

# Sex Trafficking in Hawai'i

## Part 1: Exploring Online Sex Buyers

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September 2018

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ASU School of Social Work

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#### **Overall Study Description**

Researchers from the Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research (STIR) at Arizona State University are conducting a multi-part study about sex trafficking in Hawai'i. The study entitled *Sex Trafficking in Hawai'i* will encompass exploring online sex buyers and the response to sex buying demand in Hawai'i, discovering the experiences of sex trafficking victims regarding recruitment, retention, exiting, and determining the Hawai'i community's developing capacity to respond to sex trafficking victims of all ages and genders.

Funding for this project is from the Kaimas Foundation, a private family foundation with strong interest in the well-being of vulnerable people including children and women in Hawai'i ([kaimasfoundation.org](http://kaimasfoundation.org)) and in partnership with ASU STIR and the Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women.

#### **Online Sex Market in Hawai'i**

Understanding the methods used by sex buyers and the size of the sex buyer population is an important part of developing an understanding of sex trafficking in a community. The influence of sex buyers must not be overlooked as traffickers respond to the demands of sex buyers (finding a person for them to buy sex from). Prostitution and sex trafficking are visible only for the purpose of locating and coordinating the sex sale with sex buyers. For this study, we did not intend to look for persons trying to buy sex from a child or an obviously sex trafficked person. This is a broad look at the response to the online sex market in Hawai'i. Currently, little is known in the research literature about the Hawai'i sex market, both indoors (brothels, hotels, bars, online, etc.) and outdoors (street, in cars). This phase of the study focused on the online sex market and the response from sex buyers in Hawai'i. The data collected for this project produced an estimate the size of the population of online sex buyers in two locations in Hawai'i, Oahu and the Big Island.

#### **Previous Research on Online Sex Ads in Hawai'i**

Research literature on online sex buying sex trafficking in Hawai'i that has preceded this study has been limited but is an important foundation for this project. Ibanez and Suthers (2014) conducted an exploratory study about the phone numbers found in online sex advertisements. They reported an average daily count of sex advertisements posted on Hawai'i Backpage.com at 68 advertisements and the area codes of the phone numbers in the advertisements demonstrated the existence of victim movement and trafficking networks.

## Key Findings from the 2018 ASU Hawai'i Demand Study

- In 2018, people, including children, are being sold for sex in Hawai'i as demonstrated by 58 online sex advertisements found on the Oahu Backpage.com webpage in one day.
- People are buying sex from online advertisements and the majority of the buyers live in Hawai'i.
- This study found that the response to sex selling advertisements placed on Backpage.com in March 2018 received an astronomical response rate to one in 24 hours than any other city in the U.S. with 407 unique contacts (text or call). Previous research by the ASU STIR team found a typical response in Phoenix, Arizona of 45 unique respondents, in Chicago, Illinois, 25 unique respondents, Denver, Colorado, 20 unique respondents, and Boston, Massachusetts, 22 respondents.
- The results of this study led to the estimate that one out of every eleven men in Hawai'i over the age of 18 is an online sex buyer.
- Hawai'i does not currently have an organized effort to combat sex buying although it is illegal under state law. Honolulu Police Department arrested 50 sex buyers from January 2017 to June 2018.
- Attention, intervention and prevention of online sex buying directly links to addressing sex trafficking in Hawai'i. Sex trafficking victims are bought and sold for sex to online sex buyers.
- Changing online sex buying behavior will take the efforts of the entire community to address the secrets of sex trafficking perpetration and victimization in Hawai'i.

**58** similar ads  
in one day

Mostly local  
buyers

**1 in 11**  
men in  
Hawai'i  
search  
online to pay  
for sex

Oahu online sex market buyers =  
**18,614**

## Study Description

The ASU STIR office has previously conducted online sex advertisement response research around the U.S. and the Arizona State University Institutional Review Board has approved this methodology. The current study entailed developing two normative sex advertisements and placing them online on Backpage.com. A normative sex advertisement is an online prostitution advertisement that has language, art, and photos similar to most of the other advertisements in the region. Photos for the advertisement were obtained through the CEASE project that paid models who posed specifically for this type of project and consented to the use of the photo in this manner. Two normative advertisements were developed based on observation of the other advertisements on Backpage.com in the Hawai'i market.

The advertisements were then placed on the Women Seeking Men Personals section of Backpage.com on March 23<sup>rd</sup> and March 30<sup>th</sup>, Easter weekend, in the two markets Oahu and the Big Island. The Women Seeking Men Personals section is a well-known site for sex selling advertisements around the globe. This section became an increasingly likely site for online sex selling advertisements after Backpage.com closed their Adult Entertainment section in January 2017. The responses texts and voice calls from the advertisements were sent to a VoIP (Voice Over Internet) and no contact was made between the research team and the potential sex buyers contacting the VoIP. The phone numbers and text messages were collected for analysis. The ASU STIR research team analyzed the contact behavior and created three estimates (using two different methodologies) for the size of the online sex buyer population. Estimates for how many sex buyers were looking to buy sex in March 2018 were derived for Oahu and the Big Island, and a population estimate of sex buyers was suggested for the state of Hawai'i.

