

## **2014 Las Vegas Sex Trafficking Case Study**

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This report provides a one-year snapshot of sex trafficking cases developed by the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department's Vice & Sex Trafficking Investigations Section. The partnership between Arizona State University, Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research and the Las Vegas Police Department demonstrates a collaborative initiative that exemplifies innovation in sex trafficking research. This collaboration assisted in the exploration of law enforcement actions, case development and case analysis for the dual purpose of academic and operational learning and improvement with regards to sex trafficking investigation management in an affected, metropolitan environment.

Support for this study was from the Arizona State University McCain Institute for International Leadership and the National Amber Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) at the National Criminal Justice Training Center.

This publication was prepared under Cooperative Agreement number 2013-MU-MU-K011 from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of OJJDP or the U.S. Department of Justice.

*This study is important to the LVMPD because it quantifies the work that is being done in our community on many levels. Just like the American public, law enforcement, social services and community leaders who have never worked on sex trafficking cases, often have limited knowledge about what these cases encompass. This report supports what LVMPD Vice and Sex Trafficking Investigations Section already knows and provides an opportunity to demonstrate the challenges we face and why.*

*LVMPD is working hard to change the culture in policing and support a victim-centered, trauma-informed approach. Although there is a tremendous amount of support from LVMPD leadership for the mission of the Vice and Sex Trafficking Investigations Section, the information and facts supported in this report provide a broader view of the actual impact of the violence occurring within our jurisdiction on a daily basis. This study demonstrates the uniqueness of the victims served by our unit. The sex trafficking victims we work with are often traumatized and uncooperative. The study breaks down the aspects of the investigations that support the need for more law enforcement resources to conduct these complex but critically important investigations. This study explains the barriers and challenges this unit and other units like it, face in our everyday work. We hope that this report can demonstrate to our leadership and community partners the intricacies of sex trafficking cases. Among our goals, is to increase the understanding that prostitution is not a victimless crime and it serves as a contributing factor that drives a large amount of violent crime affecting our citizens and tourists.*

*Patricia Spencer, Lieutenant, LVMPD Vice and Sex Trafficking Investigations Section.*

## **Executive Summary**

This study is the result of a unique collaboration between the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) and the Arizona State University Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research (ASU STIR) to analyze sex trafficking cases developed in Las Vegas, Nevada. The purpose of the study is to explore the efforts of law enforcement in identifying and investigating incidents of sex trafficking in Las Vegas and to identify trends and patterns that might inform future research or practice. This study was approved by the leadership of the LVMPD and the Arizona State University Institutional Review Board.

Cases were included in this study if there was an identified victim of sex trafficking contacted by LVMPD officers and if this contact resulted in a criminal investigation into the circumstances of their alleged trafficking. All sex trafficking reports that articulated the criminal elements of prostitution and included an identified sex trafficking victim as investigated by the LVMPD in 2014 were included in this report.

In 2014 there were 190 victims of sex trafficking identified in 159 separate sex trafficking cases developed by the LVMPD. The data reviewed for this study were collected from both paper and electronic files at the LVMPD, coded and entered into an online database for analysis by the ASU STIR research team.

### **Findings**

In these cases:

- The arrest of the sex trafficker occurred sometime between the same day as the report was taken and 365 days later with an average of 29 days.
- 73.4% of the cases were never filed for prosecution
  - 12 cases resulted in a conviction of the sex trafficker(s).
  - 22 cases resulted in plea agreements with the sex trafficker(s).
- 64.7% had only a minor (under age 18) victim(s).
- Only 23.9% of the cases had a cooperative victim.
  - 16.3% of minor victims were cooperative.
  - 27.7% of adult victims were cooperative.
- 20.5% of the victims reported that the sex trafficker transported them from another state for the purpose of sex trafficking/prostitution.
- Sex Traffickers were 87.3% male and 76% African American.
- The average age of the sex traffickers was 29 years old. The sex traffickers of minors were significantly younger and closer to the age of their victims than sex traffickers of adults (27.42 years vs. 32.6 years)
- In 15% of the cases, (one out of every six), a sex trafficker was identified as a gang member.
- 30% of the sex traffickers had recently traveled to Nevada for the purpose of sex trafficking.
- In 13% of the cases a weapon was used by the sex trafficker to threaten the victim.

- The most common type of sex trafficker was a Romeo-type pimp using romance and promises to convince the victim to enter into prostitution.
- In 22 cases, the Romeo-type pimp turned into a violent, fear-based Guerilla pimp once the victim stopped responding to the Romeo technique.
- Social media was used in the recruitment of nearly one out of every three sex trafficking victims.
- Sex traffickers used different types of violence to keep the victims from leaving or reporting including physical violence (56.2%), psychological violence (49.4%), and sexual violence (11.2%).
- Online venues were used by the sex traffickers to advertise the sex trafficking victims in 33 (37.1%) cases. Backpage.com was used in 78.8% (n =26) of the cases that used online platforms.
- 95 (80%) of the sex traffickers had criminal histories with an average of 12 previous arrests.
- The average age of the sex trafficker at their first arrest in their lifetime was 17.5 years old.
- One out of every seven cases had a previous sex trafficking charge.
- Previous charges included domestic violence (n=37, 38.9%) and weapons charges (n =43, 45.3%).
- The average age of the minor sex trafficking victims was 16 years old while the average age of the adult sex trafficking victims was 23.8 years old.
- Minor victims were more likely to be African American while adult victims were more likely to be White.
- Only 45.5% of the minor victims had a missing person's report filed about them.

## **Conclusions**

Working with over 150 case files, the research team identified a number of patterns and recommendations. A common feature of many of the cases and the reason that so few were filed for prosecution was a lack of victim cooperation with law enforcement. Additionally, over half of the juvenile victims did not have a missing person's report in the National reporting systems which made identifying them more difficult as well as there not being a proactive search for the missing minors. Online platforms like Backpage.com and "escort" service providers were the most common venues identified for trafficking victims. Violence was a pervasive theme of most sex trafficking cases, especially with underage victims working with a single trafficker or in a small group with a lone trafficker. Finally, the criminal histories of the sex traffickers indicate that they have extensive experience with the criminal justice system with an average of 12 previous arrests as well as interpersonal violence with one out of every three having a previous domestic violence charge. Nearly half have a previous weapons-related charges.

