

Who Buys Sex? And How Do We Stop Them?

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Human Trafficking Prevention Conference

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Overview

- ❖ **Key concepts**
 - Commercial sex markets as function of supply, demand, and distribution
 - Distinguishing sex trafficking, CSEC, & prostitution
 - The role of demand as driver of all illicit markets
- ❖ **Demand reduction as strategy** for combatting sex trafficking
- ❖ **Overview of basic tactics**
 - Deter demand to reduce sex trafficking market activity
 - Evidence of effectiveness
- ❖ **Policy versus practice**
- ❖ **Challenges, emerging threats**
- ❖ **Status report and trends**

Demand Reduction = Primary Prevention

- ❖ **Demand reduction is necessary for truly comprehensive attempt to prevent sex trafficking.**
 - Tactics are effective, evidence based, and feasible to implement
 - No evidence that sustained prevention occurs when demand is ignored or minimized
- ❖ **Empirical case for full decriminalization as a harm reduction and human rights strategy is based mainly upon misused data and faulty research methods.**
- ❖ **Impeding primary prevention (i.e., demand reduction) expands prevalence of sex trafficking and exploitation, and increases harm.**

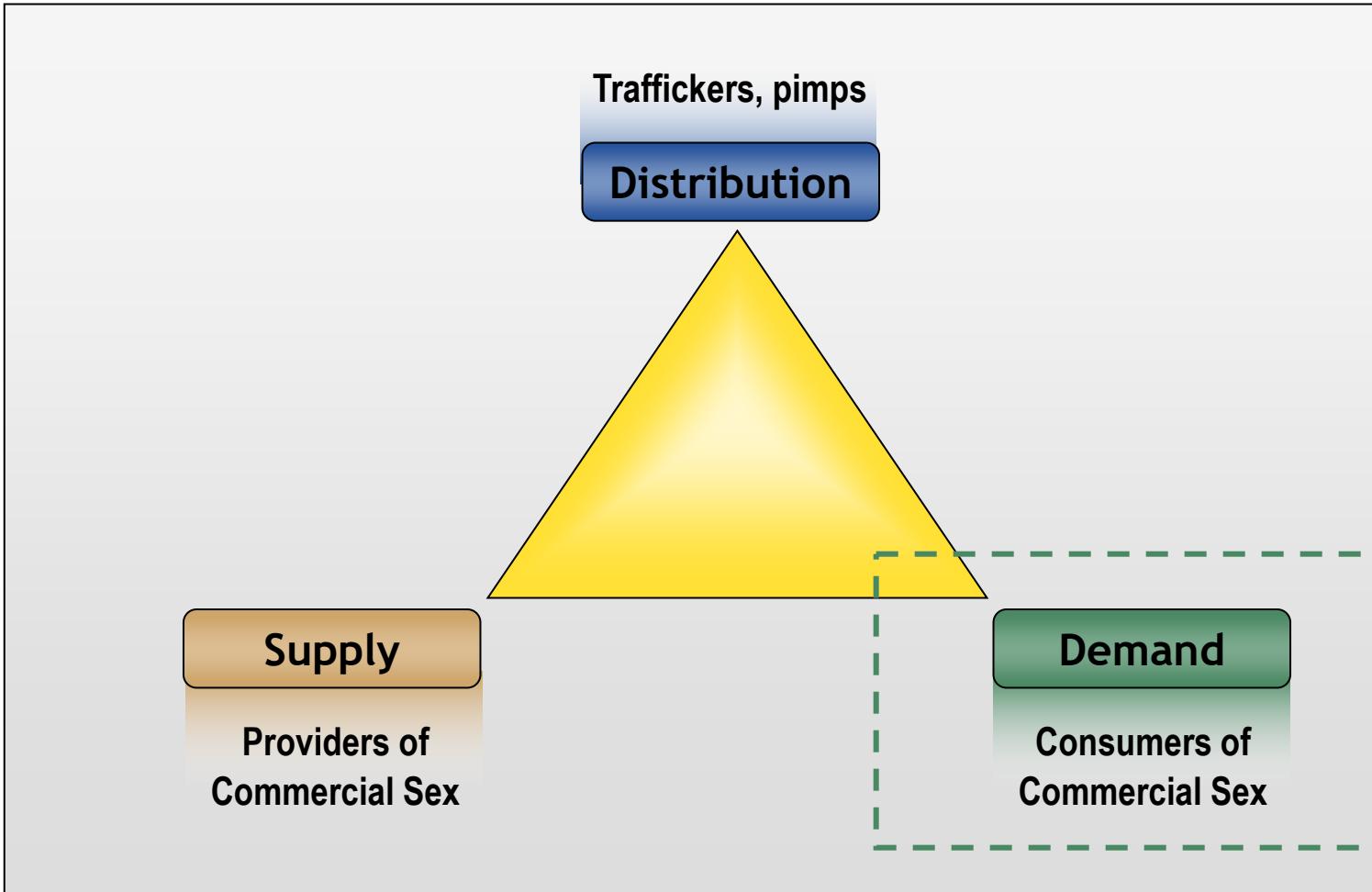
Cases

1. Belmont, MA local patrol, victim rescue
2. Puerto Rico drug cartel
3. FBI - Operation Cross County
4. Craigslist, Backpage, Pornhub successes

