the Ricky Martin Foundation and the University of Puerto Rico, we dedicated ourselves to reconstructing and broadening our understanding of the environment in which the forgotten souls of our society live. Ironically, they, who are also the most vulnerable and exert the least political weight, become the objects of rabble-raising political and advertising campaigns in our country.

When taking the first steps in our research journey, we were struck by the fact that the social worker who coordinated our initial introductions to possible victims of human trafficking was a victim of abuse. She began her story by pointing out that her mother sent her to the United States so she could receive medical attention for an existing condition when she was only fourteen years old. Her family's financial situation was so precarious that the girl was advised to spend a summer in the United States with an aunt who could provide her with medical insurance. She went, but at a great cost. The payment for this treatment was contingent on the young girl being prostituted to her aunt's friends. Even the girl's return trip was subject to the amount of money she received from sexual favors she performed for adult males who were in business with her aunt.

During the second phase of research, this story compelled us to understand that the human trafficking and enslavement of children has been occurring for several decades. In fact, this phase includes incidents that we tracked as far back as the 1960s, which proves that this callous exploitation of children has been part of our reality since before the Palermo Protocols.

Therefore, arriving at a deeper understanding of these minors' situations became an inevitable process during this phase. This is unquestionably a human rights issue that it's just starting to reveal itself. Our research perspective is not quantitative, nor is it statistically representative of the phenomenon of human trafficking. Human trafficking and enslavement as objects of study are clandestine crimes obscured by secrecy and invisibility that impede representative sampling of the population. Nonetheless, qualitative approaches are indispensable to sociological, political, humanistic, and anthropological insight into this phenomenon. One hundred and sixty-eight countries with reported incidences of human trafficking evidence its globalization. Twenty-five countries have incorporated the topic of human trafficking into their educational curricula. Hence, we have a great task before us.

The truth is that our reality exceeds the conceptual frameworks of other regions, which is precisely what makes it harder to understand. The extent of poverty, violence, and dependency positions us at an apex of constant opposition to this population of minors.

Now more than ever, we are convinced that this effort should be geared toward enhancing curricula in our education system and an urgent formulation of inclusive, health-based, and holistic public policies as *conditio sine qua non* for the improvement of the quality of life of our Puerto Rican children and youth.

César A. Rey-Hernández, Ph.D.  
Luisa Hernández-Angueira, Ph.D.

For a man, not having the power of his own life,  
cannot by compact or his own consent enslave himself to any one,  
nor put himself under the absolute, arbitrary power of another...

-John Locke

## Introduction

According to Lydia Cacho (2010), human trafficking implies a form of control that employs fear, manipulation, coercion or deceit to break people's wills with the purpose of reducing the means of resistance and escape. This type of enslavement, which primarily targets women and children, turns bodies into merchandise, into objects of desire through servitude and submission. For this reason, the United Nations (UNODC, 2012) has classified this phenomenon as a form of modern slavery that reduces people, mainly women and children, to commodities, constituting the most extreme violation of human rights.

The present work represents the second phase of the research on human trafficking in Puerto Rico which began in 2007 and culminated in 2010 with the publication of the book *Human Trafficking in Puerto Rico: An Invisible Challenge*. This publication demonstrated that contrary to the common belief that human trafficking is a crime that took place in the Pacific region, it was happening in our own backyard and, similar to other countries, the phenomenon is related to the local culture and takes on different modalities. The dominant form in Puerto Rico has been termed "domestic human trafficking." Experts from other regions have denominated it as internal human trafficking. This form of human trafficking takes place within the island's borders, mainly between Puerto Ricans. Although recently, according to testimonies obtained during this research phase, cases of Dominican and Mexican children have been documented in this illegal economy. As in most cases, women and children are also traffickers' most vulnerable targets on the island. Likewise, biological or foster parents are, more often than not, the perpetrators of these crimes, thereby defying patriarchal discourse based on protecting the family, children, and wife. There were also instances where a relative or neighbor was the perpetrator. One of the peculiarities of the island's context is that the foster parents operating under the supervision of the Department of Family Services, the agency responsible for supervising foster homes, often become these minors' predators.

High levels of poverty, social inequality, gender discrimination, migration, and the large number of children living in foster homes are some of the reasons that account for this phenomenon in Puerto Rico. While seemingly paradoxical, the ever-growing subculture of consumerism in Puerto Rico is also relevant.

The initial phase of the study (Rey-Hernández & Hernández-Angueira, 2010) confirmed that the following activities are among the main sources of child exploitation: prostitution, child pornography, drug distribution and sale, and using children as mules for drug smuggling, among other illicit activities. Despite its limitations, this dramatic evidence brought human trafficking as a social issue into the public eye and captured

the attention of public policy makers, who defined it as a criminal offense in the Penal Code. These findings made that investigation the first comprehensive and far-reaching study on human trafficking in Puerto Rico. However, concern for one sector of the population subjected to these human rights violations on the island, along with the misinformation and lack of awareness, encouraged us to pursue this heartbreaking, hellish situation that bears the face of women and children. Thus, we proceeded with the second phase of this investigation.

### **Following the Footsteps of Human Trafficking: Methodology**

In addition to empirical research and the collection of accurate data on human trafficking, we have taken ethical issues into consideration during this second phase of research. Given the complexity of the topic, we cannot lose sight that research on human trafficking resists purely quantitative and statistical approaches. This clandestine target population cannot be recruited using random statistical sampling techniques, which further complicates its study (Tyldum, 2010). In fact, the research, as well as the literature reviewed at the global level, coincides with our methodology. Furthermore, even if there were a reduced number of individuals being victimized by trafficking, prevention plans and interventions made by the state and diverse social sectors would be necessary. Mindful of this, the second phase of this research intends to track or follow the footprints of this phenomenon through different regions of the island to measure its scope and reveal other forms this phenomenon takes in Puerto Rico.

To these ends, we first interviewed several leaders of various NGOs that harbor and work with youths of both sexes who come from dysfunctional home environments, as we had done in the first investigation. Some of these organizations are dedicated to offering education and protection to youths who have dropped out of school or seek to obtain their high school diplomas at a more accelerated pace. Secondly, we wanted to listen to these youths' voices and learn about their life experiences. (See Appendix A.) Consequently, forty young people, both male and female between the ages of fifteen and thirty-two, were interviewed in different parts of the island. We conducted our interviews in the areas of Río Piedras, Humacao, Ponce, Guayama, and Mayagüez. During this second phase, we also utilized primary sources obtained from the news media over the last two years, mainly from the local press. Similarly, while reviewing the local press from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, we discovered the scope of these violations and how they were disguised at the time. That information, along with the life stories and testimonies told by some of these young people, helped reconstruct the fractured mosaic we had suspected from the start. That is, in addition to being sexually abused, some minors in Puerto Rico are being subjected to other forms of human trafficking and the State neither protects these victims' rights nor enforces legislation that defines it as a crime.

## The Globalization of Human Trafficking and Enslavement

During recent years, the phenomenon of human trafficking and enslavement has intensified internationally, demonstrating how economic and social forces affect this increase. When we published our first study in 2010, human trafficking was the third most lucrative illegal activity. Today, in 2013, it occupies the second place, preceded by drug trafficking and followed by the sale of illegal weapons. Contrary to 2005 estimates, the *2013 Trafficking In Persons Report* (U.S. Department of State, 2013a) estimates that there are 27.9 million victims of human trafficking around the globe at any given time. Although initially our focus was to combat human trafficking as sexual exploitation, in recent years there has been an increase in human trafficking geared towards labor exploitation (International Labor Organization, 2013a). The International Labor Organization (2013b) established that, by 2012, 5.5 million children up to the age of seventeen were involved in various types of forced labor. The breakdown of these diverse forms is as follows: 960,000 were sexually exploited; 3,780,000 suffered from labor exploitation; and 709,000 were subjected to state-imposed forced labor. Within the parameters of child labor, boys (99.8 million) are affected to a greater degree than girls (68.2 million). Nonetheless, it must be noted that this estimate does not measure either domestic labor or sexual exploitation, in which more girls participate. An estimated 98% of victims of sexual exploitation are women and girls. Likewise, the increase in human trafficking and sexual exploitation, coupled with their complexities, is such that U.S. criminal justice experts who have tried to overturn the prostitution/exploitation bipartite phenomenon have reached a consensus during the last months to regard prostitution as a form of exploitation—as sexual violence against women and girls who are victims of abuse, rather than criminals.

From this standpoint, a counter-discourse has begun to develop that leaves behind the one perpetuated by the collective imagination in which prostitution is considered a female crime when, in fact, the person paying for the services is the true felon (MacKinnon, 2011). This focuses attention on the consumer to eradicate the dubious distinction between prostitution and sexual exploitation. If there is no demand, no consumer, the system collapses, as it is occurring in the Swedish model, which regards the consumer of sexual services as the criminal (Ambassador Swanee Hunt, 2013; Yen, 2008). Under this model, which is supported by 80% of the population, prostitution and illicit activities in Sweden have decreased. In light of this, U.S. criminal experts have acknowledged the impossibility of distinguishing between prostitution and sexual exploitation. They have brought to light the fact that, paradoxically, most violations of rights take place in isolated places such as bars and nightclubs, rather than in the streets (Bettio & Nandi, 2010). As noted by the Honorable Jonathan Lippman, Chief Judge of the State of New York, prostitution must be examined from a humanitarian perspective. Victims of sexual trafficking must be provided more accessible services that help them escape from their situation of abuse and exploitation so they can start a new life. Lippman indicates: “This new initiative will stop the pattern of shuffling trafficking victims through our criminal courtrooms without addressing the underlying reasons they are there in the first place.” (Rashbaum, 2013)

Similarly, there has been an increase and a high percentage of sex trafficking globally. Though the phenomenon of human trafficking and enslavement was originally associated with the Pacific region only, today we know that it is a global phenomenon tied to local cultural specificities. Nevertheless, Asia and the Pacific are still the most significant regions in terms of the number of victims. Since 2005, however, the phenomenon has accelerated in Africa, specifically labor exploitation cases, which have doubled in the last few years. This represents 36% of exploitation cases on a global level, a number that continually rises during times of crisis. A higher percentage has been detected in the Middle East as well as in South America, East Asia, and the Pacific. However, human trafficking and enslavement for sexual purposes continues to be the most visible form of exploitation and represents 58% of all exploitation cases globally. Europe, Central Asia, and the Americas are the ideal regions for this kind of exploitation (U.S. Department of State, 2012). Although less visible, but more shocking, the same report describes that the removal of human organs for sale has been reported in sixteen nations worldwide.

Such an inordinate increase in human trafficking and enslavement has led international organizations to urge all the countries where it occurs to define it as a crime in their penal codes and to introduce legislation aimed at prevention. A recommendation was also made to establish help centers that cater to victims' needs and that, if necessary, could offer asylum. In addition, the report states that out of the 184 countries where cases of human trafficking for sexual exploitation have been documented, 168 are for child trafficking for the same purposes. Today, as in the past, these countries are part of an unequal exchange, in which the recipients are rich countries that receive the bodies of women and children from poor countries as commodities. In turn, these poor countries share substandard infrastructure and political, economic, and social instability, which result in poverty, mismanagement, and limited access to resources and services. Although the specific characteristics of each region ultimately determine the forms human trafficking will take, within a theoretical framework, factors such as social inequality, gender discrimination, poverty, lack of education, minimal government intervention, and other socio-economic factors can be identified as causes of human trafficking (Danailova-Trainor & Laczko, 2010). Forty-one countries have been reported as child sex tourism destinations. The United States, which is the top such destination in the world, receives 15,000 to 18,000 people, mainly women and children, for these purposes each year. However, the primary problem in the U.S. is the false perception or unawareness about this phenomenon at the domestic level. People see child sex trafficking primarily as a transnational phenomenon, in which foreign children are the most affected. However, American children, particularly "runaways," are the ones most vulnerable to sexual exploitation. (Kotrla, 2010).

**Figure 1.** Mother attempts to sell her daughters via Facebook.



A woman was arrested in the United States for attempting to sell her daughters, a ten-month-old and a two-year-old, for \$4,000.

According to reports, 100,000 children between the ages of eleven and fourteen from the United States are victims of sexual exploitation annually. The profile of traffickers and exploiters in the United States and internationally is that they are usually family members, companies or employment agencies, followed by pimps or brothel owners. As indicated by the *TIP Report* (U.S. Department of State, 2012), community and religious leaders are also part of the profile in countries such as Ghana, India, and Turkey. The *modus operandi* of these predators is to use technology for exploitation purposes, which is often indispensable to meet their ends. Using cell phones and the Internet, traffickers contact and control their victims at both domestic and international levels. The following account evidences an exploitation case in the United States where the predator used an

internet chat room to contact his victims; this is similar to what happens in Puerto Rico and in other places around the world (Hughes & Shapiro, 2010, p. 2).

In 1998, Jodi met Marcus in an online chat room for BDSM. Marcus used the screen name “GMYourGod,” which stood for “Glenn Marcus Your God.” He treated the women in BDSM relationships with him as his slaves. Once a woman entered into a relationship with Marcus, he did not allow her to set any limits on the sexual and physical violence she had to endure; nor did he allow “safe words”—a signal from the person being beaten and abused to the sadist that he must stop. Although he gave Jodi extreme examples of what she may have to do, such as kill a small child, two of Marcus’ other slaves who helped to recruit Jodi assured her that he would never do anything so extreme (p.1).

In telephone conversations before they met, Marcus told Jodi that she belonged to him, and he expected her to serve him. In October 1998, Jodi visited Marcus at the home of another one of his slaves in Maryland. On the first visit he whipped her and carved the word “slave” into her stomach with a knife (p. 2).

During the second visit, Jodi “petitioned” to be his slave and serve him. The document said that she would serve him “with no limitations” and “If I beg you for my release, Sir, please ignore these words.” Jodi assumed that this was part of the BDSM game and that she could leave if she wanted. In the United States, a person cannot legally consent to their own enslavement. The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution outlawed all slavery in 1865 (p. 2).

Marcus ordered Jodi to move to Maryland and live with one of his other slaves. When she arrived, Marcus shaved her head and branded a “G” on her buttocks with a coat hanger. He ordered her to break off contact with friends and family, as a way to isolate her and distort her reality to his worldview (p. 2).

Meanwhile, in other countries, human trafficking has been linked to governmental corruption and private agencies. For this reason, they are currently developing prevention and victim protection protocols. For example, seventy-three countries have introduced comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation and another sixty-two have included human trafficking and enslavement in their penal codes. Another thirty-three countries include some forms of trafficking in their codes, and six countries have established laws related to child trafficking. It is also important to point out that twenty-five countries have included human trafficking and enslavement as a topic in their educational curricula, from kindergarten classrooms to graduate school programs (K-20). The issue has also been incorporated into law school programs and governmental agencies. Sponsored by various governments and NGOs, some of these countries already have protection centers for victims, and seventy-one European countries have opened shelters for victims. On the other hand, in Latin America and the Caribbean, there is scarce support from the government and only eight countries have a national action policy to identify and process cases of human rights violations related to human trafficking and enslavement through sexual or labor exploitation.

Although there are confirmed cases of human trafficking in Puerto Rico, it is only now, after bringing this phenomenon to light, that awareness is beginning to grow, and new amendments to legislative initiatives that protect the well-being of minors are being set forth. For the first time, the *2013 TIP Report* (U.S. Department of State, 2013a) included and declared Puerto Rico as a location of origin, transit, and destiny for the crimes previously described as a result of these findings. Hence, a more rigorous approach to legislation is now encouraged:

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is a source, transit, and destination location for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. During the reporting period, the USAO indicted a Puerto Rican woman on prostitution and sex trafficking charges for recruiting, enticing, and harboring a fourteen-year-old female to engage in commercial sex acts. While three sections of Puerto Rico’s penal code address human trafficking and slavery, it has not been updated to reflect modern anti-trafficking laws (U.S. Department of State, 2013b, p. 387).

### Puerto Rico: Other Faces of Human Trafficking and Enslavement

Shedding light on the phenomenon of human trafficking on the island has turned it into a public interest issue. The local press has begun tracking and reporting on many cases involving minors, although they often misclassify them. One dramatic example occurred right before Three King's Day on January 4, 2013. While most children traditionally receive presents during this time to celebrate the Epiphany, one fourteen-year-old girl's biological mother forced her to have sex with her stepfather for reproductive purposes because the mother was unable to have more children. What is unusual about this case is that the couple also had custody of a sixteen-year-old girl and a fourteen-year-old boy, in addition to their fourteen-year-old daughter (*Primera Hora*, January 9, 2013). The state supported both of these minors with the amount of \$300 a month for each. Whether through ignorance or inexperience, the two adults were arrested and charged with sexual assault and child abuse, charges that carry much lighter sentences than the crime of human trafficking and enslavement. They also obscure the charge of human rights violation, as set forth in the new Penal Code.

Similarly, a case reported by the local press in February 2013 demonstrates how biological parents of minors repeatedly subject them to all type of sexual abuse by whatever means available, and these offenses were not identified as "human trafficking or enslavement" by the authorities or the media. The case of Carlos Camacho also reflects this. He was accused of sexual assault along with his partner, Josefina. The whereabouts of the girls' mother, who was responsible for the actual abuse, could not be identified.

**Figure 3.** Abuse for reproductive purposes.



*Primera Hora*, January 9, 2013

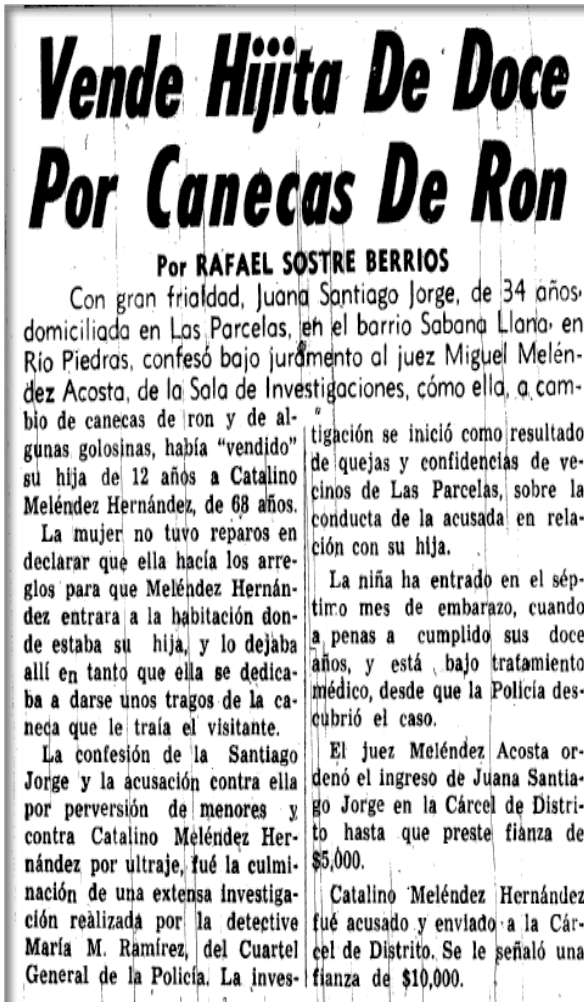
**Figure 2.** Human trafficking and enslavement in the form of domestic work and sexual abuse.



*Primera Hora*, February 12, 2013

For example, Carlos Camacho (aka Pichi), fifty-two years old, and his common-law partner, Josefina, fifty-nine years old, were charged with sexual assault and committing lewd acts against two minors. According to the evidence, Josefina **solicited the help of her neighbor's two daughters, ages five and seven, for their help with domestic chores**; their mother allowed it in exchange for future favors. Once the girls arrived at the apartment, the couple would subject them to lascivious acts and "all types of sexual assault." According to the

Figure 4. Sexual abuse: Mother sells daughter for rum.



*El Imparcial*, 1963

news report, "the whereabouts of the girls' mother were unknown," and the couple was arrested for these acts. (*Primera Hora*, February 19, 2013).

Events like these are not new in Puerto Rico, although they are often rendered invisible or ignored by the general public. The press has been reporting similar events since the 1960s. (See Figure 4.)

The dramatic case reported by the sisters of Xavier Jiménez Benceví, a twenty-eight-year-old man accused of murdering a federal witness, reflects the hellish childhood he endured in a home with fourteen other siblings. This "phantasmagoric" case presents the different faces of human trafficking and enslavement on the island, which are not classified as such by the same conceptual limitation previously referenced. Likewise, it reflects the State's complicity and irresponsibility.

Rebeca [Xavier's sister] described that when her parents raised her and her fourteen siblings in the *Brisas* public housing project in Bayamón, Xavier reacted to the abuse by "crying." On one occasion, he told her that "when he grew up, my father would

never do what he did to my mother again—not to her or to him—that he would not allow him to do it anymore."

She described how she did not escape her father's abuse either. She even showed the scars on her wrists from when she tried to commit suicide with a knife because she felt "suffocated" by the untenable situation. When the family moved from the *Brisas* to the *Falín Torrech* housing project, Rebeca said she heard rumors about Xavier being involved with controlled substances.

*"I asked my mother if she had heard that my brother was involved with drugs, if she wasn't going to say anything to him. She told me to butt out, that it was his problem, and that as long*

*as he brought money home, there was no problem,*” indicated Rebeca [Xavier’s sister], who admitted that she had forgiven her father. She had “tried” to forgive her mother, *“but it still hurts.”*

Rubí [another sister] said that her mother encouraged them to rob or look for food in garbage cans, so they could eat. *“Since they didn’t have money, my mother taught us to steal.”* She sent Rubí and Xavier, who were then eight and ten years old respectively, to steal food and personal effects for the whole family. They also ate whatever they could find in garbage cans.

She also recounted that the police arrested her once when she was fifteen. When she and her mother appeared in court, *“she [her mother] told the judge that she had no control over me. But she wasn’t telling the truth, she would instruct me to do it. That’s what my parents taught me, and it was easier for me to get things that way.”* For this, she was sentenced to a month in a juvenile detention center, where she spent her *quinceañero* or 15<sup>th</sup> birthday (*Primera Hora*, May 6, 2013).

The experience of these sisters and particularly Xavier, although he is a twenty-eight-year-old man, reflects a situation of enslavement and exploitation that they had endured since childhood. This case is dramatic because the biological parents were the ones perpetrating this type of abuse, which occurs in many Puerto Rican homes, but it is still not recognized as what it is—enslavement and exploitation.

