

THORN

# Survivor Insights

The Role of Technology  
in Domestic Minor  
Sex Trafficking

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I felt like a slave working for someone, getting beat and not getting paid, not having control over my own life.

– Survey Respondent

# Executive Summary

## STAT HIGHLIGHTS

# 260

Survivors of DMST

# 1 in 6

Trafficked under the age of twelve

# 75%

Of those who entered the life in 2004 or later were advertised online

In an effort to strategically inform technology initiatives for combating domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST), Thorn partnered with Dr. Vanessa Bouché at Texas Christian University to survey survivors about their experiences. The survey focused on understanding what role technology played in a victim's recruitment into, time while in, and exit from DMST.

Two hundred and sixty survivors of DMST, through 24 survivor organizations, spanning 14 states, completed the survey.

The majority of participants identified as female (98%), 2% as male, and 1% as "other".<sup>1</sup> Sixty-seven percent identified as heterosexual, 25% bisexual, 5% homosexual, 2% "other", and 1% "don't know". Among those identifying race (n=243), 45% reported African American, 27% Caucasian, 21% Hispanic, and 8% "other".

## Two central themes emerged from survey responses:

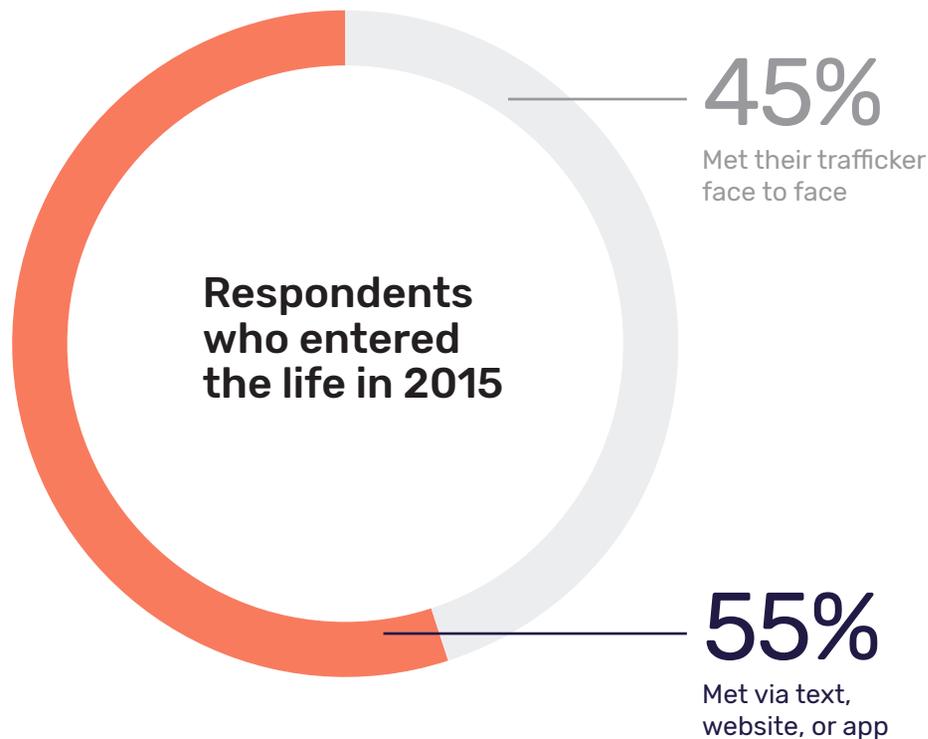
- 1 Technology is playing an increasing role in grooming and controlling victims of DMST.**
- 2 Less familiar forms of DMST, including those trafficked by family members or without a clear trafficker, emerged in the DMST landscape. However, consistent in all types of DMST observed are common experiences of childhood abuse and neglect.**

These themes suggest an important understanding about the nature of DMST and the role of technology. The need for human connection, and the vulnerabilities that arise in the absence thereof, are central to the recruitment, control, and recovery of DMST survivors. Use of technology is likely to continue to increase; however, technology is unlikely to extinguish the human element of DMST.

<sup>1</sup> Does not total to 100% due to rounding.

## Role of technology is increasing

Not surprisingly, use of technology by traffickers, victims, and buyers is increasing. The Internet and cellular technology offer individuals the opportunity to stay connected around the clock and from any distance, and it offers access - to information, goods, and people - that previously was out of reach. These same benefits support its growing popularity in DMST.



**RECRUITMENT AND GROOMING.** Across the sample, most traffickers continue to meet and groom victims through face to face contact. However, respondents who entered the life in 2015 noted much higher uses of technology in this process. Across the sample, 84% reported meeting their trafficker for the first time face to face, but **only 45% of those entering the life in 2015 reported meeting their trafficker face to face. The remaining 55% reported use of text, website, or app.** Similarly, 85% of the entire sample reported their trafficker spent time with them in person to build a relationship. By comparison, only 58% of those who entered the life in 2015 reported time in person as the means for building a relationship. Of those whose trafficker used technology in this process, 63% reported communicating online and 25% reported communicating via phone call.

Importantly, 2015 data deviated from the rest of the sample; therefore, continued investigation into the use of technology in meeting and grooming victims is required. However, the findings do show that while meeting in person was the singular dominant method of developing a close relationship in the past, it is now a dominant method while technology-based modes of communicating are increasing in usage.

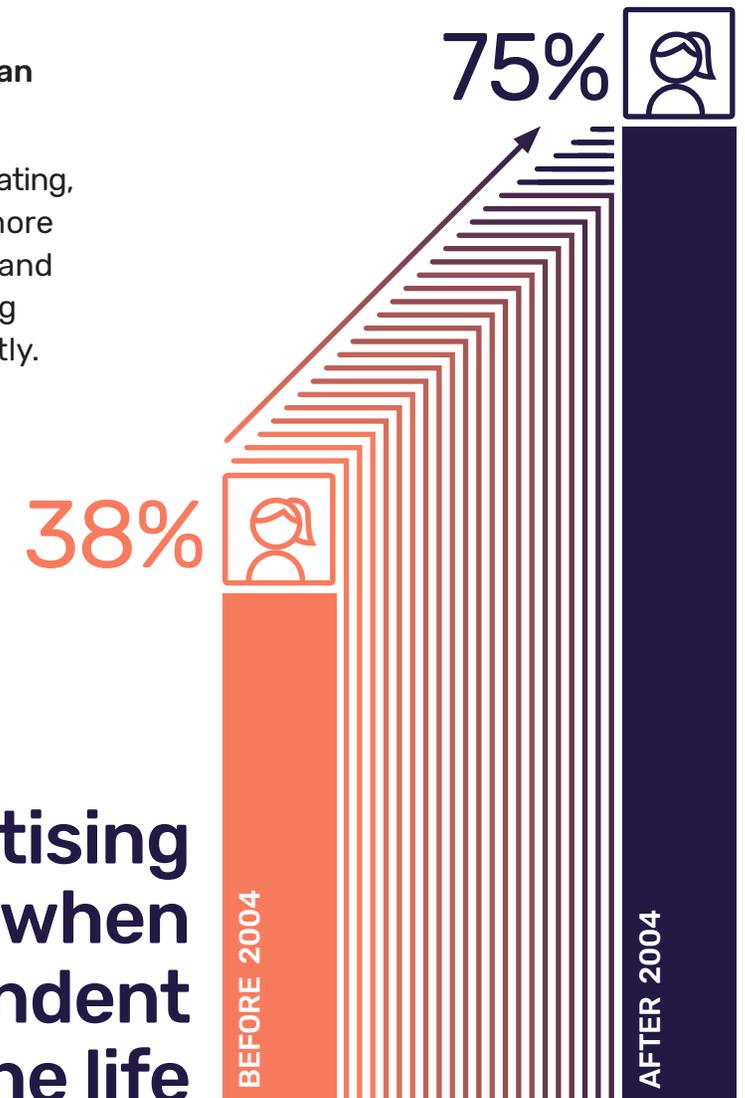
**EXPERIENCE IN THE LIFE.** While in the life, most victims do have access to the Internet and 90% of those report using social media. Victims are using social media to communicate with family, friends, traffickers, and buyers. Interestingly, findings suggest **monitoring of both Internet and cell phone use is decreasing.** The most popular websites accessed by victims were Facebook, Backpage, Craigslist, Instagram, and Google.

Online advertising is increasing while advertising on the street is decreasing. Prior to 2004, the predominant forum for advertising was on the street (78%) and only 38% were advertised online. By comparison, **for those who entered the life in or after 2004, street advertising had dropped to 61% and online advertising had increased to 75%.** The most frequently reported platform for online advertising was Backpage. The next most popular sites included Craigslist, RedBook, SugarDaddy, and Facebook.

Online advertising was also associated with an increased number of buyers per day. One in seven respondents who were advertised on the street reported more than 10 buyers per day. By comparison, one in four respondents who were advertised online reported **more than 10 buyers per day.**

By using remote means of communicating, traffickers are able to engage with more victims and buyers simultaneously and around the clock, thereby expanding their reach and influence significantly.

## Online advertising based on when respondent entered the life



## Less familiar trafficking experiences and shared vulnerabilities

Survey responses underscored numerous social factors that influenced respondents' experiences while in the life, and later on their road to recovery. Adverse childhood experiences increased vulnerability of exploitation. Recurring victimization by those in positions of trust bred distorted views of self-worth, love, and security.

