

Sex Traffickers and Buyers of Commercially Sexually Exploited Children

2020



CALIFORNIA SEX OFFENDER MANAGEMENT BOARD

SEX TRAFFICKERS AND BUYERS OF COMMERCIALLY SEXUALLY EXPLOITED CHILDREN

Human sex traffickers and sex buyers of minors are required to register as sexual offenders pursuant to California Penal Code § 290. Under California's Containment Model, traffickers and buyers are required to participate in sex offender specific treatment and assessment. Often times sex traffickers and the general sex offender population are combined for treatment and given the same risk assessment evaluations without consideration for their unique needs. Recommendations are listed first, followed by an introduction to human sex trafficking.

Sex Trafficker

The term "sex trafficker" refers to the individual who through persuasion, force, fraud, or coercion recruits, harbors, transports, advertises or arranges for the commercial sexual exploit of another individual. Specialized assessment and treatment should be conducted on adults who have been charged or convicted of human sex trafficking. The California Sex Offender Management Board recommends:

- If the individual's only sexual offense is for sex trafficking that is financially motivated, the Static-99R and STABLE-2007 should not be used to estimate sexual offense recidivism (a trained evaluator should determine if the person is eligible to be scored on the Static-99R or STABLE-2007). If there are reasonable grounds to believe the sex trafficker's action is motivated by their own sexual gratification, then these tools may be used.
- The individual's risk for violent recidivism should be evaluated using the LS/CMI.
- The individual should be assessed for psychopathy, using the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) or similar instrument.
- Individuals with sex trafficking related offenses should be in separate treatment groups from individuals with no sex trafficking offenses.
- Treatment should focus on the unique criminogenic needs of the sex trafficker.
- A gender-responsive approach should be used when evaluating a female sex trafficker.

Sex Buyer

The term "sex buyer" refers to the individual who exchanges something of value, for commercial sex, which may include exchange of money for child sexual exploitation images or videos. For adult males convicted for offenses related to the purchase of direct sexual acts with minors (i.e. not viewing child pornography), the California Sex Offender Management Board recommends the following.

- Evaluate the individual using the Static-99R, STABLE-2007, and the LS/CMI.
- Identify and treat the criminogenic needs as identified by the dynamic risk instruments.
- Research on this specific population should be conducted.

It is rare that females are arrested for offenses related to the purchase of sexual acts with minor, but a gender responsive approach to evaluation and treatment is recommended in these cases.

Understanding the Sex Trafficker and Sex Buyer

Scope of the Problem

Over the past two decades human trafficking has been an internationally identified problem. Research during the past 10 years indicates that more than 80% of the victims of confirmed sex trafficking incidents at the federal level are U.S. citizens.¹ Both boys and girls are sexually trafficked. The victims come from urban, suburban and rural areas and often have a history of abuse or neglect. The average age a child is forced into commercial sexual exploitation is between the ages of 12 and 14.² "When compared to children who have been sexually abused but not exploited, youth who are exploited experience significantly more behavioral issues, substance use, sexualized behavior, higher levels of post-traumatic stress symptoms, are more likely to run away, and have higher truancy rates."³

Policy

Attention on human trafficking has been on the International platform for many years. In recent years the focus has included domestic trafficking for sexual exploitation. Any instance in which an individual engages in a commercial sexual act through fraud, force, or coercion, is considered sex trafficking. The commercial sexual exploitation of a child involves a commercial transaction for the sexual exploitation of a minor (under age 18), which may include sex trafficking, child sexual exploitation materials (photographs, videos or other media), and child sex tourism.

¹ Banks, D. & Kyckelhahn, T. (2011, April). *Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents, 2008-2010*. U.S Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs: Beaurau of Justice Statistics (Report No. NCJ233732). Retrieved: <http://bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pb&detail&iid=2372>.

² O'Malley, N. (2019, February 21). *HEAT Institute Presentation to CASOMB*. Presentation at CASOMB Board Meeting, Board of State and Community Corrections, Sacramento, California.

