



# Mapping the Demand

Sex Buyers in the State of Minnesota

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**FULL REPORT**

AUGUST 2017

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ROBERT J. JONES  
Urban Research and  
Outreach-Engagement Center

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
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**WOMEN'S  
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MINNESOTA**

# Mapping the Demand: Sex Buyers in the State of Minnesota

August 2, 2017

By

Lauren Martin, PhD\*

Christina Melander, MSW\*

Harshada Karnik, MPP, PhD Candidate\*\*

Corelle Nakamura, MPH\*\*\*

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\* The University of Minnesota, Robert J. Jones Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC), 2001 Plymouth Avenue North, Minneapolis, MN 55411

\*\*University of Minnesota, Department of Applied Economics

\*\*\*During the study, University of Minnesota, School of Public Health

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## Report Abstract

This report seeks to deepen our understanding of Minnesotans who have paid for sex in the Minnesota marketplace for commercial sex. We sought to understand *who* they are, *where* they live and purchase sex, *how* they approach the marketplace for sex, and *what* they seek to purchase.

Sex buying is hidden, illegal, highly stigmatized, and often dangerous. There is no easily accessible way to contact sex buyers, especially considering that there are many distinct market segments. This makes it a very difficult topic to research. Therefore, our research team used a mixed-methods and community-based approach to surface stakeholder knowledge across jurisdictions, professions, geography, and experience. This statewide scan and combination of multiple types of already-existing data is a critical first step in developing an empirical knowledge-base about sex buyers in Minnesota. The study collected the following data: interviews with 157 statewide stakeholders, all cases of sex trafficking and prostitution referred to the Minnesota Court Information System (MNCIS) from 2010 to 2015, media coverage of prostitution and sex trafficking from 1995 to 2014, a review of the online sex advertising environment, and consultation with numerous stakeholders.

We uncovered a great deal of new knowledge and confirmed some of what we already knew. This report presents five major findings:

1. **Sex buyers in Minnesota are predominantly white men.** Sex buyers come from all communities across the state of Minnesota (urban, suburban, and rural), range in age from late teens to elderly, and are from all income levels and racial/ethnic communities. In short, they seem to be demographically similar to the communities in which they live.
2. **We identified three primary modes through which sex buyers connect with the marketplace:** (a) use of the internet; (b) direct in-person solicitation; and (c) word-of-mouth networks.
3. **Our data suggests that a significant proportion of sex buyers may not know or care whether the person they purchase sex from is a trafficked individual or not.** When sex buyers perceive that they are having direct interaction with the person from whom they are purchasing sex, the marketplace creates a veil that may obscure trafficking. However, some sex buyers know about and participate in sex trafficking.
4. **What sex buyers purchase is a sexual experience that is shaped by power and control over how the transaction will occur.** The marketplace is structured to accommodate a wide range of preferences and desires; some, but by no means all, sex buyers are violent and seek highly harmful activities and experiences. At root, through commodification of the sexual experience, the market amplifies sexism, racism, and ageism.
5. **Minnesota's marketplace has differentiated local markets tied together by the online marketplace.** Together, they provide conduits for the movement of sex buyers, as well as sex trafficking operations and other sex providers. Long- and short-distance movement and travel facilitates anonymity within the marketplace.

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This report benefited significantly from a team of early reviewers who helped us clarify and refine our findings as well as develop implications for practice. We thank you for your insight and willingness to read a long and sometimes unwieldy early draft. Reviewers provided high-level content feedback, not editing. The lead author takes responsibility for all content, including any errors, typos, or lack of clarity in the final report. The reviewers included Suzanne Koeplinger (Expert on Sex Trafficking), Terry Williams (The Women's Foundation of Minnesota), Beth Holger-Ambrose (Executive Director, the Link), Erica Schumacher (Assistant Ramsey County Attorney), Rev. Dr. Alika Galloway (Kwanzaa Community Church and The Northside Women's Space), Special Agent Tonya Price (Homeland Security Investigations), Sergeant Grant A. Snyder (Human Trafficking Team, Minneapolis Police Department), and Investigator Kim Wick (Duluth Police Department). Thank you!

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and they are listed alphabetically according to how they wanted to be identified; some included their professional titles while others did not.

Micheline Agerter	Charlotte Karsh	Steven Sawyer
Elisabeth Alquist	Craig Katzenberger	Amanda Schwarzkopf
Jordan Anderson	Lesley Kenyon	Crystal J. Sedevie
John Bandemer	Bryan Klassen	Shunu Shrestha
Kamara Bauman	Chad Kleffman	Sgt. Grant Alan Snyder
Chief Dave Bentrud	Libbi Koeppe	Karin Sonneman
Dustin Beseke	Kevin Koliner	Steve Soyka
Dawn Bjoraker	Myla Korbel	Paige L. Starkey
Laci Brune	Rebecca Kotz	Erin Stephens
Lisa Brunner	Det. Junell Krabbenhoft	Laura Sutherland
Daniela P. Chávez	Shawn Krebsbach	Amy Swensen
John Choi	Karen A. Kugler	Jon Swenson
Sonia Christensen	Patti Larsen	CeCe Terlouw
Chris Cichosz	Tabatha Larson	Cheryl Tigie
Annie P. Claesson-Huseby	Ann Leuthard	Jane Vader
Jeffrey C. Clapper	Nathan Lundbohm	Amy Vokal
Kristan Clow	Chief Mike Mastin	Shan C. Wang
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Christina Davenport	Daniel A. McIntosh	
Nicole DeCoteau-Vause	Erik McKloskey	
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James Dunn	Ryan Nelson	
Samuel Estes	Arianna Nason	
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Juli Fast	Nigel Perrote	
Sgt. John Fishbaugher	CeMarr Peterson	
Sarah Florman	Dave Pinto	
Terry Forliti	Sadie Porter Arch	
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Rachel Gronbach	Ann Quinn	
Cate Grueneich	Erin Rocheleau	
Erin A. Gustafson	Lonnie Roloff	
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Stephanie Holt	Julie Rud	
Heather Jensen	Donald F. Ryan	
Sipra Jha	June Sackette	
Christopher Johnson	Christina Sambor	
Sgt. Sean Johnson	Elijah Sanders	
Patty Kalibabky	Jennifer Saunders	

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## Introduction

This report seeks to deepen our understanding of people who purchase sex and sexual experiences in Minnesota, referred to as “sex buyers.” The goal is to help close a significant gap in research, practice and policy related to sex buyers. Here we present findings about *who* sex buyers are, *where* they live and purchase sex in Minnesota, *how* they enter the marketplace, and *what* they seek in the marketplace. We close the report with a final section that brings the findings together and explores implications for practice.

**The marketplace for commercial sex is structured by two primary forces: development of a “supply” of people to provide sexual experiences and the “demand” or willingness to pay for sexual experiences.**<sup>1</sup> To be clear, in this marketplace the “supply” is people. It includes children and adult women, men, and transgender people, some of whom are in the marketplace unwillingly or due to economic and social pressures of poverty, racism, sexism, homelessness, and more.<sup>2</sup> Many people who make up the “supply” are under the control of a sex trafficker or pimp, while some are not. Research and practice have demonstrated that exploitation and multiple forms of trauma are embedded within experiences in significant portions of the market.<sup>3</sup>

Previous research on sex trafficking of girls under age 18 in Minneapolis explored the complex inner workings of juvenile sex trafficking operations in Minneapolis and how they use violence and manipulation to generate a “supply” of girls that are sold to sex buyers for specific sexual experiences.<sup>4</sup> But this research was not able to answer many questions about sex buyers. Who purchases sex in Minnesota? Where are they from? How do they enter the marketplace for commercial sex? What do they seek in the marketplace? These questions about the demand-side are foundational for understanding how the marketplace for commercial sex is structured in Minnesota.

**This study sought to better understand how the marketplace for sex works from the perspective of sex buyers.** This kind of market-level and structural information is critical for statewide efforts to prevent sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. In-depth qualitative data, in combination with available quantitative data, supports identification of high-value points of intervention and prevention opportunities that can be used by social service, advocacy, and law enforcement to direct statewide activities to the areas of greatest need and harm.

This was not a prevalence study. We did not develop an estimate of the number of people who purchase sex in Minnesota. That would require different methods than the ones we used. However, we identified a study by Monto and Milrod (2014) that presents a credible scientific estimate of the proportion of men who have purchased sex in the United States based on a nationally representative survey. They found that approximately 14% of men indicated that they had purchased sex at least once in their lifetime,

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<sup>1</sup> Shively, Kliorys, Wheeler & Hunt (2012).

<sup>2</sup> Martin & Pierce (2014); Dank et al. (2014).

<sup>3</sup> Martin & Pierce (2014); Williamson & Cluse-Tolar (2002); Fedina, Williamson & Perdue (2016); Bounds, Edinburgh, Fogg & Saewyc (2017).

<sup>4</sup> Martin & Pierce (2014).

with 1% reporting purchasing sex in the past year.<sup>5</sup> If this proportion accurately reflects the patterns of engagement in the sex market for men in Minnesota, then approximately 380,000 men in Minnesota have purchased sex at least once at some point in their lives, with 26,000 purchasing sex in the past year.<sup>6</sup> These are numbers that give a sense of the potential scope and scale of sex buying in Minnesota. At the same time, it also means that a majority of men do not purchase sex.

Conducting research on sex buyers is no easy task. Commercial sex is hidden, illegal, often dangerous, and stigmatized. The market, and particularly sex buyers, are typically hidden from public view. There is no complete (or even close to complete) method to systematically identify sex buyers and all the different market segments in which they participate. Therefore, we gathered data from a combination of sources:

1. **Qualitative and semi-structured interviews with 157 experts** across the state of Minnesota (including law enforcement, prosecutors, advocates, social service providers, and others)
2. **Statewide court data from the Minnesota Court Information System (MNCIS) on all cases (N=332)** in the database from 2010 to 2015, charged under Minnesota prostitution statutes (609.324)
3. **Media coverage of prostitution and sex trafficking, 1995-2014**
4. **Analysis of online advertisements for commercial sex**

Analysis methods involved comparing and contrasting data across these multiple sources to minimize the biases inherent in each source of data. These community-focused methods were chosen to develop a statewide and empirically based framework of the marketplace for commercial sex in Minnesota. However, like all research, this study has limitations, which are described in the methods section.

**This report shows that people who purchase sex come from all communities in Minnesota and all walks of life.** The majority of sex buyers in Minnesota are middle-aged and married white men with jobs. The most common ways that sex buyers enter the marketplace for sex (online and direct in-person solicitation) seem to obscure whether trafficking or economic force compelled the involvement of the person providing sex. This thin veil – motivated by the sex buyer’s desire and the sex provider/victim’s fears<sup>7</sup> – hides trafficking and the violent and brutal sex trafficking operational processes that deliver a person to the sex buyer. We also identified subsets of sex buyers who understand and participate in sex trafficking operations (word-of-mouth sex buyer networks) and subsets of sex buyers who specifically seek out juveniles.

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<sup>5</sup> Monto & Milrod (2014). They used the General Social Survey that is conducted by the National Opinion Research Center to create a nationally representative sample of households. To arrive at an estimate of men who purchase sex, they had to recode and restructure the data. Their process is described on pages 806-808.

<sup>6</sup> We arrived at this estimate based on the most recent US Census Bureau data about the number of men aged 18 and older in Minnesota from 2011 to 2015. Data accessed from [www.umn.policymap.com](http://www.umn.policymap.com).

<sup>7</sup> Shively et al. (2012) came to the same conclusion in their comprehensive report on demand reduction in the US. They write: “The distinction between people selling sex who are versus are not compelled by a third party is usually invisible to buyers – particularly since most buyers are motivated to believe that providers are involved voluntarily. Market incentives and fear of reprisals from pimps and traffickers motivate providers of commercial sex who are trafficked to present themselves as if they participate voluntarily, and most johns cannot (or choose not to) see otherwise” (p. 4).

**Not all sex buyers are the same or seek the same things within the marketplace.** The primary commonality among all sex buyers is that they enter the market with purchasing power.<sup>8</sup> We find that purchasing sex is, in essence, buying a sexual experience, rooted in the power to control that experience. The sex act and the person purchased function as distinct purchasable components that are part of fulfilling the experience. We identified a broad range of commonly sought experiences, including the desire for quick anonymous sex with a stranger, fantasy, fulfillment of fetishes, young and youthful providers, humiliation, violence, and assault.

**Transit and movement are inherent in the statewide and regional marketplaces for sex.** Our data has illuminated a statewide market with regional differentiation. Different regions have variations in their marketplace for sex relative to population size, number of market niches, historical trends, unique aspects of their geography or locale, and more. These differentiated markets foster movement of sex buyers and trafficking operations to foster anonymity, novelty and “newness” of providers and victims, “training” in smaller markets, diversification of income streams, and opportunities to cycle through more lucrative regional markets. In short, sex buyers in Minnesota participate in a robust and diverse marketplace for sex that has many built-in layers of exploitation and trauma.

This study collected a great deal of data. This is the first in a series of reports about the marketplace for commercial sex in Minnesota. **Future reports will discuss the following:**

1. The strengths and weaknesses of the statewide response to sex trafficking in Minnesota, including available secondary data
2. LGBTQ identities and harms in sex trafficking/trading
3. Racialization in patterns of sex buying
4. Deep-dive into regional markets for commercial sex in Minnesota

It is important to note that this report contains difficult and sometimes graphic information about violence and harm committed against people who provide sex and are victims of sex trafficking. Some of the information in this report is disturbing. We want readers to be aware of this before they continue reading. Quotes are provided verbatim and, thus, may include words that some readers might find offensive, difficult, or objectionable.

## Organization of the Report

The remainder of the introduction describes the Minnesota legal and policy framework and terminology used in this report. Language about sex trafficking and commercial sex is difficult. Much of our common and everyday language is stigmatizing and potentially harmful to people involved in the marketplace. In this report, we seek clear language that is structured by both the policy framework and close attention to the lived realities of people involved in commercial sex, particularly on the “supply side.”

Section One of this report provides a high-level overview of the study methods. We describe the types of data collected and how we gathered that information. That section ends with a description of the primary limitations of this study. Good empirical research strives to be clear about strengths and weaknesses. Appendices A and B provide more in-depth discussion of data collection methods.

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<sup>8</sup> Shively et al. (2012).

Sections Two and Three describe findings related to demographics of sex buyers as well as what we know about where they live and purchase sex, exploring questions of *who* and *where*. These sections combine qualitative interviews, law enforcement data, and media coverage of law enforcement sting operations across Minnesota to answer the following questions: Who are sex buyers? Where do they live? Where do they purchase sex?

This is followed in Section Four by a discussion of *how* sex buyers enter the marketplace for sex. Using qualitative data from interviews, we identified three primary modes of market entry: internet-aided solicitation, direct in-person solicitation, and word-of-mouth networks. These are analytic categories we identified to help explain the market. Of course, in practice the real world is messy and does not always fit neatly into categories. This section describes how these modes of entry work, the relationship to sex trafficking, and some combinations of modes of entry.

In Section Five we examine *what*, exactly, our sources reveal about the types of experiences that sex buyers seek to purchase. Section Five is based on qualitative interviews and analysis of the online marketplace. It describes what we learned about the specific sex acts and types of experiences sought. Of course, this is not an exhaustive list. But it does give us a sense of the market contours and types of market segments in Minnesota.

Finally, we conclude the report by describing what our data tells us about the overall Minnesota marketplace for sex and discussing the implications for practice, particularly for prevention and intervention. We explore how the information in this report might impact service provision, law enforcement, and, most importantly, public awareness. We believe our findings suggest that there is much work to do among men in all of our communities.

We provide some technical information in the appendices. This includes a deep dive into our methods, data collection protocols, database construction, and references.

## Language and Terminology

**Language and terminology used to describe commercial sex can be problematic because the marketplace and societal views on the marketplace are complex.** Some terms support a viewpoint that all commercial sex is always harmful and inherently constitutes violence against women. Other terms come from the view that commercial sex can be a legitimate form of work. As a research team, we had two criteria for selection of language to frame our data collection and terminology used in this report. First, we sought to avoid terms that determined a stance on the nature of commercial sex in favor of language that allows us to remain open to what the data tells us about people's experiences. Second, we sought to align with the Minnesota legal and policy framework.



### SEX BUYER

People who obtain sex or sexual activity with money or a trade for something of value (e.g. food, place to stay, goods, drugs).



### PROVIDER/VICTIM

People who provide sex or sexual activity include victims of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, as well as people who are not involved with a trafficker.



### TRAFFICKER

People who profit from connecting sex buyers to provider/victims (including pimps and third-party facilitators).

## There are three main roles in the marketplace for commercial sex:

1. **Sex buyers** are people who purchase sex (also referred to as “johns,” patrons, or tricks).
2. **Provider/victims** of sex or sexual activity include victims of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, as well as people who are in the market independently without a third party.
3. **Traffickers** include pimps, third-party facilitators, and others who make a profit from connecting sex buyers to provider/victims.

We use the term “sex buyer” to describe a person who has purchased sexual activity or provided something of value in exchange for sex or sexual activity. For this research, we only included buyers of physical interactions of sex or sexual activity. Not included in this definition are viewers of pornography and webcams, users of phone sex or chat lines, and customers for exotic dancing.

A great deal of research and practice-based experience focuses on the characteristics and vulnerabilities of provider/victims in the marketplace for sex.<sup>9</sup> This data shows that victims of sex trafficking and juveniles involved in commercial sexual exploitation have significant prior experiences of trauma, including sexual abuse, physical abuse, and other adverse childhood experiences. Victims tend to come from households and communities living in poverty.<sup>10</sup> Thus, involvement in the commercial sex market can be a way for people to survive.<sup>11</sup> Trading sex for basic needs (food, shelter, clothing, etc.) is sometimes referred to as “survival sex.” Further, past research shows that communities of color and American Indian communities are more likely to be victimized in Minnesota.<sup>12</sup>

In this report, we use the hybrid term “provider/victim” to describe the person who *provides* a sexual experience directly to a sex buyer. We include the term “victim” here to acknowledge that a large proportion of people who supply sex are victims of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, while others may not be. Exploitation of provider/victims is rampant in the sex industry, whether or not a person is a victim of trafficking. Typically, the term “exploitation” means taking advantage of someone in order to unfairly benefit from their labor or work. In the commercial sex market, exploitation occurs when sex buyers and traffickers take advantage of provider/victims based on income inequalities, racism, sexism, homophobia, and other disadvantages to secure their engagement in the commercial sex market.

<sup>9</sup> Fedina et al. (2016).

<sup>10</sup> Martin & Pierce (2014).

<sup>11</sup> Rosen & Venkatesh (2008).

<sup>12</sup> Pierce (2009); Martin & Pierce (2014); Atella, Schauben & Connell (2015).

The exact proportions of provider/victims who are trafficked into the market is not currently known because much of the market is hidden and stigmatized. We also use the term “victim” to denote that children under the age of 18 are always considered victims of a crime if they are supplying sex. Further, adult provider/victims may move in and out of situations of trafficking, exploitation, poverty, and coercion. Thus, provider/victims include children under the age of 18 and adults of all races, ethnicities, and genders.

Understanding the role of traffickers and other third-party facilitators is critical to understanding how the market works and, therefore, how sex buyers enter the marketplace. There are many roles that fall under the umbrella term of “third-party facilitator.” These include pimps and traffickers as well as other people who watch victims, transport them, enforce rules or quotas set on victims by a trafficker, and punish violations of those rules and expectations. Traffickers find, recruit, and control victims in order to create a “supply” that they then profit from selling. Sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children and adults are rooted in this exploitation, violence, and brutality.<sup>13</sup> We use the term “trafficker” or “sex trafficking” to encompass third-party involvement according to Minnesota statute.

Previous research and practice have also shown that some recruitment of victims and activities that are encompassed in the concept of “trafficking” or facilitation are carried out by peers. This is sometimes referred to as “peer recruiting.” Some peer recruiting is enacted by youth who are trying to help and support friends who are in need of food or a place to stay. Sex trafficking victims can escape violence and direct involvement in the marketplace by recruiting more victims on behalf of a trafficker and/or carrying out other roles such as “training” new victims, enforcing income quotas, and providing for basic needs (shelter, clothes, food, etc.). These roles are typically carried out with violence and manipulation. Former trafficking victims who work with a trafficker are sometimes referred to as a “bottom” or “bottom-bitch.”

The terms we use in this report are meant to provide clarity. However, in the real-world marketplace for sex, many of the terms, behaviors, and categories are blurred around the edges. For example, some of our interview respondents presented a broader view of “sex buying” to encompass the production and use of child pornography and other types of sexual victimization of children that do not necessarily match the Minnesota legal frameworks regarding prostitution and sex trafficking. The distinction between a trafficker and sex buyer is not always clear. We found evidence that some traffickers are also sex buyers and that they sometimes use sex buying behavior as a way to facilitate their trafficking activities. Some sex buyers directly solicit sex in similar ways that traffickers find victims. Finally, there is overlap between some areas of sex buying and sex offenses against children.

In our report, we do our best to remain consistent with language in ways that elucidate the lived realities of people in the marketplace for sex.

## Policy Framework in Minnesota

**There have been many changes to the legal, policy, and social service delivery framework in Minnesota since 2005, when the Minnesota sex trafficking statutes were passed.** Likewise, there has been a substantial shift in public discourse around minors involved in commercial sex – from delinquents

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<sup>13</sup> Martin & Pierce (2014).

or “bad kids” to victims.<sup>14</sup> Prosecutions of individuals for sex trafficking and the promotion of prostitution have increased, as have penalties and sentences. These changes are well described elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> This report focuses on sex buyers. Little has changed in relation to the policy and legal framework pertaining to purchasing sex in Minnesota.

**It is illegal in Minnesota to purchase sex or sexual activity.** The purchase of sex or sexual activity is dealt with in Minnesota’s prostitution statutes (State Statute 609.324). The statutory definition of prostitution includes individuals who purchase sex (called “patrons” in statute and referred to as “sex buyers” in this report) and individuals who provide sex (called “prostitutes” in statute and referred to as provider/victims in this report). Prostitution is defined in statute as:

... hiring, offering to hire, or agreeing to hire another individual to engage in sexual penetration or sexual contact, or being hired, offering to be hired, or agreeing to be hired by another individual to engage in sexual penetration or sexual contact.<sup>16</sup>

Prostitution is a misdemeanor crime in Minnesota, with a few exceptions. Prostitution activity can be charged as a gross misdemeanor if it occurs in a public place. Purchasing sex from a minor under age 18 can be charged as a felony, with varying degrees of incarceration or monetary punishments based on the age of the victim.<sup>17</sup>

**In 2011, the prostitution statute was amended to create separate subdivisions for charging “patrons” and “prostitutes.”** Prior to 2011, sex buyers and provider/victims were criminalized under the same subdivisions. Thus, without consulting the original police report, it is not possible to definitely determine the role of an individual charged under this statute prior to 2011.

**In 2011 Minnesota also passed the Safe Harbor for Youth Act, which came into effect in August of 2014. Safe Harbor decriminalized minors involved in prostitution, instead viewing them as victims in need of services, supports, and protection.** The legislation also increased penalties for sex traffickers and sex buyers who purchase sex from a minor. The Safe Harbor “No Wrong Door” model – administered by the Minnesota Department of Health – focuses on fostering government, law enforcement, and non-profit coordination through training and regional navigators embedded in social service agencies across the state. The legislation also established dedicated shelter beds for minors who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

Safe Harbor is relevant for this report because part of the changes in statute created the possibility for more substantial penalties for sex buyer arrested for purchasing sex from a minor. According to Safe Harbor, a provider/victim under the age of 18 is deemed a victim of commercial sexual exploitation.<sup>18</sup> However, adults aged 18 and over are only legally viewed as victims according to Minnesota statute if

<sup>14</sup> Martin (2017).

<sup>15</sup> See for example, <http://www.health.state.mn.us/injury/topic/safeharbor/>

<sup>16</sup> Minnesota Statute 609.321, subdivision 9.

<sup>17</sup> Minnesota Statute 609.324, subdivision 1.

<sup>18</sup> A minor is considered sexually exploited when he or she engages in any commercial sexual activity. This includes “when anything of value or a promise of anything of value (e.g., money, drugs, food, shelter, rent, or higher status in a gang or group) is given to a person by any means in exchange for any type of sexual activity” (Minnesota Department of Health, n.d.). Third-party involvement is not required for the commercial sex activity to be considered exploitation of the minor. See <http://www.health.state.mn.us/injury/topic/safeharbor/>

their involvement in “prostitution” involves a third party. Then the provider/victim is legally viewed as a victim of sex trafficking. Sex trafficking is defined in Minnesota statute as:

- (1) receiving, recruiting, enticing, harboring, providing, or obtaining *by any means* an individual to aid in the prostitution of the individual; or
- (2) receiving profit or anything of value, knowing or having reason to know it is derived from an act described in clause (1). [emphasis added in italics]<sup>19</sup>

With the phrase “by any means,” Minnesota statute offers a less difficult burden of proof of trafficking compared to the Federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), which requires proof of “force, fraud or coercion.” Minnesota’s courts have handed down some of the longest sentences in the United States for sex trafficking.<sup>20</sup> Minnesota statutes do allow for charging and sentencing enhancements for purchasing sex with a minor under age 18, but they do not allow for sentencing enhancements for knowingly purchasing sex from a trafficking victim. Thus, sex buyers who purchase sex from a sex trafficking victim or sex trafficking operation are charged under the prostitution statutes in Minnesota.

It is relatively straightforward for law enforcement and courts determine the age of a provider/victim, but it is far more complicated to definitely ascertain whether a provider/victim is a trafficking victim. There are many well-documented barriers that victims of trafficking face to disclosing their victimization to legal authorities and in seeking support. Some of these include fear of retaliation from a trafficker, physical harm inflicted by the trafficker, economic dependency upon the trafficker, family connections with their trafficker (children, parents, etc.), emotional manipulation, trafficker-controlled finances or legal documents, language barriers, fear of police, unawareness of their legal status as a “victim,” and stigma.<sup>21</sup> Thus, trafficked adults are frequently charged for prostitution if they are unable to disclose and prove that they are trafficking victims.

Next, we turn to a full discussion of study methods and limitations.

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<sup>19</sup> Minnesota Statute 609.321 Subdivision 7a.

<sup>20</sup> Xiong, C. (2014). “St. Paul man gets record 40-year sentence for sex trafficking.” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Jan. 13, 2014. Accessed from <http://www.startribune.com/st-paul-man-gets-record-40-year-sentence-for-sex-trafficking/239444671/>

<sup>21</sup> Martin & Pierce (2014); Shively et al. (2016); Baker, Dalla & Williamson (2010).

## Section One: Research Methods and Description of Sources

This is a mixed-methods study that combines first-hand qualitative data from knowledgeable stakeholders with data on law enforcement and court activities related to prostitution and sex trafficking. Online advertisements for sex in Minnesota were also explored. There is very little empirical or comprehensive research on the multifaceted and segmented marketplace for commercial sex and how sex buyers enter and behave in the market. Thus, we lacked a strong framework on which to build this study or develop a sampling frame to collect data directly from sex buyers themselves.

Given the current state of knowledge on sex buyers, this study systematically collected community-based empirical knowledge about sex buyers in order to synthesize and collate what is already known across jurisdictions, professions, geography, and experiences into one analysis. Information was gathered to better map the “lay of the land” of sex buyers in Minnesota. This is a necessary prior step to deep-dive data collection from sex buyers who participate in the marketplace for sex.

Because so little is systematically known about sex buyers in Minnesota, the research questions for this study are basic:

1. **Who are sex buyers in Minnesota?**
2. **Where do sex buyers live and purchase sex?**
3. **How do sex buyers enter the marketplace for commercial sex in Minnesota?**
4. **What kinds of sexual experiences do they seek?**

These deceptively simple questions are hard to answer. Sex buying is illegal, stigmatized, and dangerous. Sex buyers often go to great lengths to hide sex buying behaviors from family, friends, law enforcement, and society at large. Discovery and exposure of sex buyers can lead to arrest, shame, lost income, loss of family, and more. Thus, the few people who know a lot about sex buyers are some law enforcement and criminal justice personnel, social service providers who work closely with provider/victims of commercial sex, and provider/victims themselves. We did not interview provider/victims, as this was deemed potentially harmful and unsafe for potential research participants. Instead, after review by the University of Minnesota’s Institutional Review Board, we collected the following data between May 2015 and August 2016.

1. **Qualitative interviews** were conducted with law enforcement and criminal justice professionals, social service providers, and advocates across the state of Minnesota. We conducted 133 semi-structured interviews with 157 people in over 25 communities across all regions in Minnesota, including border towns in neighboring states.
2. **Minnesota Court Information System (MNCIS)** provided a data set with all charges from 2010 to 2015 of sex trafficking (N=201) and prostitution (N=332) contained in MNCIS, including charging details and demographic information about individuals charged.
3. **Print media coverage** of sex trafficking and prostitution in Minnesota from 1995 to 2014 was collected and comprehensively reviewed for information about sex buyers in Minnesota. News stories about sex buyers were mainly derived from coverage of law enforcement activity.

4. **The online advertisements for sex** were analyzed using an online tool called Traffic Jam to explore and verify information provided in interviews.<sup>22</sup> We also visually examined all 37 online sites mentioned in interviews.

The findings presented here result from a two-phased analysis. First, we thoroughly analyzed each source of data independently, assessing the strengths and limitations of the findings. Then we combined, compared, and contrasted the different sources in ways that strengthen our conclusions by addressing the gaps and weaknesses inherent in each individual source. We applied the strongest data from among all the data types we collected in order to answer each question. This analysis technique is referred to as triangulation.

Below, each data source is described. Additionally, more detail on methods is provided in Appendices A and B, including consent forms, data collection protocols, and some technical details.

## Qualitative Interviews

**We interviewed 157 people who work at 95 different agencies and organizations across Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.** Half of the agencies were criminal justice (47) and half were non-profit and governmental social service agencies (48). Fourteen agencies were based in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin, and all but one worked in direct collaboration with Minnesota-based law enforcement or social services. All but one out-of-state interview location was in a town that borders Minnesota. For one agency, based in Washington, DC, the interview was conducted by phone.

Stakeholders across the state of Minnesota with first-hand knowledge of sex buyers are not necessarily easily identifiable. We used a combination of approaches to identify and screen potential interviewees to develop our sample of stakeholders. A list of cities and locations was developed based on Safe Harbor regional implementation, the presence of a sex trafficking task force, and prostitution sting activities focused on sex buyers. In addition, we made sure to include large cities, regional centers, and cities situated along major Minnesota highways and border towns.

To identify potential social service agencies, we consulted with task forces, Safe Harbor personnel, and many other stakeholders across Minnesota. A member of our team investigated the social service terrain for each city, including trafficking-specific services, domestic violence and women's services, youth-serving agencies, homeless shelters and food shelves, and general social services. We called each agency and asked if they had any experience with individuals involved in sex trading; if they did, we screened for a potential interview. If they did not, we asked if there was any person or agency in their town we should call. We identified law enforcement agencies in each of these cities as well, using a similar methodology. However, we also used our systematic media review (described below) to highlight law enforcement agencies that had conducted sting operations or other investigations related to sex buyers. We also consulted with Safe Harbor personnel and agencies that had received specialized training on sexual exploitation. This combination of cold-call investigations, networking, and purposeful sampling allowed us to identify individuals across the State of Minnesota with deep first-hand knowledge of sex buyers in all regions of the state.

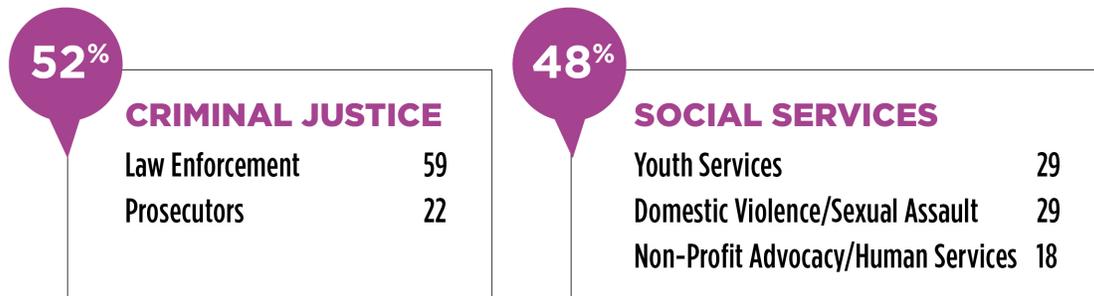
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<sup>22</sup> Dubrawski, Miller, Barnes, Boecking & Kennedy (2015).

Once we identified a list of potential individuals to interview, a member of our team worked with them to coordinate an in-person visit from our research team to conduct the interviews. Most interviews were conducted individually, but some stakeholders preferred to be interviewed in small groups. Several interviews from Greater Minnesota and surrounding states were conducted over the phone.

Individuals we interviewed covered a broad range of expertise and geographic range. Table 1 below shows the distribution of criminal justice and social service personnel who participated in interviews.

**Table 1. Interviews Conducted by Role (N=157)**



Slightly more than half of interview participants were criminal justice personnel across a wide range of expertise. These included law enforcement officers, probation officers, city attorneys, county attorneys, and district attorneys. We selected these interviewees based on their direct experience with sex buyers and willingness to participate in an interview. Law enforcement officers we interviewed were involved in sting operations, posing as a provider/victim online or on the street; others have gained insight about sex buyers as beat cops, undercover officers, and sex trafficking investigators. Prosecutors we interviewed worked closely with law enforcement and/or social service providers on sex-buyer sting operations and sex trafficking prosecutions.

Social service personnel we interviewed included advocates, therapists, case managers, social workers, and program directors within youth services (county services, foster care, homeless youth shelters), domestic violence and sexual assault services, and non-profit advocacy/ human services (including criminal diversion programs, adult homeless shelters, needle exchange programs, prostitution/trafficking-tailored services, children's advocacy centers, and policy centers). Knowledge about sex buyers is embedded in a wide variety of social service domains. We interviewed people from seven agencies that focus exclusively on sex trafficking and an additional 22 organizations that have sex trafficking or prostitution-specific programming, curricula, or staff. Many were recipients of Safe Harbor funding, and some were connected to Safe Harbor Regional Navigators. We identified only two social service organizations in Minnesota that work directly with sex buyers, and we interviewed staff from them. The remaining 26 organizations whose personnel participated in an interview identified and worked with provider/victims of commercial sex based on self-disclosure of clients, intake forms, or referrals from partnering agencies.

