

# HUMAN TRAFFICKING SERIES

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## Human Traffickers, Buyers, and Sex Tourism

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### The Economy of Sex Trafficking

To fully understand human sex trafficking, or “modern day slavery” (Venkatraman, 2003), its context must be explored. The buying and selling of persons globally and domestically has become a market-based economy that thrives because of supply and demand (Polaris Project, 2012) for commercial sex. The circumstances under which human lives that are bought, sold, and traded as objects for another’s sexual pleasure (Aronowitz, Theuermann, & Tyurykanova, 2010) can be disentangled by identifying the individuals involved in these egregious human rights violations through the sale and purchase of sex. As part of this special series on human trafficking, the present issue focuses on the supply and demand of commercial sex to more fully understand the reasons that human sex trafficking continues to exist. Information is presented on human traffickers, exploiters or “pimps,” the techniques they strategically employ to recruit victims into “the life,” the solicitors or buyers of sex (often referred to as “johns”), and sex tourism.

### Human Traffickers, Exploiters, or “Pimps” as Suppliers

The hidden nature of human sex trafficking has produced few academic studies of sex traffickers in general, and especially of domestic human sex traffickers. An early empirical analysis on commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) of children in America reported that nearly all of the traffickers that they came into contact with were minority males between the ages of 16 and 60 (Estes & Weiner, 2001). More recent research, including ethnographic and personal accounts of trafficking, has recognized the increasing numbers of females (Surtees, 2008) and people known to the victim, such as family members (Raymond, Hughes, & Gomez 2001; Trujillo, 2011), who have coerced victims into the sale of sex for monetary or in-kind goods like food, drugs, or shelter.



### DOMESTIC SEX TRAFFICKERS

Despite the dearth of scholarly work on the subject, a characterization of American traffickers can be identified by combining reports from victims and survivors, scholars, law enforcement officers, service providers, and courtroom personnel who have had involvement with them through the variety of social and criminal justice response mechanisms. Descriptions of traffickers from journalists, law enforcement, survivors, and social service providers are remarkably similar (Baughman, 2011; Lloyd, 2011; Sher, 2013; Smith & Coloma, 2009). Additionally, non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations like Shared Hope International and Polaris Project have described the characteristics of traffickers or exploiters. Indeed, traffickers are most often male and have been described as shrewd, ambitious, smart, charming, charismatic, and experts in human behavior. They strategically locate and target vulnerability and particularly, mental health concerns, family disruption, and self-esteem deficits among would-be victims to ensure that their tactics are well-received and coercion is successful (Kennedy et al., 2007). It is not uncommon for traffickers to frequent bus stops and subway stations, group homes, or search the Internet to identify vulnerable women and girls to tailor their recruitment strategies in locating suitable targets for CSE (Lloyd, 2011; Smith, 2014). In an effort to remain celebrated among peer exploiters and the women they control, traffickers may develop a persona signified by a particular alias that defines their status, wealth, personality, and power, while their victims often refer to them as “Daddy”—denoting the multifaceted role of protector, provider, disciplinarian and lover (Sher, 2013).

### GLOBAL SEX TRAFFICKERS

Globally, traffickers tend to be male and will exploit victims within their own countries, but this varies by both region and country (UNODC, 2012). There is a greater proportion of females who perpetrate human trafficking than females who per-

petrate other types of crime. Specifically, 33 percent of convictions worldwide for human trafficking were females, while the global average female offending rate for all crimes is below 15 percent (UNODC, 2012). There does seem to be a difference, however, in how females participate in the human trafficking trade relative to their male counterparts. Specifically, females are more likely to have a role in the exploitation of girls and tend to be in lower-ranking positions that have higher visibility than males. As a consequence, they face an increased likelihood of being identified and criminally prosecuted. Furthermore, female traffickers are more likely to have been victims of trafficking themselves, brought into the sex trade through coercion or manipulation, and who subsequently moved up to a position of power within the “stable,” but who may still be under the control of other members of the trafficking group. While many factors can affect the number and classes of people prosecuted and convicted for human trafficking in different countries, it appears as if female traffickers are more similar to their victims in terms of adverse life events, family dysfunction, and a history of sex trafficking victimization (UNODC, 2012).

