

SEX TRAFFICKING PREVALENCE, COST OF RISK, AND OUTREACH IN DELAWARE: A COMMUNITY-BASED SAMPLE

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About the Author

Dr. Angie Henderson is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) in Greeley, Colorado and the co-founder of The Avery Center for Research & Services. With expertise in both qualitative research design, she has published over 25 peer-reviewed journal articles, 4 book chapters, and two co-authored textbooks. Her research on bottoms – the second-in-command in a sex trafficking operation – was just published in *The Journal of Human Trafficking*. She has also given over 50 professional presentations at academic conferences. She has presented at the United Nations' Commission on Crime Prevention & Criminal Justice in Vienna, Austria. Dr. Henderson has expertise in interviewing, focus groups, observational analysis, and content analysis and extensive expertise in studying the experiences of victims and survivors of sex trafficking. In particular, Dr. Henderson has extensive experience using a trauma-informed approach to working with and interviewing victims & survivors of sex trafficking, a very vulnerable population.

Of particular importance is Dr. Henderson's service to and collaboration with a nationally-serving nonprofit organization dedicated to helping women exit sex trafficking. At The Avery Center, Dr. Henderson has taken the lead on data collection efforts, and in this role has advised the organization on methods, analysis, and theoretical implications used to inform programming and services.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reliable data on the scope of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) is difficult to access; most reports rely on law-enforcement or health care interactions with sex trafficking victims, victims who reach out for services post-exploitation, or other non-governmental organization estimates. What's missing is a real-time look at how sex trafficking victimization operates outside of organizations. The purpose of this project was to provide a snapshot of CSE in Delaware using a community-based sample. Using the Avery Center's social network of actively exploited individuals¹, we analyzed the commercial sex trade, including those under third-party trafficker control, in Delaware. To date, the Avery Center's social network includes over 5000 individuals—mostly adult women—involved in the commercial sex trade. For the purposes of this project, we analyzed all 152 Instagram accounts that were connected to individuals who had advertised in Delaware. Demographically, 33% of this subsample were Black, 49% White, 5% mixed race, and 3% Asian². Sixty-three percent were categorized using the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) standards for assessing whether or not an individual is under the control of a third-party (pimp/trafficker). The remainder of the sample (37%) were suspected third-party control, but we could not confirm it using the DHS rubric. Additionally, over a third of the sample (N=53) were connected to strip club operations on their social media accounts, which research has shown to be connected to third-party controlled sex trafficking activity.

Qualitative Data. We interviewed 15 adult women to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of those individuals who had been involved in the commercial sex trade in and around Delaware. Of those who experienced CSE in Delaware, 25% had resided in Delaware at the time of their exploitation; the remaining 75% traveled to Delaware only briefly as part of their exploitation. Two of the participants described interactions with law enforcement, and 40% indicated that their buyers were military-affiliated. Themes emerged out of the data surrounding the overall landscape of commercial sexual exploitation in Delaware, including familial trafficking and association with religious groups, interactions with hotel staff, school staff, and law enforcement, buyer characteristics, and financial transactions associated with trafficking victims' exploitation. These themes are discussed in detail beginning on page 6.

¹ We also built a sample of 72 sugar baby profiles and used facial recognition software to locate individuals' social media accounts, which unfortunately did not lead to much success. Thus, we scraped commercial sex advertising websites, located individuals' linktrees and added them to the network. Additionally, we searched organically in our network of >5000 and added individuals as we identified notable networks, including connections to DE strip clubs and pimps who regularly traffic their victims to DE.

² Content analysis involved the researchers assessing race and ethnicity based on the individual's descriptors, including the race/ethnicity listed in their linked advertisements. Ten percent of this sample were unable to be verified as belonging to any racial or ethnic category.

Quantitative Data. We built predictive models to assess overall CSE prevalence based on total advertisements and individual profiles in Delaware. Based on the total number of commercial sex ads in Delaware in 2021 (N=22,700), we estimate that just under a quarter of those advertisements featured a victim of sex trafficking, for a total estimate of 5,189 sex trafficking victims. We also estimate 1,297 traffickers are associated with or moved those victims through Delaware during the same time frame. Finally, we estimate a total of 16,839 adult male sex buyers in Delaware that contribute to the demand for sex trafficked victims. The step-by-step calculations for reaching these estimates are presented on page 15.

Finally, we conducted a cost of risk (COR) assessment for sex traffickers, sex buyers, and CSE victims in Delaware. In 2021, one individual was arrested for patronizing a prostitute, presumably a sex buyer. This individual was not convicted, which means that in 2021, there was *zero* cost of risk to buyers for purchasing sex in the illegal commercial sex trade in Delaware. For a prostituted person, the cost of risk is estimated at \$2.22 per year, given that only 10 individuals were arrested in 2021 for prostitution. It should be noted that none of those cases have reached disposition yet, so the final cost could ultimately be much lower. However, it is important to note that the fine associated with each charge on a prostituted person is only one piece of the “cost” levied against the exploited individual. Many victims experience associated, long-lasting costs, both financial and otherwise, that situate them in debt bondage not only to their trafficker, but sometimes to the state or municipality as well ([Henderson & Rhodes, 2022](#); [Sweeney, 2021](#)).

One trafficker was arrested in Delaware in 2021. This case has also not yet reached disposition, and there are no published minimum or maximum fines for traffickers in the state. We estimated an average of \$10,000 based on cases in other states in the U.S., which brings the cost of risk for a trafficker to \$5.78 per year. This estimate should be interpreted with caution, however. Judges can levy much higher fines using their discretion. In all, there is much room for improvement when it comes to holding exploiters (buyers and traffickers) accountable compared to victims in Delaware. If all 10 individuals arrested are, indeed, victims of trafficking, the legal process is daunting and victims are not promised expungement or diversion, which means the criminal record for their own victimization could have lasting deleterious effects (Henderson & Rhodes, 2022), while exploiters are not held accountable. One correction to this could be to adopt the [Equality Model](#), where victims/sellers are never arrested, but instead law enforcement focuses on reducing demand for commercial sex by conducting buyer stings and investigations into traffickers without relying on victim testimony. [Detective Joseph Scaramucci](#) is a great resource for training LE to do this with a high success rate.