³ Basson, D., Langs, J., Acker, K., Katz, S., Desai, N., & Ford, J. (2018). *Psychotherapy for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children: A Guide for Community-Based Behavioral Health Practitioners and Agencies*. Oakland, CA: West Coast Children's Clinic. p. 13

On November 6, 2012, California voters overwhelmingly passed Proposition 35, also known as the *Californians against Sexual Exploitation Act*. This proposition specifically targeted human sex traffickers and included the provision that certain convicted sex traffickers are required to register as sex offenders. In California, the following codes are registerable sex offenses under PC § 290.

- 236.1(b) – Human trafficking
- 236.1(c) – Human trafficking of minor
- 236.1(c)(1) – Human trafficking of minor
- 236.1(c)(2) – Human trafficking of minor via force, fear, duress, etc.
- 266 – Entice minor for prostitution
- 266h(b) – Pimping where prostitute under 18
- 266h(b)(1) – Pimping minor
- 266h(b)(2) – Pimping a minor under 16 years old
- 266i(b) – Pandering minor
- 266i(b)(1) – Pandering minor over 16 years old
- 266i(b)(2) – Pandering minor under 16 years old
- 266j – Procurement of minor under 16 for lewd and lascivious acts
- 267 – Abduction of minor under 18 for prostitution

University of San Diego conducted an analysis of legislative policies implemented after the 2012 act. Many of the recommended changes to legislation have been enacted; including adding sexual abuse and sex trafficking prevention to sexual health education as a prevention measure.⁴ San Diego County passed and implemented an education program for buyers of commercial sex. Recidivism rates have not been released from this program.⁵ They also advocated increased resources for prosecuting trafficking. Counties across California have implemented law enforcement training and increased investigations.

Human Sex Trafficker

The human sex trafficker is the individual who through persuasion, force, fraud, or coercion recruits, harbors, transports, advertises or arranges for the commercial sexual exploit of another individual. Historically literature has used the term pimp to describe this individual, and both terms are used here.

⁴ Senate Bill 1165, 2016

⁵ Carpenter, A., Delgado, M., & Fellmeth, R.C. (2016). *The State of Human Trafficking Law, Policy and Education: Legislative Review and Policy Recommendations*. Center for Education Policy and Law , San Diego, CA: University of San Diego.

Between, 2009 and 2018, a total of 440 convicted sex traffickers that were required to register as sex offenders were released from state prison. On June 1, 2019, an additional 486 sex traffickers with registerable offenses remained incarcerated; 248 of them are scheduled to be released by 2025.⁶ This number did not include criminally charged sex traffickers throughout California that had not had their cases adjudicated and sentences handed down or those sentenced in federal court systems.

Although sex traffickers are lumped in with other sex offenders in the Containment Model, preliminary research indicates that there are noted distinctions. Often the trafficker is seeking financial gain rather than their own sexual gratification. However, some traffickers will also sexually assault victims.

Early developmental and environmental factors of the sex trafficker include involvement in child protective services or foster care, juvenile delinquency, and high levels of physical or sexual abuse.⁷ Several studies found that over half of their samples had not completed high school, which may have contributed to a feeling of limited options for making money.⁸ “For these young men and women coming from households marked by domestic violence, physical abuse and sexual assault, pimping allowed them to gain a sense of power and control over their environment for the first time.”⁹

When considering major cities across the U.S., a 2014 study found that 85% of sex traffickers were male and 65% were black.¹⁰ Family involvement, either as traffickers or sex workers, and community exposure are common entries into pimping.¹¹ Approximately 1/3 of one sample reported they began trafficking during adolescence (ages 14-17).¹² Some began by selling drugs and moved into “pimping” while others reported they were recruited by the women.¹³ Human sex traffickers often have a history of substance

⁶ California Sex Offender Management Board (CASOMB). (2019, February). *CASOMB Annual Report 2019*. Retrieved: http://casomb.org/pdf/2019_Annual_Report.pdf

⁷ Gotch, K. (2016). Preliminary Data on a Sample of Perpetrators of Domestic Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation: Suggestions for Research and Practice. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 2(1). <http://doi=10.1080/23322705.2016.1136539>; Raphael, J. & Meyers-Powell, B. (2010, September). *From Victims to Victimizer: Interviews with 25 Ex-Pimps in Chicago*. DePaul University College of Law: Schiller DuCanto & Fleck Family Law Center.