The case of Pedro (not his real name), another one of our respondents during this second phase, demonstrates how some modeling agencies with questionable reputations on the island exploit our young people with the promise of making them famous.

Pedro’s father abandoned the family when he was a newborn, and his mother was left solely in charge of the family. Today, Pedro is nineteen years old and lives with his mother and three older brothers. He studies fashion design and is also a model. He said he is a homosexual and a Goth, which causes him to feel stigmatized and discriminated against. This situation led to his hospitalization for depression, and he attempted suicide several times. Although he claims to come from a “very Christian” family, when he was sixteen years old he was raped by a forty-year-old uncle, who later offered him money.

He also confessed to have been the victim of abuse at the hands of a modeling school which, under the pretenses and promises of making him an international model, forced him to do whatever they wanted: *“Ah, they’d say that we had to do all this or that we had to do all that...They offered me the world but never came through. They offered me money that I never saw. After they abused me...not only me, but also others. Most of us were minors—fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, up to nineteen years old; none of us were older than that. **We were all in middle school.**”* (Seventh to ninth grades, emphasis added.)

Pedro currently lives in the urban center of a town in the southern region of Puerto Rico, where he pointed out, *“that there is a drug spot, and they don’t do anything about it. They’re scared of the drug spots. The drug spots control the [town]...One day I’ll get out of here.”*

Lydia (not her real name) is another one of the young respondents from the Island’s interior whose testimony reflects the abuse she was subjected to by people she considered friends and a close family member.

According to her, she dropped out of school in ninth grade because of problems with her classmates. She lived with her mother and her two younger siblings, since her father “washed his hands” of them when she was very young. Her mother was an alcoholic. She remembered that

a twenty-five-year-old cousin *“almost raped”* her when she was eight years old. She said, *“My mother used to change my clothes in front of him and he would watch me. He threatened to harm my father on two occasions if I didn’t let him touch me, so I let him.”* She considered herself an alcoholic when she was sixteen years old because *“I drank a lot of alcohol.”* Even so, she entered a residential training program to obtain a technical degree for five months. But after learning some secretarial skills, she dropped out, saying, *“That was a horrible place; a lot of things happened.”* At sixteen, she moved in with a man after two weeks of meeting him. But he used drugs and alcohol, and *“he insisted that I do the same. He abused, threatened, and hit me. I was very afraid of him, and stayed even after having two children with him. I remained in the drug world, using crack, marijuana, and cocaine. After some time, I decided to leave him, and I was doing well—taking care of my children—until I met a friend who introduced me to the world of prostitution.”*

She moved to the north of the island to work as a prostitute along with her friend, who became her pimp. *“She paid me in money and drugs.”* While her mother took care of her kids, Lydia continued immersed in the world of prostitution and drugs, namely crack and marijuana. *“I was abused by different men until I decided to check myself into a women’s rehab facility for drug abuse and alcoholism.”* She met the father of her third child with whom she had a good relationship, according to her, but still resorted to prostitution and drugs. Ultimately, this relapse made her decide to join a faith-based group home because *“I want to rehabilitate myself, so I can be with my family.”*

Lucy, a young girl from Mayagüez, also experienced sexual exploitation from a very young age.

At age fourteen, her mother abandoned her and her three younger siblings to move in with another man. Her father was a heroin user who frequently abused her mother. He went to jail for drug charges and was killed shortly after being released. Lucy (not her real name), who was only fourteen, took care of her younger siblings since then. She recounted that, at sixteen, she was raped by a neighbor’s son who was supposedly looking after her and her family. For

this reason, she decided to move in with a man. She stressed the fact that she didn't work as a prostitute at the time.

*I worked in brothels but not as a prostitute. So for me to be able to support myself and stuff, I went with a lady who offered me a job at her place of work that, by coincidence, was a brothel. I was the cashier, I was not a prostitute, but I was in the brothel environment. She paid me and took care of me. I was like the bait because I was the youngest and, so I was the bait for these old perverts who came looking for girls.*

Afterwards, Lucy recognized that the lady was, in effect, sexually exploiting her since she later put her to work as a prostitute and took all the money she earned. Lucy was also in the drug world, confessing to using cocaine, marijuana, Percocet, and all kinds of other drugs. She continued working as a prostitute in a hotel in the western region of the island where, as she stated, *"they sold me as an escort."* At the time, her siblings were also drug users, so she decided to go live in a public housing project by herself.

With tears in her eyes, Lucy recounted that, while living there, one night on her way back from a pub four men raped her and she woke up in a hospital room where she spent forty-two days. She only got help from some workers at a cigarette company but, according to her testimony, she had to pay them with sex. So she returned to prostitution, but moved out of the housing project. For a while, she was homeless and using all kinds of drugs.

Where she worked, there were prostitutes from other countries, and the schedule was established according to the clientele who, as she described, ranged from government employees to retirees receiving social security benefits. Once again, Lucy became the victim of sexual exploitation. This time, it was at the hands of police officers who, after performing raids and arresting prostitutes, traded sexual favors in exchange for promising to release them; the sexual acts took place either in the police car or wherever they crossed paths.

Today, Lucy proudly declares that she obtained a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from a university in the Island's western region, but first she had to join a faith-based program led by women to rehabilitate herself and deal with her situation as a survivor of abuse. She is still haunted by the ghosts of prostitution and drugs.

Another face of human trafficking and enslavement that we rediscovered during this second phase of research is exploitation through forced begging, which is less apparent in Puerto Rico and has been a crime on the books since the 1960s.

Figure 5. Begging: Leader of fake youth cadets incites begging.



*El Imparcial, 1963*

On a Wednesday in September 2012, at around one o'clock in the morning, seven minors were removed from their home in the municipality of Toa Alta by personnel from the Department of Family Services. Agents from the Bayamón branch discovered that these minors were being exploited by their own relatives, who forced them to beg in the streets at all hours of the day and night (Hernández Cabiya, 2012). One of the minors was a fourteen-year-old teenager who was five months pregnant. Once they arrived at the regional Specialized Investigations Unit (*Unidad de Investigaciones Especializadas*), it was expected that the minors would feel freed and protected since this is supposed to be the mission of their "rescuers". However, they went from the whip of exploitation, which ruled their young lives, to the whip of institutional abuse because institutions lacked the mechanisms to address the situation.

As per her testimony, Sandra (not her real name) was also a victim of forced begging from a very young age, in addition to being involved in drug and sex trafficking. She was pregnant at age sixteen and dropped out of school to become a mother. At that time, she entered into a violent marriage, which resulted in her ten-month-old daughter's removal from her care because her partner accused her of domestic violence. Her record with the police did not work in her favor either. Her baby's removal had a deep impact on Sandra. She was deeply marked by it, and driven to a life full of despair that led to her involvement in illegal activities at such a young age.

She started using various kinds of drugs, and she also worked in drug trafficking for a year. During that time, she lived in an abandoned apartment with some men in the southern region of Puerto Rico. Her job was to carry drugs island-wide. She earned \$300 to \$400 per trip for this type of work.

*Well, that can make you a lot of money, depending on where the deal is going down. Because if it involves me getting into a car to take you, let's say, from Guayama to San Juan or from San Juan to different places, to anywhere in Puerto Rico, then they might give you 300 or 400 bucks.*

When Sandra was seventeen she was offered a job performing private dances. She was approached by adults from outside the drug trafficking world in which she was involved. One day, she went to familiarize herself with the work environment and saw girls as young as fifteen working there. After seeing the environment, she decided not to accept the job offer.

*There was a time in my life when they tried to degrade me, tried to make me give private dances and those sort of things, to make money. I can't say that I didn't do it, you know, I went into that scene to see how it was, but I got scared and said, "no, this is not for me."*

*...they were older people. One of them was forty years old. He looked for girls, you know. It was a private dance; you don't have to do anything. But there are people who are watching you, and if you want to become a decent person, it is better not to go there...*

*...I saw other young girls, girls who were even fourteen and fifteen years old. You know, being fondled by adults. Those shows took place at a private house. I never accepted the job because I told myself that it was going to be hard, my life later on. I'd rather people say "look, there's a junkie" or whatever else, than being outcast for being a prostitute, never that. I thought "that's not for me; it's better if I keep selling drugs and make it easier." The day I get arrested, I'll keep my mouth shut.*

Drug trafficking was very profitable work for Sandra. She could make \$1,000 in two weeks. Sandra explained the drug trafficking structure because she worked different positions within it. The street dealer is the lowest position in a drug trafficking operation. This dealer may work two or three hours selling various substances. The next level up after the street dealer is the runner; this person is the boss's right-hand man. The runner is in charge of picking up and delivering packages. He is the product distributor.

*Well, I can be a street dealer and work a double shift. In one day, I may have a bundle with twenty-five baggies that go for ten bucks each. Twenty-five times ten gives you a certain amount. I get them for four bucks and break even if I pay back seven, so I make three bucks. I multiply all that, divide it up, set the seven bucks aside, subtract them, and those three dollars from each of the twenty-five baggies are mine. And if I sell ten bundles during my shift, which is supposed to last three hours, all that profit is mine.*

[A runner] *Man, I swear that in a month you can make up to 10,000 bucks or more.*

The experience that most affected Sandra was joining a group of people to beg at traffic lights. The group collected money for a child with a health condition. They took a percentage of what they collected and the rest went to the child's mother. Sandra felt dirty for having done this. After leaving this group, Sandra surrendered to the courts in an attempt to regain custody of her daughter.

*Something could've been done legally, but they were doing it illegally. I went to traffic lights to collect money and I would force the person, "Hey, I'm here working my ass off, but you have to give me 50% of the money I make in those jars." If there were two jars with 500 bucks, just to say a number, or 300, then half of it was mine in a day's work.*

*Yes...at traffic lights, any light in any town. At the traffic lights, those persons fill out paperwork, and people fall for it, people of, I don't know, maybe low income or weak state of mind, I'd say, who do this to make a few bucks for their children. Because me, no matter what I've gone through in life, if one day I had a situation with my daughter, I'd hit the streets and force my family or someone to go with me, or I'd go myself to get burned under the sun and collect the money for my daughter myself. I wouldn't allow some bums to do it and give me, how much, a fourth of it.*

*That hit me, I thought of how I'm a mother and what if that happens to my daughter, and I have to go beg at a traffic light and, because I'm a liar, nobody gives me money, and my daughter dies. That hit me so hard, to the point that I never did it again.*

Sandra was almost eighteen when she surrendered to the courts. At the juvenile detention center, she saw eleven-year-old girls at the admissions area because they were too young to be committed to the juvenile facility. Many of these girls went there to get clean. Sandra met a thirteen-year-old girl who gave birth to a crack baby at twelve. This girl did not know how to read or write when she entered the juvenile facility.

*I got to know a thirteen-year-old girl who had a baby when she was twelve. She had to break her crack addiction, she didn't know how to read or write. She learned at a juvenile facility.*

Sandra spent one year and a half in the juvenile detention center. She believes that she learned a lot at this place. Her last months there, she collaborated with a social outreach initiative named PACOA (*Programa de Acercamiento Comunitario en Acción*). During that time, she visited schools to give talks on juvenile delinquency. She spent time with girls who, like her, lived in families surrounded by domestic violence.

*I learned, and now I value my life much more. There were many officers who tried to help; but, at the beginning, I spat at them, kicked them, and told them off in a thousand ways. I realized that I needed help. When I really understood that I was truly not well, then I accepted help from my mentor; an officer who was a mentor, like your dad or your mother. We called them our mom or dad. These people almost always found a way to connect with you.*

Sandra indicated that she has several aspirations, including becoming a social worker to help the community.

The particular characteristics of these and subsequent real life stories of children on the island represent other faces of human trafficking and enslavement not considered during the first phase of the investigation. Likewise, these modalities are not included in either the Palermo Protocols or in any legal statute in Puerto Rico. Lack of conceptual clarity among agencies and the conceptual limitations of the Palermo Protocols themselves impede the classification and inclusion of these modalities in the definition of human trafficking and enslavement.

### **Human Trafficking and Enslavement: A Conceptual Problem**

One of our achievements during the first phase of our investigation has been positioning the term “human trafficking and enslavement” as a problem in the realm of public opinion. Indeed, for the first time in Puerto Rico, the local press titled a story about a case with the headline “human trafficking”. The case of Peluquín, which was tried as a human trafficking case under federal jurisdiction, attests to this. The local press reported: “Child Prostitution Ring Put to an End” (Díaz Román, 2011). Federal agents explained that these charges represented the first accusation of child prostitution made by federal authorities in Puerto Rico. In the case, Rommel Cintrón (aka Peluquín) allegedly operated a prostitution ring that sold female minors in the Condado area of San Juan. According to authorities, Cintrón provided tourists with girls and young female adults to quench their sexual appetites. “An hour of sex with one of Peluquín’s beautiful girls cost \$1,500.” (Díaz Román, 2011).

The initial accusations were overturned. Cintrón did, however, declare himself guilty of the misdemeanor charge, as reported in the November 21, 2012 edition of *El Vocero*, a local newspaper. He originally faced child sex trafficking charges. However, he was sentenced to six months of time-served after the federal prosecution dismissed the child sex trafficking charges and indicted him on new charges for concealing sexual acts that took place between a man and a minor at his residence.

**Figure 6.** Peluquín: First reported case of human trafficking in Puerto Rico.



*El Nuevo Día*, July 15, 2011

Similarly, the story of Betsian Carrasquillo Peñalosa, better known as *Gordi, La Comehombres* or Man-Eater, was the first case of human trafficking in Puerto Rico, although it occurred within our borders (*Primera Hora*, October 11, 2012). Betsian Carrasquillo tried to sell her fourteen-year-old daughter at a hotel in the Island's capital. She took her daughter to a hotel where she planned to sell her for sexual favors. There she was intercepted by federal agents, and charged with human trafficking.

A third case of child trafficking for sexual exploitation involves Gerardo Navarro Rodríguez, a fifty-nine-year-old pediatric psychiatrist who was married with two children. He used his position as a trustworthy authority figure to sexually abuse two male teenagers, ages sixteen and seventeen, while treating them at his office for severe depression. The doctor also took them to his home where he sexually abused them under the guise of having them do some electrical repairs. After complaints that he trafficked and sexually abused two of his underage patients, he was arrested by agents from the Homeland Security Investigations office of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Bureau (ICE-HSI) (Cobián, September 27, 2013).

**Figure 8.** Third child trafficking case in Puerto Rico.



*El Nuevo Día*, September 27, 2013.

that she stayed over at her aunt's house and slept in the same bed with her; the girl commented that Ríos Negrón hugged and kissed her "in a passionate or romantic way" (Cobián, July 2, 2013).

**Figure 7.** *La Comehombres* [The Man-Eater]: First case of child trafficking in Puerto Rico



*Primera Hora*, October 11, 2012.

A fourth case of human trafficking and enslavement against a minor was registered on the Island when a woman (the girl's aunt) and a man were arrested for allegedly having sex with a girl and prostituting her. They were arrested and now face federal charges for transporting a minor with the intent to engage in criminal sexual activity. The girl's aunt, Vanessa Ríos Negrón, twenty-nine, was arrested in Orlando while Juan Berto Matos González was detained in Ponce. The victim was between fourteen and fifteen years old when the events took place between 2011 and 2012. The girl told ICE-HIS agents that she met Matos González at her aunt's home in the summer of 2011. She also indicated

From there on, the aunt sexually exploited the girl. She was forced to have sexual encounters in various places including the Nuevo Camino Motel and the Holiday Inn Hotel, both located in Ponce. According to the federal complaint filed, Ríos Negrón was the one who transported the girl to those locations.

On February 2012, the teenager ran away from home and Ríos Negrón left her with some of her friends in the *Aristides Chavier* public housing project, located in Ponce. She still came to pick the girl up to have sexual relations.

At some point, the minor needed money and Ríos Negrón told her that she knew a man, identified as Matos González, willing to pay them \$200 for watching them have sex. The aunt convinced the girl and promised that the man would not touch her, that he only wanted to watch. On February 28, 2012, Matos González picked them up from a pharmacy in Ponce and drove to the Holiday Inn Hotel, where he watched them having sex. But at some point, he penetrated the girl; she complained and he stopped. When they were done, the man paid each of them \$200. According to the news report, Ríos Negrón moved to the United States shortly after. Some time later, the girl called her aunt to tell her that she needed money. As per the girl's testimony, her aunt responded: "*You know what you have to do; call Berto.*" After the preliminary hearing, it was reported that they both face a minimum sentence of fifteen years to life if convicted. The girl was transferred to a psychiatric hospital in Mayagüez, where she was treated for depression and anxiety.

These cases demonstrate that many victims of child exploitation in Puerto Rico are not necessarily being transported across frontiers, from one place to another, for the abuse to take place. Rather, they are being transported or trafficked within our borders. We consider this type of human trafficking and enslavement to be domestic human trafficking because it occurs within the island's borders and is perpetrated by Puerto Ricans. However, Betsian Carrasquillo's case made local and international news when she was charged with sex trafficking and transporting a minor within a territory of the United States for sexual purposes. All four of these cases—Peluquín, Betsian Carrasquillo, Gerardo Navarro Rodríguez, and Vanessa Ríos—represent the first cases in Puerto Rico to be considered what they really are: human trafficking and enslavement of minors. Be that as it may, we do not know anything about the victims or what courses their lives took. This fact confirms that human trafficking and enslavement is considered a crime by the federal agencies and their protocols, rather than a human rights violation, as it should be.

Despite these cases, the term "human trafficking and enslavement" still causes confusion among government agencies and the general public. Therefore, one of the contributions during this research phase is that we have deconstructed some of the categories mentioned in the definition of the term, and we have detailed and extended it to take into account our Puerto Rican context. Originally, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish the Trafficking of Persons, especially Women and Children, one of the Palermo Protocols (2000)—the first international consensus that defines human trafficking and supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime—established the following:

- a. “Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;
- b. The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used;
- c. The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article;
- d. “Child” shall mean any person under eighteen years of age.

Following our investigation, the Ricky Martin Foundation, the University of Puerto Rico, and other members of civil society battled until the new Penal Code, signed and ratified by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in 2012, made human trafficking a crime for the first time through Senate Bill 2021. However, its definition is much more limited and narrow than the one suggested by the U.N. protocol. Article 158 (Enslavement) of the Penal Code establishes that human trafficking shall include the following:

1. The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of a person by means of threat, force or other forms of intimidation.
2. Kidnapping or restriction of freedom by means of fraud, deception or abuse of power by taking advantage of a victim’s vulnerable state.
3. The concession or receipt of payments or benefits to obtain consent from the victim’s guardian to enslave him or her.

The incorporation of this definition to the new Penal Code demonstrated a certain interest and commitment from federal authorities, which, as previously noted, prompted the *2013 TIP Report* (U.S. Department of State, 2013a) to take an interest in Puerto Rico and include it for the first time. Although this incorporation into the Penal Code represented an achievement and advancement in preventing human trafficking and protecting its victims, this inclusion responded to a more limited definition than the one given by the Palermo Protocols, which does not necessarily address our particular set of circumstances. Thus, it was imperative for us to revise and extend that definition to fit the context of Puerto Rico. After identifying that there are other dimensions of human trafficking that are not covered by the protocol, our team has proposed an

amendment for new legislation consistent with our reality. (See Appendix B—Model for New Human Trafficking Legislation in Puerto Rico.)

From the beginning, our investigation *Human Trafficking in Puerto Rico: An Invisible Challenge*, like many other studies on human trafficking and enslavement, accepted the definition set forth by the Palermo Protocols. However, as indicated by other researchers addressing the topic, this definition is too narrow. One of our criticisms is that the Protocols do not mention, define, or deal with domestic human trafficking, which exists in many countries, Puerto Rico, among them. The aforementioned definition limits its content to transnational violations (Iñiguez de Heredia, 2008) without exploring other dimensions of human trafficking and enslavement within the borders of a country. This definition also ignores commercial aspects, the commodification of bodies, and human trafficking more focused on the transportation and transfer of persons, rather than on selling or purchasing them. These aspects constitute a crime against the State, not the individual. Consequently, the protocols do not examine the philosophical differences between prostitution and sexual exploitation. Additionally, some passages suggest that illegal immigration is the same as human trafficking and prostitution. To clarify this perception, Teresa Ulloa Zúrriz, Regional Director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (CATW-LAC), pointed out that there are significant differences between illegal immigration and human trafficking.

Illegal immigrants subject themselves willingly to the traffic (Ulloa Zúrriz, 2007). The relationship with the trafficker ends at the immigrant's destination, advance payments exist, there is no restriction of movement once at their destination, recruitment is not premeditated, documents are not confiscated, and the purpose is to arrive in another country. Hence, it is a crime against the State. In human trafficking, on the contrary, the crime is against the individual. The person becomes a commodity, the relationship with the trafficker does not end at their destination, payment initiates after the person has been exploited, and there is restriction of movement (victims are generally locked-up). Their recruitment depends on the form of exploitation that will be inflicted on the victims. Traffickers confiscate their victims' documents for the purposes of sexual and/or labor exploitation. In this relationship, the victim has become merchandise; therefore, the crime is against the person. These two phenomena, however, have the following in common: the fact that there might be irregular border crossing (facilitation of illegally entering a country, which is a violation of immigration laws); a commercial operation using human beings; the existence of organized crime rings; human rights violations; and, in both cases, the trafficking does not necessarily take place across borders but can occur within them.

As noted by some feminists, it is also necessary to deconstruct the categories of women and children (the primary victims of this crime), which are treated as an all-embracing biosocial category, when it is really a social construction with economic and political functions that have repercussions on global society, as well as on each person's life (Pheterson, Gail, & Jo Doezema, 2004). Similarly, the protocols' definition considers human trafficking a "crime" only when perpetrated against women, children, and primarily the State, rather than a human rights violation, as we accept in our investigation. In light of these shortcomings, we are

proposing an amendment to the Penal Code so that it defines and categorizes “human trafficking and enslavement” accurately and efficiently because the present definition falls short. This effort represents one of our contributions toward preventing and tackling this atrocity in our society. First, the proposed amendment includes a series of definitions that cover the different circumstances surrounding human trafficking. This will help integrate various types of victims into its criminal classification. The definition of “human trafficking and enslavement” has been amended to include domestic human trafficking. This model incorporates the different forms of exploitation indicated by the Palermo Protocols, as well as those determined by the particular circumstances that give rise to the crime in Puerto Rico, such as forced begging and human trafficking for reproductive purposes. It also includes a list of aggravating circumstances applicable to the crime of human trafficking and enslavement along with exempting victims from criminal liability. Lastly, since human trafficking and enslavement must be seen as a human rights violation, the amendment includes a human rights model applied to victims of human trafficking which could be incorporated into a prevention and assistance law for human trafficking. (See Appendix C.)