This report illustrates that the crime of sex trafficking is a violent crime and a violent form of organized crime and it should be addressed by law enforcement as such. The lack of victim engagement is the emerging theme along with the necessity to prosecute the sex traffickers to address public safety in Las Vegas. Proactive policing to intervene with these violent offenders who in some cases have previously been arrested for sex trafficking would help to prevent more sex trafficking victims, address some of the interpersonal violence being committed in the Las Vegas community and would create a safer community.



## 2014 Las Vegas Sex Trafficking Case Study

In partnership with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD), the Arizona State University Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research (ASU STIR) developed a research plan to explore and analyze sex trafficking case files from 2010 to 2015. Cases were included in this study if there was an identified victim of sex trafficking contacted by LVMPD officers and if this contact resulted in a criminal investigation into the circumstances of their alleged trafficking. These files included police reports, transcribed records of interviews of both alleged sex traffickers and alleged sex trafficking victims, and case-related information including, but not limited to, evidence collected during the investigation and case notes documented by LVMPD investigators. A large percentage of the sex trafficking cases analyzed in this report were never officially submitted for prosecution, and some of the reviewed cases were declined by prosecutors for a number of reasons to include: a lack of prosecutorial merit, because the victim could not be located or was not cooperative, and insufficient evidence. All sex trafficking reports that articulated the criminal elements of prostitution and included an identified sex trafficking victim as investigated by the LVMPD in 2014 were included in this report.

The purpose of the study is to explore the efforts of law enforcement in identifying and investigating incidents of sex trafficking in Las Vegas and to identify trends and patterns that might inform future research or practice. This study was approved by the leadership of the LVMPD and the Arizona State University Institutional Review Board.

In 2014, there were 247 victims identified by the LVMPD Vice & Sex Trafficking Investigations Section. A total of 159 cases were analyzed for this study. These cases represented a total of 190 victims. The 57 victims not included in this study either did not have enough information about the sex trafficking situation or originated as domestic violence investigations where the elements of sex trafficking could not be established. This study represents 76.9% of the 2014 victims identified by the LVMPD Vice & Sex Trafficking Investigations Section.

The 159 cases had the following victim type (divided by minor (under age 18) or adult):

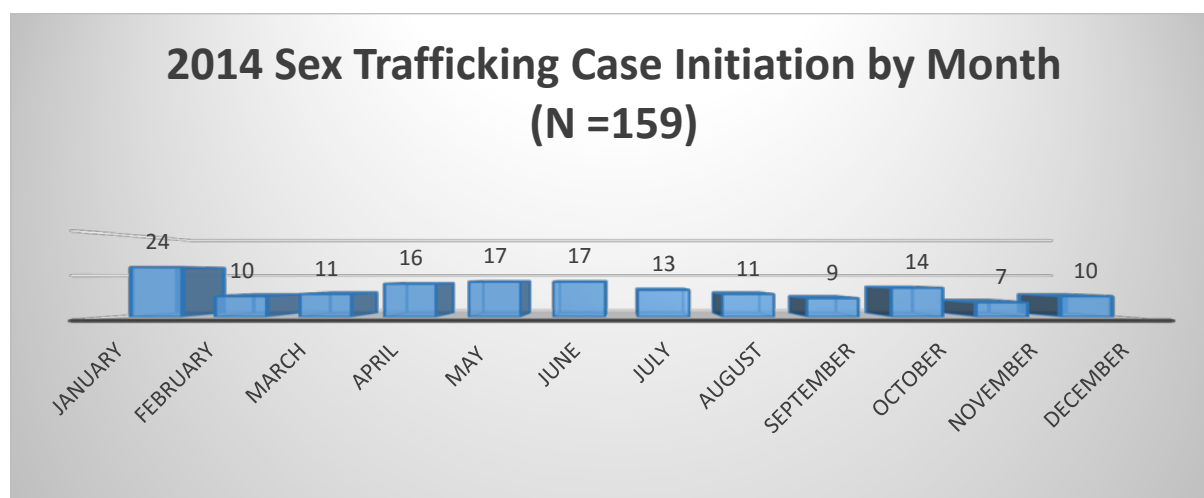
Victim Type	# of cases	% of cases analyzed
Adult	54	34%
Minor	99	62.3%
Both	5	3.1%

Decoy	1	.6%
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Each sex trafficking case ranged between having one victim to four victims, with the average of 1.1 victims. While incidents of multiple victims are not uncommon, the data shows each case was more likely to have one victim. Of the 190 victims, 67 (35.3%) were adult victims, and 123 (64.7%) were minors (under the age of 18). There were five cases (3.1%) that involved both an adult and a minor. The 159 sex trafficking cases were analyzed and in 89 cases (56%) the sex trafficker(s) was identified. Instances with more than one sex trafficker were identified in 18 cases (11.3%).

### Overall Case Analysis

Thirty (18.9%) of the cases involved the transportation of a victim to Nevada from another state for the purpose of sex trafficking the victim. Cases were developed throughout 2014 with the most cases (n=24) developed in January followed by May (n=17) and June (n=17).