## Recruitment Tactics as Production

Sex traffickers create and reinforce a subculture of human trafficking. In order to manipulate women and girls, they first “court” their victims by showering them with affection, food, and gifts (Kennedy et al., 2007). Exploitation relies upon isolation so that victims are without social support from family, friends, and other pro-social influences. This tactic is strategically similar to batterers in domestically violent relationships (Steiner, 2009) and unfortunately, is as effective in immobilizing and trauma bonding victims to their exploiters (Stark & Hodgson, 2008) so they face significant challenges in attempting to leave the sex industry. At some point in the development of victimization, the trafficker (who is often perceived as a lover or boyfriend) transitions his good will into manipulation and may insist that he needs the money or that she owes him for his monetary gifts (Baughman, 2011; Kennedy et al., 2007). The trafficker will then turn her out, and a cycle of sexual assault, drug use, violence, and formal criminal justice processing follows.

Victims are separated from anyone who is not part of “the life” so that sex work is normalized (Smith, 2014), they learn to distrust outsiders, and will lie to protect their exploiters—even when they are subjected to violence and sexual abuse. Additionally, the subculture of sex trafficking promotes a relatively static set of language and rules under which women and girls who are trafficked will operate (Smith & Coloma, 2011). Traffickers control their victims through physical and sexual violence and psychological manipulation so that they internalize the belief that they deserve to be trafficked, would not be found credible if they reported their abuse, and are unwanted by family and friends. Victims are subsequently punished for any perceived infractions. Traffickers use divisive tactics of granting authority and power between women in order to breed jealousy and foster competition. Ultimately, this environment mirrors the captivity and uncertainty that facilitates fear, enhanced startle responses, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and learned helplessness (Ross, Farley, & Schwartz, 2003; see

LaViolette and Barnett, 2014 for related psychological manipulation in domestically violent relationships). Research has demonstrated that traffickers often have control over two to three victims at a time (termed a “stable”), with more extreme examples indicating the exploitation of between 10 to 12 women who are prostituted. Traffickers may also be involved in other forms of organized crime, including drugs or gangs. To be sure, “today’s pimps are drug lords who got smart” (Sher, 2013, p. 56), highlighting the sophistication, organization, and connectedness characteristic of some human trafficking syndicates in the United States.

## Buyers and Solicitors as Demand

Much like sex traffickers, a single profile underscoring the characteristics of solicitors of commercial sex is lacking in the scientific literature. That said, empirical assessments offer a portrait of individuals who solicit and purchase other human beings for sexual pleasure. These individuals tend to be male, but may come from a host of demographic backgrounds. Indeed, researchers have identified buyers that range in age from 14 to 93 years old, who represent a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, with broad levels of educational attainment and income levels, occupational prestige, and sexual orientation (Farley, Bindel, & Golding, 2009; Farley et al., 2011; Malarek, 2011; Raymond, Hughes & Gomez, 2001).

Interviews conducted with prostituted women in the United States have provided detail in terms of the behaviors characteristic of solicitors of commercial sex. Raymond, Hughes, and Gomez (2001), for example, reported that a majority of prostituted women in their study indicated that buyers expected them to submit to egregious requests, frequently including unprotected sex and engaging in degrading sex acts. According to Raymond et al. (2001), buyers would often increase monetary payment with the expectation that this would compensate their demands, and they would regularly become violent if they were met with resistance. Raymond and colleagues (2001) reported significant abuse experienced by victims from buyers in the form of physical and sexual assaults, sadistic sex acts, threats and use of weapons, stalking, kidnapping, harassment, and other crimes against their person and property.

More recently, interviews with buyers offered a deeper understanding of behavior and motivation. A sample of approximately 100 men in Boston, who admitted to buying sex, revealed the average age at first solicitation experience was 21 (ranging from ages 11 to 49). Additionally, men reported purchasing sex anywhere from a single instance to 600 times, with a mean of 54 times. Approximately 40 percent reported that they did so at least once per month. The most often cited motivation for buying sex was to “satisfy immediate sexual urge, entertainment, [or] pleasure,” followed by wanting something more or different than what they were getting in their relationships, and commitment-less or emotionless sex, among other reasons (Farley, et al., 2011; p. 27). Eighty percent of buyers chose women based on their age, and half selected them based on race or ethnicity, with a majority of these sexualizing the “racial other”, (Farley, et al., 2011; p. 18).