## Online Advertisement Response March 23, 2018

On March 23<sup>rd</sup> ASU STIR researchers placed two normative sex advertisements in the Hawai'ian online sex market. The sex advertisements were placed on Backpage.com in Oahu and the Big Island. Using a VoIP, all voice, email and text responses were collected from callers for a 24-hour period.

### Oahu Response

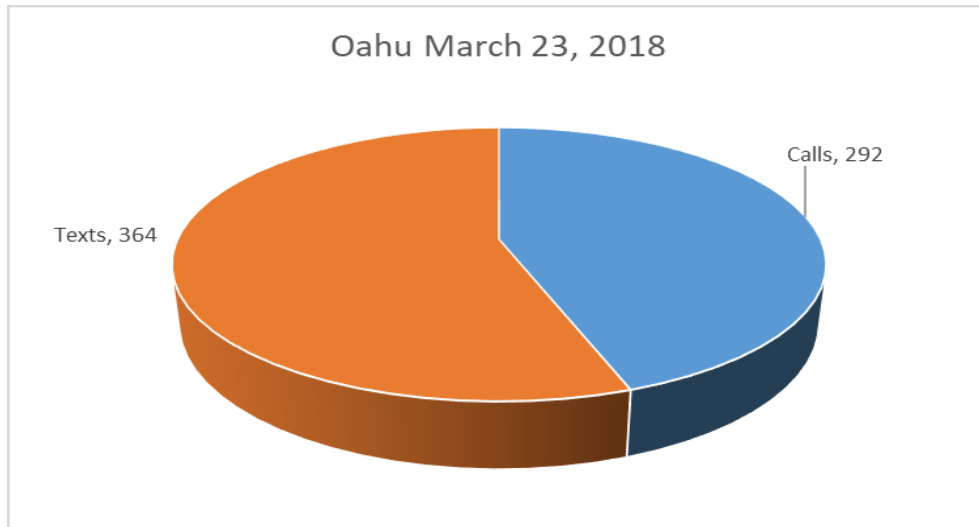
#### March 23, 2018 Oahu Advertisement Response

During the 24-hours after the advertisement was posted on the Oahu Backpage.com page by the research team, 58 other sex advertisements were posted independently. All were similar to the normative advertisements. In the 24-hours after the advertisement was posted, the advertisement received **756 contacts, 392 calls and 364 texts**. These contacts were from **407 unique phone**

756 contacts  
407 unique  
numbers

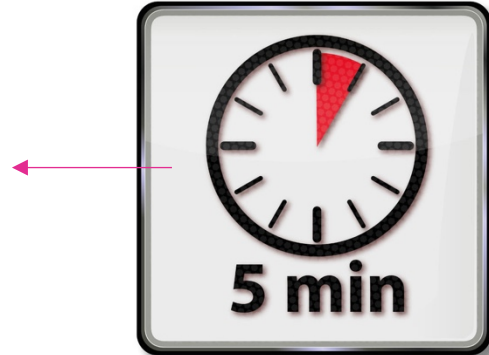
← numbers.