We were able to identify multiple stakeholders in all regions across Minnesota with direct knowledge of sex buyers. To protect confidentiality of interview participants, we have generalized the exact locations

to display the number of interviews within each Minnesota Safe Harbor Region. Figure 1 shows the regions we covered and the number of interviews conducted in each region.

**Figure 1. Number of Interviewees in Safe Harbor Regions**



Interview data was collected using a semi-structured template provided in Appendix B. The template contains five domains: interviewee's work area, patterns of sex buyer behavior in the marketplace, sex buyer connections to commercial sex operations, operational structures of commercial sex markets, and the overall marketplace. The template contains sample questions within each domain. All members of the interviewer team had a master's degree or doctoral degree. All staff received training from the Principal Investigator (PI) of the study about the goals of study and interviewing techniques. The PI used a team-based approach in which all lead interviewers contributed their strengths to developing the interview protocol and style.

Prior to the interview, a consent form was emailed to each potential participant. Directly before the interview, a member of the research team conducted a verbal consent process, and all participants were provided a hard copy of the consent form for their records if they wanted it. The consent process described the purpose of the study, voluntary nature of the study, data use plans, and confidentiality.

For the semi-structured interview process, interviewers were instructed to provide an overview of the project and begin with questions about the interviewee's professional experiences related to trafficking and prostitution. This allowed the interviewer to gain a broad understanding of the interviewee's expertise. Then the interviewer followed the respondent's lead, making sure to address all areas of the template. The goal was to allow the interviewee to guide the direction of the interview based on their professional experience. Interviewees were instructed to rely *only* on their first hand-knowledge and not on trainings or information they heard from others. Interviewers were instructed to probe with

clarifying questions to gain an understanding of how certain the interviewees were of the information they provided and, if appropriate or relevant, the degree of prevalence or commonality.

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and uploaded into NVivo qualitative analysis software. Data is stored on a password-protected server at the University of Minnesota.

Interview transcripts were analyzed using a combination of fixed themes derived from our research questions and additional themes identified through a grounded theory approach based on the content of the data itself.<sup>23</sup> Our team spent seven months developing and refining the code book for qualitative analysis of interview transcriptions. The goal was to develop a code book based on themes that are mutually exclusive and internally coherent. The interview team tested and refined a first draft of the framework by coding and reviewing 19 interviews. Then a larger coding team was brought on that included graduate-level research assistants who had not participated in interviews. The codebook went through an additional 10 iterations. The final codebook had 47 themes (referred to as “nodes” in NVivo).

All the interviews were coded using NVivo 11 for Windows Pro Edition. To create uniformity in coding, all members of the team reviewed the codebook individually and as a group and participated in group sessions to collectively code one interview. Each team member then coded three to five interviews that were intensively reviewed by the lead interviewers until the coder demonstrated a consistent understanding and use of the code book.

The interviewer and coding teams included researchers with diverse experience; several had experience with commercial sex as victims of trafficking, self-described providers of sexual services, and social service providers. The combination of interview and experience-based expertise was critical in refining and finalizing the codebook.

As part of the coding procedure, team members were instructed to flag unclear sections of data using the “annotations” feature in NVivo for the lead interviewers to review. Lead interviewers, including the Principal Investigator, made final decisions about how to code the data in these sections. In addition to this review process, lead interviewers spot-checked a portion of all coded transcripts for accuracy and consistency. Inconsistent coded transcripts were re-coded by the lead interviewers.

To analyze qualitative data for this report, we selected relevant themes from our full list of NVivo nodes. The NVivo node output from each of these themes was analyzed and summarized. The lead authors then read the node output, the node summaries, and the transcript text from all the interviews in order to surface themes, patterns, trends, and information to answer our primary research questions for this report. This type of analysis is referred to as the constant comparative method.<sup>24</sup>

## Minnesota Court Information System (MNCIS)

**The Minnesota Court Information System contains court cases that originated as felonies, gross misdemeanors, and some limited traffic and non-traffic-related misdemeanors from all 87 counties in the State of Minnesota.** To our knowledge, it is the only statewide data set of its kind. Based on several interviews with experts on this system, we were informed that misdemeanor and gross misdemeanor

<sup>23</sup> See for example: <http://www.groundedtheory.com/>.

<sup>24</sup> Glaser (1965).

cases related to prostitution were likely included in MNCIS because they were deemed to be sexual in nature.<sup>25</sup>

**UROC received a data set containing key variables on all cases in MNCIS pertaining to prostitution and sex trafficking from January 1, 2010, through December 31, 2015.**<sup>26</sup> State data on arrested persons in Minnesota is technically public data. Based on our research questions, we requested non-public data on race and residential address of the person charged. Therefore, we were required to obtain a court order from the Supreme Court of Minnesota. Personal data is highly sensitive. UROC partnered with a unit at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work that has extensive experience with highly confidential data and dataset construction. Minn-LinK, within the University of Minnesota School of Social Work's Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, received the data from State Court System, linked the tables, removed duplicate individuals, and de-identified the data for use by the UROC team. All data was accessed at a secure computer housed at the Minn-LinK offices.

The research questions for this study pertain to sex buyers. As discussed above, individuals arrested for purchasing sex would be charged under Minnesota Statute 609.324. We requested cases charged under this statute and several others (sex trafficking and other sex offenses) in order to place sex buyers within a broader context of the commercial sex market.<sup>27</sup> These statute groups are listed below in Table 2.

**Table 2. Statute Groups Included in Data Obtained from MNCIS**

Statute Block Number	Statute Description
609.324	Prostitution
609.322	Sex trafficking
609.33.2	Disorderly house
609.352	Solicit a child for sexual conduct
617.246	Pornography of minors
609.27	Coercion enhancement

Within the MNCIS dataset, we identified a total of 332 cases related to prostitution. Within those cases, we identified 318 individuals charged with a prostitution-related offense, including both sex buyers and provider/victims. Table 3 below shows the breakdown of cases. We can see that there is, in fact, very little overlap between cases charged as prostitution and sex trafficking, and there are very few overlaps

<sup>25</sup> We appreciated input and guidance from the Hennepin County Sheriff's office and others in the Hennepin County Court system who directed us to request MNCIS data. Also, Marcy Podcopaz, Peter Jannett, and Julie Rud helped our team select which MNCIS variables to request.

<sup>26</sup> Data was requested on July 7, 2015, and received on January 25, 2016, after receipt of a court order from the Supreme Court of Minnesota, which was granted on December 1, 2015. A cleaned and de-identified data set was provided to the UROC team by Minn-LinK in March 2016. We then had a number of technical issues, which were eventually resolved with support from Peter Jannett.

<sup>27</sup> A full discussion of this data will be provided in a separate report.

between cases related to commercial sex (prostitution and sex trafficking) and other criminal sexual conduct.

**Table 3. Number of MNCIS cases (2010-2015) by MN Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Statutes**

Case Type	Total (n=1093)	
	n	%
Sex Trafficking	201	18.4%
Prostitution	332	30.5%
Both Prostitution and Sex Trafficking	2	0.2%
Other Statutes	554	50.8%
Sex Trafficking and Other	4	0.4%

The individuals of interest for this study are the subset of individuals arrested for purchasing sex within the prostitution statutes. The data set we received did not differentiate between sex buyers and provider/victims. Therefore, as a proxy, we identified two groups as potential sex buyers: males arrested for prostitution (N=170) and all individuals arrested for purchasing a juvenile victim (N=80). Table 4 below shows the gender breakdown of prostitution cases in MNCIS.

**Table 4. MNCIS Gender for All Parties Charged with Prostitution (609.324)**

Gender	Total (n=318)	
	n	%
Female	125	39.3%
Male	170	53.5%
Null	23	7.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>318</b>	

This is not a perfect proxy. Our extensive interviews with law enforcement agencies across Minnesota suggest that policing strategies, such as sting operations, are geared toward arresting men for purchasing sex and women for selling sex. It is possible that some men arrested for prostitution were provider/victims, that some sex buyers are female, and that some transgender persons have been mis-gendered. Our interviews suggested that these instances were rare.

While MNCIS data has the advantage of being statewide, we believe it has the disadvantage of being substantially incomplete with respect to the accurate number of arrests of sex buyers. Contrary to initial advice, we believe a significant number of cases were not referred to the court system and, therefore, are not contained in MNCIS. Interviews with law enforcement described many arrests of sex buyers that were not present in the MNCIS database; and our review of print news media also showed arrests that were not contained in MNCIS. While this is confusing, *prima facie*, it also makes sense. MNCIS is

primarily for felony-level cases, and most prostitution (and, therefore, purchasing sex) is a misdemeanor-level crime. We do not know why some prostitution cases were referred and others were not.

To highlight the potential scale of missing cases, we constructed a comparison of the number of prostitution cases contained in MNCIS versus the number of prostitution cases from a small sample of law enforcement agencies across Minnesota for the years 2010-2015. Table 5 below shows a substantial under-representation of cases that originated at local law enforcement agencies. For example, Duluth Police Department reported 71 cases related to prostitution while MNCIS shows only 2 cases from Duluth. The St. Paul Police Department identified 145 cases, but MNCIS identified only 31 for St. Paul. A full assessment would require prostitution data from over 1,000 police departments across Minnesota, a task that is simply not practical to undertake.

**Table 5. Count of MNCIS Prostitution Cases Compared to Local Law Enforcement Department Cases, Sample of Cities (2010-2015)<sup>28</sup>**

City	Local Law Enforcement Prostitution Case Count	MNCIS Prostitution Case Count
Duluth	71	2
Mankato	23	1
Moorhead	8	0
St. Paul	145	31

A full discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of MNCIS and the statewide systems-based data on sex trafficking will be the subject of another report. However, given the weaknesses in MNCIS data described above, we use the data from MNCIS with caution in this report.

## Print News Media Coverage of Sex Buyers in Minnesota

**Print news media coverage contains important information about sex buyers in Minnesota.** We found that many local news agencies covered law enforcement activities related to prostitution. Thus, media coverage is an additional source of information about sex buyers that complements and extends the data contained in MNCIS.

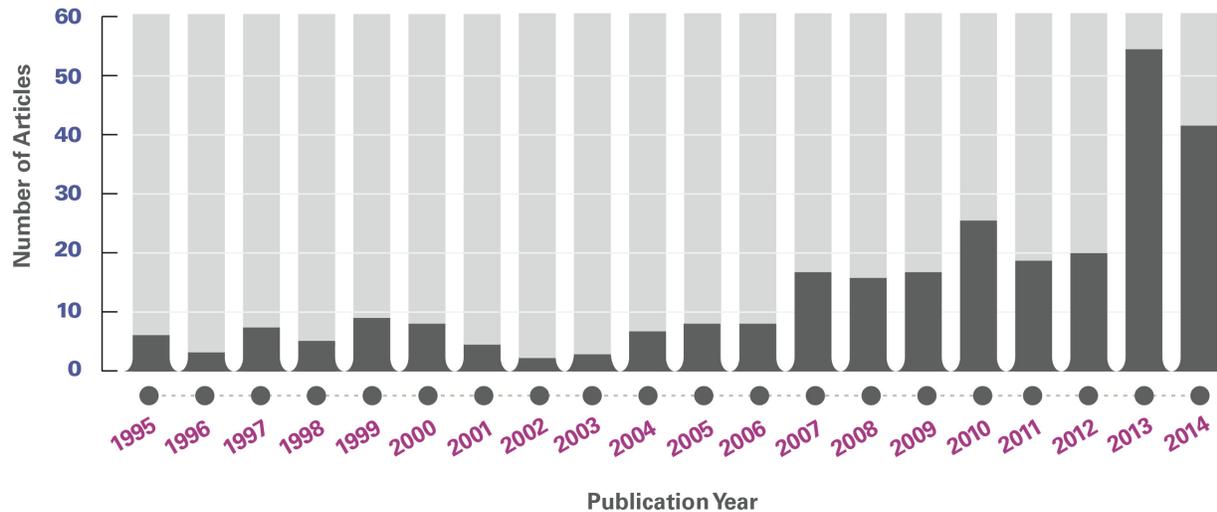
We conducted a search using the search terms “Minnesota,” “sex trafficking,” and “news” and a second search using the terms “Minnesota,” “prostitution,” and “news.”<sup>29</sup> All print news media articles available online from 1995 to the end of 2014 were systematically collected and analyzed for this study. The

<sup>28</sup> Local law enforcement agencies provided a case count based on their records of arrests for Minnesota statute number 609.324, prostitution cases. This number includes people arrested for all prostitution-related offenses.

<sup>29</sup> The LexisNexis search engine returned matches in a single document, which we then separated and reformatted into individual Microsoft Word documents for each article. The Google articles were cut and pasted from websites and also saved as new, individual Microsoft Word documents. During this process, we kept the full text from articles and deleted ads, pictures, and videos.

search on sex trafficking identified 1,152 print news media articles, and the search on prostitution identified 1,121 articles. Of those, 708 were determined to be duplicates or irrelevant, leaving 1,565 articles. Charts 1 and 2 below show print news media articles by publication year.

**Chart 1. Number of Articles by Publication Year**



All articles were then reviewed to determine whether the content contained information on sex buyers. We included all articles that mentioned specific sex buyers, whether it was anonymous or not. We excluded articles that alluded to the overall demand for commercial sex but did not highlight specific incidents. We also excluded any articles that exclusively covered a so-called “jane sting” operation, in which a law enforcement officer posed as a sex buyer to arrest a provider/victim. These articles by definition would not provide information about real sex buyers. Additionally, an article was deemed outside of the scope of our study if it met all of the following three criteria:

1. The sex buyer was from or currently living outside of Minnesota;
2. The transaction and arrest happened outside of Minnesota; and
3. The publishing agency was not Minnesota based.

Chart 2. Article Keyword: Number of Articles by Publication Year

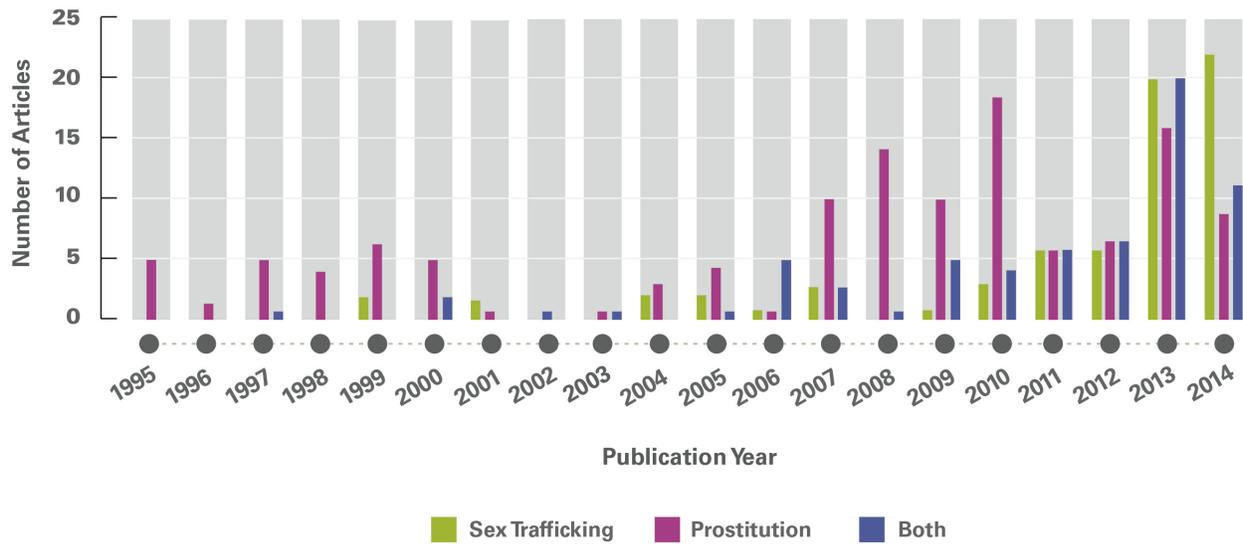
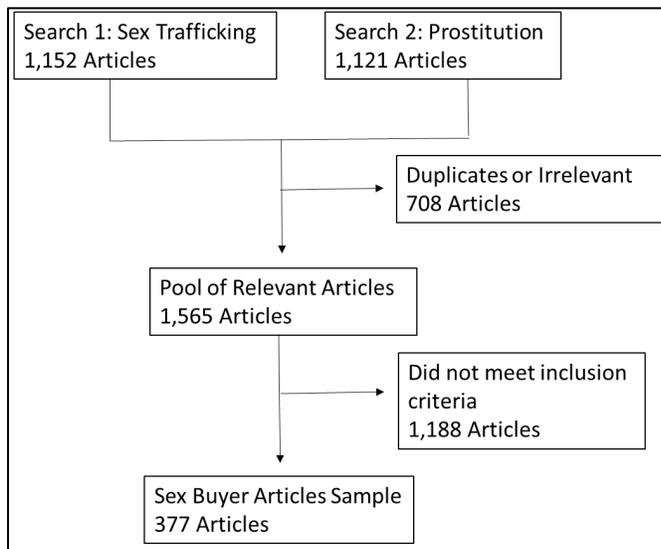


Figure 2, below, shows how the final sample of articles on sex buyers in Minnesota was generated.

Figure 2. Sample Generation for Print Media Articles



In order to analyze the content of each article in a systematic fashion, we created variables based on our research questions which included article publication information, demographic information about individuals mentioned in the article, and data about the marketplace for commercial sex. We reviewed and coded all articles in our sample of 377 using a form designed in a data management system called Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) to record the presence of these variables. REDCap is a well-

supported data system that utilizes secure servers operated by the University of Minnesota’s Academic Health Center’s Information Systems group.

To analyze this qualitative data in a quantitative way, our team created variables that allow us to identify and quantify the content of each article. For example, we identified and counted each individual mentioned in the article by role in sex trafficking and commercial sex (e.g., a sex buyer, trafficker, victim). We also collected data about whether the individual was arrested through a “john sting” or not, any indication of movement of victims, modes of solicitation, sexual transaction location, and any additional transaction details mentioned in the article. These categories were created and fine-tuned through an iterative process of codebook development by a team of seven research assistants and interns. All staff and interns were trained and coding was reviewed by lead research assistants and the Principal Investigator.

For analysis, we generated simple frequencies for all variables collected. All data cleaning and analysis was done using Stata (Version 14). This analysis yielded 821 mentions of sex buyers within the 377 print news articles that pertained to sex buyers. Some of these articles also mentioned individual provider/victims and sex traffickers, but the majority covered sex buyers only. Table 6, below, shows the number of mentions of individuals.

**Table 6. Individuals Mentioned in Print News Media Coverage of Sex Buyers in Minnesota**

Individual Mentioned	Frequency	Percent
Sex Buyer	821	79.4
Trafficker (Trafficker, pimp or their associates)	81	7.83
Sex Provider/Victim	132	12.77
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,034</b>	<b>100</b>

The majority of sex buyers mentioned in print news media were identified in a so-called “john sting” (66%). The others were identified by their connection to law enforcement activity to identify and arrest a sex trafficker or through their association with a documented victim of sex trafficking.

## Online Advertisements for Sex

**The internet is now a primary component of the marketplace for commercial sex.** Online advertisements for sex, particularly through websites such as Craigslist.com and Backpage.com, have made it far easier for potential sex buyers to find a provider/victim. There are also numerous websites that allow sex buyers to communicate with each other. Thus, the online commercial sex marketplace is an important source of data for understanding sex buyers and their behaviors.

We used two primary methods for analyzing the online marketplace for sex within Minnesota. First, we conducted a visual review of all websites and applications (apps) mentioned in interviews. We identified 37 websites and apps that facilitate transactional and commercial sex. Each site was analyzed for how it fits in the marketplace and its primary roles in the marketplace. Our list is not exhaustive; it simply

includes the websites and apps that our interview participants shared. These included websites that feature online advertisements (e.g., “high-end” escort web pages, backpage.com), third-party review sites (such as the Erotic Review), social media apps used for recruiting and soliciting, online forums used by sex buyers or traffickers for anonymous communication, and advertising sites that scrape and repost online ads for sex. This information was crucial to understanding more about internet-aided solicitation, which is discussed in Section Four, below.

Second, we used Marinus Analytics’ tool called Traffic Jam, which enables high-speed analysis of key features in escort advertisements online. It was developed by a team from the Auton Laboratory at Carnegie Mellon University.<sup>30</sup> We used Traffic Jam to explore the volume of online advertisements and prices within the cities listed on Backpage.com for Minnesota from October 2011 to December 2015. We compared this information to data collected in qualitative interviews to confirm and expand upon qualitative data gathered about those regional markets. We also did an in-depth analysis of the online market structure in Duluth, Minnesota, to compare qualitative data and better understand peak seasons for commercial sex in Duluth within the online marketplace. After we completed data collection and analysis, significant changes were made to Backpage.com and to the Traffic Jam tool. The online environment is fluid and evolving. Specific websites and online behavior changes based on many factors such as law enforcement activity on particular websites, trends, and new apps. But the underlying functions and mechanisms of the online marketplace, described in Section Four, are durable across websites and apps.

## Limitations

All research studies have limitations and weaknesses. There is no wholly comprehensive and flawless study. This study has several potential weaknesses related to potential biases in our data, insufficient information about some aspects of the commercial marketplace, data sources that we were not able to include, and more. Below we describe limitations and our attempts to correct for these shortcomings.

A primary limitation of this study is that we did not collect data directly from sex buyers. We chose not to attempt data collection directly from sex buyers because we felt this type of study was premature given our current state of knowledge. There was not yet enough known about sex buyers in Minnesota and the statewide marketplace to conduct an accurate or reliable sample. However, data collected directly from sex buyers could be a logical next step from this study.

Interview data may favor knowledge from some individuals over others in ways that skew our findings. We interviewed individuals who have knowledge about sex buyers from their professional experiences, including social service providers, police, prosecutors, and more. Thus, our methods did not gather information about sex buyers who are completely unknown to law enforcement and social service providers in Minnesota.

To minimize biases from specific sectors, we intentionally sought an even distribution of interviews from criminal justice personnel and social service providers to reduce these knowledge gaps and triangulate our qualitative findings. Likewise, we interviewed people with a broad range of expertise, including

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<sup>30</sup> Dubrawski et al. (2015); see also their website: <http://www.marinusanalytics.com/>

youth, adults, and all regions of Minnesota. Each profession has certain gaps in knowledge, as well as specific strengths, because of its practice area. These are discussed below.

Our data from law enforcement did not surface as much information about sex buyers operating in parts of the market that are hidden from law enforcement tactics. Criminal justice qualitative data and MNCIS records are representative of law enforcement activities, and they likely do not fully represent all activity in the marketplace for sex. Sting operations to identify sex buyers tend to focus on commercial sex acts mediated through online advertisements and street-based solicitation. Thus, sex buyers in these areas of the market may be over-represented in law enforcement data compared to other areas of the market. Criminal investigations tend to focus on sex traffickers and identification of victims, especially minor victims. Thus, sex buyers who purchase sex from people who have not been victimized through sex trafficking might also be under represented in law enforcement data. Finally, street-based sting operations tend to occur in neighborhoods with higher rates of poverty and people of color. Thus, these communities might be over-represented in the aggregated arrest data.

Social service providers tend to work with individuals who have been harmed as a result of participation in the commercial sex market, many of whom have experienced economic vulnerabilities. Thus, our study may under-represent sex buyers who purchase sex from individuals who have not been similarly harmed and who do not seek supportive services.

Our purposeful sampling methods allowed us to gather information from a variety of perspectives in each locale, but it is possible that we did not interview all knowledgeable personnel in each locale. This could have been due to scheduling conflicts, lack of interest in participation in the research, or lack of information about knowledgeable personnel. To reduce these limitations, our team collected interview data over a period from June 2015 to June 2016 and traveled to the locations of our research participants. We researched the communities ahead of time to learn about past sex trafficking and prostitution enforcement activity and service provision, and the professionals involved in these cases. We also called social services and police departments to inquire about the local expertise that was not reported in news media. Finally, we asked our research participants for additional recommendations of knowledgeable community members.

Participants in interviews held various definitions of sex buyers, trafficking, exploitation, and prostitution. The interview team was trained to present a consistent framework for each interview that explained our definitions and terminology. But it is clear that participants' information also relied at times on the participants' own frameworks. Our qualitative coding allowed us to interpret interview data within a consistent framework. Differences in participants' perspectives were also very useful for understanding the connections among certain social issues related to commercial sexual exploitation and other social issues such as transactional dating and exploitation, child sexual assault, and child pornography. A future study could explore these connections further.

Interview participants had their own biases and opinions about commercial sex. In order to reduce these biases, we asked our interview participants to rely on their first-hand experiences of cases and clients that were a part of their professional expertise. We also asked interview participants to clarify and elaborate on their knowledge of sex buyers and to describe the basis of their knowledge. This context information was used to guide qualitative coding and to avoid use of data in our analysis that our interview participants labeled as speculation, opinion, or rehashed information from a conference or training. We also know that many of these opinions come from years of experience, so we welcomed

participants' sharing and stating their opinions as opinions. For example, a human trafficking investigator with 20 years of expertise on this topic may have a well-developed analysis of sex buyers in Minnesota that is crucial information for this study.

MNCIS data also has additional limitations depending on how the data was collected. Race data is inconsistently collected; the race/ethnicity reported by the officer may or may not reflect an individual's self-ascribed racial identity. Gender data in law enforcement records is also assigned by officers on the case and, therefore, may misrepresent gender identities, especially for transgender individuals. There are many missing data points because the data was collected in support of criminal justice practice rather than research. Further, as described above, the MNCIS data we obtained did not differentiate between individuals arrested for purchasing sex and those arrested for providing sex.

A major limitation of the MNCIS data is that it does not represent all law enforcement activity related to prostitution in Minnesota. There was a selection process by which cases moved from arrest to charge to prosecution. Because that process is managed differently by different cities and counties, there is much variation across the state. Some cases of arrests and prosecutions in 2015 may not have been included in MNCIS due to long processing timelines. MNCIS data is likely biased toward cases where the individual was not able to remove the charge from their record. While the MNCIS data has some obvious reporting limitations, our qualitative data collected with law enforcement and criminal justice personal can fill in gaps.

Print news media articles provide valuable information, but there are some limitations associated with this data. News media articles are typically dependent on law enforcement sources for content and, thus, have the same basic limitations as law enforcement data. They do not necessarily represent a complete picture of the scope and breadth of sex buying in Minnesota. Further, there may be a bias toward higher profile cases, as these may have been deemed more newsworthy. While our methodology sought to remove duplicate media coverage, some news media articles did not provide names and, therefore, there may be some duplicate cases.

There are several limitations to our analysis of the online marketplace. It was not a stand-alone analysis of the online market. Data were collected to help confirm and better understand information from qualitative interviews. We did not pay for any membership-level access to websites of interest in order to do more thorough reviewing, and we reviewed only what was accessible to the public on these sites. Future research is needed to explore the multitude of nuances and variation in the online marketplace.

While our data has some limitations, we believe that when all the sources are combined, we are able to present a rich and nuanced analysis of sex buyers and their behavior in the marketplace for sex in Minnesota. Further, our analysis took into account the unique weaknesses of each source and attempted to minimize these limitations. We are careful not to overstate claims for findings if they were not thoroughly supported by our data.

## Section Two: Who Are Sex Buyers in Minnesota?

Popular images and public opinion may suggest that people who purchase sex are unusual or deviant and that commercial sex is an “urban” issue that does not impact rural areas and greater Minnesota.<sup>31</sup> Purchasing sex is sometimes seen as a seedy part of nightlife. While stigmatized, sex buying is also seen as something private. A primary goal of this study is to identify who purchases sex in Minnesota. Our data strongly suggest that sex buyers are predominantly white, middle-aged married men from all areas of Minnesota and all communities. The data do not support some popular concepts about sex buyers. Later sections describe the geographic locations where sex buyers purchase sex and live, how sex buyers enter the marketplace for sex, what they seek to purchase, and an overview of marketplace in Minnesota.

**Sex buyers, and the demand for commercial sex, are the least understood aspect of the marketplace for sex.** Many of our qualitative interviews suggested that there may be, or at least has been, a built-in tendency to protect the reputation or privacy of sex buyers because they are seen as upstanding people in the community or because they do not want to disrupt the social fabric. For example, one of our interviewees said:

*There’s definitely a little bit of good-old-boy mentality of, you don’t want to air your neighbor’s dirty laundry. Because what does that mean for you? Because [it’s] your next-door neighbor you invite over for barbecues. And your next-door neighbor’s wife is your wife’s best friend. You know what I mean? I think there’s a little bit of not-in-my-backyard. Or your next-door neighbor is also your Boy Scout troop leader and is the president of your 4H club. ... So I think there’s a lot level of protection a bit for johns – for buyers. – Youth services provider, East Metro*

The dynamic of protecting the identities of sex buyers, in combination with the secretive and hidden nature of the marketplace for sex, makes it difficult to fully document sex buyers in Minnesota. However, the combination of data sources explored in this study provides some empirical evidence on overall patterns and trends.

### Predominant Demographics of Sex Buyers

**All of our data sources suggest that sex buyers in Minnesota are predominately white, married men, from middle and upper socio-economic backgrounds.** Several people we interviewed described sex buyers like this:

*A good majority of them are going to be your middle-aged to older white males as a demographic .... A little bit, I would say, higher up on the economic scale – they have a little extra money to spend. A good majority of them, I would say 80 to 90 percent, are married with children. – Law enforcement officer, Central Minnesota*

*... the majority [of sex buyers] have been in their forties and fifties, certainly middle class, if not upper-middle class. They always lawyer up. Tend to have decent jobs. The majority are white. They’re not all white. ... They have jobs that allow them to be able to get away in the day, they*

<sup>31</sup> Monto & Milrod (2014); Friedman & Johnston (2013).

*have flexibility in their jobs so that they can get away to have their dates [euphemism for purchasing sex], you know. They do not [fit] the stereotype that I think the average member of the public would think of when they think of someone who buys sex. So we've seen a variety of jobs ... that people hold that are buyers."* – Youth services provider, Southeast Minnesota

**Our data suggest that the demographics of sex buyers match the broader racial/ethnic demographic composition of the state.** In Minnesota, 85% of the population identifies as white or Caucasian.<sup>32</sup> It makes sense, therefore, that the majority of sex buyers would also be white. These quotes from criminal justice personnel, the first from central Minnesota and second from southern Minnesota, are indicative of interviewee perspectives on the demographics of sex buyers.

*But we've kind of got a representative sample of every bit of the community here. You know, even ... some of the university kids ... not from this country – have answered ads and we've arrested [them]. It was weird that it was all demographics of the city.* – Law enforcement officer, Central Minnesota

*I think generally the clientele is reflective of the community.* – Prosecutor, Southeast Minnesota

Our findings are supported by several other national studies that found that the racial/ethnic background of sex buyers is generally representative of the broader population. In a comprehensive report on demand reduction efforts in the United States, Shively et al. (2016) summarize national-level research findings on sex buyers as follows:

*"Studies of male consumers of commercial sex find that buyers are similar to the general population in most regards, and quite unlike most populations of criminal offenders, although the population of johns also contains some dangerous criminals and sociopaths."*<sup>33</sup>

The people we interviewed suggested that most sex buyers they encounter seem to be what they would ordinarily consider to be "normal" or average men and that it could be "anyone."

*I think people always assume that it's "Mr. Scum Bum" getting prostitutes, but it's ... a wide variety of people.* – Law enforcement officer, Northeast Minnesota

*All ages. All income. All races. All sexual preferences. I don't think that you could put a john [sex buyer] in a profile category. It's your neighbor. It's anybody from a high school kid all the way to somebody in their seventies [that] have answered my ads [stings].* – Law enforcement, East Metro

*I would say a majority of them are white males. Gosh, we've had such a gamut. I mean, we've had all the way from hospital directors down to guys fresh out of the Marines. But a lot of people in ... professional fields, too. We've had truckers. But I would say a majority of them are white males. Most of them are married, or a large majority of them are married. I would guess ... probably 35 to 45 is kind of our average age if we were to ... average everything out. ... This last [sting], we got ... a couple guys on the older [end] – you know, 65 – and then a couple younger. ... But I would say probably that average age is 35 to 45.* – Law enforcement, West Metro

<sup>32</sup> US Census Bureau data from 2011-2015 estimates that 84.78% of Minnesota's population identifies as "white." Accessed from [www.umn.policymap.com](http://www.umn.policymap.com)

<sup>33</sup> Shively et al. (2012), p. 7

**Many described sex buyers as respected community members with influence, authority, and income.**

Our data suggests that the majority of sex buyers tend to have at least some disposable income to spend on purchasing sex. Our qualitative data suggests that sex-buying behavior may be more clustered among men with middle and higher incomes. MNCIS data does not contain information about occupation, but it does list whether an arrested person obtained a public defender, which can indicate lower economic status. In the MNCIS data set, 19 out of 103 men arrested for a prostitution-related offense had a public defender, which means 84 did not.

**Our interviews and print media sources described sex buyers from a variety of employment sectors, with the majority from white collar, professional sectors.**

These included businessmen, doctors, lawyers, dentists, judges, professors, law enforcement officers, correctional officers, pastors, and salesmen. Numerous interviewees discussed the socio-economic status and jobs of sex buyers.

*I would say most are hard-working, probably educated people. But I would say 95% of them definitely have decent jobs. A lot of them are like on their lunch break or on their way home. ... I think we've only had one or two that I was like, for sure, they just scraped together enough money and they probably weren't in the best home situation. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

*We've had dentists, we've had doctors, we've had unemployed, construction workers, military personnel, correctional officers ... we've had police officers [identified by law enforcement as sex buyers]. – Law enforcement, Southeast Minnesota*

*I've heard multiple, multiple accounts of some staff working in detention facilities or, like, locked facilities who are actually buyers ... people in helping professions sometimes. I've heard a lot from the youth about police [purchasing sex]. You know, like, I'm sure you've heard this already but, like, "Oh, give me a blow job, and I'll let you off the hook for this." – Youth services provider, West Metro*

Interviewees also described manual labor or “blue collar” sectors; these professions included farmers, truckers, construction workers, and sailors. The demographic composition of sex buyers’ professions tended to represent the surrounding community where the sexual exchange took place.

*You know, in my cases, I've had a really wide range of people, from very white collar to unemployed. I would say the medium they group around [is] probably low to middle income, blue collar, labor, a handful of farmers, other trades. I would say that's the majority of what we see here. But that's really reflective of our community also. ... Even though a lot of these guys are not from [small town], you know they do come from surrounding areas. – Prosecutor, Southeast Minnesota*

*Business owners here in town. We've had farmers. We had a lot of truckers obviously. Guys working over the road see the ad, and then they see where we're at and call us up ... – Law enforcement, Southwest Minnesota*

*We have had no truckers. We are farmers, 50% of them are farmers. – Law enforcement, Southwest Minnesota*

Several research studies suggest that sex-buying behavior may be slightly higher among men with military experience.<sup>34</sup> One study suggested that military service provides opportunity for men to learn about and be exposed to paying for sex.