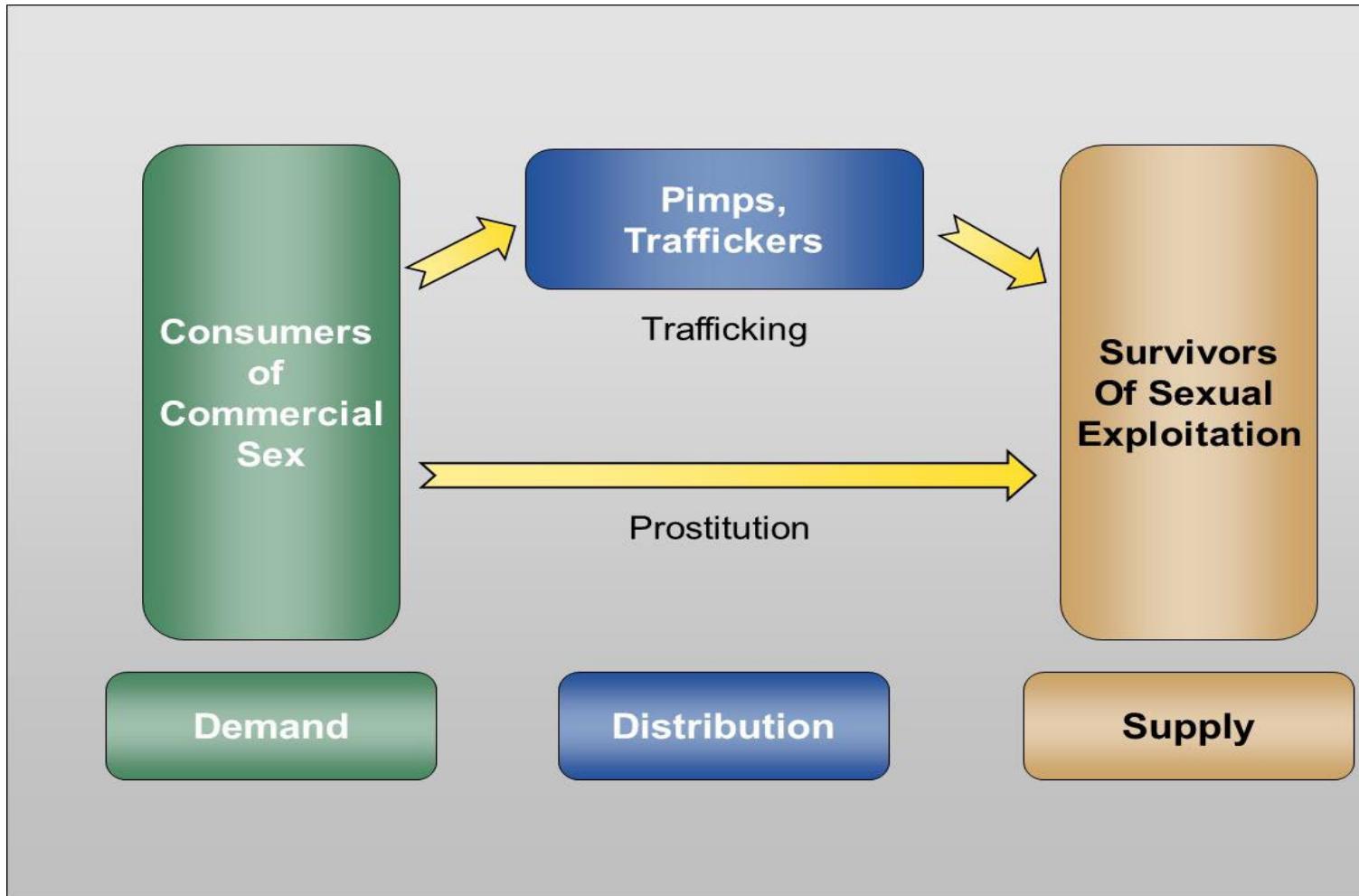
Definitions & Parameters

- ❖ **Prostitution and sex trafficking: basic definitions and distinctions**
 - **Prostitution:** Exchange of sex for something of value
 - **Sex trafficking:** Prostitution compelled through force, fraud, coercion, or unable to consent due to status as minor.
- ❖ Both sex trafficking and prostitution are illicit markets for commercial sex, and function as does all commerce, subject to market forces: supply, demand, distribution.
- ❖ **Trafficking versus prostitution as a false dichotomy.**

Components of Prostitution & Sex Trafficking Markets



Flow Model Illustrating Causal Role of Demand in Commercial Sex Markets



Limitations of Focusing on Supply & Distribution Alone

- ❖ No precedent for successfully suppressing illicit markets when demand is strong.
- ❖ Effects limited to temporary suppression & displacement
- ❖ With strong demand and great \$\$ incentives, arrested pimps & traffickers are quickly replaced
- ❖ Virtually endless supply of victims:
 - ▶ *“We can never rescue our way out of the problem, or ever build enough shelters.” (survivor)*
- ❖ Asking victims to change behavior to reduce risk and reliance on victims to prosecute traffickers unfair, burdensome, limited

Limitations of Focusing on Supply & Distribution Alone

- Traffickers innovate, find alternative supply, as long as there are profits to be made.
- Immense service gap - impossible to find and serve all victims
- Legalization does not reduce (and instead increases) illegal prostitution.
- Where legal or decriminalized, majority of prostitution/trafficking market remains outside of legal system.
- Majority of providers have unprotected sex for premium, and/or are forced by traffickers or buyers.