⁸ Gotch, 2016; Spidel, A., Greaves, C., Cooper, B.S., Herve, H., Hare, R.D., Yuille, J.C. (2006). The Psychopath as Pimp. *The Canadian Journal of Police & Security Services*, 4(4).

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Alicia-Spidel/publication/235954684_The_Psychopath_as_Pimp/links/00b49514b56519f96600000/The-Psychopath-as-Pimp.pdf; Raphael & Meyers-Powell, 2010

⁹ Raphael & Meyers-Powell, 2010

¹⁰ Dank, M., Khan, B., Downey, P.M., Kotonias, C., Mayer, D., Owens, C., Pacifici, L., and Yu, L. (2014, March). *Estimating the Size and Structure of the Underground Commercial Sex Economy in Eight Major US Cities*. The Urban Institute.

¹¹ Dank et al., 2014

¹² Gotch, 2016

¹³ Dank et al., 2014

abuse.¹⁴ A study of gang involvement in San Diego found that approximately 50% of the traffickers interviewed were directly associated with gangs. Some of those not directly involved with gangs had arrangements with gangs.¹⁵

A 2016 study of traffickers in San Diego placed traffickers into four categories. The “enforcer-contractor” accounted for 67% of the traffickers and viewed themselves as drivers and security or protection from both buyers and others who may attempt to control the women. They reported adult women involved in commercial sexual acts recruit them, and they “share” the money. Approximately 28% of the sample were the “traditional enforcer,” who described themselves as a “pimp” who keeps all or most of the money. The “vicious-violent” trafficker accounted for 4% of the sample. They use extreme physical and psychological control and are more likely to recruit minors because they are easier to control. The final type is the “organized trafficking groups,” which are often affiliated with gangs, and are “structured clandestine, closed networks, run by a small core group of individuals.” They trafficked both domestic and international victims, as well as adults, juvenile and child victims.¹⁶

Many of the traffickers interviewed describe trafficking as a business endeavor. A study of trafficking in Chicago noted, “The majority of the pimps in our sample, however, see an unending demand for paid sex, a world that appears to accept it, and participants lining up to make profit from it.”¹⁷ The trafficker may play one or more roles in the commercial sexual exploitation of the victim, and the method and purpose for the trafficking may vary.

One aspect of sex trafficking is recruiting victims. Studies that rely on self-report from “pimps” find that they report avoiding trafficking minors, because of the risks involved. Given the average age that a girl is introduced to commercial sexual exploitation in California is 12-16 it is likely that self-report underestimates the number of individuals who exploit minors. Gotch’s 2016 preliminary study found that 21% trafficked only adolescent victims, 25% only adult victims, and the remaining 54% trafficked both adult and child victims.¹⁸ Those that started trafficking when they were still in high school, would recruit from their school.¹⁹ Juveniles who were trafficked were often runaways looking for food or shelter.²⁰

¹⁴ Spidel et al., 2006

¹⁵ Carpenter, A. & Gates, J. (2016, January). *The Nature and Extent of Gang Involvement in Sex Trafficking in San Diego* (Report No. 249857). U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs: National Institute of Justice.

