



# Exploring the Impact of the Super Bowl on Sex Trafficking 2015

## FULL RESEARCH REPORT

Office of Sex Trafficking  
Intervention Research

**ASU** School of  
Social Work  
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

THE MCCAIN INSTITUTE  
*for* INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP

*“The McCain Institute is again proud to support the second year of research surrounding sex trafficking and large events. Patterns and trends from the three cities gives us greater knowledge about how traffickers are operating, how victims are being moved and gives us all more information to fight sex trafficking each and every day.” – Cindy Hensley McCain, Co- Chair Arizona Human Trafficking Council*

# Exploring the Impact of the Super Bowl on Sex Trafficking

February, 2015

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## **Exploring the Impact of the Super Bowl on Sex Trafficking 2015**

### **Introduction:**

The purpose of this two-year study was to develop new knowledge about the true impact of the Super Bowl on sex trafficking by exploring ad volume, trends and movement of ads along with the scope and volume of demand associated with the event. In years past, media reports have speculated that the Super Bowl was one of the most prominent national events where sex trafficking occurs; however, researchers have yet to substantiate these statements.

While there is no empirical evidence that the Super Bowl causes an increase in sex trafficking compared to other days and events throughout the year, there was a noticeable increase in those activities intended to locate victims from both law enforcement and service provision organizations. Awareness efforts leading up to the Super Bowl included numerous news stories about sex trafficking, as well as training for hotels, airport staff, and other tourism focused groups. Elected officials joined activists, student groups and members of the community to increase the overall public knowledge about the issue of sex trafficking, with media coverage in print, radio and billboards across the Greater Phoenix Metropolitan Area.

Building upon previous research on demand for commercial sex conducted by the Arizona State University Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research, the authors sought to quantify the net effect of the Super Bowl on local, regional and national sex trafficking in an empirical fashion, using source data provided by a leading internet based adult services website and data collected using the website.

This study is the second half of a two-year study that was initiated before, during and after the Super Bowl in 2014, with the goal of comparing ad and demand volume in the 2015 Super Bowl host city with the 2014 host city. Additionally, a related research objective was to apply these findings to create a baseline of working knowledge regarding ad volume, demand and trends in the city that will host the next Super Bowl in 2016.

Both the 2014 and 2015 studies included two parts that helped to draw a picture of the sex buying/selling market. The first part provided a baseline measurement of regional sex trafficking trends in Northern New Jersey/ New York and Phoenix, Arizona by measuring ad volume for the average number of ads posted for the ten days prior to and including Super Bowl Sunday, as well as using a validated tool to flag high risk trafficking ads. In the second part, researchers explored demand by placing decoy sex ads online and measuring the response.

## **2015 Research Findings Summary:**

Findings from data collected during the 2014 and 2015 Super Bowls resulted in a number of surprising results. Overall the sex selling and sex buying markets significantly increased in both Northern New Jersey and Phoenix when the two years were compared.

The overall increase in the sex buyer volume and the number of commercial sex ads indicates that public awareness and concern about sex trafficking and increased law enforcement attention on the crime has yet to reduce the overall demand for commercial sex or supply of sellers.

- The sex market in both Northern New Jersey and Phoenix appear to have grown substantially in the past year. The daily number of sex selling ads posted on Backpage.com in Northern New Jersey increased by 57.6% and in Phoenix there was a 30.3% increase.
- Sex buyer volume has also grown considerably with the volume of buyers contacting the two posted sex ads increasing by nearly 40% in Northern New Jersey and by 22% in Phoenix, Arizona.
- Researchers flagged 65% of the ads as possible victims of sex trafficking. Of the suspected trafficking victims, they were more likely to be from a non-local area code, pointing to victim movement from another location.
- The majority of potential sex buyers in each city were from local area codes. In Northern New Jersey/New York, a daily average of 64.1 callers contacted the ads, with 75.5% being from local area codes. In Phoenix, Arizona, there was an average of 43 contacts per day, with 70.1% from local area codes.

## **Exploring the Impact of the Super Bowl on Sex Trafficking 2015**

This report is the second of two phases of a study exploring sex trafficking and the Super Bowl. In 2014, the first phase of the study was conducted and dispelled a number of myths related to sex trafficking and the Super Bowl, particularly relating to the Super Bowl acting as a causal factor for increased sex trafficking. The 2014 study found evidence of sex trafficking victimization through the movement of identified ads from outside the host city (Northern New Jersey) and rescued persons who had been trafficked during the time period around the Super Bowl. The volume of ads and the volume of responses to the decoy ads by people that were attempting to purchase sex were collected and assessed for content and intent. The sex buying market in Phoenix and Northern New Jersey were both found to be significantly larger than the law enforcement resources that were allocated to investigate it. The ten-day study developed 74 high-risk minor tips (34 in Phoenix and 50 in Northern New Jersey and New York), of which one in Phoenix was a confirmed minor who had been rescued during the 2014 study period.

In 2015, the research methods followed the same pattern as 2014. There were two aspects to the study; first, scanning and categorizing online sex ads and second, placing decoy sex ads and exploring and measuring the contacts made by potential sex buyers. Sex ads were scanned by ASU researchers, trained specifically in the recognition of sex trafficking victimization, and scraped and analyzed by Praescient Analytics to explore volume and content. The specific content analysis included searching the text and photos (faces and background information) to identify trafficking indicators, particularly for persons suspected to be under age 18 through the use of the Sex Trafficking Matrix. The Sex Trafficking Matrix is a tool that has been validated through applied research with law enforcement and is built from a truth set made up of 74 online sex ads confirmed as containing known victims aged 18 and below. This tool was adapted by Praescient Analytics to develop an algorithm to flag ads at high risk for being a sex trafficked minor and was used by the ASU research team to create tips for high risk ads to be reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and law enforcement in Phoenix and San Francisco.

Finally, information was gathered from the placement of two decoy ads on Backpage.com twice a day for eleven days to establish a demand level for online sex within the sex market in each city. Potential sex buyers' contact information was collected and analyzed.

## Part 1: Ad Volume and Applying the Sex Trafficking Matrix

For this study, online sex ads were posted in the escort section of Backpage.com, a popular adult services website, and were screened using the Sex Trafficking Matrix. Ads were screened both manually and through using a computer screening program for the ten days leading up to Super Bowl Sunday, 2015. The ads reviewed included those in Phoenix and those geographic areas closest to the football stadium in New Jersey for Super Bowl 2014. The ad volume was compared against a baseline of activity from 2014.

### Ad Volume Changes from 2014 to 2015

Ad volume was assessed using paired sample t-tests to measure changes in the average ad postings per day during the ten days before and including the Super Bowl. Ad volume in Phoenix, reported below, was limited to the same ten days as the data was collected in 2014, a fifteen-day data collection is reported below.

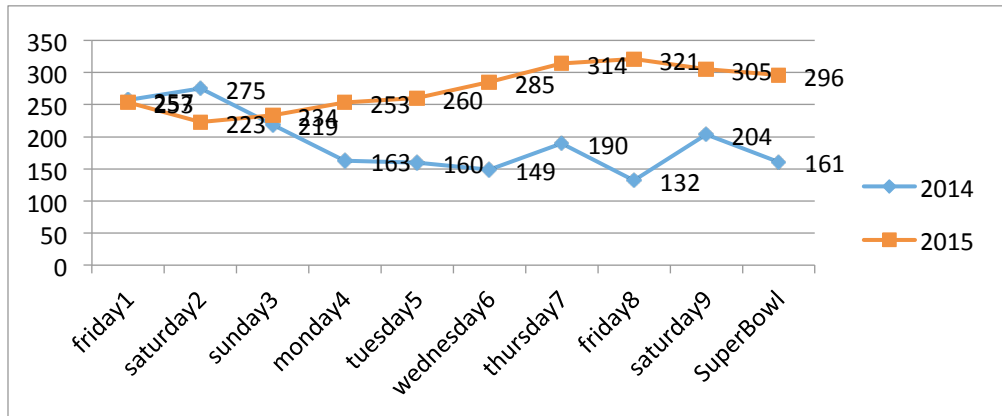
#### *Phoenix*

The overall sex ad market on Backpage.com in Phoenix, Arizona significantly increased from 2014 to 2015 by 30.3%.

Phoenix	Number of Ads
2014	1910 ads
2015	2744 ads

The daily ad volume in the Phoenix metropolitan area on Backpage.com was significantly higher in 2015 during the 10-day period before and including the Super Bowl ( $M = 274, SD = 34.5$ ) than ad volume during the same time period and same website in 2014 ( $M = 191, SD = 47.44$ ).  $t(10) = -3.56, p = .006$ ).