Exchange with a Survivor*

CNN Question:

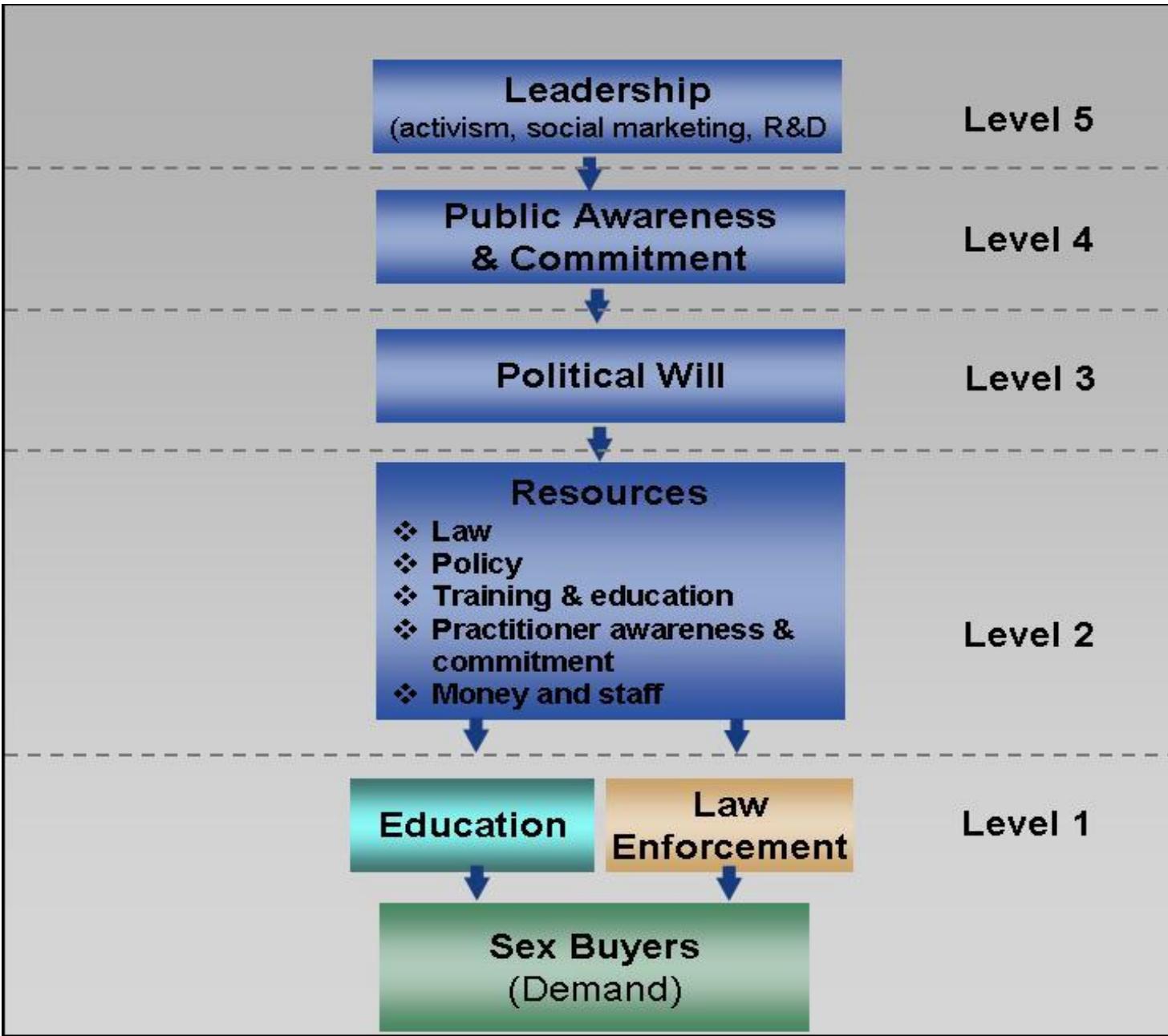
“Do you think these arrests [of traffickers] will do anything to slow down the problem of sexual exploitation and human trafficking in this country?”

Survivor Response:

- ▶ *“Actually, no. It’s maybe making a dent, but you have to go after the johns.”*

▶ * Interview with Asia Graves, a trafficking survivor, during CNN coverage of trafficker arrests in 2014 FBI-led “Operation Cross Country” enforcement action.

Combating Demand



Who Are The Buyers?

► From Demand Abolition survey of over 8,000 men in US:

- Most men (80%) have never paid for sex.
- About 20% of buyers are “High-frequency” and their actions account for 75% of the illegal sex trade.
- Only about 6% of men who purchase sex illegally report ever having been arrested for it.
- Demographic traits are poor predictors of sex buying.
- Buyers and non-buyers hold strikingly different views on masculinity and sex buying is “normalized.”
- Perceiving a risk of arrest has a deterrent effect on sex buying.

