

# **THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

**A White Paper prepared for Microsoft**

by

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## **Summary Findings**

The purpose of this project was to explore the role technology has played in shifting the stage of recruiting, buying, and selling in the sexual trafficking industry from the perspective of consumers in three western provinces in Canada. This study looked at 51 men who were attending a Prostitution Offender Program, meaning that they had been charged for the first time and were participating in a court diversion program. To be charged, these men were all actively communicating with someone (i.e., an undercover police officer) for the purpose of prostitution. While they were all classified as first time offenders, some of the men indicated that this was indeed the first time they had sought the services of a sex trade worker while others acknowledged purchasing for as long as ten years.

Our study found that the men were highly diverse in terms of age, income, levels of education, length of time purchasing, and ways in which they looked to make sexual purchases. They were fairly equally divided between being in stable relationships or not, and varied in how frequently they purchased.

Regardless of their level of involvement as consumers, the majority of the men acknowledged that being a consumer in the sex trade was impacting them in many ways: health, work, relationships, and children. The vast majority (92%) indicated that they had tried to quit purchasing but had been unsuccessful.

What was somewhat surprising was the data that demonstrated how young these men were when they started looking at pornography (72% under the age of 19 and 13% under the age of 11) and when they started purchasing (14% under the age of 18 and 48% by the age of 25).

The impetus behind this study was to explore the role of technology in human trafficking and sexual exploitation. As the literature indicates and our study agrees, viewing pornography is often the catalyst to further involvement as consumers. The men in our study began viewing pornography at very young ages, in some cases younger than 11 years of age.

## **About the Survey**

The goal was to survey 50 men in Prostitution Offender Programs in three cities. The cities of Winnipeg, Saskatoon, and Edmonton are Canadian communities with a strong blue collar representation. Street purchasing appears to be more prevalent than the use of escort services. We proposed to complete the surveys in group sessions at the various Prostitution Offender Program schools, protecting participant confidentiality by using Reply Awareness Technology known as clickers. After receiving ethics clearance (Mount Royal University Human Research Ethics Board, June 2013), we were able to pilot test the survey and the clickers as a survey technique at a school in late June 2012 in Winnipeg where 17 participants took part in the survey. In September, we attended a school in Edmonton where 12 men participated and a second school in Winnipeg where an additional 12 men participated. In December, we attended the school in Saskatoon where 10 men participated in the survey. In total, 51 men at these Prostitution Offender Programs agreed to participate in the survey.

The study participants attending Prostitution Offender Programs had been charged under the Criminal Code of Canada 213(CC) with Communicating for the Purpose of Prostitution. This law makes it illegal to stop a vehicle for the purpose of communicating about prostitution or obtaining sexual services of prostitution. A person can be charged if he or she stops a vehicle to speak with a person on the street with the intent of speaking about a possible arrangement to engage a sex trade worker.

The Prostitution Offender Program is a one day post court diversion program for individuals who are first time offenders charged with ‘Communicating for the Purpose of Prostitution’. This charge occurs when someone is apprehended by an undercover police officer in a sting operation where the undercover officer is posing as a sex trade worker. To be eligible for this diversion program, a person must be a first time offender without a criminal history of sexual exploitation and/or violence. The purpose and value of Prostitution Offender Programs are contentious and only a few cities in Canada offer such programs.

Most programs across Canada follow similar a structure. During the full day, participants hear first hand from survivors of the sex trade, families, Police vice squad, neighbourhood members affected by the sex trade, social and health services, and community businesses. Those attending the Prostitution Offender Program must attend the full day and are charged \$500 to support running the program. If those charged pay the fee and attend the full day, the criminal charge of ‘Communicating for the Purpose of Prostitution’ will be withdrawn.