### Sex Ad Volume Changes in Phoenix, Arizona from 2014 to 2015



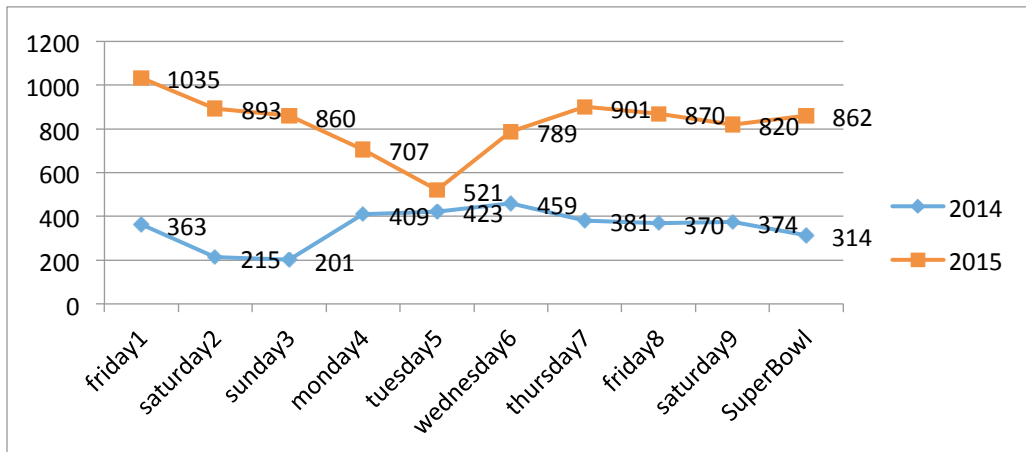
### Northern New Jersey/ New York

The overall sex ad market on Backpage.com, in Northern New Jersey/New York significantly increased from 2014 to 2015 by 57.6%.

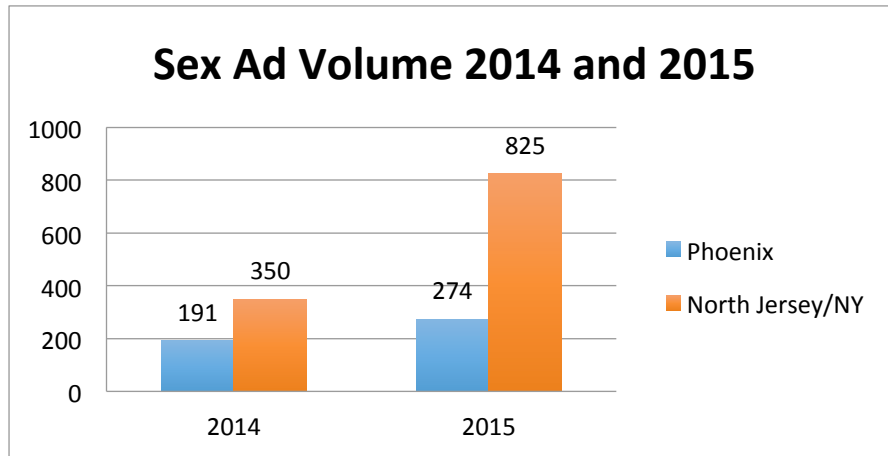
Northern New Jersey/New York	Number of Ads
2014	3509 ads
2015	8258 ads

The ad volume on the Northern New Jersey/New York Backpage.com site (including Manhattan, Staten Island, Brooklyn and Northern New Jersey) was significantly higher in 2015 during the 10-day period before and including the Super Bowl ( $M = 825$ ,  $SD = 136.13$ ) than ad volume during the same time period and same website in 2014 ( $M = 350$ ,  $SD = 84.66$ ).  $t(10) = -8.00$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

### Sex Ad Volume Changes in Northern New Jersey/New York from 2014 to 2015

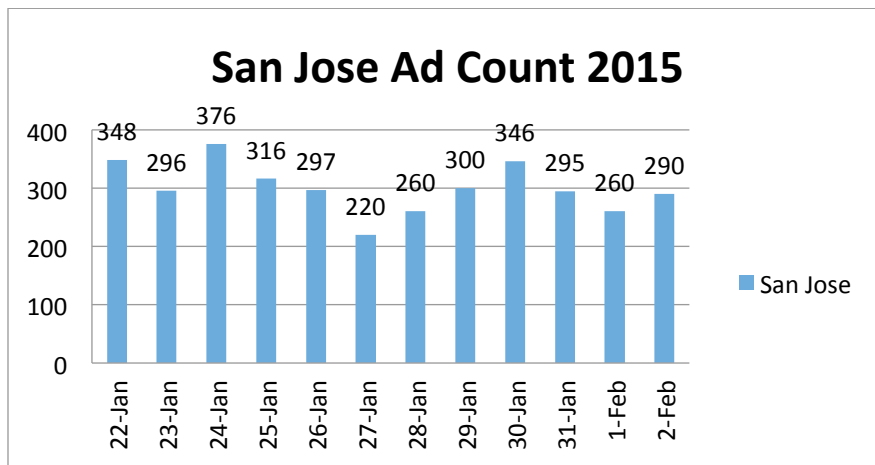


## Ad Volume Comparison

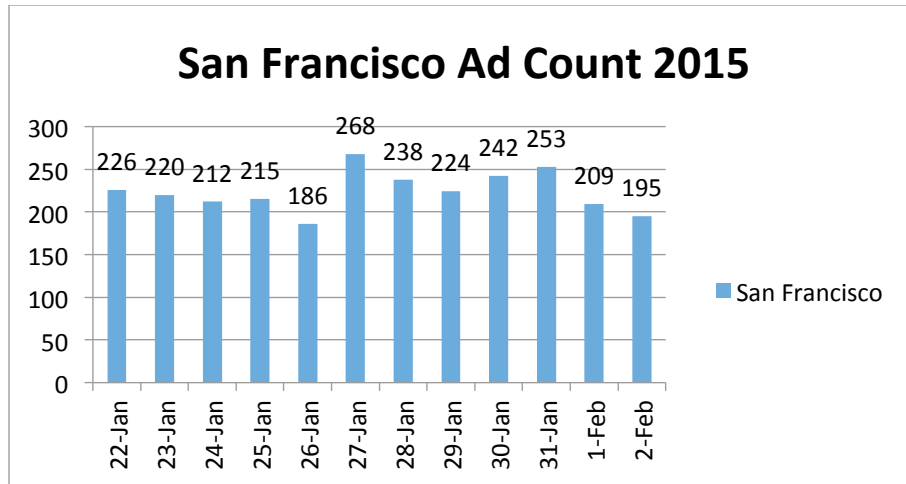


### San Jose and San Francisco Ad Volume

A baseline of online sex ad volume was collected for San Jose and San Francisco from Backpage.com, for ten days in 2015. There were 2966 ads posted in San Jose with a daily ad count ranging from 220 to 376 ( $M = 296.6$  ads). In San Francisco there were 2267 total ads posted with a daily ad count ranging from 186 to 268 ( $M = 226.7$  ads).







## Screening of Ads Results

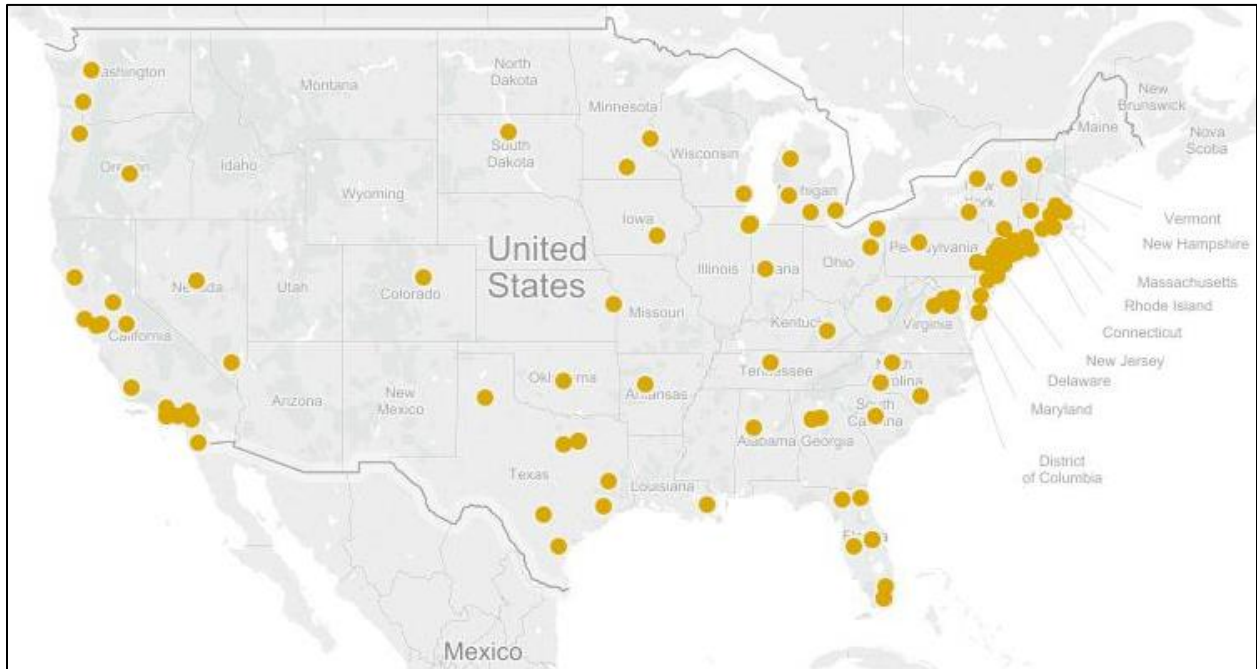
### Phoenix, Arizona

All ads posted on Backpage.com escorts page in the Phoenix Metropolitan area were scanned by Praescient Analytics using the algorithm searching for high risk sex ads from January 18, 2015 to February 2, 2015 (the day after the 2015 Super Bowl). The research team scanned the ads listing ages 18 to 22, which made up between 23.3% (1/23/15) to 80.6% (1/30/15) of all ads posted. In Phoenix, 1,395 ads were hand scanned with 30 (2.2%) being identified as escort agency websites, 32 (2.3%) as massage and 1,333 identified as prostitution (95.6%). Of the 1,333 prostitution ads, the Sex Trafficking Matrix tool identified 870 (65.3%) as having six or more trafficking indicators on the matrix. An additional 24 (1.8%) were flagged as possible trafficked minors.