METHODS & SAMPLING

A variety of methods were utilized to gather data for this report. We performed content analysis on (1) social media accounts in our Avery Center network; and (2) sugaring profiles from 2 mainstream sugar baby websites. We also conducted 15 in-depth interviews with individuals involved in the CST in and around Delaware. Quantitatively, we built predictive models to assess prevalence of sex trafficking, buying, and victimization in the state, and we also estimated the cost of risk for being involved in the CST. We also utilized Rubmaps.com provide a snapshot of illicit massage businesses in Delaware, used web-scraping software to assess the total number of advertisements for commercial sex in Delaware for 2021, and we also utilized facial recognition software to locate sugar babies' social media accounts to perform outreach and advertise study participation.

It is important to note that while we did not gather data on our visit to Delaware in December 2021, we did spend two full days observing and conversing with incarcerated women via in-person outreach in Baylor Women's Correctional Facility and Hazel D. Plant Treatment Center. We compiled a few observations from our time visiting that contribute to the CSE landscape in Delaware, as we see it.

Samples

1. The Avery Center's social network includes a community-based sample of adult women involved in the commercial sex trade (N>5000), including those under a trafficker's control. This network is over 10 years old and is managed by two Avery Center staff, both of whom have lived experience in the commercial sex trade and identify as sex trafficking survivors.
2. In August 2021, sugardaddy.com and Seeking Arrangements were scraped for individuals advertising or being advertised in Delaware. Many traffickers and trafficking victims utilize these websites and are increasingly used by both buyers and traffickers to groom potential victims as well ([Henderson & Lundstrom, 2021](#)). A sample of individuals was used to run through facial recognition software so we could identify individuals' social media accounts and add them to our network for outreach and study participation.
3. To advertise for study participation, we announced the opportunity for compensated in-depth interviews in both the social media network and we also utilized the platform [Freedom Signal](#) to do outreach directly to individuals advertising on commercial sex websites. From these efforts, we conducted 15 in-depth interviews with individuals involved in the commercial sex trade in and around Delaware. The final interview sample included individuals who had been trafficked inside Delaware (80%) and individuals who were familiar with the area, but had never experienced exploitation inside state borders (20%). Interviews were transcribed using rev.com.
4. Spotlight is a software platform used by law enforcement to recover victims using webscraping technology. This platform scrapes several online advertising venues for ads for commercial sex,

and found Delaware-based advertisements on the following websites in 2021: AdultLook (N=19), AdultSearch (N=1,300), MegaPersonals (N=6,700), OneBackpage (N=344), PrivateDelights (N=157), SipSap (N=45), SkipTheGames (N=14,100). We used Spotlight as a starting point for estimating prevalence and also for the Cost of Risk calculations.

5. Cost of Risk data were provided by the Delaware Criminal Justice Council's Statistical Analysis Center (SAC). Maximum fine data were requested from the SAC, but we did not receive this information before this report was due. Thus, we imputed the traffickers' average fine data based on other states' information, and we obtained maximum fine data from publicly-available websites associated with the Delaware legal system.

6. Rubmaps.com is a website where sex buyers review their purchases of often-trafficked individuals at illicit massage parlors. On this site, buyers rate the transaction for quality, cost, and a variety of "service" related factors.

7. Though not an official part of data collection, we did anecdotally observe instances of sexual exploitation and associated overlap with drug abuse/use while we were conducting outreach workshops in Delaware correctional facilities in December 2021.

RESULTS: QUALITATIVE DATA

CSE Landscape in Delaware

Twenty-five percent of our sample had resided in Delaware during their exploitation, and one in particular provided insights that were corroborated with individuals who traveled there as part of their involvement in the CST. Lori, a survivor who had been sex trafficked both as a child and adult in Delaware, says:

Well, I think here's the thing, is we're 30 minutes from Philadelphia. We're an hour and a half from Atlantic city. We're 45 minutes from Baltimore. We're two and a half hours from New York. You could easily bring girls from New York to Delaware and back out. And then downstate is where we see a lot more of opioid issues. It gets very rural until you get to the beaches. And at the beaches, it's resort towns. And that's where I get worried because we get a lot of Eastern European brought over every summer in herds, bring them over. They make enough money to feed their family and put a roof over their family's head for the entire year. You know? So they go home and then they come back and they do it all over again. So yes, they are waitressing, but are they doing something else? I don't know. But it's a red flag when they don't speak English. You know? And you have a lot of beautiful girls who are... they're at least high risk.

This quote indicates multiple intersecting issues that make individuals in Delaware vulnerable to experiencing commercial sexual exploitation. The uniqueness of being so close to major

metropolitan areas means traffickers have ready access to move victims between jurisdictions quickly. Additionally, given the existing literature on the overlap between drug and sex trafficking, it should be no surprise that this participant mentions opioid use as a risk factor. Recent research has honed in on how the drug and sex trades comingle, particularly in urban areas (Michaelis, et al., 2022). Lesser known is how drug use overlaps with CSE in rural areas.

The above comment about sex tourism in parts of Delaware might be cause for concern as well. Though understudied in general research on CSE and outside the scope of the present study, it would be worth investigating lesser known modes of advertising, such as Snapchat, Tinder, and Tik Tok to gain a better understanding of whether or not this participant's fears about European summer staff are at risk as well.

Travel patterns through the state were also an emergent theme in the data. Lori described her experiences:

So travel patterns, a lot of it was by private car because 95 was right there and it's easy to get on and off. But then also I've used Amtrak. I used Greyhound a little bit, but Greyhound was considered like a low class like you only did it if you really had to.