*“The fact that many of the men who had paid for sex had also served in the military further indicates that paying for sex may be more a product of situation and availability than behavior based on the peculiar qualities of the individual himself.”<sup>35</sup>*

Our interviewees mentioned active duty military personnel as included in the general category of men who purchase sex, but this was not a major theme in our qualitative data.

In media coverage of sex buyers, employment was listed for 137 of the individual mentions of a sex buyer. It is likely that employment was mentioned when it was particularly noteworthy. For example, there was extensive coverage of a former CEO of a large health care facility who was arrested for prostitution twice. Judges, county prosecutors, legislators, law enforcement officers, criminal justice personnel, and other public servants were also mentioned. There was coverage of two police chiefs who were arrested as sex buyers, one in Robbinsdale and the other in Aiken. Other identified careers included doctors, lawyers, pastors, mechanics, professional athletes, college professors, teachers, truck drivers, businessmen, coaches, construction workers and contractors, and administrators. The fact that many sex buyers are men of influence and community standing may contribute to why sex buyers remain a more hidden part of the marketplace for commercial sex.

**Interviewees described the age of sex buyers as ranging from late teens to over age 70, which is the sexually active lifespan of men.** Police and prosecutors repeatedly suggested that in their cases with sex buyers, they saw a clustering in the age range between 30 and 50 years old. Men in this age range have more purchasing power as they become more established in their careers.

*But the ages are far more ranging, I mean, from ... early twenties up to sixty years old. ... I think older buyers have more money. ... It's been interesting to me ... to see how many of the buyers that we've dealt with tend to be somewhat affluent. I mean, men ... who can get away from work. ... Maybe they have a career such that they ... have the ability to get away from the office. And they have the disposable cash. You know, these girls don't take credit cards. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

MNCIS data, displayed in Table 7, broadly supports the notion that men from a wide range of ages purchase sex. Men charged for prostitution-related offenses ranged in age from 20 to 69, with the majority under the age of 40.

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<sup>34</sup> Shively et al. (2012) p. 9; Monto & Milrod (2014).

<sup>35</sup> Martin & Milrod (2014) p. 816.

**Table 7: MNCIS Age Distribution of Likely Sex Buyers (Case Filed Date-Birth Date)**

Age	Total (n=104)	
	n	%
20-29	24	23.08%
30-39	37	35.58%
40-49	21	20.19%
50-59	15	14.42%
60-69	7	6.73%
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	

Interview participants frequently did not specify the sexual orientation or gender identities of the male sex buyers they described, but it was clear that the majority of men sought to purchase sex from women. We found no evidence of transgender individuals purchasing sex. It is possible that transgender people also purchase sex and our interviewees did not see that portion of the market. In Section Five, we discuss at length a sub-market of cisgender<sup>36</sup> men purchasing sex from transgender women.

### Other Sex Buyers

Our interviewees were clear that the majority of sex buyers are white, married men. But many also described other groups of people who purchase sex, though in much smaller proportions. For example, they identified women, men of color, and people who purchase sex from same-sex provider/victims. Sex buyers in these groups were clearly differentiated from the norm by our interviewees. The marketplace for sex is complex and has many sub-markets, so it is important to highlight other portions of the commercial sex market that are not often in the public view.

### Women as Sex Buyers

While our data suggests that the majority of sex buyers are men, people we interviewed described some situations in which women purchase sex. As one social service provider put it:

*You know, there's been a few cases were the buyer has been a woman. – Domestic violence/sexual assault (DV/SA) provider, Northwest Minnesota*

We identified three broad patterns of female involvement in commercial sex as sex buyers. First, some male sex buyers were accompanied by a woman as part of a heterosexual couple that participated in the sex purchasing and the sexual experience. Several law enforcement officers from across the state described it like this:

<sup>36</sup> The prefix cis- means “this side of” or “not across.” Cisgender refers to a person who identifies with the gender assigned to them at birth, e.g., cisgender man is someone who identifies as a man and was assigned “male” at birth. Thus, the term is used to call attention to the privilege of people who are not transgender.

*Never [had cases of women buyers]. Not that we've seen. Now when you talk to these gals [provider/victims], they'll tell you they have couples come out. That they get dates with couples ... not a lot, but they'll tell you that. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

*Oh, I've seen [as a female decoy in a sting] ... women [as sex buyers]. Couples. Couples that want to be voyeuristic or spice up their marriage or, I don't know, add a third party and want a professional or something. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

*I've had [as a female decoy in a sting] females call me and want to do things. I've had gay couples call me. I've had married couples call. Rare, in most of those cases, but they're there. And that's where I kind of go back [to,] it can really be anybody. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Second, we found that there are women who participate in a female same-sex market segment. Interview participants described this as adult women purchasing sexual experiences from young women. We found this market segment described in Duluth and the Twin Cities. However, this market segment was described as smaller in size and scope than the heterosexual market. A few social service providers described it as follows:

*There's like an LGBTQ kind of trafficking underground thing that's happening here too, ... where women [over age 30] are purchasing sex from young lesbian women. – Youth services provider, Northeast Minnesota*

*Although I did talk with somebody who, [it] was Pride weekend, and she got offered \$30 to whatever with a woman ..., you know?– DV/SA provider, Northeast Minnesota*

Finally, interview participants who worked with juvenile victims of commercial sexual exploitation described a few instances where older women obtained sex from a younger man or younger woman by providing for basic needs. These instances highlight both the underground, hidden nature of sex buying that does not match gendered stereotypes of a male sex buyer and a female provider (i.e., non-heteronormative sex buying) and its interconnection to dating violence. For example:

*The one boy who had an older woman who was exploiting him ... It was a boy who was doing the survival sex and it was an older woman in her maybe late forties, and that's the only one I know for sure ... – Youth services provider, West Central Minnesota*

*I had a young, queer-identified woman that I was working with ... [she] was older than me. She lived in Wisconsin. Found my client through social media. And was, like, hey, baby girl, I will take care of you. Like, you're beautiful. – Youth services provider, East Metro*

## **Men of Color**

Most law enforcement officers and social service providers were very clear that in their experience, sex buyers are predominantly white men but that men of color and men from many ethnic backgrounds also purchase sex. We found evidence of law enforcement identifying men from a variety of communities. Identification of sex buyers through arrest is dependent on law enforcement tactics and activity. For example, many street-based sting operations in Minneapolis and St. Paul happen in neighborhoods with higher proportions of people of color, new immigrants, and people with lower incomes. Thus, sting operations in these neighborhoods may target these demographics. However, we also know that white

men with higher incomes also purchase sex in these neighborhoods. One stakeholder, describing stings conducted on a street-based tract in the Twin Cities, said:

*I would say more than half are people whose first language is not English and a good percentage is of East African origin, and the other [half] is from Latin America and a few from other places as well. And of the ones that do speak English, I would say a fair number of African American and a fair number white. Some of the guys live in Minneapolis, [and] some of them come from the suburbs. – Non-profit social services, West Metro*

Further, this interviewee described how the arrest process may be complicated by language and culture in these locations. Some men may not have understood what was happening, while others may not know that it is illegal to purchase sex in Minnesota.

*Some of the complications [arise from] the way the police process the sting and how that intersects with culture and language. And it's a little bit hard to say, because if you read the police report, it looks very straightforward. Then you get their story and they said, "I didn't know what she [undercover police officer] was saying," or "I thought she needed help," and it is hard to kind of tease all of that out. – Non-profit social services, West Metro*

Arrest is also dependent upon the ability of law enforcement to identify non-publicly accessible modes of sex buying. Evidence from a 2014 study of sex trafficking conducted in Minneapolis pointed to community-specific patterns of sex buying among men in the Latino, East African, and Hmong communities and the presence of closed sex buyer networks in all communities.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, these sex buyers may or may not be arrested, based on the ability of law enforcement to work within specific communities and to infiltrate closed networks of sex buyers who do not purchase sex from the internet or other publicly available means.

Finally, our evidence suggests that sex buying is not common among American Indian men. One stakeholder confirmed this trend:

*In all of our sting operations, we've only arrested one Native American male; the rest of them are white males. – Law enforcement, Northeast Minnesota*

Print news media and MNCIS data do not shed further light on racial representation of sex buyers. In print news media, the article content rarely mentions the race of the arrested person. While some articles included pictures of the arrested persons, we did not analyze photos. Race is included in our MNCIS data set, and the majority of men arrested for prostitution were described as "white."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Martin & Pierce, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> As discussed in the Methods section, data from select police departments suggests that cases in MNCIS are only a small proportion of the total individuals identified by law enforcement; we do not know how and why some cases were referred to MNCIS while others were not. It seems likely that sex buyers with more resources might be able to avoid a charge and, thus, a referral to MNCIS. Given this uncertainty, specific figures on racial representation of sex buyers from the MNCIS data are not reported here because we believe they could be misleading.

## Sex Buyers of Low Socio-Economic Status

There are some market segments where sex buyers do not necessarily have disposable income. Only 18% of men charged for prostitution (19 out of 103) and included in the MNCIS database used a public defender. These sex buyers purchase sex through bartering of goods and services or very small amounts of commodities such as drugs or food. People we interviewed described homeless and poor men purchasing sex in this way.

*On the weekends and really late at night, if you have an ad posted at 2 am, you're going to get ... drunk people. We've had homeless people who have tried [this]: "I have four beers left out of my six-pack. Can I have sex with you for the four beers?" – Law enforcement, West Metro*

*Those [sex buyers in low-cost street-based markets] are street people who are ... more than likely homeless or they're men working odd jobs where they can get a little bit of money, things where they don't have their own apartments where they can have sex. – Non-profit social services, Northeast Minnesota*

## Non-Heteronormative Market Segment

Interview participants described the marketplace for sex as predominantly men purchasing sex from women and girls. This is sometimes referred to as “heteronormative,” meaning that it is based on the norm of heterosexuality. This is a deeply held social narrative about commercial sex embedded in popular culture (e.g., movies, TV, books) and viewed as common knowledge. This societal view may influence how law enforcement and social service agencies structure their activities and, thus, may shape the information that is gathered. Our data and past studies suggest that a large segment of the commercial marketplace is heteronormative, but we are not able to determine with certainty the degree to which heteronormative experiences dominate the marketplace.

The majority of online advertisements that we analyzed across Minnesota clearly depict images of girls and women advertising to men. Our data also suggests that other market segments (massage parlors and brothels, among many others) also are structured to deliver girls and women to men. Many social service providers we interviewed work with LGBTQ youth, and they also reported a highly heteronormative structure to the marketplace, with other forms of sexual expression forming smaller and distinct market segments. Thus, for some provider/victims their engagement in the heteronormative marketplace may not match their sexual orientation or gender identity.

However, there are other market segments that are not heteronormative, including men purchasing sex from men, women purchasing sex from women (as previously mentioned), and men purchasing sex from transgender individuals, mainly transgender women. These market segments include the online market, social media, gay night clubs, street-based and direct solicitation, and more. Non-heteronormative sex buying occurs in many of the same types of spaces and places as heteronormative sex buying. But these market segments tend to be more hidden than the mainstream, heterosexual marketplace.

*If I had to describe [the LGBTQ commercial sex market] in one word, I would say “secretive.” But I would say the overall marketplace is involves ... buyers [who] come off as heterosexual males, but they maybe [aren’t. And] they might identify as heterosexual males, but aren’t necessarily. – Non-profit social services, West Metro*

*Those buyers [of gay men] actually look the same as the buyers for transgender male and females, I believe. A lot of them are older white men, but a lot of them are older men of color, too. I would say it’s a good balance between the two of them. – Non-profit social services, West Metro*

Through interviews, we learned about a specific market segment where sex buyers can purchase sex from transgender individuals. This marketplace is accessible through word-of-mouth and also online through a separate Backpage.com section for transgender provider/victims, called “T/.”<sup>39</sup> This market segment is geared specifically toward transgender women provider/victims. Transgender provider/victims participate in both the heteronormative market and the trans-specific market. Participation in the heteronormative market can be very dangerous if the sex buyer is unaware that the provider/victim is transgender.

*But they’re advertising in the escort section, not the transgender section. And I’m like, “This is innately dangerous as it is.” But I could see it being very dangerous for a transgender person, a male posing as a female on an escort site, and then having a man buyer show up and you are a man. I could see that being very dangerous, you know? But we have a huge, huge influx of transgender right now. I’ve never seen it, a female posing as a male. It’s always been a male posing as a female, or living as a female. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

The transgender-specific market segment was described in interviews as seen by sex buyers as a “fetish” market. The view among sex buyers that transgender people are a “fetish” can create harm to provider/victims by objectifying their identity as transgender. One interviewee described it like this:

*She wants to [have bottom surgery], but then if she does ... then she won’t be able to make as much money. Because it’s a fetish thing, you know, to have boobs and [a penis], so she can make \$150 an hour with her penis. So even though she hates it [her penis], she’s going to keep it. You know? – Youth services provider, West Metro*

Text from online advertisements clearly shows that there is a market segment specifically for purchasing sex from transgender people. Below is some sample text from online advertisements in the T/ section of Backpage.com.<sup>40</sup>

Hi guys I’m a 20 years old college student, passable, fully versatile and my photos are really me. I’m 5 ft 7 145 lbs 34DD 24-34 9" FF thick cut & shoots big loads. I have smooth skin long legs and full lips (I LOVE TO KISS)

**\$\$\$My heart shows So Dont Be Cheap/ Fully Functional Hung Shemale vAvailable NOW – 23**

**\*Hey Guys! My super freaky VERSATILE Time is available to Men who desire the BEST in ToP NoTcH companionship... .! 22 9 FaT and HaRd inches!!!**

<sup>39</sup> This page used to be called “T/S” for transsexual.

<sup>40</sup> Content retrieved directly from the T/S section of Backpage.com in September 2016.

## Conclusion: Who

Taken together, our data sources present a picture of who purchases sex in Minnesota – predominantly men with power and privilege in our society. We documented that sex buyers come from all communities across Minnesota, including urban, suburban, and rural. Sex buyers reflect the general racial and ethnic demographics of men in Minnesota. For Minnesota, this means most sex buyers are white men, with less participation in sex buying among African American, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and Middle Eastern men. Native American communities seem to have minimal participation in sex buying. The racial and ethnic make-up of sex buyers as mostly white men was consistently described across all data sources, including police, prosecutors, social service providers, and law enforcement data.

Purchasing sex requires at least some disposable income. Our sources suggest that many sex buyers are employed men in a wide range of professions. In some professions identified in our sources – such as law enforcement officers, judges, human services staff, and clergy – sex-buying behavior may be viewed as an abuse of power. Some immigrant men who were arrested for purchasing sex may not know the laws of the United States, and our sources suggest that some among them may have misunderstood what was happening in the sting operation that led to their arrest.

Our strong conclusion is that men who purchase sex have power and privilege and are part of mainstream society. They typically seek to hide their involvement in the commercial sex market since this is not deemed to be socially acceptable behavior and it is illegal. As discussed above, the vast majority of men in the United States do not purchase sex, and even fewer purchase sex on a regular basis.<sup>41</sup> The next section describes our findings related to where sex buyers live and where they purchase sex. Our findings reaffirm that, from a geographical perspective, sex buyers are represented across the whole state and they are part of mainstream society.

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<sup>41</sup> Monto & Milrod (2014).

## Section Three: Where Sex Buyers Purchase Sex and Live

**We find that sex buyers live and purchase sex in geographic communities across Minnesota and from across the United States.** Far from being an urban problem, our interviews suggest that when police departments across Minnesota look for commercial sexual transactions in their jurisdictions, they find them. They also find that most sex buyers travel to purchase sex. This includes short distances as part of the regular workday as well as longer travel specifically for purchasing sex. Some sex buyers travel great distances.

In this section, we describe findings related to the geographic locations where sex buyers purchase sex and where sex buyers live. The relationship between the two means that travel is a constituent part of the market. The types of physical locations where sexual transactions actually occur are described at the end of Section Four. We provide some discussion of travel in this section, with additional information provided in Section Six.

### Geographic Locations Where Sex Buyers Purchase Sex

The primary source of the data we have to identify the geographic locations where people purchase sex is through sting operations for prostitution arrests and location-related details from sex trafficking cases. To be clear, the cities and municipalities that have conducted sting operations do not necessarily have an unusual problem with commercial sex; they are simply looking for – and, therefore, – finding people who purchase sex. Many law enforcement officials in Greater Minnesota said they were initially skeptical that sex buyers were in their area but were surprised by the number of sex buyers who answered decoy advertisements placed as part of new enforcement activities.

**Many law enforcement personnel from across the state described the intensity and frequency calls from sex buyers during their sting operations.**

*We ... had to turn guys down because we arrested so many people on our first [sting]. It was just constant. And that was like at noon on Tuesday. – Law enforcement, Central Minnesota*

*Honestly, I have a phone that I activate only when we do these [sex buyer stings], and my phone is blowing up for days and days. It will be a week later, and they [sex buyers] are still texting, “Are you still in town?” Crazy. Crazy. – Law enforcement, Northeast Minnesota*

For many, this experience changed their views on the prevalence of sex buying in their communities. A law enforcement officer from Central Minnesota said the following:

*Three years ago, when people said Backpage, we didn’t understand what it meant. Part of it was [gaining an] understanding the buying process. We didn’t know, and then it was, “Wow, we really have people in [name of small town] that are doing this.” – Law enforcement, Central Minnesota*

Another law enforcement officer from Central Minnesota described how they came to see that people were purchasing sex in their jurisdiction and what they decided to do about it.

*Well, last winter we had a case – other investigators in the area were working with [Southern MN] Police Department on a trafficking case – and that kind of brought it to light that “hey, we may have a problem in the area.” So ... the case went through, and there was some discussion in our department about it. The Chief and I and my partner sat down, and we just [were] doing a team briefing and we started discussing this. And I looked at the Chief and I [said to] the Chief, “Where are all the hotels, in this area? It’s in our city. We have to own this – it might be an area problem, but it’s filtering mainly through our city with the hotels and stuff.” And he agreed. At that point we just decided that we need to own it; we’re going to take on this challenge. And we developed a team of area investigators and police officers mainly with [Northern MN city] Police Department and the [Name of Minnesota] County Sheriff’s Department. “We teamed up together, established a team, and decided to do start doing some research. – Law enforcement, Central Minnesota*

A law enforcement officer from Southern Minnesota shared a similar story about collaboration and discovery of sex buyers in their community. After attending a training on sex trafficking and prostitution, this officer initiated the police department’s first buyer stings on Backpage.com.

*We posted an ad, and we were really surprised at the amount of traffic [phone calls] coming into ... the phone number that we had posted [on Backpage.com]. So that’s how it all started. And since then, we’ve ... made 41 charges related to prostitution. – Law enforcement, Southwest Minnesota*

Finally, law enforcement described the level of “demand” for sex in smaller Northern cities. These sentiments were echoed across the state:

*So in February, we did [a sting operation] again, and we had members from BCA, the Sheriff’s Office, the Police Department, including myself. We were able to work with one of the hotels who helped us out with the fee for the room. And we set up ... another ad. And I was so surprised. Fifteen minutes [after the ad went] up, we already had people calling. – Law enforcement, Northwest Minnesota*

*We’ve had some guys that will travel from smaller outreaching communities, but it’s not like, from our knowledge, they’re coming from Minneapolis or somewhere far away to it; there’s enough demand right here within the city and immediate area. – Law enforcement, Northwest Minnesota*

Our qualitative data strongly indicates that sex buying occurs in small towns, regional centers, and the Twin Cities of Minnesota and is not a uniquely “urban” problem.

## Where Sex Buyers Live

Qualitative data from interviews with law enforcement clearly shows that people purchase sex in small towns, regional centers and large cities across Minnesota. However, it is more difficult to definitively establish the residential addresses of individuals who purchase sex. **Our data suggests that most sex**

**buyers do not purchase sex in their hometown.** They travel to nearby cities, regional centers or larger cities. That means that the location of sting operations will not necessarily tell us where sex buyers live.

Arrests are public data, but home addresses of arrested persons are not public data. Through MNCIS data we identified generalized home addresses of a small number of the total arrests in Minnesota (N=104). However, print news media helps to fill in some of the gaps because it is a surprisingly strong source of information about where sex buyers live and where they were arrested. Media coverage of arrests for purchasing sex has increased over time and is a good source of information about law enforcement activity and individuals arrested for purchasing sex. The typical news article mentions the number of people arrested, their names, and where they were from, as well as the location where they were arrested.

An article from the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* from 2015 is indicative of this type of print news article. The headline read: “2 johns paid for sex with a minor, charges say.”<sup>42</sup> The article goes on to describe the case, including the individuals mentioned in the headline. The article text provided the following: “[NAME 1], 53, of Ellsworth, Wis., and, [NAME 2], 42, of White Bear Lake were each charged with one felony count of engaging in prostitution with a minor.”

Our research identified 377 print news media articles that were coded as mentioning sex buyers. From those articles, we noted a total of 792 observations of individuals described as having purchased sex. Based on available information in each article, we identified and removed duplicate individuals mentioned in multiple articles when possible. After removing duplicates, we were left with a total of 293 individuals named or anonymously described in print media as having purchased sex in Minnesota.<sup>43</sup> From these individuals we identified sex buyer residences in a total of 146 named cities and 21 states in the United States. This is not a comprehensive count of specific individuals. But for our purposes here, this data is illuminating because it shows the spread and breadth of residential locations of sex buyers who purchase sex in Minnesota.

We combined this data from media reports with data from MNCIS to identify additional communities where someone arrested for purchasing sex was living at the time of the arrest. The individual city was generalized to the county level so that we could visualize the distribution of arrested persons across Minnesota. The point is not that these cities and counties are somehow unique; rather, it is to demonstrate the geographic spread of where known sex buyers live.

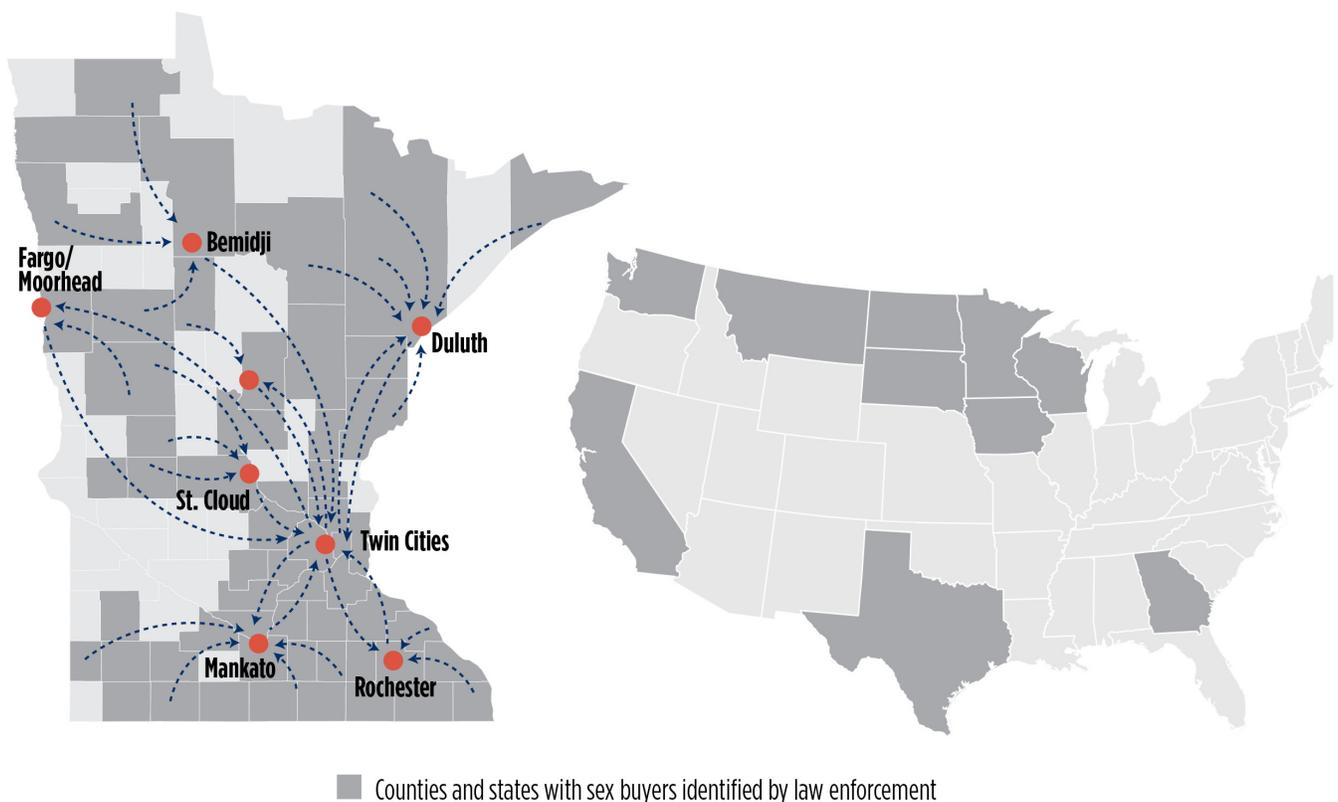
The map below shows the spread of residential locations where sex buyers have been affirmatively identified from within Minnesota. As noted above, these locations are not necessarily the location of the arrest since most individuals traveled to other locations to purchase sex. It should be noted that these sex buyers were identified through law enforcement activity through online solicitations and, in some cases, from street-based solicitations. Based upon our qualitative interview data, it is highly likely that sex buyers live in every region of Minnesota.

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<sup>42</sup> *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Elizabeth Mohr and Katie Kather, April 13, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> There may be some duplicates because not all print news articles provided a name of the arrested individual(s).

**Map 1. Geographic spread of Residential Locations of Sex Buyers in MNCIS and Mentioned in Print News Media.**



### Travel to Purchase Sex

**Our sources show that sex buyers purchase sex across the state and they travel from nearby towns, the suburbs, and from across the United States to purchase sex.** Men typically do not purchase sex in their home community unless they live in a large urban area. Even in a big city, travel to other neighborhoods or suburbs is common. Thus, travel is built into the fabric of sex buying. The quote below is an example of how police officers described sex buyer travel. This officer was describing an enforcement activity known as “Operation Guardian Angel,” which seeks to identify and arrest sex buyers who purchase sex from girls under the age of 18.

*Well, I'll put it this way. We ran a detail out of Lakeville, and it was Operation Guardian Angel, which means that we were posing as 16- and 17-year-olds. We had a trucker from Wyoming; we had a guy from Elk River; we had a guy from Coon Rapids; we had a guy, I can't remember now. But ... you can see that they'll travel distances. I mean, this guy from Elk River came down to Lakeville just to have sex with someone. And the trucker just happened to be in the area, and he was hitting up ads because he was going to stop in Lakeville at the truck stop. So ... I think [the sex buyer's location] doesn't matter as long as they are willing. I mean, these guys will travel. And it also becomes a matter of convenience: “Oh, that one's too far away. I'll just call another*

*ad and find one that's closer." So I think it has a lot to do with convenience and the time that they have available to get this done. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

From law enforcement in Greater Minnesota, we identified two patterns of sex buyer travel outside of the Twin Cities area. First, they noted that many sex buyers travel from rural areas to smaller towns or from smaller town to a nearby smaller town or to a slightly larger regional center. Many identified a 30- to 60-mile circumference around the small towns and regional centers as a general rule about travel.

*The [sex buyers] that we've actually had [in-person] contact with, probably within a 60-mile radius, on average. We had one last night 60 miles from here. And what shocked us is that these guys are willing to travel that much. – Law enforcement, Central Minnesota*

*We don't see a lot of people that want to do it in their backyard. They'd rather drive 20, 30 miles ... We have a sting in New Ulm. For the most part, we don't catch a lot of New Ulm people. But [if] we have a sting in Mankato or St. Peter, we have New Ulm people that are coming. – Law enforcement, Southwest Minnesota*

*It all depends on where we set up the operation. Like the one in Mille Lacs – it was St. Cloud and that area for big city, and the surrounding county's rural area. When we set up in Hinckley, we had a lot more from Duluth and a lot more from Minneapolis communicating with us, because it's only an hour each way. – Law enforcement, Northeast Minnesota*

Second, law enforcement personnel have identified sex buyers who were driving through their towns or happened to come to town for some other reason.

*We've had local people and we've had truck driver types, professionals that are in town for business, farmers that are going to a convention or something like that. – Law enforcement, West Central Minnesota*

Our interviewees indicated several reasons for travel from the perspective of sex buyers. First and foremost was to protect anonymity and privacy. Travel is a way to avoid being discovered by family and friends. The fear of recognition is potentially more acute in small towns and rural areas.

*People come from another community to here because they don't want their neighbors to see them in a hotel and then be, like, "Oh, I saw your husband there, what was he doing?" And the wife is, like, "I don't know, what was he doing?" The whole point is, it's illicit, it's secretive, you don't want anyone to know what you're doing. – Prosecutor, Southeast Minnesota*

*I guess in my experience, it seems like the people that want to do this, they want to get out of their home area so that they are not known. ... We had another local guy that specifically requested to come in the back door [of the hotel] because he didn't want to be recognized when he came in the front door. So that's why I am thinking that's maybe ... why we're seeing people who are coming from larger distances versus maybe home people. – Law enforcement, West Central Minnesota*

*We're too small of an area [small town], and they [sex buyers] will be recognized and questioned or eye-browed, going, "Why are you renting a room here in town, when you live here?" Because we're too small of an area. – Law enforcement, West Central Minnesota*

Travel was also described as being convenient, as a way for a sex buyer to work the purchase of sex into their regular and everyday routines.

*It's relatively convenient. Now that I'm saying that, there's this range again, but I would say many it's twenty minutes away. It's like, sneak it in somewhere during the day ... or somehow sneak it into their life. So it's not a big investment of time. I would say that's the majority. – Non-profit social service provider, East Metro*

The most common type of travel described in interviews was linked to the workday – commutes and lunch hours. Travel distances were accessible during working hours, such as before work, during lunch, or after work. This timeframe does not require a sex buyer to be accountable to family and can be built into their regular work time. This was described in towns and regions across the state, as well as in the Twin Cities metro area.

*[On buyer stings,] we've definitely had several people coming from work or on their lunch break, that type of thing. – Law enforcement, Central Minnesota*

*I would say it's more on the lunch hour and more during the evening hours during Monday through Friday. I think that's because ... a majority of the buyers have families, so they're home with their families on the weekends, and a lot of them have evenings they can get away or lunch hours they can get away. We see a spike during lunch hour when we're doing undercover operations. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

*Like 6 am – you know, first thing in the morning. And then ... the sting that I observed, they had a significant slump, two to three hours of really no activity, in the afternoon. And then after the work day ended, at about five-ish, it picked up again, and then [continued] for about the next three hours or more. I left at [about] 8 o'clock that night and they were still going. But ... they pulled in several more people after 5 pm. So it correlates with the workday. We had a couple guys, I think, over lunch hour. – Prosecutor, Southeast Minnesota*

*We know from doing our details that lunch hours are very busy. You know, 11 [am] to 2 [pm] is really busy. And post-work hours, 5 to 8 pm, 4 to 8 pm – you know, those after-work hours when people are getting off work is when we run a john detail. That's when we're the busiest, lunch hour and right after work. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Likewise, sex buying was described during business trips and among men who travel for work. This could be preplanned sex buying or opportunistic. Men who routinely travel for work (e.g., truckers, salesmen, businessmen away at conferences) were identified as sex buyers.

*We are way north. We are on Highway 2. Highway 2 is a huge corridor for men working on the pipeline. ... When people come and work on the pipeline, they come here, and they stay here, and they stay in hotels. [They pick on] our girls and our boys. When they are coming back and forth home – like, they might live in Duluth, they might make a quick pit stop in Bemidji on their way out to Williston. If they're, you know, traveling up from Canada, or down from Canada, or up from the [Twin Cities], they'll make a quick pit stop here because it's kind of an easy place to get laid. – Youth services provider, Northwest Minnesota*

*We [St. Cloud area] have the most ads, I guess, placed outside the metro area in the state. [...] And we have a lot of people that are outside the area that just come in for shopping or business that are looking at the internet and saying, "Hey, I'm going to be in town at this time. Are you available?" – Law enforcement, Central Minnesota*

Truck stops are a specific locale that caters to the mobile profession of truck driving. The notion of commercial sex happening at truck stops is not new. There has been media and other attention to these locations. Truck stops provide an infrastructure for men who travel and the operations that deliver individuals to provide sex. One interviewee described the colloquial term used in the trucking industry to refer to women who sell sex at truck stops as "lot lizards." One person we interviewed described how truck stops function in relation to travel as follows:

*I'm very interested because that [new truck stop in Western MN] – we saw the same thing when we were tracking the phone of the girl that went to Atlanta. ... They were hitting truck stops along the way ... We know that there's trafficking there. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

*One truck driver's just dropping off a load of seed at a seed place and decided that after that, before he headed back to Hutchinson [he would purchase sex] and something. – Law enforcement, Central Minnesota*

Our interviewees suggested that trafficking is a part of commercial sex at truck stops. Describing an interaction with a mechanic at a truck stop in Mankato, one interviewee said:

*While he was there working on the truck, a black gentleman walks down with two girls and says, "Which one do you want?" And he's like, "Hey, I'm just here to fix a truck," you know? – Law enforcement, Southwest Minnesota*

Interviewees also described a unique travel pattern for purchasing sex in Northern Minnesota related to leisure and recreation activities. This included vacations at cabins or resorts around hunting, fishing, and ice fishing trips, both as a solo activity and with groups of men. This was described as a year-round trend.

*Like the one that we did before that, we had people just traveling through Duluth to cabins up north and traveling back to the Twin Cities. I mean, anywhere, there's ads on the Range. There's ads in Ely. There's ads in Two Harbors, Canal Park. ... I suppose part of the reason, and this is just a philosophy on my part, is that they don't think they're going to get caught here. Which also indicates to me that this is a rich area for the buyers to come to – otherwise they wouldn't come here. – Law enforcement, Northeast Minnesota*

*It seems like there is — based on what I've been told about, at the exotic dance club — deer hunting season and fishing opener. Any time ... there's some type of ... a bunch of single guys coming up north is when they get a big boom, and so ... fall and the end of summer is more popular, definitely. – DV/SA social service provider, Central Minnesota*

*You'll see it on Craigslist. "Oh, I'm up here fishing with some buddies." It's interesting. ... It's, like, "Hey, I'm a ... white guy coming from Arizona. I just want to have some Native American pussy in my face. I'll even pay for it." – Youth services provider, Northwest Minnesota*

Sex buyers travel farther to purchase sex from individuals involved and exploited in what can be described as market segments that offer something different from the typical sexual experience that is purchased, such as sex with minors or transgender and LGBTQ provider/victims. Qualitative interviews suggest that sex buyers will travel longer distances and typically pay more money for some juvenile victims.