The information from the ads was recorded and the area code listed in the ads were analyzed. In Phoenix area ads, 60.3% (804 of the 1,333 ads) were from 113 area codes outside of the local area codes (602, 480, 623). Using a chi-square analysis, ads identified using the Sex Trafficking Matrix as trafficking (excluding the possible minors) were found to be more likely to be from a non-local area code ( $\chi^2 (1, N= 1209) = 74.41, p < .001$ ) than from a local area code.

Twenty-three ads were flagged by the Sex Trafficking Matrix as being possible minors and reports were sent to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Of the 23 ads flagged as potential minors, 13 (56.5%) were from a non-local area code with ten (43.5%) listing a local area code.

*Phoenix sex ad area code distribution 2015*



**New York/ Northern New Jersey**

*Northern New Jersey and New York (Brooklyn, Manhattan and Staten Island)*

All ads posted in the escort section of Backpage.com for Northern New Jersey, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Staten Island with ages 18 to 22 labeled on the ad were scanned and scraped for information from January 21, 2015 to February 2, 2015 (the day after the 2015 Super Bowl). A total of 3559 ads were scanned and 1527 (42.9%) were identified as prostitution ads and of those, the Sex Trafficking Matrix identified 743 (48.7%) as high risk for being a sex trafficked person.

*Northern New Jersey*

All ads posted in the escort section of Backpage.com for Northern New Jersey were scanned and scraped for information from noon on January 21, 2015 to noon on February 2, 2015 (the day after the 2015 Super Bowl). The research team scanned the ads listing ages 18 to 22 which made up between 30.9% (1/23/15) to 50.6% (2/2/15) of all ads posted. In Northern New Jersey, 837 ads were hand scanned with 223 (26.6%) being identified as escort agency websites, 46 (5.5%) as massage and 567 identified as prostitution (67.7%). Of the 567 prostitution ads, the Sex Trafficking Matrix tool identified 281 (49.9%) as having six or more trafficking indicators on the matrix. An additional 4 (.7%) were flagged as possible trafficked minors.

The information from the ads was recorded and the area code listed in the ads were analyzed. In Northern New Jersey ads, 67.4% (360 of the 567 ads) had area codes from 63 area codes from outside of the local area codes (201, 441, 212, 347, 646, 917, 718, 929). Using a chi-square analysis, ads identified using the Sex Trafficking Matrix as trafficking (excluding the possible minors) were found to be more likely to be from a non-local area code ( $\chi^2 (1, N= 530) = 8.75, p < .01$ ) than from a local area code. Four ads were flagged by the Sex Trafficking Matrix as being possible minors and reports were sent to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Of the 4 ads flagged as potential minors, 100% were from a local area code.

### *Manhattan*

All ads posted on Backpage.com escorts page in Manhattan were scanned and scraped for information from noon on January 21, 2015 to noon on February 2, 2015 (the day after the 2015 Super Bowl). The research team scanned the ads listing ages 18 to 22 which made up between 30.1% (1/26/15) to 66.8% (1/31/15) of all ads posted. In Manhattan, 2069 ads were hand scanned with 1473 (71.2%) being identified as escort agency websites, 41 (2%) as massage and 549 identified as prostitution (26.5%). Of the 549 prostitution ads, the Sex Trafficking Matrix tool identified 237 (43.2%) as having six or more trafficking indicators on the matrix. An additional 9 (1.7%) were flagged as possible trafficked minors.

The information from the ads was recorded and the area code listed in the ads were analyzed. In Manhattan ads, 38.8% (213 of the 549 ads) were from 51 area codes outside of the local area codes (201, 441, 212, 347, 646, 917, 718, 929). Using a chi-square analysis, ads identified using the Sex Trafficking Matrix as trafficking (excluding the possible minors) were found to be more likely to be from a non-local area code ( $\chi^2 (1, N= 515) = 4.49, p < .05$ ) than from a local area code. Nine ads were flagged by the Sex Trafficking Matrix as being possible minors and reports were sent to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Of the 9 ads flagged as potential minors, 3 (33.3%) were from non-local area code with six (66.6%) listing a local area code.

### *Brooklyn*

All ads posted on Backpage.com.com escorts page in Brooklyn were scanned and scraped for information from noon on January 21, 2015 to noon on February 2, 2015 (the day after the 2015 Super Bowl). The research team scanned the ads listing ages 18 to 20 which made up between 18.2% (1/26/15) to 29.5% (1/24/15) of all ads posted. In Brooklyn, 466 ads were hand scanned with 154 (33%) being identified as escort agency websites, 15 (3.1%) as massage and 296 identified as prostitution (63.5%). Of the 296 prostitution ads, the Sex Trafficking Matrix tool identified 158 (53.4%) as having six or more trafficking indicators on the matrix. An additional 6 (2%) were flagged as possible trafficked minors.

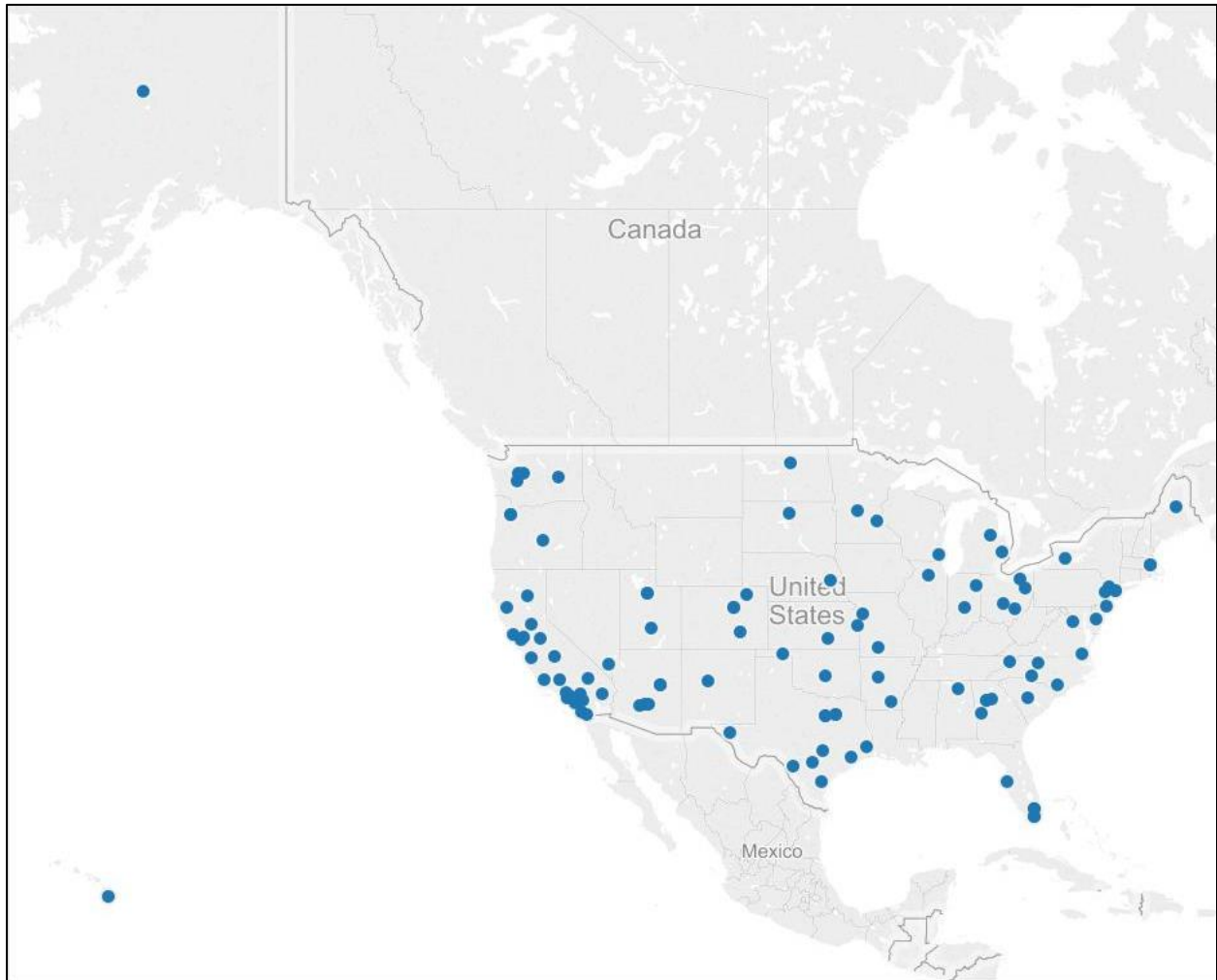
The information from the ads was recorded and the area code listed in the ads were analyzed. In Brooklyn ads, 12.5 % (37 of the 296 ads) were from 15 area codes outside of the local area codes (201, 441, 212, 347, 646, 917, 718, 929). Using a chi-square analysis, ads identified using the Sex Trafficking Matrix as trafficking (excluding the possible minors) were found to be more likely to be from a non-local area code ( $\chi^2 (1, N= 261) = 4.34, p < .05$ ) than from a local area code. Six ads were flagged by the Sex Trafficking Matrix as being possible minors and reports were sent to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Of the 6 ads flagged as potential minors, 100% were from a local area code.