The survey found that the median age entering the life was 14 years old. This corroborates other research on DMST showing that the average age of entry

into commercial sexual exploitation is roughly 12 to 14 years old. While **the most frequently reported age of entry into the life was 15, one in six participants reported being trafficked before the age of 12 with the youngest victims less than 1 year old.**

Respondents described a range of trafficking experiences in the life including the following general categories: familial, non-familial, or no trafficker. The survey found that in some cases children may be born into sex trafficking, or be forced into it as a toddler. Sex trafficking of those that are younger than 10 years old when they entered the life is perpetrated

almost exclusively by family members, often a father or stepfather. This early entrapment in the life colored their understanding of individual value or purpose with one respondent stating it was explained to them as *"what all little girls and boys do for their parents"*. Another underscored that being trafficked by a family member made escape seem impossible, stating *"I could never escape. I never have anyone to turn to. I didn't have a choice. I was born into this."*

## Participants' age of entry into the life

<1 Youngest age reported

12

15 Most frequently reported age

ONE IN SIX WERE  
UNDER THE AGE OF 12



Respondents who entered the life after age 11, were most likely to be trafficked by strangers, followed by people in their social network. In some cases, respondents reported a trafficker's offer of food and shelter was their first step into the life. In other cases, a trafficker's promise of love and wealth helped to earned their trust.

Even among those that were not trafficked by their own family, the survey results reveal that many DMST victims experienced some form of childhood abuse and neglect, reporting high rates of verbal, physical, or sexual abuse. Given these adverse childhood experiences, two out of three participants had experiences with either foster care or juvenile detention. These environments likely increased exposure to negative influences including traffickers or other victims of DMST that used their access to recruit new victims.

Throughout the report there are some significant differences between those who had a trafficker while in the life and those who reported that they did not. Nineteen percent of participants reported that they did not have a trafficker. It is likely a trafficker existed in some of these cases, but was not recognized as such by the respondent. Analysis of responses found that 42% of these respondents were subject to physical and psychological coercion by someone in relation to DMST. Others reported engaging in survival sex for access to food, drugs, or other needs.

Those reporting no trafficker appeared to have significantly more freedom, evidenced by having fewer buyers per day, being able to use their phones more frequently, having unmonitored Internet access, advertising less, and being less likely to say that they wanted help exiting the life.

Even after exiting the life, many do not characterize themselves as victims and may continue to romanticize their relationship with the trafficker. **Less than one quarter have seen their trafficker prosecuted and when asked if they would want to pursue prosecution of their trafficker, a strong majority (88%) reported they would not.**

## Recommendations

Findings of the survey support many initiatives currently underway to combat DMST such as supporting stable and loving homes, increasing awareness in the community, and expanding available support resources such as shelters and job training. These efforts play an important role in protecting vulnerable children and identifying traffickers, and should be sustained and grown when possible. In addition, survey responses suggest several opportunities for improved prevention, intervention, and recovery.

Prevention programs must be aimed directly at children and youth, and therefore require

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“It’s easy to get in and hard to get out.”

– Survey Respondent

examining those places where children and youth – especially the highest risk – are likely to be. Survey responses indicate most children were in school while in the life, and most had experiences with the foster care or juvenile detention systems at some point. **Schools were also noted by survivors as a key opportunity for intervention** noting, *“A teacher would have been the most helpful to either give me the number [of the helpline] or call for me.”*

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“A teacher would have been the most helpful to either give me the number [of the helpline] or call for me.”

**Given the increasing use of technology for grooming victims and advertising to buyers, tech companies are uniquely positioned to combat DMST and engage with victims.** For example, findings suggest increasing use of social media and apps by buyers to communicate with traffickers and victims. Further examination of patterns in this process could help industry identify bad actors on their platforms. Tech companies could also deliver online help advertisements via platforms frequented by victims. For example, most respondents reported they never saw a helpline number while in the life, and those that did not see the helpline number

encouraged use of social media for placement. Improving visibility of resources such as helplines on platforms known to be frequented by DMST victims could increase opportunities for exiting the life.

Findings also indicate there may be investigative value in how a trafficker communicates with buyers. Younger victims with traffickers were significantly more likely to report the trafficker communicated directly with buyers (rather than the victim communicating with buyers). As such, factoring in who is communicating with buyers may facilitate investigative risk assessments and victim identification.

Respondents underscored the continued need for increased availability of support services when exiting the life, with particular attention on counseling services. For many, they are in areas with limited access to trauma-informed counseling services that meet their needs as survivors of DMST. One participant suggested that the creation of virtual counseling communities could fill this need.

Finally, acknowledging the quickly shifting landscape in any area involving technology, it is important to continuously review how technology is used by traffickers, victims, and buyers. Thorn plans to continue its efforts on this front and is reviewing methods for ongoing monitoring of technology trends in DMST.



## Closing Remarks

The stories shared by DMST survivors about their experiences offer critical insights into the world of DMST and must be included in any strategy to combat DMST. The 2016 Survivor Survey not only suggests traffickers are increasingly using technology to ensnare victims in the life and advertise minors for sex, it also highlights opportunities to use technology to protect those targeted by traffickers. However, technology alone will not be sufficient. While promising technological interventions can play a vital role in engaging victims and identifying traffickers, we cannot ignore the human element of trafficking. We must continue to address those abuses that make children vulnerable and empower them on their road to recovery.



For a long time I did not realize that I was trafficked, I thought that because he gave me a choice to stay or go and I chose to stay, that it made it my fault and my responsibility.

– Survey Respondent

# Introduction

## Purpose

Thorn's mission is to drive technology innovation to combat the sexual exploitation of children. In an effort to do this most effectively, Thorn commenced the *Thorn Survivor Survey* in 2012 to understand the ways in which traffickers leverage various technology platforms to recruit, groom and sell domestic minors<sup>1</sup>. A report on the findings of this survey was published in January 2015. In January 2016, Thorn fielded a second survivor survey, and the present report summarizes these results in an effort to inform key anti-trafficking stakeholders in the private, non-profit and public sectors about general trends at the intersection of technology and domestic minor sex trafficking.

In order to create technology-based programs to address domestic minor sex trafficking, it is important to understand how traffickers and survivors utilize technology. This knowledge will inform our approach to disrupt extant methods used by traffickers and create new and innovative interventions.

<sup>1</sup> We use the term "trafficker" throughout the report to refer to a pimp, exploiter, or controller.

## The research questions we sought to answer include:

- Q1** What are the demographic and background characteristics of domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) victims?
- Q2** How are DMST victims recruited and groomed by traffickers, and to what extent are traffickers leveraging technology in this process?
- Q3** What are the general experiences of DMST victims in the life with respect to force, fraud, and coercion?
- Q4** What level and type of technology access do DMST victims have while in the life?
- Q5** What are the outlets and processes of advertising?
- Q6** What type of communication and experiences do victims have with buyers?
- Q7** How was technology used to exit the life?

## Methodology

In general, the survey instrument for this study was based on the format of the initial Thorn Survivor Survey first fielded in 2012; however, the 2016 survey instrument was significantly more detailed and was fielded using an online survey platform. After the survey instrument was designed, it was vetted by a DMST survivor to ensure that it was trauma-informed and would minimize any potential psychological duress among the participants as a result of participating in the survey. It was then IRB-approved.<sup>2</sup>

Thorn partnered with 24 organizations in 21 different cities across 14 states to administer the survey to DMST survivors. Thorn provided grants to organizations to cover staff time to administer the survey and for any support programming for participating survivors. Survey participants also received gift cards for their participation. Additionally, for organizations that completed 10 or more surveys, Thorn provided tablets to help administer the online survey.

After organizations agreed to participate, they were sent a link to the survey via the online survey software platform, Qualtrics. The online survey began with the informed consent procedure in which survivors were informed that participating in the survey was completely voluntary, that their responses were anonymous

**TABLE 1: PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS**

ORGANIZATION	PARTICIPANTS	LOCATION
Allies Against Slavery	6	Austin, TX
Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition	6	San Diego, CA
Breaking Free	34	St. Paul, MN
City of Refuge	7	Sacramento, CA
Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking	8	Los Angeles, CA
Covenant House	10	New York, NY
End Slavery Tennessee	18	Nashville, TN
Generate Hope	8	San Diego, CA
Grace Haven	4	Columbus, OH
Janus Youth	10	Portland, OR
Journey Out	20	Los Angeles, CA
More Too Life	20	Sarasota, FL
My Life My Choice	26	Boston, MA
Phoenix Dream Center	9	Phoenix, AZ
Rebecca Bender Initiative	19	Grants Pass, OR
Recovery Agents of Hope	15	Tampa, FL
Redeeming Joy	7	Harrisburg, NC
Safe Harbor/Center for Youth Services	6	Rochester, NY
Saving Innocence	21	Los Angeles, CA
The Hope Project	6	Muskegon, MI
The Link-Passageways	10	Minneapolis, MN
The Well House	10	Odenville, AL
There Is Hope For Me	26	Orlando, FL
Traffick911	10	Dallas-Fort Worth, TX

<sup>2</sup> All human subjects research is required by federal law to be approved by an institutional review board. This research received full-board approval from IntegReview.

and confidential, and that they could stop at any time or refuse to answer any question.<sup>3</sup> After survivors agreed to participate, they proceeded with the questionnaire.

The questionnaire began with a disclaimer, which stated, *“Throughout the survey, please note that the word ‘controller’ refers to your trafficker, pimp, or boyfriend. We use this generic term because we understand that each situation is different. Throughout the survey, we refer to ‘controllers’ as male and ‘survivors’ as female. If this is not the case for you, please disregard these gender references and read it in the context that makes most sense to you. In addition, throughout the survey we use ‘the life’ to refer to sex trafficking, human trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation.”* These definitional clarifications were provided to increase internal validity of the survey by ensuring that all respondents were interpreting key terms similarly.

Collectively, the 24 partner organizations interviewed 316 sex trafficking survivors. However, an analysis of each respondent revealed that 57 survey participants entered the life when they were 18 years old or older, and therefore do not qualify as *minor* sex trafficking victims. These participants were removed from the analysis to maintain a focus on DMST. This yields a total dataset of 260 DMST survivors.