*The only thing that stands out in my mind in regards to [buyer travel] is people who travel interstate have sex with minors – you know, interstate travelers. They will travel far, ... but in regards to johns, mainly if there was a younger girl, an underage person, they'd go farther, but other than that they don't have to go far. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Interviews described men who travel long distances to purchase sex specifically from juveniles as displaying more predatory behavior.

*We've had men travel from Duluth to the [Twin] Cities because that's where the juvenile girl was. And he knew she was a juvenile at the time. Actually, two juveniles. He was coming to ... Bloomington to engage in a sex act with two juveniles. These are a little bit more – these are unusual johns. Again, they fall in line with this ... exceptional, predator-type john ... ; they will spend more energy and more money and more resources if they know she's a juvenile ... if that's what they're interested in. That particular john traveled from Duluth. He was married. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

At the same time that sex buyers travel farther for commercial sex in specific market segments, they may also pay for the victim's transportation to them or to their own desired location.

*There was a guy whose wife in Woodbury was out of town for the weekend, and so he brought in an underage and had her at the house for a weekend and paid her, you know, 1,500 bucks or something. – Prosecutor, East Metro*

*I had one case where there was this farmer in Fargo that loved these two girls and would pay thousands of dollars to have them come stay overnight and do everything that he wanted to do. Whereas, I mean he wouldn't have to travel. But he ... even had this communication between the girls and the pimp, like, "Hey can we go up to the farmer's? He'll pay for our gas to get up there. Make a couple thousand dollars." So ... I'm sure, those guys [who seek out juveniles] are willing to pay to get them there. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

*I think that the traffickers and pimps ... definitely are just taking youth, you know, around to different cities and different places. Sometimes different states, too. But a lot of times within Minnesota, as well. Because there might be certain events, like parties, that they're going to, that they've been hired to go to and to bring youth to. That happens a lot. Or – because, frankly, especially with our transgender youth, ... [sex buyers] have certain fetishes and ... maybe there isn't a transgender youth that's in the life<sup>44</sup> in [Southwestern Minnesota], so that youth gets brought there. And then here and there. You know what I mean? – Youth services, West Metro*

We also identified travel patterns that were unique to specific regional commercial sex markets. For example, in Duluth, because of the harbor, sailors and crew members associated with the shipping

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<sup>44</sup> Common term used by youth to describe being involved in commercial sex and trafficking.

industry were described as purchasing sex in ways that fit into their pattern of travel for work in shipping. In the Twin Cities, we identified a flow of sex buyers from the suburbs to purchase sex in the first ring suburbs or downtown areas in street-based solicitation and hotels. The airport and hotels in Bloomington near the Mall of America and the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, as high-volume travel destinations, also present a unique, opportunity-rich location for potential sex buyers in the Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota and from out of state. More information about these regional patterns of travel is provided in Section Six.

## **Conclusion: Where**

In this section, we have demonstrated that sex buyers live in communities across the state of Minnesota and that they typically travel to purchase sex. All sectors of professionals we interviewed suggested that the average distance of travel is 30-60 miles; and, further, that travel around work is most common. However, some sex buyers travel much greater distances in relation to work and leisure travel and purchasing sex from minors or other less common market segments.

The map and discussion in this section allude to the much larger patterns of regional and national travel to purchase sex in Minnesota that is connected to highways, Minnesota-wide patterns of travel for work and vacations (e.g., travel “up north” to the cabin), and travel connected to opportunity-rich locations such as larger cities, conventions, events, and more. These broad patterns of travel structure the Minnesota marketplace and are described in the Section Six of the report.

Before turning to the overall Minnesota marketplace for commercial sex, we describe how sex buyers enter the marketplace, followed by a discussion of what they seek to purchase.

## Section Four: How Sex Buyers Enter the Market

To fully understand the “demand side” of commercial sex, we must know *how* sex buyers enter into the marketplace. In order to purchase sex, a sex buyer must find or identify a potential provider/victim, communicate with him or her, and eventually connect in person for a commercial sexual transaction to take place. **Through analysis of qualitative interviews, we identified three primary ways that sex buyers find and connect with a person from whom to purchase sex: use of the internet, direct in-person solicitation, and word-of-mouth networks.** This section describes the permeable divide between sex buyers and provider/victims that is mediated by how a sex buyer enters the marketplace.

The three modes of entry described in this section are analytic categories discerned from our qualitative data. The real world is messy. Delineating these main themes allows us to make sense of and better understand a complex reality. The reader should bear in mind that each of these modes of market entry are multifaceted and range in levels of built-in exploitation, predation, and harm to provider/victims. Some market entry points are composites or combinations of multiple modes of entry. The way sex buyers enter the marketplace is also shaped by considerations of safety and risk reduction (arrest, secrecy, etc.). Risk management by sex buyers is also discussed in Section Five because it is related to what sex buyers seek to purchase.

The marketplace for sex includes trafficked and exploited individuals (minors and adults), as well as adults who are not trafficked.<sup>45</sup> **Data shows that trafficking, exploitation, and violence are interwoven throughout the marketplace, but that this may be hidden from some sex buyers and hard to discern, depending on how they enter the marketplace.**<sup>46</sup> Therefore, a secondary focus in this section explores sex buyers’ knowledge, beliefs, and perceptions about the experiences, motivations, and life circumstances of provider/victims. When do sex buyers *perceive* their involvement in the market as engaging independently willing providers of sexual services versus obtaining a victim of trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation? Does this impact their behavior in the market? As with all areas of the marketplace for sex, answers to these questions are complex. But they help get to the heart of what kinds of potential strategies may be most effective at preventing trafficking and exploitation among different segments of sex buyers.

The mode of entry into the marketplace is the first step toward purchasing sex. To complete the exchange, the sex buyer and the provider/victim must meet in person in the real world. This section concludes with a discussion of the types of locations where sexual transactions occur.

### Use of the Internet

**The qualitative data we collected strongly indicates that the majority of sex buyers now use the internet to identify and connect with a provider/victim.** It is easily available, convenient, and relatively private. Sex buyers can enter the marketplace without prior knowledge of the local “scene.” The internet offers a broad array of options for entering the marketplace. We heard this from across professional experience from law enforcement officers, social service providers, advocates, prosecutors, and others.

<sup>45</sup> See for example, Weitzer (2009); Dank et al. (2016).

<sup>46</sup> Shively et al. (2016).

*I think so much has transferred or moved to the online setting, so we do not hear about having a track [street-based location for prostitution] or people referring to a track as the place where they go and sit at and are being picked up. – DV/SA service provider, Northwest Minnesota*

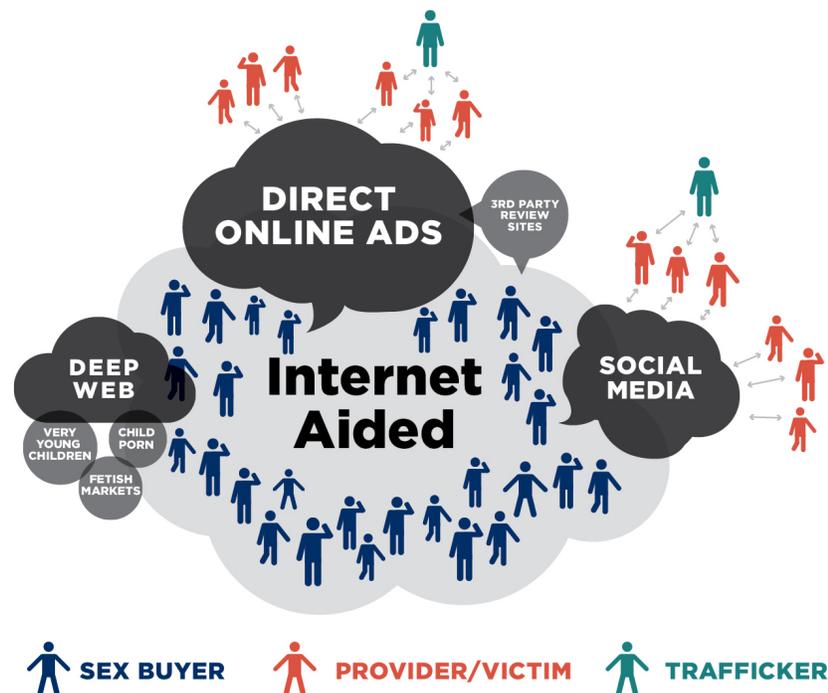
*[Since] I was down in the [Twin] Cities, – and this was just two, three years ago – there’s really been a shift from ... the offline to the online. ... When I did street outreach, a lot of my routes that I would walk and do outreach on would be tracks [street-based location for prostitution], and so I’ve noticed over the years doing that, I would see less and less people. ... I think it’s consistent with my experiences that there’s been more of an online marketplace than anything else. – DV/SA service provider, Northwest Minnesota*

### **The online marketplace has four distinct components:**

1. Direct online escort ads, such as those placed on Backpage.com, which allow a sex buyer to shop online for a provider/victim. We identified at least 37 online sites where advertisements for sex are posted.
2. Online, third-party review websites, which are similar to direct online escort ads but allow sex buyers to view profiles of provider/victims, provide reviews and ratings of provider/victims, and communicate with other sex buyers. Many of these sites require paid membership for full access to all features of the website.
3. Social media sites and applications (apps) are a growing location where sex buyers identify and contact young provider/victims, many of whom are in their early to late teens and may not yet be involved in the commercial sex market. Here, we detected predation that is similar to how traffickers initially recruit a potential victim.
4. Finally, the so-called “deep web” is a part of the internet that is not searchable through the World Wide Web (www), with parts that are accessible only through encrypted software. It is used by a highly distinct subset of sex buyers linked to child pornography and sex offenses with very young children.

Figure 3 visualizes these four components of internet-aided sex buying. It shows how a large pool of anonymous sex buyers use the internet in these four ways to connect directly with provider/victims. It also visualizes how traffickers are typically hidden behind the screen of direct online interaction between a sex buyer and a provider/victim. We describe each of these components of the internet below.

Figure 3. Use of the Internet to Enter the Marketplace for Sex



### Direct Online Advertisements for Sex

According to our interviews, the majority of sex buyers connect to the marketplace for sex through direct online ads for sex. It is convenient, anonymous, and easy. The online marketplace offers a full range of sexual experiences with a wide range of provider/victims. The most commonly described internet location for online sex ads was Backpage.com, which is a series of localized webpages organized by city. In Minnesota, there is a Backpage for seven cities: Bemidji, Brainerd, Duluth, Mankato, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Rochester, and St. Cloud. Backpage.com hosts classified advertisements in a variety of categories, including apartments for rent, job postings, dating ads (i.e., “personals”), and the sale of various items. Users of this site can also pay to post “escort” ads, and they can pay more to increase the visibility of their ads.

Other websites that operate similarly to Backpage.com include EROS, escortdater, Pure VIP, City Vibes, Skip the Games, and Listcrawler. Interviewees mentioned 37 other websites that host direct online ads for sex. This is likely not an exhaustive list. The online marketplace changes and adapts to new conditions such as legal action against specific websites<sup>47</sup> and reaction to law enforcement activity<sup>48</sup>.

Advertisements for sex are typically very brief, containing a provocative photo and coded text for pricing, types of services, and a description of the provider/victim (age, ethnicity, body features, etc.). All

<sup>47</sup> See for example: <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-backpage-shutdown-20170109-story.html>

<sup>48</sup> This concept is referred to as criminal displacement. It means that crime often adapts to law enforcement activity by moving to a different area or making changes to make it harder to detect. See for example, Heil & Nichols (2014).

the direct online advertising sites use thinly veiled and coded language to describe or indicate that it is an advertisement for commercial sex. Below, we provide text examples of advertisements posted on Backpage.com in Minnesota.

Advertisement Example 1:

5'3, 120lbs, curvy ass, beautiful smile, sense of humor, dinner dates, movies, overnights, travel companion. ..outcalls only

Advertisement Example 2:

☞Irresistible ☞ Sexxy ☞ Freak ☞ Available Now☞ - 26

Hi gents I'm [name]!

☞☞☆••A True One Of a Kind ☞☞ ☆••Available all day & night

☞☞☆••Unwind & experienceTLC at it's best!☆••Sweet, Easy going, & SUPER CUTE!!

☞☞☆••I can Guarantee you will love every minute you spend with me!

☞☞☺☆••You can best describe me as a friendly, charming, open-minded sweetheart who loves to have fun!

☞ No explicit talk ☞ ☞Call me anytime☞

Advertisement Example 3:

ABOVE AVERAGE COLLEGE PLAYMATE 23 LET S ESCAPE TOGETHER 200 STARTING DONATION PICS ARE 100 ME I HAVE MORE PICS START BY CALLING ME CALL NOW [NAME] BEST OF BACKPAGE LOCATION BEMIDJI BRAINERD DAKOTA SCOTT DULUTH INCALL OUTCALL MANKATO MINNEAPOLIS ST PAUL

Advertisement Example 4:

COME GET YOUR HEARTS DESIRE 22 INCREDIBLY BUSTY WITH LOADS OF OUTFITS NO AA SORRY NO TEXT REAL PICS 200 DONATION WHITE MEN ONLY CALL ME NOW MY NUMBER IS ON MY PICS

Advertisement Example 5:

ROMANTIC DATES ONE HOUR 300 9TY MINUTES 450 HOURS 600 HOURS 800 HOURS 1000  
HARDCORE DATES ONE HOUR 500 9TY MINUTES 750 HOURS 1000

The online advertisement for sex is not necessarily an advertisement for a “real” person. The photo accompanying an online ad may or may not be linked to an actual person. Interview participants described patterns of advertising posting, suggesting that many ads may not reflect the demographic characteristics of the provider/victim that answers the sex buyer’s text or call.

*They won't post pictures of themselves. They'll find pictures that look similar to them. So, say if it was an African-American female, and she's skinny, they'll find a different picture of an African-American female that's skinny, and they'll post that provocative picture. – Prosecutor, East Metro*

Experienced sex buyers know this and therefore ask the providers/victims they contact to verify their identity by providing additional photos or other proof of the ad’s authenticity.

*Because you'll get a lot of the guys [sex buyers] that will say, "Is that really you? You are really hot." Because, you know, you got a lot of bait-and-switch on [online advertisements]. You've got a lot of girls that are not using their real photos, both for security reasons and for evading law enforcement. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

Typically, an online advertisement appears to be posted by a provider/victim. While many ads are posted by provider/victims, our data shows that traffickers also post and pay for advertisements.

*Some of them [provider/victims] are clearly independent [without a trafficker]. And some of them [provider/victims] are claiming to be independent, but you know, you see a male has rented the room, but then we won't see anything in the room that indicates that a male is there. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Our interviews suggested that traffickers typically try to hide their involvement in posting online advertisements by using prepaid credit cards, "burner" or temporary cell phones, and Google Voice phone numbers, among other strategies. They also have former victims (sometimes referred to as "bottoms" or "bottom-bitches") post the ads online. A sex buyer, however, may or may not know or see any of this behind-the-scenes involvement of a trafficker. It appears to the sex buyer as though he or she is communicating with a provider/victim.

When sex buyers interact only with a person they perceive as a willing provider of sex, trafficking or age of the victim may not be obvious. Many interviewees made a distinction between sex buyers who purchase sex online who know about trafficking and those who are unaware. Law enforcement and prosecutors interact with many potential sex buyers as part of their sting operations. Many echoed these themes in the following quotes.

*Sometimes ... when we're doing details, the johns will call up and say, "You don't have a boyfriend, right?" You know, "boyfriend" means trafficker. And they're hyper sensitive to that. But I think a lot of them are simply unaware that [trafficking is] happening. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

*I would say that a good chunk of them are [aware of trafficking], whether they want to believe it ... but they just don't care. ... But I think there are some, too, that worry. Because either I'm going to get robbed or things like that ..., I think is a lot of their concern. – Prosecutor, East Metro*

Our qualitative data suggests that the majority of sex buyers encountered by law enforcement may be somewhat aware of trafficking in the marketplace but choose not to delve too deeply. However, interviewees also described a smaller proportion of sex buyers using online ads who interact with traffickers without reservation. One interviewee describing family-based trafficking said the following.

*Some of our cases [involve online solicitation] where there's, like, a mom/daughter relationship. Then the guy [sex buyer] will be, like, "Well, you know, I want to like, do things to the mom, and then I want to do things to the daughter, and then I want them to do things with each other." They get really graphic and really explicit. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

The behavior of traffickers is not the subject of this report.<sup>49</sup> We did uncover a great deal of qualitative data on traffickers' behavior in the online marketplace, which will be the subject of future reports.

Individual ads can also be a front for businesses that derive a secondary profit from online escort ads, including secondary re-posting of online advertisements for sex and escort call centers. Interviewees described several websites that profit from pulling advertisements for sex from other websites and then re-posting those advertisements to their website (i.e., the website "Bitches of Backpage"). A provider/victim who is advertised on one site may unknowingly have his or her ad placed on many more websites. Interview participants described how these sites make money from collateral advertising revenue based on webpage views.

*We get a lot of the cross-advertising. You put it up on Backpage and goes up on to, you know, "Bitches of Backpage" and these other like ones that draw from ... they basically go out and troll Backpage. So it's not like it is an actual separate ad that's posted. They just suck the information off of Backpage. ... You know, if I own a website and I have all these people that advertise my website, I can suck all this information over, which will get the johns to look at it, and then I get paid, you know, my advertising money ... – Law enforcement, East Metro*

A few interview participants suggested that some of the advertisements on Backpage.com and the other websites are advertisements for call centers that post the same ads in multiple regional online web pages. Our interview participants did not elaborate on exactly how individual provider/victims of sex in each region are connected to these call centers.

Backpage.com has been the subject of intense and ongoing public and legal scrutiny for its alleged role in facilitating sex trafficking. Recently, the Dallas headquarters of Backpage.com was raided and its chief executive was arrested for pimping and conspiracy. The owners of the site were called before Congress. Prior to that appearance, in January 2017, Backpage.com closed its adult services section, claiming censorship.<sup>50</sup> However, advertisements for sexual services are still placed throughout other sections of Backpage.com. In 2010, Craigslist received similar public pressure and closed their adult services section.<sup>51</sup> Craigslist is still used for commercial sex and these ads are intermingled with advertisements for consensual sex acts (e.g., anonymous or fetish).

Another feature of Backpage.com is unique to Greater Minnesota in small towns. Interviewees in rural areas suggested that Backpage sites provide an anchor for sex ads in the smaller communities that surround Minnesota cities. Sex buyers use the Backpage site from the closest city to enter the marketplace. Travel is often necessary to take advantage of the sex advertisements available through backpage.com. As one interviewee described it:

*They'll [sex buyers] drive 60 minutes to come. ... You go to Backpage, Duluth is the major city on Backpage for northern Minnesota, so if you're from the Iron Range and you're looking at the site, you're going to click on Duluth. – Law enforcement, Northeast MN*

<sup>49</sup> See for example, Martin & Pierce (2014); Dank et al. (2014); Williamson & Cluse-Tolar (2002).

<sup>50</sup> See, for example: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/01/10/backpage-com-shuts-down-adult-services-ads-after-relentless-pressure-from-authorities/?utm\\_term=.5cf6474faf92](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/01/10/backpage-com-shuts-down-adult-services-ads-after-relentless-pressure-from-authorities/?utm_term=.5cf6474faf92).

<sup>51</sup> See, for example: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/16/business/16craigslist.html>.

Next, we examine the role of third-party review sites and online forums that allow sex buyers to interact with each other online.

### Third-Party Review Sites and Online Forums

Direct online advertising is supported by third-party review sites and anonymous online forums for sex buyers who want more information about provider/victims and who want to communicate with other sex buyers. Third-party review websites allow sex buyers to read a profile of the provider/victim, interact, and provide a review. Websites we identified included The Erotic Review, Preferred 411, and Rub Maps, among many more. These websites typically have a limited public view and members-only access, with multiple levels available for purchase. One of our interviewees described these sites as “the Yelp of online sex buying.”

*We have more and more of them [sex buyers in sting operations] who ask, “Oh, do you have any reviews?” And what they’re talking about is the erotic review, basically, the Yelp of escort services for that, because they have a paid user section where they can give you fairly explicit details about the girls and whether or not their photos are real and how was the experience and race and things like that. So, again, a paid Yelp ... for experts. So you have some more of that, more savviness that kind of comes out [as] more paranoid ... of them. – Prosecutor, Central MN*

Academic research on these websites and sex buyers who use them suggest that they are a distinct group of highly active sex buyers, referred to as “hobbyists.”<sup>52</sup> These studies have found that sex buyers who use these third-party review sites are “more sexually liberal, and reported having far more partners” compared to the general population of men and other samples of men who purchased sex.<sup>53</sup> They also tend to be older and wealthier than the general population, with a higher proportion of white men. They are motivated and organized and tend to believe that women selling sex enjoy what they do.<sup>54</sup> While these sites are geared toward female provider/victims, we do know of one study of online review sites for men who purchase sex from men.<sup>55</sup>

In contrast to online advertisements for sex, on third-party review site sex buyers can interact online with each other and with the actual person they will meet for transactional sex. A law enforcement officer described two websites that allow this direct interaction, Preferred 411 and The Erotic Review.

*Preferred 411 is an internet service where you can authenticize yourself that you are a real person that is working prostitution [as a provider/victim] and that you have credentials to back up that you’ve been seen. And your stats, basically, of your body, what you’re willing to do, if you’re shaved or not, if you will or won’t do specific things, is all lined out in a profile. And a lot of regular johns belong to them or check with them. Erotic Review is another one that is very hard to penetrate into. You buy the service. And it is run by a john. And, basically, it’s a place for hobbyists to share their experiences kind of in a Playboy/Penthouse Forum format. Very crudely – a story of their encounter with that girl, and they say whether that girl is worth it or not. And*

<sup>52</sup> Milrod & Monto (2012).

<sup>53</sup> Milrod & Monto (2012), p. 812.

<sup>54</sup> Milrod & Monto (2012), p. 816; Milrod & Weitzer (2012).

<sup>55</sup> Grov et al. (2013).

*then it also has a profile. So the girls can be on there, and then the johns are basically blogging to each other about their experiences and what's going on. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

A key feature of third-party review sites is the reviews themselves. For example, one interviewee described the review experience like this:

*Look, she has big reviews. One from September. Let's look at that one. ... This is a guy ... in St. Cloud now: "I called Cherry a few different times and we were just never able to connect. Finally we were able to make it work out. I am really glad I kept pursuing this. She is very cute and a little shy at first. I will recommend." And then you have all this VIP [area] about performance, attitude, appearance, and all that stuff. – Prosecutor, Central MN*

Reviews provide ratings of providers based on looks, skill, and type of sexual services, sex buyer satisfaction, and other factors. For example, a law enforcement officer from central Minnesota said that men on third-party review sites talk about whether a provider does anything "special" or focuses on a fetish activity (MTD026).

*If you go onto the Erotic Review, and the girl's got good reviews, a hobbyist, or the buyers, will also go on there and say, "I'm going to go be with this girl because she's a freak, and I can see what's she doing on her review." – Law enforcement, East Metro*

Law enforcement activity and sting operations are also a topic for discussion, according to our interviewees. Law enforcement officers we talked with had evidence that sting operations are discussed in detail on these sites.

*[On a site, someone might post] That if you see this women, you know that she's a police officer. – Non-profit advocacy provider, West Metro*

*... If there are police stings, they let one another know that "hey, we all better go underground" or "don't respond to this ad" or whatever else. – Prosecutor, East Metro*

The degree of trafficking and presence of provider/victims under age 18 on third-party review sites was not clear from our interviews. But it is clear from academic literature that hobbyists and other sex buyers who use review sites are generally looking for independent and willing adult providers of sexual services rather than victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.<sup>56</sup>

Anonymous forum threads such as Reddit and Tumblr provide ways for sex buyers to discuss purchasing sex, although they do not contain direct ads or typically information about specific individuals. These sites tend to discuss more intricate and insider elements of the marketplace, such as general etiquette and standard procedures for purchasing sex, tips to avoid law enforcement detection, and sentiments related to their behavior and activity. Our review of these sites indicates that sex buyers who are new to this activity participate in these anonymous forums, whereas experienced and frequent buyers use paid membership sites.

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<sup>56</sup> Milrod & Monto (2012).

## Social Media

When we were conducting interviews in 2016, many interviewees suggested that online activity with juvenile victims was moving from Backpage.com to social media. Social media is used to advertise sex, recruit or solicit sex from minors, and find additional youth to recruit and solicit by obtaining access to victims' social networks. Use of social media in the commercial sex market is an important trend, particularly for understanding the predatory behavior of some sex buyers and youth victimization in commercial sex. The way social media is used to facilitate commercial sex reveals an underlying lack of safety and security for many young people who do not have access to basic needs and are therefore at risk for commercial sexual exploitation.

Any online application that facilitates communication can be used to facilitate commercial sex, so the specific social media platform itself may not be the issue. Interviewees said they see solicitation of juveniles on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Kik, Snapchat, Yik Yak, MeetMe, Plenty of Fish, Grindr, Tindr, Tagged, and other apps. Teens' use of social media is ever evolving and changing. As several interviewees said:

*So, it would be some [on] Facebook, although a lot of the girls are not on Facebook anymore ... or they're not really active on Facebook anymore. What's the other one? Snapchat? Kik is more of a messaging site. There's – oh, I just made a list the other day – like, Plenty of Fish. – Youth services provider, Southeast MN*

*A lot of teens that I've been in contact with are meeting people either through a text, most of the time through chat groups, either through the internet like Facebook, Instagram. Another site that they're using frequently is Yik Yak. So I learn a lot more through the youth, even though we have some internet technology training, where ... they kind of update us every year. And you can take webinars and stuff to see what the latest stuff is. You find out about it; the youth have already had it for a month, two months. – DV/SA social service provider, West Central MN*

Young people and trafficking victims may use social media to “advertise” that they are seeking to exchange sex for money, food, or things they need. This form of commercial sex is clearly exploitative to youth who use this as a way to meet basic survival needs. Investigators of minor victims of sex trafficking, as well as social service providers, discussed this trend related to commercial exploitation of youth:

*I said, “Well, how do you advertise?” She's like, “I just go on MeetMe and tell people I'm selling”; like, her quote said, “Who wants to fuck for money?” – Law enforcement, West Metro*

*Then one day, they [a youth at a drop-in center] may came up to me and be, like, “You know what, I want to tell you that the reason I have those [scantily clad/provocative] photos up is because guys like it. And they respond to me, and they send me messages. And they offer to buy me things. And they offer to meet me up at the mall and buy me – you know, buy me a brand-new phone.” – Youth services provider, East Metro*

Sex buyers also use social media to troll for potential youth to victimize, using similar emotional manipulation tactics as traffickers to recruit a young person to sell sex to them.<sup>57</sup> This pattern was noted for youth in general and LGBT youth as well. Several youth services providers described it like this.

*I really find it's a low percentage of youth who are actively looking for buyers like that. It's buyers [who] are actively looking for youth. – Youth services provider, West Metro*

*This guy from Texas, who's in his sixties, you know, reaching out to him [gay-identified boy] and supporting him and grooming him and, you know, loving him for who he was. ... I think it happens with girls, definitely, too. But with boys, I feel like the online soliciting and grooming and, you know, especially if a boy does identify as gay, that is a huge part of it." – Youth services provider, West Metro*

When a sex buyer behaves in this way, there may be no need for a trafficker since the sex buyer is in some ways acting as both a trafficker and a purchaser of sex. While this type of sex buying does not involve a third party, it is a form of exploitation of vulnerable youth. Our interviews described clear evidence that social media, and the access it provides to networks of vulnerable youth, are used by sex buyers to target, groom, and directly exploit youth, with or without a third-party trafficker. We learned about this type of sex buyer behavior from numerous interviewees, across professional disciplines and regions of Minnesota. It is a well-documented trend in our qualitative data.

*Just last week, a youth talking about one of their friend's older male friends friend group posted them on Facebook and sent them an e-mail just straight up asking if they'd be willing to exchange sexual favors for items or drugs. – Youth services provider, West Metro*

*And these buyers will get on Facebook and say, "Hey, you're cute. You want to meet up?" And have that little conversation. And the girl might say, "Sure I can meet up, but it's going to cost you." "No problem. What are you offering?" type thing. And then, all of a sudden, they're in a parking lot ... and having this date [euphemism for commercial sex]. – Law enforcement, Central MN*

Some sex buyers display highly predatory behavior by attempting to recruit a large number of potential victims who are under age 18. Interviewees described how sex buyers scan social media and send multiple messages to many different youth. In particular, they look to identify networks of vulnerable youth, for example, online friends of people advertising for sex. Below are a few quotes that describe how this works.

*[This is] based off of what I'm seeing from the predators [sex buyers of teens], the people that are out there looking to hunt these girls. ... If I were to do a search warrant on a predator's Facebook page, I'm going to find that he's sending out messages to a hundred different girls saying, "Hey, babe," you know or, "You're really good looking. Let's meet." ... So I think that they're just picking people. Like I can't tell you if it's anyone specific. But once they get someone to respond or friend them, you know whether it be Facebook, Tagged, MeetMe – ... all these little apps are just gateways for people. I had one on Kik where a guy down in Iowa solicited an 11-year-old. You know, just because he was on there, and he started off with, "Hey, you're really*

<sup>57</sup> For more information about emotional manipulation tactics of traffickers, see, for example, Martin & Pierce (2014).

*good looking.” And the girl’s like, “Oh, I am? Thanks.” And then ... he started asking for pictures of her in her underwear and things like that after he told her how much he loves [her]. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

*I would say it’s initially the suspect [sex buyer] reaching out to them and then the victim accepting that friendship [in] some way. The ones that I have done, even in after getting a search warrant on these guys, it’s social media sites – I mean, it’s just a bunch of random teenage girls a lot of times. And ... there is no real connection, so what I can about imagine they are doing ... [is] they start going through the list of that person’s friends or the ones that they would like to talk to and possibly try and solicit. – Law enforcement, West Central MN*

One interviewee described how social media is a unique tool for sex buyers to identify and target potential victims. Social media allows for very private communications where young people think they get to know someone and that the person cares about them.

*It allows the recruitment, the buying, the posting of all of that to happen so much easier, so much [more] accessible. You know, you don’t even have to physically be in contact with someone to groom them anymore for months. You have access to their phone, which is in their bedroom. And they’re at home and you can link to [them. It’s like] if I just have an Amazon wish list of things that I want, and all of the sudden this person I’ve been chatting to can buy me that stuff without me telling where I live and stuff, but it’s getting directed to my house. And they also start buying me ... maybe some lingerie, some other things. That’s a way that they can begin grooming without even having that physical contact. Kind of like online dating, you really feel like you get to know someone just by talking to them and ... especially being young, you believe what folks say. If they have pictures of them rolling in money and hitting the club every night, you’re gonna think they’re this big-time baller, whether or not that’s even their picture. – Youth services provider, West Metro*

## The Deep Web

Our interviews identified the deep web as a distinct segment within the marketplace for sex used for producing and sharing child pornography involving children under the age of 12, including sexual exploitation of very young children and infants.

*Most of the deep web stuff is indicative of child porn. You’re going to find a lot of that in the deep web. The reason that the deep web’s not used as much is because, like, you and many others don’t know about it. And you can’t sell a product with people that don’t know about it. So they use the World Wide Web [www] as opposed to the deep dark web. So it’s a marketing thing, you know. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

The deep web is a part of the internet that is not accessible by web browsers. Some of our interviewees also described the so-called “dark web,” which is a part of the deep web that is only accessible through an encrypted network. Interviews identified the dark web being used for highly illegal and deviant behavior. Buyers and traders on the dark web use Bitcoin, PayPal, or other means of electronic forms of payment that are harder to trace than credit cards or bank records.

Users of child pornography are often networked together and use the internet to share images and depictions of child sexual abuse. Use of the dark web protects anonymity and makes it much more difficult for law enforcement to trace pornography and sexual abuse of children.

*You can't post child pornography like you used to be able to because if it goes across the server at AOL or Google or something like that, and they see that you uploaded child pornography, those ISPs [Internet Service Providers] are required by law to report that stuff. And they're going to shut your site down, and they're going to report to law enforcement. And [producers/users of child pornography] know that kind of stuff, so that's why they've migrated over to where it's not monitored. – Law enforcement, Wisconsin*

Only a few interviewees discussed this aspect of the online marketplace, and it was described as quite separate and distinct from the primary online marketplace for sex in Minnesota.

### Direct In-person Solicitation

While use of the internet was identified as the most common way that sex buyers access the marketplace, some sex buyers directly solicit a provider/victim in person. **Locations identified by interviews include street-based prostitution tracks (Twin Cities and Duluth), places where young people and homeless youth congregate outside, truck stops, bars, and sexually oriented businesses.**

In-person solicitation by a sex buyer can be directed toward someone who is actively involved in trading sex, as well as someone who is economically vulnerable, homeless, under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or otherwise vulnerable. Similar to the model of solicitation with the internet, trafficking operations are often hidden from sex buyers and are likewise embedded within many of the locations of solicitation. Figure 4 displays many of the locations mentioned in interviews. They include a combination of outdoor and public locations as well as solicitation inside a business or establishment.

**Figure 4. Locations of Direct In-Person Solicitation**



## Outdoor and Public Solicitation

Outdoor and public solicitation generally happens in two types of locations: known street-based tracks, and areas where vulnerable youth hang out. In some cities, there is overlap between the two if parks, homeless shelters, libraries, and other outdoor amenities are located near a known track.

Street-based prostitution, once a dominant mode of market entry for sex buyers, was described in the Twin Cities and Duluth, but not in other parts of Minnesota. Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Duluth have longstanding and well-known locations where street-based prostitution occurs.