### *Staten Island*

All ads posted on Backpage.com escorts page in Staten Island were scanned and scraped for information from noon on January 21, 2015 to noon on February 2, 2015 (the day after the 2015 Super Bowl). The research team scanned the ads listing ages 18 to 22 which made up between 41.2% (1/23/15) to 78% (2/1/15) of all ads posted. In Staten Island, 187 ads were hand scanned with 64 (34.4%) being identified as escort agency websites, 7 (3.8%) as massage and 115 identified as prostitution (68.1%). Of the 115 prostitution ads, the Sex Trafficking Matrix tool identified 50 (43.9%) as having six or more trafficking indicators on the matrix. An additional 1 (.1%) was flagged as possible trafficked minors.

The information from the ads was recorded and the area code listed in the ads were analyzed. In Staten Island ads, 28.7 % (33 of the 115 ads) were from 15 area codes outside of the local area codes (201, 441, 212, 347, 646, 917, 718, 929). Using a chi-square analysis, ads identified using the Sex Trafficking Matrix as trafficking (excluding the possible minors) were found to be more likely to be from a non-local area code ( $\chi^2 (1, N= 114) = 5.29, p < .05$ ) than from a local area code. One ad was flagged by the Sex Trafficking Matrix as being a possible minor and a report was sent to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The one ad flagged as a potential minor was from a local area code.

### Northern New Jersey/New York sex ad area code distribution 2015



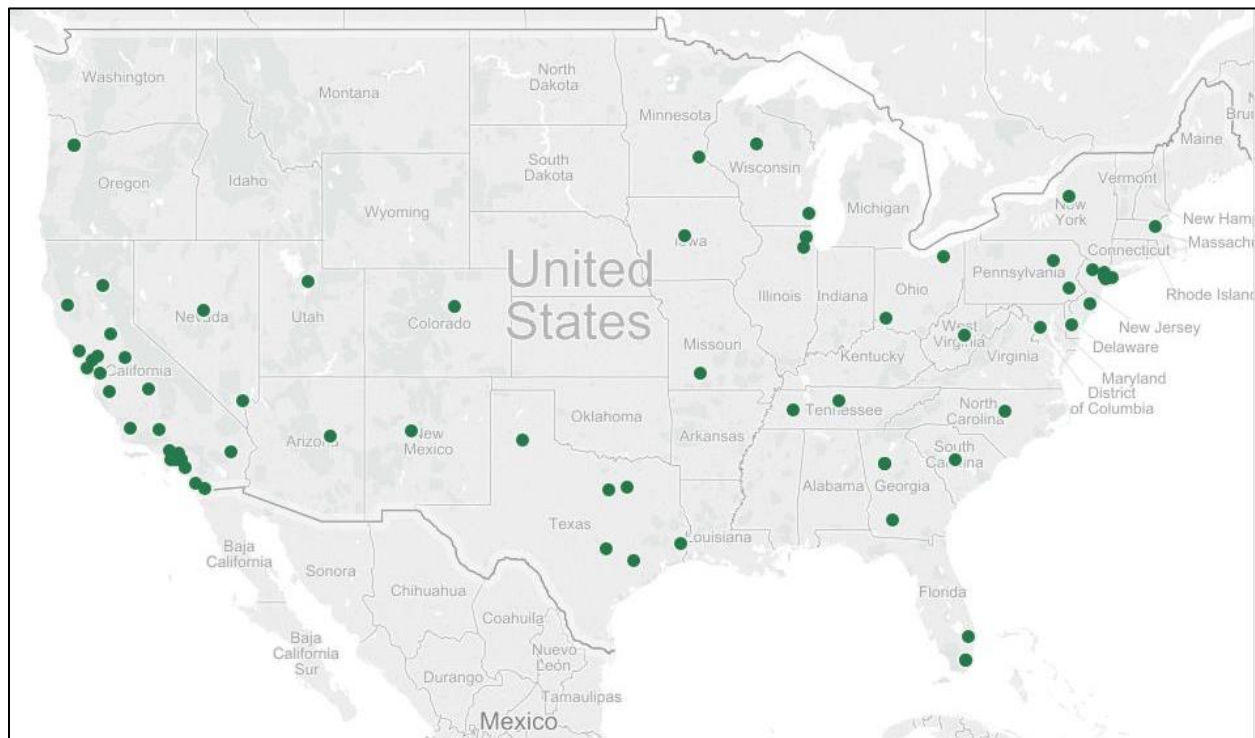
### San Jose/San Francisco - Super Bowl 2016 Location

*San Jose* All ads posted on Backpage.com escorts page in San Jose were scanned and scraped for information from noon on January 21, 2015 to noon on February 2, 2015 (the day after the 2015 Super Bowl). The research team scanned the ads listing ages 18 to 22 which made up between 22.6% (1/24/15) to 49.5% (1/27/15) of all ads posted. In San Jose, 1266 ads were hand scanned with 351 (27.7%) being identified as escort agency websites, 30 (2.4%) as massage and 883 identified as prostitution (69.9%). Of the 883 prostitution ads, the Sex Trafficking Matrix tool identified 505 (57.2%) as having six or more trafficking indicators on the matrix. An additional 21 (2.4%) were flagged as possible trafficked minors.

The information from the ads was recorded and the area code listed in the ads were analyzed. In San Jose ads, 48.7% (430 of the 883 ads) were from 71 area codes outside of the local area codes (925, 707, 669, 650, 510, 415, 408, 209). Using a chi-square analysis, ads identified using

the Sex Trafficking Matrix as trafficking (excluding the possible minors) were found to be more likely to be from a non-local area code ( $\chi^2(1, N=838) = 21.6, p < .001$ ) than from a local area code. Twenty-one ads were flagged by the Sex Trafficking Matrix as being possible minors and reports were sent to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Of the twenty-one ads flagged as potential minors, eleven (55%) were from non-local area codes with nine (45%) listing a local area code and one ad only listing an email address not a phone number.