It is also important to note that, of the 260 survey participants, 50 reported not having a trafficker when they were in the life; however, they remain in the sample for two reasons. First, they were minors engaged in commercial sex and U.S. federal law dictates that they are therefore victims of DMST. According to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000), any minor under the age of 18 that has been recruited, harbored, transported, provided, or obtained for a commercial sex act is a victim of a severe form of sex trafficking, regardless of whether they were forced, defrauded, or coerced in the process. Law enforcement and prosecutors have interpreted this to mean that minors engaged in commercial sex—with or without a trafficker—are victims of DMST. Second, research suggests that the psychological coercion of sex trafficking victims is such that they may not identify the person exploiting them as a trafficker. In other words, those that report not having a trafficker may have had one, but they do not perceive that person as being a trafficker.

An analysis of those reporting they *did not* have a trafficker reveals that, in fact, most of them were in a coercive situation. The survey asks all respondents: *“How would you describe/ understand your situation while you were in the life?”* Answer options included: *“somebody forcing you to have sex for money”*, *“somebody*

<sup>3</sup> While many respondents skipped various questions if they did not want to answer, only nine respondents did not complete the survey the entire way through.

*making you do things you didn't want to do", "you were in a dating or domestic violence situation", or "other".* Of the 50 respondents who said they did not have a trafficker, three of them understood their situation as someone forcing them to have sex for money, 10 said someone forcing them to do something they did not want to do, and eight said they were in a dating or domestic violence situation. Thus, 42% of those who said they did not have a trafficker were being physically or psychologically coerced by someone.

Among those who responded with "other," six of the descriptions demonstrate that they were engaged in survival sex, or selling sex out of desperation to make money to survive. While they may not have had a trafficker, selling sex appeared to be their last resort. Some of these responses include:

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"I didn't know any other way to survive. I was homeless and jobless."

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"I didn't have the money for the things I needed and I didn't want to be in a foster home."

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"Trying to take care of myself because my mom was not able to."

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"At 16 years old I was working a typical job but on the weekends would sleep with men for a place to sleep and alcohol."

Only one respondent who reported not having a trafficker stated that it was her own choice to sell sex. She said she was "doing what I want." Two others noted that they did it for drugs:

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"Easier access to drugs."

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"I needed to get money to get high, so I sold my body."

In short, although 19% of the sample reported not having a trafficker, we include these respondents in the analysis because they were minors when they were engaging in commercial sex and are therefore victims of sex trafficking according to federal law. Moreover, a deeper examination of these respondents reveals that most of them were under some form of coercion prior to and while in the life.

A majority of those in the sample that had a trafficker stated that they had more than one trafficker while they were in the life. In fact, only 30% (n=62) say that they had only one trafficker. In the event that a survey participant had more than one trafficker, we stated, *"If you did have more than one trafficker, then for the remainder of the survey please answer the questions about the trafficker based on the trafficker that you spent the most amount of time with."*

## Overview of Survey & Participants



Abuse and trafficking goes hand in hand and usually the women preyed on have had trouble in the home, CPS case, foster care or just a broken home and men spot the weakest link.

– Survey Respondent

# Overview of Survey & Participants

## Demographics

The median age entering the life was 14 years old; however, the most frequently reported age of entry was 15. One in six participants reported entering the life before the age of 12 (age 0-2 n=9; age 3-5 n=14; age 6-8 n=6; age 9-11 n=15). Figure 1 provides the age distribution of respondents when they entered the life.

In order to examine technology trends over time, it is necessary to conduct much of the analysis based on the year in which the participants entered and exited the life. Although participants were not asked in what year they entered the life, this information was extrapolated from other questions about age at time of entry and time of survey participation.

**FIGURE 1: AGE OF RESPONDENTS WHEN THEY ENTERED THE LIFE**

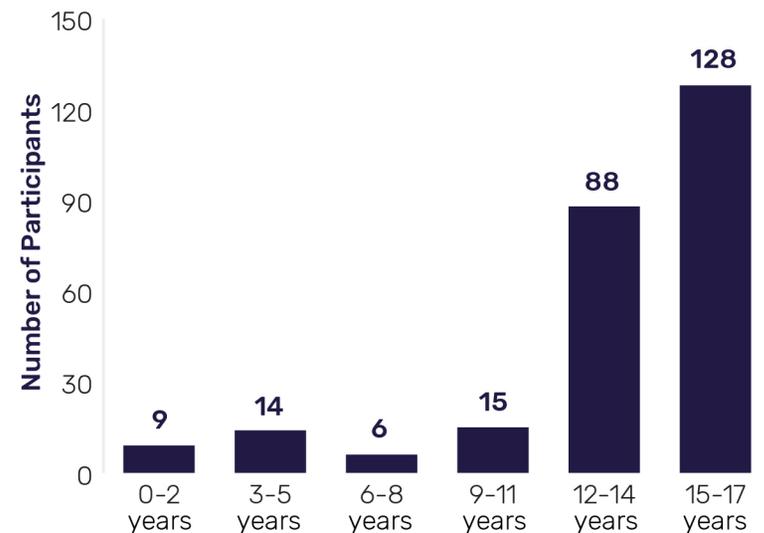
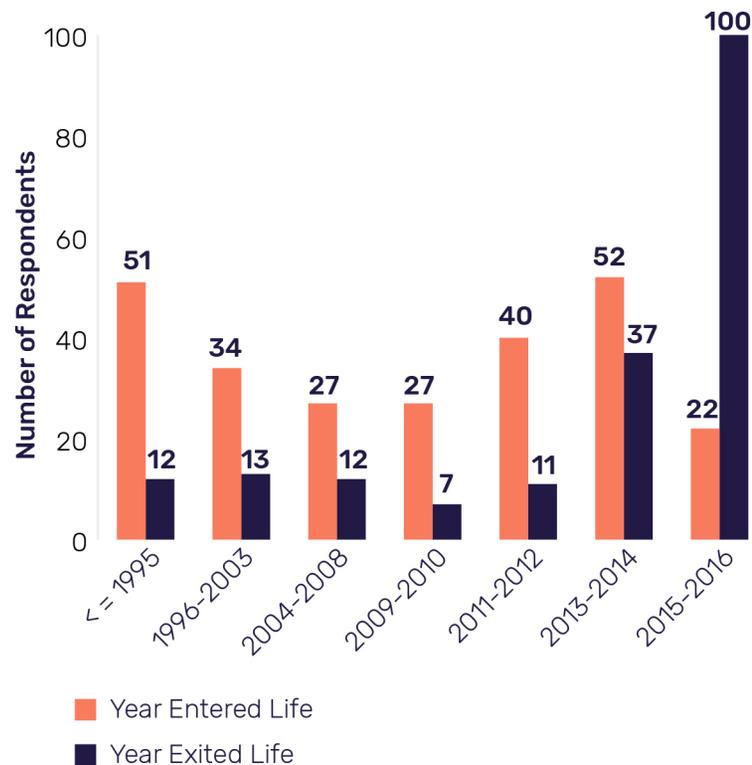


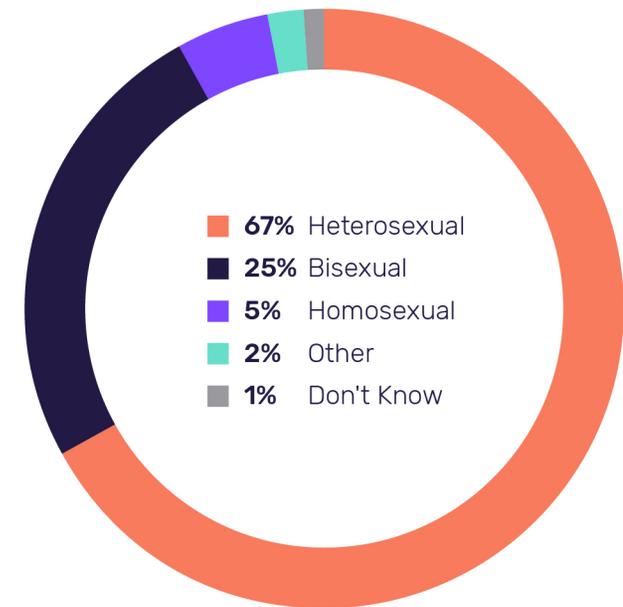
Figure 2 provides data on the years in which the respondents entered and exited the life. Over half of the sample entered the life after 2009, with the most frequently reported period of entry being 2013-2014. About half (52%; n=100) left the life between 2015-2016 (51 responded that they have not yet left the life and are therefore not included in the data for “year exited life”).

**FIGURE 2: YEAR RESPONDENTS ENTERED AND EXITED THE LIFE**



The vast majority of the sample (98%) identifies as female. There were four males in the sample and two participants identified their gender as “other.” The majority of the sample identified as heterosexual (67%). Another 25% as bisexual, 5% identified as homosexual, 2% as “other” and 1% said they “don’t know” how to classify their sexual orientation.

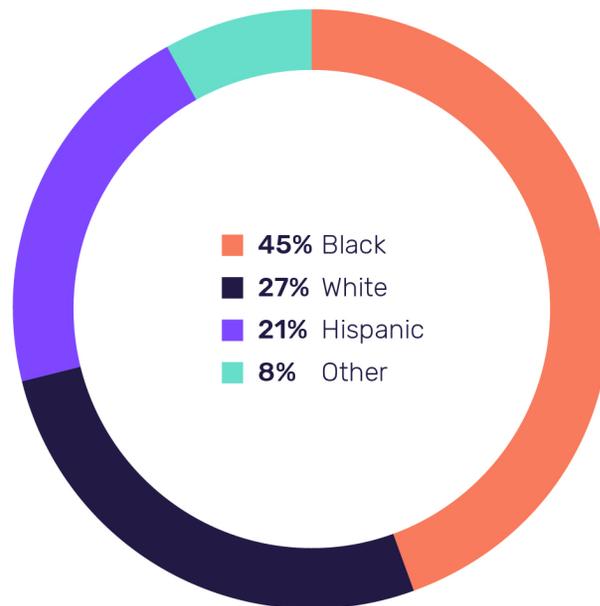
**FIGURE 3: SEXUAL ORIENTATION**



Among those for whom their race was identified (n=243), 45% identify as Black or African American, 27% identify as White or Caucasian, 21% identify as Hispanic, and 8% who identify as other.