Who Are The Buyers?

A 2020 study in Sweden surveyed a randomized of over 6,000 men and found having paid for sex to be strongly associated with:

- **frequent pornography use**
- **dissatisfaction with sex life**

Associations remained statistically significant after adjustment for age, income, and educational attainment.

Deegan, C., Jacobsson, E., Mannheimer, L., & Björkenstam, C. (2020). Are Men Who Buy Sex Different from Men Who Do Not?: Exploring Sex Life Characteristics Based on a Randomized Population Survey in Sweden. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 1-7.

Who Are The Buyers?

A 2011 survey of 110 men who bought sex in Scotland found the most frequent users:

- **were more likely to have committed sexual aggression against non-prostituting women**
- **used pornography more frequently**
- **had higher levels of rape myth acceptance**

Farley, M., Macleod, J., Anderson, L., & Golding, J. M. (2011). Attitudes and social characteristics of men who buy sex in Scotland. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 3(4), 369-383. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022645>

Who Are the Buyers?

A study in Atlanta that surveyed 218 men who responded to a decoy online ad found that:

- **6% of the buyers stated without prompting that they wanted to buy sex with a minor.**
- **When offered a minor, 47% of the men accepted it, in spite of 3 warnings about the fact she was not of legal age.**

Shapiro Group, 2010. Men Who buy Sex With Adolescent Girls.

Sex Buyer Motivations

- ▶ **Type I: Loneliness**
 - ▶ Intimacy (“girlfriend experience”).
 - ▶ Emotional support that they are not receiving elsewhere.
 - ▶ Difficulty meeting women conventionally.
 - ▶ Feeling that women find them unattractive.
- ▶ **Type II: Sex**
 - ▶ Sex with little or no emotional involvement.
 - ▶ No time or desire for the responsibility of a conventional relationship.
- ▶ **Type III: Thrill /Variety Seeking**
 - ▶ Unusual sex acts that most women are unwilling to engage in.
 - ▶ Excited by the illicit nature of prostitution.
 - ▶ Sex with women with a variety of physical traits
- ▶ **Type IV: Pathology**
 - ▶ Less risky means of mimicking extreme or illegal fantasies, such as incest or rape.
 - ▶ Desire being “in control” or dominating women when having sex.
 - ▶ Harm or humiliate women.

Basic Demand Reduction Tactics

1. **Reverse stings:** Police decoy operations designed to apprehend sex buyers
2. **Web-based reverse stings:** Police operations involving decoy online ads
3. **Other sex buyer arrests:** Based on investigations or ad hoc opportunities
4. **Identity Disclosure:** Publicizing the identities of sex buyers (“shaming”)
5. **Employment Loss**
6. **“Dear John” messages:** Sent to homes of suspected or confirmed sex buyers
7. **Vehicle seizure:** Impoundment of vehicles used in attempting to purchase sex
8. **Driver’s license suspension**
9. **SOAP Orders:** Geographic restrictions or restraining orders
10. **Community service:** Sanction or diversion options for arrested or sentenced buyers
11. **Public education campaigns**
12. **Neighborhood action targeting sex buyers**
13. **Surveillance cameras or video recordings** used to deter sex buyers, or provide evidence for prosecution
14. **“John schools”** Education or treatment programs for arrested sex buyers
15. **Information technology-based deterrence:** programmed to identify sex buyers and convey deterrence messages and/or support police sting operations and investigations

North Carolina

City or County	Type	Population
Alamance County, NC	County	162391
Asheville, NC	City	94067
Belmont, NC	City	15136
Boiling Spring Lakes, NC	City	6168
Boone, NC	City	18036
Brunswick County, NC	County	137303
Burke County, NC	County	87611
Burlington, NC	City	151131
Cabarrus County, NC	County	231278
Carolina Beach, NC	City	6000
Cary, NC	City	176987
Charlotte, NC	City	879809
Cleveland County, NC	County	100670
Concord, NC	City	107697
Craven County, NC	County	100720
Cumberland County, NC	County	335508

Dallas	City	4488
Davidson County, NC	County	167000
Durham County, NC	County	326126
Durham, NC	City	276341
Eden, NC	City	15527
Elizabeth City, NC	City	18707
Fayetteville, NC	City	208778
Forsyth County, NC	County	382590
Fuquay-Varina, NC	City	29110
Gaston County, NC	County	222119
Gastonia, NC	City	76635
Goldsboro, NC	City	32749
Graham, NC	City	17273
Greensboro, NC	City	298263
Greenville, NC	City	92860
Guilford County, NC	County	542410
Harnett County	County	141477
Henderson, NC	City	14954
Henderson County, NC	County	119260

Hendersonville, NC	City	15099
Hickory, NC	City	43532
High Point, NC	City	114059
Hoke County, NC	County	53787
Iredell County, NC	County	186693
Jackson County, NC	County	43126
Jacksonville, NC	Onslow	72723
Johnston County, NC	County	215999
Jones County, NC	County	9255
Kernersville, NC	City	27763
Kings Mountain, NC	City	10885
Lenoir, NC	City	18263
Lincoln County, NC	County	89670
Lincolnton, NC	City	11099
Lumberton, NC	City	20928
Madison County, NC	County	21193
Marion, NC	City	7853
McDowell County, NC	County	44578
Mebane, NC	City	17797
Monroe, NC	City	34888
New Bern, NC	City	31539
New Hanover County, NC	County	231448