But like Amtrak was no big deal at hop on and all off of there wasn't really any questions even when I was a teenager ish, it was just like, "Oh, she's a cute girl in a Catholic school uniform. Like she knows where she's supposed to be going or what she's supposed to be doing." When it came to the highways, and I haven't been back to Delaware in a while, but it was like going down local highways and then going into different neighborhoods and stuff. It was beach areas like Lous Beach or Cape Rehoboth a few times, taking the ferry back from Rehoboth over to Cape May in New Jersey, that type of thing, ocean city, Maryland as well.

She went on to say that much of her presence in these areas as a young girl went undetected because she thought people likely assumed she was on vacation with family:

A lot of it had to do around like the function of holidays or beach holidays. And so like if everybody was going to be in town like, "Oh yeah, of course, you're going to come this way." And some of it, it wasn't a big deal to have a teenage girl in a group of men if it was like a beach town and like, "Oh, she's somebody's daughter and that's why she's here."

The themes regarding travel and modes of transportation throughout Delaware provide interesting insight regarding important areas for prevention and intervention work. Tourist areas, bus stations, train stations all provide notable areas to advertise for signs of exploitation. It should be noted that the most successful campaigns target individuals involved in CST using less formal language (e.g., not asking riders "are you being trafficked?" but instead something along the lines of "what did you have to do to survive?"). [The Avery Center](#) has also run successful outreach campaigns on social media using less direct language and story-based narratives instead. These campaigns have utilized geo-targeting in partnership with global organization [Stop The Traffik](#).

Twenty-five percent of our study sample experienced familial sex trafficking, or sexual exploitation at the hands of family members. To provide more context into how these operations functioned, Lori details the network she was aware of as a minor:

So it was facilitated a lot on church property, but also in private homes that type of thing, sometimes conference rooms at different hotels that would just kind of depend because Delaware was so easy to access. I mean, that was from the time I was probably six until I was 18 and out of high school. I went to high school in Wilmington for two years, freshman and sophomore years. And a lot of it was in downtown Wilmington and then different houses sprinkled throughout the Wilmington area. Some in Dover, some towards the beach, like the Rehoboth area. Usually the biggest connection point was people that really wanted child porn. And they were willing to basically broker with my mom and like an uncle what they wanted to have in those videos and then my uncle would bring the camera equipment to wherever they said that they wanted to film it.

According to Lori, there is significant overlap between child sex trafficking and pornography. This matches another participant's experience. Amy says:

So my father/trafficker, and you'll hear me use the terms kind of interchangeably, so he was a missionary. So he traveled from church to church giving speaking testimonies. And so he would have recordings of himself, video recordings of himself, that he would sell of sermons, although sometimes those video recordings of sermons would not be, they would be of illicit material that he would be distributing.

Both Lori and Amy experienced familial trafficking inside of an underground, religious-based organization. In the following section, we discuss signs of abuse that were missed by individuals interacting with each of them.

Trafficked as a Child: Signs

Currently, Amy is an adult working in special education in Delaware. She has a vested interest in making sure that educators are properly trained on the signs of abuse and trafficking. Reflecting on her own experience, she says:

So it didn't really set off any red flags even though I can remember disassociating. I have one memory of like where they have the word banks and you would take the word bank and fill in the blank? I could not remember the word just from that space because in that amount of time, I would start to disassociate. And by the time I got down to the blank, I couldn't remember the word or I couldn't remember how to spell it. And my teacher was like, "Why do you keep misspelling the words from the word bank when they're spelled right there?" Well, it was because I was disassociating in that amount of time.

Though Amy's experience occurred in the 1980s and 1990s in a private school setting, there is still much to be gleaned from this experience. As Amy was discussing the above incident, she was describing the fear her mind was preoccupied with instead of thinking about her schoolwork. That

fear centered on the sex acts she'd be forced to engage in after school, "worried that dad's going to have homeless men staying at our house for prayer meeting when I get home." It would make sense that educators be trained to pick up on signs of trauma, especially malnourishment (see below) and signs of dissociation.

Amy also discussed the importance of context, and how signs were ignored because they would have seemed so out of place in a private religious school where such serious issues are never discussed:

In the early days, I was in a private school, a private religious school, because we were able to get free tuition based on his pastor status, so a small Christian unsuspecting school with unsuspecting people. There wasn't even a school nurse. There was a principal who took our temperature, but I would just get sent back to class because I would... But yes, there they could have maybe picked up on at least the sexual abuse, I would think. But at some point, I was pulled out of school and homeschooled. And at that point, I really did not have contact with any professionals. I didn't really have contact with anyone except immediate family.

[Interviewer]: And that sounds intentional.

[Amy]: Yes. It was intentional because it happened the summer, it happened when I started to show some very intense physical signs of the trafficking, things that I think... You can't have a little girl who's claiming that there's blood in her underwear at school. That's not going to work.

Lori had a similar experience at her private school:

So I think the bigger thing with my intersection with school, I went to what would be considered one of those fancy all girls Catholic schools, where they pay like 6,000 a year for some top notch education. Really it wasn't. But anyway, so they think that they're paying for a service and that somehow makes them better than everyone else around. Because of that, a lot of the school staff, they would notice that I was coming in late. They would notice that I was super emaciated. I didn't have an eating disorder, they [her traffickers] wouldn't let me eat because they said the guys would pay more for looking like a kid.

They would think that I was angry and belligerent. And why am I not nicer? Because my family's so nice and my deacon granddad is so nice. And it was just kind of like, you're in deep shit and I told them the truth. And they were like, "You're very imaginative and we're just not sure why you're saying this about your family." And I'm like, "I just described my grandfather to you and you're going to tell me I imagined it."