## Main Findings

### Demographics

Age	18-24 yrs =16% 25-34 yrs =18% 35-49 yrs = 33% 50-64 yrs = 29% 65+ yrs = 4%
Birth Place	59% Canada or USA
Education	72% High School Graduates 46% Post Secondary
Annual Income	\$100,000 plus = 25% \$50,000 or less = 54%
Relationship Status	75% Married 25% Single 49% Fathers

## Highlights of Findings

### Purchasing Habits

- Fifty percent of participants have been purchasing for less than one year while twenty percent had been purchasing for over 10 years
- 51% began purchasing before the age of 25
- 66% were viewing pornography by the age 15 years
- 62% search for sex in bars, clubs, street (track or stroll), dating sites, escort services, websites. The other 38% include locations such as parks, malls, hitch-hiking, and parties.
- 23% seek sexual services regularly while the additional 77% seek services somewhat frequently or rarely
- Frequency of purchasing ranged from daily (28%) to annually (62%)
- 92% purchase locally, with no travel being required either for themselves or for someone to come to them

### Perceived Effects of Sexual Activity

- 28% reported a family member knowing they were a purchaser
- 37% believe their sexual purchasing has affected their work
- 52% believe their sexual purchasing has affected their health
- 56% believe their sexual purchasing has affected their personal or dating life
- 51% of parents believe their sexual purchasing has affected their relationships with their children
- 92% had tried quitting
- 26% feared they had purchased from a minor

### Frequency of Internet Use

- 29% use the internet to seek sex
- 100% use their personal computer as opposed to public computers (such as at work) to search out sex sites
- Computers are used most frequently rather than cell phones or I-pads to search sex sites
- 36% reported that someone in their household was aware that they search the internet for sexual activity
- 84% reported spending less than 1 hour each time on sex sites on line
- 16% reported spending over 1 hour on line each time with 8% reporting over 12 hours searching sex sites
- No one reported searching sex sites daily; responses ranged from every other day to every second month
- 83% view sex sites on the internet by themselves (as opposed to with someone else or in a group)

## Uses of Internet

- 50% reported when they are on sex sites they are seeking a physical encounter while the other 50% are satisfied with viewing the sites
- 38% do not use the internet to seek out physical sexual encounters but use the sites as a stimulant prior to a street encounter
- 62% do not purchase through sex sites on line; they head out for an encounter
- 67% view online sites before they venture out to purchase sexual encounters
- 43% look at pornography online and that satisfies them while the other 57% seek out further viewing on a stroll and possible purchase
- 92% have never used Skype for sexual purposes
- 86% never used their phone for sexting
- 64% have visited chat rooms for sexual purposes

## Effects of Internet Use

- 50% believe that viewing sex sites protects them from being caught
- 38% believe the internet has made it easier to purchase
- 38% believe the internet has increased their need to purchase
- 58% believe the internet has made it more difficult for them to quit purchasing sexual encounters

## Recommendation

Pornography is increasingly available through the ready access of technology such as the Internet. As young people grow up with easier access and more comfort with various forms of technology, it is to be expected that boys and young men will find it more appealing and accessible to view pornography using multiple personal devices, making it appear to be a safe and simple exercise, perhaps even without consequences. This simple access may even make online forms of viewing pornography and other sexual activities such as 'sexting' seem to be socially acceptable and normative.

For years, prevention efforts have looked at the supply side of the economic equation – unsuccessfully. There has been and likely always will be an endless supply of new workers entering into the sex trade. However, with recent research studies providing data to better understand consumers, it would appear to make sense to explore prevention models that focus on the demand side of the equation.

This is an activity which primarily involves men as the consumers. And clearly, these men are becoming engaged as consumers at very young ages. If a prevention approach were to look at the demand side of the equation, it would appear to make sense to target such a prevention activity at young boys and men.

Therefore, we recommend that an intervention program, using technology, be designed, developed, tested, and implemented to address the demand side of sexual exploitation. The goal would be to educate men and boys on why not to become customers using a technology format that is easily accessible and familiar. This program would be flexible for use by a range of ages of men from high school to seniors. The purpose would be to spell out the realities of the trade as well as the risks and personal impacts associated with being a consumer in an effort to reduce demand. We believe we could alter and prevent a number of men from becoming consumers of the sex trade if they understood the reality of the trade, why persons end up in the trade, and how they, as consumers, both affect others and are themselves impacted by the trade.