North Wilkesboro, NC	City	4194
Onslow County, NC	County	206160
Pamlico County, NC	County	12344
Pender County, NC	County	62815
Pitt County, NC	County	179961
Pollocksville, NC	City	269
Raeford, NC	City	4724
Raleigh, NC	City	469124
Randleman, NC	City	4631
Richlands, NC	City	2287
Robeson County, NC	County	116328
Rockingham, NC	City	9031
Rocky Mount, NC	City	53957
Rowan County, NC	County	148150
Roxboro, NC	City	8290
Salisbury, NC	City	33961
Shelby, NC	City	20046

Statesville, NC	City	27140
Swain County, NC	County	14136
Taylorsville, NC	City	2320
Transylvania County, NC	County	33165
Wake Forest, NC	City	30117
Watagua County, NC	County	54086
Waynesville, NC	City	10145
Weldon, NC	City	1628
Wilmington, NC	City	120194
Wilson, NC	City	47731
Winston-Salem, NC	City	245787
Woodfin, NC	City	8107
Yadkin County, NC	County	37214

U.S. Cities and Counties Employing Anti-Demand Tactics

Demand Reduction Tactics	# U.S. Cities and Counties
Arrest Tactics	
Reverse Stings	2,341
Reverse Stings - Web-based	1,724
Other Sex Buyer Arrests	1,297
Post-Arrest Tactics	
Identity Disclosure	2,843
Vehicle Seizure	299
John Schools	238
Community Service	240
Geographic Exclusion Zones ("SOAP" orders)	140
Driver's License suspension	35
Other Tactics	
IT-Based Enforcement & Deterrence*	> 78
Loss of Employment	582
Neighborhood Action	267
Surveillance Cameras & Video Evidence	272
Public Education	215
"Dear John" Letters	102
Any Anti-Demand Tactic	3,123

Change in Past 12 Months

Demand Reduction Tactics	U.S. Cities and Counties Identified		
	May 1, 2023	April 30, 2024	Change
Arrest Tactics			
Reverse Stings	2,206	2,341	+ 135
Reverse Stings - Web-based	1,615	1,724	+ 109
Other Sex Buyer Arrests	942	1,297	+355
Post-Arrest Tactics			
Identity Disclosure	2,437	2,843	+406
Vehicle Seizure	296	299	+ 3
John Schools	236	238	+ 2
Community Service	237	240	+ 3
Geographic Exclusion Zones ("SOAP" orders)	140	140	+ 0
Driver's License Suspension	35	35	+ 0
Other Tactics			
IT-Based Enforcement & Deterrence	> 78	> 78	+ 0
Loss of Employment	502	582	+ 80
Neighborhood Action	267	267	+ 0
Surveillance Cameras & Video Evidence	272	272	+ 0
Public Education	214	215	+ 1
"Dear John" Letters	102	102	+ 0
Any Anti-Demand Tactic	2,697	3,123	+ 426

U.S. Cities and Counties Employing Anti-Demand Tactics



Reverse Stings & Other Sex Buyer Arrests

- ▶ Street-level reverse stings
- ▶ Web-based reverse stings
- ▶ Brothel reverse stings
- ▶ Opportunistic arrests
 - ▶ Investigations of brothels
 - ▶ Suspicious public behavior
- ▶ Investigative leads
 - ▶ victim/witness reports
 - ▶ Spin-off investigations

Evolving Reverse Stings Methods, Increased Penalties:

- From 1960s through 2010, vast majority of buyers arrested in stings, soliciting adult officers, misdemeanor charges or citations.
- From 2005 forward, increasing use web-based reverse stings.
- Web-based reverse stings have presented the opportunity to target those seeking to purchase access to children for sexual abuse, and charge them with felony level trafficking and solicitation offenses.
- At least one-third of reverse stings now target buyers of children.
- Texas passed a state law making simple solicitation of prostitution a state jail felony. Effective September 1, 2021.
- Florida implemented a “john registry” modeled on sex offender registries, listing the identities of arrested sex buyers.

Recent NC Cases

► Lee County, NC sex buyer arrest, ID disclosure

► In April, 2024, a Lee County man faced several charges after deputies said he tried to purchase a 9-year-old to rape. The Lee County Sheriff's Office said deputies were investigating 50-year-old Joseph Jay Vieu with the assistance of the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office after he attempted to purchase a child. Cumberland County Sheriff's Office first received a tip from Gate Beautiful Inc. on April 2 about the situation. That group is a nonprofit that works to help survivors of sexual assault and human trafficking. Police said the group alerted them about what Vieu was trying to do. "I have no words to describe this type of behavior," said Lee County Sheriff Brian Estes, "I would like to thank the investigators involved with this case and I pray for justice." The sheriff's office then executed a search warrant on Thursday, April 25 at a home in the 1300 block of Post Office Road in Sanford. Vieu was arrested and charged with two counts of human trafficking of a child victim and two counts of soliciting prostitution of a minor.