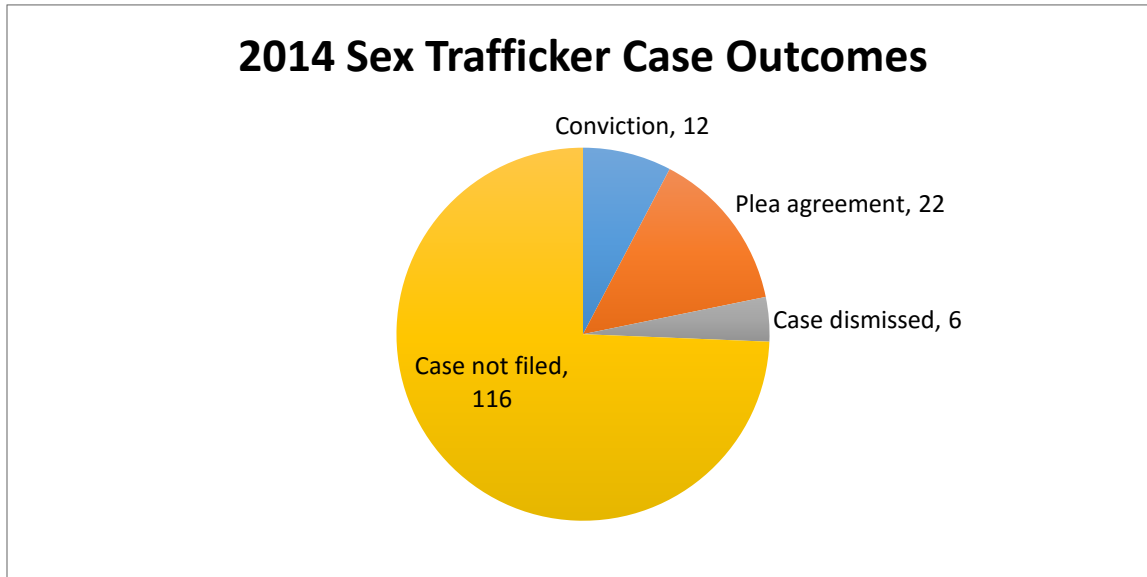
### Case Outcomes

The challenges of developing a case, collecting evidence to support prosecution and having a willing victim emerged while examining the outcomes of the 159 cases. In only 23.9% (n=38) of the cases was the sex trafficking victim cooperative with the collection of evidence for arrest and prosecution of their sex trafficker. Some victims were cooperative during their first interviews but then left the state and refused to return. Other victims were uncooperative initially and then shared some information, but not enough to warrant an arrest of the sex trafficker. Overall, minors, in particular, were uncooperative with only 16.3% cooperating and 37.7% of adults working with Law Enforcement on the development of the criminal case against the sex trafficker.

In the 40 cases that were filed by Law Enforcement for prosecution, the time between the first report and an arrest of a sex trafficker ranged from the same day as the report (n=23, 57.5%) and 365 days with an average of 29 days. This demonstrates the variability and complexity of the

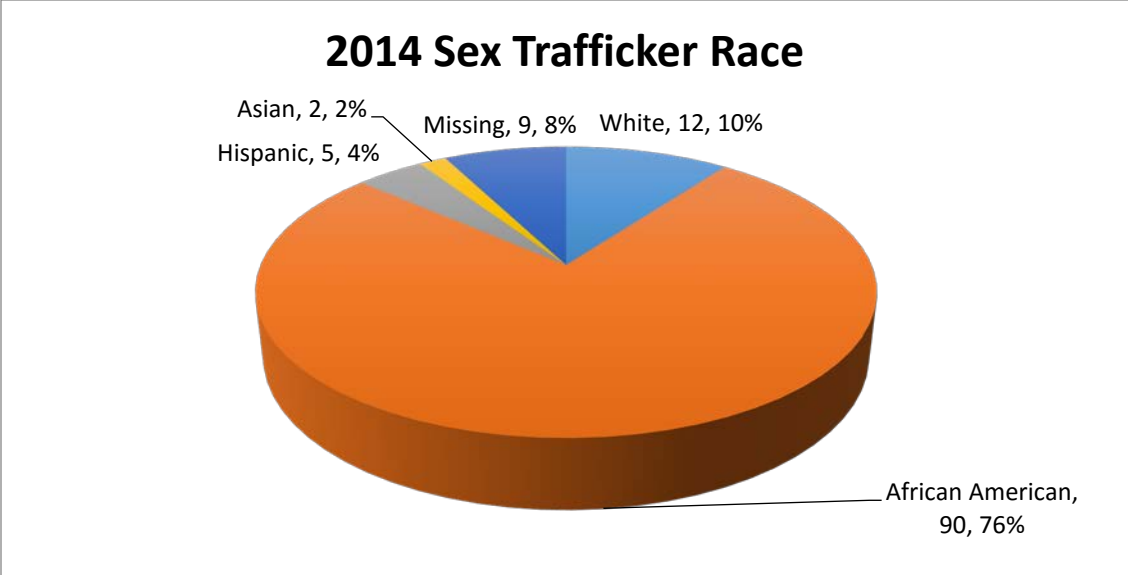
case development required for an arrest for a sex trafficking case with an average of 29 days needed to build arrest materials.

Nearly three-quarters (n =116) of the cases were never filed (73.4%). Forty cases were filed but six (3.8%) were dismissed (due to not enough evidence or the victim didn't show up for court), twelve cases (7.6%) had a conviction and 22 cases (14%) were pled out by the defendant(s).



### Sex Trafficker Description

In the sex trafficking cases, 118 sex traffickers were identified. The sex traffickers were mostly males (n =103, 87.3%) with only 15 (12.7%) females. The age was known of 101 of the sex traffickers, with their age ranging from age 18 to 59 years old with the average age of 29 years old. Race was identified for 109 (92.3%) sex traffickers with more than three quarters identified as African American.



*Relationship Between Sex Trafficker and Victim*

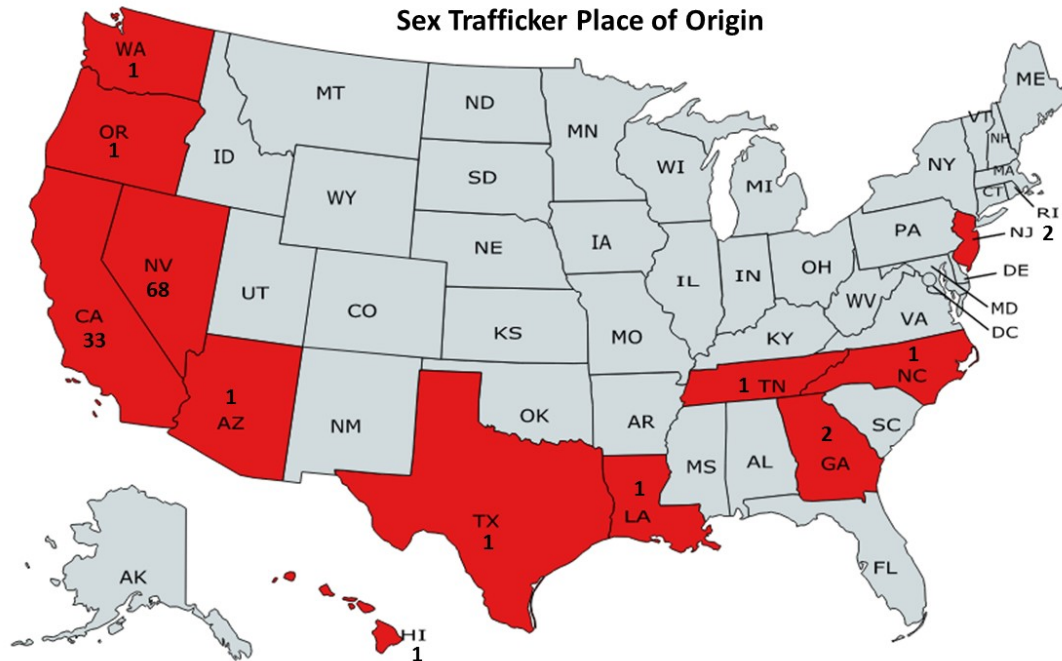
Of the 101 sex traffickers, the relationship between them and the victim was identified in 70 (69.3%) cases. The most common relationship was found in more than a third of the cases (37.6%) was of boyfriend followed by a stranger (12.9%).

