

A photograph of a woman in a prison cell. She is looking out through the metal bars of a window. Her right arm is extended, and her hand is open, reaching out towards the right side of the frame. She is wearing a silver watch on her left wrist and a ring on her left ring finger. The cell has a grey metal door with a yellow padlock. The wall behind her is made of grey concrete blocks. The text is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

Current drug laws in Latin America reinforce a cycle of poverty. A lack of education and economic opportunity often pave the way to drug dependency, low-level involvement in the drug trade, sexual exploitation, and recidivism.

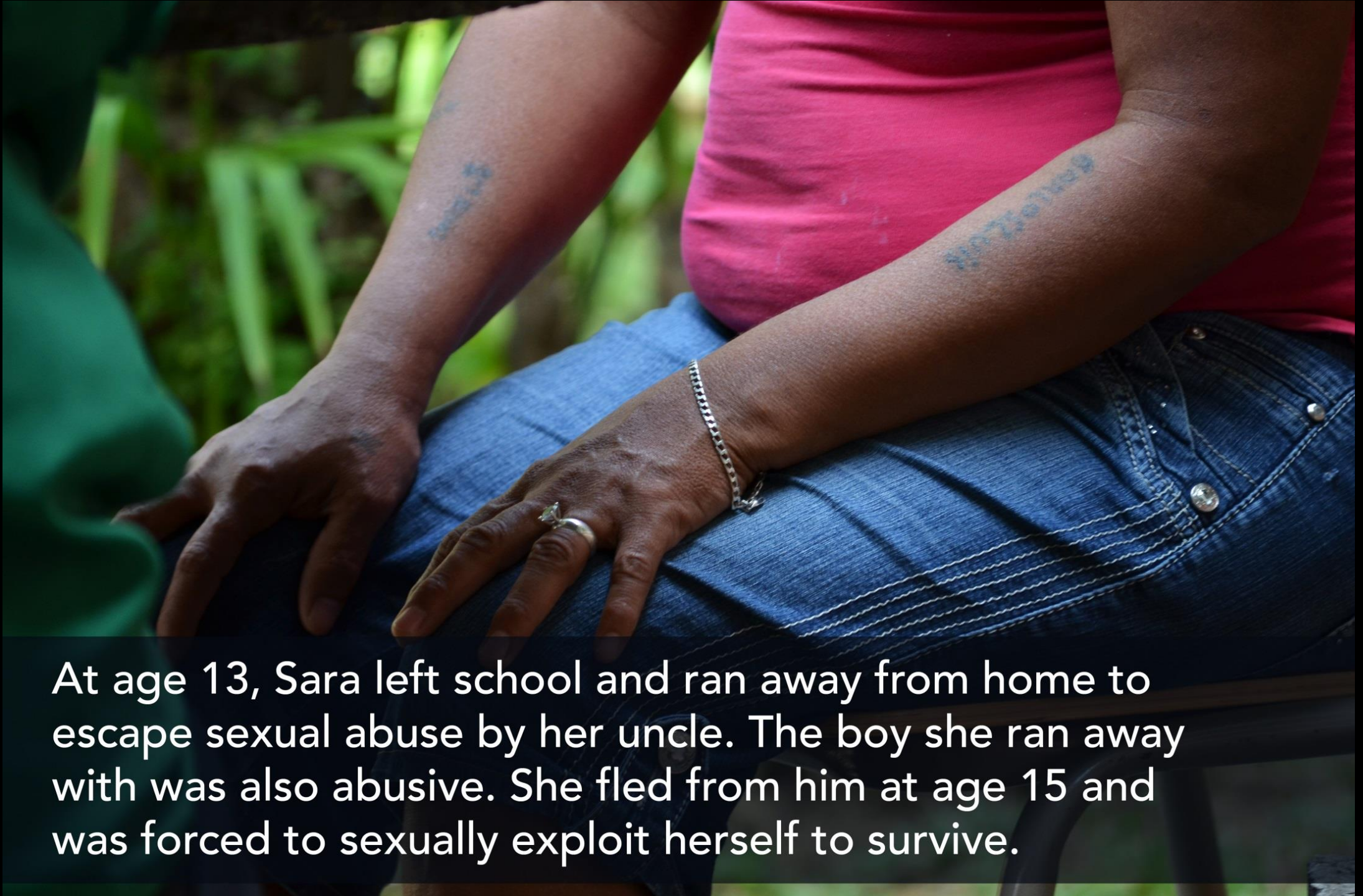




## FAILED BY THE SYSTEM

Current sentence: 5 years, 4 months for selling crack. 1 year, 8 months for attempting to bribe a police officer with US\$3.75.





At age 13, Sara left school and ran away from home to escape sexual abuse by her uncle. The boy she ran away with was also abusive. She fled from him at age 15 and was forced to sexually exploit herself to survive.

Sara has spent most of her life living on the streets.  
She began using drugs and became involved in  
criminal activity to support her habit.

Life on the streets was dangerous.

One day, she was attacked by a violent  
man she had refused to sell drugs to and  
beaten with a board full of rusty nails.



"I don't know how long I was lying on the ground, but they say that when the ambulance arrived, the nurse told the boy who had helped get me onto the stretcher that a few minutes more and I would have been dead."



Eventually, Sara was sent to jail. When released, she fell back into using and selling drugs.

She is now 50 years old serving a plea-bargained sentence for drug trafficking, plus an additional one year and eight months for attempting to bribe the arresting officer with the equivalent of US\$3.75.

She still hopes for a better future.



“When I leave here, I’m going to stay with my little sister and get a job somewhere, but I won’t go back to working illegally, and much less to consuming [drugs], because my sister really needs me.”



Giselle Amador is a medical doctor and a Senior Advisor to the Costa Rican Association for Research and Intervention in Drugs (ACEID). She met with Sara during a recent visit to Buen Pastor and says that her case is not uncommon. It serves as an example of the cycle many women get caught up in.





“Since childhood, Sara has suffered a lifetime of violence and violations of her basic rights. Physical and sexual abuse, repeated pregnancies, and finally confinement in prison for selling small amounts of crack, all complete the picture of vulnerability.”

This photo series was produced by the  
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)  
with support from the Open Society Foundations.



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**Special Thanks to**  
Buen Pastor Prison, San José, Costa Rica