#### *San Jose sex ad area code distribution 2015*

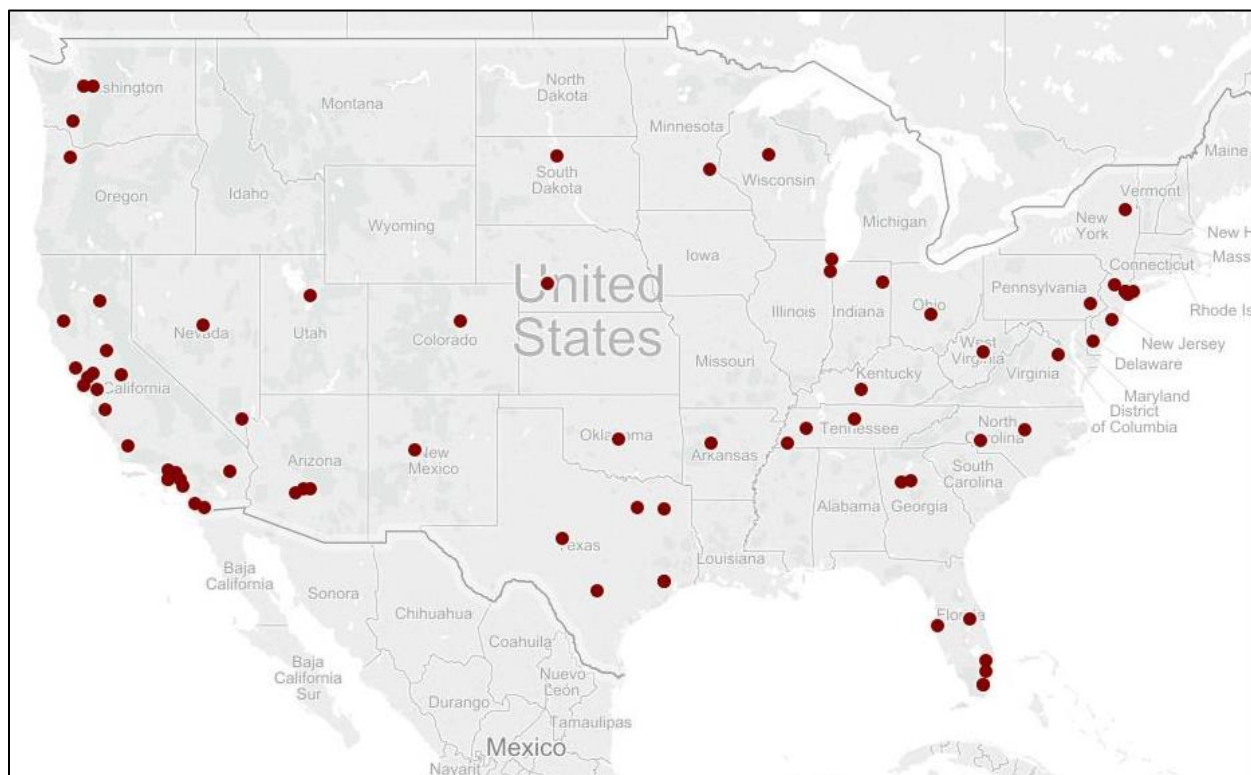


*San Francisco* All ads posted on Backpage.com escorts page in San Francisco were scanned and scraped for information from noon on January 21, 2015 to noon on February 2, 2015 (the day after the 2015 Super Bowl). The research team scanned the ads listing ages 18 to 22 which made up between 32.7% (1/23/15) to 63.4% (1/29/15) of all ads posted. In San Francisco, 1,271 ads were hand scanned with 208 (16.4%) being identified as escort agency websites, 4 (.3%) as massage and 1,059 identified as prostitution (83.3%). Of the 1,059 prostitution ads, the Sex Trafficking Matrix tool identified 575 (54.7%) as having six or more trafficking indicators on the matrix. An additional 11 (1%) were flagged as possible trafficked minors.

The information from the ads was recorded and the area code listed in the ads were analyzed. In San Francisco ads, 57.5% (731 of the 1,271 ads) were from 76 area codes outside of the local area codes (925, 707, 669, 650, 510, 415, 408, 209). Using a chi-square analysis, ads identified using the Sex Trafficking Matrix as trafficking (excluding the possible minors) were found to be

more likely to be from a non-local area code ( $\chi^2(1, N=1025) = 16.78, p < .001$ ) than from a local area code. Eleven ads were flagged by the Sex Trafficking Matrix as being possible minors and reports were sent to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Of the eleven ads flagged as potential minors, ten (90.9%) were from non-local area codes with one (9.1%) listing a local area code.

#### *San Francisco ad area code distribution*



#### **High Risk Ads: Flagged as Potential Minors**

Ads that were scanned and scored above a six on the Sex Trafficking Matrix tool and were found to have additional indicators in the text and photographs that suggested they were a possible minor (under age 18), were sent to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and to law enforcement in Phoenix, Arizona and San Jose/San Francisco, California. Additional investigatory tools from DARPA's Memex project were utilized to enhance tip reporting (See DARPA Memex description below). There were a total of 73 ads that were flagged as high risk for being a sex trafficked minor.

Phoenix, Arizona

- 21 ads flagged as a possible minor

New Jersey/New York

- 20 ads flagged as a possible minor

San Jose and San Francisco

- 32 ads flagged as a possible minor

Fewer ads were flagged in 2015 in both Phoenix (from 34 in 2014 to 21 in 2015) and Northern New Jersey (from 50 in 2014 to 20 in 2015). This decrease may be attributed to a number of reasons. Perhaps there are fewer minors being sold online, ad posters are becoming increasingly skilled in hiding minors, or the researcher team was more discerning in which ads they flagged as potential minors. Using network analysis and online search tools from the DARPA MEMEX project, data was collected on each ad related to phone number, linked phone numbers, linked ads, and linked persons.

In the 73 flagged ads for potential minors we found:

- More than half (54.8%) of the phone number area codes were from the local area of the ad placed.
- Forty-five (61.6%) of the flagged ads were linked to multiple phone numbers ranging from 1 other number to 11 other numbers, with an average of 2.11.
- Thirty-two (43.8%) of the flagged ads were linked to other girls or women (or in one case, a young male), ranging from one to seven other people with an average of 2.
- Thirty-nine (53.4%) of the flagged ads had previously been in other cities prior to the study.
- Twenty-eight (38.4%) of the ads flagged as a potential minor had been in another state.

#### Case Example: Phoenix, Arizona

In a sex ad posted on the Phoenix, Arizona Backpage.com escorts page on January 26, 2015, the ad was flagged as a potential trafficked ad and then further scored as a potential sex trafficked minor due to the following factors found in the ad:

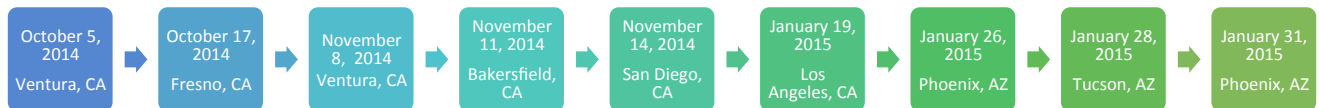
- Youthful descriptors
- Images in photo look like adolescent room decorations
- Photos depicted youthful poses



- Gangly arms and face with youthful look

The person in the ad was first found on Backpage.com in October 2014 and traveled and posted ads in Ventura, Fresno, San Bernardino, Bakersfield and San Diego, California, before arriving in Los Angeles, California in mid-January 2015. The ad was then was posted on Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona Backpage.com sites on January 26 and 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The person in the ad was linked to four phone numbers and five other females and had a history of 13 other ads.

This is the ad movement in the 3 months prior to being flagged on January 26, 2015:



### **DARPA's Memex Program**

DARPA's Memex program was launched to create domain-specific index and search. Today's web searches use a centralized, one-size-fits-all approach that is wildly successful commercially; however it does not work well for many government use cases. Memex will create new ways of discovering internet content that is specific to individual users' domains of interest and invent better methods for interacting with and sharing this content, so users can quickly and thoroughly organize and search for content specific to their interests.

The first domain that Memex has addressed is the fight against human trafficking. Human trafficking is a factor in many types of military, law enforcement and intelligence investigations and has a significant web presence to attract customers. The use of forums, chats, advertisements, job postings, hidden services, etc., continues to enable a growing industry of modern slavery. The index curated for the counter-trafficking domain includes a rich set of data with millions of attributes that when analyzed can show linkages between content not easily discoverable by an analyst without computer assistance.

### **Super Bowl marketing trends:**

Super Bowl specific marketing language was included in many of the ads screened during the ten days leading up to the Super Bowl. Researchers have noticed that ads placed use creative text and wording to attract potential customers' attention. "Super bowl" specific language was also noted in ads screened from the non-host cities.

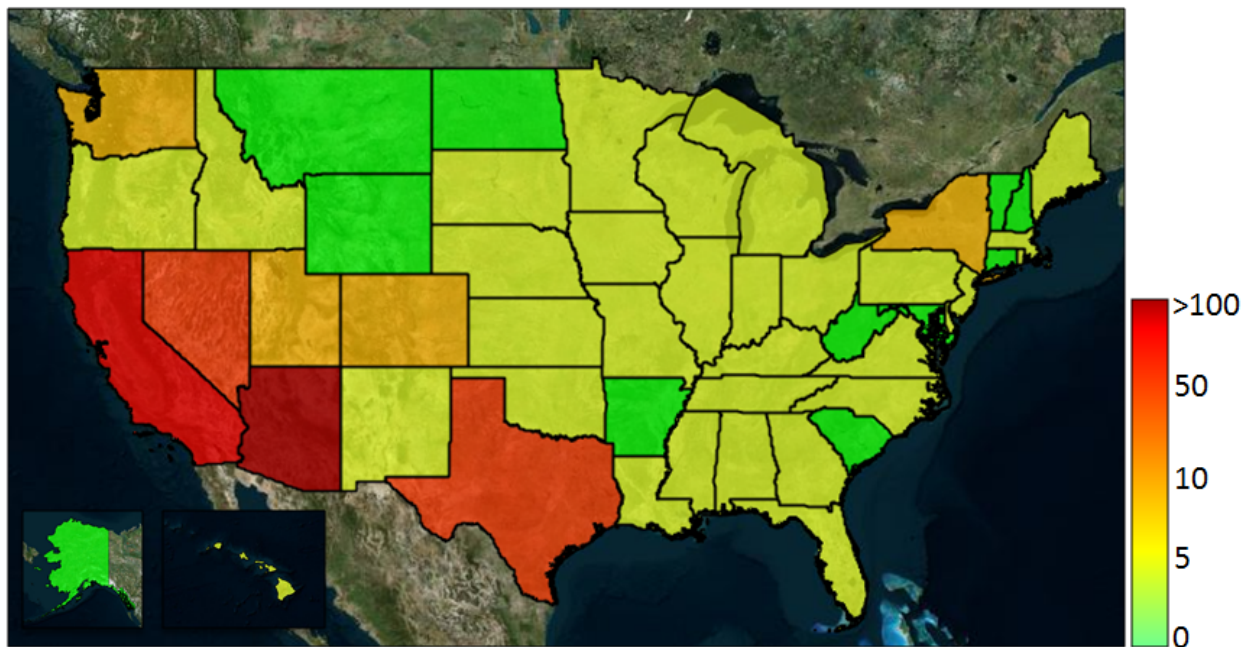
- "Super Bowl special"
- "Super Bowl Sunday a night you won't forget"