Boyfriend	Friend	Stranger	Employer	Girlfriend	Mother	Cousin
38	12	13	2	2	1	2

*Movement of Sex Traffickers*

Of the cases with sex traffickers identified (n =89), 30.3% (n =27) had recently come from another state, often traveling with the victims, while the rest were residing in Nevada and had some form of residence. Of the sex traffickers with a known residence outside of Nevada, the majority (n =18, 66.6%) were from California (Oakland, San Bernardino, Moreno Valley, Alameda, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Lancaster, Alta Loma, Desert Hot Springs). Two sex traffickers were from Georgia and one each from Arizona, Hawaii, Louisiana, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington. Of the sex traffickers from states other than Nevada, 62.9% were involved with a sex trafficking case involving a minor.





In fourteen cases (15.7%), one out of every six cases, at least one of the sex traffickers was a member of an identified gang. The gangs included:

- |                            |                      |           |
|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------|
| Bloods                     | Inglewood Family     | Hope Gang |
| Black Rag Mafia            | Gangster Bloods      | Sureno    |
| 12St in Desert Hot Springs | Gangster Disciple    | Cartel    |
| 59ECC                      | Gerson Park Kingsmen |           |

### *Violence and Weapons*

A weapon was used by the sex trafficker in 22 of the cases (13.8%). weapons included: a .45 handgun, a long barreled gun, a samurai sword, and a revolver.

Weapons were used in the sex trafficking cases by the trafficker to sexually assault the victim (*raped her with a knife to her throat, he scared her with a gun before raping her*) or to hurt the victim (*he used the butt of a hand gun to knock out the victim's teeth, he stabbed her in the side and slashed her face with a knife, she cut the victim's face with a small knife as she screamed at her*), and to scare the victim (*he shot another pimp, he told her about shooting another girl that used to work for him, he shot at her mother's house*). In one case the sex trafficker was found in possession of a stolen firearm from a robbery in Utah. Kidnapping was a part of the sex trafficking activities in fifteen cases (9.4%). One victim reported that she watched her sex trafficker shoot another sex trafficker who was trying to recruit her.

### *Types of Sex Traffickers*

Romeo pimps woo victims through the use of promises for a better future, protection, and the finer things in life (Roe-Sepowitz, Hickie, Dahlstedt, & Gallagher, 2014; Williamson & Cluse-

Tolar, 2002). Romeo pimps tend to find vulnerabilities in the victim and make promises to meet those needs, while also charming the victim and working to establish a relationship based on financial and emotional dependency (Morselli & Savoie-Gargiso, 2014). Victims may identify a Romeo pimp as a boyfriend or even a husband. A Guerrilla pimp is a term used to describe a trafficker who uses violence and terror as a means to control and dominate victims (Kennedy et al., 2007). Tactics used by a Guerrilla pimp may include sexual and physical assault, kidnapping, and threats of violence toward the victim and the victim's loved ones. Guerrilla pimps do not groom victims through forming emotional attachments, but through the use of fear. The "bottom bitch," sometimes referred to as the "bottom," is considered the trafficker's most trusted worker. Often, the bottom is the trafficker's highest earner and is the one who has been with the trafficker the longest (Weinkauff, 2010). The bottom may become responsible for recruiting other individuals, for grooming and teaching others the "rules of the game", for posting ads for the other individuals, for handling money, and may even dole out punishments. Parents or relatives may also be involved or responsible for the victimization of a sex trafficking victim.

Of the 89 cases in which a sex trafficker was identified, more than half (52.8%, n =47) of the sex traffickers were a Romeo-type pimp. Romeo-type pimps were more often found in the cases with minor victims than in the cases with adult victims. Guerrilla pimps were identified in 41 cases, but in 22 (46.8%) of the Romeo-type pimp cases, the Romeo-type pimp changed to become a Guerrilla pimp using violence, threats, and fear to keep the victims in the sex trafficking situation. In four cases the primary pimp was identified as a 'bottom' but in six other cases, there was a bottom involved in the sex trafficking victimization along with a male primary pimp.

## **Recruitment & Retention Methods of the Trafficker**

### *Differing techniques*

In the 89 cases with details about the sex trafficker and their behavior, social media was used to connect to the victims in 29% (n =26) of the known sex trafficker cases. Facebook was used in 17 cases (19%), Instagram in eight cases (9%), Plenty of Fish, Twitter and Snapchat all had one case. The sex traffickers also made contact with victims in person at various locations including on the street, at the Greyhound bus station, and the shopping mall. Other recruitment methods included 28 (31.5%) cases through a romantic relationship, with the victim identifying the sex trafficker as their boyfriend/girlfriend. In two (2.2%) cases a friend introduced them to the sex trafficker, and a family member introduced the victim to the sex trafficker in four (4.5%) of the cases. Fraud, or the promise of something (love, lots of money/fortune, that they would be taken care of, that they would be protected), was used by the sex trafficker in 39 (43.8%) cases where the sex trafficker information was available.

### *Physical Violence used by the Sex Trafficker*

Of the 89 cases with a known sex trafficker, 50 (56.2%) of the cases involved physical violence by the sex trafficker to force the victim to participate in prostitution. Physical violence was inflicted by sex traffickers through the use of physical assault and assault with an object or

deadly weapon. Physical assault included acts such as pushing a victim out of a moving vehicle, using a hand to punch, slap, or choke the victim, kicking the victim, and pulling the victim's hair. Use of a weapon included acts such as using a cord or belt buckle to whip the victim, shooting the victim with a gun, using a knife to stab the victim, burning the victim, using the butt of a gun to knock the victim's teeth out, using a razor to cut the bottom of the victim's feet, and pouring battery acid on the victim.