*Lake Street's [Minneapolis] just always been a hotbed. It's been a hotbed since the '60s, [areas listed near there], so it's ... a conglomerate, it's always been here. People know it's here. I've heard stories of ... men who are fathers who think, "Well, hey, boy, you turned 18, it's time to get you some." – DV/SA social service provider, West Metro*

*There's a couple [tracks in St. Paul]. Historically, it was always University Avenue. ... But now, we have active prostitutes on [other streets mentioned]. That's the last that I heard where the activity was. Occasionally they would pop up in other places. We'd get complaints ... – we had a dentist's office off of [street deleted] that was complaining because they ... had used condoms in their parking lot several mornings a week. So we knew there was an active prostitute working that area. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

Sex buyer behavior in street-based tracks was described as fairly conspicuous by several interviewees, often involving driving around an area known for street-based prostitution and identifying a potential provider/victim from there.

*But, yeah, I've had a couple of cases where they didn't say anything on the tape. It was all gestures and thumbs-up and nodding their head and pointing at this and making the motion as if they're giving a blow job. And, you know, when they said, "How much? Ten bucks? Twenty bucks?," [they gave a] thumbs up instead of saying anything out loud. – Prosecutor, West Metro*

*So they just go out based on the information they get where's the hot prostitution area. They go out and drive around and it's very obvious if you drive around [street deleted] after 5 pm, it's lined every corner. It's very obvious. They drive around and when they see something that ... caught their interest, they circle and park and walk for a minute, come back, get in their car, they move. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

*And, [on the Duluth street track] you see males pull up in cars, ... that are middle-aged white guys, generally speaking, that have nice automobiles, that will talk to these females and then drive away. Or the females get in the car and they drive around the block and you don't see them for a little bit and they come back and drop the female off and drive away. – Law enforcement, Northeast MN*

Our data suggests that a subset of sex buyers directly solicits sex from young adults and minors at transit hubs, buses, parks, schools, homeless shelters, shopping malls, and places where homeless youth congregate. Here, a sex buyer behaves similarly to how a trafficker might identify and recruit a victim. They look for and exploit poverty, homelessness, drug addiction, and other behaviors that suggest vulnerability. This behavior was described as opportunistic, predatory, and exploitative. This subset of

sex buyers deliberately seeks out an individual who is in an economically vulnerable position. We provide many quotes here because this was a dominant theme from across the State.

*And so I think a lot of it is ... driving around homeless shelters. You know, offering money, offering ... whatever they can offer at the time. But hang[ing] outside of shelters. Buyers and sellers, you know, outside of the shelters. – Youth services provider, West Metro*

*I think that a broader ... definition of what that could look like is a lot of girls hanging out at parks for long periods of time, because that's just where they're at because they don't want to be home, and then people coming up to them in these public spaces. But are they really just hanging out at parks because they know that that's where they'll get propositioned? Not necessarily, I don't think. I think that they're just hanging out at parks because that's just some place to hang out. – Youth services provider, Southeast MN*

*I've ... known victims that have gone to the mall and have actually been approached coming out of the bathroom. – DV/SA social service provider, West Metro*

*If they [homeless transgender youth] hang around certain locations in town, places that are mentioned where they are connecting with either direct, for a lack of a better word, johns, or pimps, and sometimes you know they might be, I've been told they'll be given business cards. Like, a man will watch. And I've never had any, I'm sure, but I've never had anybody talk with me about women perps. So that's just what I've heard. Somebody will hand them a business card with some dollar signs written on it. – Non-profit advocacy, Northeast MN*

There are some similarities and differences in sex buyer behavior between these two types of outdoor, direct in-person solicitation for sex. On street-based tracks, it is more likely that provider/victims may be actively involved in the commercial sex market. Traffickers who utilized street-based markets for their victims were described as being in nearby vicinities to monitor their victims, although they were often not in plain view. Therefore, in direct solicitation on a street-based track, it can be unclear to the sex buyer whether those individuals are trafficking victims. Interviewees indicated a wide and broad range of sex buyers entering the market in this way, including wealthy white men driving expensive cars, as well as new immigrants and people of color.

Solicitation of sex outdoors that is outside of a known “track” is directly geared to sex buyers’ solicitation of youth who clearly are economically vulnerable, precariously housed, or under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Many of these youth are not necessarily actively involved in the formal commercial sex market. Thus, youth solicited directly by sex buyers may or may not be in a trafficking situation at that time. However, in these cases some of the sex buyers are themselves traffickers looking to identify and obtain a youth to control.

Outdoor solicitation can still be seen as predatory and exploitative since many provider/victims working on street-based tracks and youth solicited are obviously homeless, chemically dependent, and/or struggling with mental health concerns. Outdoor solicitation was identified as a very low-cost market segment. According to our interviews, sex buyers typically expect to pay less and may offer food, drugs, alcohol, or other survival-based payments in lieu of money in both street-based tracks and non-track-related outdoor direct solicitation. Describing a street-based track in Duluth, one interviewee referred to this as the “five-dollar blow job type thing” where women are “trying to [get] quick money for a fix” (Non-profit advocacy, Northeast MN).

## Indoor Solicitation in a Business Establishment

Numerous people we interviewed talked about direct solicitation occurring within bars and night clubs as well as sexually oriented businesses such as strip clubs across Minnesota. For example:

*I have seen guys parade some girls down at the bars. Not so much for immediate; It's just like, "Hey, I've got these two girls on me." It's not like a "hey, let's go hook up in my car" kind of thing. And they're generally with the pimp right there. So, I don't know if they're actually in the bar saying, "I've got a couple girls for sale," or if they're just walking around with them and if someone approaches them kind of a deal. – Law enforcement, Central MN*

Some interviews described night clubs as places where gay men connect for transactional sex.

*You know, usually when you're in those kind of places [gay male night clubs], I think you're under the influence – you know, especially the buyers are probably under the influence – but I think it's pretty straightforward ... in places like that. Because, again, you're able to be yourselves, and you know that they're there for a reason. – Non-profit advocacy, West Metro*

Bars and nightclubs were described as opportunity-rich environments for sex buyers, where commercial sex transactions blended into and obscured by the party environment and where many potential provider/victims are under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

Solicitation at strip clubs and other sexually oriented business is similar to solicitation at bars and night clubs, the main difference being that the business model is constructed around sexual pleasure, erotic encounters, and voyeurism. Thus, they present a unique locale for direct in-person solicitation, due to the direct connection of the business to sexual experiences. A potential sex buyer might be attracted to a strip club as a place to connect to the local commercial sex market, especially in small towns and rural areas. Our interview data indicate that sex buyers do solicit for sex in these venues, but it is also clear that many entertainers in sexually oriented businesses are not provider/victims of commercial sex.<sup>58</sup> Working as an entertainer in a strip club is not the same thing as involvement in the commercial sex market. Furthermore, interviewees discussed a synergistic relationship between strip clubs, traffickers, and sex buyers.

*So strip clubs are a breeding ground for traffickers. They'll recruit out of a strip club. But then ... they will also have a girl who maybe isn't making enough [selling sex], and then they'll put her in the strip club. And then she has to work in the strip club. And then that's where she'll meet more johns. So instead of being online, she'll be in the strip club, and then she'll go have sex with johns after work at the direction of her trafficker. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Discussing a case with a trafficker out of Chicago, several interviewees described how traffickers use strip clubs as a way to connect with potential sex buyers in smaller towns across Minnesota as part of a diversified portfolio of ways of connecting with sex buyers.

*If he [trafficker] was here [Rochester], it was hotels and things like that. I know that he did some work through the strip clubs in Austin. ... and actually he would sell or tell other pimps, this is a great place to train your new [victims], to see how they work with customers, where he could physically watch them interact. – Law enforcement, Southeast MN*

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<sup>58</sup> Martin & Melander (2017).

Smaller towns have a smaller and less diversified commercial sex market. Licensed and formal sexually oriented businesses, therefore, act as a local anchor or hub for sex trading that occurs offline. If someone is new to town or does not know where to go to solicit sex, our interviewees suggested that a person looking to purchase sex would go to a local strip club in search of commercial sex.

Interviewees from across the state also described direct in-person solicitation at small-town bars that act informally as sexually oriented businesses, with seasonal pop-up strip clubs or back rooms that cater to local men and seasonal sportsmen or vacationers. One law enforcement official in Northern Minnesota described it as follows:

*They're not legal strip clubs. They're just these outlying little roadhouse bars where there's not a lot of police or sheriff deputy presence because our county – if you pull up a map of Beltrami County, Beltrami County is fairly large. And the county seat, Bemidji, is in the southernmost part of the county. – Youth services provider, Northwest MN*

Finally, other indoor locales in which sex buyers use direct in-person solicitation were saunas and public bath houses.

*I know from the little [prostitution] sting, if you want to call it that, my partner and I did, that [nearby sauna] was the place that the lady [provider/victim] wanted to meet. And she asked for \$20, and then paid for the room, and I think it was a total of \$40, and that was the set up. So it's sad and very conveniently located for ... people that are looking for that. – Law enforcement, Northeast MN*

These types of establishments are part of how the broader marketplace for commercial sex is structured in Minnesota. They provide a node or link in a network in which sex buyers connect with trafficking operations.

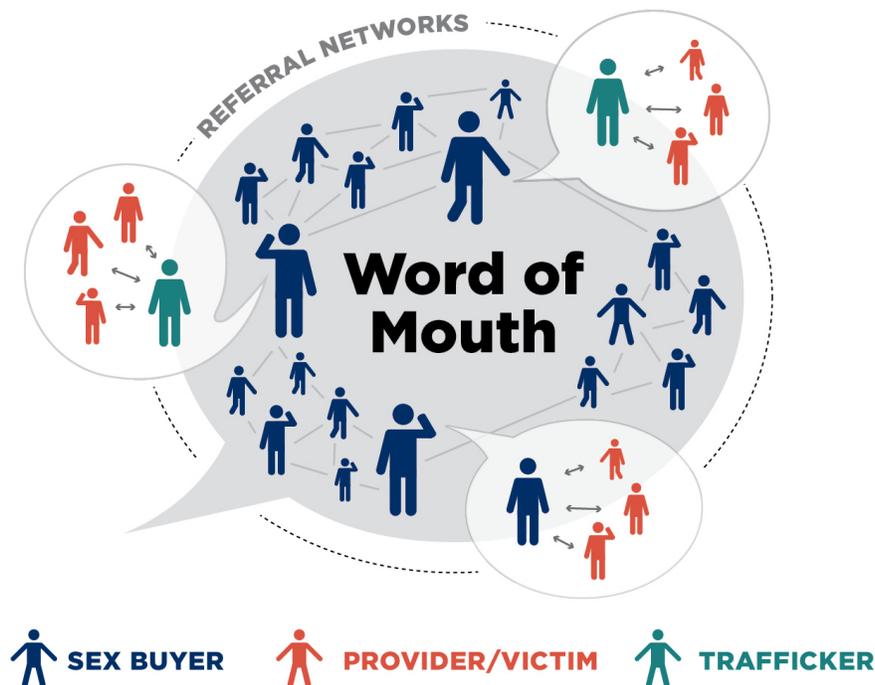
## Word-of-mouth Networks

**Word-of-mouth networks are used by a subset of sex buyers to connect directly with traffickers or other sex buyers to procure sex.** Sex buyers who use word-of-mouth networks come from all economic backgrounds, including low income, middle class, and blue collar, as well as professionals and white collar businessmen who are relatively well off. Word-of-mouth modes of entering the market also include family-based and survival-based sex trading. These networks are based largely on trust and personal connections. This type of connection is underground, hidden, and very difficult to investigate.

Formal word-of-mouth networks should be distinguished from the function of general word-of-mouth to disseminate knowledge about the commercial sex market among sex buyers and people who want to gain access to the sex market. Sharing knowledge is critical to how the market works. This includes things like sharing the location of street-based tracks, instructions on how to purchase sex from the internet, which bars or bartenders can help to “hook you up,” and more. This type of knowledge sharing can occur person-to-person or through online means discussed above. Our interviews made a clear distinction between this sharing of critical communication and use of a word-of-mouth network to obtain sex from a specific provider/victim. The former provides information about the marketplace and how it works; the latter is a mode of market entry used by a subset of sex buyers to obtain sex.

Figure 5 displays the relationships between sex buyers and different types of word-of-mouth networks.

Figure 5. Word-of-Mouth Networks



### Defining a Word-of-mouth Network

The key defining feature of a word-of-mouth network is that a sex buyer obtains a provider/victim through a personal relationship. Some networks consist of a single sex buyer connected to a trafficker; others involve groups of sex buyers who are connected to each other, where one member or more may have connections to a trafficker. Sex buyers who engage in word-of-mouth networks to procure sex are generally not casual purchasers; they are typically “in the know” about trafficking and exploitation in the market because these sex buyers are working directly with a trafficker.

Word-of-mouth networks present several advantages to sex buyers. They are harder for law enforcement to detect because they do not leave an online trail. This protects anonymity and reputations. One interviewee suggested this was a preferred mode of market entry for high-status sex buyers who regularly purchase sex.

*It was more personal networking]. ... Because while he [the trafficker] already ... knew these [sex buyers] were very high-profile people here in [city redacted] – and they [sex buyers] would not necessarily just go out and buy, because of their reputation. So if they knew that if this would be done very discreetly, as discreetly as they could, I think they [sex buyers] would rather go through this route [buying through word-of-mouth and personal connections] than go through other routes. – DV/SA social service provider, Northeast MN*

Another advantage for the sex buyer is that they can obtain exactly the provider/victim and experience he wants without wading through the false advertisements or “bait-and-switch” pictures that occur in online advertisements, as described above.

*Word-of-mouth will get you to knowingly buy a child. ... Online they will never say they are underage, unless it's some type of private, membership-only directory website that you have to be a member of and be let into the club before you even have access to the girls' pictures and see who you want to buy. ... So there's either word-of-mouth or, if you're going to find people online, you're not going to know ahead of time that they're underage.*  
 – Youth services provider, West Central MN

For sex buyers who specifically want to purchase a person under age 18 or a transgender individual, cultivating a word-of-mouth connection to a trafficker will allow the sex buyer direct access with less work.

*But those who have done it so many times [sex buyers], [and] have connections, know some people – those people build this kind of relationship because you do it too much, you get too into this game with, you know, the pimp, and then you can really ask him if he can really find them what they want. If they fancy a juvenile that this [pimp] really will make phone calls or the ways people talk and will provide that to him. ... But if somebody has connections with drugs, they will really contact those organized gang members because they have drugs [or] something, they have some sort of a connection where they will facilitate to them the means to gain access to juvenile females.* – DV/SA social service provider, Northeast MN

*Or – because, frankly, especially with our transgender youth, they [sex buyers] have certain fetishes and ... maybe there isn't a transgender youth that's in the life in [Southwestern Minnesota] – so that youth gets brought there. And then here and there.*  
 – Youth services provider, West Metro

## Types of Networks

Interviewees described many different word-of-mouth networks across Minnesota including: employment sector networks (e.g. truckers), friend-groups, gang-affiliated and criminal networks, insular community networks (religious cults, small town, etc.), exploitative and high-poverty networks (landlords, etc.), and word-of-mouth specifically to obtain a juvenile or transgender person. Previous research highlighted word-of-mouth networks in racial/ethnic minority and immigrant communities.

Interviewees described several employment sector networks including truckers and men who met though working at the same company. In these instances, the workplace served as a way for men to meet, communicate, and network with each other around purchasing sex.

*They [truckers who purchase sex] communicate by CBs to each other. They're a very close-knit group. You have to do undercover. You have to have a truck driver to get into that world. You have to have a truck to get into that world. All these things are utilized for us to get into it.* – Law enforcement, West Metro

*[Redacted name] was a prime example of that word-of-mouth. He never posted a Backpage ad. He worked at [redacted technology company], met a group of Asian guys, and ... he's like, "Hey, I got this girl that'll party with you for 70 bucks or whatever." "Oh, okay." And then they brought some friends, and [those friends] brought some friends. And so now he's got 20 Asian dudes – and they were all Asian, which was a really weird thing about his deal. But he would call, and then this calling tree would go out. [...] "Oh, I hear you got somebody new." "You know, yeah, she's a white girl." "Okay, well, how much?" "Well, she wants 100." "Oh, okay, well, you know, if that's worth it." – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Similarly, some word-of-mouth networks develop through groups of friends and acquaintances, especially when other sex buyers and traffickers are among this friend-group. These personal networks can be a route for introducing men to the activity of sex buying, facilitating sex purchasing, and, perhaps, normalizing sex buying.

*Yeah, and it's people just through their friends, too. A lot of connection that way, like ... where they're not going to blatantly put that out there, so it's through mutual friends [...] Yeah, like that pimp's connecting them with buyers and then also other people in the life, you know, connecting with each other, too. – DV/SA social service provider, Central MN*

*... Sometimes it's not through the internet. It's through the guys telling his friends, "Hey I've got this girl. She's bad-ass. She's like probably a little young." They won't actually ever say [that the provider/victim is underage] because then they're incriminating themselves. ... But [they might say,] "She's young and tight" ... like, her vagina's tight. – Youth services provider, West Central MN*

*Like the pimp when I was going through his phones, ... he obviously copied and pasted this image – this same set of text words or whatever. And it said, "Hey I have these two hos selling pussy. Both are 18. Let me know if you're interested." And he had sent that out to a bunch of different people. And then some, who obviously knew him, ... were like, "Send me pictures." So he would send pictures of them. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Interviewees from across the state described friend-based networks in a wide variety of social and economic contexts. For example, within a low income neighborhood sex buyers connect through parties and knowing people.

*But what I'm seeing is, yeah, they are friend of friends, the word-of-mouth kind of stuff. I mean, you're not going to have some guy from Woodbury drive into town and say, "Oh, well, like, I know this is kind of a shady neighborhood, maybe I can get a prostitute over here." That doesn't happen. It really doesn't happen like that. What will happen is some dude from our hood is dealing or going out to another party, and some guy basically by a referral system, an unofficial referral system, will hear about this girl, or something like that, and then they'll come in, or they'll meet somewhere. So, it's not someone doing a cold call; it's this very strangle little three-point connection piece that we're seeing happening, in terms of outsiders coming in. – DV/SA social service provider, West Metro*

In Northern Minnesota, interviewees described a similar scenario for how sex buyers connect with a victim through friends or friends of friends.

*You know, it's kind of a tangled web up here. It could be coworkers. It could be others – like a slightly distant family member or friend of the brother or friends of the uncle. Or just be people who come by the house. “Oh, you're horny? Wow, you can have sex with my daughter.” – Youth services provider, Northwest MN*

Word-of-mouth networks were also described as a way to facilitate sex provided at parties. In Northern Minnesota, many interviewees described sex buying among male friends in cabins and how procurement of provider/victims occurs through word-of-mouth.

*You know, ... there's a lot up here [Northern Minnesota]; we're trying to figure out how it's happening. We have a lot of cabins. We've heard a lot of stories about cabins and girls are being brought up here or these parties are happening. So to me, when I hear the stories, I think it's word-of-mouth. It's people knowing, it's setting it up. – DV/SA social service provider, Northwest MN*

Obtaining sex at parties was also described as part of gang-related word-of-mouth networks. Traffickers use their pre-existing friendships or affiliations within the criminal underground to identify individuals interested in purchasing or participating in quid pro quo sexual exchanges. These situations have significant intersections with sexual assault.

*In gang relation, I would say it's a lot of peer-to-peer stuff. So they meet them, they make friends with them, and then they, the young people that I'm working with, are looking at it more as like a gang rape versus being trafficked or exploited. So maybe they thought they had to sleep with one person to get in this gang, and then they're passed around from person to person. Or [they] are told that they have to sleep with these people in order to get the status, or are threatened, and that they have to sleep with different people throughout the gang. – DV/SA social service provider, Northwest MN*

In small towns and big cities, some interviewees suggested that word-of-mouth networks develop through connections people have from other illegal activity, such as drug dealing.

*Like small communities that these traffickers are now coming to, what I'm seeing and hearing is they start as drug dealers, build their connections, know who's who, know who they can trust, kinda learn the system, and then slowly start having the girls come out and ... then start their trafficking business that way. And then it becomes a lot of word-of-mouth, and knowing the right people. And then it's more, it's not the electronics, it's more maybe texting and phone calls, but it's more, they know. – DV/SA social service provider, Northwest MN*

Another type of network discussed by interviewees involves sex buyers who take advantage of poverty by using debt or rent to force provider/victims to provide sex or procure sex from someone else. This occurs in rural and urban areas.

*Frequently what I've heard the most frequent in some of our rural areas here is mothers trying to provide for their children, multiple children, and when they have teenage daughter and when they rent, ... a landlord is getting services; and when they need to get groceries, they have their*

*drug dealer; and they have whoever else is getting serviced then by mom, daughter, combination of both. Whatever the case may be. – DV/SA social service provider, Southwest MN*

*Then [victims of sex trafficking] share with us that, yes, my husband, you know, has many girlfriends. And when he needs money for drugs, he brings me over to his boyfriend's – or one of his friend's house, and I have to have sex with his friend so that he can have money for his drugs. So it's just a very dark secret that needs to get exposed. ... [the victim has sex] to cover their rent. Or to cover the purchase of tires. But usually it's that they're low on rent money, and in order to not get evicted, she has to do this. – DV/SA social service provider, Northeast MN*

Interviewees in Northern Minnesota described word-of-mouth networks for obtaining sex within small, insular communities such as religious cults or very small towns.

*I'm sure it is happening here, too, but definitely up in the North, northern St. Louis County, there has been a lot of issue with child pornography, and people in like those kinds of child pornography clubs. Exploiting youth for the purposes of getting pictures. So I think that's a form we see the network of buyers. – DV/SA social service provider, Northeast MN*

Several interviewees described trafficking as part of a religious cults in Northern Minnesota. In one case the religious community knew about a husband who was trafficking his wife. In another, the interview participants description was not clear whether charges of sexual abuse also involved elements of trafficking.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, a previous study of sex trafficking in Minneapolis identified closed sex-buyer networks in all different communities in Minnesota at all income levels.<sup>60</sup> That study found that networks among sex buyers are particularly salient in immigrant communities. It is also particularly important for parts of the market that have less access to the online market, such as rural communities and low-income communities.

### **Proportion of Word-of-mouth Networks in the Overall Marketplace**

This study did not obtain enough direct evidence about the extent of word-of-mouth or the proportion of the market share it represents. However, our research does strongly suggest that word-of-mouth networks are a significant component of the market, especially in light of increasing surveillance of online activities and the high visibility of street-based solicitation. Criminal justice personnel and social service providers repeatedly said they believe their knowledge of these networks is only the tip of the iceberg.

*A lot of the things that we are really missing, especially when it comes to the juveniles stuff is, I think, ... within-house. You have a guy that, basically, this girl is getting pawned off to all of his friends for money. And there is no advertising ... it's all by word-of-mouth. And that is what I really feel that we're missing, missing the boat on that. Because how do you infiltrate that when you're not in that group of friends? – Law enforcement, Southeast MN*

<sup>59</sup> See for example: <http://www.startribune.com/accused-cult-leader-stands-trial-in-pine-county/396680501/>

<sup>60</sup> Martin & Pierce (2014).

Word-of-mouth networks are built on trust. Trust is linked to security.<sup>61</sup> These networks have built-in mutual reinforcement, given that all parties are involved in illegal activity, so they have a vested interest in protecting each other within networks.

*It's based on trust. Everything they do is based on trust and relationship. Basically, the girls are being traded to people that they know, but not to anybody that wants to get sex on the street. So ... they run it in a very organized manner where it's very difficult for law enforcement to get a fact or build a case on them. We run into those problems with people. We get a gun, we get a drug, we get other things – [but] we don't really do any trafficking. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Ultimately, we cannot say what proportion of sex buyers use word-of-mouth networks or how much of the market share is facilitated through these networks. Our research clearly shows this is an important market entry point. Continued research and investigation into word-of-mouth networks is needed. This entry point into the marketplace is associated with deep connections to sex trafficking and high levels of exploitation and violence.

### Composite Modes of Entry

Not all modes of market entry fit neatly into one of the three categories described above. Some market segments rely on a hybrid of two or more of the modes described above. We found that massage parlors, truck stops, some brothels, and intracommunity sex trafficking are dependent upon sex buyers using multiple modes to access these markets.

Sex buyers who purchase sex at an illicit massage parlor may learn about the location through the internet or through word-of-mouth. Further, inherent to soliciting sex at a massage parlor is a direct in-person solicitation of a sex buyer to a masseuse. In this way, sex buyers access massage parlors in a composite of all modes of entry. This niche is predominantly for sex buyers who seek out paid sex with Asian women. Interviews linked illicit massage parlors to Asian-based sex trafficking rings nationally that traffic Asian victims, some of whom are foreign-born and speak little to no English. These networks draw in primarily white/Caucasian and some Asian male sex buyers. Discussing an Asian massage parlor, one interviewee said the following:

*You have the main room. Off the main room were two rooms with mattresses and oils and condoms. ... And the problem is that ... okay, she's [trafficked provider/victim] here, but two weeks ago there was a different person there. And two weeks before that, there was a different person. And they are all coming out of Chicago, and they're all being brought here by the same person. So to us, it looks like a classic trafficking case. – Law enforcement, Southwest MN*

Sex buyers may learn about the location of the massage parlor through several modes of market entry. Massage parlors that provide sex are described on a members-only third-party review site called RubMaps.com. Here sex buyers discuss which masseuses provide sex acts, how much to tip, sex acts received, and ratings of the physical attributes of provider/victims.

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<sup>61</sup> Schneier (2012).

*They [sex buyers using the internet to access a massage parlor] prefer Asian women. And they're, for the most part, white dudes. Some of them are also Asian themselves. But they tend to be very straightforward in what it is that they want. For the most part, it's a massage that leads to a blow job or a massage that leads to sex. So they spend more time with the girls. And they tend to go back to those girls and be more of a regular to the girls. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Sex buyers can also learn about massage parlors through word-of-mouth networks with other sex buyers. At the same time, interview data suggests that sex buyers still use direct in-person solicitation with a masseuse who may or may not be a provider/victim.

*I suppose the word-of-mouth might be “we have some massage parlors.” ... But I guess there is some word-of-mouth ... around the community that this is the place you go if you want a happy ending type of thing. –Law enforcement, Central MN*

Thus, this place-based illicit business operation is intricately connected to multiple ways of entering the marketplace.

The trucking industry has received much national attention for its connection to commercial sex and trafficking operations and for a group called Truckers Against Trafficking.<sup>62</sup> Purchasing sex at a truck stop is an example of a composite model of multiple modes of market entry. Our interview data suggests that word-of-mouth networks are a core component of trucking culture. Some truckers use CB radios to communicate about provider/victim locations.

*So the truckers, again, [are] opportunists. They'll just see the girls, like, wandering around, and they communicate through the CBs. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Whereas some truckers are trafficking provider/victims and marketing them to other truckers, in addition, provider/victims work at truck stops and sex buyers can solicit them directly in-person.

*And in this rural community where you have a lot of transit coming through – you know, there's a lot of cargo. There's a lot of – you know what I mean? – ... there's a trucker community. It's really easy to kind of transport goods as well as sell sex, you know, on the side. – Youth services provider, East Metro*

Finally, our interviewees indicated that truckers are increasingly using the internet to communicate with each other and provider/victims.

*And the trucker just happened to be in the area, and he was hitting up [Backpage] ads because he was going to stop in Lakeville at the truck stop. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Another mode of entering the market is through sex trafficking that occurs within specific communities. Our interviews indicated that this intracommunity trafficking and sex buying has occurred within some new immigrant communities, including Latino, Hmong, and Somali communities. Sex buyers connect through a combination of word-of-mouth, business cards with pseudonyms or fake businesses, and location-based solicitation. Sex trafficking operations and sex buying patterns appear to be tight-knit and insular within these communities. The following scenario about sex trafficking within the Hmong

<sup>62</sup> See the website: <http://www.truckersagainstrafficking.org/>.

community summarizes this combination of word-of-mouth networks with the use of the internet and business cards. The interviewee also described how shame and stigma against premarital sex are used to keep victims from telling law enforcement or seeking help.

*... And there's a lot of trafficking going on because there's Hmong communities in Minneapolis, there's a Hmong community in Wausau, Eau Claire, La Crosse. What'll happen is, you'll get these gangs ... – one of the gangs, for example, is the true Asian Bloods. And so there'll be representatives in all of these geographical areas ... they may take a girl from here, they'll go to Wausau, and basically that girl's available for a week while they're in town and they're basically pimping her out. And it's other [Hmong] people that're in the know. And then they move to Minneapolis, and then eventually they may come back to La Crosse, but they're constantly on the move. ... They ... advertise [by] word-of-mouth and within their own little community. ... They have the Hmong language, so ... I'm told there's Hmong Facebook-like applications on the internet that they do a lot of communication on. But I've also been told that they'll make [business] cards and they'll just start handing 'em out. You know, like, they'll go to the meeting spots where the Hmong men hang out and they'll just [say,] "Oh, here, call this number, call this number for the next week, call this number, call this number." – Law enforcement, Wisconsin*

In the Latino community we learned about cantinas, nightclubs, and brothels where primarily Latina victims were trafficked by Latino traffickers. Provider/victims are reluctant to talk to law enforcement or seek help due to fears of arrest and deportation. These operations were advertised using word-of-mouth networks and distributing business cards to men in the Latino community.

*Throw in business cards, too. Because, like, if you look at the ... kind of that cartel-run human trafficking conspiracies that are run out of Houston and are expansive across the country, ... underground brothels, cantina bars, and business cards is generally how they do it. And the business cards are things like, you know, towing service or car detailing or tamales. That's a really ... very unsophisticated way to do a very sophisticated thing. And that stays under the radar. And their greatest protection is that, number one, the Hispanic community doesn't trust law enforcement. Okay? And so they're unlikely to report when they know. They get a business card, and they find out, they know that this is, you know ... they'll deliver a girl to you or something like that. But the other reason is that they [trafficking operations] only serve Hispanic men. So unless you're embedded in that culture or you have informants that are embedded, you're never going to hear about that. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Sexually based webcam services were mentioned by a few interviewees who indicated that some provider/victims may use webcams as an additional way to build sex buying customers and make money when they are not involved in commercial sex. Webcams are a way for provider/victims to provide sexual services without physical contact, and may be an easier entry into the marketplace for both provider/victims and sex buyers. Thus, there may be some of overlap between online live pornography and sex trading, with some provider/victims engaged in both. It was unclear from our sources the degree to which trafficking occurs in these webcam environments. Further, it was also unclear from our interviews whether users of webcams also purchase sexual activity in person with a provider/victim. The webcam pornography business was not the topic of this study.

## Locations of sexual transactions

Mode of market entry is only the first step in obtaining commercial sex. Eventually the sex buyer connects in-person with a provider/victim to complete the transaction. These locations are an important part of sex buyer behavior. **Our data identified many types of locations, including hotels, private homes, parties, cars, and public bathrooms.** The common element across locations of transaction is some element of privacy, although, as will be described, some of these transactions take place in semi-private locations.

In sexual transactions that were arranged over the internet, the most common locations described by interviewees was either a hotel or a private home. The sex buyer typically communicates to determine this location.

*But I would guess that, when we talk to our girls, they say most of this – most of these things – some of them happen in ... these johns' personal homes. But mostly hotels. They'll go to hotel rooms. Or they'll do car dates [euphemism for transactional sex]. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

*... They're coming a lot to the hotels, ... whether they're juveniles, adults, girls, they're still working in hotels. ... Obviously, the girls come to them as well [to a sex buyer's home]. I mean, the arrangements are made online, but, you know, they're getting them to come to whether it's ... their hotel, their house, their apartment, things like that. ... That's definitely still going on. I think there's a lot of girls that feel more comfortable working in a hotel ... or their own apartment or things like that versus going out to see the john. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

*She was asked to go to ... his friend's house and, you know, give him sexual favors. So that's something that ... she said that was something she was forced to do. – DV/SA social service provider, West Metro*

We found some evidence that more activity from internet-based modes of market entry is moving to sex buyers' private homes because hotel-based sting operations have been widely publicized in the media.

*And I had people stray away from a hotel. They don't want to do a hotel. They'll do what's an out-call: "Come to me." So then, if someone would arrive that they wouldn't feel comfortable with, they just wouldn't answer the door. Or maybe they'll send them to the wrong address. ... That's another way of avoiding getting caught. Obviously, we do get a lot of voice over IP phones. ... So ... the number is random. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Cars were identified as a primary location for direct solicitation modes of entering the market. If a sex buyer is soliciting a person who is outside from their car, it was described as convenient to have the provider/victim come into the car for the transaction.

*... because a lot of the times, the sex acts are happening in cars. You know, for the street-based. So they may hang in the liquor store a little while, go take a stroll, get picked up and ... then they may [say,] "Drop me at McDonald's." – Law enforcement, West Metro*

*But the actual acts then tend to happen in cars or buildings after the initial negotiation takes place. – Youth services provider, West Metro*

However, some sex buyers who enter the market through the internet complete the transaction in a car.

*When we're doing our demand work [online], people will say, "Can you do a quick car date [euphemism for transactional sex]?" "Can you do this?" So they [online requests] are happening ... I would say, less frequently. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

According to our data, transactions from word-of-mouth networks typically happen in sex buyers' or traffickers' homes. The sexual transaction can be a one-on-one sexual activity or a party. This was described above in our description of word-of-mouth networks.

**Other locations that were identified by interviewees included truck stops, public bathrooms, restaurants, outside in the street or alley, public bathhouses or saunas, massage parlors, strip clubs, night clubs, party buses, parks, cabins, casinos, ice fishing huts, and so-called trap houses and flop houses.** Most of these locations, even many of the public locations, have an element of privacy in them.

*So this is all a big paved parking lot. And they [provider/victims] would joke with me, because I have been there a few times socially, and after they found out what I did, [they] would jokingly tell me how parking spot number whatever was the prostitution spot. – Law enforcement, Northeast MN*

*Mille Lacs Lake has ... a whole city of fish houses on there. You know, we've heard that the girls are being brought in and just ... have to make their route on the lake with all the fish houses too. – Non-profit advocacy, Central MN*

The physical location for the exchange of sex could be in many different places. Sex buyers find places that are private or semi-private, convenient, and that provide some degree of anonymity.

## Conclusion: How

This section explored the multiple ways that sex buyers enter the marketplace. How sex buyers identify and connect with a provider/victim is typically shaped by convenience and anonymity. The primary mode of market entry was identified as internet-aided because it is convenient and easily accessible. Typically, in internet-aided purchasing and street-based solicitation, a sex buyer interacts directly with a person the buyer perceives as the provider/victim. In the use of social media and direct in-person solicitation of young people, our evidence suggests that sex buyers display predatory behavior toward youth and young people. Word-of-mouth networks provide security, confidentiality, and greater control over the purchase. Sex buyers using these networks collaborate with other sex buyers and/or sex traffickers.