Black respondents are significantly more likely than non-black respondents to say that they have not yet left the life permanently. Specifically, 27% of black respondents state they are still in the life, while only 13% of non-black respondents say they are still in the life.

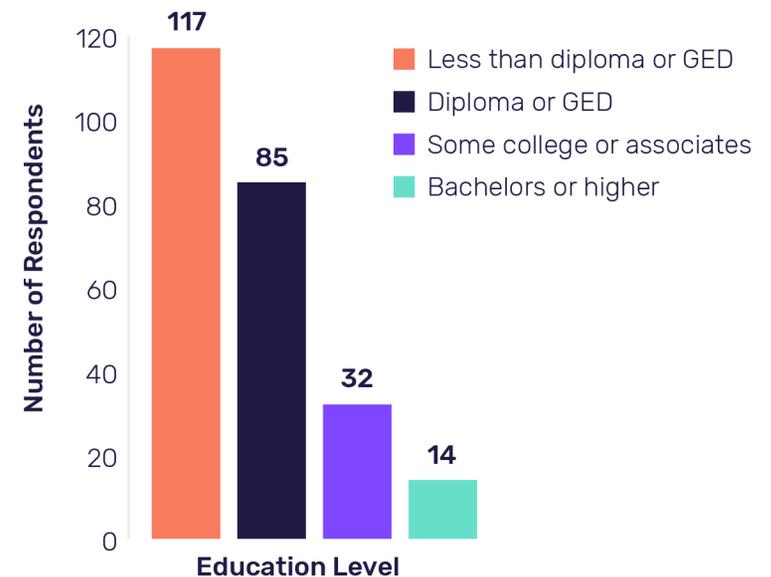
**FIGURE 4: RACE**



The level of education among survey participants included 46% (n=117) who had less than a high school diploma or GED, 35% (n=85) who graduated high school or obtained a GED, 12% (n=32) who had some college or an Associate's degree, and 6% (n=14) who had a Bachelor's degree or higher. Black respondents have significantly lower levels of education than

non-black respondents, and white respondents have significantly higher education levels than non-white respondents. For example, 51% of black respondents report having some high school or less, whereas this is the case for only 35% of white respondents.

**FIGURE 5: EDUCATION LEVEL**



The majority of the sample (55%; n=144) was in school while they were in the life, for at least part of the time. Specifically, 26% (n=65) said they were in school some of the time they were in the life, 15% (n=38) said most of the time, and 14% (n=35) said the entire time they were in the life they were also in school.

## STAT HIGHLIGHTS

42%

Were in foster care

## Personal Background

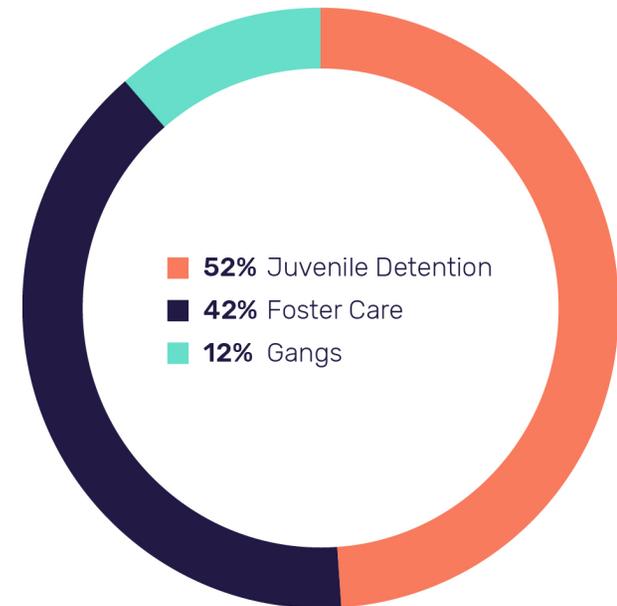
The survey asked a variety of questions about the personal background and histories of the survey participants. Twelve percent (n=30) of participants report that they were in a gang, 42% (n=103) were in foster care, and 52% (n=129) had been in juvenile detention. Overall, two out of three victims had experience with either the foster care system or juvenile detention. Specifically, only 89 of 246 participants did not have an experience with either foster care or juvenile detention. It is important to note that while there is no significant difference between the black and non-black respondents with respect to being in foster care, black respondents are significantly more likely than non-black respondents to state that they had been in juvenile detention. Specifically, 58% of black respondents had an experience with juvenile detention, and this drops to 44% for the non-black respondents.

Several respondents report negative experiences in the foster care system and their lack of faith in the system. For example:

“In my case I was in foster care and I never knew anything about human trafficking. Not every foster home was loving, to them I was just a paycheck. In my heart I feel this is also human trafficking.”

“I don’t trust CPS.”

**FIGURE 6: RESPONDENT INVOLVEMENT IN GANGS, FOSTER CARE, AND JUVENILE DETENTION**



The family dynamics and the relationships that participants have with their mother and father are complex. Overall, the survivors have a better relationship with their mother than with their father; however, the dynamics of the relationship with both parents appear to be complicated.

Eighty-three percent (n=209) report that they lived with their mother growing up, while only 38% (n=97) said they lived with their father growing up. Black respondents are significantly less likely than non-black respondents to have lived with their father growing up. Specifically, only 30% of black respondents grew up with their father whereas that number increases to 46% for non-black respondents.

## STAT HIGHLIGHTS

29%

Said their father was involved in their life growing up

43%

Knew someone who was a trafficker while growing up

Almost half of respondents (49%; n=117) agree or strongly agree that they have a good relationship with their mother. Fifty-four percent (n=131) agree or strongly agree that their mother was involved in their life growing up, and 47% said that their mother was supportive of them. On the other hand, 39% (n=90) agree or strongly agree that their mother was emotionally abusive, 25% (n=59) that their mother was physically abusive, 5% (n=12) that their mother was sexually abusive, and 35% (n=81) that their mother had a drug or alcohol addiction. Those who report that they have a good relationship with their mother, that she was involved in their life, and that she was supportive are significantly less likely to report that she was emotionally or physically abusive, or that she had a drug or alcohol addiction.

The picture is bleaker for the respondents' relationships with their fathers. Only 32% (n=67) agreed or strongly agreed that they have a good relationship with their father, and only 29% (n=61) said their father was involved in their life growing up. Forty-five percent (n=93) said that their father was addicted to drugs or alcohol, 34% (n=70) agreed or strongly agreed that he was emotionally abusive, 30% (n=60) that he was physically abusive, and 18% (n=38) that he was sexually abusive.

Several respondents provided insight into the relationship between various types of childhood abuse and DMST:

"Abuse and trafficking goes hand in hand and usually the women preyed on have had trouble in the home, CPS case, foster care or just a broken home and men spot the weakest link."

"My mom struggled severely [with mental illness]. She wasn't emotionally abusive to me, no but she was emotionally absent."

"I never had anyone there for me growing up besides my great grandmother. My mom was in and out of my life because of her alcohol problem. I use to go through hell having to wake up and getting told we have to move. Always being out at night when its cold just to get left at someone's house. So your mother can go drink. Then being teased about my father not being in my life...growing up and taking care of yourself is hard. So hard you have to go out there and "Make That Money Honey"."

Beyond the lack of strong familial support, many respondents grew up in environments where buying and selling sex may have been somewhat normalized. Forty-three percent (n=108) said that, growing up, they knew someone who was a trafficker. Forty-nine percent (n=123) stated that, growing up, they knew someone who sold sex.



I was groomed very well at the beginning and then my abuser switched on me in a very mean and cruel way and at that time I thought that I loved him and then it came to the point where I was deathly afraid of him.

– Survey Respondent

# Recruitment & Grooming<sup>4</sup>

## STAT HIGHLIGHTS

# 17%

Noted that their trafficker was a family member

# 80%

Of those whose trafficker was a family member were 10 years old or younger

Most victims reported their trafficker was either a family member, part of their social network, or stranger. Face to face contact remains a dominant tool for selecting victims and gaining their trust; however, the use of technology in this process is on the rise.

In an open-ended question, the survey asks respondents to describe how they met their trafficker. From the answer to this question, three categories emerged regarding the relationship the respondent had to the trafficker when they met: family member, social network, or stranger.

Family member is defined as anyone who might be considered a relative, including stepfathers, uncles, or cousins. Seventeen percent (n=20) noted that their trafficker was a family member. Figure 7 (on the following page) shows that 76% of those whose trafficker was a family member were 10 years old or younger when they entered the life, and over half of them said their trafficker was their father or stepfather.

“My father was my abuser when I was 4 to 7. He sold me for his own gain to use drugs.”

“My mother sold my body for dope at the age of 13 and that is how I got started in the lifestyle.”

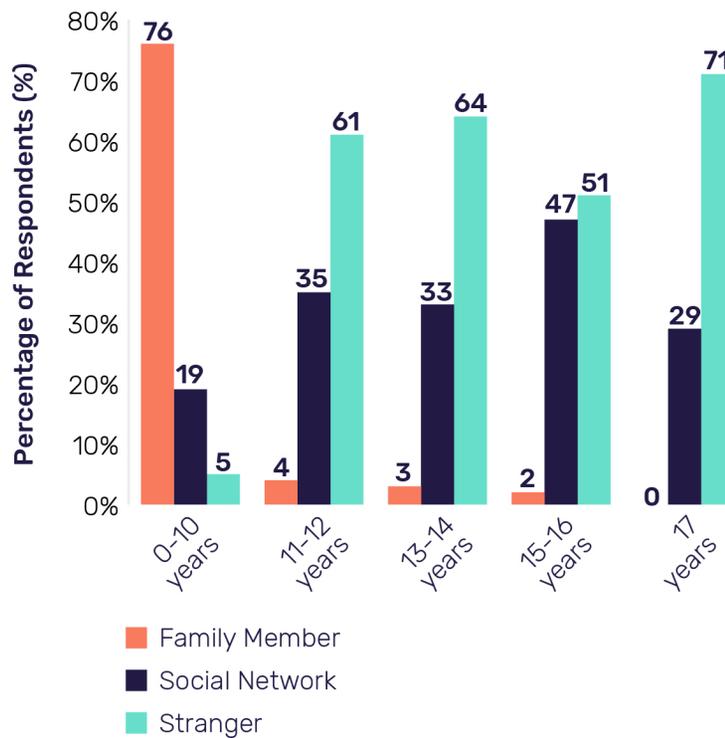
Social network is defined as someone who is the respondent’s direct friend, a friend of a friend, a classmate, neighbor, etc. It is anyone who is not a family member, but who is also not a complete stranger. Thirty-three percent (n=62) of those with a trafficker met him/her through a mutual friend, a family member, or at school. The trafficker was part of their larger social network.