#### *Psychological Violence used by Sex Trafficker*

Psychological violence was used by the sex trafficker in 44 (49.4%) cases. Psychological violence was inflicted by sex traffickers through the use of rules, threats of violence, name-calling, and withholding food, money, and ability to sleep. Threats made by the sex traffickers toward victims included threats to severely harm or kill the victim, threats to severely harm or kill the victim's family, threats to severely harm or kill the victim's children, threats to kick the victim out or force the victim to be homeless, and threats to have the victim arrested. Victims reported having food, water, sleep, and important items such as identification withheld from them to keep the victim under the trafficker's control.

#### *Sexual Violence used by Sex Trafficker*

In ten (11.2%) cases, sexual violence was used by the sex trafficker on the victim in the sex trafficking situation. Sexual assault was repeatedly reported as a means of torture or control over victims. Victims reported experiencing vaginal and anal rape by their sex trafficker, as well as being forced to perform oral sex. Sexual assault was reportedly used as a means to condition the victim, threaten or overpower the victim, or punish the victim. Victims also reported being forced to perform sexual acts with the sex trafficker's friends.

#### *Rules and Expectations in the Sex Trafficking Situation*

Explicit rules were explained to the sex trafficking victims by their sex traffickers in 45 (50.6%) of the 89 cases of known sex traffickers. Rules included quotas (how much the victim needed to earn through selling sex each day), which ranged from \$200 to \$1200. Other typical rules included:

- No black male customers
- Do not look at another black male, they are a pimp and will take you
- Just make Daddy money and everything will be ok
- Call the sex trafficker Daddy
- Steal from the tricks
- Steal watches and wallets
- Break after every trick to give the trafficker the money
- How much to charge for sex acts (quickie, full sex, oral sex, anal sex)
- How to identify cops
- To use condoms
- To charge more for not using a condom
- Not allowed to contact family
- No Facebook or social media access
- Steal the insurance card from the tricks (to get personal information to open credit cards)
- Never take money directly from a customer, have them put it on the bed

- Get all the money from your tricks up front
- If you don't meet your quota you cannot eat or sleep
- No days off
- If you talk to another pimp you will be beaten
- Do not call it a price, call the money for the sex a donation
- When in casinos don't walk down the center, walk on the edges

*Sex Trafficker Venues*

Of the cases with details about the sex trafficker's behavior (n =89), the venues where the victim were advertised or sold for sex varied and in many cases multiple venues were used by the sex trafficker. Thirty-three (37.1%) cases involved the sex trafficker putting ads online to sell the victim. Online venues included backpage.com (n=26) craigslist.com (n =13), myscarletbook.com (n =10), and mojovillage.com (n =7). Sixty-five (34.3%) of the victims were sex trafficked on the street, and 50 (26.3%) were sex trafficked in casinos. Eight (4.2%) victims were trafficked on social media (Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat). Eight victims (4.2%) were sold to persons known to the sex trafficker (word of mouth) while three (1.6%) were employed by escort agencies. Thirteen (6.8%) victims were employed by strip/gentlemen's clubs while being sex trafficked.

*Criminal Histories of the Sex Traffickers*

Ninety-five (80.5%) of the 118 sex traffickers had histories of previous arrests. The age of the first offense for the 95 sex traffickers with a criminal history ranged from age 9 to 32 years old with an average of 17.5 years. Excluding administrative criminal events, such as violation of probation or arrest for a warrant, the sex traffickers had an average lifetime history of 12.6 crimes.

Criminal histories of the 95 sex traffickers were divided into fifteen categories and the first crime committed was explored for each criminal record.

Crime type	# as first offense	Percentage of total
Assault/Battery	19	20%
Theft	15	15.8%
Drug Related	13	13.7%
Property	8	8.4%
Robbery	7	7.4%
Domestic Violence	6	6.3%
Burglary	5	5.3%
Traffic/driving related offense	5	5.3%
Vice related crimes	4	4.2%
Auto theft	4	4.2%
Fraud	2	2.1%
Weapon related	2	2.1%
Sex crime	2	2.1%

Homicide/murder	1	1%
Child abuse	1	1%

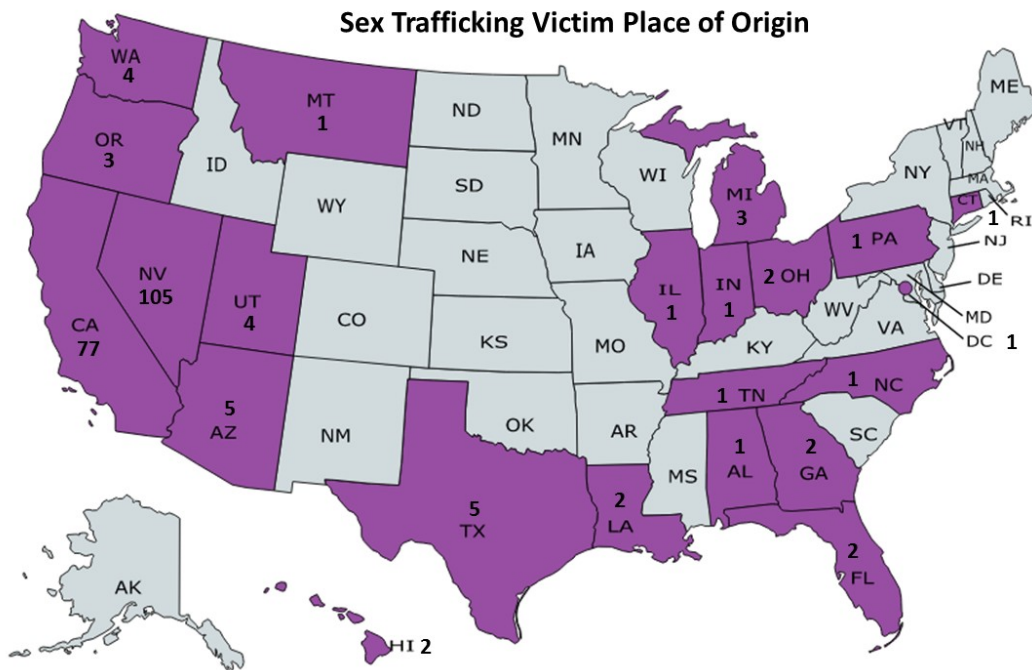
Twenty (21.1%) of the 95 cases with criminal histories had a previous vice-related crime with thirteen (13.7%) had a previous arrest for one or more of the following crimes: sex trafficking, promoting prostitution, pandering, or living off the earnings of a prostitute. One out of every seven sex traffickers had a previous sex trafficking related charge. Five (5.3%) had previous prostitution charges.