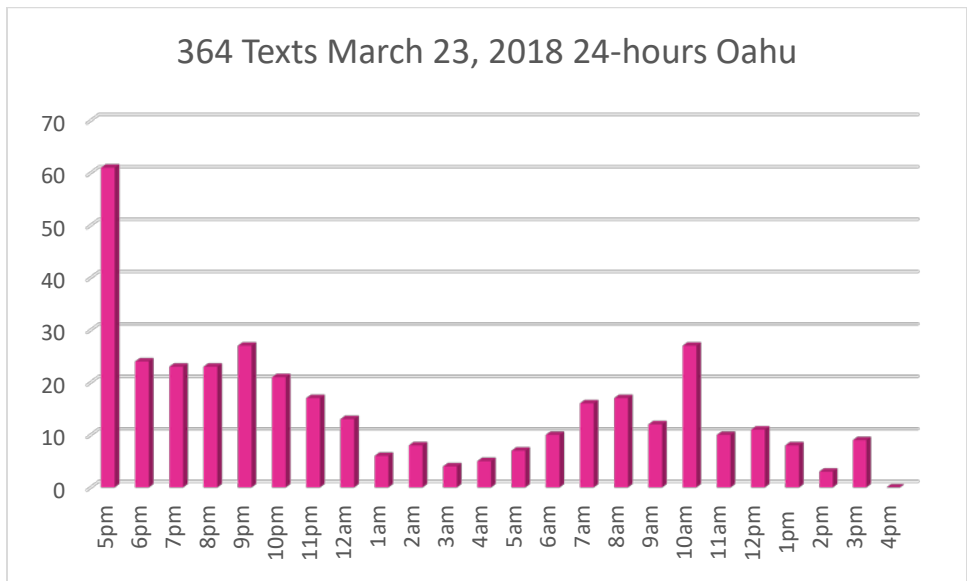
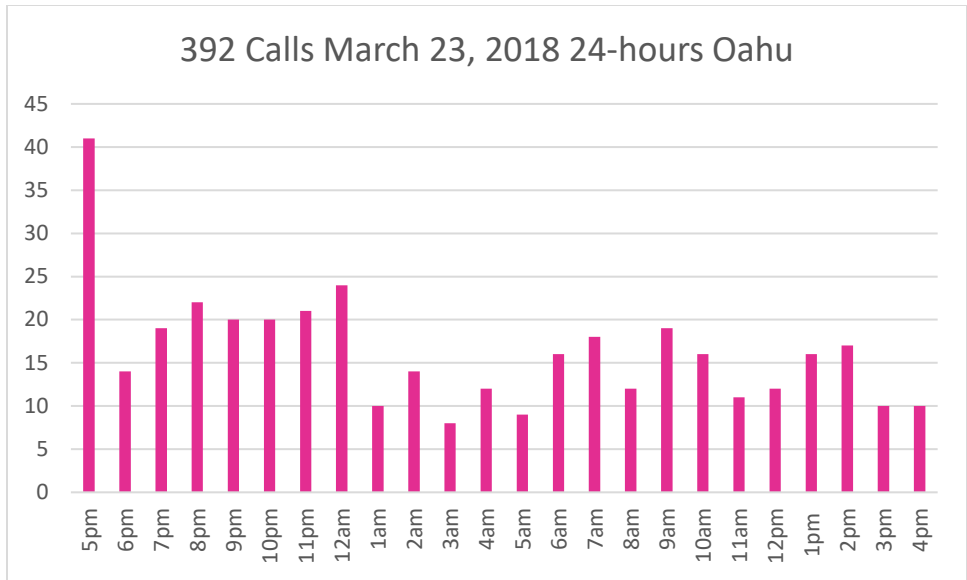


In the first four and a half minutes that the sex advertisement was live in Oahu on March 23, 2018, 10 texts were received from 7 unique phone numbers and 10 calls were received from four unique phone numbers. **Contacts during the 24-hours came from 87 different area codes with 286 (70%) from Hawai'i (808 area code).** The patterns of the contacts indicated that both calls and texts were at their highest frequency during the first hour (5pm) the advertisement was placed with continuous contact activity for the 24-hours.

10 calls  
10 texts  
numbers

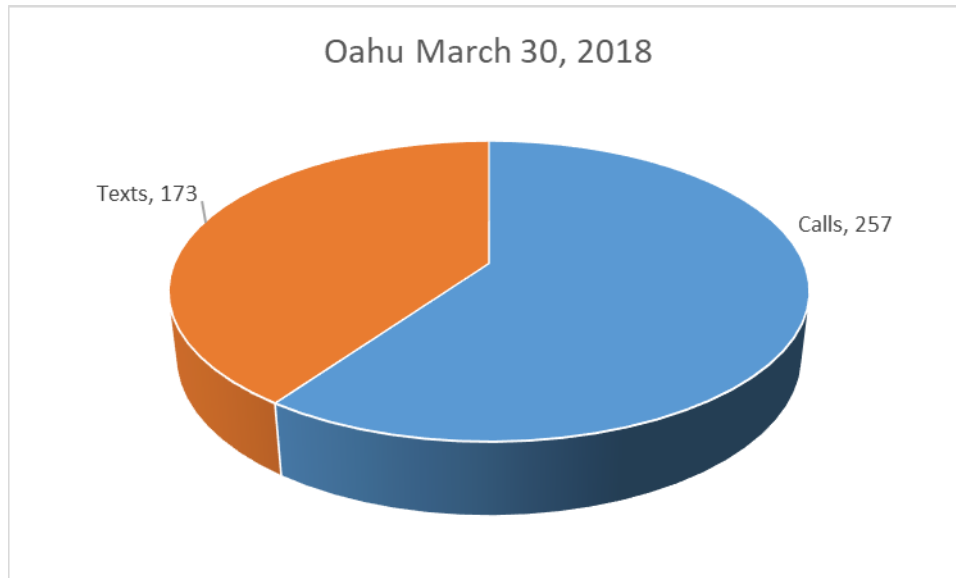


**70%** of all contacts to Oahu  
were from  
area code **808**



**March 30, 2018 Oahu Advertisement Response**

During the 24-hours after the advertisement was posted on the Oahu Backpage.com page by the research team, 57 other advertisements were posted. In 24-hours, the advertisement received **430 contacts, 257 calls and 173 texts**. These contacts were from **239 unique phone numbers**.



In the first four minutes that the advertisement was live on March 30 in Oahu, seven calls and texts were received from five unique phone numbers. The 407 unique contacts came from 49 different area codes with 177 (74%) of the unique phone numbers (n =239) from Hawai'i (808 area code).