“My homegirl told me about this guy she met who used to give her things. She just had to do him some favors. I became interested. She called for him to pick us up. Never went home after I met him.”

“We met in high school. He was on the basketball team and asked me to call him.”

“He was my mom’s boyfriend’s brother.”

<sup>4</sup> Survey questions regarding the recruitment and grooming process pertain only to those respondents who reported having a trafficker in the life (n=210).

**FIGURE 7: RELATIONSHIP TO TRAFFICKER BY AGE ENTERED THE LIFE**

The third category is complete stranger, and 50% of those with a trafficker said that their trafficker was a complete stranger to them when they met. Many of them indicated that they were at a bus station, walking down the street, on the track, or at a party when the trafficker started talking to them.

“I was standing at the bus stop and he stopped and started asking me how old I was where I’m from, why am I all by myself.”

“I was walking from el pollo loco to the nail shop when a man drove up to me and ask if I want to go to Vegas. I said let me get my nails done and I call you. I said I’ll go to Vegas, and we partied for a week and he took me a track Boulder Highway and caught a date.”

“At the gas station, he told me he wanted my number. I thought maybe he thought I was cute, so I gave it to him because he was nice looking.”

Others whose trafficker was a stranger noted that they were on the streets as a homeless runaway when their trafficker offered to help.

“Left home because I was being molested and raped and ended up on the streets and ran into him in the streets.”

“I was homeless at the time and sleeping in the car of a friend who loaned the car out to another friend while I was asleep in it. That other friend just so happened to be the cousin of my soon to be pimp. She introduced me to him after a couple of hours of being with me and learning of my situation and how they could benefit from it.”

“I was a run away he gave me money and a place to stay then forced me into the life.”

In addition to the open-ended question about how respondents met their trafficker, the survey also asked a close-ended question about the manner by which they met, including in person or online. **The vast majority (84%; n=174) of victims with a trafficker report meeting their trafficker in person.** The second most common form of initially meeting the trafficker was via a website (8%; n=17). The websites mentioned where victims met their traffickers include all of the following: Facebook.com (n=13), Tagged.com (n=2), BackPage.com (n=2), Craigslist.com (n=1), MySpace.com (n=1), and Mocospace.com (n=1). The apps on which victims met traffickers include: Whatsapp (n=1), Plenty of Fish (n=1), Meetme (n=1), Tagged (n=1), and Skout (n=1).

There is no significant difference in the meeting modality based on the year in which a victim entered the life. That being said, the percentage of victims that entered the life in 2015 that report meeting their trafficker in person is only 45% (n=5). The remaining 55% (n=6) are evenly divided between text, website, and app. Thus, although most victims continue to meet their traffickers face-to-face and there is no consistent trend over time showing an increase in alternative methods of meeting, the change in 2015 makes clear that it is imperative to continue examining this trend overtime.

After being introduced, traffickers groom their victims. This is the start of a psychologically coercive process that makes victims believe

the trafficker cares deeply for them, wants to take care of them, would never hurt them, and is not forcing them into the life.

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“For a long time I did not realize that I was trafficked, I thought that because he gave me a choice to stay or go and I chose to stay, that it made it my fault and my responsibility.”

---

“I was groomed very well at the beginning and then my abuser switched on me in a very mean and cruel way and at that time I thought that I loved him and then it came to the point where I was deathly afraid of him.”

---

“I was in an emotionally and physically abusive relationship but felt a strong love bond despite that abuse.”

---

“He was very affectionate and charming, very manipulative. Once things got more intense he would yell at me for not doing things the way he told me to, but I was very confused.”

The vast majority developed a close relationship with their traffickers by spending time with them in person (85%; n=173). However, those who entered the life more recently are less likely to report developing a relationship with their trafficker in person than those who entered the life further in the past. Only 58% (n=6) of those who entered the life in 2015 said that they developed a relationship with their trafficker in person.

## STAT HIGHLIGHTS

42%

Said that the trafficker earned their trust within 1 month of meeting

28%

Said that the trafficker earned their trust within 4 months of meeting

Those that developed a close relationship with their traffickers by communicating over various technology platforms said they communicated via text/chat (63%; n=88) or talked over the phone (25%; n=52).<sup>5</sup> Victims who entered the life more recently are significantly more likely to state that their trafficker used phone calls and texting/chatting to develop a relationship with them. However, it is important to note that the majority of those who used these various technologies to develop a relationship with their trafficker also reported developing a close relationship by meeting up in person, as well. Therefore, while meeting up in person was *the* dominant means of developing a close relationship in the past, it remains *a* dominant method today while other technology-based modes of communicating are increasing in usage.

About half (49%; n=101) of the respondents with a trafficker said that they could not tell that the person they were communicating with was a trafficker. There is no significant difference between those who could or could not tell and the age they entered the life or whether they developed a relationship with the trafficker in person, over the phone, or through texting/chatting.

The grooming process does not take very long. Forty-two percent (n=86) of those with a trafficker said that the trafficker earned their trust within one month of meeting. Another 28% (n=57)

said that the trafficker earned their trust within four months of meeting. **In other words, traffickers are able to gain a victim's trust very quickly.**

There are a variety of ways traffickers earned the trust of the victims. Eighty-eight percent (n=170) said the trafficker told them he would take care of them, 83% (n=161) said the trafficker bought them things, 74% (n=144) reported that the trafficker made false promises, and 73% (n=142) said the trafficker told them that he loved them. Examples of how the trafficker deceived them include all of the following:

“He told me he loved me and that he cared about me.”

“He made me feel loved and secure. That I could trust him and tell him everything that I was going through at that time. Never made a “pass” at me then - just showed what I thought was ‘genuine friendship.’”

“He was very sweet and loving and said that he would never force me to do anything that I didn’t want.”

“He acted like he cared for me and had my best interest at heart.”

“He was really nice. He gave me things. He was attractive. He was supportive.”

<sup>5</sup> Apps and websites that were used for chatting include: Facebook (n=16), Snapchat (n=3), Kik (n=3), Instagram (n=2), Skout (n=2), Meetme (n=1), Tinder (n=1), Tagged (n=1), Textnow (n=1).



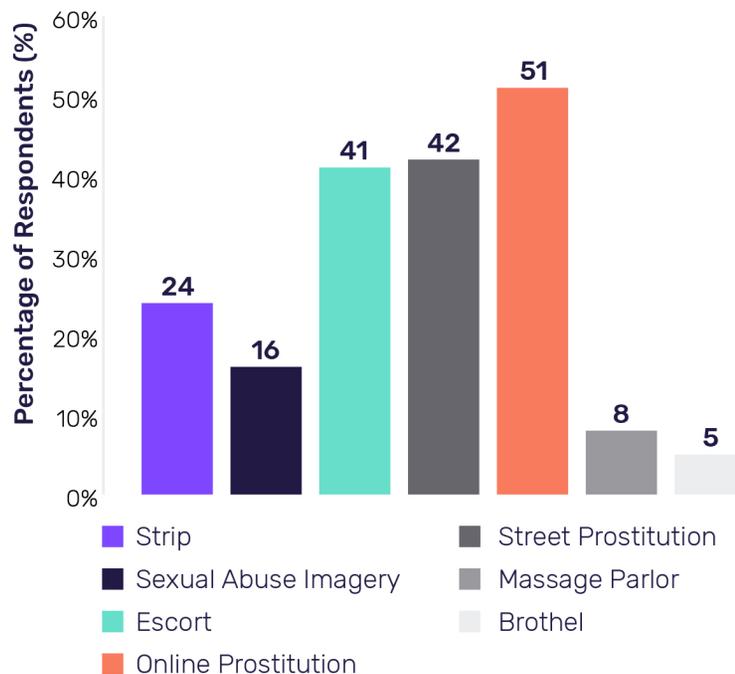
That is what happened to me. I could never escape. I never have anyone to turn to. I didn't have a choice.

– Survey Respondent

# Experience in the Life

The most common commercial sex outlets and venues reported included street prostitution (51%; n=133), online prostitution (42%; n=110), escort services (41%; n=108), and strip clubs (24%; n=62). Figure 8 provides the outlets of commercial sex in which all respondents engaged, regardless of whether or not they reported having a trafficker.