Other international law provisions are not applicable in Puerto Rico because it is considered a territory of the United States, so the federal U.S. Department of the Interior maintains authority over these affairs. Given their applicability, however, they should be adopted as a matter of international law, just as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court did in 1998 by establishing a general ban on human rights violations and including the following as crimes against humanity:

1. Enslavement: “Enslavement means the exercise of any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership over a person and includes the exercise of such power in the course of trafficking in persons, in particular women and children.”
2. Torture: “Torture means the intentional infliction of severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, upon a person in the custody or under the control of the accused; except that torture shall not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to, lawful sanctions.”
3. “Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity.” (Article 7)

Likewise, under war crimes, the statute also includes: “torture or inhuman treatment; willfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health; unlawful deportation or transfer or unlawful confinement.”

Although in Puerto Rico these international statutes do not apply, there is legislation aimed at safeguarding and protecting children’s rights which, paradoxically, is dead letter, since it thwarts exactly what it proposes. Therefore, the legislation below, for example, also needs to be amended in terms of the nomenclature it uses:

- a. Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act 2003 (CAPTA) – Prevention of and treatment for sexual abuse (this law does not use the term “human trafficking and enslavement”, but instead

uses “sexual abuse.” It describes it, however, as if it were “human trafficking and enslavement”). It is suggested that the term “human trafficking and enslavement” be used to define it clearly and accurately according to the model we have presented.

- b. Act No. 177 (2003), known as the Comprehensive Child Welfare and Protection Act by the Department of Family Services, was amended in 2011. Originally, this law described what constituted sexual abuse without considering human trafficking and enslavement. For this reason, our research team suggested incorporating human trafficking and enslavement as a criminal offense and a human rights violation. In addition, the definition of human trafficking according to the Palermo Protocols should be included with the amendments presented by our research team. This would provide uniformity and agreement between agencies.

This law was amended in 2011 and became Act No. 246. However, it still raises many questions. While it includes the definition of trafficking contained in the Protocol, it does not extend it to the rest of the articles. Therefore, we want to suggest an amendment to this law, particularly since it is the standard used by all personnel at the Department of Family Services. (See Appendix C.)

This amendment was presented before the honorable legislator from Mayagüez (¿nombre?) as a way of making public policy for those most in need and vulnerable in our country. It was well received and is still on the table to be presented in due time.

- c. Act No. 177 from the Department of Labor is related to child labor. Similarly, it does not include a definition of human trafficking and enslavement either, although its description of forced labor coincides with definitions of human trafficking and enslavement. Therefore, we recommend incorporating the same definition of human trafficking according to the amendment we have presented. This law also raises some questions.
- d. The Department of Consumer Affairs also contains bylaws against child obscenity, indecency, pornography, and violence in video or computer games, radio, television, and movies under Article I. These bylaws have been enacted and adopted in accordance with the power conferred upon the Secretary of the Department of Consumer Affairs under Act No. 5 signed on April 23, 1973 in accordance with the laws passed on August 9, 2002, namely: Act No. 140, known as the Citizen's Bill of Rights on Child Obscenity and Pornography; Act No. 141, known as the Movie Rating System Act; Act No. 142 to create the Citizen's Orientation Office Against Child Obscenity and Pornography in Radio and Television; and Act No. 143, which notifies the public about programming blockers in television sets. Although originally a good initiative, these bylaws need to be amended to incorporate the definition of human trafficking in all its manifestations, particularly when technology is used. (See Appendix D.)

### **The Discursive Aspects of Human Trafficking for the Purposes of Child Labor Beyond Our Borders**

The most well-known and visible aspect is human trafficking and exploitation for sexual purposes (Rey-Hernández & Hernández-Angueira, 2010). It has also been the most studied in recent years. However, human trafficking for labor exploitation, which affects a higher number of persons and a larger population, has not been explored as profoundly (Giménez-Salinas & Reguena Espada, 2009). Contrary to sexual exploitation, which primarily targets women and girls, this type of trafficking affects men as well. In both forms of exploitation, children are easy prey for traffickers. Human trafficking for labor exploitation usually takes place in countries with a significant labor demand, which is often satisfied by recently arrived immigrants. However, during times of economic crisis, this demand is also satisfied by citizens. This often includes minors, who are also subjected to some kind of labor exploitation.

Hence, the resurgence in discussions and debates on who is considered a “child” and all aspects regarding child labor, particularly cultural ideas about what the definition of “child” suggests, as well as its scope (Dosumnu & Adidogun, 2011). In other words, the greatest challenge in studying child trafficking and enslavement is to reconcile the universal definition of “childhood.” International human rights discourse must also be reconciled with local conceptions of childhood that take into account cultural diversity, as indicated in the essay *On Challenges, Dilemmas, and Opportunities in Studying Trafficked Children* (Gozdziak, 2008).

The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines child labor as economically active children between ages five and fourteen. Given this commercial context, both the ILO and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) address the need to eradicate child labor activities, since they believe that child labor can only have negative effects, regardless of culture or need. They argue that child labor impairs intellectual, physical, psychological, and moral development. They also assert that substituting school or recreational time with work, which often exceeds children’s physical capacities, causes illnesses and deformities. In addition, certain activities are psychological and moral risks in and of themselves, which, according to these organizations, is why child labor should be eradicated. In line with these arguments, the abovementioned organizations assume an abolitionist and ethnocentric stance toward child labor. Bourdillon, White, and Myers (2009) also condemn all work that is potentially detrimental to children because it is their right to be protected from such work and receive a quality education. These authors call for the rethinking of the universal minimum age as a frame of reference for child labor.

In contrast, other non-governmental organizations, such as the *Instituto de Formación para Educadores de Jóvenes, Adolescentes y Niños Trabajadores de América Latina y el Caribe* [Training Institute for Teachers of Working Youth, Teenagers, and Children in Latin America and the Caribbean] (IFEJANT, by its Spanish acronym) and Save the Children support and promote child labor, arguing that both “work” and “childhood” are categories that need to be properly placed in their particular social contexts. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to talk about “diverse childhoods” in relation to social contexts, rather than about a

Given this lack of conceptual clarity and the inconsistency detected between different public agencies, during this phase of research we have proposed that all legislation related to the protection and welfare of minors in Puerto Rico be amended to include all modalities of the crime of human trafficking and enslavement. To these ends, we proposed an amendment to Act No. 246 of the Department of Family Services for the Safety, Welfare, and Protection of Minors in Puerto Rico. Among other things, this amendment revises Articles 2 and 3 of the law to revise the definition of child abuse to include human trafficking and enslavement in any of its modalities. Likewise, it should be included in the definition of sexual abuse and institutional abuse. In Article 3, which includes all definitions, we have proposed the following definition along with the different modalities. For the purposes of this law, exploitation shall be understood as the voluntary or involuntary use of a minor in any of the following situations:

1. prostitution or any activity that implies sexual exploitation.
2. forced or coerced labor or service, including bonded labor or debt bondage.
3. enslavement or any practice similar to it.
4. organ removal.
5. forced or coerced begging.
6. employing, procuring or offering a minor for illegal activity.
7. employing, procuring or offering a minor for reproductive purposes.
8. employing a minor in armed violence.
9. any work that, because of its nature or environment, could harm the health of children or endanger their safety in accordance with Puerto Rico's Child Employment Act.

Lastly, we have amended the definition of human trafficking and enslavement, and recommended it include the following:

Exploiting, recruiting, transporting, transferring or harboring a minor through the use of intimidation, force or other forms of coercion, such as abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability or the concession or receipt of payments or benefits to obtain consent for the purpose of exploitation. However, in cases of child trafficking, consent is irrelevant

An example of the original piece of legislation on the Safety, Welfare, and Protection of Minors Act (Act No. 246) can be found in Appendix E of this text. The law is currently being revised as Senate Bill No. 573, which includes human trafficking and enslavement as a form of child abuse.

singular notion of childhood, since what is usually affirmed as childhood is culturally, not universally, defined (cited in Rausky, 2009). Some women scholars of this topic also approve of this approach to child labor (Klocker, 2009; Dosumnu & Adidogun, 2011). There are various arguments that justify and explain this posture—from the structural to the cultural. For example, Klocker (2011), who has studied minors in Tanzania, discusses how contractual or legal arrangements might improve the work experience of children: “Children under the age of eighteen can work in other people’s households doing domestic chores, caring for children, and running errands.” The author then complicates the issue of childhood and chronological age perception, maintaining that it is a social construct and suggesting that children can certainly work, but under specific conditions.

From this standpoint, there are many cultures that emphasize work as a virtue since very early in the socialization process. Such is the case of Ghanaian society, where parents deem children’s participation in family cocoa farms—the cornerstone of the local economy—to be very important since it helps them become hardworking and productive individuals. Ghanaian society despises laziness; children, therefore, assume the work with no difficulty. This was proven by an ethnographic study conducted in Ghana, specifically with children working on cocoa farms in the Ashanti region (Berlan, 2009). Although these children attended school, they were not exempt from work in the school environment. Often, under teachers’ orders, children were sent out with a machete to cut weeds during school hours. They were also obligated to perform agricultural work, which ranged from clearing the land to sowing it, regardless of the temperature. The harvests were sold to generate income for the school. This work was done once a week. This research evidences that child labor and academic education are not mutually exclusive. It also evidences that there are instances of children doing harder and more dangerous work at school than at home.

Ghanaian children, who participated in the study, worked harder, more dangerous jobs at school than at the family cocoa farms. These children’s school setting was not any better than their work setting. Although they had been attending school for several years, they had only acquired basic literacy skills. The school lacked resources, it had no electricity for ventilation, it was overcrowded, and teachers were frequently absent. The children even complained about being hungry and having stomach cramps, whereas at the family farms they could gather fruits and hunt animals to eat. According to the author, this is why many children would rather work on the cocoa farm instead of going to school, even though they are willing to go to school.

Within this context, which voices should prevail? As we have examined, it is important to take the cultural context of child labor into account since, for example, child labor in western societies responds mainly to class inequality. Therefore, children from underprivileged sectors of society are the ones who work. For example, the extremely impoverished economic conditions in Guatemala and Nicaragua allow children access to the labor market with their parents’ consent. The poverty and scarcity that define life in these countries, and many others in Latin America, require greater sacrifices from family members (Dammert, 2010). In Guatemala and Nicaragua, the older girls in each household assume roles that are not age

appropriate, according to this author, because they have to take charge of their siblings' care and education, at the expense of their own development. When not in this role, they are performing domestic work, selling things or engaged in some other kind of work. A research investigation on child labor in Guatemala (Vásquez & Bohara, 2010) showed that 17,350 Guatemalan girls perform domestic work; 3,700 work in the industrial sector, and 850 boys beg. These children work in unsafe conditions and have abandoned school entirely. Therefore, Guatemala's level of illiteracy is one of the highest in the region, surpassed only by Nicaragua and Haiti. As has been confirmed, child labor only reproduces existing inequalities in the region and contributes to the breeding ground of human trafficking and enslavement in all its forms with the complicity of all members of society.

In recent years, the number of children exposed to human trafficking for labor purposes has increased. UNICEF (June 2013) estimates that around 150 million children between ages five and fourteen are working in industrialized or developing countries. Moreover, in its most recent report, the International Labor Organization informed that there are 168 million children in the world between ages five and seventeen subjected to child labor. The report highlights that 59% of these children work in agriculture. Fifty-four million children work in the service sector, and another twelve million work in the industrial sector, primarily in construction or manufacturing. Eleven and a half million children work in the domestic sector, while unpaid family labor represents 68% of child labor (International Labor Organization, 2013b). Child trafficking for labor exploitation presents several complex aspects that merit further discussion.

First, child trafficking for sexual exploitation is the predominant and most visible form, leaving child trafficking for labor purposes—whether legal or illegal (no queda claro si lo que se está diciendo que es legal o ilegal es el trabajo o el tráfico)—in the shadows. In second place, when addressing child labor, it must be done from an anthropological perspective. What are their ages? Who are they? Are they boys, girls, children, teenagers, young people? What activities are they performing? Who is behind child labor? Who do they answer to?

A short foray into different countries and regions around the world depicts an excessive participation of children in various legal or illegal labor activities, which reflects the degree of exploitation to which they are subjected. As we examined, some authors have pointed out that incorporating children to the labor market deprives them of access to schooling. It also puts them in danger, since many of the tasks they perform are detrimental to their physical, mental, psychological, moral, and social health.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the International Labor Organization (2013b) indicates that 17,843 children between ages five and seventeen work. The list of countries in that region where the problem of child labor exists includes Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Most of the children exploited in these countries either work in fields, mines or have been introduced to the pornography industry. Similarly, countries such as Brazil, Colombia,

Mexico, and others in Latin America report vast numbers of children in the labor market, primarily girls who are forced to perform unpaid domestic work, and boys and girls who are forced to work in the streets selling gum, candy or other products by their relatives or guardians. This phenomenon is intensified by the migratory patterns, political regimes, and gender inequality that prevail in the region. Traditionally in these countries, domestic work represents the most striking type of exploitation, regardless of workers' ages. In the particular case of children, they usually work in households that seek cheap or unpaid domestic laborers who will be at the mercy of their employers. This type of work generally includes part-time or full-time, live-in work, along with everything that situation implies.

Working full-time at an employer's home implies that there will not be a clear division between the workplace and the place for rest. These children must be available twenty-four hours a day, with no vacation or free time, which causes many of them to lose contact with their families and communities of origin. In many cases, the children do not know where they are or how to get to their homes if they were to get lost. For example, one of our researchers found a little Mexican girl between seven and ten years old whose employers sent her on an errand one night; she was crying because she got lost and did not know where she lived or with whom. Such situations make them even more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. On occasion, these children, who are often taken far from their homes, are abducted across international borders with the promise of a better life someplace else. Parents may even be coerced with the promise of improving the family's economic situation (Bourdillon, White & Myers, 2009).

Child labor exploitation is present in the Caribbean as well. For example, according to the Secretary of Education in the Dominican Republic, child labor is the principal cause for school dropouts, particularly between sixth and eighth grade.

Only four out of ten children finish basic schooling, and they come from large families (four or more siblings). Poverty and the country's economic crisis continue to be the main causes of this phenomenon. According to an opinion poll in the Dominican Republic, one out of every two parents of child workers who were interviewed barely finished fourth grade or elementary school. The surveyed parents do not have work contracts nor do they have insurance or a pension. They are paid on a daily or weekly basis, but most people have a monthly income of less than RD\$5,000 (Carrasco Agosto, 2009).

Despite the aforementioned cases, Latin America is not the region with the highest rate of child labor exploitation. Africa is, with one out of four children being affected by this problem; Asia follows, with one out of eight children. India, for example, has the highest rates of child labor globally. Fifteen million children work due to the country's severe economic problems. However, this takes place in a country whose constitution prohibits forced labor from children under the age of fourteen (Ahmad, 2011), which demonstrates that banning child labor is unrealistic and impossible to enforce in many developing countries.

In the long term, however, child labor reduction strategies should be implemented to improve children's schooling and reduce their poverty. Yet, as mentioned before, reducing child labor depends on each country's perception of what constitutes a minor based on its own culture and characteristics (Hassan, 2011).

### **Child Labor Exploitation in Puerto Rico: Legal and Illegal Activities**

In Puerto Rico, child employment is regulated and school attendance is compulsory. Therefore, during this phase of research, we decided to check compliance with these provisions and analyze children's participation in the labor market in both legal and illegal activities.

For these purposes, the Child Employment Act (Act No. 203 signed on May 12, 1942) defines a minor as a person under the age of eighteen. Nonetheless, if we analyze its content, we notice that the very spirit of the act contains many ambiguities and inconsistencies with regards to age. For example, on the one hand, the law establishes that no minor under the age of sixteen (16) shall be employed; however, it defines a minor as a person under the age of eighteen, not sixteen, as established in the ban on employment. On the other hand, in the case of minors under fourteen years of age, the law absolutely prohibits their employment. However, the law provides that a fourteen-year-old can work, for example, delivering newspapers, working on television commercials or other artistic endeavors.

No minor under sixteen (16) years of age shall be employed nor permitted to work in any paid occupation during the hours in which the public schools of Puerto Rico are in session. Under this provision, only children between ages fourteen (14) and sixteen (16) are allowed to work in Puerto Rico (the law prohibits minors under fourteen (14) years of age from working). They are only allowed to work in farming or sales, only during vacations and outside of school hours. Any other work not legally referenced would constitute a crime (Act No.177).

Despite these prohibitions, poverty and social inequality coupled with the lack of opportunities on the Island run contrary to the image of "progress and modernization" and growing consumer culture promoted by the media. These and other factors place children in a vulnerable situation, which make them easy prey for predators and unscrupulous people. A summary of results for Puerto Rico from the *2010 Kids Count Data Book* (Rivera-Hernández & Andino-Ortiz, 2011) evidences the degrading and paradoxical life circumstances of our children. The poverty rate among people under eighteen years of age in Puerto Rico (56%) is more than thrice the rate of the United States as a whole (18%). Meanwhile, more than half of these children (51%) come from families that do not have at least one parent employed full-time for the whole year, which represents almost twice the national rate of the United States (27%). For the period between 2006 and 2008, the average number of teenagers in Puerto Rico between ages sixteen and nineteen who were not attending school and had not graduated from high school was 19,951 (8.41%). In contrast, the average in the United States for that same period was 6.5%. The *2012 Kids Count Data Book* indicates that 42,000 teens between the ages of sixteen and

nineteen were neither in school nor working in 2010, which represents 18% of teenagers on the island between these ages.

The available data for the period from 2006 to 2008 indicates that the municipalities with the higher percentage of teenage drop-outs (ages sixteen to nineteen) were Humacao (13.3%), San Lorenzo (12.6%), Arecibo (10.8%), and Toa Baja (10.3%). During the 2006-2008 period, an average of 34,467 teenagers between ages sixteen and nineteen were neither enrolled in school nor working (14.6%). In contrast, the average in the United States for that same period was 7.9%. The available data indicates that the municipalities with higher numbers of teenagers who were neither enrolled in school nor working were Humacao (21.1%), San Lorenzo (19.7%), Toa Baja (18%), and Arecibo (16.8%). During the 2006-2008 period in Puerto Rico, an average of 545,485 children came from families who lived below the poverty line. This figure represents 56% of children in Puerto Rico. The child poverty rate in Puerto Rico was more than thrice the rate in the United States as a whole (18%) during this same period. Municipal percentages of child poverty for the 2006-2008 period ranged from 35.4% (in Trujillo Alto) to 77.8% (in Orocovis).

The following percentages represent poverty levels in municipalities with the highest numbers of teenagers who have dropped out of school, are not enrolled in school or do not work: Humacao – 56.3%; San Lorenzo – 52.7%; Arecibo – 56%; Toa Baja – 45.7%. From 2006 to 2008, 41.7% of children in Puerto Rico received public assistance, which is more than twice the rate of the United States (18.8%). On a municipal level, the percentages of children who received public assistance fluctuated between 24.3% in Trujillo Alto and 60.1% in Orocovis.

The municipalities with relatively large urban and suburban populations, such as Bayamón, Caguas, Carolina, San Juan, and Arecibo, had comparatively low rates of public assistance recipients. According to the available data, the median income for the past twelve months indicates that the lowest incomes are in Guayanilla (\$9,685), San Sebastián (\$10,704), and Corozal (\$11,595).

Under these conditions, a significant percentage of children in Puerto Rico are being exploited and forced to work in either legal or illegal activities, as expressed by one of our respondents.

Mario started working when he was fourteen years old. His job consisted of picking peaches in Pennsylvania, U.S.A., during the summer when he visited his father's house. Mario's father worked on a farm picking fruits. Mario worked on that same farm during the summer months, but was paid less than his father. While his father earned \$600 a month for picking peaches, Mario received \$340 for performing the same task. Their work schedule was from six in the morning until five in the afternoon.

*I used to put my hoodie here (pointing to his chest); I wore it like this, straight down, and kept picking fruits and putting them inside it. Then I put them on the ground and a truck came to pick them up.*

*I was paid less than my old man; he was paid \$600 and I was paid \$340 and change.*

Although Mario performed the same exact work as his father and other adults, he received less pay. This situation demonstrates that there are diverse forms of child labor exploitation. Employers may recognize children as cheap labor. Furthermore, Mario was not required special permission to work as a minor. The only other minor among his co-workers was the boss's nephew. Mario only held this job during those two summer months. He saved the money he earned to buy parts for his four-track vehicle.

At the time of the interview, Mario worked on his own doing yardwork. He said that he could earn \$30 to \$66 depending on the type of yard. He uses the money to buy things he wants like clothes and tennis shoes. He also gives some of it to his mother to help her financially.

Mario said that he has never used drugs or been involved in drug trafficking. However, he commented that drug trafficking is part of life in Puerto Rican barrios. He also said that it is fairly common to see children working at drug spots; a world in which, he added, both adults and children use firearms.

*There are people like that, yes; in every barrio you go, they are hustling like that... Yes, in all barrios, anyone who says that there isn't a fifteen-year-old kid hustling on the corner selling drugs is lying.*

Mario is now fifteen years old and goes to an alternative education center in his effort to finish school as soon as possible. He wants to finish high school to be able to work.

**Figure 9.** Illegal child labor



A seventeen-year-old in possession of an arsenal that included an AK-47 rifle and sixty bullets was apprehended at the *Villas* public housing project in Bayamón.

*El Nuevo Día*, February 21, 2013

There are many children in Puerto Rico who, under these conditions, might also be victims of labor exploitation in legal activities such as cleaning backyards, doing housework, and collecting coffee, among others. However, for the aforementioned reasons, Puerto Rican children are primarily engaged in informal illegal sectors of economy. In Puerto Rico, 30% of the economy is informal; 70% of that is illegal. Therefore, the island has turned into an underground nursery of children who reinforce this economy, as reported daily by the news media. Based on a report from the UN, *The International Business Times* reported that Puerto Rico is listed among the top five most dangerous islands in the Caribbean (as cited in *El Nuevo Día*, June 21, 2012). This list was the result of a study on global homicide rates. The report

was issued by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, using data collected by authorities between

2008 and 2010. Puerto Rico ranked in fifth place with a homicide rate of 26.2 per 100,000 people, after Jamaica, St. Kitts & Nevis, Trinidad & Tobago, and Bahamas. *The International Business Times* stated that “most violent acts in Puerto Rico are related to drug trafficking, which is primarily headed to the United States through various routes.”