Texts included information from two possible traffickers "I am a veteran and I would love to help you grow your business" and "I am looking for talent. Great pay for a couple of hours work." Other texts from potential buyers included information such as the caller was visiting from Reno or Michigan. The potential buyers in their texts requested specific acts including: full service (vaginal penetration), Greek(anal sex) and if they could bare back (wear no condom). There were references to drugs like "party girl". Names from callers included Thomas, Joey, John, Wayne, Fred, Caleb, and Damian; they identified themselves as students or members of the military.

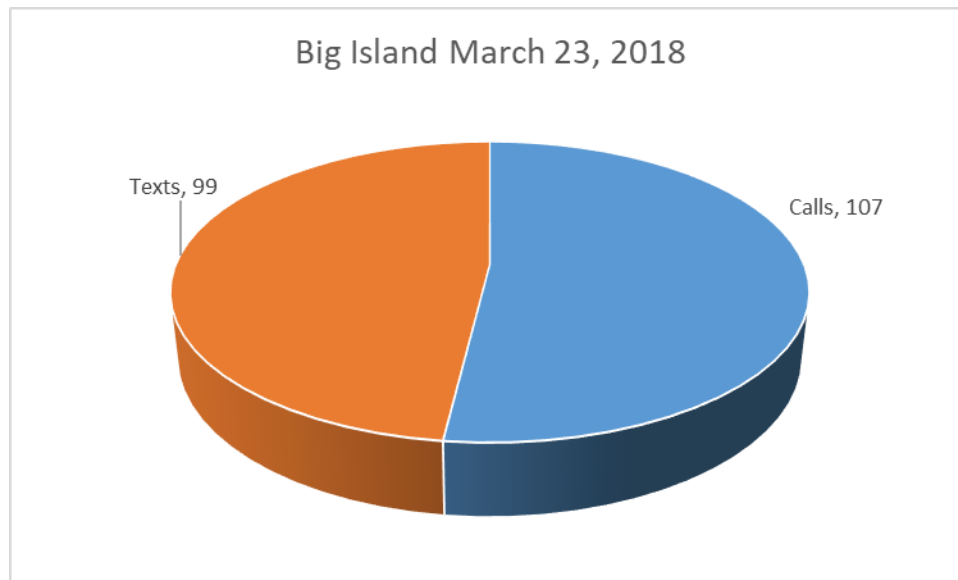
Text Location Data (written in the text messages) from Oahu Advertisement Response:

Kona	Kailua
Maui	Marine Base
Kauai	Haiku
Waikoloa Village	Hilton Hawai'ian Village
Kale Koa	Ko Olina
Hilo	Puna
Oahu	Kihei Maui Meadows
Lahaina	Big Island
Honolulu	North Shore
Waikiki	Schofield
Kihe	

## Big Island (Hawaii Island) Response

### March 23, 2018 Big Island Advertisement Response

During the 24-hours after the advertisement was posted on the Big Island Backpage.com page by the research team, two other sex advertisements were posted independently. In 24-hours, the advertisement received **206 contacts, 107 calls and 99 texts**. These contacts were from **113 unique phone numbers**.



In the first four minutes that the advertisement was live in the Big Island, three texts were received from three unique phone numbers. The 113 unique contacts during the first 24-hours came from 18 different area codes with **67 (59.3%) from Hawai'i (808 area code)**. The patterns of the contacts from sex buyers on the Big Island fluctuated with the highest number of texts being received during the first hour (5pm) the advertisement was placed but the most calls were received later (8pm).