Our data suggests that some sex buyers may believe that they are not complicit in sex trafficking or purchasing sex from a juvenile, while others may choose to ignore potential signs of sex trafficking. Cultural narratives about independent providers of sex may impact sex buyers' perceptions of their interactions with provider/victims. Sex buyers may *perceive* their purchase of sex to be from an independent provider of sex rather than a victim of sex trafficking.<sup>63</sup> But in practice, the distinction may not be clear or accurate. Yet another distinct group of sex buyers know about sex trafficking and, in some instances, participate in it. Further, our data suggest that some sex buyers are themselves a direct

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<sup>63</sup> Shively et al. (2016).

cause of exploitation and harm to provider/victims as well. This is discussed more in depth in the next section.

In this study, we examined the market from the perspective of sex buyers. Previous research in Minneapolis looked at the market from the perspective of trafficking operations and identified four business models that trafficking operations use to deliver victims to sex buyers: escort, brothel and brothel-like, street-based, and closed sex buyer networks.<sup>64</sup> The operational processes of traffickers are behind the scenes for most sex buyers. The business models help us understand how trafficking operations use a supply chain to make money. In a different industry, we would be talking about acquisition of raw materials, manufacturing, and product distribution.

Sex buyer market-entry behavior does not neatly overlap with sex trafficking business models for several reasons. First, not all provider/victims are under the control of a sex trafficking operation. Therefore, they are not, strictly speaking, “delivered” through business models. Second, sex buyer modes of market entry tell us how consumers in this industry approach the market. Do they go to a store, purchase a product online, or learn about a new product from a friend?

Sex buyers’ understandings of the marketplace are an important consideration that help us understand something about the motivation, intent, beliefs, and values of sex buyers and their behavior in the marketplace. Sex buyers’ knowledge and behavior in the marketplace varies widely; thus, strategies for reducing harm in the marketplace will also need to be varied and nuanced. This knowledge can be used to shape how and where to deploy limited resources for law enforcement, prevention, education, and awareness-raising.

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<sup>64</sup> Martin & Pierce (2014).

## Section Five: What Sex Buyers Seek to Purchase

The previous sections of this report explored *who* sex buyers are, *where* they purchase sex, and *how* they enter the market. In this section we explore *what* sex buyers seek to purchase. Common wisdom suggests that it is obvious that sex buyers seek to purchase sex. **However, our data indicates that in reality, sex buyers purchase a *sexual experience* that is structured by the ability of sex buyers to use money (purchasing power) to control the details of the experience (e.g., length of time, specific sex acts).** Some sex buyers pay for a one-sided interaction without obligation of reciprocity with the provider/victim.<sup>65</sup> At core, therefore, sex buying turns sex and sexual activity into a commodity that can be purchased, allowing the sex buyer to exert some level of control through the use of money.<sup>66</sup>

Based on qualitative interviews, we identified a wide range of experiences sought and levels of control exerted by individual sex buyers.<sup>67</sup> At a bare minimum, sex buyers use their purchasing power to select a sex act and length of time for the experience. Although most seek quick and anonymous sex with “no strings,” some seek aggression and violence. We also identified broad variation in the specific sexual requests and experiences sex buyers seek to obtain. The types of sex acts in the marketplace include oral sex, vaginal penetration, anal sex, so-called fetish activities such as urination and defecation, and many more.

When we analyzed cost in relation to provider/victim demographics and the nature and content of experiences, it became clear that the market is rooted within and amplifies general societal structural inequalities. Racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ageism are inherent in the market and expressed through a cost structure that creates hierarchies of value for specific traits and demographics of provider/victims.<sup>68</sup> These hierarchies of value, based on identity, may devalue and dehumanize provider/victims within the commercial sex market.

Many provider/victims in the market have limited ability to negotiate for themselves, set the terms of the experience, or protect their safety; this includes victims of sex trafficking, young people, and provider/victims living in poverty. Much-needed money from a sex buyer or pressure, coercion, and force from a trafficker may override all else. In addition, our data indicates that some proportion of sex buyers take what they want by force, regardless of any prior negotiations.

This section of the report may be particularly challenging for the reader. The information we gathered is sometimes sexually graphic and disturbing. We try to present a balanced picture of what we learned from interviews, highlighting the spectrum of experiences sought by sex buyers to describe the full range of marketplace experiences from the perspective of sex buyers. We start by exploring in more depth how sex buying is structured by power and control. While the market is structured by power and control, this does not mean that every sex buyer exerts obviously controlling behaviors. Then we

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Joseph & Black (2012); Milrod & Weitzer (2012).

<sup>66</sup> See, Carbonero & Garrido (2017) for a discussion of commodification and emotional labor in commercial sex.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Joseph & Black (2012).

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Butler, 2015, “[R]ace and racism have played a role in creating the epidemic of sex trafficking in the United States and have undermined effective legal and policy responses. Race intersects with other forms of subordination including gender, class, and age to push people of color disproportionately into prostitution and keep them trapped in the commercial sex industry.” (p.2).

describe what we call the “primary marketplace,” summarizing what our interviewees described as the most common and proliferating sex buyer behaviors. This is followed by articulation of three distinct “market segments” that our interviewees suggested are utilized by sub-groups of sex buyers who may or may not also participate in the primary marketplace. Finally, this section closes with a discussion of sex buyers’ risk management behavior.

A thorough understanding of the demand side – what customers seek – is a cornerstone to a more complete vision of the marketplace as a whole. The data here is written from the perspective of what sex buyers seek to purchase. However, it is clear that from the provider/victim’s perspective, a great deal of harm, violence, and trauma are inflicted by sex buyers. This topic will be explored further in future reports. While sometimes difficult, this sex buyer perspective provides important information for developing prevention and interventions to reduce harm to provider/victims and their communities.

## Purchasing Power and Control

**The power to purchase, or trade for, a sexual experience of the sex buyer’s choosing is a defining feature of the demand side of the marketplace for sex.** As noted above and described in more depth below, consumer preferences often supersede provider/victims’ agency within the sexual transaction. In the broader labor market, this kind of exploitation of workers occurs in many different industries and economic sectors.<sup>69</sup>

At a bare minimum, most sex buyers seek to control the price, the type of sex act(s), and length of time by negotiating with a provider/victim or trafficker before agreeing to the transaction. Many law enforcement officers we interviewed discussed negotiations via text as part of the evidence collected during their sting operations. For example, here is what several said:

*We have guys [who say,] “Can I do this for that? How much? I only have \$200 bucks,” or “I only have \$100 bucks,” or “I only have \$80 bucks. What can you do for that?” – Law enforcement, Southeast MN*

*Some will ask ... “What are hard boundaries for you?” – [meaning] what are hard no’s, basically. And I [female undercover police officer] would say, “Brown showers. I don’t want to be pooped on.” But then ... some guys are really pushy: “Well, what if I pay you an extra 100 bucks and I’ll bring my own sheet?” – Law enforcement, East Metro*

The degree and nature of negotiations may be related to how much experience a sex buyer has in the market. One person we interviewed suggested a range in degree of negotiation. Sex buyers who are new to the marketplace and naïve may negotiate less than experienced sex buyers who know what they want.

*I think the thing that you need to take a look at when you talk about the johns is the experience of the johns. Some are very first-time people and they are naïve [about] what they’re doing and they’re just out looking for somebody. They see a pretty picture and they want that. And then*

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<sup>69</sup> See, for example, an investigative journalism report on exploitation in the short haul trucking industry: <https://www.usatoday.com/pages/interactives/news/rigged-forced-into-debt-worked-past-exhaustion-left-with-nothing/>.

*you get progressively into the experience of a john where you have somebody who ... doesn't just negotiate how much. They just negotiate what they're looking for. They're negotiating certain places or acts or fetishes or all the things that go with it. – Law enforcement, Central Minnesota*

One law enforcement officer involved in undercover sting operations said that sex buyers typically seek the best “deal,” with lots of different options from a sort of “menu” of choices:

*Some of the comments we hear [from buyers] are, either my wife or my girlfriend ... won't give me any sexual attention at all, or she won't do certain things or what people would consider to be naughty things. Anal sex – I know yesterday, working a detail, a lot of the comments ... were about, will she do anal sex. [...] These men want to find women that'll do that. Certainly, oral sex is a big deal. Then we do see some of the domination or sort of the fetish stuff – the spanking, the really rough sex, really controlling sex, ... if you will. Multiple positions – I know [from] the reviews that I read from the men in TER [The Erotic Review], ... a lot of these men are really into multiple positions in a session. It seems like they want it to be as diverse and as action-packed, if you will, as they can possibly get. ... You don't see a lot of just straight [...] walk-in-the-door, missionary sex – “I'm done, thanks, I'm out the door.” It's going to be a lot more on the menu than that. And that's a quote we get: “What all's on the menu?” – Law enforcement, East Metro*

Sex buyers negotiate market deals and types of sex act in coded language. For example, the term “Greek” means anal sex and “ATM” stands for “ass-to-mouth” (a penis or object penetrating the anus and then the mouth). Our data indicates that buyers seek reduced prices for quicker sex acts (“quickies”) and multiple women (“two-girl specials”); and they offer more money for sex with no condom (“bareback” or “BB”) and multiple orgasms (“multiple pops”). Many interviews with undercover officers described the content of these conversations.

*Yeah, “If I'm just real quick, if I can do it for 20 minutes, how much for like a quickie?” Or [they] wanna just come in for a quickie. – Law enforcement, Southwest MN*

*A lot of them were mainly interested in what was the price difference between one or two women. That was the biggest thing. And then, you know, they kinda go back and forth. [...] If my memory is right, most of them wanted both because the price difference was not that outrageous. But a couple of them just wanted the blonde or just wanted the brunette. – Prosecutor, Southeast MN*

Our interviewees suggested that condom use is built into the basic price. If a sex buyer seeks sex without a condom, they have to negotiate the price with the provider/victim or trafficker. According to our interviews, the extra cost for not using a condom ranged from \$5 to \$100.

*You might even see, if you do go onto Backpage, that there will be different prices if you have condom-less sex and that buyers may sometimes request that and pay more. And it's just kind of like, depending on how much money you want to get, you might end up agreeing to it. – Youth services provider, Northwest MN*

*So you can get more money without a condom. I know like, without a condom it's way more. – Youth services provider, West Central MN*

*And almost all of them, when they show up at the room, [maybe] half of them [sex buyers] will [say,] “Hey, if I give you an extra \$100, will you go without a cover [condom]?” – Law enforcement, West Metro*

One law enforcement officer involved in sting operations described the typical sequence of the negotiations between a sex buyer and provider/victim. This interviewee sums up what many interviews conveyed about how sex buyers typically bargain and about how sex buyers value the provider/victims:

*When we see each other in person, we’ll discuss money. And everything’s based on time. Almost everything is based either a half an hour or an hour. That’s the most common – you know, ... “How much for a half an hour? And then, once we’ve established ... it’s \$75 for a half an hour ..., then it might later on turn into “And what all do I get during the half-hour? Do I get multiple pops?” In other words, can the man have an orgasm more than one time. Some girls say, “Nope. It’s more money.” Once you’ve done one, ... even though you’re still within your half-hour, you want to do it again, it’s more money. Some don’t. Some will say, you know, it’s X amount of dollars for an hour, and that hour will include, you know, either pretty much straight oral sex or pretty basic intercourse. And ... certainly, anal sex is an upcharge, or more money. If you want, ... say, oral sex without a condom, that’s more money. Some just do it as part of the whole – you know, it’s a straight fee. This is the fee, and everything goes for that. ... It varies. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

Negotiations and attempts to get a “deal” and set the conditions of the purchase is one aspect of control derived through purchasing power. However, many law enforcement officers and social service providers made the observation that while purchasing sex is about sex, it is at core about control of the experience. One social service provider with deep knowledge of the marketplace described it like this.

*They’re not paying for the sex. They’re paying for the entire [experience] ... They might make the transaction that they’re buying your vagina or your body, but what they’re really getting out of it is a whole lot more than just your body ... They’re getting their ego stroked. They’re getting to feel like they’re in control or they’re smarter, or they’re outsmarting a young girl, even if the girl thinks she’s outsmarting him. They get someone to cater to their needs and only care about their feelings. That’s what they want. They want someone to care about them, [and] they don’t have to care about [having] feelings back [for] the person [selling sex]. They’re [sex buyers] getting a lot for what they’re paying for. And it’s not just a body. – Youth services provider, West Central MN*

A social service provider from the Twin Cities described how violence can be part of the “menu” of options that sex buyers choose from.

*There’s a lot of men that will tell you right up front, “You’ll get an extra hundred dollars, but I’m going to beat the shit out of you.” That’s a big thing, too. – Non-profit advocacy, East Metro*

Another social service provider, from Central Minnesota, described how a youth victim described violence as part of what sex buyers want.

*She [provider/victim] was in St. Cloud and she said she would be with eight, nine guys a night. And she said, in her experience, ... the older they were, the meaner they were ... and that nine times out of ten, she would leave with bruises. From what she’s expressed to me, you’re*

*expected to just do whatever they want, whatever they want. She reported that there were a few times where it was multiple men with her. – Non-profit advocacy, Central MN*

A law enforcement officer said that the degree of control depends on the “mentality” of the sex buyer. This interviewee described how provider/victims often cannot predict in advance which sex buyers will use force to take what they want. Their purchasing power gets the sex buyer in the door and sets an expectation for a sexual experience, but many provider/victims do not know exactly what will happen from there.

*It depends on the mentality of the john, or the buyer if you want to call them that. [Because sometimes] – you’re going to have control freaks. Oh, my god. That will come in, and they’ll bring their own bag of tricks. And they have a complete agenda of exactly how it’s going to go. And they’re paying you for it to go that way. And so you’ll do what they say or else. And so, you know, once that door shuts, it’s kind of anything goes. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

Another law enforcement officer echoed this same theme, suggesting that purchasing sex from a sex trafficking victim is about power, drawing a parallel to sexual assault and rape.

*But the [adult provider/victims] consistently say that it’s more of a control thing, it’s more of a power thing, it’s more of almost a violent encounter. They [sex buyer] tend to want to control the victim in a violent way. ... I think [for] your [buyers of adult provider/victims] ... I don’t see it as much as a sexual thing. It seems to be more of – in dealing with sexual assault crimes all the time, and then dealing with sex trafficking, I think it’s kind of similar. I think that ... the buyers are more into the control-rape type scenario. It’s more, “I want to rape somebody; I don’t want to do it to somebody that’s not willing, so therefore I’m going to pay somebody money, and then I’m going to rape them. And I’m going to have that power over them. And I’m going to do that, and I’m going to justify it by paying them for it, so I’m not a bad guy, but I want to experience what it’s like to be a rapist.” – Law enforcement, East Metro*

A law enforcement officer suggested that sex buyers view provider/victims as less than fully human and use their purchasing power to buy experiences that are humiliating and degrading. The interviewee talks about power in the sense of exerting power over the provider/victim. Similar to the quote above, this interviewee also drew connections between motivations for paid sex and sex crimes.

*... It surprised me from the guys that wanted the prostitute to put the strap-on on, and then they wanted to receive. Or guys that even wanted to pee in the prostitute’s mouth and stuff like that. And then it kind of made me realize some of this seems to be not so much about the sex part as it is about the power part. You know, a lot of sex crimes are more about power and control than they are about the actual act of sex. And power and control is what excites some of those sexual predators and stuff. So it almost seems like some of that is coming into this prostitution-ing. You know a guy is probably not willing to ask if he can pee in her mouth, but a prostitute, you know, isn’t seen-- you know, seen as probably below [him]. ... And you’re paying for her. So it’s really weird, the wide range of things people ask for or want. – Law enforcement, Central MN*

Another person we interviewed talked about power inherent in the use of degrading language while having sex as a juxtaposition of violence and sex that occurs in the context of commercial sex.

*... They're looking for that power of like ... talking horribly to one person while penetrating them, while doing things to them that they're supposed to like. So [it's] that juxtaposition of violence and sex which us, as a society, are so good at tying together. – Youth services provider, West Metro*

We also found that sexual assault and physical assault are aspects of some sex buyers' preferences and behavior. Many of our interviews suggested that assault and rape are common in the commercial sex market; some sex buyers specifically pay to commit violent acts (as noted above), whereas others just do it. Given the nature of our data, it is not possible for us to determine the proportion of sex buyers who engage in violent and degrading behavior. However, we know that provider/victims experience it on a regular basis. Violence was described by law enforcement officers and social service providers across Minnesota.

*I've heard that ... the girls have reported that some of the guys [sex buyers] get rough. They get more than they were OK with. A lot of times they will come [to] us [sexual assault services] too because they were maybe agreeing to oral sex and were forced into something more. – DV/SA social service provider, Central MN*

*And while in treatment [post-arrest program], they [sex buyers] talk about having paid for sex with prostitutes and, [along] with that story, numerous stories of these men seeking, usually, women on the street, but to assault women. So they were purposely looking for prostitutes and assaulting them physically. – Non-profit advocacy, East Metro*

*They [victims] haven't so much talked about certain sex acts, it's just that they [sex buyers] are so violent with them. The Native women that I've experienced or that I've had conversations with who have been trafficked have been particularly petite. And they have been particularly bruised up and down the inside of their legs and bruised on their arms, like they have been restrained. And just like really horrendously brutalized. And then been very brutalized internally. You know not because of using objects but just because ... the sex has been so rough and they're so tiny. They haven't been beaten around the face, or anything like that, although that has happened. – Non-profit advocacy, Northwest MN*

*The same girl [Native American woman who was arrested for prostitution] that I was sitting with the day before was killed by a cab driver [sex buyer] in South Minneapolis. Her body was dropped off [street name], one-half block from her mother's house. Now, I know this cab driver couldn't have known where her mother lived ... but, she was killed that way. But I think his intent was murder. – Non-profit advocacy, East Metro*

Before exploring the details of what sex buyers seek to purchase, we felt it was important to set the context of power and control in the marketplace for sex. We believe that only a small proportion of sex buyers seek to commit violence and rape, and an even smaller number are intent on murder; but the harm is very real. The purchasing power of the sex buyer sets the expectation for a sexual experience of some kind that is controlled by the sex buyer, but, as noted above, provider/victims do not necessarily know what to expect in any given transaction.

In the remainder of this section, we provide an overview of the types of sexual experiences that make up the primary marketplace for sex and discuss three distinct market segments. It is not possible to provide an

exhaustive description because the preferences and desires of each sex buyer are unique. However, we present the common themes we discerned from across Minnesota.

## Primary Marketplace

We were able to establish a clear consensus among interviewees from all regions of Minnesota and a range of professional expertise that the primary marketplace is designed for heterosexual men to obtain sex from women, specifically young-looking women. **Most sex buyers seek quick and anonymous sex with young-looking female provider/victims.** Evidence in Minnesota suggests that a majority of victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation are people of color.<sup>70</sup> The experiences of provider/victims of color in the marketplace are shaped in relation to Eurocentric (i.e., white or Caucasian) beauty standards. Girls and women of color are described as “exotic” or “mixed.” Prices for them are typically lower than for Caucasian girls and women; and some sex buyers seek them out to enact racist fantasies. Thus, our data suggests that the sex buyers purchase racially sexualized experiences that are packaged and commodified.<sup>71</sup>

## Quick, Anonymous Sex

Our findings surfaced that many, if not most, sex buyers seek a brief and time-limited experience with an anonymous provider. Interviewees said sex buyers request sessions lasting 15 minutes, 30 minutes, or an hour, with 30-minute increments being the most common.

*They [sex buyers] want to meet for that half-hour to an hour, you know, over the lunch hour. – Law enforcement, Central Minnesota*

*A good number of them want a fairly quick sex act – so, often, [that means] oral sex. And in the situation they’re in, especially on the street, that’s what’s offered. That’s typically what’s going to happen on the street. – Non-profit advocacy, East Metro*

*It seems like most of the time, at least from what I recall, a lot of people just want that half an hour. ... It seems like the majority is the half an hour over the hour. – Law enforcement, Central MN*

The experience is shaped by a lack of intimacy and connection. Below are examples of how interviewees from across the state described the length of time for sexual experiences in the marketplace.

*But then again, there are guys who aren’t looking for any connection. I mean, we have one girl who talks about [how] every time that she did it [paid sex], she played Flappy Bird [an online game]. She just played a game on her phone the whole time, every single time, because these men weren’t looking for any connection. They weren’t looking for any ... sexual interaction. Like, they didn’t care if she was enjoying it and they didn’t care ... if she was paying attention. They just wanted to have sex quick. – Youth services provider, West Central MN*

<sup>70</sup> Attela (2015); Martin & Pierce (2014); Pierce (2009).

<sup>71</sup> Ocen (2015); Butler (2015).

*They want the anonymity. ... They're not going to tell you their real name half the time.  
– Law enforcement, East Metro*

Convenience is a potentially motivating factor in seeking out quick sex. Sex buyers who seek convenient sex may have less preference about what sexual experiences they receive and which providers they see, as long as the arrangement meets their criteria for convenience. For example, one law enforcement officer described this trend as follows.

*They [sex buyers] would want to find a girl that was either near or on the way to wherever they were going that day: work, or if they were out [shopping], or they were going to the doctor. Then they would find someplace close [... ] It didn't really matter the girl. It was more the location of where the girl was at. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

The quote below sums up the nature of quick and anonymous sex by relaying information from two sex buyers who were put on trial for purchasing a 12-year-old girl.

*In this case that we were just in trial on, we had both of the men who engaged in sex acts with a 12-year-old. We made them testify. And we didn't give them any deal, and we didn't give them any immunity. And I'll tell you, when they were interviewed, they were shocked to find out that she was 12. Did we get them to finally come out with the fact that they were aware she was a juvenile, just by the sheer look of her? I mean, she was tiny. Yes. She was significantly younger than 18. Yes, she was. Okay, great. Did that stop them from having sex with her? No. Our johns are not necessarily picky, right? Think about the amount of time that they spend with these girls. Fifteen, 20 minutes, max? In, out, done. So when you see the ads on Backpage [saying] this much money for a half an hour, and this much money for an hour, it's not actually a full hour. Nobody's hanging out with these girls for an hour. What that means is ... this much money to blow your load once. This much money to blow your load twice. And then get out. Nobody really gets to blow their load twice, by the way. It's a thing. Doesn't happen. ... So these men are opportunists. Instead of going to the bar and investing time and, you know, having a conversation with a human being and buying them a couple drinks and then taking them back and engaging in a sex act, they're, like, "You know what, I'm just going to tell my wife that I'm going to be home a little bit late. I'm going to be working in the office, you know, until 6:30 tonight, and I'm going to call Backpage. And I'm going to do that quickly before I go home." So it's a matter of convenience for a lot of the men. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

In contrast to the majority of sex buyers who seem to want quick, convenient, and anonymous sex, some people we interviewed, as well as the academic literature on commercial sex, describe a potentially smaller proportion of sex buyers who purchase longer experiences accompanied by companionship. The quotes below are indicative of what our interviewees said about this.

*There's some trends of, some of them ..., they want to hang out with [the] prostitute. So, you know, it's not ... the majority of the cases, but there are a significant number of cases where they're like, oh, you know, are you 420 friendly [open to smoking pot], you know, marijuana, or whatever they want to come out there and hang out and you know get high or do whatever. So there's some of that going on for it. – Prosecutor, Central MN*

*And so some of these guys, when they show up, they're expecting the girlfriend experience. ... They want the kissing. They want the hugging. They want the conversation. They want the passion and the intimacy like you would in, I guess, a normal relationship. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

This is sometimes referred to as the “girlfriend experience” or GFE, which is a sexual interaction that includes conversation, kissing, companionship, and sexual contact. Several academic studies of online hobbyists suggest this is a common experience purchased through third-party review sites by sex buyers who frequently purchase sex.<sup>72</sup> It is usually associated with higher pay for the provider/victim compared to the quick anonymous sex. However, our sources did not indicate that the GFE was a common request across Minnesota.

*Yeah, usually it's just sex – oral sex or regular sex. It's not companionship or – I mean, I haven't heard anybody say that ... the guy just wanted to sit and talk to them. ... Once in a while, you have that. But none of the girls that we've talked to have had that. – Law enforcement, West Central MN*

The online hobbyists are a distinct and unique group of sex buyers who may not be representative of the majority of sex buyers. In our review of the online marketplace, we observed a flourishing of new “transactional dating sites.” These sites are members-only sites where young individuals can be paired with an older, wealthy individual for paid dating. It is possible that this new trend may be taking the place of the GFE within the primary marketplace.

In contrast to GFE, we found evidence that the “porn star experience,” or PSE, is more common in the online marketplace. The PSE happens in the context of time-limited and anonymous sex. The label suggests a type of experience based on sex acts found in pornography. One interview described the difference between PSE and the GFE:

*I guess [PSE would be] whatever a porn star would do, so more willing to be a little freaky, a little naughty. I think the Girlfriend Experience would be more kissing and no condom and stuff like that, [...] whereas Porn Star is like you want to get freaky. I mean, there is a lot of different porn, so you would probably want to specify like, I'd say, no anal or no bareback, so you kind of negotiate that. – Law enforcement, Northeast MN*

Another deviation from quick sex is when a sex buyer cultivates an ongoing transactional relationship with a provider/victim. This relationship is referred to as a “regular.”

*I have had guys that want to make it a regular thing. The girls do that, you know, they have their regulars. I think they prefer that. They're safer. They know what to expect. They know they're gonna get paid. ... I know some of the guys have said, “Maybe we can do this on a regular basis.” “Oh sure.” So, yeah, I think that happens a lot. – Law enforcement, Northeast MN*

In many instances the “regular” customer is much older than the provider/victim and can provide some type of basic income the provider/victim can rely upon.

*But given the opportunity, some johns will also become what the girls refer to as “regulars,” where the same girl will call the same john, or the same john will call the same girl ... and they'll*

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<sup>72</sup> Milrod & Monto (2012).

*engage in a sex act once every week or whatever. ... But most of our girls are young girls. And so ... the johns will kind of become, like, that support system for our girls, you know? The go-to [is] "I'm in trouble, I'm cold, I'm hungry. Come get me." And those regulars, more often, will do that. Because they know, when they go pick her up, because she's on the run from her parents, that he's going to get something in return. He's going to engage in a sex act with her.*

– Law enforcement, West Metro

## Young and Youthful

Our data suggest that while there is a market for all types of women, the majority of sex buyers are seeking young women. Our best evidence for this comes from evidence collected as part of online sting operations. According to the many law enforcement personnel we interviewed, sex buyers look for provider/victims aged 18-21, but many do not necessarily make a distinction between 16, 17, and 18 years old.

Several undercover officers suggested that ads for younger provider/victims receive more calls and activity from potential sex buyers than ads they place for older women.

*It seems like the younger, because a couple of our UCs [undercover officers] are older and in their early forties if not a little bit older, and they always advertise them younger, usually in their thirties. But when we put up a juvenile ad, like sometimes we'll put up a juvenile ad and our adult UC ad – and [it] never fails, the juvenile ad that we have has specific language that talks about "young" or "daddy's little girl" or some kind of language like that – that ad always gets more calls than the [ad for the] 30-year-old does. – Law enforcement, Southeast MN*

Law enforcement officers said that many sex buyers are not specifically seeking girls under age 18, but that some are willing to purchase sex from provider/victims that are described as being under age 18. In this way, juvenile victims can be hidden within the dominant market trend toward young women. Law enforcement officers involved in online sting operations pose as the provider/victim and are able to obtain a great deal of information from text and phone communication. Here are two examples.

*I think more often than not they're calling and looking for an adult. But when you suggest that a juvenile would be available, ... it's hard to quantify. There's often a willingness to go there. It's not like, "Absolutely not! I would never do it with an underage." No, it's not like that.*

– Law enforcement, Central MN

*And the sad part about it, too, is a lot of times [in a sting,] we ... would offer, "Well, you know, so and so is not available right now, but we've got a 16-year-old. Would you be ok with that?" "Oh yeah, yeah! That'd be great!" – Law enforcement, Northeast MN*

Two prosecutors in Southeast Minnesota echoed the same themes.

*So they [undercover officers] post the ads for 18-year-olds, but when the person reaches out, the undercover officer will say, "Well I'm 17 and my friend is 15, is that OK?" And, actually, it's a little comforting that a great number of the men will then say, "No, no thanks." But a great many of them will say, "Hm. That kind of makes me nervous, but I'll still come."*

– Prosecutor, Southeast MN

*But I haven't had anybody that I've prosecuted say, "I want a 14-year-old" or "I want a 16-year-old." ... They're accepting of the idea of it, I mean ... that's not a deterrent. You know, when they find out it's a 16- or 17-year-old, they still show up. – Prosecutor, Southeast MN*

In some sting operations, sex buyers provided reasons they would not agree to purchase sex from a minor. For some, they only want to purchase sex from an adult, and for others, it is the fear of arrest. One law enforcement officer we interviewed said:

*Oh yeah. There's some people that definitely said, "Hey I'm not into underage." Typically it's "I don't want to get arrested." So, you know, "I don't want anything to do with it." Even though they could get arrested for a 19-year-old or a 30-year-old or a 40-year-old. ... But I think the guys know that it's a felony to hire an underage prostitute, ... and they know that we're doing sting operations. So a lot of them are pretty shy about it. – Law enforcement, Central MN*

The price that a provider/victim can garner indicates their relative worth and desirability in the overall marketplace. Some people we interviewed said that young provider/victims make more money and that older provider/victims may have to engage in more sexual acts for less money. For example, one undercover officer said the following.

*... Where you get a lot more of the negotiations [is] on the end of the older, if you're portraying to be an older adult prostitute or adult sex trafficking person. When we're doing it, you see that group as more price gouging, trying to get the cheapest, trying to get the best, trying to get off, and trying to get twisted. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

In addition to seeking young provider/victims, sex buyers also seek providers who can role play or act youthful. We learn about these details primarily from social service providers who work directly with provider/victims and learn about sex buyers in that way. For example:

*So they [sex buyers] like the youthfulness. Even if an adult has that demeanor, they love it. They love the demeanor of an innocent, fresh, full of life, full of spirit person. ... Once you've been around the block enough times, you don't have that same like excited face to see new things. ... If you act ... dull, you're not worth anything financially to them. They can pay someone else for a better experience. – Youth services provider, West Central MN*

*... One victim that we talked with said that some of her johns or buyers had said that they wanted her to appear younger than what she was. So that just told me – and told her, too – that the younger the girls are, the better for them. – Non-profit advocacy, Central MN*

## **Fantasy, Fetish and Deviance**

Our data identified fantasies that many buyers seek to create, re-enact or experience through paid sex. Some of these may be considered deviant or fetish-based. It is important to underscore that fantasy and fetish behaviors were described as part of the primary marketplace rather than a deviant or unusual aspect of commercial sex in Minnesota. According to our participants, sex buyers who seek specific fantasies or fetishes are likely to arrange these ahead of time with the provider/victim. During buyer stings, officers reported sex buyers saying things like "My wife won't do this," or "I can't ask my wife this," indicating that these requests are premeditated and not spontaneous.

*Well, when we've done the chats, they're looking for something more than they think – what they say they can't get from, whatever, their partner or their wife. Some type of role playing. We see a lot of that. Toys. Do you have toys we can play with? Dildos? Sexual things that they would do with somebody that is not their intimate partner. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

It is not possible to list all fantasy and fetish activity requested in commercial sex. Nor is there a universally agreed-upon definition of what is considered “fetish” or “fantasy” in sex. Participants were not always able to articulate what these fetishes were, calling them “weird,” “abnormal,” and “bizarre” sex at times.

*[Sex buyers request] things that probably aren't allowed in most bedrooms. So does that make sense, that this stuff is very fetish? It's not, it's not something they're asking their wife or their girlfriend to do for them. – Law enforcement, Southwest MN*

*We had guys with fetishes. You know, you name it, ... we saw it. Bring in the plastic, you know, tarp. The girl would urinate or defecate on them. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

Some of these activities that participants cited as “fetish” or “fantasy” included acting out or role-playing specific scenarios, sex toys/dildos, daddy-daughter role play, dressing up in costumes, “cross dressing,” lactation fetishes with providers with breast milk, disability fetishes, adult-baby fetishes, sadomasochism fetishes, pregnant women fetishes, animal play, bestiality, and defecation/urination fetishes. Several interviewees said the following:

*You have guys that want ... the fetishes that are off the wall, you can't even imagine that the things that are going on! ... I mean we've had fetishes of lactating women. ... We had one guy with a fetish of a cream pie, he called it. ... Toys. With dildos and vibrators and stuff like that. And some normal fetishes. – Law enforcement, Central MN*

*[Sex buyers request] more freaky or weird kind of things. One guy wanted to come in drag and that sort of thing. More weird fetishes ... but I don't want to downplay that I know that violence happens. – Law enforcement, Northeast MN*

*[...] He liked to have the girls cut his penis with a scalpel and then have intercourse ...  
– DV/SA social service provider, West Metro*

*You name it. But primarily what sticks out for them, they say, is the older white guy here asks for some weird shit that his wife won't do. We've had him ask to drink bathwater, kick him in the groin – I mean, whatever they feel that their wife would not do or be comfortable with.  
– Law enforcement, Northwest MN*

*I put a guy in the pen [jail] for a diaper fetish that wanted ... the child to defecate in the diaper for him and weird, weird stuff. – Prosecutor, South Dakota*

Defecation and urination fetishes were described frequently in our interviews from both law enforcement officers and social service providers working with youth victims of sex trafficking. This was a common theme across the entire state, indicating that it may be a widespread activity targeted to youth. However, it is also possible that it stood out to our interviewees because they viewed it as particularly abhorrent.

*... as sick as this sounds, guys ... have asked to be able to urinate on women. Sick, disturbing kinds of stuff. – Law enforcement, Central MN*

*... girls that have been peed on. Like, a guy paid money to pee on her. That's all he wanted to do was pee on her. Or guys will ask girls to poop on them or, yeah, none of this is advertised. However, people can make a lot of money. Yeah. I mean, a lot of it people think like, "Oh they're just going to have sex," but no. These girls have to do super degrading, crazy things. – Youth services provider, West Central*

*We've had anywhere from straight sex all the way, from someone who'd claim a massage and see where it leads to, others, you know, threesomes, and someone'd have really gross stuff in terms of ... shitting on you, peeing on you. – Law enforcement, Southwest MN*

*... poop on their face. Pee on them is the one. Basically, it's always defecating on them [provider/victim] ... – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Additionally, language in the online marketplace can indicate whether a provider is willing to perform fantasy or fetish activity, such as “fetish friendly.” Participants noted that because of an increased demand for fetish activity, traffickers are increasingly using new techniques to “train” victims to perform these fetish activities. Because the market overall targets young women and girls, this type of “training” is increasingly happening to youth victims of sex trafficking.