Criminal and drug-trafficking organizations in Puerto Rico mostly use children to perpetrate their crimes. The drama described by Lymaris Suárez Torres, for the newspaper *El Nuevo Día* (March 29, 2012), clearly paints a picture of these young people’s lives; and the stories of our respondents confirm it.

*Their first contact with a firearm was at a very young age. Little by little, they experienced the supposed power that daring to mercilessly pull the trigger gives them, until they, presumably, become cold-blooded killers. The goal was to kill the enemy wherever they found him, an avenue or a public place where innocent bystanders might also be killed; thereby moving up the ranks of the underworld hierarchy.*

*Allegedly, their motto was: “better my enemy suffer, than my mother cry.”*

### **Child Exploitation in Drug Trafficking and Criminal Organizations in Puerto Rico: Armed Violence**

Beginning in the 1990s, the Rosselló administration established its “iron fist against crime” policy. On February 13, 1993, the government declared before the legislature: “they’ve asked for war and war is what they’ll get. Let the criminal know this: our patience has run out.” Thus, Pedro Rosselló’s government initiated a public safety policy, which had been implemented and had failed in other jurisdictions. To a certain degree, this policy has been followed by the subsequent administrations, except for some variants. This policy was based on a philosophy that put more police officers out on the streets, with more arms, and with the National Guard intervening in places identified with high criminal activity (Figueroa Cancel, March 13, 2013). Ideologues did not consider drug trafficking and its consequences to be a social problem rooted in social inequality. Instead, they looked at it as a criminal act, thus creating strategies based mostly on the occupation of public housing projects, those marginalized areas.

Their objective was to control, police, and punish all suspects and everyone who stepped outside of the norm, particularly those who were involved in drug trafficking. However, the policy defeated its own objectives. The immediate consequence was an intensification of violence related to drug trafficking (more than 15,000 murders since then) as a result of organizations displaced by police presence, in addition to the impact of social and economic forces that ensue from globalization. In his assessment of this plan, Miguel Pereira, Ex-Secretary of Corrections in Puerto Rico, dramatized it by giving an example of drug economy dynamics. Pereira indicated that a drug trafficker might make a deal with a Colombian cocaine producer to get kilos for \$400 each, which they later sell for \$15,000 in Puerto Rico. He exclaimed: “if I lose 90% of my 1,000 kilos, which cost me \$400,000, leaving me with only 100 kilos to sell, I can still sell this for \$1.5

million. Kids who live near drug spots realize this immediately.” To further dramatize his presentation, Pereira revealed that the youngest child in a juvenile detention center is seven years old (Figuroa Cancel, March 13, 2013). The violence that results from drug trafficking on the island is such that every poll on public safety that is conducted by radio stations and newspapers indicates that violence related to drug trafficking is the biggest fear in our society, particularly among young people.

Just as in Brazil’s favelas, a youth sub-culture developed within the projects that promotes and glorifies drug traffickers as idols who defy the much-feared police, (Downey, 2003) and who are willing to lead shorter lives having it all and not enduring the poverty common to the rest of the residents. As expressed by a seventeen-year-old that we interviewed: *“I’d rather live less and live well.”* Besides poverty and a lack of other opportunities for these teenagers who are pushed to participate in illegal activities and become victims of exploitation, there are other elements or variables that entice them into a world where the only exit is their own enslavement, specifically gaining status in that world and the money (“the dough”) to satisfy luxuries in a consumerist sub-culture that the media promotes. Many of these teenagers see drug trafficking as the only way to satisfy this level of consumption.

That is how Raúl (not his real name) expressed it in his testimony. When he returned to Puerto Rico, he got involved in drug trafficking again, lured by the money he made in that world. He could buy whatever he wanted without depending on anyone. When he came back to Puerto Rico, he spent some time working at a “drug kitchen.”

*Honestly, yes, because they’re always talking about guns this and guns that, but that’s bullshit, easy come, easy go... I was totally into it because of the dough. Once you are in it from the heart, it’s very hard to get out because it’s not easy... money, when you have a lot of it, that’s what calls you: money, money, money, but in the long run, that’s what you’ll see less of... **those girls that give up everything for money**, money is nothing, it comes and goes (emphasis added).*

In Puerto Rico as in Brazil, gangs tend to be more territorial. In the same favela (poor neighborhood) or public housing project, for example, there might be more than one gang, depending on the number of members, that is to say five or more. According to the ICE, “there is always someone willing to fill a leadership vacuum.” Contrary to Colombia and/or other countries that use child soldiers in their armies to defend their nations, Puerto Rico does not have an army to defend its nation, but there is armed violence in the territorial defense of drug spots. The term “armed violence” is used in reference to the territorial conflicts between gangs. At the 2000 *Viva Río* congress, the following definition was adopted for children affected by armed violence in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: children in organized armed violence refers to “any person under the age of 18 who is employed or otherwise participates in Organized Armed Violence where there are elements of a command structure, and power over territory, local population or resources” (Downey, 2003).

Puerto Rico is perhaps the only territory with more drug spots than schools. Evidence suggests that many of these territories exhibit a structure of power and command, and minors participate in them. It was confirmed that the Island ranks sixth in the Caribbean for violent crimes; crimes which are often perpetrated by our children. Although our investigation did not focus on armed children working in drug trafficking gangs, during this second phase of the investigation, many of the testimonies tell of a connection to the drug world. This was also confirmed by the testimony of minors who are not involved in drug trafficking, but live in barrios or public housing projects taken over by drug trafficking. Likewise, the information received from NGOs that work with at-risk youth in these areas confirms the existence of these organizations and the involvement of children in that world.

During this phase, semi-structured and in-depth interviews conducted with different NGOs focused on their backgrounds, specifically on the following topics as related to their criminal records: age, education, community, sexual abuse, involvement in drug trafficking and/or consumption, use of weapons or anything related to their recruitment, if applicable, and participation in any drug trafficking organization activity. (See Appendix F.) Despite the fact that our respondents are between the ages of fifteen and thirty-two, they were exploited in drug trafficking from a very young age. All of them started experimenting with drugs when they were between twelve and seventeen years old. Most of them were in junior high school where, coincidentally, the highest number of school desertion cases in Puerto Rico is registered. Many of them used marijuana, smoked crack, and inhaled cocaine, among other drugs. Some of them “worked” selling marijuana and cocaine at the schools they attended, and also worked as lookouts, dealers, and runners. Others transported weapons and drugs, and one attested to having armed protection. Most of them come from broken homes while others are orphans or have a parent in jail. For some, the death or incarceration was related to violence or their involvement in drug trafficking. The majority of respondents come from homes where the parents or guardians do not work and a high percentage of them reported having family or relatives involved in drug trafficking, namely siblings, cousins, aunts or uncles. Therefore, a large part of their criminal and violent behavior could be the consequence of the socialization they received throughout their life. Others have passed through several foster homes. All of them had dropped out of school when they were between eleven and thirteen years old, including Raúl.

Raúl dropped out of school in tenth grade, and he already worked at a spot selling drugs. At school, he only sold weed, but at the project where he lived he sold Percocet, Xanax bars, weed, rocks, and blow. At school, his clientele ranged from two to six people, depending on the day of the week. He made twenty to twenty-five dollars per day. Bags of weed went for five dollars. Raúl bought his first car with the money he made in drug trafficking. The boss co-signed Raúl’s car loan. According to Raúl, there is a hierarchy and/or chain of command in drug trafficking.

*You start out as a “lookout”, the kids who use a walkie-talkie or a particular kind of language or code to guard the spot or warn about the presence of the police or other*

*authorities. This is the warning system used against the police or members of an enemy gang. The minors were paid in cash on a daily or weekly basis. The next level up is to be a runner or a dealer. Then you go on to be a supervisor of drug sales. After that, they give you guns; in other words, you are now armed to protect the drug spot against the police and other gangs.*

Raúl narrated his daily routine as a dealer:

In junior high school, there was a student who worked as his security. It was a kid armed with a Glock 40. The boss gave him that gun for protection purposes. It might cost \$1,500 to \$1,600 on the street. The student who protected Raúl had failed the ninth grade three times. Later, when he was in high school, Raúl was armed with a .38. He earned more money in high school; his clientele ranged from fifty to one hundred people from both inside and outside the school. He could make up to \$500 per week. At the beginning, he was the only one selling in the school. Later on, he divided the work up with another student. Each person kept the profits from their shifts.

You can then work at the “table”; this is where you work packing the drugs. This position is what’s commonly known as the kitchen. The kitchen is usually a rented house where the drugs are cut and packed. The next level up is the boss, the top of the hierarchy. There is also the person who brings the drugs to Puerto Rico, but Raúl indicated that “you don’t know that one.” Within this structure, there is a vertical social ascent that makes young people feel proud of the position they can reach.

This “pride in ascending” was confirmed by José (not his real name) during the first phase of the investigation. As per his testimony, José, a seventeen-year-old teenager nicknamed “el menor” [the kid], started working in the drug “business” when he was only nine years old and was exposed to different modalities of human trafficking and enslavement:

*The wilder I got, the more they respected me and the more I moved up. I dared to do anything. I worked at a drug spot in the projects and was paid by the runner.*

*I started working in the projects and threatening people with guns; I began beating up a few from around there. Mugging and beating. I used to hang with people who had all kinds of weapons and used all kinds of drugs. Everything and anything, not only weed; it was also zannies, Percocet, until I got to blow, all kinds. I was always the youngest, and I was big, you know, and I wanted to act the wildest because I was the youngest. I was the youngest; they were all twenty, twenty-seven, seventeen, fifteen, and sixteen. **That’s right, because inside that world they admired me more and more and said “menor is wild, he knows this and that.” They praised me and that made me take it up a notch, to become wilder and wilder,***

*knock out some teeth, shoot whoever, or whatever else. You know, I broke bad; I let myself get carried away* (emphasis added).

In addition to dealing drugs and being a gunman, he also stole social security numbers and birth certificates from schools (all forms of human trafficking and enslavement), which he later brought to his boss who paid him for the whole operation. At a young age, he was already playing with the big shot drug dealer in his hometown and was feared by the rest. In his own words: “in this business there are clients and bosses from diverse social classes; doctors, lawyers, taxi drivers.” José stated that, at those levels, they distribute heroin, crack, cocaine, marijuana, Percocet, and Xanax bars, among others. They are in possession of illegal arms at all times during a drug transaction.

Juan (not his real name) also confirmed this with his life testimony, which is marked by exploitation through drug trafficking. Juan is an eighteen-year-old young man from the northern region of Puerto Rico. His father worked in a public corporation and his mother is a housewife. He has nine brothers and sisters; three full siblings and six half siblings from his father’s side. Juan is under the custody of the Department of Family Services and the Department of Juvenile Corrections and is currently living in a children’s group home in the southern region of Puerto Rico. There are approximately fifty-two young men at that home. Juan said that they keep them locked in their rooms all day long. There are eleven minors in the room for children under fourteen years of age; approximately seventeen in the room for teenagers, ages fourteen to seventeen; and close to nineteen young men in the room for the eighteen to twenty-one age group.

When he was seventeen years old, Juan spent five months at a juvenile correctional facility in the northern region of the island. That institution placed approximately sixteen minors per division. There were close to seventy in total. When he was in the ninth grade, Juan started having trouble at school and had to repeat the grade. At the time, he was already involved in the street life and had bad grades. His parents separated when he was twelve years old. The problems between them affected Juan; they fought a lot and hit each other in front of him and his two siblings. Because of his parents’ problems, Juan felt frustrated and took to the streets. When he was around thirteen years old, he started smoking marijuana and crack, and sniffing blow. When he turned fifteen, he was sent to the United States to live with his brother. He did not like the environment; he thought it was boring.

*From there on out, they began... for me, like, mental disorders. I would get frustrated and go out to the streets. I started smoking cigarettes, then marijuana, even smoking crack, sniffing blow.*

*Yes, smoking crack. At fifteen, I was sent to the U.S. with my brother. I spent five or six months with him, got into it again, and got sent back.*

*Crack. I even smoked... once I got hooked for like six months. Six whole months hitting it every day, every day, every day. It makes you crazy. Even the boss told them not to sell to me anymore because that wasn't for me, he said, because I had another kind of mind. And so I got clean on my own, in the streets. What happened was that one time a buddy of mine, I call him my buddy, but he smoked and offered me some, and I took it. I put in ashes, I put in the little rocks, breathed out, then you light it up and inhale. That's exactly what I did.*

When he returned, he continued in the street life. Around age sixteen, he got more deeply involved in drug trafficking. Juan also had friends who were involved in the street life. He began selling drugs when he was seventeen. He started out as a dealer and lookout with a walkie-talkie. During a weekday, he could earn \$300 to \$400 for working a shift from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. Profits during weekends could amount to \$700. Juan also became a runner.

*No, that was when I was fifteen. At sixteen I went full-on into the streets. I used to run away from my mom's house and spend weeks at... (unintelligible) house. I used to go to the U.S. on my own, alone and everything.*

[You started out as a dealer?] *"Yes, as a dealer and also a lookout. With a walkie-talkie."*

*I started out just trying it out, smoking marijuana, I went to cop this and that. Since my friends were already working, I got some shifts. I knew the boss because, before he was the boss or even had the idea in his mind, we used to go to the court and play basketball together.*

*A shift from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., around 300 to 400 bucks. 450. On a Friday, if business was good, you could make 600 or 700 bucks. The money went fast, though. Rent, food...*

*As a runner, man, I made 600 to 700 bucks almost every Friday. That is, I have twenty-five bundles with twenty-five baggies each; the dealer gets one buck for each baggie, the runner gets two, and the rest goes to the boss. That's how it is, it's sort of complicated.*

Juan also used drugs, namely pills and marijuana. His drug spot was in the island's northern region, but he also sold drugs in other areas. The spot was located in the barrio. Different types of clients came in to buy. The night shift, from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., is the busiest one.

*Yes, it can also be done drive-thru style. There's like seven or eight of us dealers; a client comes and one of us goes, someone else comes, another one of us goes. Like that... in and out, in and out, in and out, in and out all the time. Different people.*

*Of course, I even sold to people wearing ties and everything. [Clients came driving...] Mercedes, Acuras, Audis, Corvettes.*

Juan was armed. He spent \$1,200 on a Glock 23 and had two 22 round magazines, a 15 round, and a 12 round magazine. The weapons and ammunition were obtained through police connections. Juan told us about how the police are paid off to keep them from intervening in drug spots. Police officers can be paid up to \$3,000 per week for keeping out of drug spots.

*I bought one for 1,200 bucks, a Glock size 23. I had four magazines: two 22 round, one 15 round, and one 12 round. The ammo boxes also came from the point men... I always had rifles with me; AK-47, M16, R-15... I was very well-armed. I've dealt with everything: .40, .45, 9 millimeters, .38, .357. Right now, I can take any weapon and take it apart in a second. Work it, oil it, anything, everything.*

[How did you get your hands on the weapons and ammunition?] *Connections with the police.*  
 [How much are police officers paid?] *Man, \$1,000; it depends, \$2,000, \$3,000. Per week, not per month. Weekly, on Saturdays, let's say, we are gonna settle this every Saturday. On Saturday, one of the officers making the rounds in the area is supposed to go to that area... There are many connections. They sell themselves, because they do anything for money, police officers have trouble paying their bills, so you can imagine. They sell themselves. Also, many of them live around the area and stuff, they fear for their families and prefer to take the money and tell themselves "forget about it, I'm getting a bit of extra money just for passing by and not getting out or anything, for letting them do whatever they want."*

[Did the officers know?] *Yes, all of them had to know. Let me tell you, I had a bulletproof vest, knee guards, ankle guards. I had everything. I was always prepared in the street. Come 11:00 or 11:30 p.m., I put on my vest because I knew the heat that was coming.*

The boss of the drug spot was twenty-one years old. He was in jail at the time of the interview. There were minors working at that spot. *"Not all of the employees but most of them. We were the majority, we were the hardest, we were the most.... At least me, I'm not scared. It's my life against the life of someone else; I'd rather their momma cry than my momma cry"*.

Juan never intentionally killed anyone, but he does not know if somebody died in any of the shootings in which he participated. *"I never killed, but I did shoot from one car to another... I don't know if I killed anyone, but I shot a bunch of times."* Shootings were the consequence of conflicts between drug spots. Juan said that he never wants to go back to that life, or even to live in that place. He has been out of drug trafficking for one year and four months.

*Man, I don't even wanna go back to my hometown in the north.*

*Nothing, nothing at all. Right now you could piss test me and nothing. Not even marijuana or nothing. There's nothing that could make me... Ever since I went to jail, I realized that*

*nobody is your friend. Nobody... not even those who told you in the street that they had your back through thick and thin, nah.*

The drug is distributed among regional commissions. Juan stated that drug traffickers bought the drugs from the very police officers who seized it. *“Papi, it’s all the commissions around the area and all over. Even the cops, when they confiscate drugs, they don’t care, they steal product from...”*

At a drug spot, four runners, ten dealers, and twenty lookouts can work in just one day. Most of the workers are minors. Juan knows a young man who started working in the streets when he was twelve years old. A while ago, another two minors he knew were killed; one of them was a runner and the other was a hitman. The hitman died at twenty years old; he had killed fourteen people since first taking that job at sixteen.

*Four runners, dealers... there can be up to ten dealers, lookouts... there could be up to twenty. Posted in different areas with walkie-talkies.*

*I have a friend who’s twelve and in the street. He’s fourteen now, but since he was twelve, he was in it.*

Juan thinks that the common denominator of people involved in drug trafficking is the developmental context. *“That goes from generation to generation. It’s generational. They inherit the business from their families. It’s complicated.”*

Juan was living in a children’s group home at the time of the interview. Court-appointed social workers recommended this home as part of his rehabilitation process. He has been living there for ten months. The home is administered by a couple. Most of the minors living there were abandoned by their families and remain under the custody of the Department of Family Services. Juan is eight months away from serving his sentence. He is currently finishing school in an alternative education center; he is in the tenth grade and his grades are As and Bs. He wants to become a jockey or a veterinarian.

Even though Juan is not active in drug trafficking anymore, he fears for his life. He wears a bulletproof vest and his gun when he visits his neighborhood. He still hangs out with the people in the barrio’s drug spot.

*You know, last time I went there, because I’m still taking heat, I know I can’t risk it so I threw on my vest and took my weapon. Let’s do it. Because I can’t tell you I’m out, out. But I’m not involved with drugs; I’m not selling or using or moving them or nothing. I went there to hang with what’s left of my crew because most were taken away by the DEA.*

Men are not the only victims of exploitation in drug trafficking. Even though sexual exploitation is more visible among women, they are also subjected to the world of drugs and drug trafficking. That is the testimony of one respondent who got involved in drug trafficking when she was in junior high school. She was raised by her godmother because her mother died when she was little. She dropped out of school in the seventh grade planning to take the equivalency test offered by the Department of Education. She said that her family is great. *“They didn’t have any vices, none, they were professionals.”*

This respondent is from the western region of the island, but she lived for some years in the United States. She has three sons, all by different fathers. During junior high school, she was a gang member. Afterwards, she started using and selling drugs. The crew was all teenagers and children, but it was controlled by adults who ran the drug spots. She recounted that besides selling drugs and mugging people, they also *“smashed cars, blew them up, we beat people who were walking down the street, we beat each other up... Stole from school, from the teachers’ purses, the pizza parlors across the street. We also did carjackings. The biggest job was a game store, that was the biggest one.”* However, they did not keep anything; all earnings were brought to the boss.

After four years, she stepped away from gang life, but she disclosed that *“when I went back to... [her hometown] I started using drugs. I didn’t use before, I only sold them. I spent one or two years selling them and then I started using.”* She was seventeen years old and got involved in a relationship with the drug spot’s boss. He was a jealous, possessive, and violent person.

*And at the hotel, that’s where he turned violent, I didn’t know him that well yet. He tore my clothes off; you could say that he raped me, but I still kept dating him. He was a scary guy and... Again, although I sold the drugs, I didn’t keep the money; I could make between \$2,500 and \$3,000 in a day.*

He provided drugs for her personal use. Glenda said that the most popular drugs she sold to her clients were coke, heroin, and marijuana. Her clients *“included white-collars, such as doctors and even pastors. During my years in drug trafficking, I witnessed highly violent and traumatic events like young people being set on fire or stabbed.”* She confessed to helping set fire to four teenagers who were in debt to the boss. That happened at a remote location in the country’s northern area. She also stated that, besides bringing in the merchandise and weapons, Mexican suppliers (cartels) *“brought in children... to make them sell drugs after they fought for their documents, they were from Mexico and the Dominican Republic.”* She added that in the case of women, they hooked them on drugs and prostituted them later. As per Glenda’s testimony, hooking young people on drugs to control them is a rather common practice. Glenda’s story is one of the rawest testimonies documented in this investigation.

At twenty-one years old, and after being on the island for a while, Glenda left her children in Puerto Rico and went to the United States. She distanced herself from the environment she knew and checked into a

rehabilitation center. She worked at a nursing home assisting the elderly. She came back to Puerto Rico to be with her children, but she sees herself living far away from Puerto Rico in the near future and leaving behind her tragic life as a teenager and young adult, which has left her scarred.

Isabel was also involved in drug trafficking and a victim of human trafficking and enslavement. She was born in the United States, but raised in a northern municipality of the Island since she was five years old. She is one of the youngest of five siblings. Isabel had not met her biological father until recently, in 2009. Her stepfather, whom she calls dad, raised them since they were little. She thinks that she had some rough times in her childhood.