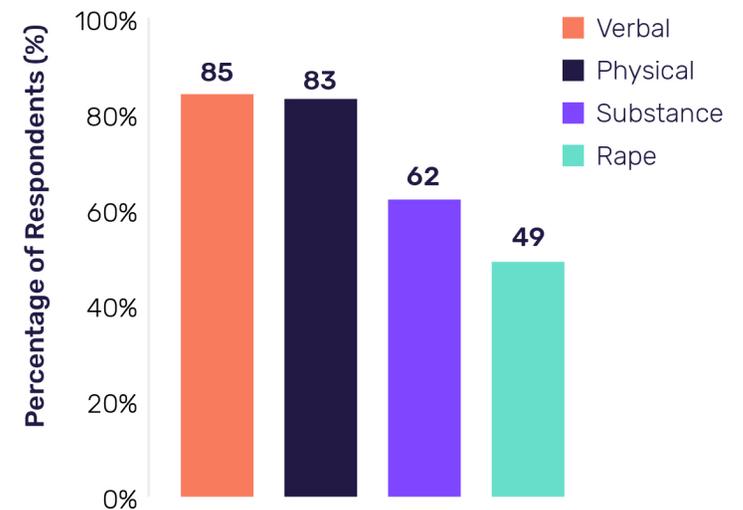
**FIGURE 8: TYPE OF COMMERCIAL SEX OUTLET**



The average age entering the life for those engaged in online prostitution and stripping is 14.2. The average age for those engaged in street prostitution is 13.8, and the average age drops to 12.8 for those reporting being forced into pornography production.

Not surprisingly given technology trends, those that entered the life more recently are significantly more likely than those that entered the life further in the past to engage in online prostitution. Only 26% of those who entered the life prior to 2004 engaged in online prostitution, which increases to 40% for those who entered the life in 2004 or later.

**FIGURE 9: TYPES OF ABUSE BY TRAFFICKER**



## STAT HIGHLIGHTS

61%

Were asked to recruit other girls for the trafficker

71%

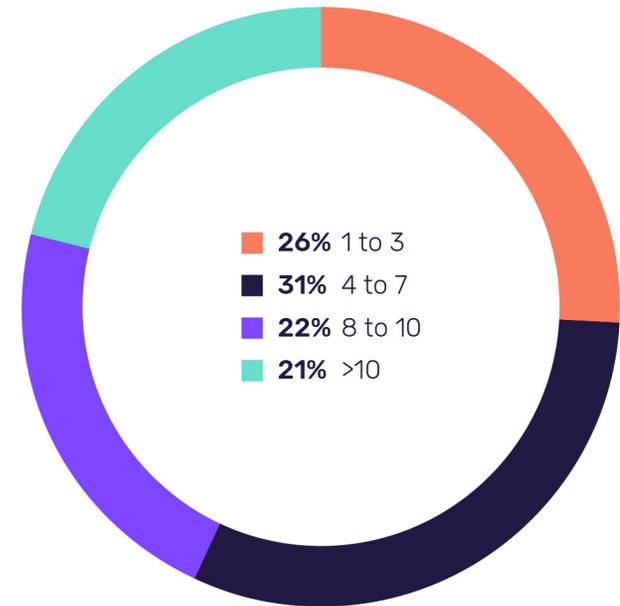
Of traffickers have more than one victim

DMST victims experience severe and frequent abuse by their trafficker while in the life. Among the respondents who reported having a trafficker, 88% (n=182) said that the trafficker harmed them in a variety of ways, including: verbal abuse (85%; n=165), physical abuse (83%; n=161), substance abuse (62%; n=133), and rape (49%; n=95). Those forced into street prostitution are significantly more likely than those not forced into street prostitution to report that the trafficker frequently harmed them. Ninety-one percent of those in street prostitution said their trafficker harmed them compared to 83% of those who were not forced into street prostitution.

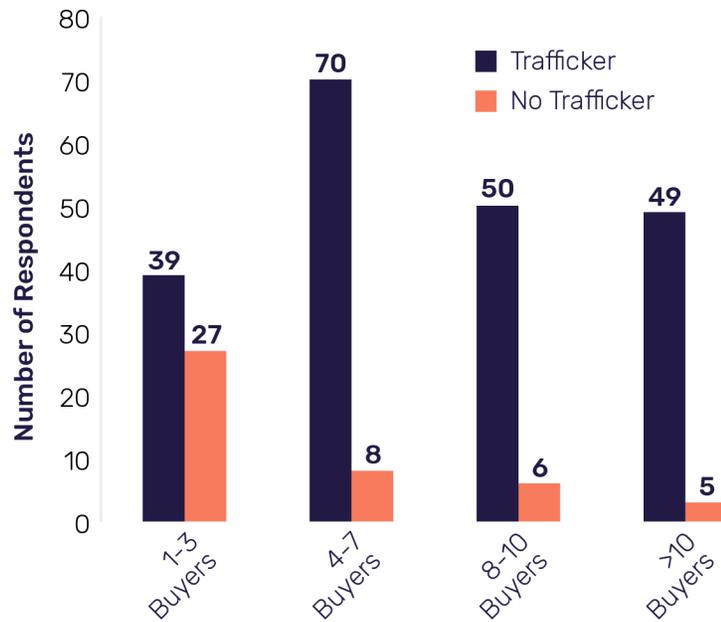
The vast majority (71%) of traffickers had more than one victim. Overall, the average number of victims per trafficker is 3.6. This is not surprising given the extent to which traffickers require victims to recruit other victims. The majority (61%; n=124) of respondents said that the trafficker asked them to recruit other girls to be under his control. Those working in escort services and street prostitution are significantly more likely than those that did not work in these capacities to state that they were asked to recruit other girls on behalf of the trafficker.

The number of buyers per day varied significantly across the sample, with 26% (n=62) saying they had 1-3 buyers per day, 31% (n=74) having 4-7 buyers/day, 23% (n=55) having 8-10 buyers per day, and 20% (n=49) reporting that they had more than 10 buyers/day on average.

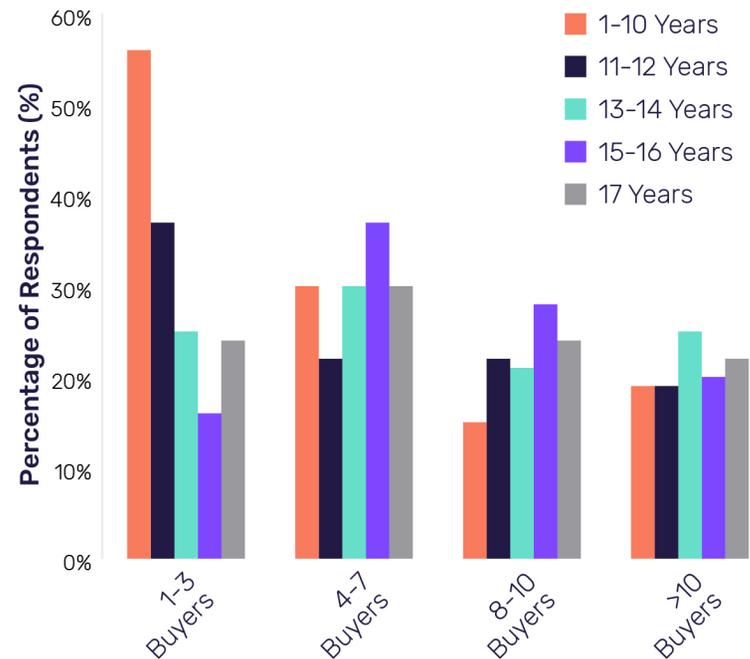
FIGURE 10: AVERAGE NUMBER OF BUYERS PER DAY



Those reporting that they have a trafficker have significantly more buyers per day than those that reported not having a trafficker. Sixty percent (n=27) of those without a trafficker said they had 1-3 buyers on average per day, whereas only 19% (n=39) of those with a trafficker said they had only 1-3 buyers per day. On the other hand, 48% (n=99) of those with a trafficker had more than eight buyers per day, whereas this is the case for only 20% (n=9) for those without a trafficker.

**FIGURE 11: AVERAGE NUMBER OF BUYERS PER DAY BY TRAFFICKER**

Additionally, there is a significant difference between the number of buyers per day and the age a victim entered the life; those who are older when they entered have significantly more buyers per day. Figure 12 shows that 53% (n=84) of those who entered the life when they were 13 to 17 had more than eight buyers per day. However, this drops to only 34% (n=20) among those who entered the life at 12 or younger.

**FIGURE 12: NUMBER OF BUYERS PER DAY BY AGE ENTERED THE LIFE**

Of those with a trafficker, 74% (n=146) said they kept very little or none of the money that they earned. Those that were younger when they entered the life are significantly more likely to report that they were not allowed to keep the money they earned.

A little over half of the sample, 55% (n=135), said that they were paid only in cash. Of those that were paid in currency other than cash, 58% (n=51) were paid in drugs, 22% (n=25) received payment via prepaid credit cards, and 13% (n=15) received payment via credit cards.

It appears those entering the life more recently may experience less monitoring and more access to people outside of the life.

# Tech Use & Access in the Life

## Cell phones

Most respondents (74%) had access to a telephone while in the life – a landline for those entering the life further in the past and a cell phone for those entering the life more recently. Telephone access is used both to communicate with people in the life (such as traffickers and buyers) and people outside of the life (such as family and friends), as well as to use the Internet (following the advent of the smartphone). It appears those entering the life more recently may experience less monitoring and more access to people outside of the life.

Of those with a trafficker who had access to a cell phone, 83% (n=111) said that the cell phone was not shared by their trafficker and 77% (n=101) reported they did not have to share their cell phone with anyone else (such as other victims of the trafficker). **Fifty-seven percent (n=77) reported that their trafficker purchased the cell phone for them**, 28% (n=38) said they purchased it themselves prior to entering the life, and 13% (n=17) said they purchased it themselves after they entered the life.<sup>6</sup>

Sixty-eight percent (n=115) of the entire sample that had a cell phone while in the life (either smartphone or regular cell) stated that they could use the phone “all of the time.” Those with a trafficker are significantly less likely to report that they could use their phone “all of the time” than those without a trafficker.

Given the inherent increase in connectivity of smartphones compared to regular cell phones, respondents were asked to specify which type of cell phone to which they had access. A smart phone was defined as having the capability to download apps and access the Internet (in addition to calling and texting), whereas a regular cell phone was defined as having the capability only to call and text. Of those entering the life after 2007, a majority reports that they had a smartphone (78%; n=87) while the remaining 22% (n=24) said they had a regular cell phone.<sup>7</sup> Given the normalization of smartphones starting in 2007 with the release of the iPhone, it is not surprising those who entered the life more recently are significantly more likely to have a smartphone rather than a regular cell phone.