- <https://abc11.com/lee-county-man-joseph-jay-vieu-arrested-charged-with-human-trafficking/14735893/> (2024)
- <https://www.cbs17.com/news/local-news/i-have-no-words-lee-county-man-facing-human-trafficking-charges-after-trying-to-purchase-child-deputies-say/> (2024)
- <https://abc11.com/videoClip/14736838/> (2024)
- <https://www.yahoo.com/news/lee-co-man-charged-trying-042430447.html> (2024)
- <https://abc11.com/videoClip/14737768/> (2024)
- <https://www.wral.com/story/lee-county-man-arrested-in-an-attempt-to-buy-a-9-year-old-child/21400133/> (2024)
- <https://www.cbs17.com/news/local-news/cumberland-county-news/sanford-man-charged-with-human-trafficking-in-cumberland-county-sheriff/> (2024)

Recent NC Cases

- ▶ **Roanoke Rapids, NC sex buyer arrest, ID disclosure**
- ▶ In January, 2024: a Roanoke Rapids man who police say tried to solicit sex from a juvenile female and went inside a restroom while the victim was using it was arrested and taken to the Halifax County Detention without the opportunity for bond, and awaited a first district court appearance. The events which led to the arrest of 39-year-old Raynard Antwain Bradley, 39, occurred around 8 p.m. at a restaurant on Julian R. Allsbrook Highway when police responded to a sexual assault call. As officers responded Halifax Central Communications reported a man was running across the road to a motel. Roanoke Rapids police Lieutenant D. Newsome and Officer M. Morris encountered the man, who was identified as Bradley. He admitted to having narcotics in his possession and .8 grams of crack and several items of paraphernalia were found. Meanwhile Chief Shane Guyant said the sexual assault investigation revealed that Bradley was soliciting a juvenile female for sex in exchange for money. Investigation, the chief said, showed that Bradley went inside the women's restroom while the female juvenile victim was using the bathroom. He approached the victim and attempted to perform sexual acts on her. The victim locked herself in a bathroom stall while Bradley stood outside the stall with no clothes on, intimidating and preventing the victim from leaving. Eventually Bradley ran out of the bathroom and left the restaurant clothed when another customer entered. Bradley was charged with attempted second-degree forcible rape, second-degree kidnapping, soliciting prostitution of a minor, possession of schedule II narcotic, and possession of drug paraphernalia.
 - <https://www.rrspin.com/news/8422-man-charged-with-soliciting-minor-in-attempted-sexual-assault.html>

Recent NC Cases

- ▶ **Robeson County, NC reverse sting, ID disclosure**
- ▶
 - ▶ In October, 2021, Robeson County authorities charged five men with misdemeanor soliciting prostitution charges as part of an undercover operation, the sheriff's office said in a news release on Saturday. Charles Wall, 45, of Raeford, was charged with solicitation of prostitution, possession of a stolen firearm and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon. He was given a \$15,000 secured bond and taken to the detention center. Four other men, Francisco Hidalgo Tixteco, 44, Mica McDonald, 43 and Luis Miguel Hidalgo, 24, all of Raeford, North Carolina, and Henry Stephens, 65, of St. Pauls, North Carolina, were each given a \$1,000 secured bond and taken to the Robeson County Detention Center after their arrest on Friday, Sheriff Burnis Wilkins' office said in the release.
 - <https://drydenwire.com/news/man-faces-felony-charges-for-allegedly-soliciting-prostitute-in-shell-lake/> (2021)