Non-familial trafficking is hard to detect, even among juveniles. Familial trafficking, on the other hand, is even more difficult to detect because it happens in places and to people we least expect it to. And in Lori's case, it was written off as a behavioral problem. As mentioned earlier, geo-targeted campaigns could be used to address these tragic oversights by engaging both educators

and youth, in addition to trauma-informed training targeting educators as well as [prevention work](#) with youth.

Ava experienced both familial and pimp-controlled sex trafficking in Delaware and for all intents and purposes, “fit the description” of a juvenile at risk for experiencing sexual exploitation. She ran away from home and “got sold a dream”:

[My] main trafficker that I had as a young girl, he had his nephew who was the one who did the major recruiting and would... I had ran from home, didn't have nowhere to go. He offered me a place to stay, sold me a dream, and I fell for it because I was young. But, yeah, you know how that goes. That dream don't never last.

Based on these participants’ experiences, even the victims who appear to need help because of other circumstances went overlooked.

For other adult trafficking survivors, hotel staff in Delaware missed an opportunity to ask more questions. Jamie described her experience in a hotel in Wilmington that ended horribly:

I was staying up late. I was trying to catch a few more dates to just make sure that I had my traps and that I had enough money to pay for my room and buy my weed and stuff like that, food, whatever. And the call came in probably around 1:30 in the morning. It was a white guy. He wasn't that far away. He wanted to see me for an hour. And I went through the whole...the screening process. And he checked out, everything seemed fine. I don't remember his name, but I do remember I was able to find him on Facebook and verify who he was. And I sent in my address, told him, like I used to tell everybody else, call me when you're downstairs. I'll tell you what floor to go to. Once you get to my floor, call me again. And I'll give you my room number, which I never actually gave anybody my room number, I usually poked my head out of the door and waved at them and they would come into the room and everything went smoothly until he came into my room and I asked him for the donation and he started getting really rough.

He kind of, he basically assaulted me. He was trying to rape me, but I was screaming. And then he started choking me. And when, I guess he thought I passed out, he started trying to rip my clothes off, but I kicked him and we got into an altercation to where he was throwing me around the room and telling me that I was going to do the date, whether he paid me or not. And I guess one of my neighbors must have complained to the front desk because within 10 minutes of him being in my room and I'm fighting this man, I got a knock on my door and he immediately stopped. And he just went, opened the door and he walked out and it was actually the security guards at my door. So in an attempt to be able to stay in my room, I told them that he was just a visitor who I was having a hard time with and, and he finally left. So they made sure I was okay. They wanted to know if I wanted to call the police. And I didn't because I didn't want them to know that I was working out of

my room. So I was pretty shaken. I cried. I didn't sleep. And the next morning by 8:00 AM, I had booked the flight back to California.

Jamie went on in the interview to say she never returned to the state because the trauma was too severe. She went on to be trafficked for several years after this experience.

Though most of the participants in this study did not indicate one particular demographic characteristic over another when asked about buyers, the theme of privilege came up several times. Lori said that her buyers, particularly while she was young, were middle to upper-middle class:

A lot of them were at least 50K a year, like 60, like where it's comfortable. It's not a lot, it's not excessive, but you're at some kind of comfortable level where you don't have to think about rent, you don't have to think about the mortgage, that kind of thing. Pretty much a lot of them were in some kind of finance role. So they were all college educated. There was some lawyers, there was a dentist or two, but by and large, a lot of them had something to do with the financial world. There was CPA, there was that type of thing, couple stock brokers and honestly I have some other names...they're just respectable family names in that local area.

The remainder of the sample indicated their buyers were mid- to upper-class men as well, which many attributed to the proximity to major metropolitan areas. Another participant indicated that the buyers she interacted with were very discreet, even moreso than any surrounding areas she'd been trafficked to. Marin says:

Yeah, I think more so people feel safer there. They're more so discreet with not wanting their family members to know stuff like that and just make sure it's a safe place to go to.

Interviewer: So, if you had to turn tricks, if you had a choice, you would turn tricks in Delaware versus anywhere else?

Marin: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, really? Because you felt more comfortable and safer here, huh?

Marin: Yeah. Nobody wants to get in trouble. They just want to do their business and go.

Interviewer: Were they nicer to you?

Marin: Yeah, they was.

These findings could indicate a number of things; buyers could be wealthier and have more to lose, or they do not have to risk being caught (see the "Cost of Risk" assessment below), or it could be a combination of the two. Additionally, this victim likely has regular buyers who are fully screened, which is also a sign of high-frequency buying (e.g., more disposable income, which indicates more privilege).

Financial Transactions

Another theme that emerged in the data had to do with how money flowed as part of the criminal enterprise. Lori recalled how her uncle moved money through casinos in Delaware:

So they were usually arranged by my uncle. Generally speaking, everybody paid in cash, he would go to like different casinos and stuff. And he had an arrangement of how he would be able to get that money back and not have it be... It would be under 10,000 so he didn't have to report it. It would always be under 10,000, that kind of thing...

Every once in a while somebody would pay in check, but you had to be like super special and it wasn't a typical and it was usually like one of those bank checks where like they guarantee the funds, that kind of thing. But they didn't really want to have a lot of that kind of paper trail. They wanted to be able to explain it. So cash was easier and they just figured out different ways to or people always pay them in cash for whatever. And then nobody really questioned it.

I'm trying to think. I'm convinced that he had some arrangements with some banks because my dad worked at the stock market. I think that there was a piece there. I don't really understand it necessarily, but like we used to put money in safety deposit boxes of the different banks. And then when the dust kind of settled and cooled off, he was like, "Okay, now I can put it into something else" and that type of thing.

Lori also recalled how busy finances were at the end of every calendar year, a fact she is trying to make sense of to this day:

Lori: With the banking stuff, it was a lot of the transactions especially around like right before, like December 31st, it always seemed like there was a lot of stuff that would happen before the end of that year. It always had something to do with that December 31st thing usually.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Lori: Like they would give more money. There would be more activity right around then. And I never really understood why except I think that they somehow were trying to lower their tax bracket and make contributions. But technically because we were associated with the church, I'm sure that there was always some donations and stuff to make it look more acceptable.