<sup>6</sup> Remaining 2% reported “other”.

<sup>7</sup> The first iPhone was released in June 2007.

**TABLE 2: TOP 10 APPS USED BY RESPONDENTS WITH SMARTPHONES**

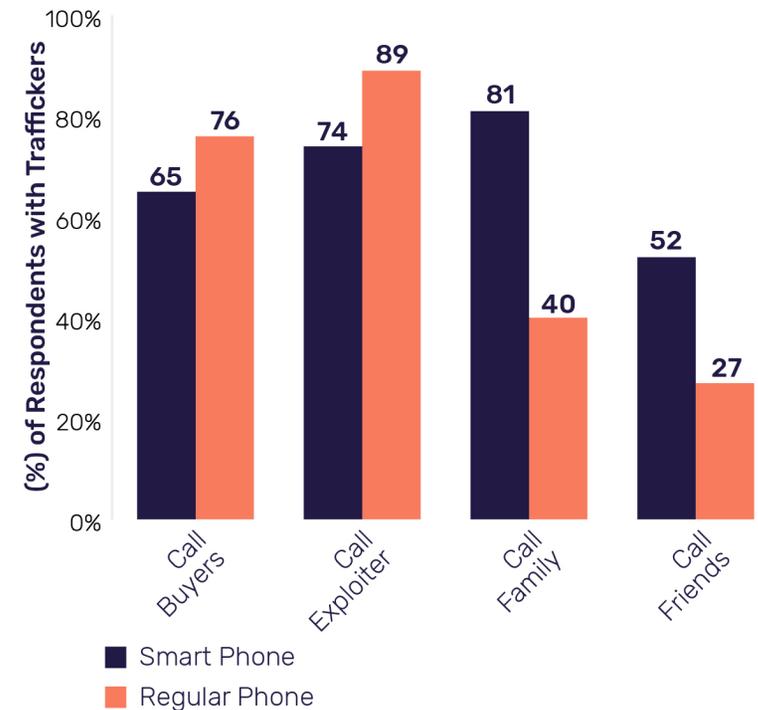
TOP 4 APPS	
Facebook	51
Instagram	23
Snapchat	16
Kik	10
Backpage	6
Tagged	5
Plenty of Fish	5
Twitter	5
Meet Me	5
Tinder	4

Of the respondents with a smartphone, the vast majority used this device in very typical ways: 92% (n=105) called people; 91% (n=104) texted; 73% (n=83) used apps; and 86% (n=98) accessed the Internet on it. Additionally, 70% (n=57) of the entire sample that used apps on their smartphones said that they used texting apps.

In an open-ended question among those who reported using apps on their smartphones, the most common apps listed in descending order include: Facebook (n=51), Instagram (n=23), Snapchat (n=16), Kik (n=10), Backpage (n=10), Tagged (n=6), Plenty of Fish (n=5), Twitter (n=5), Meet Me (n=5), Tinder (n=4), Skout (n=3), YouTube (n=3), Text Now (n=3), Pandora (n=2), Sugar Daddy (n=2), Sugar Babies (n=2), Mocospace (n=2), Myspace (n=2), Glide (n=2), Craigslist (n=2), Google Chrome (n=2). Only one respondent mentioned each of the following apps: Whatsapp, Candy Crush, Ashley Madison, Tango, Playstore, Textfree, Neighborhood, Text+, Fling, Badoo, Skype, Text Me, Cityvibe, Rhapsody (now Napster), Netflix, Google voice, OKCupid, Plenty of Fish.

Those with regular cell phones (versus smartphones) are less likely to use it to call friends and family and more likely to use it to call buyers and traffickers, which suggests they may be more cut off from those outside of the life. Of those with a trafficker and a smartphone, 81% (n=66) called their family, 74% (n=60) used it to call their traffickers, 65% (n=53) said they used

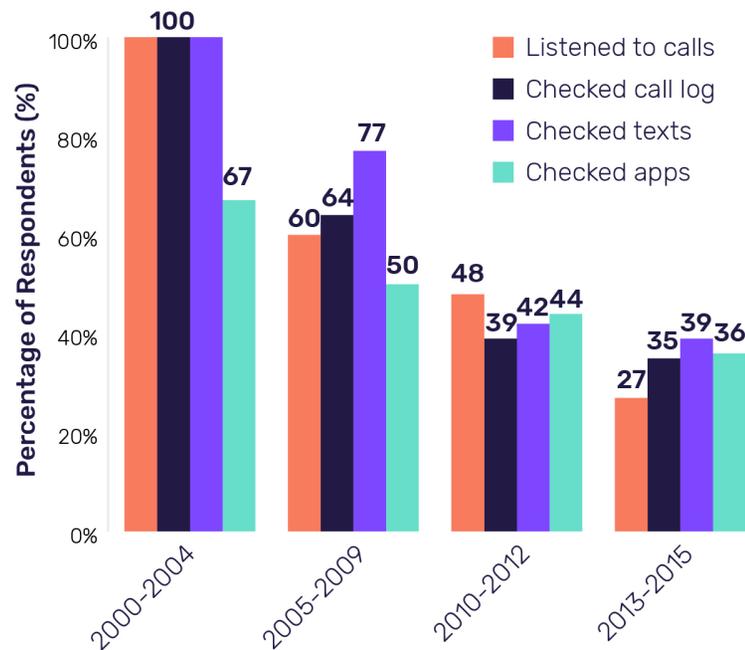
it to call buyers, and 52% (n=42) called their friends. This is in contrast to those with a trafficker who had access to a regular cell phone wherein 89% (n=40) used it to call traffickers, 76% (n=34) used the phone to call buyers, 40% (n=18) to call family, and 27% (n=12) to call friends.

**FIGURE 13: HOW RESPONDENTS WITH TRAFFICKERS USED THEIR PHONES BY TYPE OF CELL PHONE (SMART OR REGULAR)**

Monitoring of cell phones, regardless of type, is quite common; approximately one half of respondents who had a cell phone reported monitoring of calls, texts, and apps.

However, those with regular cell phones appear to be more closely monitored than those with smartphones. For example, while 45% (n=47) of those with a smartphone report someone listening on their calls “all” or “a lot” of the time, 53% (n=28) of those with a regular cell phone reported the same experience. In addition, of those with a smartphone, 47% (n=48) reported someone checked their call logs “all” or “a lot” of the time, compared to 58% (n=31) who had a regular phone.

**FIGURE 14: PERCENTAGE OF THOSE REPORTING PHONE WAS MONITORED “A LOT OF THE TIME” OR “ALL THE TIME” BY YEAR ENTERED THE LIFE**



Interestingly, respondents who entered the life more recently are significantly less likely than those who entered the life further in the past to report that their cell phone use was monitored. Specifically, those who entered the life more recently are less likely to report someone listening to their calls, checking call logs, and checking text messages. Figure 14 shows a consistent downward trend in those that report the trafficker monitoring these activities “a lot of the time” or “all the time.” Although perhaps counterintuitive, this is promising in that it indicates that minor sex trafficking victims’ cell phone access is being monitored less than it was in the past, indicating that could be a promising means of intervention.

## Internet

The majority of participants (69%; n=176) reported that they had access to the Internet while they were in the life. Not surprisingly, there is a very strong significant relationship between entering the life more recently and having Internet access while in the life. The vast majority (81%; n=141) accessed the Internet on their phones. Only 26% (n=46) used a desktop, 33% (n=58) used a laptop, and 26% (n=45) used a tablet.

Access to the Internet was not monitored for 60% (n=105) of respondents with access to it. As with cell phone monitoring, those who entered the life

**TABLE 3: WEBSITES  
ACCESSED MOST**

TOP 4 SITES	
Facebook	102
Backpage	76
Craigslist	29
Instagram	14
Google	9
Tagged	9
Redbook	7
Plenty of Fish	7
YouTube	6
SugarDaddy	5
Kik	4
Eros	4
Cityvibe	4
Erotica	4
SugarBabes	3
MySpace	3
Mocospace	3
AshleyMadison	2
Fling	2
Gmail	2
Twitter	2

more recently are significantly less likely to report that their time on the Internet was monitored. However, there is a strong positive correlation between having a trafficker and having Internet access monitored. Indeed, all but one of the respondents who reported that their access to the Internet was monitored had a trafficker.

Of those for whom the Internet was monitored, they said it was monitored in the following ways: 60% (n=42) said someone watched over them when they were on the Internet and 60% (n=42) said someone checked their Internet history.

Ninety percent (n=157) of those with internet access said they had access to social media accounts and approximately half (46%; n=81) said they had access to online games. The vast majority (86%; n=98) with social media accounts said the accounts were their own and they did not need to share their social media accounts with other victims who had the same trafficker.

When asked what websites they accessed the most, all of the following were mentioned more than once: Facebook (n=102), Backpage (n=76), Craigslist (n=29), Instagram (n=14), Google (n=9), Tagged (n=9), Redbook (n=7), Plenty of Fish (n=7), YouTube (n=6), SugarDaddy (n=5), Kik (n=4), Eros (n=4), Cityvibe (n=4), Erotica (n=4), SugarBabes (n=3), MySpace (n=3), Mocospace (n=3), AshleyMadison (n=2), Fling (n=2), Gmail (n=2), Twitter (n=2).<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that, with a few exceptions, the websites the respondents access most often are sites where commercial sex is advertised. Specifically, of the 21 sites listed to the left, 13 of them are known to advertise sex.

Finally, 76% (n=72) of those with a trafficker said that the trafficker used social media, online games, and apps regularly. Those listed were very similar to the sites the respondents use, including Facebook, Instagram, MySpace, Snapchat, Tagged, MeetMe, MocoSpace, Twitter, BlackMeet, and games including Candy Crush, Angry Birds.