¹⁶ Carpenter & Gates, 2016

¹⁷ Rapheal & Meyers-Powell, 2010

¹⁸ Gotch, 2016

¹⁹ Dank et al., 2014

²⁰ Spidel et al., 2006; Dank et al, 2014

Traffickers may recruit acquaintances from their community, meet individuals on-line or use current victims to recruit other victims. In some instances, family members are the traffickers.²¹ Research has considered the methods traffickers use to control and manipulate their victims. Since the 1980's research on the methods of "pimps" often demonstrated attention or love for the "prostitute" and convinced them that commercial sex is a short-term strategy to relieve financial burden. They seek out "women for whom they could promise and provide financial support, safety, and personal relationships. As a result, they target women who are economically disadvantaged, dependent on drugs, victims of previous sexual assault, or lacking in emotional support."²² After the initial subtle coercion, he becomes more domineering and controlling with increasing physical and sexual violence and threats of violence.²³ Some traffickers would emphasize the financial gain.²⁴ In order to maintain control traffickers may use psychological and economic manipulation, physical force or drugs to coerce women.²⁵

An understudied and often over-looked area is family-facilitated child sex trafficking, which is reported by victims in approximately 12-15% of cases.²⁶ Two separate studies of family-facilitated child sex-trafficking, found that approximately 2/3 of victims were trafficked by their mothers²⁷. Other traffickers, included, fathers, uncles, and cousins. The mothers were often trafficking their children for drugs or money to support their drug addiction. In a rural sample, approximately 81% of the cases "involved parents who used illicit drugs as currency to profit from trafficking their children."²⁸ Both studies found that the age of child trafficking was younger for family-facilitated trafficking, with average age of entry at age 11 (compared to 14 for non-family facilitated trafficking), and several victims reporting entry as young as age 6.²⁹ In about 25% of the cases in which the mother trafficked her child, she also engaged in prostitution and was "mentoring" her child.³⁰ Victims trafficked by family members were found to have higher rates of multiple types of abuse, including neglect/abandonment by mothers, child physical abuse, child sexual abuse, and witness to domestic violence.³¹ More research is needed to better understand complexities of family-facilitated trafficking.

²¹ Development Services Group, Inc. (2014). *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children/Sex Trafficking: Literature Review*. Washington D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

²² Dank et al., 2014

²³ Spidel et al., 2006; Dank et al., 2014

²⁴ Dank et al., 2014

²⁵ Dank et al., 2014; Carpenter & Gates, 2016

²⁶ Sprang, G. & Cole, J. (2018). Familial Sex Trafficking of Minors: Trafficking Conditions, Clinical Presentation, and System Involvement. *Journal of Family and Violence*, 33(4), 185-195.

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10896-018-9950-y>

²⁷ Sprang & Cole, 2018; Reid, J.A, Huard, J., & Haskell, R.A. (2015). Family-Facilitated Juvenile Sex Trafficking. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 38(3), 361-375.

²⁸ Reid et al., 2015

²⁹ Reid et al., 2015

³⁰ Reid et al., 2015

³¹ Reid et al., 2015

The trafficker has preparatory roles, such as posting ads, finding clients, communicating the details of the appointment with the clients, protecting the victim, controlling and manipulating the victim and collecting money from the victim or client. They may describe themselves as “business managers.”³² Often times the trafficker or an associate of the trafficker will transport the victim to meet the sex buyer.³³

Commercial sexual exploitation takes place in many locations including strip clubs, massage parlors, truck stops, hotels, bars, restaurants, conventions, and online communication allows for mobile brothels. A part of the commercial sex industry includes the payment of individuals in key positions who can provide sex buyers with contact to the sex trafficker including hotel and convention workers, cab drivers, and others. One Chicago study reported payoffs to law enforcement so the business can survive.³⁴

Criminal History and Psychopathy

Criminal histories revealed additional offenses for intimate partner violence (71%), general violence (64%), and forcible rape (46%); as well as gang involvement, dealing drugs, and substance abuse history.³⁵