In the criminal records, domestic violence arrests were found for 37 (38.9%) sex traffickers, homicide/murder charges were found for 9 (9.5%) traffickers, kidnapping charges were found for 10 (10.5%) traffickers, and previous weapons charges for 43 (45.3%) of the traffickers.

### Sex Trafficking Victim Description

#### *Movement of Victims*

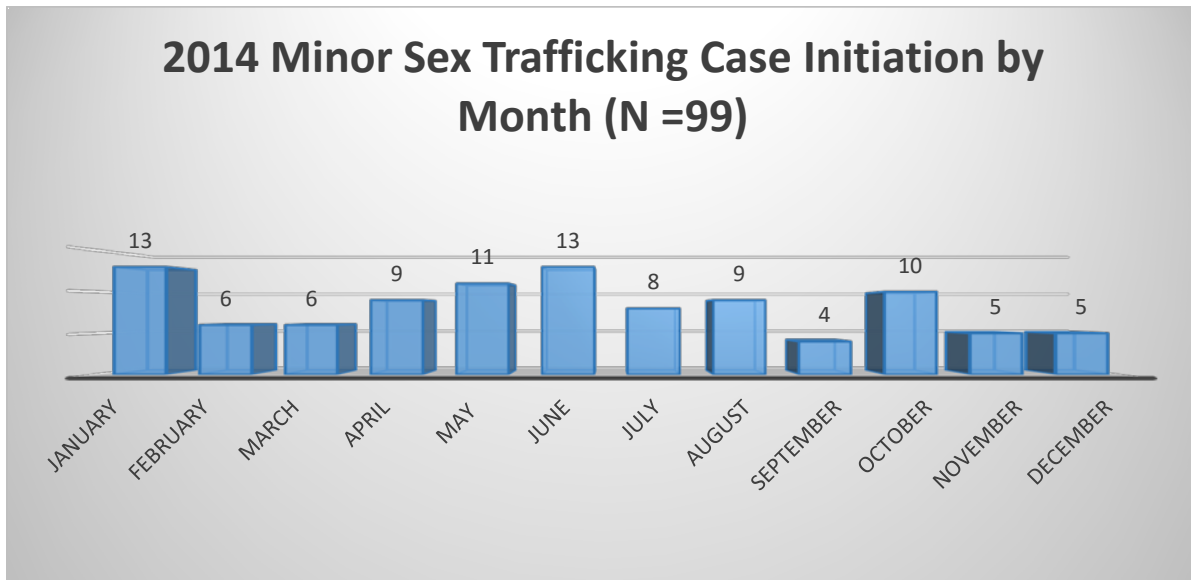
Thirty-nine (20.5%) of the sex trafficking victims reported being taken across state lines for the purpose of being prostituted by the sex trafficker. This included traveling from another state with the sex trafficker to Nevada where they were identified as well as the sex trafficker taking them to other states to prostitute during the sex trafficking victimization.



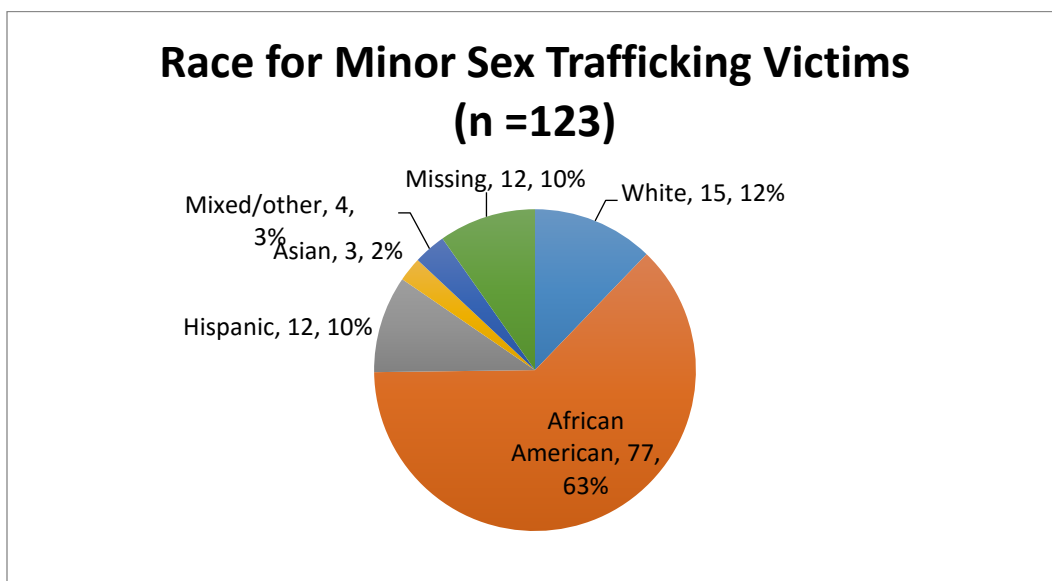
### Case Information

#### Minor Cases

In this report, 123 minor sex trafficking victims from 99 sex trafficking cases were explored. The 99 cases of minor sex trafficking were developed throughout 2014 with the most cases (n =13) developed in both January and June.