Interviewer: I was just going to ask, do you think that cash flowed into the church or out of the church?

Lori: oh yeah.

Interactions with LE

One final theme that emerged from the data included how study participants were treated by law enforcement. It is important to note here that the findings in this report are not unique; many survivors in our larger studies indicate the same types of interactions with LE. In general, if LE have

not been trained on sex trafficking or victimology, these trends are to be expected. Additionally, they can be addressed with further training.

Charity describes the lack of empathy:

I've had a few interactions with the police. I've been through a couple of things. They didn't treat me bad, but sometimes they do look at you differently because of the lifestyle you're in. I wouldn't say they treated me bad, but I've been pressed by cops a little bit. They try to get information out of you and all that. But it definitely put a bruise on my ego to have to go through that, because they look at you different. They don't look at you as a normal person... They don't understand how you end up in that life. A lot of people go through things in their childhood and their past, and the environments they grow up in just automatically gets them in that situation.

The police don't care at the end of the day. I mean, I've been a lot of places they say they're doing all these things, but you got all these new laws that are supposedly going into effect in different places and it's slow moving. They're slow to act on it, and at the end of the day, sometimes they seem to be making a choice and they're choosing their life anyway, so they don't really care what you do. Well, she's choosing it. She could leave him if she wants to right now. Well, that's not really how it goes, but I mean, you know better than anybody else that we can't convince nobody of the life we lived or what it really is like until they live it. No matter how much we try to...

Ava describes her interaction and summarizes the lack of being able to see the situation for what it was, though she admits she did not tell the full story for fear of retribution from her trafficker:

I only really ever had one real interaction for me with the police in Delaware. It's just they didn't listen to me. But obviously I didn't tell the whole truth, like everything. I didn't come around and say whatever, but at that time I had a big giant bruise on my neck, and I had a slightly black eye or whatever. They didn't even ask about it, question my bruises or my eye or anything. He was telling them, "Oh, she just has really bad anxiety and she's bipolar." They just went with his story, what he said. Just led with that, "Oh, she's crazy thing." She probably had a little attitude or flipped out or whatever. But they had been called to the hotel three times. I don't understand sometimes they didn't do much of anything. But, now that I'm looking back, I'm out and I've been working obviously in my own city and working with the law enforcement. There's not enough training that's been done with a lot of law enforcement for them to even know what to do. They don't even know what the hell is going on. They don't know.

Drugs

Other interactions with law enforcement had to do with drug interdiction or patrol officers interacting with or responding to individuals involved with drugs. Again, though we did not collect official data during our time visiting Delaware's correctional facilities, many of the individuals we

spoke with indicated that they had been incarcerated on drug charges and only during our visit made the connection between their experiences in the drug trade and their realization that they also experienced commercial sexual exploitation simultaneously (Michaelis, et al. 2022)³. A more in-depth study exploring these overlapping realities in Delaware would be illuminating.

Charity described the intersection of drugs and being involved in the sex trade, and how difficult it was to find an organization that would be a good fit for treating both:

I mean, the relapse rate is high. Then, at the end of the day, there's no long term organization for survivors afterwards. You have to be in crisis or in dire need for someone to even help you. I've been there. I've had girls reach out to me from everywhere when I was working in the non profit sector. I had no funds to give them. What do I tell them? Girl, do what you've got to do? I mean, I didn't even know what to tell them. That's the same way I felt. Nothing out here for me. What am I supposed to do? It's nothing for me.

Similar to our interactions with inmates in DE, many did not know they were victims of sex trafficking, much less have awareness that services existed for people like them. Continued, consistent outreach in facilities throughout the state could go far in closing these gaps.

³ This trend is explored in depth in a paper forthcoming in *Urban Crime: An International Journal*'s special issue on "Human trafficking and Urban Safety: Exploring pathways to prevention, protection, partnerships, and beyond."

RESULTS: QUANTITATIVE DATA

Rubmaps

As described earlier, Rubmaps.com is a website that exists so that sex buyers can review their purchases in illicit massage businesses. Our analysis revealed a total 136 businesses in the entire state; however, only 37 of the businesses had reviews from buyers that were less than 12 months old. As a publicly-available website, we would encourage law enforcement to begin informally investigating these businesses as potential sites for labor *and* sex trafficking.

Prevalence and Cost of Risk for Engaging in the Commercial Sex Trade: Delaware 2021

While data on the prevalence of sex trafficking victims, buyers and traffickers remains scarce, the economic impact of this industry can be estimated with some validity. The International Labor Organization estimates that sex trafficking generates \$99 billion per year globally (ILO, 2014). Yet, few scholars have attempted to calculate the overall cost of risk to traffickers, buyers and sellers/victims as a way to better understand how and why this industry flourishes. In 2009, economist Siddarth Kara built an economic estimation model to gauge the cost of risk of trafficking individuals for commercial sex in seven different countries, including the United States⁴. Using traditional economic theories of risk and reward, Kara suggested that it is vital to attack the industry's "immense profitability...by inverting its risk-reward economics; that is, by making the risk of operating a sex slave operation far more costly" (p. 200). This approach is useful, though admittedly crass. Yet, Kara describes the commercial sex industry for what it is:

a mature, multinational corporation that has achieved a steady-state growth and produces immense cash flows ... [and] has four components: a product (the victim), a wholesaler (the trafficker), a retailer (the slave owner/exploiter), and a consumer (pgs. 17, 202).

Since sex trafficking is an illegal enterprise, accounting for the cost of risk should any involved party be arrested, convicted, and fined is key. Further, it can help policymakers, law enforcement, prosecutors, and others approach this industry more efficiently – by raising the cost of risk for exploiters, while reducing harm to victims, in an effort to truly put traffickers out of business.