Given their criminal versatility and the manipulative and exploitative nature of sex trafficking, researchers have considered the link between psychopathy and sex traffickers. Psychopathy is defined by a specific combination of personality traits and behaviors. “Interpersonally, psychopaths are grandiose, egocentric, manipulative, forceful, dominant, exploitative, and cold-hearted. Affectively, they display shallow and labile emotions, are unable to form long-lasting bonds to people, principles or goals, and are lacking in empathy and genuine guilt and remorse. Their lifestyle is impulsive, unstable, and sensation-seeking. They readily violate social norms and fail to fulfill social obligations and responsibilities, both explicit and implied.”³⁶

Approximately 79% of a sample from Oregon scored in the high or very high range with a score of 30 or greater on the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised.³⁷ This was higher than a Canadian sample, in which 36% of the sample scored 30 or greater, with higher scores on the interpersonal and affective sub-scales than the comparison group.³⁸ The affective scale includes items about superficial charm, conning/manipulation, grandiose sense of

³² Dank et al., 2014

³³ Skodmin, F., Dunham, R., & Hughes, D.M. (2016). Analysis of Human Trafficking Cases in Rhode Island, 2009-2013. *Sage Open*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016655585>

³⁴ Raphael & Meyers-Powell, 2010

³⁵ Gotch, 2016

³⁶ Hare, R.D. (2003). *Hare PCL-R 2nd edition: Technical Manual*. North Tonawanda, NY: Multi-Health Systems Inc., 5.

³⁷ Gotch, 2016

³⁸ Spidel et al., 2006

self-worth, and pathological deception, which can be seen with many traffickers recruiting of victims. The affective scale measures lack of remorse or guilt, shallow affect, lack of empathy/callous, and failure to accept responsibility for actions. These factors can be seen when the trafficker shifts the blame for his actions to victim, and engages in psychological, financial, and physical coercion to control the victim.³⁹

"As such, all available information led to the conclusion that professionals working with this population should have extensive knowledge about the construct of psychopathy, the research supporting it, and the research on effective intervention strategies for individuals with high levels of psychopathic traits. Additionally, professionals working with perpetrators of domestic trafficking for sexual exploitation should be knowledgeable about sexual-offense-specific research, domestic violence research, the impact of adverse childhood experiences, the criminal subculture, human trafficking in general, and the sex trade industry."⁴⁰

Recent research on the treatment of psychopaths, indicates that treatment should be modified based on the cluster of scores. The treatment provider's approach to responsiveness and therapeutic alliance can affect the outcome of treatment completion.⁴¹

Female Sex Trafficker

Many male traffickers described having a "bottom" who is an experienced sex worker that helps with the business, by recruiting and orienting new sex workers, and helping supervise the other women. The "bottom" has often been with the trafficker for longer and the trafficker may have fathered children with them.⁴²

A high proportion of women who are sex traffickers began by being trafficked, often times when they were children, by family members.⁴³ The majority of women felt coerced into trafficking when their boyfriend was incarcerated and they were threatened to keep the business going. Others found that recruiting new victims into the trade provided them with a greater sense of control and freedom.⁴⁴

³⁹ Spidel et al., 2006

⁴⁰ Gotch, 2016

⁴¹ DeSorcy, D.R., Olver, M.E., & Wormith, J.S. (2020). Working Alliance and Psychopathy: Linkages to Treatment Outcome in a Sample of Treated Sex Offenders. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 35(7-8), 1739-1760. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0886260517698822>.

⁴² Dank et al., 2014

⁴³ Raphael & Meyers-Powell, 2010; Dank et al., 2014

⁴⁴ Raphael & Meyers-Powell, 2010

Challenges in Convicting Cases

Several challenges present themselves when investigating sex buyers. A victim of sex trafficking is not likely to come forward and accuse the buyer directly, often times they are not able to identify the buyer after the fact. Police departments invest more resources in investigating the trafficker over the buyer because it is a minor crime. In a Rhode Island study, the author noted that law enforcement was interested in apprehending the trafficker but was less interested in holding the buyer accountable.⁴⁵ The buyer can deny knowledge of the victim having been trafficked or knowledge that the victim was underage, due to advertisements indicating the victim is an adult.