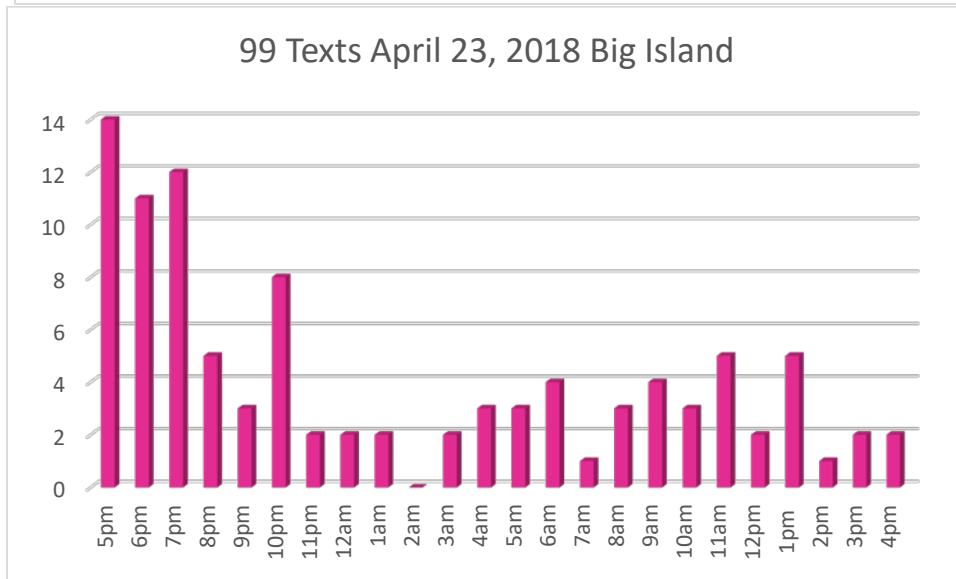
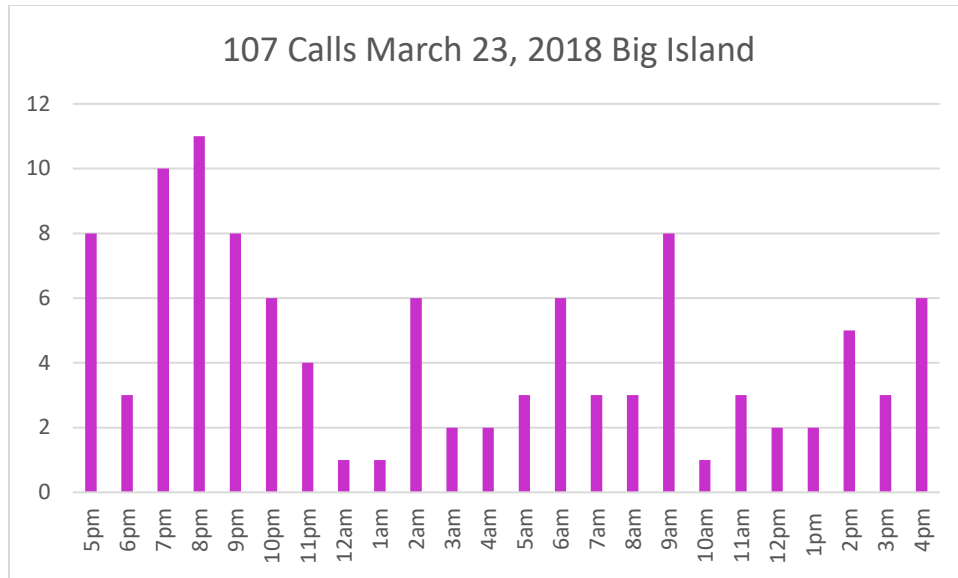
advertisement  
three hours

3 texts



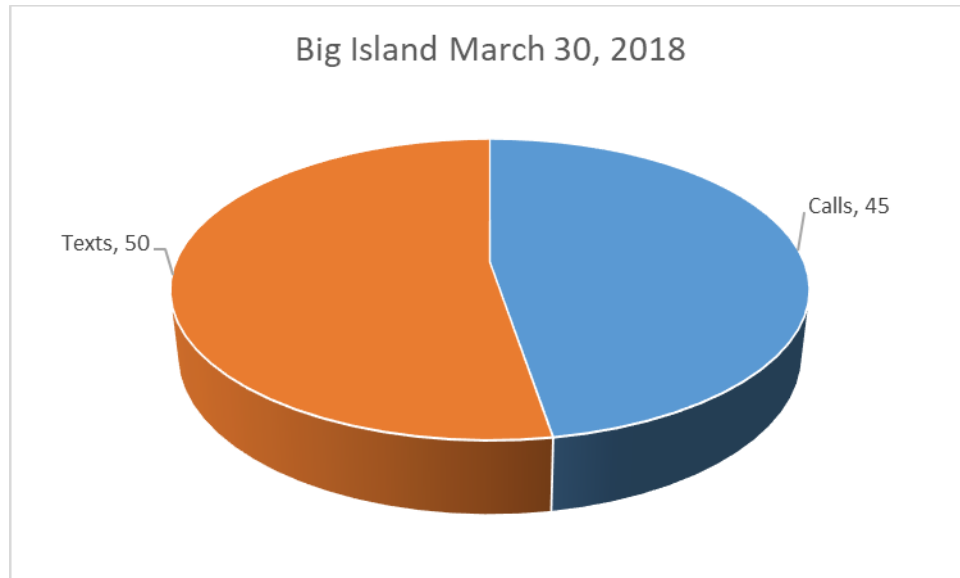
59% of all contacts from the Big  
Island  
from 808 area code





**March 30, 2018 Big Island Advertisement Response**

During the 24-hours after the advertisement was posted on the Big Island Backpage.com page by the research team, two other advertisements were posted independently. In 24-hours, the advertisement received **95 contacts, 45 calls and 50 texts**. These contacts were from **65 unique phone numbers**.



In the first four minutes that the advertisement was live in the Big Island, three texts were received from three unique phone numbers. Contacts came from 15 different area codes with 67 (67.7%) of the unique phone numbers (n =65) from Hawai‘i (808 area code). They identified themselves as a trucker, visitor, and a surfer. Names from callers included James, Dan, Alberto, and Mike.

Text Location Data (written in the text messages) from the Big Island:

Kona
Hilo
Waikoloa
Mauna Lani
Waimea

### Estimating the Size of Online Demand in Hawai‘i

The two advertisements posted on Backpage.com in the Hawai‘i market twice (one week apart) resulted in 627 unique contacts. During the two times the advertisements were placed on the Oahu Backpage.com, there were 58 (March 23, 2018) and 57 (March 30, 2018) other advertisements posted during the same 24 hours. For the advertisements posted on the Big Island, both times there were two other advertisements posted.