Using Kara's models, Lundstrom (2019) calculated the cost of risk to a U.S.-based trafficker for doing business based on total arrest records, the chance of conviction and the maximum federal fine. At the federal level, the cost of risk to a trafficker for conducting business in the U.S. was \$730 per year (Lundstrom, 2019). However, given the varied economic and criminological

⁴ Kara's estimate was based on street-level, or outdoor, prostitution only and therefore was limited in scope. In 2021, much of the commercial sex trade is facilitated online, so our estimates account for these shifts. As one example, in his model, he valued one commercial sex act in the U.S. at \$30, which is a gross underestimate (Dank et al., 2014; Henderson & Rhodes, 2022).

landscapes that exist across the U.S. when it comes to commercial sexual exploitation (CSE), it is vital to localize these estimates to account for differences between jurisdictions. Demand for commercial sex can vary widely across the U.S., as can law enforcement approaches and justice system responses to pursuing and successfully prosecuting such activity. A full picture of why the commercial sex trade is so profitable necessitates taking into account the localized cost of risk to criminals for offending and conducting business, not to mention the long-term impact – economic and otherwise – on their victims.

Below, we adapt Kara's (2009) model to predict cost of risk to all involved parties by examining local law enforcement and justice system responses to addressing sex trafficking in Delaware.

An Economic Approach to Risk Estimation

Why Focus on Cost of Risk?

Kara (2009) explains systematically how traffickers maintain their exorbitant profit margin:

The most effective way for any business to increase profits is to minimize costs. For most businesses, the largest operating cost is labor. ...The greater the profits, the greater the demand for slaves. ... They keep prices as low as possible to secure as many customers as possible, new and repeat. The operating costs of the business are low. ... The retailer demands slaves because they elevate profits and expand the customer base by virtue of lower retail prices. The only vulnerability the retailer suffers is the illicit nature of his business. There is a cost if he is caught, but most slave owners are not targeted with aggressive investigation (p. 202-203).

To discourage traffickers, profit margins must be decreased substantially. Even though in many countries there are harsh punishments for traffickers, law enforcement and the justice system in general have yet to fully attack all sides of the industry. In any industry, demand drives supply and profit. The commercial sex trade is no different. We begin with predicting the extent of sex trafficking victimization, including estimated prevalence, value and profit in the state of Delaware.

Estimated Value of a Sex Trafficking Victim

Every time a forced, frauded or coerced commercial sex act is executed, there are at minimum three parties involved: a product (the victim⁵), a wholesaler/retailer (the trafficker(s)), and a consumer (the sex buyer). To estimate the cost of risk to each party, we need to establish assumptions about the industry. First, research shows that on average, commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) victims are forced to earn roughly \$1000 (gross) per day for their traffickers. The cost of running the business to a trafficker is fairly inexpensive, especially compared to other

⁵ Note that we are using the label “victim” because we are discussing individuals who experience force, fraud or coercion when exchanging a sex act for something of value (TVPA, 2000)

businesses. On average, traffickers have the following overhead costs: hotel, food, advertising, condoms, grooming/clothing. Kara (2009) assumes about a 70% profit margin per victim.

Additionally, most research on domestic pimp-controlled sex trafficking suggests that victims do not get paid days off, and are forced to deliver that \$1000/day quota to their traffickers 365 days a year. Yet, to be conservative in our estimates, we suggest calculating the annual workday total at 260 days to account for incarceration, illness, hospitalizations, assault or other forms of violence. Thus, we estimate that victims in Delaware are valued at roughly \$182,000 per year:

$$\text{EV (Estimated Value)} = (\$1000^6 - \$300^7) \times 260 = \$182,000 \text{ profit per victim annually}$$

Predictive Modeling: Sex Trafficking Victimization in Delaware

In Delaware in 2021, a total number of 22,700 advertisements were posted online for commercial sex. Additionally, a total of 6,653 individual profiles existed across commercial sex advertising platforms in the state. These online advertisements do not all represent trafficking victims; some are selling sex of their own volition and do not have third-party traffickers. To account for this, we weighted these data according to best estimates provided in empirical research, which shows that approximately 89% of all commercial sex providers report they would prefer to not be selling sex and feel forced, frauded or coerced into doing so (Farley et al., 2004). However, it is worth noting here that some find this to an overestimate. To correct for that, we half Farley's estimate to provide the most conservative possible scenario to adjust for the number of consensual sex workers with online profiles. This translates to 5,189 total victims in the Delaware in 2021.

Using the estimated number of victims in Delaware using these sources, we conservatively estimate each victim is forced to engage in 5 sex acts per day for 260 days per year. Thus, the total demanded commercial sex acts from sex trafficking victims in Delaware is calculated as follows:

$$5189 \text{ victims} \times 5 \text{ (acts per day)} \times 260 \text{ (days/year)} = 6,745,700 \text{ demanded commercial sex acts per year per victim in Delaware}$$

Having established this baseline, we can predict the cost of risk (COR) to sex traffickers, sex buyers and sex trafficking victims below.

Predictive Modeling: Sex Traffickers in Delaware

⁶ An average nightly quota per trafficking victim is \$1000.

⁷ Traffickers carry a daily overhead cost of \$300

Calculating the number of traffickers operating in a given area is fairly straightforward, as research suggests that the average trafficker has between 4-8 victims (Kara, 2009; Nichols, 2016). We use the median number for this calculation (6) to predict an average of 1,297 traffickers exploiting victims in the Delaware area each year. It is important to note when considering this range that traffickers move victims through Delaware and are very likely **not** based in Delaware year-round. Assuming there are on average 1,297 traffickers in Delaware, we can estimate cost of risk for a trafficker to do business if caught. Note: fines for this crime are discretionary, and historically have varied based on the severity of the case (e.g., if a minor was a victim). Thus, we impute \$10,000 here as a placeholder, assuming the majority of the victims we are identifying using our estimates are adults and not minors).

