

## **Mapping the Demand for Sex with Trafficked People in Minnesota**

### **URS Proposal, Fall 2015**

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Human sex trafficking is an issue that is not only present abroad, but also at home within the United States. The common idea is that within prostitution, individuals engage voluntarily with a person who serves as their pimp, and that this is not sex trafficking. Human trafficking occurs at a systematic level and “a trafficking recruiter can be a family friend [...] or even someone well-respected within the community who can build to trust of potential victims” (Kim & Hreshchyshyn, 2004). Human trafficking is an industry that generates billions of dollars and intersects with strip clubs, pornography, escort services, modeling agencies, etc. This hyped sex environment that is at the forefront of American culture creates a myth of glamorous sex work. According to the United Nations Population Fund, victims who engage in sexual activity are doing so as a means of forced survival; contrary to the connotation the term “sex” entails, many posit that there is no mutual desire on the part of the female victim (MacKinnon, 2011). Dr. Lauren Martin and Alexandra Pierce’s (2014) published work *Mapping the Market for Sex with Trafficked Minor Girls in Minneapolis: Structures, Functions, and Patterns* focuses on the context of: who is involved in the market; how does this exploitation system work; and where does human trafficking occur in Minneapolis, MN. The research I will engage in is to be part of a team conducting research that elaborates on Dr. Lauren Martin’s previous work by focusing on the buyers (i.e the demand) of human trafficking victims in terms of content analysis as a means to assess trends.

This research has practical implication in public policy. As of now, most states have laws and statutes that criminalize prostitution; In Minnesota, statutes emphasize that an individual who “engages in prostitution” is subject to gross misdemeanors (Minn. Stat. Ann. § 609.324 Subd. 7.). Targeting the sex workers by no means minimizes the clout the human trafficking

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industry carries; sex trafficking victims are subject to the pimps and, hence, are at the bottom of the power hierarchy. A pending question in human trafficking research is “how do we stop human sex trafficking?” As discussed in Martin & Pierce’s *Mapping the Market* study, “[...] interrupt[ing] sex trafficking operations [are tied to] sex buyer demand.” (p.12). Furthermore, additional research has shown that in terms of prostitution control, “[...] law enforcement has little effect on the amount of prostitution [...]” (Weitzer, 1999, p. 83). The research I will be conducting aims to shift the focus from the activity of the sex workers to the buyers / purchasers of sexual services; this information would target the backbone of this market economy. The research will contribute to a better understanding of human knowledge / culture in terms of who has a strong hand in human trafficking. We know who the victims are. It is time to understand the perpetrators.

My role as a researcher in Dr. Martin’s team includes applying analytical skills to: collect, gather, and interpret qualitative data of the demand sector of human sex trafficking. First, I will be conducting a thorough content analysis of evaluating heterogeneous pools of documents (e.g. published articles, media, court documents, and audio interviews, etc.) pertaining to the human sex trafficking market; specifically, I will be discerning the chain of operation of the demand sector of human sex trafficking. Then, I will be translating the content I read into qualitative data that will assess trends of the sex buyers in terms of: where they get access to the sex market; how do they interact with the girls; where the transactions take place; and the links in which the sex traffickers sell the victims. I am responsible for coding the qualitative data into quantitative information. The data I find will be placed into a STATDATA and Gant Chart system; these tools documents court data case reviews, content analysis, new buyer database, and

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preliminary reports from the articles data base into qualitative data. I will be working in a team of researchers and the work will not be overbearing; the research is feasible to conduct, as this research is a continuum from the original *Mapping the Market for Sex with Trafficked Minor Girls in Minneapolis: Structures, Functions, and Findings (2014)*, and follows a similar structure in terms of assessing the same (human sex trafficking) market, but from the sex buyers' perspective.

I intend to disseminate the new knowledge I produce in a poster board presentation in the Undergraduate Research Symposium during the end of my spring semester (April 29<sup>th</sup> 2016). The nature of the buyers and how they interact with those who sell sex trafficked victims is a relatively new field that is gaining increased attention. My goal is to communicate the severity of the human trafficking sex market in Minneapolis, MN from the perspective of the supply-demand chain.

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#### Citations

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Weitzer, R. (1999). Prostitution control in America: Rethinking public policy. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 32(1), 83-102.