There are two methods to estimate the size of the sex buyer market (M) for the two advertisement locations. The *first* method is to multiply the number of unique callers (U) with the number of similar type advertisements (A).

$$U * A = M$$

For Oahu, the first week there were 407 unique callers to the advertisement and 58 other advertisements resulting in an estimate of 23,606 potential sex buyers. For week two in Oahu, there were 239 unique callers and 57 other advertisements, resulting in an estimate of 13,623

potential sex buyers. If we average the two estimates, **the online sex buyer market in Oahu at any given time is 18,614 individuals.** Because there were only two other advertisements on Backpage.com at the same time as our advertisements were placed on the Big Island page, interpretation of the Big Island estimate should be made with caution. For the Big Island, the first week there were 113 unique callers to the advertisement and 2 other advertisements resulting in an estimate of 226 potential sex buyers. For week two in the Big Island, there were 65 unique callers and two other advertisements, resulting in an estimate of 130 potential sex buyers. If we average the two estimates, **the online sex buyer market in the Big Island at any given time is 178 individuals.** This assumes that all of the other advertisements received a similar number of unique contacts but this is unlikely and has considerable error without knowing the pattern of sex buyer behaviors (how many advertisements does a potential buyer call before they find a seller or give up, do they have preferences for race, age, or photos).

The *second* method of estimating the size of the online sex market is more accurate and is called capture-recapture. Using capture-recapture we matched individuals' phone numbers from two random samples of sex advertisement respondents (responding to our advertisements). Using the overlap figure from the two independent samples, we estimate the size of the total population of online sex purchasers for each city. In this instance, the exposed population includes all males in the area over the age of 18 (American Fact Finder, 2017) that appear in multiple samples taken from the same population. One consideration regarding the overall population is that it is not closed. To minimize issues of attrition and new recruits, we kept the time between collecting samples as short as possible. Advertisements were placed one week apart, on the same day of the week at the same time of day on the same online venue in each city. We attempted to avoid issues of trap addiction or trap avoidance by placing the identical advertisements. Although their attempt to purchase sex from the first online sex advertisement was not completed, previous research by this research team indicated this is not unusual and should not impact their decision to attempt a second contact. To estimate the population directly using a capture-recapture formula by Chapman (1951) for small samples:

$$\hat{N} = \frac{(n_1 + 1)(n_2 + 1)}{m + 1} - 1$$

### **Oahu Sex Buyer Estimate**

During the study there were an average of 57 sex advertisements posted on Backpage.com on the Oahu Backpage.com, 407 unique responses for week one and 239 unique responses for week two with a recapture of 75 phone numbers. The derived Chapman's N is 1,304 sex buyers responding to Backpage.com advertisements on Oahu in March 2018.

### **Hawai'i Sex Buyer Estimated Population**

This estimate can then be generalized to Hawai'i by applying the Chapman's N to the exposed population of Hawai'i. The exposed population for this study are all of the males over the age of 18 years old in Hawai'i was 559,309. The exposed population was determined using American Fact Finder (2016) and uses the 1-year population estimates of males over age 18 from the U.S. Census from the most recent year available, 2016. This is the basis by which we calculated the percentage estimate of the male population of Hawai'i to be online sex advertisement customers. This exposed population (559,309) is the denominator. The numerator was calculated by

multiplying the average number of advertisements within each city by Chapman's N. In Hawai'i, the exposed population was 559,309 males. The average number of advertisements posted (57 advertisements) was then multiplied by 1,304, the estimated Oahu sex buyer population in March 2018 produced from the Chapman N formula resulting in an estimated 74,362 potential sex buyers. This estimate is then reduced to only include the percentage of 808 area code contacts (72%) resulting in 53,541. The final estimate of 9.6 percent of the adult male population over the age of 18 in Hawai'i are attempting to purchase online sex. If the consideration of local responses (area code 808) is removed, the estimate rises to 13 percent (one out of every seven). This model reports the number of active online sex advertisement customers on the first data collection date (March 23, 2018) and considers issues of attrition (customers no longer buying sex from online advertisement source) and new customers (who are entering the market to buy sex online in that city for the first time). These estimates are conservative with consideration of confidence intervals and standard error rates. **This estimate suggests that one out of every eleven males (9 out of 100) over the age of 18 and living in Hawai'i, are online sex shoppers.**

### **Study Assumptions**

There are a number of study assumptions necessary to consider when interpreting the findings from this evaluation. 1) All men over the age of 18 in each city are potential customers for online sex advertisements 2) The advertisement placed on backpage.com was normative to all of the other advertisements posted on backpage.com and was not detected as a deceptive advertisement by potential customers 3) That the callers (customers) called other sex advertisements posted on backpage.com during the 24 hours after our advertisements were posted 4) That the advertisements were placed on two average Fridays in March 2018. Week two of the study was Easter weekend which may have influenced online sex buyer behavior. These estimates use the most up to date and conservative statistical methods. This study only considered responses to online sex advertisements placed on Backpage.com Women Seeking Men Personals section. As a note, Backpage.com was shut down globally one week after this study was completed.