A study in Finland tracked the problems with convicting sex buyers. Researchers identified 31 cases of sex trafficking or pandering, in which the victim was trafficked; which was associated with 379 investigations. They noted that one case with a single victim was associated with 2 traffickers' investigations and 113 sex buyers. In many of the cases the sex buyer was not investigated or prosecuted if known. Police did not forward approximately half the cases to prosecution. Of those forwarded, about half of the cases were dropped during the prosecution. A handful of those convicted appealed their case and won. "All in all the 350 investigations led to 34 convictions, which means that the conviction rate is about 10%."⁴⁶ Many of the buyers denied having knowledge of the victim being trafficked. This type of drop in number of investigations to convictions is not uncommon in this type of case.

Sex Buyer

The sex buyer is individual who exchanges something of value, such as money, for commercial sex, which may include exchange of money for child sexual exploitation images or videos. When this commercial sexual exploitation is perpetrated against a minor in California, the offense is a registerable sex offense. Individuals on probation or parole for a registrable sexual offense are mandated to participate in sex offender specific assessment and treatment.

Research specifically about adult males who pay to engage in sexual acts with minors is scarce. This population has been subsumed in the research of individuals who sexually offend against minors. While there is research on sex buyers, often called "johns" in the literature, the research does not differentiate between those purchasing sex with adults and those purchasing juveniles (pubescent children). It is worthwhile to review this literature since some of the victims ages may be unknown to buyers, because the buyer

⁴⁵ Skodmin, Duhman, & Hughes, 2016

⁴⁶ Niemi, J. & Aaltonen, J. (2017). Tackling Trafficking by Targeting Sex Buyers: Can It Work?. *Violence Against Women*, 23(10). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801216657896>.

does not ask or the victim is advertised as being an adult. A Rhode Island study noted that minor victims were advertised as being 19 or older.⁴⁷

Many believe the sex buyer is the driving force behind sex trafficking, as they create the demand. Farley, et al, studied a group of sex buyers and compared them to a comparable group of non-sex buyers in Boston.⁴⁸ They found that in general individuals who purchased sex, preferred to have a variety of sex partners, and non-relational or non-committed sexual partners. Individuals who purchased sex were more likely to report they feared rejection by women. They were more likely to endorse rape myths, such as the belief that "prostitution reduces the likelihood of rape."⁴⁹ They were more likely to report that they would force a woman to have sex or rape them if they could get away with it, and had engaged in more sexually aggressive behavior. Men who purchased sex tended to view prostitution as consenting sex and were less likely to evaluate accurately the emotional state of the women in prostitution. Despite this, two-thirds of the sample of sex buyers believed that "a majority of women are lured, tricked, or trafficked into prostitution" and knew that minors were available for purchase. They also believed that prostituted women were intrinsically different from other women.⁵⁰

In an effort to decrease the demand for sex trafficking Toronto responded by having a diversion program for adult sex buyers called a "John School."⁵¹ These schools are intended to educate sex buyers about the "social, economic, health, and personal risks and harms related to street prostitution."⁵² Six presenters give formal presentations about the risks and harms of prostitution, including attorneys, police officers, nurses, community representatives, former sex workers, and a representative to speak about sex addiction. The goal of the diversion program is to create an emotional experience in the buyer so that they make a change in their behavior. Despite statements that the diversion program is non-punitive, the researchers identified that "the key discourse and communicative strategy . . . is one aimed at moralizing, blaming and shaming."⁵³ They also found that the

⁴⁷ Skodmin et al., 2016; Mitchell, K., Jones, L.M., Finkelhor, D., & Wolack, J. (2011). Internet-Facilitated Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: Findings from a Nationally Representative Sample of Law enforcement Agencies in the United States. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 23(1), 43-71. DOI: 10.1177/1079063210374347.

⁴⁸ Farley, M., Golding, J.M., Matthews, E.S., Malamuth, N.M., & Jarrett, L. (2017). Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Do Not Buy Sex: New Data on Prostitution and Trafficking. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(23), 3601.