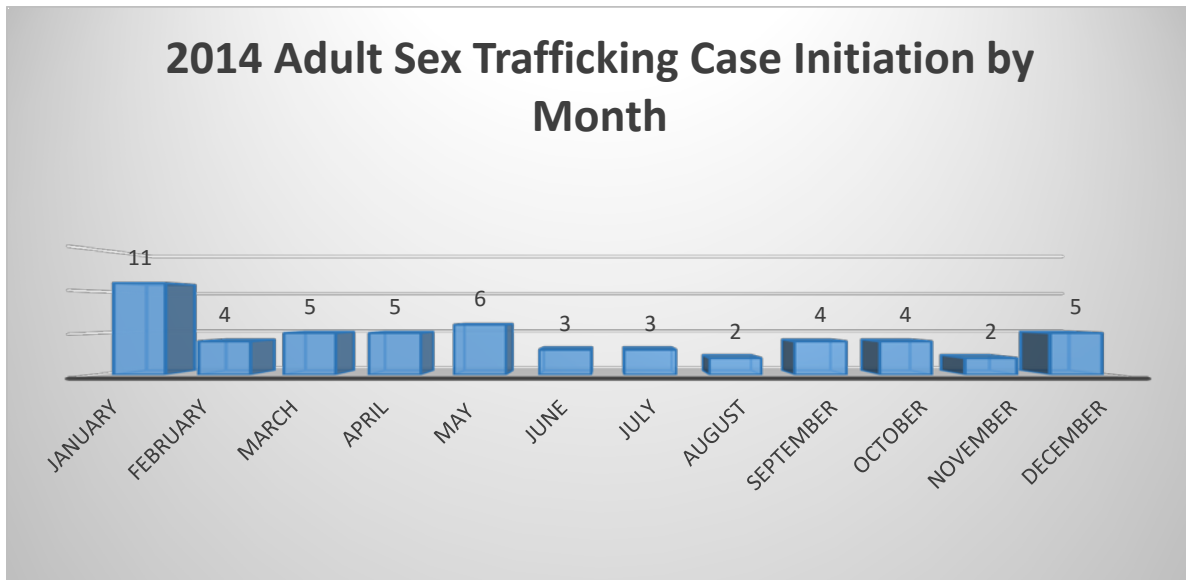


More than a quarter (n =25, 26.2%) of the minors cases involved the minor being contacted by law enforcement in the company of an adult female who was also involved in the prostitution activity. The average age of the minor sex trafficking victims was 16 years old ranging from age 12 to 17. Fifty-six (45.5%) of the minor victims had a missing person’s report filed for them. Of the 123 minor sex trafficking victims, race information was available for 111 (90.2%). For minor victims, the most common race identified was African American (n =77, 63%) followed by White (n =15, 12%).

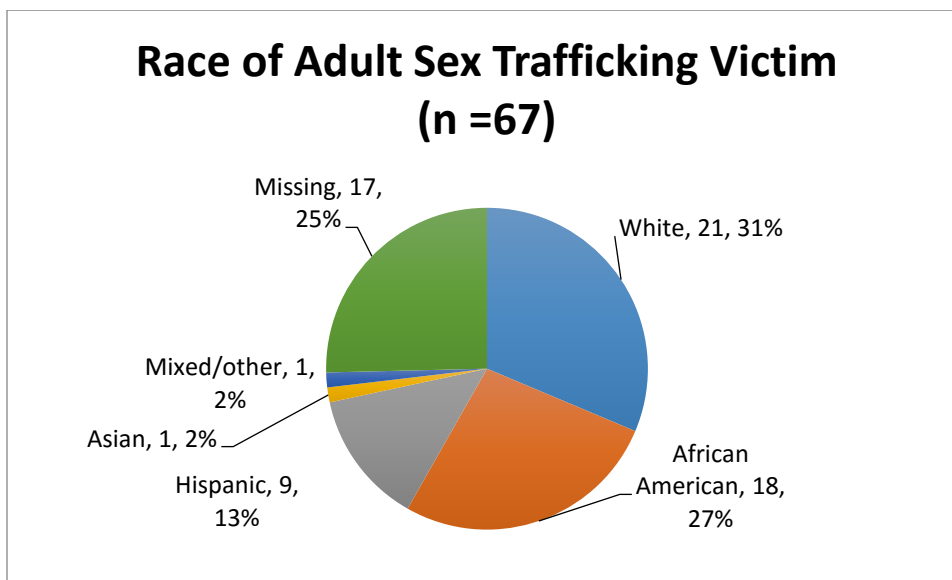


**Adult Cases**

There were 54 cases of adult sex trafficking developed throughout 2014 with the most cases (n =11) developed in January followed by May (n=6).



The average age of the 67 adult sex trafficking victims was 23.8 years old ranging from age 18 to 47. Race was known for 50 of the adult sex trafficking victims with the largest group being White (n =21, 31.3%) followed by African American (n =18, 26.7%).



**Comparing Minor and Adult cases**

*Sex Traffickers of minors compared to sex traffickers of adults*

The sex traffickers of minors only were significantly younger and closer to the age of their victims than sex traffickers of adults only (27.42 years vs. 32.6 years) ( $t(81) = 2.83, p = .006$ ).

When comparing the minor sex trafficking cases with the adult sex trafficking cases, the adult victims were significantly more likely to cooperate with law enforcement to identify their sex trafficker and proceed with the case. Thirty-seven percent of adult victims cooperated with law enforcement compared to 16.3% of minor victims ( $X^2(2, N = 156) = 8.75, p <.02$ ).

Sex traffickers of minors were more likely to be Romeo-pimps when compared to the sex traffickers of adults with 96% of the sex traffickers of minors were Romeo-type pimps while 64.7% of the sex traffickers of adults were Romeo-type pimps ( $X^2(1, N = 59) = 8.213, p <.01$ ). Sex traffickers of minors were more likely to use social media to recruit than the sex traffickers of adults ( $X^2(1, N = 40) = 4.748, p <.05$ ) as well as post the victims on online sex selling venues ( $X^2(1, N = 47) = 5.24, p <.05$ ). Sex traffickers of minors were also more likely to force the victims to sell sex on the street than sex traffickers of adults ( $X^2(1, N = 65) = 12.707, p <.001$ ) as well as more likely to force their victims to work in multiple venues (street, casino, online ads) ( $X^2(1, N = 57) = 7.782, p <.01$ ).

Venue	Adults (n =67)	Minors (n =123)
Online ads	12 (17.9%)	27 (22%)
Casino	13 (19.4%)	33 (26.8%)
Street	15 (22.4%)	48 (39%)

## Discussion

This study describes in detail the sex trafficking cases of the LVMPD developed during 2014. The majority of the cases involved an unwilling victim, a complex and violent case that often included a victim’s boyfriend shifting to a violent sex trafficker.

Case patterns found included:

- Less than a quarter of the identified victims were cooperative with law enforcement to develop a sex trafficking case against their sex trafficker. Less than 20% of the minors identified as sex trafficking victims cooperated with law enforcement.
- A significant number of the victims left the state of Nevada and refused or were unable to return to assist in the development of the criminal case against their sex trafficker(s). Travel funding was not regularly available to bring the victim back to Nevada for the case.
- One out of five victims (n =39, 20.5%) were brought from another state to Las Vegas by their sex trafficker(s) for the purpose of being sex trafficked/prostituted. This strongly negatively influenced the participation of the victim with law enforcement as many quickly left Las Vegas and could not be located by law enforcement.
- The average sex trafficker was a 29-year old African American male.
- The average minor victim was a 16-year old African American Female.
- The average adult victim was a 23-year old White female.
- Less than half of the minors had a missing person’s report filed for them, indicating that while using missing person’s reports is an important tool when for looking for possible sex trafficked minors but that family disconnection and ‘throwaway’ status of minors may also be contributors to the minor being vulnerable to the sex trafficker.