*... I think things are shifting now. And so it's not about just hurrying up and getting them on the streets, but it's about "we need to train them. We need to make them a better product. We need to have them specialized in certain types of sexual acts. And we need them to not be breaking down." I think the more, I don't know, kinkier or more erotic type of activities that the girls can perform, especially at a younger age, the more money the exploiters can get for them. ... So I think, then, this training has taken a whole new level that we're going to start seeing. – DV/SA social service provider, Northwest MN*

One social service provider suggested that the increase in demand for fetish acts causes young victims of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation to feel worthless and dehumanized. The interviewee also echoed the notion that young victims are “trained” on how to do fetish acts.

*She [youth victim] said some of the things that they've been asking her to do have just been unbelievably disgusting. And that she said that just re-instills that she's not worthy because of what they've done to her. ... And that's what [female youth victim] had talked about. There's just some really disgusting things. And apparently there's a fetish training place, whether it's in St. Cloud or in the metro, where they're being trained specifically to be able to do all these bizarre fetishes. And that's what, you know, [victim] talked about is these. They're not coming to me for normal sex; it's, like, really fucked-up sex. ... So one ... just wanted things shoved up his butt. And the other one, well, he's the farting one. Animal [play]. And then obviously the really young – pretending that they're really young. – Non-profit advocacy, Central MN*

## Appearance and Body Type

According to law enforcement and social service providers, there is a wide range of provider/victim appearance and body type sought by sex buyers. This quote echoes what we heard from many — that there is a market for just about anything a sex buyer might want to purchase.

*[...] at least, in my experience, there is such an intentional variety and range of body types, ethnicities, and sizes of genitalia and breasts that it's deliberate for that reason. There's also a market for pregnant women. And so I think there's a demand for all of that. ... If you are flat-chested, that's okay. Because there's going to be a market for you. If you're heavy, heavy-breasted, that's okay. If you're Asian, great. If you're African-American, great. Blonde, great. All of it's welcomed. Except getting older. – Non-profit advocacy, West Metro*

While there is a great variety of provider/victims that sex buyers seek, our data indicates that sex buyers typically seek women based on Eurocentric beauty standards. This was described as the “all-American girl” – blond, young, and friendly. Traffickers may seek out young women who meet these “standards” as a business strategy to increase their profits.

*The ... busiest prostitute that I've ever seen is the one that had the good-girl ads. Not provocative in the sense of, you know, showing a lot of skin. But she's the all-American nice girl. ... That is the person who, in my work, [is] absolutely the busiest, bar none. Right under that is the very sensual woman, showing very sensual pictures. Not the hardcore titties and ass. It's the sensual pictures so that they can create this fantasy in their mind as they're having sex with them. And, ... definitely, the hardcore stuff goes, too. There's no question about it. But ... those, from a business perspective, are the wiser. – Prosecutor, East Metro*

*And they [traffickers] will think, well, if she's a white girl, she's more likely to get more calls. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

*White females are generally the preferred victim for the traffickers. And for the buyers. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

Our interviews suggested that young white girls and women can make the most money in the marketplace. But we know from other sources that the majority of youth victims of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation are people of color, who are quite literally devalued in the market with respect to their white peers. We learned from both law enforcement and social service providers that some African American provider/victims will be advertised online as white.

*What we see a lot of times is, ... some of them will advertise pictures of maybe a very tan female, a tan white female, but then you get there and it'll be a black female. I've noticed a lot of that, where it's not even close. You get in there and think you have a tan female, it's going to be a tan female, or just a white female, and it's a black female. – Law enforcement, Southeast MN*

*We've had so many times pictures of white girls, Latina girls, and you get there and it's an African American chick. I mean, nothing like these pictures. But I think they've caught on to the fact that there's so many African American girls on there [Backpage.com] that they have to set themselves apart. And then we ask, “Don't people say anything when you show up and, you*

*know, it's not them?" They're like, "No they [sex buyers] don't care by the time they get here."  
– Law enforcement, West Metro*

Many interviewees noted that female provider/victims of color were often denoted in advertisements as “exotic” or “mixed,” thus labeling their appearance in relation to whiteness.

*[Sex buyers look for] vaguely mixed girls, the girls that are racially ambiguous or that are closer to white, but not actually white. Whiteness is still a standard, but it's still more attractive if you have a brown or black girl that can pass as or is lighter skinned or stuff like that. "Exotic" is always the word I see [in online ads]. I hate that word so much. – DV/SA social service provider, West Metro*

Our participants indicated that sex buyers seeking Asian provider/victims typically engage in sex buying through massage parlors. This composite mode of market entry, described in Section Four, is directly connected to what sex buyers refer to as “Asian massage parlors,” a specific niche in the market for Asian female provider/victims.

Some interviewees suggested that American Indian and African-American provider/victims may be specifically sought by some sex buyers in Greater Minnesota because they are ethnically or racially different from the majority of women in rural Minnesota.

*Unfortunately, I think that our buyers are definitely seeking the ... mysterious or mythical or – I don't know what word it is – Native American girls for some reason. ... So I think that because we have such that high population around here that those are probably what are being sought out. Or the African-American. Because [Northern MN town] is so not diverse. So anybody that stands out that's not the good Lutheran or the good, you know, Scandinavian person is probably sought out a little bit more. – Non-profit advocacy, Central MN*

Sex buyer preference for provider/victims of color can be seen as part of a fetishization or “othering” of provider/victims of color in the marketplace across Minnesota. Some people we interviewed indicated that African-American and American Indian provider/victims are subjected to greater degrees of violence.

*African-American women are treated much more violently, and so are Native Americans. Actually, ... Native Americans are by far more abused than anybody else. I had four friends from 1999 to now that were Native American and that were involved in prostitution, and they are all dead. – Non-profit advocacy, East Metro*

Many interviewees described the marketplace for sex as inherently racist, and this is also described in the academic literature.<sup>73</sup> Numerous social service providers we interviewed from across Minnesota discussed racism, violence, and racist fantasies as part of the “experience” that some sex buyers purchase. The interview excerpts below are difficult to read. But they illustrate the ways that the purchasing power of sex buyers creates a space in the marketplace for men to re-enact long-held United States historical narratives about rape, slavery, and colonization.

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<sup>73</sup> Racism is a widely discussed aspect of the commercial sex market, See, for example: Pierce (2009); Butler, 2015; Ocen, 2015.

*Racism is rampant in this industry. It's loud and it doesn't hold back – in prices and the way that they [women of color in the sex industry] get treated [by sex buyers]. And I personally think that the types of men [sex buyers] that would call for minorities, ... they're sick, they're sicker people. Because they're like white men that want to fuck black women and call them slave names and stuff like while they're doing it. And it's like that's what's getting them off, is that they're treating this n-word, bitch, however they feel like treating her. And that's like what's getting them [off], that's what's floating their boat. It's not even the sex act, it's the fact that they can treat people however they want and it's OK; no one stops them. – Youth services provider, West Central MN*

*Girls [trafficking victims] will go be friends with the girl they're being sold with and the black girl will make \$100 less with the same sexual act, exact same thing. Or johns will use things like "let me be your slaveholder," like "let me, you're such a sexy slave." Or they'll just bring up like, racial, old, historical .... If a man doesn't feel like he's dominant in his life or doesn't feel like he has control, it's super empowering for him and super control-filled and super like, glorifying to rape a black woman and be her owner. ... And she has to go along with that if she wants to make money. Some guys find that so hot, and she has to play that role. And how degrading to say, like, "I'm your slave." – Youth services provider, West Central MN*

*[O]ne [American Indian] elder talks about how one guy buys Indian women just so that he can beat them. He buys them so that he can beat them. I'm sure there's sexual assault at some point in that process, but he wants to beat them first. He wants to physically assault them and harm them. ... You know, when you think about what excites certain types of sexual predators, I think for him that that's definitely part of his arousal is to beat women first and then to be able to rape them, the way that she talks about. – Non-profit advocacy, Northwest MN*

Our data does not indicate how prevalent these kinds of experiences are in the marketplace. It is clear that while the primary marketplace, as described by our interviewees, offers a wide range of options for sex buyers, this marketplace is also inherently sexist, racist, and ageist. It is geared predominantly to sell women and girls to men so they can purchase a sexual experience. The general desirability of young white women and the higher price they garner are indicative of how racial and ethnic groups, and women of different ages and body types, are quite literally valued and devalued as humans.

As described throughout this report, it should be remembered that boys and men are also in the marketplace as provider/victims. We learned less about people who purchase sex from boys and men, and that could be because law enforcement and social service providers are not as knowledgeable about this part of the market.

The fundamentally racist nature of the marketplace for sex is not a new observation. Survivors of trafficking have noted racial hierarchies in the sex market and the quite different experiences of women of color compared to white women involved in commercial sex.<sup>74</sup> This is an important aspect of the marketplace from the demand side that highlights the role of racial disparities in Minnesota in shaping the commercial sex marketplace. This will be the topic of future reports.

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<sup>74</sup> Carter & Giobbe (1999).

## Market Segments

In addition to what we term the primary market, our interviewees discussed three distinct market segments that attract a subset of sex buyers. These include sex buyers who specifically seek the following: victims under age 16; lesbian women, gay men, and transgender women; and very young children.

### Victims under Age 18

As described above, there is a strong market preference for young provider/victims, but our data identified a subset of sex buyers who specifically seek out victims under the age of 18. Further, our interviewees suggested they will pay more, travel further, and work harder to find a victim who is under the age of 18. In this section, we use the term “victim” because anyone under the age of 18 involved in commercial sex trading is considered a victim of sex trafficking or sexual exploitation in the Minnesota legal context.

Our data suggests that victims under the age of 18 are considered one of the highest-priced market segments, regardless of the mode of market entry, race, and body type. Sex buyers who seek out this market segment travel further and pay significant sums of money.

*People who travel interstate have sex with minors – you know, interstate travelers. They will travel far, ... but in regards to johns, mainly if there was a younger girl, an underage person, they'd go farther, but other than that they don't have to go far. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

*There was a guy whose wife in Woodbury was out of town for the weekend, and so he brought in an underage and had her at the house for a weekend and paid her, you know, 1,500 bucks or something. – Prosecutor, East Metro*

One interviewee described this subset of sex buyers as having strong preferences for minors, implying that they may not participate in the primary marketplace:

*There are men who, in general, just want to blow their loads, right? But there's this other type of very secretive life that these men have with this fetish of engaging in sex acts with children. Now, I see that in my ... office because a lot of my partners at my office will specialize in these types of cases, where the men will specifically seek out the juvenile girls. And they'll travel across the country. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Typically, online advertisements for sex do not specifically state that a victim is under the age of 18. Interviewees across the state suggest that sex buyers using online ads to identify a juvenile look for coded language, words such as “young,” “fresh,” “naïve,” and “barely legal.” These terms also suggest the strong preference for young and youthful provider/victims, but some of our interviewees suggested that a subset of sex buyers do sift through online ads looking specifically for minors under age 14.

*It's usually in the advertising; however, they [traffickers] play it very safe on Backpage because you can't be under 18 on Backpage. ... So they play it safe. However, over the phone girls can say, “Yeah, I'm really 13,” and, you know, people love that. Men love that. Men want young girls. Men want young, little girls and that's what sells. That's where the big money is. Our girls that are older – and older meaning still under 18, or 18 and have been in the life longer – are cheap*

*because they're "used"; or they're whatever, "No way you're 18 and like, still fresh" or "no way you're 18 and still a virgin." You know? They lose their value. – Youth services provider, West Central MN*

*And so there's certain ... language or terms that they [traffickers] think are going to be more attractive to purchasers. Like "new in town." You know, that is code for somebody who's pretty fresh or young or just been turned out. There are different kinds of terms that I think make ... more value to certain purchasers. – Prosecutor, West Metro*

When conducting online sting operations, law enforcement officers do identify and arrest sex buyers of juveniles. However, many law enforcement officers and social service providers suggested that avid sex buyers of juveniles are more likely to use word-of-mouth networks and direct in-person solicitation to identify someone to purchase. This trend was described in Section Four. But to reiterate, many interviewees from law enforcement and social services strongly asserted that knowingly and deliberately purchasing a victim under the age of 18 requires some connections to a trafficker.

*In the situation with minors, they're either very heavily guarded and it's something that turns into, like, a chain commodity where they're being that much more careful to make sure that these young people aren't being exposed to, you know, just any buyer. It needs to be a buyer who is well familiar with the seller, things like that. – Youth services provider, West Metro*

We also discussed the provision of sex at gang-related parties as part of the mode of entry through word-of-mouth networks. This is somewhat of a unique case that is different from the typical marketplace where one sex buyer purchases sex from a provider/victim. As described above, the sex buyers here are typically the men and boys attending the party. We mention this again here because our interviews suggested that traffickers typically target young teens to be used as sex objects at parties. Thus, this is part of the market segment that is specifically for victims under age 18. One interviewee described it like this:

*Some [victims under age 18] ... won't ever talk about their buyers. But that's, like, sex parties. And having ... that individual [female victim] see if they can get as many other young females as they can. And then it's thrown in, like, kind of a party-style atmosphere. ... It's seemingly starting out very organic, like, it's a party, and here we are, and we're all drinking, and we're having a good time – when underlying [that,] both the victims and the buyers are aware of what's going to take place. – Youth Services, West Metro*

Law enforcement and social service providers who learn about sex buyers looking specifically for juveniles suggested that they pose greater risks to society. In their experience, sex buyers of juveniles requested more violent and degrading sex acts more often than in cases involving adults. Participants were very concerned and disturbed by buyers who requested sex acts with minors.

*We placed an ad and during the conversation [with the buyer], we suggested that we also had a female with us that was 16 years old. And we ended up with, I think, seven arrests? Yeah, seven felony arrests. And talking to those individuals and doing those investigations, those were the real sickest of the sick, I think it's fair to say. Their sexual fantasies were way [off] the chart. And there's a couple of them that if we [had not arrested them], I think that they would've probably*

*... really done some bad things to some juveniles, if they were true. The fantasies they had were just over the top, with bondage and stuff like that. – Law enforcement, Central MN*

*And it's hard to explain. I mean it's just a crazy world. And these buyers just want, you know – again, the communication is never romanticized. It's degrading. ... You know, my experience is pretending to be that child. My experience is pretending to be the child victim, or prostitute, and selling myself or selling a girl to these men. These men are very degrading. It's more of a control; it's more of a twisted view. It's not what you get when you interview them. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

A law enforcement officer who participated in an interview shared an excerpt of text message communication between an undercover officer and a potential sex buyer. In this case, the law enforcement officer played the role of a mother who was selling her daughter for sex. When the buyers refer to “she” and “her,” they are referring to someone they believe is a juvenile female. The texts read as follows:

I don't care how many guys fuck her before I do. I think it would be really sexy if she did.  
 How many guys are going to use her today?  
 Let's see a pic of her pussy and I will leave right now.  
 I really want that pussy.  
 How many times has she been fucked now?  
 I want her to pretend to be my daughter. I like incest.  
 Last question. How old was she when she started having sex for money?  
 13, almost 14.  
 Damn. Do you have any other younger sisters?  
 I would like her to wear a school girl outfit. I would like her to let me watch her pee.

If she wanted my cock in and around her, then she would love to help prove how young, wet, and tight she is ...  
 I hope some old fat ugly fucker isn't going to pop her pretty little cherry.  
 This is a real nice cock she will be missing in her tight holes and down her throat ...

In the text excerpts above the sex buyer was interacting with a person he believed to be a mother selling her daughter. In reality, he was interacting with a law enforcement officer. But these disturbing quotes demonstrate that sex buyers can be predatory, and degrading, violent, and traumatizing for juvenile victims of sex trafficking.

Another law enforcement officer, referencing a sting operation, described a sex buyer who intended to purchase sex from a provider/victim he believed was 16 years old. The sex buyer showed up at the agreed-upon location with duct tape, a tarp, and rope in his car trunk. He was arrested for prostitution, but those involved in that investigation believed that it was possible that the sex buyer intended to kidnap and murder the youth. It is not possible to establish the prevalence of this kind of disturbing behavior and violence from sex buyers who specifically seek sex with juveniles. But our interviews suggested that violence is not uncommon among sex buyers who specifically seek youth.

## Lesbian, Gay and Transgender Provider/victims

As previously described, a majority of the marketplace for commercial sex is heteronormative, with cisgender male sex buyers and women provider/victims. However, our interviews described some men and women who seek same-sex provider/victims and transgender women. Previous research shows that LGBT youth are over represented among young victims of commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking.<sup>75</sup> We found evidence of a market segment of men purchasing sex from male provider/victims and men purchasing sex from transgender women. We have a small amount of evidence of women purchasing sex from women, but in general young lesbian women are exploited as part of the primary market from male sex buyers. We found no evidence of sex buyers purchasing sex from transgender men.

Men seeking paid sex from a man, as well as men seeking paid sex from a transgender woman, were described by some interviewees as a way for a self-described heterosexual man to experiment with their sexuality.

*I think they [buyers of gay men] are looking for the same things that anyone is looking for. I think they're looking for someone that – you know, sometimes it's just to spend time with. Someone that they can do – or have sexual intercourse with. ... For instance, like I said, you have a lot of buyers that have not come out, too. So, you know, you might have a straight male, or someone that considers [himself] a straight male, looking for another male, you know, just because they can't try this in their normal community. They can't say, outside, that they're gay or that they're transgender or ... anything like that, so they're looking for ways to figure it out. They're looking for ways to satisfy themselves, and they can't do that at home. – Non-profit advocacy, West Metro*

This same interviewee also described male sex buyers purchasing sex from a lesbian women or girl as part of a male fantasy, or as part of heterosexism against lesbian women.

*... These men [buyers] are trying to prove something, you know. Especially if they know you're a lesbian. And they're trying to ... screw the lesbian out of you and that kind of thing. So ... it's sad and it's scary. – Non-profit advocacy, West Metro*

Several people we interviewed talked about older gay men cultivating a transactional relationship with younger boys. This was sometimes referred to as a “sugar daddy.” In most instances, the younger boy was economically vulnerable, living in poverty or homeless.

*One of the first narcotics cases that I arrested a person from was a male prostitute from [deleted] Park in St. Paul. And I said, “How did you get here?” And he said, “Oh, I've got a regular from your community that comes up. He picks me up.” And this kid was 14 years old. He says, “He picks me up. He takes me to Valley Fair, he takes me to the zoo, he takes me to all of these places.” He says, “And then I come down here and I spend the weekend with him and that's our arrangement.” ... I ask, “How did you meet him?” “Well, I met him in the park.” And you know, that prostitution with that person, that suspect never got arrested. – Law enforcement, Southwest MN*

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<sup>75</sup> Dank, et al. (2015).

Purchasing sex from a transgender woman was described as part of a “fetish” market and available mostly online. We do not know if sex buyers of transgender women solely seek out this population, or if they purchase sex in the primary market as well. Our interviews, particularly youth services providers, described some sex buyers deliberately seeking provider/victims who had not undergone gender re-assignment surgery. This was discussed more in depth in Section Two in the sub-section on the non-heteronormative market.

Some transgender women provider/victims also participate in street-based tracks, although our data indicates that there are much higher risks to their safety in these settings. If a sex buyer does not know that the provider/victim is transgender and has internalized hatred or transphobia towards transgender individuals, the sex buyer may physically or sexually assault the provider/victim.

*Usually after the ... sexual act [with a transgender provider], then if any homophobia or anger comes out, it can turn into violence, which I have seen as well, from the buyer because they are struggling with their own inner homophobia. Society tells them ..., “If you like women, then why would you like a beautiful trans woman?” – Youth services provider, West Metro*

*If they’re [buyers] coming in as a straight male, and all of a sudden they’re done and they realize they just, you know, had oral [sex] from a transgender person, that might really upset them. So who knows? They might do things that – some of the lingo is “break” – you know, like, break a person. Like, rape or something like that, you know. Just to feel that kind of power and control again. It could be death. And there are a lot of transgender people that are murdered and killed because of stuff like this. ... So it’s sad, it’s sick, and it’s scary. – Non-profit advocacy, West Metro*

Our research on these market segments is inconclusive. Research on transgender women’s participation in commercial sex highlights participation due to societal marginalization, employment discrimination, and lack of access to gender-affirming medical supplies.<sup>76</sup> Recent research on LGBTQ persons, men who have sex with men, and women who have sex with women has also found high rates of violence perpetrated by sex buyers.<sup>77</sup>

## Very Young Children

As discussed in Section Four, we identified a distinct market segment related to child pornography and sexual abuse of young children and infants. This was described in our interviews as being a completely separate market that functions predominantly on the deep web, linked through international networks. While this is a separate market segment and a distinctly different pool of offenders, our data on this topic indicates that this is highly secretive and hidden, with high levels of harm and exploitation to young children. We did not gather a great deal of information about this market segment, as child pornography was not the primary focus of this report. But we thought it was important to mention again in this section, which details what sex buyers seek to purchase.

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<sup>76</sup> Crosby & Pitts (2007).

<sup>77</sup> Dank, et al. (2015).

## Risk Management

The experiences sex buyers seek and how they obtain those experiences are mitigated by perceived and real risks for participation in this illegal commercial sex market. Our data indicates that the greatest risk perceived by sex buyers is that their behavior will be exposed to their family and community. A law enforcement officer addressed this theme.

*They [sex buyers] have a great fear of public exposure. So when you interview them, through interview tactics, ... they're going to talk to you right there maybe, because they don't want you showing up at home or at their work. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

Fear of arrest was also identified. However, these two risks are linked, since arrest often leads to family members, friends, and co-workers finding out about the sex buyers' activity.

*That was one of the questions we asked them – “What are you most fearful of?” – and it was just the arrest. Nine out of 10 times, they would say, “Being arrested.” The other one would say, “If my wife would find out.” – Law enforcement, East Metro*

Law enforcement activity can impact the strategies that sex buyers use to obtain paid sex. They mitigate these risks through numerous strategies that include use of technology, use of coded language in negotiations, and patterns of when and where sex purchasing takes place.

*Use of the online market is both convenient and can mitigate risks for sex buyers. Here, sex buyers use multiple strategies to first ascertain that the ad that they have contacted is not an undercover police officer. These strategies include the use of sophisticated technology, internet searches, third-party review sites, and photographic evidence from the provider/victim. If used skillfully, the online environment can shield sex buyers from police detection. They're using, you know, the same things we do, like [software name] and those kind of things, and doing reverse image searches to see if our pictures are real that we use. If they've been used on other ads, you know, you can do some of those reverse image searches real easy. So they're trying to figure out who we are and to protect themselves, too. ... They want some type of proof that we're a real person. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Law enforcement officers have identified numerous ways that sex buyers use technology to hide their identities online.

*... Nowadays, with technology, people are disguising their numbers. They're using more texting apps. They're using Google Voice. ... So they're switching their numbers just about every time that they post an ad. And we just came across a john that was doing the same thing. ... I can't remember if it was a texting app or a Google Voice number, but he was trying to hide his identity as well. – Law enforcement, Central MN*

Sex buyers also use strategies to determine if the person they are interacting with on the other end of an advertisement for sex is a “real” person, rather than a law enforcement officer.

*... A lot of the times, they'll do a search on the internet to see if my [undercover officer] photos are real. They'll check Erotic Review [third-party review site]. ... They'll look and see how many times I've posted before, and ... that'll be a red flag if they don't find that number having occurred in the ads previously. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

Some law enforcement officers observed potential sex buyers engaging in what appeared to be surveillance of hotel parking lots and rooms to avoid arrest.

*They will sometimes come and survey it before they come to the room. Like, they'll hang out in the area and see if people are coming or going or whatever. When they come to the hotel, a lot of times, they'll look around. They'll be real nervous, and they'll look in the closets, and they'll look in the bathrooms and that kind of thing. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

Coded language is one of the primary strategies used by sex buyers to minimize risk of arrest and prosecution when arranging a transaction. Advertisements online placed by traffickers and provider/victims use similar coded language. They use code words and images to replace potentially incriminating words ... [they use] nicknames, shorthand, abbreviations, and even emoticons. For example, instead of saying “sex,” individuals use “full service.” Sex without a condom is “bareback” or “BB.” Instead of “dollars,” individuals use “donations” or “roses” to indicate payment.

*... It's challenging because they talk in code. I mean, they use the term “full service” to refer to sex. And very few of them openly discuss specifically what sex acts they're looking to buy. We've had one or two who have asked for massages “with happy endings.” – Prosecutor, Southeast MN*

*You know, they'll use the verbiage that the girl [victim] will understand. So [they use] terms that a girl would [understand] and [that] a cop may not necessarily understand what they're asking for. So ... they might say, “I'd like a ...” and they'll use a term; they'll say, “I'd like a BBB for 50.” And then ..., unless the girl knows what that means, you're like well, what's that? It's a bareback blow job for \$50. Or, for a while, ... instead of using the word “condom,” they were using “cover,” or they were using “hat.” Or ... some sort of thing so they're not talking in sexual terms, which is what gets them in trouble, when they use sexual terms. So they use things that are nonsexual. – Law enforcement, Central MN*

This language is somewhat dynamic and may change over time. As mentioned earlier in this section, juveniles can also be hidden in the online marketplace through coded language. Using coded language may reduce the risk of incrimination for sex buyers, who can later argue in court that coded language in phone calls and text messages were not arrangements for commercial sex. Several people we interviewed described this as a generic and ubiquitous part of the marketplace.

Law enforcement officers said that in some cases this coded language can make it harder to prosecute. Experienced sex buyers may be aware of this and use strictly coded language in person until sexual contact occurs, thereby assuring them that they are not interacting with an undercover law enforcement officer. This could have serious implications for provider/victims if specific sex acts are not agreed upon prior to sexual contact.

*But they want everything. I mean, there's a range of different things that they want. I think the concept of time is huge in these cases. And it's also hard for jurors to understand that, until basically they're naked together, they're not going to say exactly what they want because they know that this is investigated in Minnesota, that there's consequences both publicly and criminally for it. So they negotiate for time, but may not specify their sex act until, like, that moment. – Prosecutor, Southeast MN*

Sex buyers' preference for where and when a sex transaction takes place can reduce their risk of exposure of their activity to family and community. Travel is an important risk reduction strategy that sex buyers use to hide their activity. Sometimes these patterns of travel include movement from small towns to larger cities, as discussed in Section Three. Seeking out locations to purchase sex where there are fewer chances of seeing someone they know is a way that sex buyers reduce risk of exposure.

*Most people don't want to do it in their backyard. They don't want to be seen by somebody that they might know. They prefer an apartment or a house over in a hotel. Because there's safety in that, to them, even though it's more dangerous. It's safety to them, because they're going to be less likely to be seen. It's going to look more normal than them showing up random in a hotel and having to walk those hallways to get to where they're going to and [not know] who they're going to run into. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

Some interviewees suggested that fitting sex purchasing into normal travel routines, the work day, or errands, is a strategy to reduce the “abnormality” of their absence from family.

*Traveling – so they're gone anyway, or already away from home for some other reasons. So it's not like they took a half-day trip and have to explain it; they're out and about anyway. So they just don't talk about it. – Non-profit advocacy, East Metro*

Finally, a small number of interviewees described sex buyers who were concerned about being robbed by traffickers and provider/victims. The quote below indicates that sex buyers communicate with and warn each other about the presence of traffickers (i.e., the word “pimp” in this quote) for their own safety. The information we gathered about on this topic supports the discussion in Section Four about sex buyers' awareness of traffickers in the marketplace and their lack of concern for this issue.

*... Occasionally ads will post up on Backpage, like, “Don't go see this chick. Her pimp popped out of the closet and robbed me” or “[he] took my phone.” ... They'll usually get flagged out of there, but I'll see those come up, like, “Don't see this girl, you'll get robbed.” So ... I think it's fairly common knowledge that it's out there [that provider/victims have pimps/traffickers]. But, again, I just don't think that they care. – Law enforcement, East Metro*

Risks perceived by sex buyers and their strategies for avoiding risks highlight something about what sex buyers think about their participation in the marketplace. It is clear that many sex buyers know the behavior is illegal and looked down on by their families and communities. The topic of risk reduction among sex buyers and law enforcement activity will be explored further in future reports.

## Conclusion: What

The specific aspects of what individual sex buyers purchase in the marketplace for sex vary greatly. After thorough analysis of all our qualitative data, some strong commonalities emerged. As discussed, the main theme is that the purchasing power inherent in sex buying allows for a degree of control over a sexual experience that is purchased. This power and control is exerted in different ways and degrees by individual sex buyers, as explored above. The majority of sex buyers, according to our data, are men seeking quick anonymous sex with a young woman. We described the broad range of sexual experiences that includes many types of sex acts, activities described as “fetishes,” and deeply rooted sexualized racism and violence.

Interviewees described a range in degree of harm, humiliation, and violence within what sex buyers purchase. But at root, we identified a process of dehumanization of the provider/victim as part of the commodification process. Further, our analysis of what sex buyers seek in the marketplace highlights how structural inequalities – racism, sexism, and ageism – are amplified through the commodification of provider/victims and sexual experiences and a cost hierarchy based on identity and demographics. A process we refer to as racialized sexualization is embedded within the marketplace and has very real and negative impact on many provider/victims. This theme will be more fully explored in future reports.

## Section Six: Conclusions, the Marketplace, and Implications

This report has discussed *who* sex buyers are, *where* they live and purchase sex, *how* they enter the marketplace, and *what* they seek to purchase. We focused on in-person sexual activity in exchange for money or something of value. Some interviewees discussed intersections between commercial sex and web cameras, pornography (including child pornography), strip clubs, and sexual abuse, but this was not the focus of our report. Based on our combination of sources, we have presented empirical evidence that begins to answer some very basic questions about sex buyers and their behavior in the marketplace in Minnesota. Our data also revealed that sex trafficking and exploitation are interwoven throughout the marketplace for commercial sex and often obscured from sex buyers. This report helps to address a substantial gap in knowledge and practice related to sex trafficking prevention and reducing harms experienced by victims of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

### Summary of Key Findings

**We have shown that sex buyers live and purchase sex across the entire state of Minnesota and they are representative of the general population of men.** This means that the majority of sex buyers in Minnesota are white men, with some men of color also purchasing sex. Our data suggests that sex buyers are predominantly middle-aged men who have disposable income they can spend on purchasing sex. Many are married and come from middle to upper income backgrounds. There are a few exceptions to this, particularly men who purchase sex who are also part of the underground economy or involved in sex trafficking and other criminal activities. There are some circumstances under which women purchase sex, although this seems to be far less common than men purchasing sex.

**Sex buyers live, work, and purchase sex across the entire state of Minnesota.** Travel is a constituent part of the marketplace. Most sex buyers we learned about travel, on average, 30 to 60 miles to purchase sex, and they typically purchase sex as part of their regular workday. Some sex buyers travel greater distances and build sex buying into work-related or leisure travel. Sex buyers who specifically seek sex with minors are more likely to travel greater distances to obtain these sexual experiences. The primary functions of travel seem to be to protect the anonymity of sex buyers, convenience, acquisition of experiences they are not able to procure in their own towns or regions, and to provide an excuse or cover story for family members so they can better conceal their activity in the commercial sex market.

**Our sources suggest that most sex buyers enter the marketplace using the internet.** Online escort ads dominate the marketplace, and we identified 37 sites where sexual services are advertised. Sex buyers interact via electronic communications with provider/victims and others they perceive to be provider/victims (e.g., police officers, traffickers); thus, this mode of market entry obscures the presence of traffickers. While online escort ads receive the most public attention, our interview participants suggest that social media is an area of growing concern because sex buyers use common applications (apps) to solicit sex from young people.

**We also identified sex buyers who solicit sex from provider/victims directly in person and some who procure sex through word-of-mouth networks.** Word-of-mouth networks constitute an area of the marketplace that many interview participants talked about, but its role in the marketplace is not yet well

understood. Word-of-mouth networks are hidden, secret, and likely to involve more experienced sex buyers, and they are more likely to be entrenched within trafficking operations.

**Finally, our data is clear that there is no singular profile of what sex buyers seek to purchase.** Based on analysis of interviews, we were able to ascertain that sex buying is structured by purchasing power and the control sex buyers *can* exert over their sexual experience by using money. In practice, sex buyer behavior and preferences span a spectrum of sexual experiences and levels of control that are sought.

**Most sex buyers seem to seek quick anonymous sex, including vaginal, oral, and anal.** Our interview participants also described sex acts they characterized as “fetishes,” including urination and defecation. Some proportion of sex buyers monetarily negotiate for rough sex or violence, while another, likely smaller, proportion of sex buyers use their purchasing power to “get in the door” and then take what they want by force, committing sexual assault and rape and causing bodily harm. Furthermore, our interviewees suggested that most sex buyers seek out young adult provider/victims but are willing to have sex with minors when offered; however, some specifically seek children.

**Analysis of the patterns of what sex buyers seek and how much they will pay suggests that provider/victims are literally “valued” within the marketplace based on the prices they can garner.** We identified a hierarchy of value, based on Eurocentric (i.e., white or Caucasian) beauty standards and age. Interviewees and our scan of the online marketplace suggest that sex buyers typically pay more for sexual experiences with provider/victims who are young and white compared to African-American and indigenous provider/victims. Hierarchical valuing (pricing) based on their race, ethnicity, and age may dehumanize and devalue many people who are provider/victims.

This was not a prevalence study. Based on our methods, we did not attempt to establish a new, empirically based count of sex buyers. We did identify a publication using a nationally representative sample of men which estimates that approximately 14% of men indicated that they had purchased sex at least once in their lifetime, and 1% had done so in the past year.<sup>78</sup> In Minnesota, this mean would that approximately 26,000 men have purchased sex in the past year. MNCIS data reviewed for this study identified 334 sex buyers who were charged with prostitution from 2010 to 2015; however, data from individual police departments suggests this is a small proportion of men who are arrested in Minnesota. But taken together, the data makes it clear that law enforcement identify far less than the 1% of estimated sex buyers in the past year. Thus, current law enforcement activity is just scratching the surface of the scale and scope of sex buying in Minnesota.

In the remainder of our conclusion, we explore larger implications of our findings as well as draw out some implications for practice in prevention, intervention, and interdiction.

## Implications of Findings

In this section, we highlight implications from findings described in this report, including implications for practice. First, there is clearly a statewide marketplace that is connected to a national market. Below, we sketch some of the local conditions that shape the statewide marketplace and highlight a few regional trends. Second, the marketplace for sex is complex and multifaceted. Thus, our approaches to prevention and reducing harm must also be varied. Third, when we step back to take a bird’s-eye view

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<sup>78</sup> Monto & Milrod (2014).

of the marketplace for commercial sex, it becomes clear that it is rooted in large-scale structural inequalities. On the whole, the market in Minnesota overwhelmingly involves white men with financial means purchasing sexual experiences from marginalized provider/victims, many of whom lack basic needs such as food, housing, and more. This juxtaposition should spur Minnesota to look more deeply at racial and income inequality in the state.