Results from a similar interview schedule conducted in London revealed slight differences from the Boston sample. Almost half reported that they first bought sex before the age of 21 years old, and 78 percent had done so by the time they were 25 years old (ages of first experience ranged from 12 to 58). Buyers ranged in the number of times they purchased sex from once to 2,000, with the modal number at 15. Immediate satisfaction was also the most reported motivation in this sample, followed by “seeks variety, wants to select certain physical, racial, and sexual stereotypes,” wanting something more or different than what they were getting in their relationships, and other reasons (Farley, Bindel, & Golding, 2009; p. 21), which appears consistent with Farley et al.’s (2011) findings.

A comparison of men who had purchased sex with those who had not revealed a number of significant differences. Buyers were significantly less likely to view “prostitution” as a form of sexual exploitation, as being harmful to the woman being prostituted, or as being harmful to the community when compared with the views of non-sex buyers (Farley et al., 2011). A substantial number of buyers in one analysis were aware that the women they were exploiting suffered from histories of abuse, had been coerced to enter the sex trade, and were under the control of a “pimp” or trafficker (Farley, et al., 2009; Farley, et al. 2011). This awareness, however, did not translate into deterrence from participating in sex trafficking.

Sex buyers were significantly more likely to believe that prostituted women were somehow “different” from other women, and were less able to empathize with them. They displayed significantly higher scores on an assessment of hostile masculine self-identity than did non-buyers (levels of rape-myth acceptance, however, were similar across the two groups), were more likely to admit they had previously engaged in sexually aggressive behaviors with partners, and disclosed that they would rape a woman if guaranteed they would not get caught (Farley et al., 2011). The criminal histories of both groups of men revealed that men who had bought sex were more likely to have felony and misdemeanor charges than were non-sex buyers, and “all of the crimes known to be associated with violence against women were reported by sex buyers and none were reported by non-sex buyers” (Farley et al., 2011; p. 34). These empirical findings present a stark picture of those individuals reporting the solicitation and purchase of human beings for the purpose of sex, in terms of what appears to be underlying personality traits, propensity for violence against women, and engagement in sex- and violence-related deviance and criminality.

## Sex Tourism as Global Demand

Globalization, while contributing in many positive ways to the world economy, has also facilitated the CSE of women and children. Indeed, it is increasingly easy for sex buyers to travel to certain destinations with the purpose of buying a trafficked human being for the purpose of sex, a phenomenon known as “sex tourism.” According to the U.S. Department of State (2007), weak law enforcement, governmental corruption, and poverty in tourist destinations all contribute to sex tourism.

Farley and colleagues’ work with sex buyers in Boston and Lon-

don revealed that both groups had traveled to different countries to buy sex. More than one-quarter of the Boston men and nearly half of the London men reported engaging in sex tourism (Farley, et al., 2009; Farley et al., 2011). The most frequently listed destination countries among American sex buyers included Canada, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, and Puerto Rico (Farley et al. 2011). The Netherlands was the top destination for men included in the London sample, followed by Thailand, India, Germany, the United States, Spain, France, China, and Hungary (Farley, et al., 2009).

Child sex tourism is a particularly deplorable form of trafficking, in which buyers travel to countries with enhanced vulnerability and limited bureaucratic oversight or law enforcement protection for would-be victims of sex trafficking. Additionally, countries with increased proportions of homeless youth, extreme poverty, and populations that have normalized child slavery are particularly at risk for predators who travel with the express purpose of buying children for sex (Kara, 2009). World Vision (2014) reports that some of the most popular destination countries include Cambodia, Thailand, Mexico, Costa Rica, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic. It is estimated that approximately one quarter of sex tourists worldwide are United States citizens, and account for as much as 80 percent of the child sex tourists in Latin American countries (World Vision, 2014).

## Discussion

The sex trafficking of women and children would not exist without a market-based economy in which suppliers or traffickers provide a steady stream of victims through strategic manipulation tactics or the production of trafficking. These exploiters control victims using multiple forms of passive and overt coercion and violence. In doing so, they produce a readily available supply of human beings to buyers or solicitors who create demand for purchasing of these women and children. This phenomenon is not limited globally, but also exists within the United States. In nearly twenty-five percent of one sample, U.S. residents traveled out of country to engage in sex trafficking as a form of “tourism.” Enhanced education and awareness of characteristics of traffickers, their predatory strategies for manipulation, and the buyers responsible for creating this demand can encourage an end to the profound exploitation of persons for purposes of commercial sex.

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