Additional Reasons to Arrest or Detain Buyers

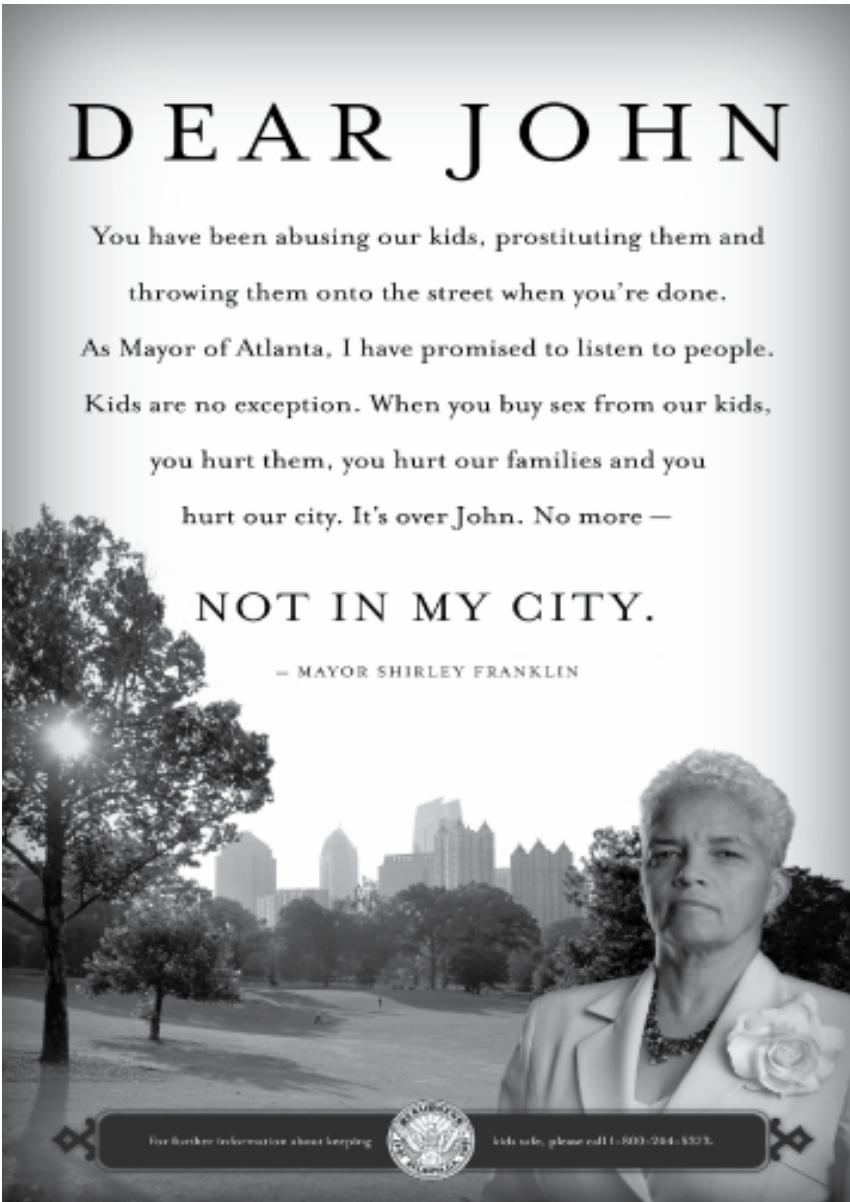
► Supports victimless prosecutions

- Source of intel about sex trafficking markets, locations, websites
- Source of Investigative leads - pimps and traffickers
- Point of entry for closed networks - popup brothels, gaming networks
- Interview & release

Public Education / Social Marketing

- ▶ Middle & high school (Cook County, IL)
- ▶ Billboards, posters (Rochester, NY; Oakland; Atlanta)
- ▶ Presentations to community groups (Kansas City, MO)