- “3down Touchdown juicy booty outcalls”
- “Overtime call for postgame deals”
- “Sexy upscale vip superbowl companion”
- “Touchdown on this petite Latin treat lets play”
- “It’s 4<sup>th</sup> and goal score with a young hottie eager to please”
- “Location near super bowl central we’re here 24/7 until kick off”
- “Hut hut it’s getting close to super bowl so lets huddle up for a good stress reliever”
- “Come play with the right team no competition”
- “Come score a touchdown”

## Praescient Analytics Key Findings

### Geospatial Analysis

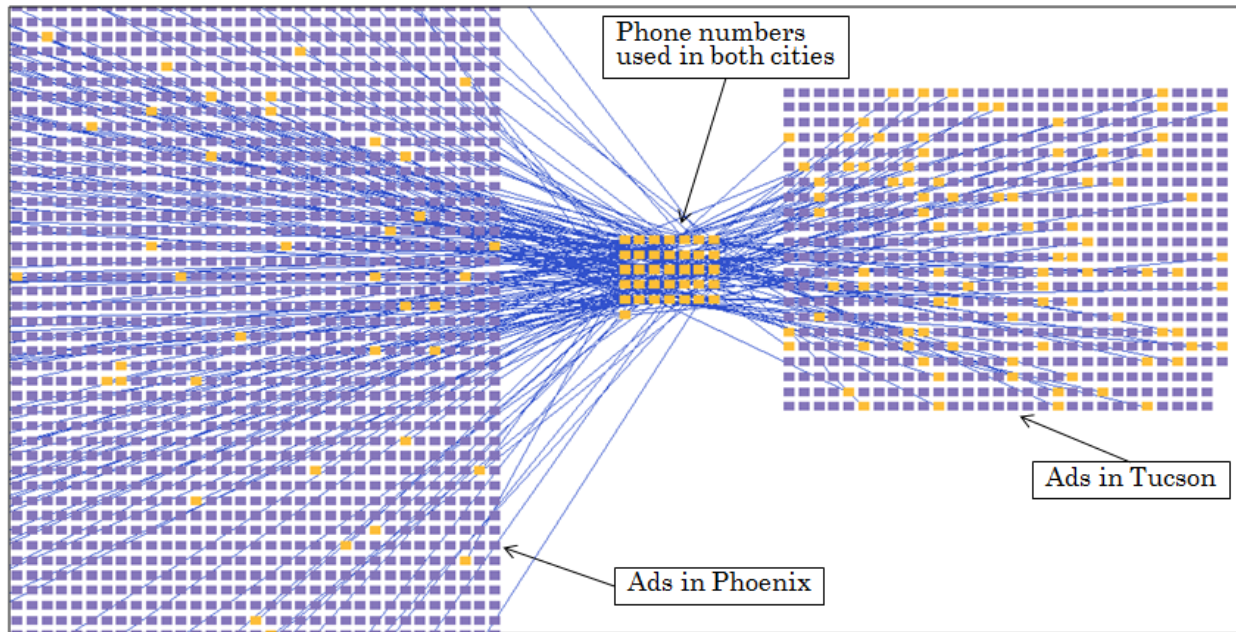
We found that 47% of the phone numbers associated with ads posted in Phoenix and Tucson had non-Arizona area codes. California area codes alone represented 18% of the total. Phones from 40 states and the District of Columbia were associated with at least one ad appearing in Phoenix and Tucson during Super Bowl weekend.



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### Network Analysis – The Phoenix-Tucson Sex Ad Ecosystem

We found that roughly 13% of the ads posted in Tucson from January 23 to February 8 were associated with phone numbers that also posted ads in Phoenix. This ratio was consistent throughout our collection period, indicating ongoing overlap between these two cities.



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## Phone Migration

Between mid-November 2014 and February 2015, we collected more than 400,000 ads from the Phoenix, Tucson, New York City, northern New Jersey, Los Angeles, San Francisco Bay Area, and Las Vegas metropolitan areas. We found more than 30,000 unique phone numbers associated with these ads. We tracked the movement of these phones over the course of the study, and found that roughly 1% was associated with ads in three or more distinct metro areas. We assess that these highly-migratory phones are evidence of organized criminal trafficking.

Future analyses of the movement of these phone numbers should endeavor to collect ad data from more locations around the U.S. and for a longer period of time. A more robust collection effort would undoubtedly reveal a more complete picture of the movement of phones, traffickers, and victims.

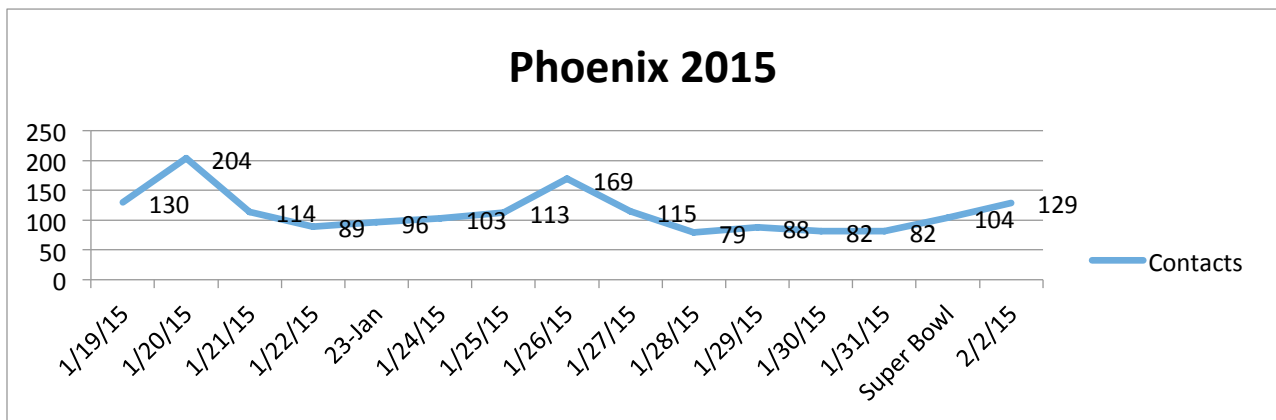
## Part 2: Demand

In the second part of the study, the same two normative sex ads from the 2014 study were placed on Backpage.com, Adult Entertainment Escort section in Phoenix, Arizona, San Jose, California and Northern New Jersey, New Jersey with phone numbers connected to a Voice over IP (VOIP). The phone numbers for the two ads used area codes local to the city they were placed. No contact was made with the potential buyers. The potential sex buyers made contact through voicemail and texts that were recorded by the VOIP system and then analyzed

by the research team. The two ads were placed twice a day for eleven days. Potential customers made contact through a phone number on the ad and texted and left voice messages. The ads were normative with the age listed as age 19 by using similar language as other ads in that age group.

### Phoenix

In Phoenix, two ads were placed, twice a day on the Phoenix Backpage.com Adult Entertainment Escort section for fifteen days beginning on January 19, 2015 through February 2, 2015. A total of 1697 contacts were received for the two ads over the 15 days with 901 (53.1%) being unique contacts (only counting the first contact). Seventy-six potential sex buyers (8.4%) contacted both of the ads in Phoenix, Arizona. An average of 113.1 contacts was received each day for the two ads. Potential sex buying customers used texts to contact the ads 51.5% ( $n = 874$ ) of the time and voicemails 48.5% ( $n = 823$ ).



The contacts for the Phoenix ads from potential buyers were from 116 area codes including the three local area codes (480, 602, 623). The majority of the contacts, 73.3%, were from the three local area codes.