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=shib&db=edb&AN=126072380&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

⁴⁹ Farley et al., 2017

⁵⁰ Farley et al., 2017

⁵¹ Fischer, B.J., Wortely, S., Webster, C., & Kirst, M. (2002). The socio-legal dynamics and implications of "diversion": The case study of the Toronto "John School" diversion programme for prostitution offenders. *Criminal Justice: International Journal of Policy & Practice*, 2(4), 385–410.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/17488958020020040201>

⁵² Fischer et al., 2002

⁵³ Fischer et al., 2002

working class and minorities were over represented in the programs, because they were more likely to take plea deals rather than pay an attorney to fight the charges. No information about the outcomes of the diversion program were included in the article. However, it was hypothesized that a fee would be sufficient sanction to alter behavior of the buyers⁵⁴. Separately the Boston study participants believed that a fee and a few days in jail would be a deterrent for many buyers.⁵⁵ In one survey, 100% of the sex buyers endorsed that a 30-day jail stay would deter their sex buying behavior.⁵⁶

The Role of the Internet and Social Media

Online advertising and use of phone apps, allows for increased access to buyers and a wider market for sex trafficking, as well as a medium for grooming and recruiting vulnerable women and children into sex trafficking.⁵⁷

In the 2016 San Diego report, it was estimated that by 2013, commercial sex was predominately advertised online.⁵⁸ Traffickers write advertisements to target certain populations of sex buyers, and include the ethnicity, physical description, may include the age of the victim, or at times use sexually explicit photographs of the victim.⁵⁹

When examining commercial sexual exploitation of minors online in 2006 (which involved the exchange or the arrangement to exchange money) researchers found that approximately 42% of the buyers were over the age of 40, 70% were white, and 40% were single and never married.⁶⁰

Growth of the Internet has allowed a subculture of sex buyers to communicate and associate with like-minded individuals. Multiple web forums have been established in which sex buyers share information about the sexual services in their area and post a detailed review or personal experience of the provider, including the cost.⁶¹ Language in the reviews often objectified the women; and despite knowing that the sex trade in their location was illegal, online communities allowed them to endorse their belief that participation in the sex trade was okay.⁶² Bounds et al, took the interpretation one-step further, indicating the online communities communicate “a sense of belonging to

⁵⁴ Fischer et al., 2002; Carpenter et al., 2016

⁵⁵ Farley et al., 2017

⁵⁶ Farley et al., 2017

⁵⁷ Skodmin et al., 2016

⁵⁸ Carpenter & Gates, 2016

⁵⁹ Skodmin et al., 2016

⁶⁰ Mitchell et al., 2011

⁶¹ Blevins, K.R., & Holt, T.J. (2009). Examining the Virtual Subculture of Johns," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 38(5), 619. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241609342239>.

⁶² Blevins & Holt, 2009; Bounds, D., Delaney, K. R., & Julion, W. (2017). Hunter-Prey Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Online Posts of Men Who Buy Sex. *Journal Of The American Psychiatric Nurses Association*, 23(4), 258–267. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078390317700264>

something larger than themselves – a community of hunters who must avoid becoming prey of those who oppose them (i.e. the women they hunt and distrust as well as law enforcement).⁶³ The “girlfriend experience” was often a topic among sex buyers in online forums. The girlfriend experience places an emphasis on “enthusiastic sexual partners who make the experience seem a consensual, unpaid sexual relationship.”⁶⁴

A study of national commercial sexual exploitation of children estimated that during 2006 approximately 10% of child pornography cases nationally included the exchange of money.⁶⁵ This typically occurred on websites that sold child sexual exploitation materials. At other times, a trafficker would be advertising commercial sex for purchase and would include a picture.

⁶³ Bounds et al., 2017

⁶⁴ Blevins & Holt, 2009; Bounds et al., 2017

⁶⁵ Mitchell et al., 2011

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