- Law enforcement had limited ability to charge sex traffickers with lesser crimes (lower than sex trafficking) as they develop the case and if the case is not strong enough to charge with sex trafficking, the entire case, in some situations, involving charges including kidnapping and/or sexual assault are dropped completely.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study illustrates the challenges facing those tasked with serving the needs of sex trafficking victims in a major metropolitan area through investigation and prosecution. Perhaps the most important takeaway from this study is the fact there exists a finite capacity for law enforcement to investigate these complex cases due to a number of factors. The first important implication from this report is the sheer volume of sex trafficking cases confronted by the LVMPD. In 2014, this unit of 12 investigators was responsible for investigating cases involving 247 potential sex trafficking victims. The Vice & Sex Trafficking Investigations Section, therefore, averaged 20.6 new sex trafficking victims per month.

The complexity of these investigations is illustrated not only in its victim count and caseload, but also by its victim type and level of cooperation. Ninety-nine of the reviewed cases (64.7%) involved minor victims totaling 123 distinct victims, yet of that number, only 16 victims (16.3%) cooperated with law enforcement in building a case against their trafficker. This compares similarly to incidents of sex trafficking involving adult victims (148 total) in which only 40 victims (27.7%) cooperated with law enforcement in building a case against their trafficker. There are numerous psychological factors that influence victim self-identification, trafficker manipulation of victims and willingness to cooperate, yet from an ethical and practical perspective, law enforcement must still invest the time in each case with the hope that it will end in suspect identification, arrest, prosecution, and conviction.

Victim maintenance is considered among the most challenging and most necessary factors in ensuring a successful prosecution of a sex trafficking case. However, given the nature of the victimization experienced by sex trafficking victims, law enforcement is often under-prepared to assist in their maintenance particularly when addressing the impact of violence. Violence against the victim(s) is a common factor in virtually every sex trafficking investigation. There are three types of violence one must be aware of when assisting sex trafficking victims – the visible, the less visible and the invisible. Visible evidence of violence is most noticeable following physical assaults on victims that occurred in 138 (56.2%) victims. This includes evident bruising, swelling, broken bones and other temporary disfigurement that are the result of trafficker inflicted “discipline.” Less visible violence often takes the form of sexual violence, as has occurred in 27 (11.2%) of the cases reviewed in this study. This type of sexual violence is often hidden and reluctantly shared by a cooperative victim and only becomes known through victim disclosure or during a medical exam. Finally, the most difficult type of violence to identify is invisible violence – psychological violence. In 122 (49.4%) of all cases studied, psychological violence was employed as a means to control trafficking victims. Described as the chains you cannot see, psychological violence is perhaps the most powerful tool at a trafficker’s disposal and many times paired with either physical or sexual violence or both.

It is clear from this research that sex trafficking investigations are complex. In only 89 of 159 cases (56%) studied was the trafficker even identified through means that include witness identification or investigation leaving an additional 70 cases (44%) that were unable to proceed past the point of victim identification. For those cases that did proceed, the average time to completion was 29 days per case with a range of one day to one year for case completion. Given the rate at which new cases come in and the rate at which they can conclude, it places an operational burden on the investigating unit to prioritize their efforts towards those cases that are most likely 1) solvable and 2) prosecutable. There were 116 cases (73.4%) never filed for prosecution for a number of reasons and 40 (25.1%) were filed for charges resulting in 12 (7.6%) convictions, 22 (14%) plea agreements, and 6 (3.8%) dismissals.

What does this mean to those tasked with sex trafficking investigations? This research indicates that the complexity of sex trafficking investigations makes it necessary for law enforcement to consider a multitude of factors at the outset of any investigation. Chief among these factors is the critical necessity to develop an authentic and genuine relationship with the victim that is based more so in victim care than it is in case management. Victim maintenance is necessary to ensure that a level of trust is developed early on that illustrates to the victim that law enforcement has their best interests in mind, that there are options to safely exit their abusive and sexually exploitative relationship with their trafficker, that their cooperation is key to prosecutorial accountability for the trafficker and that there is a holistic post-case plan in place to ensure their successful reclamation of their previous life free from harm. As illustrated by this research, uncooperative victims, who have numerous valid reasons for not assisting law enforcement, are the key challenge to overcome with regards to holding traffickers criminally accountable.

Other key takeaways from this research include a need for law enforcement to break down existing investigative silos and to assume a more open approach to sex trafficking investigations. As sexual violence is often used as an element of control over sex trafficking victims, this fact alone meets most states requirements to define a domestic relationship covered by domestic violence laws. As was seen throughout this research, collaborations between Vice and Domestic Violence detectives will provide both different avenues of investigation and, from the domestic violence side, a service provision pipeline to assist in victim recovery.

From a juvenile sex trafficking victim perspective, a similar relationship must be built with Missing Persons Units as only 45 (45.5%) of all minor sex trafficking victims identified were the subject of missing person's reports. Finally, what is clear from this research and other studies in the field is that sex trafficking is becoming equally prevalent in a virtual environment. Nearly 33% of all cases studied had a direct connection to social media platforms that require near constant monitoring and a certain technological expertise to effectively mine crucial investigative details. While Backpage.com remains the most common venue for sexual exploitation, other sites are beginning to be used as traffickers are learning from previously used investigative and prosecutorial techniques and successes. Integrating a near full-time cyber-

investigative capacity into sex trafficking investigations is not only sound investigative management, it is an absolute necessity as the sex trafficking environment is aggressively moving away from the streets and onto the internet.

### **Conclusion**

This report illustrates that the crime of sex trafficking is a violent crime and is a violent form of organized crime and it should be treated as such. Money and resources are needed to manage and investigate the cases properly. A victim advocate directly embedded within the Vice and Human Trafficking Investigations Unit is absolutely necessary. There needs to be more case management of sex trafficking victims to allow detectives to focus on the proactive development of cases to prevent more victimization. Without this increased victim advocacy and support services, this report shows that it is difficult to keep the victim involved with the prosecution of their trafficker and to stay out of the 'life' and away from the bonds of the trafficker. Education of our law enforcement and community leadership and fostering intolerance to the abject victimization and violence right in front of us are the key to addressing sex trafficking in the Las Vegas Community.

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