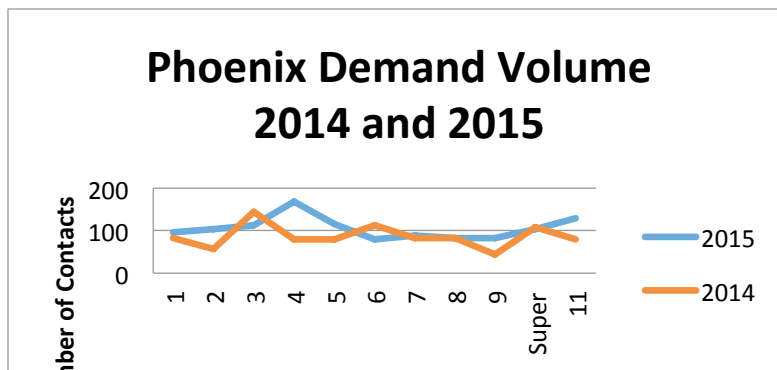
Messages included language about drug trading “high grade medical marijuana” and drug using “party favors” and “lets smoke”. The ads received contacts from four self-identified pimps asking about traveling to Las Vegas with his “regular girl from Miami Beach who would be into doing 2-girl specials” and to go to Dallas and a “handsome and charming pimp from Brooklyn, New York”. A recruiter for a pornography company made contact with explicit expectations for swallowing body fluids, as did a graphic designer who wanted to trade business cards for sex services. One person texted and asked if they could pay for violence. Specific location requests for services included: Tempe, Glendale, Scottsdale, Wickenburg, Prescott Valley, Casa Grande, Gilbert, Maricopa, Mesa, Chandler, Yuma, Goodyear, and West and South Phoenix with some specific cross streets (51<sup>st</sup> Avenue and McDowell, Central and Southern, Gilbert Road, Campbell

and 20<sup>th</sup> Ave, 48<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Bethany Home Road, the 202 and 44<sup>th</sup> Street, and 56<sup>th</sup> Street and Camelback).

References to the Super Bowl include “are you available for the Super Bowl?” and “I’m here from Seattle and after yesterday’s game outcome I need a little cheering up. R u up for hanging out with me for a gfe hour?”

### Comparing Demand in 2014 and 2015 in Phoenix, Arizona

In 2014, the day with the largest number of contacts from potential buyers was the Sunday before the Super Bowl 2014 with 144 contacts. In 2015, the day with the largest volume of contacts was the Monday just before the Super Bowl 2015 and the day after the 2015 Pro Bowl (also held in Glendale, Arizona) with 169 contacts. During the same eleven days prior and including the Super Bowl in 2014 compared to 2015, there is a 22.1% increase in volume, 950 contacts in 2014 to 1160 contacts in 2015, suggesting an overall increase in the buyer market in the Phoenix Metropolitan area.



### Northern New Jersey/New York

In New Jersey/New York, two ads were placed, twice a day on the Northern New Jersey Backpage.com Adult Entertainment Escort section for eleven days beginning on January 23, 2015 through February 2, 2015. A total of 2419 contacts were received for the two ads over the 15 days with 1214 (50.2%) being unique contacts (only counting the first contact). Ninety-eight potential sex buyers (8.1%) contacted both of the ads in Northern New Jersey. An average of 219.9 contacts were received each day for the two ads. Potential sex buying customers used texts to contact the ads 34.8% ( $n = 841$ ) of the time and voicemails 65.2% ( $n = 1577$ ).

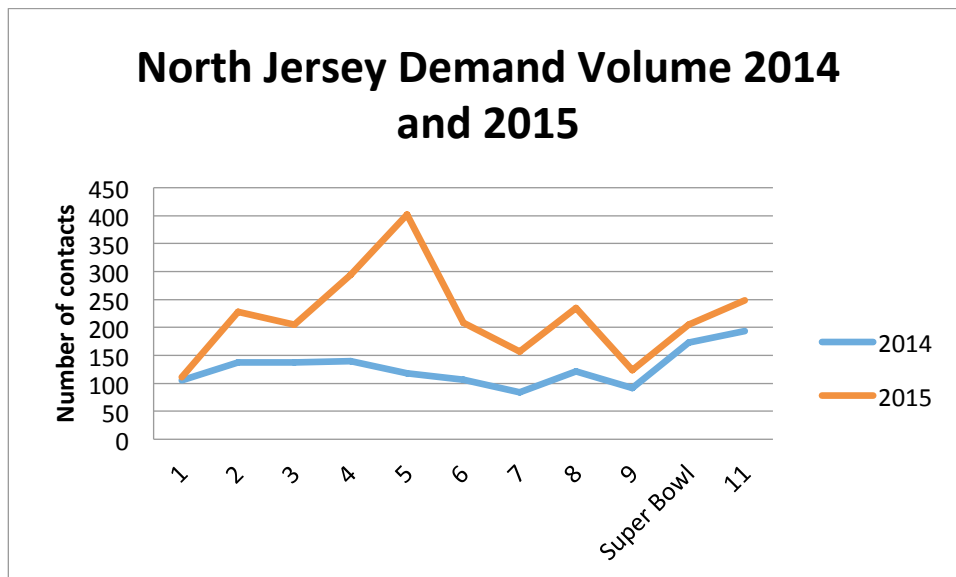
The contacts for the Northern New Jersey ads from potential buyers were from 75 area codes including the eight local area codes (201, 212, 347, 551, 646, 718, 917, 929). Only 46% ( $n = 559$ ) of the unique contacts from potential sex buyers were from the eight local area codes with 55% ( $n = 655$ ) from out of area.

Messages included language about drug using “lets party” and “I wanna smoke up”. Two self-identified pimp/trafficker contacts were received; one specifically describing his role as a driver and the other was for customers in Midtown Manhattan. One photographer contacted an ad to offer more professional photographs.

Specific location requests for services included: Clifton, Somerville, Orange, East Orange, Morristown, Wayne, Basking Ridge, Essex County, Edgewater, Secaucus, Cliffside Park, New Brunswick, Paramus, Englewood, Belleville, Paterson, Bergenfield, Wallington, Montclair, Morris Plains, Parsippany, Dover, Randolph, Denville, Ramsey, Woodbridge, Midtown Manhattan, Bergen County, Rahway, Fairfield, Elizabeth, Union City, Lodi, Bayonne, Bloomfield, Edison, Ridgewood, and Jersey City. There were specific hotels referred to by the potential customers as desired places to engage in commercial sex including the Robert Treat Hotel, Rodeway Inn, Marriott and Executive Suites, all within the host cities metropolitan area.

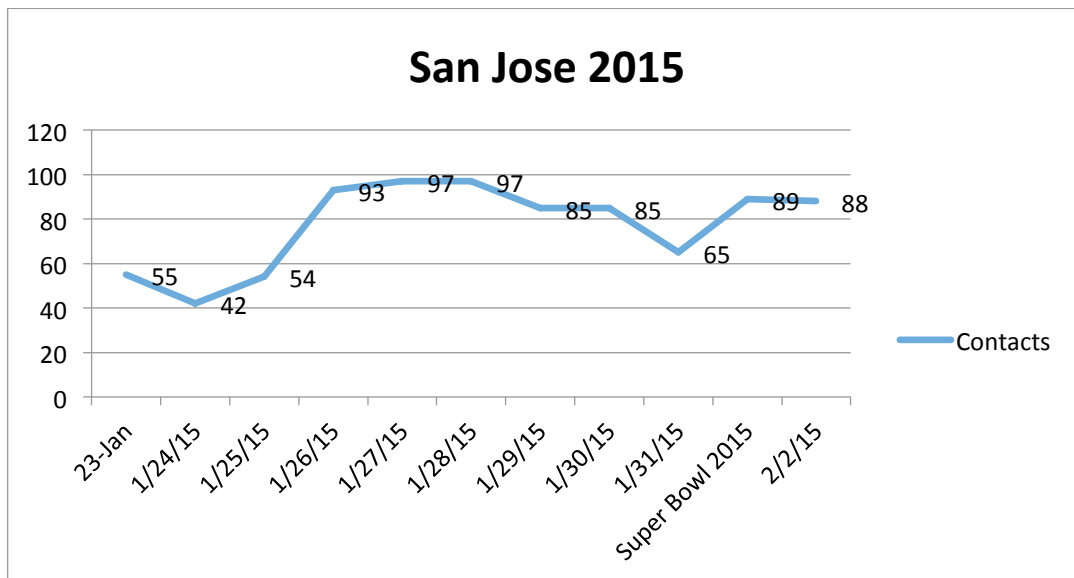
### Comparing Demand in 2014 and 2015 in Northern New Jersey

In 2014, the day with the largest number of contacts from potential buyers was the Monday before the Super Bowl 2014 with 140 contacts. In 2015, the day with the largest volume of contacts was the Tuesday before the Super Bowl 2015 with 402 contacts. During the same eleven days prior and including the Super Bowl in 2014 compared to 2015, there is a 39.8% increase in volume, 1457 contacts in 2014 to 2419 contacts in 2015, suggesting a significant overall increase in the buyer market in the Northern New Jersey/New York Metropolitan area.



## San Jose

In San Jose, two ads were placed, twice a day on the San Jose Backpage.com Adult Entertainment Escorts section for eleven days beginning on January 23, 2015 through February 2, 2015. A total of 850 contacts were received for the two ads over the eleven days with 447 (52.5%) being unique contacts. Twenty-nine (6.4%) of the unique contacts from potential buyers called both numbers. An average of 77.3 contacts per day were received for the two ads. More than half, 57.6% (490) of the contacts from potential customers were voice mail with 42.4% being text messages.