### **Current Responses to Demand in Hawai'i**

The criminal statutes in Hawai'i that include sex buying and selling are in Appendix I. In Honolulu, Hawai'i, the Honolulu Police Department arrest both sex buyers and prostituted persons as part of their public safety policing (HPD, 2018). From January- December 2017, 36 sex buyers and 72-prostituted persons were arrested. From January to June 2018, 14 sex buyers and 37-prostituted persons were arrested.

### **Implications of this Study**

For every sex advertisement placed on Oahu's Backpage.com website, which costs \$14 in bitcoin, there are over 400 potential buyers who responded within 24 hours. **The sex market response to the online advertisements was significantly more robust than other large cities on the continental U.S.** In contrast to over 400 potential buyers in one day for one advertisement, the Honolulu Police Department arrested 50 sex buyers over 15 months, from January 2017 to June 2018. There is no current statewide strategy to address sex buying behaviors in Hawai'i.

The root of the demand for buying sex in Hawai'i is complex. While most men in Hawai'i are not online sex buyers, the high percentage of online sex buyers in Hawai'i relative to other large

cities makes clear that bribing women for sex is an accepted part of male behavior. In fact, men using economics to subvert sexual consent is considered by some to be a victimless crime. Male demand is the root of both prostitution and sex trafficking.

Prior to Western contact in 1776, there was no prostitution in Hawai‘i. There was also no term for prostitution in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (Native Hawaiian language).<sup>1</sup> Later, Native Hawaiians described this new idea with the general term ho‘okamakama, which meant to have illegitimate children.<sup>2</sup>

The demand for prostitution in Hawai‘i can be traced to Western intervention, which “exponentially increased the amount of transient foreign men on the prowl for sexual partners” and “who assumed that Hawaiian women should be available to them if offered material or monetary remuneration.”<sup>3</sup> As the whaling industry grew, so did accounts of Native Hawaiian women compelled into sexual slavery on ships for the entire eight-month duration of whaling voyages. The demand problem became serious enough to warrant a kapu (ban) on prostitution which “may have signified that chiefs were attempting to protect women from the increasing demands that ship captains were making on chiefs, women, and their families to provide women for sex on voyages lasting several months.”<sup>4</sup>

Foreign male entitlement to Native women was so entrenched that the crews of two British ships and one American ship led violent riots against the kapu on prostitution out of “ire at not being able to obtain women for sex.”<sup>5</sup> Conflicts over sexual access to Native women even resulted in direct attacks on the homes of the ali‘i. Although the kapu superficially restricted women’s activities, historians argue that its ultimate purpose was to protect women from exploitation by foreign men, who were not subjects of the ali‘i.<sup>6</sup>

Prostitution made inroads as gender roles where women had status and inherent value were replaced by a rigid, hierarchical gender binary where women became adjuncts to men. This occurred alongside increased attempts by Westerners to control Native sexuality, land, education and economies, culminating in a shocking overthrow of the Native Hawaiian Kingdom.

The remolding of Native Hawaiian society resulted in prostitution push factors such as impoverishment of and racism toward Native Hawaiians, and pull factors such as sex trafficking of foreign women and girls brought into the islands as “picture brides” for plantation laborers.<sup>3</sup> The breakdown of traditional Native Hawaiian societal structure, isolation of individuals from communities, and high numbers of male laborers also contributed to the

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<sup>1</sup> Pukui, Mary Kawena, *Nānā I Ke Kumu*, Vol. 2, 1972.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Arista, N., “Captive Women in Paradise 1796-1826: The Kapu on Prostitution in Hawaiian Legal Context,” *American Indian Culture & Research J.*, 40, 42, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*, at 44.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*, at 46.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*, at 52.

institutionalization of sex buying. The confluence of the military and tourism further increased the demand. The Honolulu Police Department, local government, and the U.S. military jointly oversaw prostitution until the end of the World War II.

Today, it is genuinely troubling that more people are penalized for homelessness (sit-lie violations) and jaywalking in Honolulu than for buying sex. The general lack of response by law enforcement and the state demonstrates a crisis of priorities. Further, the higher rates of criminalization of prostitutes relative to sex buyers also shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the issue. The reproduction of dominance by one gender-based class over others prevents the advancement of women and others as political groups.

Ultimately, sex buyer demand is the culprit of sex trafficking. Addressing sex buyers is a critical step to reducing sex trafficking in Hawai'i. Sex buyers create a market for victims to be bought and sold for sex, with over 400 buyers for one online advertisement, there is a tremendous incentive for sex traffickers to sexually exploit children and adults in Hawai'i. An effective approach to sex trafficking will require a response to sex buying demand.

*“If there were no buyers, there would be no business for the pimps and traffickers and no victims of human trafficking.”*

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#### References

Honolulu Police Department, Lieutenant Mike Brede, Narcotics/Vice Division, Honolulu Police Department, June 28, 2018.