*Well, my dad, even though he was a good provider, because we always had a roof over our heads and never lacked anything... he raised us just as he was raised, that's my opinion. At least he didn't hit us, but he verbally insulted us a lot. A lot of times he would yell at me, "You pig, you'll end up the same." That's because I have a sister who also had a horrible life on crack and I think heroin as well; he used to compare me with her all the time.*

Besides the insults she received and the comparisons to her drug addict sister, who died, Isabel was also abused by her brothers and cousins while her mother stood by as an accomplice. Even though Isabel has no memory of it, her mom mentioned that, when she was three years old, Isabel's brother *"did what he saw in a sexual movie."*

*Yes, I remember that my brother touched me when I was six years old. I also remember when a cousin touched me during my childhood, and I remember that when I was a teenager, my brother didn't put it in, but he sodomized me. Right? Is that the word? He also said ugly stuff to me.*

*"I was the kind of girl who was always depressed and crying in her room." Of all these serious situations, Isabel thinks that her father's words affected her more than her brothers' abuse. "I think so, because that's what goes to your subconscious and stays there for the rest of your life."*

When she was seventeen years old, Isabel moved in with Luis, the neighbor of a childhood friend, who abused her when he was high on drugs. *"And all because I wanted to help him, I was just trying to keep him from going out and using, but heroin, even more so than crack, is a disease, it makes you sick; his bones would hurt and he used to go crazy and beat me up so he could leave."* Luis went to jail for stealing to support his habit. When he got out, he passed through all the Hogares Crea around. Isabel had sex with a fourteen-year-old and became pregnant. To get rid of Luis, she decided to take her son and move to Pennsylvania with a cousin who promised she would help her get a job. Once she arrived, however, she found that her cousin was living with a man who kicked her out into the streets in less than a month because of the lack of privacy

in the small room where they all lived. *“They were intimate, and I could even see them, but I didn’t turn around, I wasn’t interested in any of that.”*

A week after arriving in Pennsylvania, she met a man who is the father of her two other children. When she was homeless, he found her a place to stay with a friend of his, until they moved to a basement he found. Isabel paid for the apartment with the cash assistance she received while he stayed home doing nothing.

*He didn’t do anything, he spent all day at the landlady’s house, but he knows the life. He really knew the life, about drug trafficking and selling, he knew it all. The only thing is, he had dealt with all types of drugs, but he was holding back.*

Isabel said that even though her partner knew a lot about the drug world, he was not involved in any of it. He only used marijuana, like she did. She added: *“he did transport cocaine from one state to another in the eastern part of the U.S., though. He did it to help me and the kid; it was illegal, but he did it for a good cause. He is a very respectful man.”* They stayed together for six or seven years. During that period of time, Isabel gave birth, first, to another boy and then to a girl. The relationship lasted until she decided to join a faith-based group home in the hopes of getting clean. He also checked into a place, but left. *“Then he got involved with another woman in another town who supported him.”* Last Isabel heard, he was fine and, occasionally, he visited the drug spots in her town, she suspects, to buy marijuana or cocaine.

Isabel became pensive and then mentioned that he was the one who introduced her to cocaine. Cocaine led her to crack. She even considered herself the number-one client. She used it as an antidepressant, to avoid thinking.

*Getting high, it took away all my inhibitions of feeling ugly or whatever. I felt like the prettiest girl in town, the best, number one. When I was high on crack, I used to hit the streets and not sleep for two months, I didn’t eat... It keeps me awake, I don’t get hungry; I just walked around my town, just walked and walked.*

Isabel walked around the town. She begged for money during the day and worked nights as a prostitute. She commented that there were all types of clients.

*All kinds of people, even judges. And using too... In their cars, even looking down on everyone. They went straight to the shooting gallery looking for prostitutes. When you went in, you’d see them all messed up, sweaty, with their shirts and pants open...*

When she was twenty-five years old, she entered the faith-based group home for the first time. It was arranged by the town’s social workers, so she could regain custody of her children. A week before finishing the rehabilitation program, Isabel relapsed and lost her children yet again. The oldest child is in the custody of

the Department of Family Services and the other two are with their father. As part of her rehabilitation process, Isabel returned to the group home and feels proud of her decision. She graduated with honors as a geriatric technician from a technical college in Bayamón. *“I’ve been clean since last June.”* Looking toward the future, she hopes to open a senior center and get her children back; they are now fourteen, eleven, and eight years old.

As a result of our initial investigation, when Sofia (not her real name) was asked by a radio reporter about the problem of human trafficking and enslavement, she narrated her experience in the world of drug trafficking, where she was exploited by the drug kingpins for sexual and labor purposes from a very young age.

*At thirteen, I hung out at the drug spots, which is where everything was: the money, the drugs, the weed, the blow, the smack, everything, everything. My friends were addicts, my girlfriends were also prostitutes, among themselves because moneywise, at home, they didn’t have anything. They were young and pretty, men wanted to get with them because they were pretty and so young that, well, it was easy and the men helped economically. I worked the table, where you process the drugs. Where workers sit down to process the drugs. I worked with marijuana at the table. [What do you do there?] So, there you work with what they call bricks, which are pounds of marijuana. They get there and you break them down because they come compressed. [How old were you?] I was thirteen. My mom didn’t know anything about it. Yes, they paid me. I didn’t see it as work. [Who benefited from all that?] Well, the owners of the spots, of course, the businesses, the spots benefited from all this. They benefit from destroying the lives of young people.*

*So, they introduced me to a boss, and I started dating him. He’s nineteen years older than me. I was thirteen and he was thirty-something. He saw what I was doing and told me to come work with him. So, you know, I stopped working at the table. What I would do was, I supplied him. I would go somewhere and pick up the bricks. [Did you become a mule?] Exactly. I was in a relationship with that person, with a drug boss, who was married and had children. He had a daughter my age. I had sex with him. I was with him for six years. My mom found out and wanted him in jail. I even lived with him. He was very possessive. He kept me from doing a lot of things. He completely took me off the streets, out of school. He didn’t want me seeing anyone. [In other words, he took away your freedom, to put it that way?] Totally; I lived with him in one of those rich people’s apartments. You could only get in with a beeper, and you needed a card to get into the elevator to go up or down. I only went out with him, everything with him. I would spend some time with him, and then I stayed locked up. Nothing, no car, no keys, nothing. [How old were you?] I was fourteen. My father didn’t know I was living locked up; he didn’t know anything, but my mom knew. I stayed with him and got pregnant, by the*

*boss. I got pregnant with his baby. I got rid of the first baby because he didn't want it. [Did you have an abortion?] Yes, I had an abortion. He didn't want it. He said that he couldn't give me anything if I kept the baby. It was very hard for me, very painful. I was a trophy to him. I was young and beautiful. I was a model because he paid for me to be in a modeling agency. He paid for my trips, for everything. But he only wanted me all to himself. Every time he went out or on a trip or had a business thing, I was the one he took with him.*

As a consequence of being a victim of exploitation, her reproductive system was damaged. Despite all of this, Sofia is a woman in recovery who loves her children, regardless of their special needs.

*See, my little girl was born with deformities of her spinal column and ribs. She's missing three ribs on one side, and then a heart valve that, when they're born, it's supposed to close when they cry, but it stays open. She doesn't have ovaries. It's possible that because of her deformities, she could grow crooked, leaning to her right side. I don't think it's a punishment; I think my daughter came into my life to teach me about things that go beyond physical or economic things. That you have to enjoy life, day by day, you know. That when things are meant to happen, they will happen. And that God always has a purpose [with her voice breaking]. (Interview by Jerohim Ortiz Menchaca, *Radio Isla*, October 24, 2013.)*

The testimonies presented up to now evidence, in some way, the presence of an underground market sustained by corruption, international mafias, and an informal and illegal economy, which all shape this modern slavery. Miriam's testimony attests to the globalization of this phenomenon, which, in this particular case, extends its tentacles across the island.

Miriam lived in Chicago, in the United States, for a while. While living there, she started having trouble in school when she was sixteen years old. Although she did not drop out, she did not attend classes either. Her friends were the biggest influence on her behavior. She started missing school and coming home late. Miriam's mother advised her to go to school, but she continued to be absent. With the support of her uncles, who were members of a gang, Miriam joined the world of gangs in Chicago. Because she had relatives in the gang, she enjoyed a certain protection from the abuses usually committed by members. On one occasion, however, a drunken gang member tried to have sex with her, but she refused. He then tried to hit her, but other members intervened and beat the man up for trying to abuse her.

*And because they're my uncles, there's a certain respect that members must show me. They can't do anything to me; they can't bother me, to put it that way. If they want to be with me, it'll only happen if I want to. But they can't force me or hit me or anything.*

*Yes, because they were always drunk, and well, he tried to have sex with me, but I refused. I didn't want, didn't want to, and he wanted to hit me.*

*... he tried to hit me. He picked me up and everybody else started hitting him.*

Women were frequently the target of abuse in this group. Miriam knew that gang members forced some women to have sex in exchange for drugs. Women were also battered by male gang members.

*Let me tell you, when I started hanging out with them it was me and two of my girlfriends. One of them [fifteen years old] was pregnant by one of the guys. The other one kept getting worse and worse; she even had sex with them for drugs. To this day, she's still not well.*

*...you see, it's basically prostitution because they give them drugs in exchange for sex. Which is basically prostitution, but I've never seen them doing it for money.*

Miriam's friends were the gang members; people who were in the habit of smoking, drinking, and using drugs. They were also involved in drug trafficking. Miriam recounted that her community and school were divided into gangs.

*In my school, everything was divided by gangs. You'd see different groups here and there, and you'd identify them because of the colors they wore or the spot where they hung out. And maybe you'd see only five in the group, but if they called, thirty would show up.*

*Drug abuse and all that. And so, one has to witness all that. It's all divided by different gangs, by different things. Well, sometimes you do it to, how do you call it, like, to make friends and not feel out of place.*

Miriam witnessed male children selling drugs and weapons. She indicated that almost all gang members were minors. These children sold drugs in the streets and in school. Their earnings were a percentage of the sales. In these groups, according to Miriam, only males can sell. Females are used as drug mules because it is less probable that they will get caught. As per Miriam's testimony, most police officers are men, and they are not allowed to physically search women unless a female officer is present.

*What I'm saying is that they used women on purpose because most of the police officers there are men. And men can't search women; so, they took the women with them and the women carried the drugs.*

The gang members were Mexican, African-American, and Puerto Rican. According to Miriam's testimony, Chicago gangs communicate with groups in Puerto Rico. She said she heard a story about a person who came to Puerto Rico to escape the gang, and the gang members called people in Puerto Rico to kill him.

*It's like, if you are leaving, on a trip, if you are leaving the country, you have to, let's say, inform them, let them know. One left, running, and he was from here, from Puerto Rico. And he returned, running away from them, because they wouldn't let him go. If he left the group, they would've killed him or beaten him to a pulp. So he came to Puerto Rico running away from them, and they called here. He was killed here.*

Despite being involved in gangs, Miriam said she never used drugs because she was always taught at home that you should not do that. She was offered drugs many times, but she never dared try them. However, as a minor, Miriam transported drugs between Puerto Rico and Chicago. When she was fifteen years old, a member of the gang approached her, put something on her chest, under her shirt, and told her to take it to the leader. At that moment she realized that he gave her drugs. She only did it that one time because she was scared and her uncles would not allow her to become involved with drugs or weapons.

*He approached me and put something in here, under my shirt, and told me to hold it. I didn't know what it was. Until he told me to go to the leader, that's what they call him, and give it to him.*

*I mean, my uncles would let me be with them and go to parties, but they didn't want me involved with drugs or weapons, none of that.*

Miriam is currently seventeen years old and lives in a municipality on the east coast of the Island.

In recent years, websites have also played a starring role in the war between drug traffickers in Puerto Rico (*El Nuevo Día*, May 3, 2010). They use social networks as a recruitment tool and post lists on their websites with the names of people they want to murder. The webpages are also used to issue warnings and death threats. To these ends, as indicated by Rodríguez Burns, they post pictures of AK-47 rifles—their favorite because of its power—as well as Glock pistols. They write in code, in their argot, to disguise their criminal intentions. With all this structure, criminal organizations are primarily responsible for the multiple violent crimes perpetrated on the Island, which have positioned it among the countries with the highest murder rates in the Caribbean. The worst aspect of this hellish picture is that most of the principal agents are children.

Puerto Rico is the only country with 1,600 drug spots and 1,540 schools. Child trafficking and enslavement is the *modus operandi* of these drug distribution centers, which seem to be more productive than

**Figure 10.** Minors guard drug spots.



The FBI dismantled a drug trafficking organization operated from state prison, in San Sebastián, that used children to supply and guard drug spots.

*El Nuevo Día*, April 26, 2012

our centers of learning. All of this is exacerbated by a bankrupt social contract that has precipitated a social disaster. Our society needs to examine its course and rethink ways to save those who are the most defenseless and do not have any say or power, like adults do. We must create solutions to these problems. They should not depend on the government in office. Instead, they depend on the collective will that we should all build up as citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Conclusions**

After reviewing the facts during this second phase of our investigation on human trafficking and enslavement, it is clear that problems still threaten our children's security, physical integrity, and, above all, human rights. Inequality and social polarization in Puerto Rico, triggered particularly by the economic crisis running through the country, represent the principal catalysts in illegal economic activities, which use cheap child labor.

Moreover, both the persistent lack of adequate public policies and inconsistencies in information protocols and nomenclatures used by the agencies responsible for protecting our children's integrity are partly out of focus in terms of the attention and priorities of government policies. We should also mention the efforts made to incorporate the category of human trafficking and enslavement into Puerto Rico's Penal Code, in accordance with the Palermo Protocols. However, if this is not included in the policies incorporated to the organic acts of the constitutional cabinet, it will not be fully effective. Our work has evidenced the difficulty of gathering data and the misclassification that occurs at different levels of communication within agencies and between them. As a result, information becomes fragmented and it is difficult for the heads of agencies themselves to arrange prospective policies that confront the scourge of human trafficking and enslavement.

Time and again, the testimonies of young people who have been victims of different forms of human trafficking evidence that some of the very authorities consent to the operation of illegal businesses, thus making it harder to identify those truly implicated in this web of corruption. However, data on the informal economy in our country, aggravated by high levels of consumerism and the consumption of luxury articles, would allow even the most naive of observers to detect that there is a real problem of business legitimacy and tax evasion through money laundering. If this were not the case, the Banks Association of Puerto Rico would not have held nine congresses on money laundering over the past years. This issue requires special attention because of the people suspected of being involved and because this type of operation takes on international proportions with the participation of cartel members who could play supporting roles in this Puerto Rican drama.

While it is true that the forms of human trafficking and enslavement in Puerto Rico cannot be compared to those in countries like Thailand, Egypt or Brazil, this does not mean that human trafficking in Puerto Rico is not as exploitative or degrading. The respondents' statements attest to the scenarios that our children live: cases of human trafficking for reproductive purposes; forced begging; sexual and/or labor

exploitation—particularly to work in drug trafficking from a very young age either selling or distributing drugs or guarding drug spots; and the use of children in armed violence. We cannot underestimate the forms of human trafficking that represent a more hidden kind of exploitation. As a matter of fact, they become more difficult to detect and easier to cover up. This also makes it easier to speak of them euphemistically with the social implications of that.

Just as we have reiterated in the past, raising the state’s awareness is essential to attack this social problem head on and give teeth to integrating policies aimed at our children and youth. Education based on an

**Figure 11.** Tempo arriving from jail all dressed up in luxurious and fashionable clothes.



In 2002, reggaeton artist David Sánchez Badillo, aka Tempo, was charged with conspiracy and possession of drugs with the intent to distribute, and was sentenced to 24 years in jail. In 2011, his sentence was reduced and he was released. However, he is required to stay at a halfway house.

*Primera Hora*, October 11, 2013

integrating curriculum that begins in the early elementary grades and continues all the way to vocational schools is still on agenda, but it requires the interest and commitment of civil and governmental authorities, as well as the general population. In fact, education is the most effective weapon in transforming this painful reality. In accordance with this humanistic mission, part of the solution is to orchestrate a harmonious system of cooperation between state and non-governmental organizations. In recent times, we have seen steps taken in this direction, which makes us more optimistic in planning to address the issue and join efforts toward the same goal.

Lastly, and in this spirit, the training of all civil servants and staff responsible for the civic and educational processes of our children is key to further reclaiming our children’s rights. These efforts are built step by step. In order for it to be effective, the construction of a new era characterized by respect and community spirit toward our youth requires a more complex and multisectoral perspective. The Ricky Martin Foundation takes a step forward by transforming the results of its two innovative and daring research investigations of Puerto Rican society into an educational project with the *Centro Tau* in Loíza. The University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, specifically the Graduate School of Public

Administration, the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, and the Office of the Dean of Social Sciences, assumed its social responsibility by encouraging its researchers and students to continue and expand an investigation that is on its way to change public policy. We carried out this project with that in mind and convinced of the present urgency to safeguard our children.

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## Appendix A

### Respondents' Life Stories

#### Ángel

Ángel, a twenty-one-year-old male, was born in Los Angeles. But he has lived in the southern region of Puerto Rico since he was five years old. At the time of the interview, he was living with his sister because his adoptive mother was temporarily in the United States.

Over the course of his life, Ángel has had no contact with his biological father, nor does he communicate with his other siblings. Furthermore, regarding the economic aspect, he mentioned that he has worked since he was little. When he was nine years old, he worked picking oranges in Adjuntas and later, when he was fifteen, he worked in construction. He thinks he did it to have his own things.

Regarding education, Ángel attended different private schools, most of them faith-based. Her mom paid for these schools with the government pension she received. He attended six different schools from junior high school to high school because of language issues, racism, favoritism, problems with teachers, fights with other students, and arguments with teachers; he adds that he exhibited difficult behavior. After this, he finished high school in an alternative education center. At the time of the interview, he was pursuing an associate degree in nursing with the goal of finding work in the United States. His decision is based on the drug situation in Puerto Rico and, even more so, on the people who incite that situation. He thinks “*there’s no future*” on the Island.

Regarding drugs, Ángel insisted that he never used or sold drugs, but he saw other people who did, namely his brother, who is now in the United States, and his brother’s friends. He said that is precisely the reason he has not done them, because he watched his mother suffer on account of his brother and he vowed to never do such a thing. The respondent knew his brother’s friends, as well as other people in that world, but he never reached their level. He also stated that he saw many teenagers from private schools and from the neighborhood get caught up with drugs. He said that kids nowadays cling to drug trafficking as a way to have money, cars, jewelry, luxuries, etc. He added that they are minors.

*They’re children, children, thirteen-year-old kids smoking.*

As a consequence of this attachment, they later fear for their safety.

*I’ve known boys who don’t sleep ‘cause they’re paranoid. You know, they get into that world, and then they don’t know how to get out, and when you want to get out it’s too late.*

Ángel mentioned what happened to the nineteen-year-old who he had been playing basketball with for two years. He was a drug dealer, but Ángel thought he was an unassuming player on the court. During a raid, the police took everyone the young man was with, except for him. They killed him.

*In recent days, well not days, in recent months, the police raided the bad part of Ponce: (name of the place) all that area, and he was in charge of that around there. They took everyone except him. They threatened him; they killed him; they liquidated him. I heard the gunshots from my house and everything. It was very sad.*

After that, Ángel also said that he knew a twelve-year-old boy near his house. He fears going anywhere near him because he thinks the boy might kill him. He said: *“He could be armed, so he could shoot me and just leave me there.”* On several occasions, he insisted that he knew about this because he had seen it a lot during his life.

### **Christian**

Christian, twenty-one years old, lived in Ponce and then moved to Yauco. He is married and works as a security guard. He became a father when he was fifteen years old and currently has three children. Only one of his children lives with him, but he does not have a relationship with the other two because of problems with his ex-partner.

Regarding education, he said:

*I started, but I couldn't finish. I started many things that I couldn't finish because of work stuff.*

Christian dropped out of school when he was in the eighth grade and was fourteen years old.

*I had behavior problems, so my dad decided to take me out of school and send me to school in the United States.*

He stayed with his paternal grandparents, who he had only seen twice in his life. He spent three years out of the country. During that time, he became more deeply involved with marijuana and alcohol. He had many problems with the police. He came back to Puerto Rico when he was seventeen years old, where he finished ninth grade and high school. He was sent to the United States because he had problems with his schoolmates. One of the things students did was make fun of him. As a result, he started developing a strong personality, and began to have problems with his parents.

*My brothers and my dad influenced me; they'd say, “Don't come here bruised up, don't let them say you got hit in school. If you get hit, you hit right back.”*

In addition to this, Christian indicated that cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana were sold at the schools. He was not into any of them at the beginning, but later he was. He started smoking as a result of the peer pressure he experienced when he entered the Ernesto Ramos Antonini school.

*I started smoking cigarettes with them and not because I wanted or needed to smoke, but because I wanted to fit in, I wanted to be cool and feel accepted.*

Christian narrated how a sixteen-year-old boy was murdered, which affected him greatly.

*He was killed farther up in El Yeso just because he was not from there. He went to school in La Cantera, but he lived in the Perla del Caribe housing project. He was not allowed to be in La Cantera because people from there did not get along with people from his neighborhood. They shot him like thirty times; walking, he was walking home from school.*

He also pointed out that adults were involved in this process. “Bosses” controlled and used minors to deal drugs or serve as lookouts for the drug spot, among other activities. This is still happening, but he said that it does not happen as much inside the school now because the people who were bringing drugs into the school were relatives of the people dealing in the streets. Most of these youths do not live with both their parents. They live with their grandparents, siblings or single mothers.

Christian also described police complicity in the drug spots.

*They paid rents, they paid rent to the police. It was for protection; I know that you have a drug spot there and if you don't give me the money I'm asking for, I will start conducting raids here.*

Finally, after enduring these problems, Christian said that he can now advise his older siblings:

*The most important thing I've seen is how the market affects things. These people don't think twice about putting them to sell drugs. And now things are worse; they use them for shootings, they make them pull the trigger.*

He concluded by saying that he feels fine right now, but that this experience affected the core of his character.

*Yes, I feel fine. Those were experiences I went through that helped me mature. I was mixed up with so many people whose problems were worse than mine. I learned a little from each one of them, and they learned from me. We spent time together, gave each other advice, and helped each other out. And the teachers were excellent. The teachers, counselors, and social workers were all excellent. They were always looking for ways to help us.*

## **Isabel**

Isabel was born in a city in New Jersey, but she was raised in a northern municipality of the island from when she was five years old. She is one of the youngest of five siblings. Isabel did not meet her

biological father until recently, in 2009. Her stepfather, whom she calls dad, raised them since they were little. She feels that she had some rough times in her childhood.