TRAFFICKER COST OF RISK = CHANCE OF ARREST X CHANCE OF CONVICTION X FINE

$$\text{Chance of Arrest} = \frac{\text{Actual Arrests Made}}{\text{Actual Acts Committed}}$$

$$\text{Chance of Conviction} = \frac{\text{Actual Convictions}}{\text{Total Trials}}$$

$$(1/1297) \times (.5/1) \times (\$10,000) = \$5.78 \text{ per year}$$

Using the above predictions and estimating the fine allowed in the state of Delaware, at a 50% conviction rate, traffickers only need to put away \$5.78 per year to account for the risk of being arrested, convicted, and fined.

Predictive Modeling: Commercial Sex Buyers in Delaware

Currently, the maximum federal fine for human trafficking is \$1.5 million. For solicitation or prostitution, fines differ based on jurisdiction but it can range from \$50 in West Virginia to a maximum fine of \$4,000 in Texas.

To predict the number of sex buyers in Delaware, we use the total adult male population as a starting point (N= 280,643). Research shows that on average, 6% of all men purchase sex in a 12-month period (Demand Abolition, 2018). This comes out to 16,839 sex buyers in Delaware in 2021.

In Delaware, 1 man was arrested with a prostitution charge in 2021, and he was not convicted. The maximum fine for a misdemeanor charge for buying sex is \$575⁸, one third of the cost for the victim/seller, who is theoretically engaging in the exact same commercial sex act. Though we cannot truly compute this statistic based on 2021 data, even if we assumed this buyer was

⁸ https://sharedhope.org/PICframe7/reportcards/PIC_RC_2017_DE.pdf

convicted and had to pay the \$575 fine, we cannot compute the cost of risk because the sheer number of demanded commercial sex acts is too high for the calculation to be meaningful.

It is important to note here that legislators in Delaware are introducing legislation to rectify this gap ([HB 347](#)), which we commend and hope for a positive outcome that holds exploiters more accountable for their actions.

BUYER COST OF RISK = CHANCE OF ARREST X CHANCE OF CONVICTION X FINE

$$\text{Chance of Arrest} = \frac{\text{Actual Arrests Made}}{\text{Actual Acts Committed}}$$

$$\text{Chance of Conviction} = \frac{\text{Actual Convictions}}{\text{Total Trials}}$$

$$(1/6,746,142) \times (1/1) \times (\$575) = \$0.000085 \text{ per commercial sex act}$$

Total Victim Arrests

In Delaware, 10 women were arrested with a prostitution charge in 2021. Though these cases have not yet reached disposition, we estimated the maximum possible penalty at a 100% conviction rate, with the fine of \$1,150, we can calculate the total cost of risk to a sex trafficking victim for engaging in commercial sex acts against their will.

TRAFFICKING VICTIM COST OF RISK = CHANCE OF ARREST X CHANCE OF CONVICTION X FINE

$$\text{Chance of Arrest} = \frac{\text{Actual Arrests Made}}{\text{Actual Acts Committed}}$$

$$\text{Chance of Conviction} = \frac{\text{Actual Convictions}}{\text{Total Trials}}$$

$$(10/6,746,142) \times (10/10) \times (\$1,150) = \$2.22 \text{ per year}$$

Table 1 below presents a side-by-side comparison of buyers, traffickers, and victims for engaging in the commercial sex trade. It should be noted here that actual *choice* to engage in the commercial sex trade lies only in the hands of buyers and traffickers, yet their cost of risk is negligible. In fact, using the data above, victims are ten times as likely to be arrested for engaging in a commercial sex act—a crime that requires two parties, in theory. Yet, the buyer's cost of risk is zero. The majority of research on sex trafficking victimization reveals that victims do not earn any

of the money that is exchanged for sex. How are victims supposed to account for the cost of risk for engaging in a forced, frauded, or coerced sex act? It is, simply, impossible.

Table 1. Cost of Risk to Traffickers, Sex Buyers and Victims/Sellers in Delaware (2021)

	Fine	Cost of risk per year
Buyers	\$575	\$0
Traffickers	NA	\$5.78
Victims	\$1,150	\$2.22

Though it could be argued that pimps may bail out their victims, this is not always the case. In addition, these immediate financial costs of engaging in the sex trade as a “seller” do not even take into account the long-term psychological, social and physical toll that has been clearly documented in research (Farley, et al., 2004).

Part of this discrepancy in cost of risk can be attributed to the fact that victims engage in anywhere roughly 10 transactions per day, which raises their risk of arrest up to tenfold when compared to sex buyers. Buyers typically will purchase once in a day, and certainly not every day; the average is 1-2 times per month (Demand Abolition, 2018).

Additionally, it is important to point out the cycle of disadvantage that the above figures perpetuates for sex trafficking victims and survivors. CSE victims often originally become vulnerable to exploitation because of financial instability/poverty. If victims are arrested, convicted and fined during their exploitation, successful exit becomes increasingly difficult, if not altogether impossible, without legal assistance. Carrying the cost of risk that’s higher than their exploiters only serves to accumulate deleterious disadvantage over time, perpetuating re-victimization and a lifetime of deprivation and trauma.

SOLUTION

It is clear that the current practices create an insurmountable barrier to individuals successfully exiting exploitation. With the potential profit for a trafficker of upwards of \$200,000 per victim per year, and the cost of risk negligible, it is no wonder that domestic sex trafficking continues to flourish despite the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), first passed in 2000. Below, we detail the components of The Equality Model, an approach that has been adopted in 9 countries as well as a handful of jurisdictions across the U.S. This model better protects victims from exploitation while simultaneously increasing the cost of risk for exploiters in the commercial sex trade.