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Appendix I.

HRS § 712-1207

§ 712-1207. Street solicitation of prostitution; designated areas

(1) It shall be unlawful for any person within the boundaries of Waikiki and while on any public property to:

(a) Offer or agree to engage in sexual conduct with another person in return for a fee; or

(b) Pay, agree to pay, or offer to pay a fee to another person to engage in sexual conduct.

(2) It shall be unlawful for any person within the boundaries of other areas in this State designated by county ordinance pursuant to subsection (3), and while on any public property to:

(a) Offer or agree to engage in sexual conduct with another person in return for a fee; or

(b) Pay, agree to pay, or offer to pay a fee to another person to engage in sexual conduct.

(3) Upon a recommendation of the chief of police of a county, that county may enact an ordinance that:

(a) Designates areas, each no larger than three square miles, as zones of significant prostitution-related activity that is detrimental to the health, safety, or welfare of the general public; or

(b) Alters the boundaries of any existing area under paragraph (a); provided that not more than four areas may be designated within the State.

(4) Notwithstanding any law to the contrary, any person violating this section shall be guilty of a petty misdemeanor and shall be sentenced to a mandatory term of thirty days imprisonment. The term of imprisonment shall be imposed immediately, regardless of whether the defendant appeals the conviction, except as provided in subsection (5).

(5) As an option to the mandatory term of thirty days imprisonment, if the court finds the option is warranted based upon the defendant's record, the court may place the defendant on probation for a period not to exceed six months, subject to the mandatory condition that the defendant observe geographic restrictions that prohibit the defendant from entering or remaining on public property, in Waikiki and other areas in the State

designated by county ordinance during the hours from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. Upon any violation of the geographic restrictions by the defendant, the court, after hearing, shall revoke the defendant's probation and immediately impose the mandatory thirty-day term of imprisonment. Nothing contained in this subsection shall be construed as prohibiting the imposition of stricter geographic restrictions under [section 706-624\(2\)\(h\)](#).

(6) Any person charged under this section may be admitted to bail, pursuant to [section 804-4](#), subject to the mandatory condition that the person observe geographic restrictions that prohibit the defendant from entering or remaining on public property, in Waikiki and other areas in the State designated by county ordinance during the hours from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, any person who violates these bail restrictions shall have the person's bail revoked after hearing and shall be imprisoned forthwith. Nothing contained in this subsection shall be construed as prohibiting the imposition of stricter geographic restrictions under [section 804-7.1](#).

#### HRS § 712-1209

### [§ 712-1209]. Solicitation of prostitution near schools or public parks

(1) A person commits the offense of solicitation of prostitution near schools or public parks if, within seven hundred fifty feet of a school or public park, the person offers or agrees to pay a fee to another person to engage in sexual conduct.

(2) Solicitation of prostitution near schools or public parks is a misdemeanor.

#### HRS § 712-1209.1

### § 712-1209.1. Solicitation of a minor for prostitution

(1) A person eighteen years of age or older commits the offense of solicitation of a minor for prostitution if the person intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly offers or agrees to pay a fee to a minor or to a member of a police department, a sheriff, or a law enforcement officer who represents that person's self as a minor to engage in sexual conduct.

(2) Solicitation of a minor for prostitution is a class C felony.



(3) A person convicted of committing the offense of solicitation of a minor for prostitution shall be imposed a fine of not less than \$5,000; provided that \$5,000 of the imposed fine shall be credited to the general fund.

(4) This section shall not apply to any member of a police department, a sheriff, or a law enforcement officer who offers or agrees to pay a fee to a minor while acting in the course and scope of duties.

(5) The state of mind requirement for this offense is not applicable to the fact that the person solicited was a minor. A person is strictly liable with respect to the attendant circumstance that the person solicited was a minor.

#### HRS § 712-1209.5

#### **[§ 712-1209.5]. Habitual solicitation of prostitution**

(1) A person commits the offense of habitual solicitation of prostitution if the person is a habitual prostitution offender and pays, agrees to pay, or offers to pay a fee to another person to engage in sexual conduct.

(2) For the purposes of this section, a person has the status of a “habitual prostitution offender” if the person, at the time of the conduct for which the person is charged, had two or more convictions within ten years of the instant offense for:

- (a) Prostitution, in violation of [section 712-1200\(1\)\(b\)](#);
- (b) Street solicitation of prostitution, in violation of [section 712-1207\(1\)\(b\)](#);
- (c) Habitual solicitation of prostitution, in violation of this section;
- (d) An offense of any other jurisdiction that is comparable to one of the offenses in paragraph (a), (b), or (c); or
- (e) Any combination of the offenses in paragraph (a), (b), (c), or (d).

A conviction for purposes of this section is a judgment on the verdict or a finding of guilt, or a plea of guilty or nolo contendere. The convictions must have occurred on separate dates and be for separate incidents on separate dates. At the time of the instant offense, the conviction must not have been expunged by pardon, reversed, or set aside.

(3) Habitual solicitation of prostitution is a class C felony.