*Well, my dad, even though he was a good provider, because we always had a roof over our heads and never lacked anything... he raised us just as he was raised, that's my opinion. At least he didn't hit us, but he verbally insulted us a lot. A lot of times he would yell at me, "You pig, you'll end up the same." That's because I have a sister who also had a horrible life on crack and I think heroin as well; he used to compare me with her all the time.*

Besides the insults she received and the comparisons to her drug addict sister, who died, Isabel was also abused by her brothers. Even though Isabel has no memory of it, her mother mentioned that, when she was three years old, Isabel's brother "did what he saw in a sexual movie." She does remember that "my brother touched me when I was six years old. I also remember when a cousin touched me during my childhood, and I remember that when I was a teenager, my brother didn't put it in, but he sodomized me. Right? Is that the word?" He also said ugly things to her.

*I was the kind of girl who was always depressed and crying in her room.*

Of all these serious situations, Isabel thinks that her father's words affected her more than her brothers' abuse.

*I think so, because that's what goes to your subconscious and stays there for the rest of your life.*

When she was seventeen years old, Isabel moved in with a man, the neighbor of a childhood friend, who abused her when he was high on drugs.

*And all because I wanted to help him, I was just trying to keep him from going out and using, but heroin, even more so than crack, is a disease, it makes you sick; his bones would hurt and he used to go crazy and beat me up, so he could leave.*

He went to jail for stealing to support his habit. When he got out, he passed through all the Hogares Crea around. Isabel had sex with a fourteen-year-old and became pregnant. To get rid of her first partner, she decided to move to the United States. When she was eighteen years old, she moved to Pennsylvania hoping to find a better life. Isabel went to the house of a cousin who promised she would help her get a job. Once she arrived, however, she found that her cousin was living with a man who kicked her out into the streets in less than a month because of the lack of privacy in the small room where they all lived.

*They were intimate, and I could even see them, but I didn't turn around, I wasn't interested in any of that.*

A week after arriving in Pennsylvania, she met a man who was twenty-nine years old at the time and became the father of her two other children. When she was homeless, he found her a place to stay with a friend of his, until they moved to a basement he found. Isabel paid for the apartment with the cash assistance she received, while he stayed home doing nothing.

*He didn't do anything, he spent all day at the landlady's house, but he knows the life. He really knew the life, about drug trafficking and selling, he knew it all. The only thing is, he had dealt with all types of drugs, but he was holding back.*

Isabel meant that even though her partner knew a lot about the drug world, he was not involved in any of it. He only used marijuana, like she did. But he did transport cocaine from New York to Pennsylvania to help her and her child.

*He did something illegal, but he did it for a good cause. He is a very respectful man.*

They stayed together for six or seven years. During that period of time, Isabel gave birth, first, to another boy and then to a girl. The relationship lasted until she decided to join a faith-based group home for women with alcohol and drug addiction. He also checked into a place, but left. Then he got involved with another woman in another town who supported him. Last Isabel heard, he was fine and, occasionally, he visited the drug spots in her town, she suspects, to buy marijuana or cocaine. She mentioned that he was the one who introduced her to cocaine. Cocaine led her to crack. She even considered herself the number-one client. She used it as an antidepressant, to avoid thinking.

*Getting high, it took away all my inhibitions of feeling ugly or whatever. I felt like the prettiest girl in town, the best, number one. When I was high on crack, I used to hit the streets and not sleep for two months, I didn't eat... It keeps me awake, I don't get hungry; I just walked around my town, just walked and walked.*

Isabel walked around the town. She begged for money during the day and worked nights as a prostitute. She commented that there were all types of clients.

*All kinds of people, even judges. And using too... In their cars, even looking down on everyone. They went straight to the shooting gallery looking for prostitutes. When you went in, you'd see them all messed up, sweaty, with their shirts and pants open...*

When she was twenty-five years old, she entered a faith-based group home for women with alcohol and drug addiction for the first time. It was arranged by the town's social workers, so she could regain custody of her children. A week before finishing the rehabilitation program, Isabel relapsed and lost her children yet again. The oldest child is in the custody of the Department of Family Services and the other two are with their father.

Isabel is currently thirty-two years old. As part of her rehabilitation, Isabel returned to the group home and feels proud of her decision. She graduated with honors as a geriatric technician from a technical college in Bayamón. She has been sober since last June. She hopes to open a senior center and get her children back; they are now fourteen, eleven, and eight years old.

### **Israel**

Israel is a seventeen-year-old from Humacao. When they were little, his mother would beat him and his brother up.

*She was always hitting us for everything.*

She then left them with their father. He stayed living there. Since then, he has a better relationship with his mother, but from a distance. He thinks that everything has settled down. There are no problems with her or the other siblings and members of his family.

Due to problems with his schoolteachers, he now goes to an alternative school where he is in eleventh grade. His brother also attends this school. Israel is looking for a job. As of now, he plans to obtain a technical degree in car mechanics, welding or refrigeration from Mech-Tech College.

### **Jennifer**

Jennifer is a fifteen-year-old from the eastern region of the Island. She was sexually abused when she was only ten years old. The same thing happened to her little sister. The abuser was their grandmother's husband. Since both their mother and grandmother had to go to work, they were left under the care of this man who took advantage of the situation to rape them.

*He raped me and my little sister.*

They did not say anything because he threatened to hurt them if they did. Nobody knew until three months ago when Jennifer told her family everything.

At the time of the interview, she was one month pregnant. She attends an alternative school to finish high school faster. As soon as she graduates next year, she will devote herself to taking care of her baby.

### **Juan**

Juan is an eighteen-year-old young man from the northern region of Puerto Rico. His father worked in a public corporation and his mother is a housewife. He has nine brothers and sisters; three full siblings and six half siblings from his father's side. Juan is under the custody of the Department of Family Services and is currently living in a children's group home in the southern region of Puerto Rico. There are approximately fifty-two young men at that home. Juan said that they keep them locked in their rooms all day long. There are

eleven minors in the room for children under fourteen years of age; approximately seventeen in the room for teenagers, ages fourteen to seventeen; and close to nineteen young men in the room for the eighteen to twenty-one age group.

When he was seventeen years old, Juan spent five months at a juvenile correctional facility on the northern coast of the Island. That institution placed approximately sixteen minors per division. There were close to seventy in total.

When he was in the ninth grade, Juan started having trouble at school and had to repeat the grade. At the time, he was already involved in the street life and had bad grades. His parents separated when he was twelve years old. The problems between them affected Juan; they fought a lot and hit each other in front of him and his two siblings. Because of his parents' problems, Juan felt frustrated and took to the streets. When he was around thirteen years old, he started smoking marijuana and crack, and sniffing blow. When he turned fifteen, he was sent to the United States to live with his brother. He spent six months there before returning to Puerto Rico. He did not like the environment; he thought it was boring.

*From there on out, they began... for me, like, mental disorders. I would get frustrated and go out to the streets. I started smoking cigarettes, then marijuana, even smoking crack, sniffing blow.*

*Yes, smoking crack. At fifteen, I was sent to the U.S. with my brother. I spent five or six months with him, got into it again, and got sent back.*

*Crack. I even smoked... once I got hooked for like six months. Six whole months hitting it every day, every day, every day. It makes you crazy. Even the boss told them not to sell to me anymore because that wasn't for me, he said, because I had another kind of mind. And so I got clean on my own, in the streets. What happened was that one time a buddy of mine, I call him my buddy, but he smoked and offered me some, and I took it. I put in ashes, I put in the little rocks, breathed out, then you light it up and inhale. That's exactly what I did.*

*No, but it was dead around there. I didn't really like the area [where his brother lived].*

When he returned, he continued in the street life. Around age sixteen, he got more deeply involved in drug trafficking. Juan also had friends who were involved in the street life. He began selling drugs when he was seventeen. He started out as a dealer and lookout with a walkie-talkie. During a weekday, he could earn \$300 to \$400 for working a shift from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. Profits during weekends could amount to \$700. Juan also became a runner.

*No, that was when I was fifteen. At sixteen I went full-on into the streets. I used to run away from my mom's house and spend weeks at... (unintelligible) house.*

[You started out as a dealer?] *“Yes, as a dealer and also a lookout. With a walkie-talkie.”*

*I started out just trying it out, smoking marijuana, I went to cop this and that. Since my friends were already working, I got some shifts. I knew the boss because, before he was the boss or even had the idea in his mind, we used to go to the court and play basketball together.*

*A shift from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., around 300 to 400 bucks. 450. On a Friday, if business was good, you could make 600 or 700 bucks. The money went fast, though. Rent, food...*

*As a runner, man, I made 600 to 700 bucks almost every Friday. That is, I have twenty-five bundles with twenty-five baggies each; the dealer gets one buck for each baggie, the runner gets two, and the rest goes to the boss. That’s how it is, it’s sort of complicated.*

Juan also used drugs, namely pills and marijuana. His drug spot was in the Island’s northern region, but he also sold drugs in other areas. The spot was located in the barrio. Different types of clients came in to buy. The night shift, from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., is the busiest one.

*Yes, it can also be done drive-thru style. There’s like seven or eight of us dealers; a client comes and one of us goes, someone else comes, another one of us goes. Like that...*

*In and out, in and out, in and out, in and out all the time. Different people.*

*Of course, I even sold to people wearing ties and everything.*

[Clients came driving...] *Mercedes, Acuras, Audis, Corvettes.*

Juan was armed. He spent \$1,200 on a Glock 23 and had two 22 round magazines, a 15 round, and a 12 round magazine. The weapons and ammunition were obtained through police connections. Juan told us about how the police are paid off to keep them from intervening in drug spots. Police officers can be paid up to \$3,000 per week for keeping out of drug spots.

*I bought one for 1,200 bucks, a Glock size 23. I had four magazines: two 22 round, one 15 round, and one 12 round. The ammo boxes also came from the points men.*

*I always had rifles with me; AK-47, M16, R-15.*

*I was very well-armed. I’ve dealt with everything: .40, .45, 9 millimeters, .38, .357. Right now, I can take any weapon and take it apart in a second. Work it, oil it, anything, everything.*

[How did you get your hands on the weapons and ammunition?] *Connections with the police.*

[How much are police officers paid?] *Man, \$1,000; it depends, \$2,000, \$3,000. Per week, not per month. Weekly, on Saturdays, let's say, we are gonna settle this every Saturday. On Saturday, one of the officers making the rounds in the area is supposed to go to that area.*

*There are many connections. They sell themselves, because they do anything for money, police officers have trouble paying their bills, so you can imagine. They sell themselves. Also, many of them live around the area and stuff, they fear for their families and prefer to take the money and tell themselves "forget about it, I'm getting a bit of extra money just for passing by and not getting out or anything, for letting them do whatever they want."*

[Did the officers know?] *Yes, all of them had to know. Let me tell you, I had a bulletproof vest, knee guards, ankle guards. I had everything. I was always prepared in the street. Come 11:00 or 11:30 p.m., I put on my vest because I knew the heat that was coming.*

The boss of the drug spot was twenty-one years old. He was in jail at the time of the interview. There were minors working at that spot.

[Were all employees minors?] *Not all of the employees, but most of them. We were the majority, we were the hardest, we were the most... At least me, I'm not scared. It's my life against the life of someone else; I'd rather their momma cry than my momma cry.*

Juan never intentionally killed anyone, but he does not know if somebody died in any of the shootings in which he participated. Shootings were the consequence of conflicts between drug spots.

*I never killed, but I did shoot from one car to another...*

*I don't know if I killed anyone, but I shot a bunch of times.*

Juan said that he never wants to go back to that life, or even to live in that place. He has been out of drug trafficking for one year and four months.

*Man, I don't even wanna go back to my hometown in the north.*

*Nothing, nothing at all. Right now you could piss test me and nothing. Not even marijuana or nothing. There's nothing that could make me... Ever since I went to jail, I realized that nobody is your friend. Nobody... not even those who told you in the street that they had your back through thick and thin, nah.*

The drug is distributed among regional commissions. Juan stated that drug traffickers bought the drugs from the very police officers who seized it.

*Papi, it's all the commissions around the area and all over. Even the cops, when they confiscate drugs, they don't care, they steal product from...*

Juan came to have around seventy-five marijuana plants in his basement.

*I had lots of marijuana plants. I had up to fifty-two marijuana plants or seventy-five, around that. I planted them myself.*

At a drug spot, four runners, ten dealers, and twenty lookouts can work in just one day. Most of the workers are minors. Juan knows a young man who started working in the streets when he was twelve years old. A while ago, another two minors he knew were killed; one of them was a runner and the other was a hitman. The hitman died at twenty years old; he had killed fourteen people since first taking that job at sixteen.

*Four runners, dealers... there can be up to ten dealers, lookouts... there could be up to twenty. Posted in different areas with walkie-talkies.*

*I have a friend who's twelve and in the street. He's fourteen now, but since he was twelve, he was in it.*

Juan thinks that the common denominator of people involved in drug trafficking is the developmental context.

*That goes from generation to generation. It's generational. They inherit the business from their families. It's complicated.*

At the time of his arrest, Juan was living with his stepfather and stepbrother who were also involved in drug trafficking. Police officers arrived with a search warrant and an arrest warrant for his stepfather and stepbrother. They were not home. The officers searched the house and found marijuana and guns, among other things. They arrested Juan who went to jail because of all the drugs that were found in the house.

*"In my house they dealt everything, rifles and everything. They dealt everything, right now, no, because he's laying low, my... (unintelligible), but before he was all up in it." Once he got to the police station, they started questioning him. He was beaten during the interrogation.*

[How much does a marijuana plant costs?] *Man, from 1,300 to 1,400 bucks.*

Juan was living in a children's group home at the time of the interview. Court-appointed social workers recommended this home as part of his rehabilitation process. He has been living there for ten months. The home is administered by a couple. Most of the minors living there were abandoned by their families and remain under the custody of the Department of Family Services. Juan is eight months away from serving his

sentence. He is currently finishing school in an alternative education center; he is in the tenth grade and his grades are A's and B's. He wants to become a jockey or a veterinarian.

*It was the court-appointed social workers, you know. They referred me to that home; it was good for my rehabilitation and all that. They took me there on June 25<sup>th</sup>.*

*I would like to become a jockey or a veterinarian.*

Even though Juan is not active in drug trafficking anymore, he fears for his life. He wears a bulletproof vest and his gun when he visits his neighborhood. He still hangs out with the people at the drug spot in the neighborhood.

*You know, last time I went there, because I'm still taking heat, I know I can't risk it so I threw on my vest and took my weapon. Let's do it. Because I can't tell you I'm out, out. But I'm not involved with drugs; I'm not selling or using or moving them or nothing. I went there to hang with what's left of my crew because most were taken away by the DEA.*

### **Karla**

Karla is a fifteen-year-old from the eastern region of Puerto Rico. She lives with her mother, an older sister, and two younger brothers. Her father lives in the same town, but Karla does not visit him much because she does not get along with his wife. She said that she has a good relationship with him, but added:

*I don't go there a lot because I don't get along very much with his wife.*

Her mother works as a security guard and her father is a truck driver. Regarding education, Karla failed the seventh grade for not paying attention in class. She said that this was:

*...because I didn't pay attention in class.*

When she finished junior high school, she did not want to attend a regular high school, so she applied to an alternative school. She is now a junior in one of these schools. As soon as she graduates, Karla wants to enroll in an institute to study radiology and then ultrasound.

Moreover, regarding the social problems present in her community, she mentioned that there is a drug spot near her house. She said that there are a lot of fights and many shots fired by the police.

*The police raid, they fire a lot of shots, it gets crazy around here, lots of fights.*

The police have conducted raids and arrested people, but the drug spot keeps operating with the people left and new members. Karla mentioned that a seventeen-year-old minor guards the drug spot and sells drugs. Finally, she mentioned that, one way or another, this affects her a bit.

**Mario**

Mario is a fifteen-year-old teenager from the eastern region of Puerto Rico. He is currently attending an alternative education center in his effort to finish school as soon as possible. He wants to finish high school to be able to work. Mario started working when he was fourteen years old. His job consisted of picking peaches in Pennsylvania, U.S.A., during the summer when he visited his father's house. Mario's father worked on a farm picking fruits. Mario worked on that same farm during the summer months, but was paid less than his father. While his father earned \$600 a month for picking peaches, Mario received \$340 for performing the same task. Their work schedule was from six in the morning until five in the afternoon.

*I used to put my hoodie here (pointing to his chest); I wore it like this, straight down, and kept picking fruits and putting them inside it. Then I put them on the ground and a truck came to pick them up.*

*I was paid less than my old man; he was paid \$600 and I was paid \$340 and change.*

Mario was not required special permission to work as a minor. The only other minor among his co-workers was the boss's nephew. Mario only held this job during those two summer months. He saved the money he earned to buy parts for his four-track vehicle. The four-track was a gift from his mother. Mario said that she took out a loan to buy it.

At the time of the interview, Mario was self-employed doing yard work. He said that he could earn \$30 to \$66 depending on the type of yard. He uses the money to buy things he wants like clothes and tennis shoes. He also gives some of it to his mother to help her economically.

*Gas for the four-track, I buy whatever I want.*

*Yes, I give her money.*

Mario said that he has never used drugs or been involved in drug trafficking. However, he commented that drug trafficking is part of life in Puerto Rican barrios. He also said that it is fairly common to see children working at drug spots; a world in which, he added, both adults and children use firearms.

*There are people like that, yes; in every barrio you go, they are hustling like that.*

*Yes, in all barrios, anyone who says that there isn't a fifteen-year-old kid hustling on the corner selling drugs is lying.*

**Miriam**

Miriam lived in Chicago, in the United States, for a while. While living there, she started having trouble in school when she was sixteen years old. Although she did not drop out, she did not attend classes

either. Her friends were the biggest influence on her behavior. She started missing school and coming home late. Miriam's mother advised her to go to school, but she continued to be absent.

With the support of her uncles, who were members of a gang, Miriam joined the world of gangs in Chicago. Because she had relatives in the gang, she enjoyed a certain protection from the abuses usually committed by members. On one occasion, however, a drunken gang member tried to have sex with her, but she refused. He then tried to hit her, but other members intervened and beat the man up for trying to abuse her.

*And because they're my uncles, there's a certain respect that members must show me. They can't do anything to me; they can't bother me, to put it that way. If they want to be with me, it'll only happen if I want to. But they can't force me or hit me or anything.*

*Yes, because they were always drunk, and well, he tried to have sex with me, but I refused. I didn't want, didn't want to, and he wanted to hit me.*

*...he tried to hit me. He picked me up and everybody else started hitting him.*

Women were frequently the target of abuse in this group. Miriam knew that gang members forced some women to have sex in exchange for drugs. One of her girlfriends, who was fifteen years old, was pregnant by one member, another had sex with members in exchange for drugs. Women were also battered by male gang members.

*Let me tell you, when I started hanging out with them it was me and two of my girlfriends. One of them [fifteen years old] was pregnant by one of the guys. The other one kept getting worse and worse; she even had sex with them for drugs. To this day, she's still not well.*

*...you see, it's basically prostitution because they give them drugs in exchange for sex. Which is basically prostitution, but I've never seen them doing it for money.*

Miriam's friends were the gang members; people who were in the habit of smoking, drinking, and using drugs. They were also involved in drug trafficking. Miriam recounted that her community and school were divided into gangs.

*In my school, everything was divided by gangs. You'd see different groups here and there, and you'd identify them because of the colors they wore or the spot where they hung out. And maybe you'd see only five in the group, but if they called, thirty would show up.*

*Drug abuse and all that. And so, one has to witness all that. It's all divided by different gangs, by different things. Well, sometimes you do it to, how do you call it, like, to make friends and not feel out of place.*

Miriam witnessed male children selling drugs and weapons. She indicated that almost all gang members were minors. These children sold drugs in the streets and in school. Their earnings were a percentage of the sales. In these groups, according to Miriam, only males can sell. Females are used as drug mules because it is less probable that they will get caught. As per Miriam's testimony, most police officers are men, and they are not allowed to physically search women unless a female officer is present.

*What I'm saying is that they used women on purpose because most of the police officers there are men. And men can't search women; so, they took the women with them and the women carried the drugs.*

The gang members were Mexican, African-American, and Puerto Rican. According to Miriam's testimony, Chicago gangs communicate with groups in Puerto Rico. She said she heard a story about a person who came to Puerto Rico to running from the gang, and the gang members called people in Puerto Rico to kill him.

*It's like, if you are leaving, on a trip, if you are leaving the country, you have to, let's say, inform them, let them know. One left, running, and he was from here, from Puerto Rico. And he returned, running away from them, because they wouldn't let him go. If he left the group, they would've killed him or beaten him to a pulp. So he came to Puerto Rico running away from them, and they called here. They have people here.*

Despite being involved in gangs, Miriam said she never used drugs because she was always taught at home that you should not do that. She was offered drugs many times, but she never dared try them. However, Miriam transported drugs. When she was fifteen years old, a member of the gang approached her, put something on her chest, under her shirt, and told her to take it to the leader. At that moment she realized that he gave her drugs. She only did it that one time because she was scared and her uncles would not allow her to become involved with drugs or weapons.

*He approached me and put something in here, under my shirt, and told me to hold it. I didn't know what it was. Until he told me to go to the leader, that's what they call him, and give it to him.*

*I mean, my uncles would let me be with them and go to parties, but they didn't want me involved with drugs or weapons, none of that.*

Miriam is currently seventeen years old and lives in the eastern region of the Island.

## Rafael

Rafael is a seventeen-year-old young man from the eastern region of Puerto Rico. His grandmother raised him since he was four years old. When he was thirteen, the Department of Family Services removed him from her home because his grandmother has Alzheimer's disease. Since then, Rafael has been under the custody of this agency. He considers it the worst experience of his entire life. He has already been in four foster homes. Now, he is in another one, a privately-owned corporation in the eastern region, along with seventeen other teenagers. He expressed that he is not happy at all because he cannot play his favorite sport: basketball.

Currently, Rafael can visit his grandmother once a month, when the social worker drives him there. Besides that, he has no communication with his mother, but he knows that she is fine. He has no communication with his brothers either. He graduates soon and would like to become a counselor or a refrigeration technician.

## Rebeca

Rebeca is eighteen years old and lives with her father and stepmother in the southern region of Puerto Rico. Her stepmother is a thirty-two-year-old housewife. Her father is thirty-six years old and does odd jobs here and there. Rebeca is one of six siblings. She has two siblings from her stepmother's side and another three from her mother's side.

Regarding education, she said that she studied until eleventh grade. This was because her father was trafficking drugs and facing charges.

*My dad got caught... I went with my boyfriend, and since I was with the Department of Family Services, well they...*

She was in the system because her mother did not have custody.

*...and since my dad was involved in a drug case, they went looking for me because I was from the Department of Family Services.*

Rebeca was under the custody of the agency because her mother did not live with them and her father was involved in a drug case.