### **Statewide Marketplace for Commercial Sex in Minnesota**

Like all markets, the commercial sex market in Minnesota is structured by demand and supply. Where there is a demand for commercial sex, there will be a supply. While the market involves people, it is important to occasionally step back and take a dispassionate view of the commercial sex market to help shape prevention, intervention, and policy. This report clearly shows that Minnesota has a significant demand for commercial sex across the state. One law enforcement interview participant summed up the overall marketplace in Minnesota as shaped by the wealth and financial resources Minnesota has as a state.

*What else do we have in Minnesota that makes Minnesota unique? We have corporate America here. Right? We have U.S. Bank corporate. We have Target corporate. We've got Mayo Clinic [and] all of the hospitals that go along with Mayo Clinic. We've got financial resources here. There is money in Minnesota. There's flexibility in time and schedule. There's a lot of annual leave. There's a lot of sick leave you can use. – Law enforcement, West Metro*

Some aspects of the marketplace are ubiquitous across Minnesota. A basic online marketplace, survival sex trading through word-of-mouth networks, and direct in-person solicitation of vulnerable youth are interwoven into all regional markets for commercial in Minnesota. However, analysis of qualitative data collected for this study surfaced factors and conditions that shape unique regional variations in the marketplace for sex across Minnesota. Travel of provider/victims, sex trafficking operations, and by sex buyers is a connective thread that connects and supports regional markets in Minnesota and more broadly.

Regional markets are structured by the size, scope, and strength of the demand in each region. The level of demand for commercial sex in any given region is based on the size of population and their income levels combined with the local infrastructure that may draw potential out-of-town sex buyers, such as hotels, event and convention spaces, stadiums, local attractions, truck stops, sexually oriented businesses, and more. In this way, elements that foster economic vitality for a region can also support a thriving market for commercial sex. Interviewees from cities and regions that have had rapid growth in a mostly male population described an increase in their commercial sex markets. These included the Bakken oil fields and Williston in North Dakota, Duluth harbor when ships dock, and the Winona and La Crosse regions' connection to frack sand mining.

Regional markets may also be shaped by the level of income inequality in the region. We know that poverty, structural inequality, and accompanying disparities (e.g., opportunity gap in educational attainment, violence, and health) are factors that “push” some provider/victims into the marketplace and make them vulnerable sex trafficking operations, creating ready pools of “supply” in some geographic areas but not others. Proximity of these “pools of supply” near areas of strong demand (e.g., high-income areas, truck stops, event spaces, ports and harbors) create a strong local market, because

there is a local supply to meet the local demand. Travel of provider/victims, sex trafficking operations, and by sex buyers helps to equalize unequal distributions of supply across the state. It also creates “novelty” and fosters anonymity in the sex market. In other words, regional levels of inequality shape the presence or absence of provider/victims in any given region, and travel equalizes the balance of supply and demand. Thus, the statewide marketplace for sex is fluid and flexible.

**We identified six regions in Minnesota that seem to have differentiated market conditions:**

1. The Twin Cities metropolitan area – Minneapolis, St. Paul, and the suburban ring
2. Northeast Minnesota – Duluth, Superior, WI, the Iron Range and the Minnesota Arrowhead region
3. North and Northwest Minnesota – Bemidji, Fargo/ Moorhead, and eastern North Dakota
4. Central Minnesota – St. Cloud, Brainerd, and rural areas around them
5. Southwest Minnesota – Mankato, St. Peter, and rural areas around them
6. Southeast Minnesota – Rochester, Owatonna, Albert Lea, and eastern parts of Wisconsin

This report confirms that there is a demand for commercial sex across Minnesota. All regional markets cater to local sex buyers within their region, and some draw sex buyers from outside their region as well. The local pattern of sex buyer travel (i.e., between 30 and 60 miles, linked to work and leisure) to purchase sex was identified in all six regions. In the Twin Cities, this pattern was identified as men from the suburbs purchasing sex in suburban hotels or downtown locales, coming from high-wealth areas in the metro region. In less populated towns, the travel pattern is from one small town to another or from a small town to a regional center. A strong local economy combined with substantial influx of visitors and tourists creates the conditions that draw sex buyers, provider/victims, and sex trafficking operations.

The largest commercial sex market in Minnesota, according to our data, is the Twin Cities Metropolitan Region. The Twin Cities is the most populous region in Minnesota and thus has the largest and most diversified commercial sex market. It has both high wealth and significant poverty, as well as many attractions that draw people to the region, including conventions, sporting events, tourism, and the Mall of America. This combination creates a rich and large pool of potential sex buyers, which also draws a large and diverse pool of provider/victims and sex trafficking operations; some are local, and others travel into this region.

Thus, the Twin Cities commercial sex market caters to local sex buyers across the Twin Cities region as well as out-of-town visitors. We identified use of all three modes of market entry in the Twin Cities, use of the internet, direct in-person solicitation, and word of mouth networks. The Twin Cities is one of only two areas in Minnesota with street-based prostitution tracks. The market is large enough to support all aspects of what we identified as the primary market, as well as all the various market segments and activities we described throughout this report, such as non-heteronormative market segments, survival sex and commercial sexual exploitation of youth, a wide range of provider/victims, and a wide range in price.

Duluth was identified as a diverse commercial sex market that caters to local sex buyers in the Northern Minnesota region, sailors and crew members who come ashore in Duluth harbor, business travelers, and people going “up north” for vacation. We identified an LGBT market segment, street-based track, and internet-aided sex buying. Interviewees specifically discussed the unique aspects of Duluth being a

major shipping harbor and being situated near American Indian reservations. We noted a pattern in Duluth that was similar to the Twin Cities, with wealth and purchasing power situated near a geographic area with poverty, racism, and structural inequalities that act as “push” factors for provider/victims.

The Rochester area and Southeastern Minnesota were identified as a lucrative market, with a large circulation of visitors related to the Mayo Clinic and also supporting a commercial sex market from among rural areas surrounding Rochester, including farmers and others. Southwestern Minnesota was described as a much smaller, regional market that supports a primarily local sex market with some interstate travelers on the highways.

Central Minnesota, including St. Cloud and Brainerd, was described as a strong but small regional market that many interviewees described as a “training ground.” By this, they mean that the market is big enough to support commercial sexual activity but not so big as to foster competition among sex trafficking operations and provider/victims. Many interviewees said that sex trafficking operations sent provider/victims to the St. Cloud area to train them in how to perform in the market, including general behavior in the marketplace as well as some fetish activities. St. Cloud was also described as a stopping point on a transit route for provider/victims and sex trafficking operations traveling west to the oil fields in North Dakota. Bemidji and other Northwestern towns in Minnesota were described as having their own local market, as well as markets related to casinos, and travel to and from North Dakota and the Bakken Oil Fields.

Our data indicates that provider/victims are from communities across Minnesota, with a majority from areas with high rates of poverty. We identified both independent provider/victims and victims of sex trafficking participating in regional and national circuits. As part of their circuit activity, provider/victims and sex trafficking operations post online advertisements in cities and small towns along their routes, sometimes staying and selling sex at hotels, motels, truck stops, or a local strip club for a few days. They seek to make money as they travel and at specific destinations. Movement of trafficking operations also functions to obscure their criminal activity. Movement and flow of provider/victims and sex trafficking operations are the lifeblood of the regional market structure in Minnesota.

Circuit travel is also used by sex trafficking operations as a control tactic. Circuit activity works to train victims; isolate them from safety nets, family, and support systems; destabilize them; and increase dependency, all while making a profit. Our data has much to say on this topic related to circuit travel and sex trafficking operations. It is clear from our data that trafficking operations are embedded within all market segments statewide. They include all socioeconomic and racial demographics. This data will be explored more fully in future reports.

There are many implications for practice in relation to the statewide marketplace. In terms of sex buyers, travel and movement can obscure their behaviors from law enforcement, family, and community members. Our data suggest that fear of discovery and arrest could be an inhibiting factor for participation in the marketplace for many sex buyers. Thus, as is indicated by many quotes throughout this report, many local law enforcement agencies have begun to work together across jurisdictions to identify and arrest sex buyers. This interagency cooperation pools and develops broader expertise, creates and disseminates tools, and increases the ability of law enforcement to track movement of sex buyers and trafficking operations across the state.

In Minnesota, most law enforcement and criminal justice officials indicated that their work was just beginning to scratch the surface of addressing this issue. Many law enforcement and criminal justice officials suggested that they can and should do a better job of holding sex buyers accountable for their behavior. Our data shows that law enforcement is increasingly shifting enforcement activities from arresting adult provider/victims toward identification and arrest of sex buyers and sex traffickers. Of course, in Minnesota, after the passage of Safe Harbor, law enforcement can no longer arrest juvenile provider/victims. However, given the sheer number of people who likely purchase sex, sex trafficking does not seem to be a problem that can be solved solely through arresting sex buyers.

Another potential implication for practice, which stems from understanding the statewide marketplace and regional variations, is to more fully understand and remediate the impact of several notable areas in Minnesota where there is a geographic juxtaposition of high wealth and high poverty locations. These spaces are in the urban core and in proximity to American Indian reservations and communities. This wealth disparity seems to create a perfect storm. It combines the “push” factors related to poverty for provider/victims into the market (including independent providers and victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation) with the “pull” factor of purchasing power. Visualization of the overall marketplace, including sex buyers and their behaviors in the marketplace, frames these geographic locales as potential engines of victimization.

### **Sex Buyers and Sex Buying is Multifaceted**

This report shows that sex buyers are representative of men across Minnesota. While that means that most are white men, we noted vast diversity in behaviors and preferences in the marketplace. Our report identified sex buyers from all communities, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and income levels in Minnesota. Geographic patterns discussed in Section Three highlight differences in sex buyer travel; some purchase sex near where they live and others travel great distances. All of these differences suggest different patterns, levels of market involvement, and motivations.

Data collected for this study do not tell us how frequently most sex buyers purchase sex, but our interview participants made it clear that there is a range. For some, purchasing sex is an experience that a man tries only once or twice in his lifetime. For others, purchasing sex may be a casual or opportunistic pursuit that is worked into other leisure activities such as a vacation or a party. Some sex buyers purchase sex on a regular basis, gaining deep knowledge of the market, and seek very specific sexual experiences.

The motivations, knowledge, and behavior of sex buyers who have these different types of engagement in the marketplace for sex will undoubtedly vary widely. Use of money to obtain and to some degree control a sexual experience through commodification is a defining feature commercial sex. However, each sex buyer expresses the power embedded within the processes of commodification in his/her own unique way. This has potentially vastly different impacts on different provider/victims.

What sex buyers seek in the marketplace for sex varies widely from person to person. For example, in Section Five we explored what sex buyers seek to purchase and identified a very broad range of sexual experiences that sex buyers seek in the market. The range includes quick and anonymous sex, oral, anal, and vaginal sex, fantasy and fetish activity, young and “youthful” providers, use of derogatory racial epithets, and violence. Some, though clearly not all, sex buyers have violent and harmful intent. We are

not able to establish the exact proportions of sex buyers who participate in different market segments or who seek different experiences.

This study did not explore the motivation of sex buyers within the marketplace; that would have entailed questions about *why* sex buyers behave as they do. The answers to “why” questions can be answered by gathering data directly from sex buyers. Therefore, in this report we are not able to unpack *why* sex buyers choose to purchase sex and *why* they seek the specific types of sexual experiences we described. There is some academic literature that suggests a wide range of motivations, including being lonely, simply wanting sex without any emotional reciprocity, seeking paid companionship, and having psychopathic or sociopathic intent.<sup>79</sup> Motivations for purchasing sex is a topic for future research.

Some behaviors exhibited by sex buyers in the commercial sex market are illegal and highly harmful, such as sexual assault, violence, threats, rape, and sex with minors. But most provider/victims are not able to seek justice. In theory, these already illegal behaviors are reportable to police, and legal remedies already exist. However, because they occur in the context of a stigmatized and illegal activity, most provider/victims have limited recourse to legal remedies for crimes committed against them.

Assault and violence committed by sex buyers is often unreported and untreated for a variety of reasons. Many adult provider/victims fear arrest, stigma, or possible deportation if they call the police. High levels of stigma and blame, and a dominant social narrative surrounding the worth of people who trade sex, deter many provider/victims from seeking appropriate social support. Many provider/victims are judged and not believed if they seek support or report violence and sexual assault. The impacts of complex trauma due to trafficking and other violence, mental illness, and other disabilities may impede help-seeking behaviors of provider/victims. Finally, provider/victims who are victims of sex trafficking have little recourse to seek help due to coercion and control by traffickers.

An implication for practice is to support healing work with individuals who are victimized in the marketplace for commercial sex. This includes victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, as well as independent providers who experience violence and assault. A shift in societal perceptions of people who trade sex to reduce stigma could open space for better support from law enforcement and social services. Likewise, many people we interviewed described harrowing violence, complex trauma, and seemingly intractable situations that they encounter in their work with provider/victims. Secondary trauma among front-line staff is a real possibility that can inhibit effective policing and social service provision. Thus, another implication is to recognize how difficult this work can be and provide support for self-identified survivors and front-line staff.

Given such wide variability in sex buyer activity within the commercial sex market, attempts to reduce harm in the marketplace must be nuanced and attuned to context. Sex buyers who are deeply entrenched in the marketplace seeking young children and inflicting violence are clearly different from sex buyers who seek a young adult woman to purchase oral sex. Both are structured by commodification, but the impact, intent and potential prevention and intervention messages would be different. Thus, our evidence suggests that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to prevention of and intervention in sex buyer involvement in sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

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<sup>79</sup> See for example: Shively et al. (2012); Monto & Milrod (2014); Joseph & Black (2012); Milrod & Weitzer (2012).

However, our data does point to a strong implication for practice in primary prevention related to gender norms and racism. As described in this report, part of what men seek to purchase is a sexual experience that they control; and in the process, many provider/victims are sexualized, racialized, and dehumanized. Hierarchical pricing based on race and age of the provider/victim is emblematic. These processes of dehumanization, objectification, and sexualized racialization within the commercial sex market seem to be an amplification of broader social norms related to masculinity and racism. There are many labor arrangements where people providing services may be viewed as “less than,” dehumanized or objectified, such as working in fast food, waiting tables, providing personal care, and housecleaning. Thus, any relationship between people mediated by wage for services can involve a degree of dehumanization. But these economic forces seem amplified in the commercial sex market. Our data suggests the need for widespread education promoting healthy sexual relationships, gender equality, and racial equity.

### **Deep Structural Inequities**

Our findings highlight the intersections between gender, race, and class in the commercial sex market. The market is based on a substantial inequity. When we compare the demographic background of sex buyers to what we know about provider/victims, it is clear that the main aspects of the Minnesota marketplace for sex are geared toward middle- and upper-class white men purchasing sexual experiences from young women, predominantly young women of color, and other marginalized people. This structural inequality is often expressed in the experiences of provider/victims of color in the marketplace that include racial fetishization, derogatory racial slurs, physical and sexual assault based on ethnicity, and less money to the dollar for sex acts compared to white provider/victims.

The relation between the “demand” and “supply,” writ large, indicates deep social-structural inequity. Poverty, lack of basic needs, and living on the streets are substantial “push” factors that drive marginalized people into commercial sex. Thus, in many ways the “demand” for sex is filling a substantial gap in basic safety net services and supports for young people in Minnesota. An implication of this is that our state needs to do a better job taking care of young people and adults in poverty.

Furthermore, some interview participants highlighted a potentially dangerous paradox related to demand reduction activities. Many young people and adults who are exploited in commercial sex lack access to food, housing, and other basic needs. Any attempts to decrease the demand for sex must grapple with the reality that the commercial sex market provides a way for these young people and adults to survive, while at the same time causing trauma and harm. Thus, supply and demand are related in this unintended way. The income derived from sex buyers may be filling a gap for provider/victims and allowing them to survive. This hard truth suggests that true prevention of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation must address poverty, racism, and sexism.

This deep structural inequity within the market should give us all pause. Clearly, we are not yet investing enough in preventing vulnerabilities that push provider/victims into the marketplace and that allow sex traffickers to have a foothold. An implication for practice among philanthropy, social services, and government agencies is to see that anti-poverty measures (including addressing racial disparities) constitute sex trafficking prevention. These measures include provision of safety net services and

healthcare, funding for housing, educational equity, and living wages. As one of our interviewees suggested,

*If you were able to end the demand, you know, end the buyers and the traffickers and that kind of thing, then we'd have less of a problem. But they [sex buyers] have what ... they [provider/victims] need. ... [Otherwise,], how are they going to survive? Because we're not giving them jobs. ... we're harming them [provider/victims] just as much as [the sex buyers] are, in a sense.*

Our data and the literature suggest that boys, young men, and transgender individuals are also provider/victims in the commercial sex market. This is less well understood because much of our societal understanding of commercial sex is rooted in a heteronormative framework. Most policing strategies and social service options are currently geared toward identifying and helping female victims of sex trafficking. Our data suggests there are many additional barriers for young men, boys, and, especially, for transgender provider/victims in receiving support. Implications here suggest addressing services and policing to be more gender-responsive, affirming, and inclusive.

## Final Thoughts

The material presented in this report is complex, difficult, and disturbing. It is hard to know exactly where to start and what to do in relation to sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, particularly from the demand side. It is clear from our data that the marketplace for commercial sex is of a scale and scope that many have previously not considered. It is embedded within our families, communities, leaders, and regular locations that many Minnesotans frequent. The seeming mundaneness and normalcy of the “*who, where, and when*” of commercial sex, contrasted with the “*what,*” make this a hard truth to confront. Further, our data shows that sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation are interwoven and embedded within the commercial sex market, yet are often obscured from sex buyer view.

**What should we do?** The state of Minnesota is in the process of shifting its approach to policing and social service provision related to provider/victims as well as increasing arrest and prosecution of sex traffickers and increasingly sex buyers.<sup>80</sup> *This research did not seek to evaluate criminal justice or civil society approaches to demand reduction.* In light of that, we do not present or endorse specific recommendations here.

A comprehensive assessment of demand-reduction approaches used in the United States was conducted by Shively et al. in 2012. The report describes a wide range of tactics, such as so-called “reverse” or “john” stings, shaming, auto seizure, suspension of driver’s licenses, geographic restraining orders, public education and awareness, neighborhood action, “john” schools, community service, and surveillance cameras.<sup>81</sup> Most of these strategies involve arrest and are punitive in nature, such as jail

<sup>80</sup> For more information, <http://www.health.state.mn.us/injury/topic/safeharbor/index.html>; <http://mnhttf.org/human-trafficking/law-enforcement/>. See, for example, <http://www.startribune.com/minnesota-boosts-state-grants-for-law-enforcement-to-fight-sex-trafficking/416780754/>.

<sup>81</sup> Shively et al. (2012). See also [www.demandforum.net](http://www.demandforum.net) for a comprehensive list of resources related to these demand reduction tactics.

time, fines, loss of a vehicle, or a criminal record. A few have a therapeutic or psycho-educational purpose, such “john” schools or therapy models directed to sex buyers.

Minnesota could consider primary prevention to reduce demand (or eliminate the most harmful elements of sex buying). A primary prevention approach to reducing harm to provider/victims could include comprehensive sex education focused on, for example, consent, dismantling rape culture and toxic masculinity, and developing healthy gender roles. Raising public awareness about sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation within the marketplace for commercial sex is another strategy. These efforts have already begun, and this report may provide much-needed empirical evidence to support these activities and more.<sup>82</sup>

More research is needed to fully understand sex buying and sex buyers. A significant body of research has identified risk factors associated with victimization in sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.<sup>83</sup> However, little is known about connections between early childhood/adolescence and sex buying later in life. While there are some studies that explore sex buyer motivation in some market segments, more research is needed.<sup>84</sup> More empirical data about sex buying is needed to understand best practices for upstream primary prevention.

Finally, as noted above, victims of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation often rely on income from the commercial sex market to meet their basic needs. Demand reduction strategies should be paired with an approach to reducing victim vulnerabilities, including funding and support to reduce poverty, housing, and shelter for homeless youth and adults, and more resources for children in the foster care system, as well as work to reduce racism and racial disparities. The deep structural inequities in the marketplace for sex based on race, class, and gender are a call to action for all Minnesotans.

This study is a first of its kind to chart the lay of the land of the commercial sex market in one state from the perspective of sex buyers. This research addresses a large gap in knowledge, as many previous studies on sex buyers have examined singular market segments but have not examined a region’s full compositional makeup of various market segments, different modes of entering the market, and buyer behavior within these market segments. In addressing these factors, this study is a necessary first step toward conducting a more representative study of sex buyer behavior in Minnesota.

Our goal in this study was to surface empirical evidence about the marketplace for sex from the perspective of sex buyers in Minnesota that can be used to guide prevention and intervention efforts. The marketplace is complex; therefore, approaches to reducing harm must be nuanced and attentive to context. We used methods that surfaced first-hand community knowledge about sex buyers. Many questions remain and more research is needed. The right approaches for Minnesota will require thoughtful consideration by civil society, policy makers, and the general public.

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<sup>82</sup> See, for example, the Don’t Buy It Project, at <https://www.dontbuyitproject.org/>. This free prevention curriculum helps increase awareness about commercial sexual exploitation, its root causes, and how men can help end demand in their own communities. Also see, for example, the “I am priceless” campaign to reduce vulnerabilities of young people, at <http://thelinkmn.org/>.

<sup>83</sup> See, for example, Fedina et al. (2016).

<sup>84</sup> Monto & Milrod (2014); Weitzer (2009); Sanders (2008).

# Appendices

## Appendix A: MNCIS Data Base Construction and Proxy Variables

### Data Base Construction

The data set provided by MNCIS was organized in the following eight separate tables:

1. Case-level information
2. Charge details
3. Disposition of the case
4. Law enforcement agency that referred the case
5. Party (arrested individual)
6. Addresses of arrested individual
7. Race of the arrested individual
8. Order granting public defender

Each table contained a key variable that allowed us to link the tables into one comprehensive database organized around the arrested individual. Minn-LInk merged the tables and then de-identified the data set by removing names and addresses of arrested individuals. The addresses were replaced with a geocoded zip code so that we could conduct spatial analysis of the data to explore geographic patterns. The Minn-LInk team provided our team with a separate list of the addresses from MNCIS and “dummy” or fake addresses to protect confidentiality. These were then generalized to the census tract level and re-inserted into the data base for analysis.

To assure that tables were linked correctly, our team also merged tables using the “key” variables contained in each table. This exercise was the basis for creating a codebook that describes all the tables and variables, as well as how they link together.

The codebook was used to help clean the data and exclude duplicate cases created by the table-merging process. In order to eliminate duplicates, we used the variables *case\_mkey*, *party\_Mkey*, and *charge\_Mkey*. *Case\_mkey* is the unique number that MNCIS assigns to each case entered in the data set, and *party\_mkey* is the unique number that MNCIS assigns to each person entered in the data set. We removed all duplicate observations using a combination of these three key variables.

After eliminating duplicate arrested individuals, we were left with one individual who was associated with two different cases – one case with prostitution charges and another case with sex trafficking charges. To tabulate the frequencies by case or by party, only one of the observations affiliated with one of the charges was used. We corrected the frequencies of demographics and case tables to correct for the drop in one of the charges.

Some arrested individuals had duplicate database entries for multiple charges associated with one case. In some instances, these multiple charges had different final dispositions. To tabulate frequencies of variables related to arrested individuals, we selected only one charge within each statute block

associated with the final disposition of each charge. We selected the charge based on the final disposition in the following order of preference:

1. Convicted
2. Open/dormant
3. Acquitted
4. Continued for dismissal
5. Conviction set aside
6. Dismissed
7. Diversion
8. Stay of adjudication

For example, if an arrested individual had a charge where the final disposition was convicted and also had a charge where the final disposition was dismissed, the party was counted in the table as convicted and not dismissed because the individual was convicted of at least one charge.

Similarly, after we merged the tables, there were some with cases that had multiple charges with different charge degrees. To tabulate the frequencies by case or by party, only one of the observations was used and was affiliated with one of the charges. This may have introduced error into our frequency tables that included charge degree.

And, finally, there were four cases that had both sex trafficking and other statute charges. To tabulate the frequencies by case or by party, only one of the observations affiliated with one of the charges was used. We corrected the frequencies of demographics and case tables to correct for the drop in one of the charges.

We obtained the age of each observation as the year of birth of the party subtracted from 2015.

The data was stored, coded, and analyzed on the CASCW secure server using Stata version 14.

### **Data Peculiarities and Proxy Variables**

The data set does not specifically identify the role of the individuals charged in the commercial sex act. Thus, we had to create proxy variables to help us analyze the data. In order to differentiate between buyers and provider/victims of sexual services, we used the statute number under which they were charged. The statutes 609.322.1(2), 609.322.1(a)(1), 609.322.1(a)(2), 609.322.1(a)(3), 609.322.1(a)(4), 609.322.1a(1), 609.322.1a(2), 609.322.1a(3), 609.322.1a(4), 609.322.2(2), 609.322.2(4)(b) were grouped together and coded as *sex trafficking*. Those individuals booked under 609.322.1(a)(1), 609.322.1(a)(2), 609.322.1(a)(3), 609.322.1(a)(4) were identified as cases that involved a juvenile victim. Cases charged under 609.3242999999 and 609.33.2 were coded as *prostitution*. Male individuals booked under 609.3242999999 were identified as likely *sex buyers*.

According to our extensive interviews with law enforcement, we identified only two possible female individuals who have been arrested for purchasing sex in the state of Minnesota. They were associated with a male who was purchasing sex. Further, we heard about only a few male-identified individuals who have been arrested for selling sex. The way stings are organized in Minnesota supports

identification of men as sex buyers and women as provider/victims. The Minnesota statute sub-divisions were altered in 2011 to create distinct sub-divisions for purchasing versus selling sex. However, because our date range straddled this change, the data was given to us in one large group.

## **Appendix B: Data Collection Protocols and Consent Forms**

### **Consent Form**

## **Mapping the Demand for Sex with Trafficked People in Minnesota**

### **CONSENT FORM**

You have been asked to participate in a research study of the demand aspects of the market for sex with domestic sex trafficking victims. You were selected as a possible participant because we believe your work with sex trafficking victims has given you two important kinds of knowledge:

- Sex buyers that demand certain types of victims and certain sexual encounters
- Traffickers who deliver and sell these victims as “products.”

We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Lauren Martin, Ph.D., Director of Research, Urban Research Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

### **Study Purpose**

The purpose of the study is to map the demand side of the market for domestic sex trafficking victims in Minnesota, by examining the ways in which demand by sex buyers links to the structures and processes through which traffickers sell their victims. The study has two main components:

- Analysis of law enforcement reports, investigation records, and court documents
- Interviews with stakeholders across the State of Minnesota.

We are asking to interview you for the second component. We hope to gather information about the characteristics, priorities, and actions of people that purchase sex with domestic trafficking victims; the characteristics and actions of traffickers; and how and where their interactions result in the commercial sexual exploitation of trafficking victims. We will then join this information with our law enforcement reports, investigation records, and court documents to create a more accurate picture of the demand.

### **Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this study, we will ask you to do the following:

- Participate in a semi-structured interview where we will ask you about your professional experiences and observations related to the market for sex with trafficked victims.

- We will not ask you and/or collect any personal information or information about specific individuals you may work with related to trafficking.
- The length of the interview will be approximately 60-90 minutes.
- At the interview, the researcher will take notes and store the information in a document on a password-protected computer at UROC.
- We ask that you allow us to digitally record the interview for purposes of note taking and to check accuracy of data.
- The interviews may be transcribed word-for-word, and the recording will be deleted after project completion. All recordings will be stored on a password protected and secure server at the University of Minnesota. This is optional and you can say no.

What we will do with the information collected:

- We envision a variety of products from the project, including: printed and digital maps, a series of public presentations, a non-technical report on project findings, and publication of at least one article in a peer reviewed journal.
- This project could have important ramifications for practitioners in the field, awareness raising, policy and legislation and policing. Therefore, broad and wide dissemination of our findings is critical.

### **Risks of Study Participation**

We are asking experts to share their knowledge of trends, patterns and networks of domestic sex trafficking in Minnesota. We are not asking specific information about individuals themselves.

BUT, there are potential risks involved for participants and researchers:

- Risks due to sharing potentially dangerous information about criminal networks and illegal behavior.
- Risk to participating agencies if their clients learn about their participation and are displeased.
- The subject or questions may feel distressing or uncomfortable for some participants.
- It is possible that talking about this subject may trigger uncomfortable emotions.

Our plans for minimizing risks:

- Safety, trust and do no harm are our overriding principles in this project.
- Interviews will be confidential.
- All participants in semi-structured group and individual interviews will receive information about the topic, goals and plans before they are asked to agree to participate, so that they can decline beforehand if they so choose.

- We are not asking for any personal information from interview participants, about themselves or the youth that they work with.
- We will complete **a verbal consent process** and will not record names. However, for purposes of scheduling, maintaining records and documenting or activities, we will record names of agencies, the time and location of meeting, the approximate number of participants per semi-structured group interview and their workplace roles.
- In any reports or findings, we will not record the names of semi-structured interview participants, the locations of interviews, or the names of agencies.
- We will ask if we can digitally record interviews for purposes of note taking. If the answer is “no,” we will not record.
- We will transcribe digital recordings, but will mask the identity of the speaker and/or any person the speaker is describing in the transcribed document.
- The digital recordings will be stored on a password protected computer on UMN secured servers. The recordings will be destroyed once the project is completed.

**Thank you for considering participation in this project.**

### **Contacts and Questions**

The researchers conducting this study are Lauren Martin, Ph.D., Director of Research, Urban Research Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

You may ask any questions you have now, or if you have questions later, **you are encouraged to** contact them at Dr. Martin at (612) 624-0435 or by email at [mart2114@umn.edu](mailto:mart2114@umn.edu).

### **Statement of Consent**

To ensure confidentiality we will not record signatures for consent, but will ask you to give verbal consent before starting the interview. We will also ask you to check one of the boxes below indicating whether you consent to letting us record the interview.

We will also have an extensive acknowledgements section to recognize the knowledge and contributions of project participants if they wish to be included.

Please print your name below if you would like us to include it in our acknowledgements section.

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**[Optional: write your name if you want to be listed in our acknowledgements]**

I provide permission to record this interview for purposes of note taking and data accuracy.

Yes  No

## **Interview Guide**

### **Mapping the Demand for Sex with Trafficked Individuals in Minnesota**

#### **Semi-structured interview guide**

Intro:

Thank you for agreeing to speak with us today. This study is a follow-up to a study we completed in 2014 called “Mapping the Market for Sex with Trafficked Minor Girls in Minneapolis.” In that study we explored the overall market and how it is structured. Now we want to expand our focus to all of Minnesota and also to zero-in more on “The Demand” or sex buyers and their role.

In this interview, we want to cover four topics based on your work related to sex trafficking. We are not requesting specific information about you as a person or about your work on a specific case or cases. When we talk about “the marketplace,” we’re referring to the overall “space” where people are sold for commercial sex. The language of markets and buying and selling can be very difficult because we are talking about buying and selling people – but it is how those who participate in the market view it. So it is important for us to understand the logic.

In the interview we ask you to focus and reflect on what you know from your own experience, rather than what you have heard or read about?

Our main topics are 1) the nature of your work as it relates to sex trafficking; 2) patterns you’ve noticed about who is buying sex and what they’re looking for; 3) how traffickers and sex buyers interact/connect to create and participate in the marketplace; and 4) patterns you have noticed/investigated in trafficking operations and where their activities are based/take place.

In this interview we will use the following definitions of sex trafficking: for a juvenile, sex trafficking refers to anyone under the age of 18 engaged in commercial sex. For an adult, sex trafficking refers to anyone involved in commercial sex under third-party control.

Work Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kind of work do you do related to Trafficking?</li> <li>• Does your work bring you in contact with victims?</li> <li>• In what way?</li> <li>• Is there a specific territory or jurisdiction you work with?</li> <li>• Anyone you collaborate with?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victim identification/support</li> <li>• Legal advocacy (focus is victims)</li> <li>• Investigation/prosecution of sex buyers</li> <li>• Investigation/prosecution of traffickers/their associates</li> <li>• Prevention/risk reduction (at-risk individuals)</li> <li>• Other things that matter</li> <li>• Contact with Sex buyers?</li> </ul>
Buyer Patterns RE Trafficking	<p><b>Characteristics</b> of sex buyers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Who</b> are the buyers? (age, sex, race, residential location, employment, marital status)</li> </ul> <p><b>Locations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where are sex buyers going to buy sex? Where do the acts happen?</li> <li>• What are buyers looking for when they are buying sex?</li> <li>• Are buyers from here?</li> <li>• Do they come from somewhere else? If so, Where?</li> </ul>	<p><b>What buyers are “shopping” for in the marketplace</b></p> <p>Characteristics of victim/sellers (“product”): (demographics, manner/demeanor, sex act, cost and convenience)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of sex act: condomless, rough, bare; Single buyer versus group of buyers</li> <li>• Visible/less visible</li> </ul>
Connection to Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do sex buyers find victims and/or pimp/trafficker?</li> <li>• How do they connect?</li> <li>• Do they just interact with Victims?</li> <li>• Third-party?</li> <li>• Who initiates the transaction?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Links between market segments &amp; business model?</b></p> <p>“Flow” of activities (Buyers &amp; Victims) Movement?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Geographic: Local, regional, transitional/to-from other cities</li> <li>2. Temporal: Seasonal, months of the year, days of the week, time of day</li> </ol> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Third party involvement in “renegade” activities?</li> </ul>
Operational Structure	<p>How do operations do Marketing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What they advertise/market (product focus)? (i.e. victim characteristics, type of sex acts, other details)</li> <li>• Where/how they advertise/market</li> <li>• Types of advertising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure/staffing roles</li> <li>• Business models/types of services tailored to specific market segments (How are these marketed?)</li> <li>• Hard to detect? Convenience? Cost?</li> </ul>
Overall Marketplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does it fit within the larger legal marketplace for commercial sex (strip clubs, porn, etc.)?</li> <li>• What else can you share from your experience?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does the market look like?</li> <li>• How does it function?</li> <li>• How does demand fuel it?</li> <li>• How do traffickers fuel it?</li> </ul>

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