Public Education / Social Marketing



Public Education / Social Marketing

► Atlanta “Dear John” Campaign PSAs



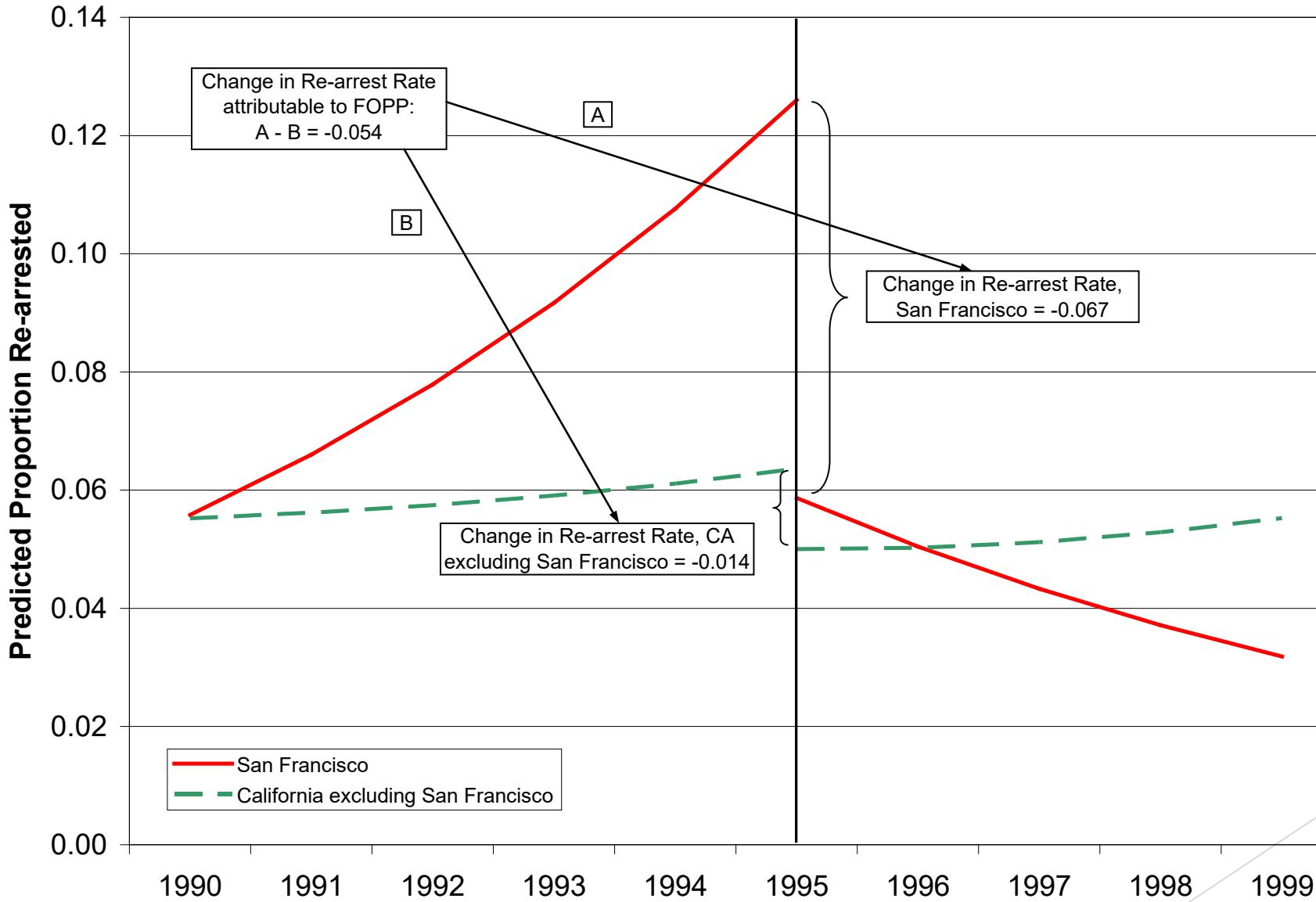
IT Based Tactics

Technology/ Program Name	Objectives	Description	Implementation
Childsafe.AI	Combat online facilitation of child sexual exploitation; deter sex buyers; provide investigative intelligence to law enforcement agencies.	Automated scans of online ads detects CSE and trafficking, alerts law enforcement agencies (LEAs); LEAs may plan stings, or allow automated deterrence engagements by AI chatbots.	Tools, training, technical assistance provided to LEAs in dozens of US cities and counties; over 17,000 sex buyers engaged by Childsafe bots in at least five National Johns Suppression Initiative operations 2018-2020.
Transaction Intercept (Streetgrace.org)	Disrupt commercial sex transactions before they occur, at point of purchase. Particular focus on disrupting purchase of minors.	Posts decoy ads, identify potential sex buyers. AI chatbots deployed to engage buyers. When intention to purchase a minor is confirmed, bot communicates risks & consequences, provides trauma & therapy resources.	Launched in 2018; developed in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, Kennesaw State University, advertising agency BBDO.
EPIK (The Epik Project)	Uses technology to assist disrupting online purchase of sex at point of sale. Functions as cyber “neighborhood watch” program, providing LEAs with actionable information for deterring CSE & sex trafficking.	Do not provide details about their online tactics, but disclose that technology includes combination of SMS, voicebots, chatbots, & AI. Once identified by IT, human volunteers engage sex buyers in deterrence conversations.	Founded in 2012. Through early 2020, documented disruption of over 178,000 attempts by roughly 90,000 men intent on purchasing sex via the internet. Trained over 250 volunteers in 14 US cities.

John Schools

- Police conduct “reverse stings,” courts process arrestees.
- Diversion: Case is dismissed if eligible men volunteer and:
 - ▶ Pay a fee
 - ▶ Attend class
 - ▶ Avoid rearrest
- Sentence: Men required to attend as condition of sentence.
- Single class versus multiple session options.
- Typical Curriculum:
 - ▶ Legal consequences
 - ▶ Health consequences
 - ▶ Impact on communities
 - ▶ Impact on “providers” (survivors)
 - ▶ Impact on johns
 - ▶ Pimping & sex trafficking
 - ▶ Sexual addiction
- Most are financially self-sustaining, revenue-positive.

Model of John School Impact on Rearrest Rates



Research findings and Implications

- ▶ **Largely ineffective means of prevention or amelioration of problems associated with sex trafficking:**
 - Any intervention neglecting the root cause of sex trafficking.
 - Legalizing or decriminalizing prostitution.
 - Harm reduction.
 - “Getting tough” with pimps/traffickers.
 - Law reform without sufficient implementation.
 - Awareness campaigns without a plan for what to do next.

Demand Reduction = Evidence-Based Primary Prevention

- ❖ **Demand reduction tactics and comprehensive approaches that include demand reduction have produced significant 40% to 75% reductions in commercial sex markets**
 - **Central PA:** sex buyer arrests + publicizing identities reduced local activity of domestic sex trafficking circuit by 75%
 - **Jersey City, NJ:** comprehensive approach including buyer arrests reduced prostitution activity by 75%
 - **Ipswich & Bolton, England:** comprehensive approach including buyer arrests and education reduced prostitution activity by 40% to 80%
 - **San Francisco, CA:** education of arrested buyers reduced recidivism by more than 40%
 - **Memphis TN & Buffalo, NY:** arrest and education of sex buyers produced significant declines in calls for police service

Evidence-Based Model for Preventing Commercial Sexual Exploitation & Trafficking

1. Arrest, educate, publicize male “buyers”
2. Therapeutic/supportive approach with survivors
3. Arrest and punish pimps and traffickers

Demand Reduction = Primary Prevention

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Key Threats, Challenges

- ▶ Successful (but inaccurate) messaging of the pro “sex work” or decriminalization movement
 - ▶ Well funded, long-term strategy
 - ▶ Well funded, coordinated research and legal agendas
- ▶ Federal commitment to inaction on demand reduction, e.g.
 - ▶ HHS, CDC
 - ▶ FBI, BJA
 - ▶ USAID, State Department
 - ▶ Ignored TVPA provision

Key Asset, Reason for Hope

- ▶ Local, state level “grass roots movement” to solve the problem.