*Yes, he caught a drug case. Then they removed me from home and I went with them. I didn't like how they treated me, so I ran away.*

Rebeca ran away from a children's group home in Salinas because she did not like it. She did not like it because they did not treat her well. It could be said that she was emotionally abused.

*...because they treated us badly there, they yelled at us.*

*...and so after that, I ran away and went to stay with an aunt; I couldn't go to school because they'd look for me there, that's why I was out of school for all that time.*

Rebeca stayed with her aunt for a while until her father got out of the rehabilitation home. It should be mentioned that her father was caught with drugs because he was a drug trafficker. As soon as he got out, Rebeca returned to live with her father.

*... and since he got out, I went back with him. And now they're battling for custody. He still doesn't have it, he has the temporary one.*

On the other hand, the siblings are all separated. They were divided among relatives.

*Two of them are with my real mom. There's another one living with my aunt and the two youngest ones are with my stepmother.*

Furthermore, the interviewer asked Rebeca if she had used any drugs or taken pills. She responded that she has never used drugs, smoked pot or taken pills, but she has seen adults using drugs. She has never been with minors who use drugs, but she has been in situations where there are people smoking cigarettes and marijuana. She has seen minors in difficult situations who later get hurt in these homes.

*I've seen them get hit. And it's very sad to watch... they yell at them; they hit them for any silly little thing, and so they become more rebellious, and don't pay them any mind.*

Rebeca started attending an alternative education center in March. She stated that she gets treated very well and that it is a very different and pretty place. She will graduate in December. She does not think that she has good grades, but she does feel that she is making better use of her time. She said that she would like to study nursing because she likes helping people.

Regarding her daily routine after leaving the center, the people in her social life, and the things that make her happy, she expressed:

*I help my stepmother clean the house. If she needs to run an errand, I go. I do my homework.*

Rebeca emphasized that some of her friends are going through difficult situations.

*Pregnancy. They don't even know what to do. Some of them take pills and get rid of them as if it were nothing, so their parents won't kick them out of the house. It's very sad.*

Last, but no less important, Rebeca narrated her experiences and anecdotes at the foster home where she felt these adults mistreated, insulted, and hurt her. She was in the foster home for a month. The caretaker

of the foster home was a woman who had other children and lived with a man. Rebeca said that the woman received social security benefits, but Rebeca did not know what the man did for a living.

*Like, it was offensive, you felt, like pretty bad.*

*Yes, they hit me once, yes. They hit me with a cell phone and scratched my face.*

Rebeca concluded the interview by saying that she would like to have her own house in the future. She would also like to have a family, after she becomes a nurse because right now there are no job opportunities and it would be a difficult process.

### **Sandra**

Sandra is twenty-one years old and the mother of a four-year-old girl. She is currently finishing her last year of high school in an alternative education center. She was not able to finish high school for various personal circumstances. She was pregnant at age sixteen and dropped out of school to become a mother. At that time, she entered into a violent marriage. Sandra thinks that she got involved in this kind of relationship because when she was growing up with her parents she was surrounded by domestic violence.

*Because before, when I lived at home, there was a pattern of abuse. When my mom and dad lived together, there were many cases of domestic violence. My dad spent three months out of jail and then three months back inside for abusing my mom. Until my mom decided to break that pattern of abuse. Because I grew up in that environment, when I fell in love and had a partner, I was a victim of domestic violence. Because, well, because, it's not that it's normal, but it was to me, that's what I lived. I said that I want a functional family. I want a home where dad and mom raise their child, their baby, and lead him ahead so he won't have to go through that same thing I went through. So, with that mindset of me not wanting that to happen, that's exactly what I did. I repeated the same pattern, the same or worse.*

Sandra's father went to jail several times for domestic violence. She said that her father was abandoned when he was a little boy and that he had various problems which led him to be interned in juvenile institutions.

*Because of domestic violence, he was abandoned when he was a little boy and, so, he always had problems since he was young, and was always going in and out of juvenile institutions because it was part of his everyday life to go to jail. He'd go in, and he was happy.*

Sandra lost custody of her daughter because of a violent relationship she maintained. At her parents' house, Sandra had experienced interventions by the Department of Family Services for domestic violence. Therefore, she did everything possible to prevent the removal of her daughter. However, her ten-month-old daughter was removed from her care because her partner accused her of domestic violence. Her record with

the police did not work in her favor either. Her baby's removal had a deep impact on Sandra. She was deeply marked by it, and driven to a life full of despair that led to her involvement in illegal activities.

*He's my daughter's dad. Because, we as a couple, we hit, kicked, and slapped each other, it was totally dysfunctional. It got to such an extreme that there were so many domestic violence complaints that the Department of Family Services finally intervened. I, then, because I had seen it happen with my mom's domestic violence case with the Department of Family Services, I was always on the offensive, I defend myself well, I wouldn't let them take my little girl away from me, but then when she was ten months old, they took her from me in court.*

*Well because this guy accused me and I don't know, I had previously assaulted the social worker. She came once to take the child, and I attacked her. So when we went to court, I got the same social worker and she decided to remove the child. The judge always said that the child's documents and vaccinations were in order. She has everything, let's give her another chance. The social worker said she didn't give chances. The judge said that she couldn't make a determination because there had been other situations that made it the decision of the Department of Family Services. We'd had personal run-ins and so this woman decided to take my daughter away, sort of like, 'I didn't do any legal damage to you, but I can take your daughter.' That day I rebelled, I hit everyone in court, close to twenty bailiffs had to come to take my daughter away from me because I wouldn't let them. So... that's when I got more into it... I already used drugs 'cause I smoked marijuana, drank alcohol, and smoked cigarettes. It's like at that moment, that's where I was... you know, they had already taken...*

*Yes, I didn't have anyone to fight for. I used to think that I didn't have anyone to, you know... When that happened I'd already quit everything, but I thought that I didn't have anyone to fight for, life was going so bad that, well, I hung on to depression. Even though I said I wasn't depressed, I was so depressed that all alone in my corner, I would cry alone. I didn't tell my mom about my problems, I'd say I was super happy. I'd always come up with an excuse like being sick, I always tried to make my life separate, alone. I didn't want to take my problems to anyone because I'd left, and I was on probation because I'd been accused of domestic violence before.*

Sandra started using various kinds of drugs and working in drug trafficking. She was involved in drug trafficking for a year. During that time, she lived in an abandoned apartment with some men in the southern region of Puerto Rico. Her job was to carry drugs island-wide. She earned \$300 to \$400 per trip for this type of work.

*Well, that can make you a lot of money, depending on where the deal is going down. Because if it involves me getting into a car to take you, let's say, from Guayama to San Juan or from*

*San Juan to different places, to anywhere in Puerto Rico, then they might give you 300 or 400 bucks.*

When Sandra was seventeen she was offered a job performing private dances. She was approached by adults from outside the drug trafficking world in which she was involved. One day, she went to familiarize herself with the work environment and saw girls as young as fifteen working there. After seeing the environment, she decided not to accept the job offer.

*There was at a time in my life when they tried to degrade me, tried to make me give private dances and those sorts of things, to make money. I can't say that I didn't do it, you know, I went into that scene to see how it was, but I got scared and said, "No, this is not for me."*

*No, they were older people. One of them was forty years old. He looked for girls, you know. It was a private dance; you don't have to do anything. But there are people who are watching you, and if you want to become a decent person, it is better not to go there...*

*Yes, I saw other young girls, girls who were even fourteen and fifteen years old. You know, being fondled by adults. Those shows took place at a private house. I never accepted the job because I told myself that it was going to be hard. I'd rather people say "look, there's a junkie" or whatever else, than being outcast for being a prostitute, never that. I thought "that's not for me; it's better if I keep selling drugs and make it easier." The day I get arrested, I'll keep my mouth shut.*

Drug trafficking was very profitable work for Sandra. She could make \$1,000 in two weeks. Sandra worked different positions within the drug trade. The street dealer is the lowest position in a drug trafficking operation. This dealer may work two or three hours selling various substances. The next level up after the street dealer is the runner; this person is the boss's right-hand man. The runner is in charge of picking up and delivering packages. He is the product distributor.

*Well, I can be a street dealer and work a double shift. In one day, I may have a bundle with twenty-five baggies that go for ten bucks each. Twenty-five times ten gives you a certain amount. I get them for four bucks and break even if I pay back seven, so I make three bucks. I multiply all that, divide it up, set the seven bucks aside, subtract them, and those three dollars from each of the twenty-five baggies are mine. And if I sell ten bundles during my shift, which is supposed to last three hours, all that profit is mine.*

[A runner] *Man, I swear that in a month you can make up to 10,000 bucks or more.*

The experience that most affected Sandra was joining a group of people to beg at traffic lights. The group collected money for a child with a health condition. They took a percentage of what they collected and

the rest went to the child's mother. Sandra felt dirty for having done this. She thought that if something were to happen to her daughter, people might not help her for being a liar. After leaving this group, Sandra surrendered to the courts in an attempt to regain custody of her daughter.

*Something could've been done legally, but they were doing it illegally. I went to traffic lights to collect money and I would force the person, "Hey, I'm here working my ass off, but you have to give me 50% of the money I make in those jars." If there were only two jars with 500 bucks, just to say a number, or 300, then half of it was mine in a day's work.*

*Yes...at traffic lights, any light in any town. At the traffic lights, those persons fill out paperwork, and people fall for it, people of, I don't know, maybe low income or weak state of mind, I'd say, who do this to make a few bucks for their children. Because me, no matter what I've gone through in life, if one day I had a situation with my daughter, I'd hit the streets and force my family or someone to go with me, or I'd go myself to get burned under the sun and collect the money for my daughter myself. I wouldn't allow some bums to do it and give me, how much, a fourth of it.*

*That hit me, I thought of how I'm a mother and what if that happens to my daughter, and I have to go beg at a traffic light and, because I'm a liar, nobody gives me money, and my daughter dies. That hit me so hard, to the point that I never did it again.*

Sandra was almost eighteen when she surrendered to the courts in an attempt to regain custody of her daughter. At the juvenile detention center, she saw eleven-year-old girls at the admissions area because they were too young to be committed to the juvenile facility. Many of these girls went there to get clean. Sandra met a thirteen-year-old girl who gave birth to a crack baby at twelve. This girl did not know how to read or write when she entered the juvenile facility.

*I got to know a thirteen-year-old girl who had a baby when she was twelve. She had to break her crack addiction, she didn't know how to read or write. She learned at a juvenile facility.*

Sandra spent one year and a half in the juvenile detention center. She believes that she learned a lot at this place. Her last months there, she collaborated with a social outreach initiative named PACOA (*Programa de Acercamiento Comunitario en Acción*). During that time, she visited schools to give talks on juvenile delinquency. She spent time with girls who, like her, lived in families surrounded by domestic violence.

*I learned about introspection. Now I value my life much more. There were many officers who tried to help; but, at the beginning, I spat at them, kicked them, and told them off in a thousand ways. I realized that I needed help. When I really understood that I was truly not well, then I accepted help from my mentor; an officer who was a mentor, like your dad or*

*your mother. We called them our mom or dad. These people almost always found a way to connect with you.*

*Then I used to go to schools and talk about my life, how it was with my parents, my life, how it was with my daughter. How it affected me that my daughter wasn't there with me. I was very real. I talked about how it was inside; it's like this and that. Some of the students came to me crying. They had problems at home, and they came asking for advice. The one time that touched me the most was when I gave a talk at a high school in Las Marías. I had to talk to, like, six young women. They all came crying. They had a lot of problems.*

*At home, their moms and dads were abusive; they were experiencing domestic violence at that age. It was one thing or the other... or they were in the drug world. It was so many things. That's where I learned to value my life.*

After she got out of the juvenile institution, Sandra reconciled with her partner. Her partner's mother asked Sandra to give her custody of her daughter, so she could be reunited with her once she got out. Sandra's desire to get her daughter back made her turn over custody to this woman. When she got out of the juvenile institution, Sandra moved to the United States with her partner and daughter. Everything was fine for the first six months, until the pattern of domestic violence re-emerged. She decided to return to Puerto Rico; her partner's mother did not allow her to keep the girl. Even though this woman has made it difficult, Sandra is determined to get her daughter back.

*... because before I got out, my ex-mother-in-law came and offered me the world, she told me to give her custody of the girl and that she'd give it back once I got out, so the Department of Family Services wouldn't keep my daughter, because I was fighting against the Department. So I thought let's try this once again. Maybe he's changed, a functional family in which mom and dad raise their children. Great, that's exactly what I'm missing in life. I already fixed this, I'm going to fix this, a perfect mother and an excellent father. So I get out on October 18<sup>th</sup> (she laughs out loud) and I went away with the same guy on October 20<sup>th</sup>. Everything was cool for six months. I lived with my daughter, I didn't have custody, she gave her back but without turning custody over to me. You know, she knew how to scheme the whole thing. I lived with my little girl, but man, after six months it was domestic violence all the time and worse than before. And I used to say that no prick was gonna fuck with me again. So I decided to go back. I came here, I was gonna take my little girl, but she said that she had custody and if I took her, she was gonna accuse me of kidnapping. I was heartbroken, but I had to leave my little girl.*

*I thought, no, I don't have to put up with this because of my daughter. I'll go and I'll fight for my daughter. I went and talked to her (the mother-in-law), I said that I wanted my daughter*

*back, and blah, blah, blah. She said “well go, do things right and I’ll give you your daughter back.” She was always offering to give me my daughter back. That was my hope.*

Sandra indicated that she has several aspirations, including becoming a social worker. She wants to demonstrate that a social worker can help communities. She has a negative concept of the Department of Family Services, and would like to see this agency helping families more instead of penalizing them. She would like the Department to restore family bonds and encourage harmonious family relationships.

*I have so many things, but I’m gonna study nursing, but my passion, I’m passionate about becoming a lawyer or a social worker. Because I’ve been there, I would like to be a social worker if only to show that there are social workers who can help the community. Today, I can say that the Department of Family Services is the worst agency.*

*They make promises and more promises, but don’t come through. I know cases. Children who are taken away and later run away, who are then running around in the streets, and what department? Where is it when you ask for help? They’re nowhere to be found, but when parents make mistakes, there’s the Department of Family Services. To do what, to remove children from their parents’ custody. Instead of leaving the children there and providing help before removing them. No, they remove them to supposedly help in a way that is not feasible for parents because they never provide transportation so that mom and dad could have filial visits and these people can relate to one another. They don’t have a bus. A parents’ workshop, but how many do they give out, from a thousand, they give one. What are you fixing in the community? They don’t fix anything.*

*Yes, and so if there’s a dysfunctional home and they intervene and the mom is tough, they leave. You go in and someone is hostile toward you and you see that there’s a problem, the school has told you about it, everyone has told you about it. Why don’t you do your job? You should try and work with these people. No, they only work when a child is killed or something else happens. I don’t trust that agency. I’m still waiting for my mother’s social worker to give me some workshops because you know... I asked her, I told her “if you’re gonna give them to mom, give them to me as well.” Well, because that helps in court, they’re parents’ workshops, and I can learn more. I can acquire more knowledge and become a better person. Can you believe it’s been a year; where are those workshops? I haven’t been to a single one. She offered them to my mom a year ago. And I told her “then give them to me too because that benefits me and I want to get my daughter back.” I have goals and these workshops will benefit me. You know that ever since a year ago, well my sister had a situation and she was given probation under the custody of the Department of Family Services. How many times have they brought her to my mom, once, how many times have we been taken to see her,*

*twice. I've seen her three times in a year. They never gave the workshops. There's never a bus, but to remove a child from their home, then they have a bus, to see if someone's slipping, of course they do.*

*I say that, sometimes, they should educate parents. Not the dysfunctional kids, no, dysfunctional parents. Find dysfunctional parents and teach them. With what? With dynamic stuff. I'd like it if there was a way of forming a group, a program and call it... Something attractive that starts with some initials, and take those parents there.*

*A parenting school. To take them on field trips, to teach those parents. To try to rescue those very deteriorated relationships between parents. To try to rescue those relationships. To teach those persons that they can live a healthier life in which they can understand each other.*

## **José**

José is sixteen years old and is from the eastern region of Puerto Rico. He has two half-sisters from his father's side and a full brother. He attended a public school until the ninth grade. He described his experience as good, but mentioned that he was bullied in school and had to learn to survive being the target of his schoolmates' jokes.

*The thing is, you know how it is, there are students who make fun of you, but I always persevered, I didn't get into it with anyone. If someone said something, I wouldn't say anything back because, really, they're ignorant. People who envy you because of how you are.*

In seventh grade, he had very bad grades and almost failed. When he got to the eighth grade, he applied himself to get good grades and did so. However, he was so involved with his studies that he did not make time to be with his family or do other things. In the ninth grade, his academic performance was passable. He always wanted to be on the honor roll, but he never succeeded.

*These are the kind of schools that want to force you to memorize twenty-five questions for you to answer them later, you know. Later, in the ninth grade, I did okay, I was never on it, you know, but I always wanted to have my... I always wanted to be on the honor roll. But there were certain things, certain difficulties in my way, which were true, my lack of intelligence. Sometimes I felt offended, but I never lost faith, and then what happens, I never had plans of coming to this educational center.*

When he finished the ninth grade, he wanted to go to a vocational school. He did everything required to apply, but he was not admitted. This affected him because his cousins were going to attend that school, and he

wanted to attend as well. His father knows the founder of an alternative education center, and he found out about the program from her. They did not know what school he was going to attend. They went to the center for an orientation and decided to enroll him. He is going to pursue a bachelor's degree. He wanted to finish high school quickly, and this center allows him to finish in a year and a half.

José feels happy at the educational center. He said that he does not regret choosing the center. He is highly appreciative of how the teachers treat the students. José also expressed that students and teachers have close relationships, like friendships. He described the environment as safe and pleasant. The schoolmates are relatively easygoing.

*Believe me, I don't regret being here, teachers are like friends to you. It's not what you see at regular public schools where teachers are just teachers. Teachers are your friends here, they help you, if they see you're a hardworking student, they help you.*

He said that there are many students who have gone through difficult experiences in life, which sometimes make them act out, but that they start to change once they get to the center.

*The thing is that many of them have gone through hard experiences in life. Maybe with their parents or their families, maybe because of their self-esteem, they have gone through stuff, and maybe they show that by acting out.*

*Well, I'll be honest with you, the guys here have drinking and smoking problems. They get to high school and think they're all grown up.*

José loves cooking and wants to be a master chef. He showed us the professional portfolio that his twelfth-grade teacher assigned him. It contains a list of places where he can study that career, cover letters, his résumé, employment demand documents, etc. He has been able to get good grades at the center, and he made the honor roll. It has been a very gratifying experience for him and his parents.

## **Laura**

Laura is sixteen years old and lives in the eastern region of Puerto Rico with her mother, stepfather, and two siblings. She has two siblings from her mother's side and seven from his father's side. Her mother is a nurse's assistant, but is currently unemployed. Her father works in the Department of Sports and Recreation. It has been two years since she last heard from her father. Ever since her parents separated, her father has not tried to maintain a relationship with her. She went to visit him, but he was not home.

*Well, my momma left him, and he doesn't come to see us. I would go visit him from time to time, but he was never home.*

Laura is currently attending an educational center. She wants to study a short career and own her own business in the future. She would like to study cosmetology.

### **María**

María is fifteen years old and lives in the eastern region of Puerto Rico. She attended a public junior high school. She has two younger sisters and lives with both of her parents, who work at a nursing home owned by María's grandmother. She had troubles in school before. One time she was defending her sisters and, another time, she was defending her friends. That last time there was a riot.

*I caused a riot, but that wasn't my intention. I just wanted to go in and separate them, but the girl hit me and so I had to hit back. I wasn't gonna just stand there.*

*So that day we got into a fight and all that. Then they took us to the police station, asked us questions, and three days later they called from the station and the case was dropped.*

María said that she only intervened to break up the fight. She then got hit and she hit back in response. She decided to go to the educational center because she was familiar with its summer camps and tutoring. She likes the environment at the center because it is a safe environment and she feels at home. She likes to spend time with her teachers because they always answer her questions.

*That it's calm, that it's not like other schools where there's always a mess.*

### **Raúl**

Raúl is a nineteen-year-old young man who lives with his mother in the southern region of Puerto Rico. His mother is a housewife and his father does odd jobs. He has four older siblings; two brothers and two sisters. Raúl dropped out of school in tenth grade due to problems, such as having failed at school twice. He did not attend classes. His mother was even called in to school. His mom went to his school and talked to him, but he continued his behavior. When he dropped out of school, his mother was given some documents about an alternative education center. He is currently finishing high school at one of these centers.

In tenth grade, Raúl already worked at a spot selling drugs. At school, he only sold weed, but at the projects where he lived he sold Percocet, Xanax bars, weed, rocks, and blow. At school, his clientele ranged from two to six people, depending on the day of the week. He made twenty to twenty-five dollars per day. Bags of weed went for five dollars. Raúl bought his first car with the money he made in drug trafficking. The boss co-signed Raúl's car loan.

*On Fridays, I could have five to six clients, on Thursdays, three to two, like that...*

In junior high school, there was a student who worked as his security. It was a kid armed with a Glock 40. The boss gave him that gun for protection purposes. It might cost \$1,500 to \$1,600 on the street. Raúl was not armed; he depended on this person for protection. The student who protected Raúl had failed the ninth grade three times. Later, when he was in high school, Raúl was armed with a .38. He earned more money in high school; his clientele ranged from fifty to one hundred people from both inside and outside the school. He could make up to \$500 per week. At the beginning, he was the only one selling in the school. Later on, he divided the work up with another student. Each person kept the profits from their shifts.

*I started there alone, then someone from the projects started going there, and we started taking shifts. Because when I couldn't go, there were middlemen who were intermediaries, who were also friends from the projects and also had controlled it there.*

Raúl's work in the projects was more complicated than what he did at school. He was a drug dealer. He was recruited because he was always around the life, yet did not use drugs. Raúl's bosses were adults who lived in the same public housing project. They could earn anywhere from \$10,000 to \$40,000 monthly. If a dealer sells \$150, the boss receives a profit of \$100. According to Raúl's testimony, there are many minors working here.