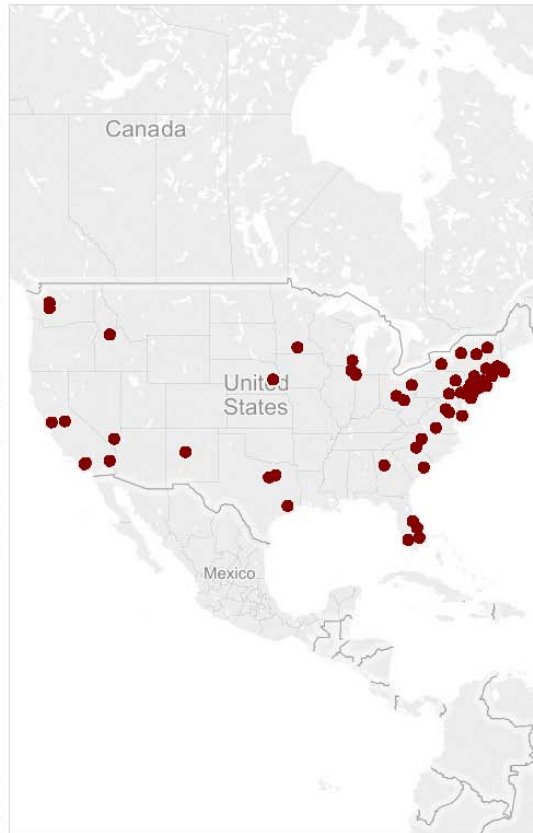
The contacts for the San Jose ads from potential buyers were from 51 area codes including the seven local area codes (925, 707, 669, 650, 510, 415, 408, 209). The majority of the contacts, 84.5%, were from the seven local area codes.

Messages included language like “Hey. I like your style ;) Would luv a qq70 incl. I'm a real wht gent and totally cool.” There were seven references to bare back (no condom) requests, multiple drug references including “it is cloudy in my room” and “I got some good blow if you are down to party”. Two contacts were from inquirers from “a model photographer” and a person offering to help “to escort legally”. Specific locations were identified as Fremont, Hollister, Campbell, San Francisco, Morgan Hill, Saratoga, Cupertino, and Sunnyvale, California.

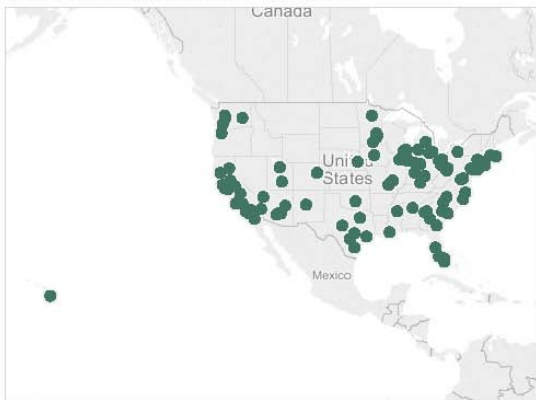
Caller Area Codes for Ads in San Jose 2015



Caller Area Codes for Ads in North Jersey 2015



Caller Area Codes for Ads in Phoenix 2015



### Implications, Challenges and Recommendations:

This study demonstrated that the online market for illegal commercial sex has grown substantially in the past year in both Northern New Jersey and Phoenix, Arizona. A number of factors could have influenced this increase; the website myredbook.com, which displayed a high volume of free sex ads on the west coast and southwest United States including Phoenix, was closed by federal officials in June 2015, the increase could be attributed to the numerous male-driven activities in the weeks before the Super Bowl (auto auction, golf tournaments, the 2015 Pro Bowl), or simply that the online sex market is on the rise. In Northern New Jersey/New York, it is possible that the law enforcement and community efforts at the time of the 2014 Super Bowl impacted the online sex market, but similar efforts of community awareness and education, active engagement of law enforcement and media to the issue in Phoenix did not have the same effect. It is more likely that the problem of online sex buying and selling has grown dramatically.



*This does not indicate that the Super Bowl caused more sex trafficking; these findings support the notion that sex buying, sex selling and sex trafficking occur every day in Phoenix and interventions to change attitudes and beliefs of sex buyers does not require a national campaign, but instead a targeted local effort as the majority of the offenders are local residents. This trend was different in other cities: in Manhattan, Staten Island and Northern New Jersey, less than 40 % of the ads had area codes that were not local and in Brooklyn, New York, only 12.5% of the ads were from area codes outside of the local numbers while 55% of the sex buyers were from out of the local area code. In San Francisco, California, nearly 60% of the ads were from out of local area codes with 57.5% of the buyers from and in San Jose, California, 48% were from out of local area codes while only 16.5% of the sex buyers were from out of the local area codes.*

Ads scraped during 2015 showed a decrease in the number of suspected minor victims reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in Phoenix, Arizona during the same time period last year. Law Enforcement efforts to focus on arresting pimps and rescuing minor and adult victims in the weeks and days leading up to the Super Bowl may have positively impacted the overall number of minor victims involved. Local Arizona law enforcement agencies worked with the FBI and US Customs and Border Protection as part of the Greater Phoenix Area Human Trafficking Task Force to increase criminal arrests and victim recovery prior to the event. The FBI reported that of the 27 juveniles recovered in the year preceding the Super Bowl, 18 were found in the three weeks prior to the event. In addition, the task force arrested 63 pimps and 350 “Johns” or commercial sex buyers (FBI, February 18, 2015).

The study concludes that the sheer volume of illicit activity, as seen in the ads and through the responses from potential sex buyers, continues to grow and continues to overwhelm the capacity of law enforcement to respond in a way that would discourage traffickers or lessen the problem. Sex trafficking is local, regional and national in scope and comprised of loosely affiliated networks of suspects and victims who travel to wherever large groups of people congregate, such as major sporting events, or where there is limited law enforcement attention. The Super Bowl itself does not create the condition in which sex trafficking flourishes, but rather traffickers will bring their victims wherever there is demand and money is to be made.

## **Recommendations**

What is clear from this two-year study is that demand for commercial sex continues unabated, with the online market being the presumptive medium of choice to solicit sex and arrange contacts. As a result, the key recommendation of this study is that a multi-partner, collaborative effort focused on mitigating the ease with which online commercial sex is offered

be commenced in cities nationwide. The online environment provides the conditions where sex trafficking can flourish – it maximizes exposure of the victim thereby increasing potential profit, while minimizing the exposure of the trafficker. It would appear from this research that opportunities to interact with the victims of sex trafficking are far more likely to occur in a virtual environment than in an actual environment. As such, law enforcement must continue to evolve its tactics in investigating sex trafficking by aggressively moving into the online environment as the next frontier to locate and recover victims and to build cases on traffickers.

Among the key evidence to be gained from online investigations is the networking of victims through identifying related ads. Commonly found during this research were multiple victims offered as “two girl specials” or related via common phone numbers. This indicates a network of at least two persons in need of assistance and implies the involvement of at least one other person intentionally marketing the victims in this manner – the trafficker. A second piece of evidence to be gleaned during online investigations is the path of the movement of victims from one city or event to the next. Throughout the course of this research, a noticeable path of victimization was identified along which victims were moved either to limit exposure to local law enforcement or to move them towards significant events such as the Super Bowl. These paths are the nexus of sex trafficking and are largely provided online. Finally, the online environment provides historical, electronic data that can be extracted and evaluated using the proper analytic tools. In applying these cutting edge technologies as we did in this study, investigators have at their disposable open source information from adult themed websites that can further current investigations or generate historical cases that traffickers use as their primary, and in many cases sole, means of commercial sexual exploitation. Combine this with many of the existing proprietary law enforcement analytic databases and investigators are well positioned and well armed with the tools to combat commercial sexual exploitation occurring in a virtual world.

The cultural transition from policing the real world to policing the virtual world may be difficult for law enforcement leaders to make, but fortunately there are assets available to ease this transition. To begin this necessary and inevitable transition, it is strongly recommended law enforcement leaders develop partnerships with local research universities that have the capacity to synthesize diverse data sources for consumption by local law enforcement. The research findings from these collaborations will assist in the documentation of the changes of this issue and assist law enforcement leaders in making well-informed, strategic decisions on an issue that many would agree exists more in the grey than in the black and white. Additional recommendations include:

- Dispel the myth about prostitution that it includes an element of choice by showing that over half of ads placed online show indications of trafficking situations predicated on

force, fraud or coercion, and that pimps openly recruit new victims by contacting online ads.

- Dispel the myth that prostitution is a victimless crime, by showing that it is dangerous and has the potential to involve violence, drug use and poses public health concerns for both buyers and sellers as victims of sexual exploitation will be forced to take higher risks.
- Continue to invest in new knowledge about the national incidence rate of sex trafficking and its growth and networks across the country.
- Focus more attention on the demand for commercial sex, and test new ways to dissuade buyers.
- Convince local and federal lawmakers and law enforcement to hold buyers accountable for driving the demand for commercial sex.
- Enforce existing laws about prostitution that will deter buying and selling of commercial sex.

The Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research (STIR) is in the School of Social Work, within the College of Public Service and Community Solutions at Arizona State University. The STIR office is staffed by academics, researchers, students and law enforcement community partners. Research disseminated from the STIR office continues to significantly contribute to the knowledge base about sex trafficking by introducing innovative research and fostering unique partnerships. The office also provides training and helps evaluate design services and interventions for prostituted persons.



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