The Equality (Nordic) Model

The central focus of The Equality Model (EM) is to stop arresting sex trafficking victims for their own victimization, and offer services for successful exit and recovery. Tyler (2021) describes the Equality Model, sometimes referred to as the Nordic Model (which originated in Sweden in 1999), as:

asymmetric decriminalization which decriminalizes people in systems of prostitution but retains some sanctions against people who purchase sexual access to others and those who profit from the prostitution of others but who are not prostituted themselves (i.e. pimps) (p. 69).

Originally, this model was introduced not only as a tool to combat sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, but also as a way to promote gender equality (Bender et al., 2019). It also serves the purpose of shrinking the overall market for prostitution. In practice, law enforcement continue to criminalize individuals who purchase or profit from commercial sex. According to the economic calculations presented in this paper, exploiters have a minuscule cost of risk for exploiting victims, which results in unchecked power that continues driving the market.

The Equality Model also provides exit programs in the form of social, psychological, and economic assistance to victims and/or those willingly selling sex to that they can transition out of the sex industry (Bender, et al. 2019; Ekberg 2004; Tyler et al. 2017). This model has operated in Sweden for over twenty years, and several other countries since 2000 have followed suit: Canada, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, France and Norway (Harkov 2018; Tyler et al. 2017). Several jurisdictions across the United States, including King County (Seattle), WA; San Francisco, CA; Brooklyn, NY; San Antonio, Waco, Forth Worth and Austin, TX; Boston, MA; Baltimore, MD, and other smaller municipalities have adopted this approach. Emerging evidence shows that the EM is promising:

The Equality Model is the most effective way to prevent vulnerable, marginalized women and girls from being exploited and harmed in the sex trade, and support those who wish to exit it. No other policy framework is as effective, because no other model targets the demand that fuels the sex trade so effectively (Bender et al., 2019, p. 25).

The purpose of this study was to establish a more thorough understanding of the commercial sex trade in Delaware as just one major metropolitan area where sex trafficking flourishes. Results indicate that a substantial problem exists when it comes to criminalizing victims and providing near impunity for exploiters: sex traffickers and sex buyers. Much work remains to be done, and both researchers and practitioners should take these foundational predictions into account when designing policy, establishing sound LE approaches, and providing victim services and outreach to help individuals escape exploitation and hold exploiters accountable.

BRIEF RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our experiences visiting Delaware and conducting this research, we feel the council is on the right track. While the prevalence estimates provided here are *only estimates*, they do still provide a starting point for understanding how much activity is occurring in Delaware. We are confident that these data will inform policy, outreach, awareness raising, and overall engagement of the community in addressing this issue. We would encourage continuing outreach efforts in women's facilities as well as juvenile-serving facilities to continue to raise awareness among those populations about services available and how to spot signs of abuse. Additionally, our data reveal that there also is much room for awareness-raising both among the general population, law enforcement, hotel staff, and educators. Many of these expert trainings exist across the U.S., and survivors leaders in Delaware are likely the best bet for consulting on how to improve in their home states. Geo-targeted ads on social media, described earlier on page 7, have proven successful in raising awareness and in victim outreach efforts.

Our visit to Delaware was incredibly impactful for us, and seemed to be so for the facility staff and inmates. Many of the individuals we interacted with came to the realization *during the workshops* that they might be victims of sex trafficking, and they saw the overlap between drug and sex abuse. We have served a handful of survivors from our visit, and many are signed up for our care package program. We are grateful for the opportunity to be a part of that outreach and are hopeful this report is helpful to your efforts in the first state.

Prostitution is a gendered survival strategy that requires the person in it to assume unreasonable risks.

-Andrea Dworkin (1993)

Appendix 1.

Delaware Human Trafficking Outreach/Awareness Workshops **December 15-19, 2021**

Goals

1. Raise awareness in targeted populations about human trafficking
2. Build connections and belonging with individuals through storytelling-based interactive workshop breakout sessions/small groups
3. “Bridge” any gaps between HT/direct service providers in the community using storytelling & belonging techniques/rapport building
4. Inform individuals about the Avery Center’s services and research work

Itinerary

Wednesday, 12/15	(A&M) Flight 6272 DEN to PHI 12:00 p.m. – 5:25 p.m. Pick up car rental at Budget
	(N) Flight 5873 JAX to PHI 12:45 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.
	2 rooms at Hyatt Place Wilmington Riverfront, 760 Justison Street, Wilmington Tentative dinner w/ Julie & Stacie
Thursday, 12/16	Exact times TBA Present 4 separate trauma-informed Outreach and Awareness HT Workshops to individuals at Delores J. Baylor Women’s Correctional Institution, New Castle
Friday, 12/17	Vicarious Trauma Prevention hours Lunch with local changemakers Interviews
Saturday, 12/18	Check out of Hyatt
	Hazel D. Plant Treatment Center 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
	Check in to Embassy Suites, 9000 Bartram Avenue, Philadelphia Return rental car

Sunday, 12/19	(A&M) Flight 2910 PHI to DEN 6:15 a.m. – 8:35 a.m. (N) Flight 5929 PHI to MDW 10:05 a.m. – 11:20 a.m. (N) Flight 6323 MDW to JAX 1:40 p.m. – 4:55 p.m.
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Appendix 2. Interview Guide

1. Tell me a little about your time in the life.
2. Tell me about your life now.
3. Type of exploitation and third-party trafficker.
4. Tell me about any interactions you had with law enforcement.
 - a. Arrested, men/women, outcome of arrest
5. How did you advertise in DE (online)?
6. Did you live there or travel to DE?
7. Did you primarily do in/outcall?
8. How much time did you spend traveling to and through DE?
9. Substance use?
10. Did you travel between cities? What did that look like (type of transit, route)?
11. Businesses you interacted with (churches, banks)?
12. Did you know to go to certain areas or stay out of certain areas?
13. Route 4/Hwy 95
14. Who were your buyers?
15. Any interactions with the military academy?

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