*It was more complicated, that's right, because there you have to move around more, you need to get a good spot, have lookouts.*

*In a week, thousands, ten, even more, thirty or forty, around there.*

*You can sell seven bags, from those seven bags, which are 150 bucks, 100 go to the boss. If you sell more than seventeen bags, how much goes to your pocket? That's a bundle of money.*

*Yes man, nowadays, young people are choosing that path, there's no going back.*

Raúl said that his mother never knew he sold drugs. He said that until this day she doesn't know.

*No, she never knew anything, that's like, you know how people say, a sacred topic for one's momma. So I always hid it, I always had an excuse...*

In drug trafficking, you start out working as a dealer. After that, they give you guns. You can then work at the "table"; this is where you work packing the drugs. This position is what's commonly known as the kitchen. The kitchen is usually a rented house where the drugs are cut and packed. The next level up after the boss is the person who brings the drugs to Puerto Rico. In this business there are clients from diverse social classes; doctors, lawyers, taxi drivers.

There are two shifts: one from 6:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. and another one from 12:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Drug traffickers buy off police officers. A police officer can be paid up to \$5,000 for turning a blind eye during their rounds.

After he dropped out of school, Raúl spent six months in the U.S. with his brother thinking about his life. After six months, his mother called to tell him that he had gotten an interview at an alternative education center. He traveled back to Puerto Rico and enrolled at the center. When he returned, he got involved in drug trafficking again, lured by the money he made in that world. He could buy whatever he wanted without depending on anyone. When he came back to Puerto Rico, he spent some time working at a “drug kitchen.”

*Honestly, yes, because they're always talking about guns this and guns that, but that's bullshit, easy come, easy go... I was totally into it because of the dough.*

*Once you are in it from the heart, it's very hard to get out because it's not easy... money, when you have a lot of it, that's what calls you: money, money, money, but in the long run, that's what you'll see less of... those girls that give up everything for money, money is nothing, it comes and goes.*

At the time of the interview, Raúl was not active in drug trafficking. He was working as a barber and studying at the alternative education center. Raúl left the world of drug trafficking when he was eighteen years old. He talked to the people from the drug spot and told them that he was getting out. Even though he had some minor confrontations, he was able to detach himself from drug trafficking.

*I went there, I showed my face, and told them that I was out, and well, things happened and all, but I bailed.*

## **Sonia**

Sonia is a thirty-year-old woman who was raised by her godmother because her mother died when she was little. She said that her family “*is great. They didn't have any vices, none, they were professionals.*” She has a ninth grade education after dropping out of school in seventh grade and taking an equivalency test. Sonia is from the western region of Puerto Rico, but she lived for some years in Wisconsin. She has three sons, all by different fathers. During junior high school, she was a gang member. Afterwards, she started using and selling drugs. The crew was all teenagers and children, but it was controlled by adults who ran the drug spots. She recounted that besides selling drugs and mugging people, they also:

*Smashed cars blew them up, we beat people who were walking down the street, we beat each other up... Stole from school, from the teachers' purses, the pizza parlors across the street. We also did carjackings. The biggest job was a game store, that was the biggest one.”*

However, they did not keep anything; all earnings were brought to the boss. After four years, she stepped away from gang life, but started using drugs. Up to that point, she had only sold them.

*I spent one or two years selling them and then I started using.*

At that same time, she got involved in a relationship with the drug spot's boss when she was seventeen years old. He was a jealous, possessive, and violent person.

*And at the hotel, that's where he turned violent, I didn't know him that well yet. He tore my clothes off; you could say that he raped me, but I still kept dating him. He was a scary guy and...*

Again, although she sold the drugs, she did not keep the money (she could make between \$2,500 and \$3,000 in a day). He provided drugs for her personal use. The most popular drugs she sold to her clients were coke, heroin, and marijuana. Her clients included white-collar, such as doctors and even pastors. During her years in drug trafficking, she witnessed highly violent and traumatic events like young people being set on fire or stabbed. She also stated that, besides bringing in the merchandise and weapons, Mexican suppliers:

*Children, they brought in children... to make them sell drugs after they fought for their documents.*

They were from Mexico and the Dominican Republic. She added that in the case of women, they hooked them on drugs and prostituted them later. As per Sonia's testimony, hooking young people on drugs to control them is a rather common practice.

At twenty-one years old, she moved to Wisconsin where she distanced herself from that environment and checked into a rehabilitation center. She worked at a nursing home assisting the elderly. She came back to Puerto Rico to visit her older child and to introduce her other children to the family. When she returned, the boss—who, although wanted by the police, has never been arrested—and her friends from that environment tried to contact her. That's why she says she sees herself living with her children far away from Puerto Rico.

## **Lydia**

Lydia (not her real name) is a young woman from the center of the Island. As she described it, she dropped out of school in ninth grade because of problems with her classmates. She lived with her mother and her two younger siblings, since her father "washed his hands" of them when she was very young. Her mother was an alcoholic.

She remembers that a twenty-five-year-old cousin "almost raped" her when she was eight years old.

*My mother used to change my clothes in front of him and he would watch me. He threatened to harm my father on two occasions if I didn't let him touch me, so I let him.*

She considered herself an alcoholic when she was sixteen years old because “*I drank a lot of alcohol.*” Even so, she entered the Job Corps program and was there for five months. But after learning some secretarial skills, she dropped out, saying, “*That was a horrible place; a lot of things happened.*” At sixteen, she moved in with a man after two weeks of meeting him. But he used drugs and alcohol, and demanded that she do the same.

*He abused, threatened, and hit me. I was very afraid of him, and stayed even after having two children with him. I remained in the drug world, using crack, marijuana, and cocaine. After some time, I decided to leave him, and I was doing well—taking care of my children—until I met a friend who introduced me to the world of prostitution.*

She moved to the north of the island to work as a prostitute along with her friend, who became her pimp. “*She paid me in money and drugs.*” While her mother took care of her kids, Lydia continued immersed in the world of prostitution and drugs, namely crack and marijuana.

*I was abused by different men until I decided to check myself into a battered women’s rehab facility. She met the father of her third child with whom she had a good relationship, according to her, but still resorted to prostitution and drugs. Ultimately, this relapse made her decide to join a faith-based group home because “I want to rehabilitate myself, so I can be with my family.”*

### **Maite**

*They were newcomers, it was calm before, there were not as many killings, then came the people from the projects and ruined it.*

That is how Maite explains what has been happening in her neighborhood during recent years, where the crime rate is rising at an alarming rate. When she was describing the region, she expressed that it is “*hotter than the sun*”, and that the young people she knew have gone bad because of drugs, including her cousin who “*says that she gets ‘nervios’, that she gets anxious and needs to use.*”

Just like the young people from the projects, Maite’s cousin does not belong to the neighborhood. Her mother sent her to her father in Puerto Rico because she had been caught selling marijuana in the United States. However, this change has not helped her rehabilitation because she is currently living in a place with a high incidence of drug trafficking, as characterized in the eastern region of Puerto Rico.

### **Marino**

Marino is a fifteen-year-old teenager who is currently in tenth grade at an alternative school because he wants to finish school quickly to “*get a job, move ahead, and have my own stuff.*” He said that he does not lack anything at home, but acknowledged that “*the economy is so bad off and we are three siblings at home.*”

This gives him a sense of urgency to get the things he wants. Regarding his relationship with his parents, he stated that he gets along well with both his stepfather and his mother, but that he did not trust them enough to *“tell them about his things.”* He said that he is doing well in school, and that he does not know if drugs are being sold at school. He expressed, however, that he knew of a girl who *“went away and came back with her eyes all red”* because she had been invited to smoke. Marino indicated that his neighborhood is always calm because many close families live there.

### **Mauricio**

Mauricio is a seventeen-year-old who works on Friday and Saturday at his family’s eatery, which is owned by his grandfather, and where: *“I help nights selling beer and he pays me.”* He uses the money to buy sports shoes and clothes. Although he works with his grandfather, Mauricio indicated that his dream is to have a car radio installation business. His father is currently serving a six-year sentence at a federal prison for selling drugs. He will be released soon, and Mauricio is very much looking forward to this. When addressing how he feels about drug trafficking in his town, he said that: *“they should clean it out, and take them all.”* Mauricio said that he has never tried drugs because no one dares offer him any. He said it is: *“because everyone knows my grandmother and my momma”* and *“I’m asthmatic.”* In his opinion, this excludes him from possible consumption, although he said that: *“This town is hot”* in reference to drug spots.

### **Minerva**

The eastern region of the Island is one of the most affected by drug trafficking. Minerva, a sixteen-year-old young woman, indicated that it even occurs both inside and outside of school grounds. She asked her mother not to enroll her in the local high school, opting instead for an alternative education because *“there are people there who they’re looking to kill because of drugs.”* Although the school administration has developed plans to guarantee students’ safety inside the school, Minerva believes that these actions are insufficient: *“They have the gates closed, but every so often they jump the gate and go out through the back of the court and jump the fence.”* This makes it impossible to control who enters and leaves school grounds with the intent to sell drugs or resolve some territorial dispute over the control of drug spots. This problem is not limited to school grounds; rather it follows the young people to the areas surrounding their neighborhoods. Minerva stated that, although there are currently no drug spots, there was one before, but it was dismantled by the police. Occasionally, however, *“cars with tinted windows have been seen in the neighborhood to do their misdeeds.”* Despite this insecure environment, Minerva claims to enjoy driving four-track vehicles with her cousins *“when there’s gas”* and plans to study nursing and cosmetology in the future.

## Marlene

Marlene, a seventeen-year-old girl, lives in the eastern region of Puerto Rico where she was born. She lives with her mother and two brothers. She said that her mother works as a housewife, and that her community is peaceful. *“Everyone in the community is family.”*

Regarding academics, Marlene is enrolled in the twelfth grade at an alternative education school. She dropped out of mainstream school in tenth grade because she found school boring and also had health problems, which she did not specify.

*It was because the teachers weren't very good, and I didn't like school. What I did was change schools.*

Regarding work, she indicated that she has never worked and that her mother has not sent her out to work anywhere. However, regarding drug addiction, Marlene said that where she lives there are several young people who use drugs, but she has never had any contact with them.

Finally, Marlene pointed out that she wants to be a pharmacist and also likes mechanics. She feels satisfied with the experience she has had studying at an alternative center.

*The teachers are more, they help you more and they're more of them and they're better.*

## Mercedes

Mercedes is a seventeen-year-old youth who lives in the eastern region of Puerto Rico. She lives with her mother, stepfather, and two sisters, who are nineteen and twenty years old. Both of her sisters study. Her father died when she was four years old and, since then, she has a step-father. She indicated that she has a good relationship with her stepfather. He treats her as if she were his daughter.

*He scolds me when he needs to scold me, because I ask for it. But it's going good for me.*

Regarding education, Mercedes has been studying at an alternative education school since eleventh grade. She had been studying at a mainstream school, but she left because it let out early and gave her a lot of free time.

*Because “la Ana” [the school] didn't have teachers, I would get out at ten in the morning, and I was wasting my time. Given this situation, she feels more comfortable in the alternative school. I love how the teachers give class. They're easier to understand, there's not a lot of confusion or anything.*

Mercedes pointed out that she wanted to study criminology because they give talks on criminology at her school and take them on different field trips. She also mentioned that there are many young people where she lives. But that it is a “mess” because they are headed down the wrong path. She indicated that they are involved with drugs. These young people dedicate themselves to “*selling, smoking marijuana, and different things.*” Mercedes said that they have invited her to use drugs, but she always says no.

*Whenever they say it, I tell them no. I'm not gonna hammer in that nail. I'm a healthy girl and I'll continue my healthy life. I always say no.”*

### **Michelle**

Michelle is an eighteen-year-old young woman who lives in the eastern region of Puerto Rico. She lives with her mother, father, and little brother. Her older brother does not live with them anymore because he got married. Both parents work. Her mother works in a factory and her father is a vendor.

Regarding education, Michelle finished tenth grade at a vocational school. She found it more difficult because, according to her, she used to be in special education.

*The vocational school is too good. I love it but it's, like, a little bit hard. I was from special education.*

She wanted to be part of the group, but she did not fit in at this school.

*Then I felt that, like, they had to give me exams separately. Everything was separate, and I wanted to be part of the group.*

For this reason, she decided to go to an alternative education school, where she is enrolled in eleventh grade. “*They give me occupational and speech therapy.*” She mentioned that she wanted to study criminology research.

Moreover, regarding the topic of drug addiction, Michelle stated that where she lives there is no drug addiction, but on a nearby street there is: “*they call it the street of fire.*” Finally, she indicated that she has never had any problems of a sexual nature, nor has she been approached to sell drugs.

### **Glenda**

Glenda has two children, one is thirteen years old and the other is ten. Both have a 4.0 GPA and are bilingual. She is currently married, but separated. She finished her bachelor's degree in Criminology with a good grade point average. During that process, she studied tailoring and took other classes, but she said that she was unable to find a job. She lived in the United States for eighteen years, where she was the manager of a military base. Due to certain circumstances, she was unable to work when she returned to Puerto Rico.

Regarding her family, she stated that she lived with her mother and father during her childhood. Her father was a drug user, and her mother was the victim of domestic abuse.

*My father was a heroin user and beat my mother a lot.*

As a result, her mother got divorced and continued to raise them on her own. She had several partners. She worked in a factory that manufactured things for the army. She abandoned her children when Glenda was fourteen years old.

*Then she hooked up with this man, she also got pregnant, and he left her. She tried to lose the baby, she can't, and she has it. When I'm fourteen years old, she finds another person, and she takes off with that person because she doesn't want us to have any other father. And she decides to take off with that person, but that she's going to support us. And I tell her, mami, but I'm only fourteen years old, and she's like, no, you already know how to keep the house. Bye.*

Regarding her father, she mentioned that he was killed in the southern region of Puerto Rico. She has four brothers, three from her father and mother, and one from her mother. She said that the brother who followed her in age was killed.

Because of her mother's abandonment, she worked in a brothel with a woman in the western area of Puerto Rico from when she was sixteen to eighteen years old. But, she emphasized that, during that time, she was not prostituting herself.

*I worked in brothels but not as a prostitute. So for me to be able to support myself and stuff, I went with a lady who offered me a job at her place of work that, by coincidence, was a brothel. I was the cashier, I was not a prostitute, but I was in the brothel environment. She paid me and took care of me. I was like the bait because I was the youngest and, so I was the bait for these old perverts who came looking for girls.*

She mentioned that she was raped when she was fourteen years old, and that she was in intensive care for forty-two days.

*I was raped. I lived in a housing project and the neighbor kids across the way, who supposedly belonged to the woman who watched us, were the ones who tried to rape me. They actually raped me the following month because I started to say no, no, no, don't leave me with that person, and yes. He was a sixteen-year-old teenager, the son of the person who took care of us. So, we would walk a pretty long stretch sometimes with my brothers to look for something to eat because we didn't have anybody.*

She also stated that the time she spent in intensive care was due to her leaving a pub one day and being followed by a man who was accompanied by four other men. He hit her on the back of her neck, and she fell unconscious. As a result, she had many hematomas, and her arms were scraped.

Regarding her studies, she began and finished the university with a good average. She studied at the Pontifical Catholic University of Mayagüez. She mentioned that what motivated her to study was the idea of becoming someone in life.

*I wanted to be someone. I said I'm not being left behind because I have to lift my brothers up. I wanted to rescue them, keep them afloat. When I have children, I won't do what my mother did to me. Also, I already had that sense with my brothers. An instinct I had, a revelation told me that I had to become someone to be able to help them.*

But during this process, her brothers started to use narcotics. She justified it by saying that they were derailed because she abandoned them to a certain extent.

*My brother started to use narcotics, but I still wasn't into any narcotics. Because I also abandoned them in a certain way, and they got derailed.*

Here is when her stepfather noticed strange behavior from her brothers, but she took the blame to protect them. She was kicked out of the house and, because of this, returned to the brothel.

*They kicked me out of the house. Then, I had to return to the brothel because my mother rejected me. Then, my stepfather didn't want to have anything to do with me. That I was immoral, that I was a lesbian. What didn't he say to me?*

This is when she began to prostitute herself because she had to pay the madam of the locale. She was there for two years, until she found a job at a factory assembling tape measures. At night, she worked at a pub, and she attended university. She said that at this time she began using drugs, such as marijuana and cocaine.

*That's when I started the drugs. I didn't have time to sleep. They showed me some black beauties, these free black pills so you don't fall asleep. They're not addictive; that doesn't do anything to you. Then, I started with marijuana. That makes you hungry, and whatever. And, third, cocaine, which was chic at that time.*

Later, the owner of a hotel sold her as an escort. She was prostituting herself and using drugs at the same time.

*One to eat, one to sleep, one to wake up. It was three things because I didn't have much time. She said that she resorted to this because she saw it as a way to forget her problems. I looked*

*for it because it was a something in my life that was giving me pleasure. The dirtier I felt... with one thing, I erased the other to not think, and everything was running.*

She observed that she had various personalities: one to study, accompanied by a particular form of dress; and another for the pub where she worked. Regarding the topic of prostitution and her experience with it, she declared that there are many women in the western region who are prostitutes. There are Puerto Rican, Colombian, Mexican, Nuyorican, and transsexual women, including minors. She said that government officials and police officers procured their services. The services cost forty dollars for five to ten minutes. The police arrest these women and threaten them until the women satisfy their needs. She commented that they were seen as toys for their convenience, and it is like an association “*where if the boss lady likes you, she’ll tell you how to dress. She gives you clothes and shows you how to take advantage of men.*”

She said that during the time she spent in the United States, everything was better. She led a clean life. She indicated that she had her first child at twenty-four. Her prior pregnancies had been ectopic because she only had half an ovary. Later, at thirty-six, she became pregnant again. She mentioned that it was a difficult pregnancy and that she lost her job, but her husband continued to work. When her son was three months old, her husband’s other son was killed, and they returned to Puerto Rico. Her husband went through an extremely difficult time due to the loss of his son. When she started having problems with her husband, she took out an order of protection against him. After two years, she took him back after he went to rehab. This caused her to relapse into drug use again. “*I’m a drug user, but nobody could tell. I worked...*”

Finally, she said that she is coming out of all these problems through the center she’s in, but she is scared of leaving and not being able to find work. Her children are in Mayagüez, and she is frightened that the people to whom she owes money for drugs might find her or do something to her children. She wants to completely rehabilitate herself because she does not want to go back. She only thinks about the options she will have when she leaves. She stated that the place where she is in provides them with tools, and they offer diverse recreational activities: volleyball, yoga, dance classes, and theater, among others. She said the place contains approximately twenty-three women from different parts of the island, whose ages range from around eighteen to forty. She stated that her mother visited her two weeks ago, and she had the chance to hug her and kiss her. Her mother told her that she would get ahead. This woman said that, although her mother abandoned her, she is her mother and harbors no resentment.

## **Manuel**

Manuel is a sixteen-year-old teenager who is currently a senior at an alternative school. He lives with his mother, stepfather, and two younger siblings. He was removed from his home by the Department of Family Services at the age of fourteen, after his mother filed a domestic violence complaint against his former stepfather. He explained:

*Because mom made a complaint, and then we were separated until all that mess was solved.*

After being removed from home, Manuel lived in three foster homes or group centers “in Juncos, one here in Humacao, and one in Guayama.” He told us that “at the first one they treated me well, but they had many problems with young people, so I would run away, I used to leave there.” He also ran away from the second home because “well, I got so, so angry that they favored the assistants that I got angry and left, and they brought me here to the beach, they treat me quite well here at the beach.” He wishes to pursue a career in nursing or to become a personal trainer.

### **Miguel**

Miguel is a sixteen-year-old teenager who is currently a senior in high school. After finishing the ninth grade in a mainstream school, he chose to enroll in an alternative education center to finish high school more quickly. He lives with his grandparents to help take care of his grandfather who is recovering from hip surgery. “I’m with my grandfather because I’m taking care of him because of a surgery... he had a prosthesis and he went through surgery. He’s in that process.” His father abandoned them, and he has no communication with him. Miguel told us, “I know where he lives and all, but right now I’ve got no communication with him.”

His plans are to study nursing after he graduates: “When I finish here I will go study at C.E.M., I’m gonna get a bachelor’s degree in Nursing. That’s something I’ve always been interested in.” He discovered this interest while taking care of his grandfather: “With what my grandfather went through and that surgery, well I was in the hospital almost all the time and that. I don’t know, I like it.”

### **Mónica**

Mónica is a sixteen-year-old teenager who is a junior at an alternative education center. She lives with her mother and grandmother in the eastern region of Puerto Rico. Her father abandoned her mother before she was born. She failed the tenth grade because she cut class and had problems with her teachers:

*I went to the first four classes, and then in the afternoon, I didn’t go in again after noon.*

When she was nine years old she met her father for the first time. She indicated that she has no contact with him, even though she knows where he is and his phone number. The young woman stated that she has a lot of hatred for her father because he did not care for her. Her stepfather tried to sexually abuse her when she was fourteen years old:

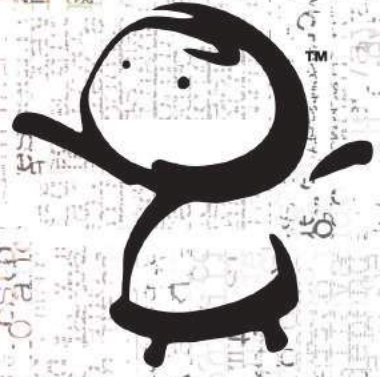
*And well, he opened it and when I realized he was up next to me, I was all like... and I told him that, what was he doing, like that. And he’s all like: “ah, you’ve been around more than I have, and what have you.” And I’m all like: “you are way off,” and he’s like, “ah.” I’m all like: “I respect myself” and he’s all like: “Ah! That hurt me down there.” And that’s when he*

*tried to take my clothes off, a bunch of shit there, and that. I tried running all over the house, but the doors had a key and, eh, he had taken it. I was screaming until he grabbed me and opened the door and I could leave the house.*

And, although her stepfather did not achieve his goal, the memory of the event has marked her life to the point of pushing her to use illegally acquired drugs to forget what happened. She told us that she used several kinds that she found at school:

*Um, “zannies” (sedatives) and “percocet” (Percocet) and that, and I was always on a trip to not think. I was always tripping, all the time.*

She has a sixteen-year-old boyfriend, who is a blood cancer patient. She told us that “*he has cancer of the blood and so... but, he studies, and he’s a mechanic of planes over there in the Army. The Army is paying him.*” She expressed her desire to study nursing and serve in the United States Armed Forces.

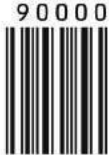


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ISBN 978-0-9914635-3-4

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