<sup>8</sup> All of the following websites were listed by only one respondent: OKCupid, Lovings, HimAndHer, Pornhub, Seeking Arrangements, Tinder, DaddysList, Streamate, AdultFriendFinder, MeetMe, Skout, MeetaFuckBuddy, XXXMeetFriends, MyTeenSpot, SugarDaddiedForMe, Zooks, Grinder, MyRedbook, TNA, NightShift, Skype, GotFolks, oovoo, ContactGirls, BDSMPPlayPen.com. Additionally, although they did not give specific sites, many respondents also noted that they accessed escort sites, porn sites, and chat rooms.

Online advertising is **increasing**, while advertising on the street is decreasing.

# Advertising

## STAT HIGHLIGHTS

# 38%

Of those that entered the life prior to 2004 were advertised online

# 75%

Of those who entered the life in 2004 or later were advertised online

Among all respondents, advertising commercial sex services took place about equally over the Internet and on the street. Sixty-two percent (n=154) said they advertised on the Internet, and 65% (n=162) said they advertised on the street. However, those with a trafficker appear to be advertising more frequently and via multiple methods, and **those entering the life more recently are significantly more likely to advertise online.**

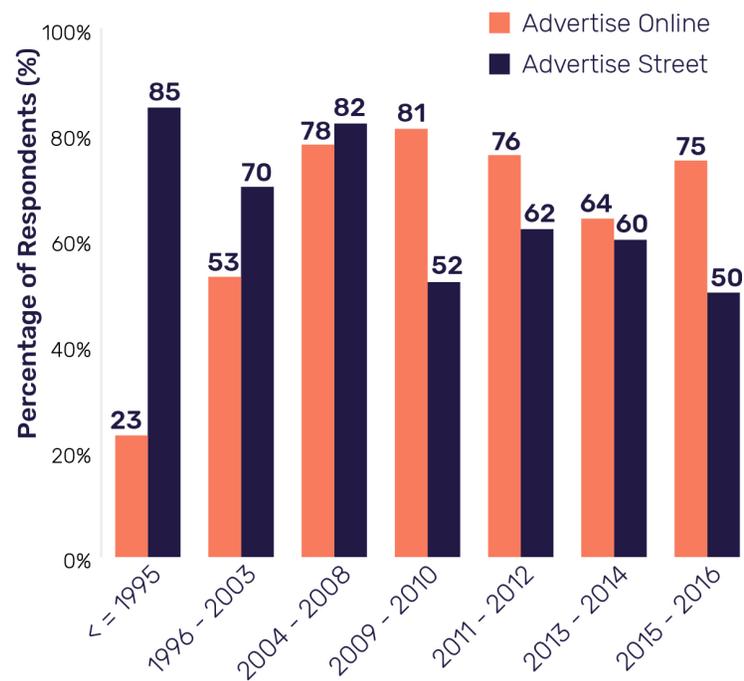
Those with a trafficker are significantly more likely to report that they advertised via both the Internet and the street. Specifically, among those with a trafficker, 65% (n=132) reported advertising on the Internet and 68% (n=138) advertised on the street compared to 48% (n=22) and 52% (n=24) of those without a trafficker, respectively.

Although the frequencies of advertising online and on the street are similar across the entire response set, those who entered the life more recently were significantly more likely to state that they advertised on the Internet and significantly less likely to state that they advertised on the street. Specifically, 38% of those that entered the life prior to 2004 said they were advertised on the Internet, whereas

75% of those who entered the life in 2004 or later said they were. Conversely, 78% of those who entered the life prior to 2004 said they were advertised on the street, which decreased to 61% for those who entered the life in 2004 or after.

Figure 15 (on the following page) shows that the trend for street advertising has slowly decreased over time while the trend for online advertising has increased. However, it also shows a dip in online advertising for those who entered the life between 2011 through 2014. There are several potential reasons for this, including the attention that online advertising sites began to receive for profiting from prostitution ads. In 2009, Craigslist signed a joint statement indicating that it would take steps to decrease the number of underage sex ads on the site, and in 2010 was subpoenaed to determine whether it was actually taking these steps. Similarly, in 2011, Backpage was scrutinized for facilitating sex trafficking through its adult services section, faced several lawsuits, and lost all credit card processing agreements in 2015. The increased scrutiny of Craigslist and Backpage appears to have led to a temporary decrease in online advertising for those that entered the life during this time period.

**FIGURE 15: ADVERTISE ON STREET OR ONLINE BY YEAR ENTERED THE LIFE**



Respondents that were older at the time that they took the survey were significantly less likely than the younger respondents to report that they advertised on the Internet, and significantly more likely to say they advertised on the street. There are several explanations for this. First, older respondents are significantly more likely than younger respondents to have entered the life further in the past. As such, many of the older respondents entered the life prior to the

advent of online classified sites; therefore, they continue to advertise on the street because it is known and familiar. Secondly, and relatedly, younger respondents have not been in the life as long, having entered during an era where online classified sites are increasingly the method by which buyers seek out commercial sex services. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, **it is much easier to disguise the age of a victim through a picture in an online advertisement than it is to hide her age in person.**

There is no significant difference based on age of the respondent or the year they entered the life and whether or not the respondent or trafficker posted the ads. Among those who posted on the Internet, a little over half reported that they posted the ads themselves (52%; n=80). Those that posted ads themselves are significantly less likely to have a trafficker. Of those with a trafficker, over two-thirds said their trafficker posted the ads (67%; n=103).

The majority of those with a trafficker who posted ads themselves stated that they were required to post a certain number of times per day (62%; n=39). When asked in an open-ended question how many times per day they posted ads, the numbers ranged from one time/day to 65 times per day, with a mean of 8 posts per day and mode of 4 posts per day.

**TABLE 4: ADVERTISING WEBSITES MENTIONED MOST**

TOP 4 SITES	
Backpage	81
Craigslist	41
RedBook	8
SugarDaddy	6
Facebook	5
CityVibe	5
Tagged	4
Eros	4
Erotica	4

**TABLE 5: WORDS IN ADVERTISEMENTS TO INDICATE VICTIM IS YOUNG**

young	44
fresh	13
tender/tenderoni	6
sweet	6
barely legal	5
virgin	5
teen	4
college	4
petite	4
new	4
innocent	3

Among those who advertised online, the most popular websites reported in an open-ended question were: Backpage (n=81), Craigslist (n=41), RedBook (n=8), SugarDaddy (n=6), Facebook (n=5), CityVibe (n=5), Tagged (n=4), Eros (n=4), and Erotica (n=4). At least one person mentioned all of the following sites: SugarDaddyForMe, SeekingArrangements, Lovings, SugarBabes, Fling, NightShift, DaddysList, Arrows, AdultFriendFinder, Eccie, MeetMe, MyRedBook, Zooks, eBay, Kik, PlentyOfFish, LiveLinks, Instagram, TNA, and Mocospace. Respondents also noted that advertisements were placed on “porn sites” and “dating sites”.

There is a great deal of overlap in the websites on which respondents report spending most of their time and those on which they advertise. In other words, much of the time they spend online involves accessing websites for the purpose of advertising. The major exception to this trend, however, is Facebook. Whereas 102 respondents said that Facebook was a website they accessed frequently while in the life, only 5 respondents mentioned that Facebook was a website on which they advertised their services.

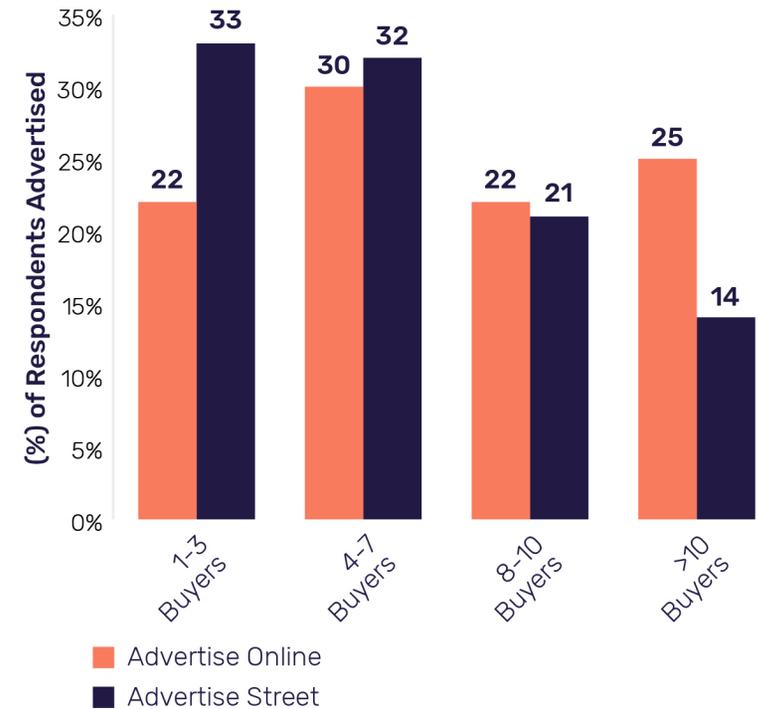
Of those who posted on the Internet, 57% (n=86) said that they paid for the ads using a prepaid credit card. Only 18% (n=27) paid for the ads with credit card and 18% (n=28) paid with a debit card.

Among those who advertised on the Internet (n=158) who posted the ads on the Internet themselves (n=80), 73% (n=58) also wrote the text of the ads themselves. Regarding the content of the ads, almost half (47%; n=72) of those who posted to the Internet stated that the ads used various words to signal that they were young. In an open-ended question about what words were used in the ads to signal they were young, the most common words were: young (n=44), fresh (n=13), tender or tenderoni (n=6), sweet (n=6) barely legal (n=5), virgin (n=5), teen (n=4), college (n=4), petite (n=4), new (n=4), and innocent (n=3). At least one respondent mentioned each of the following terms to indicate they were young: “my underage bitch”, tight, little, PYT, school girl, baby face, clean, “new to game”, sugar daddy, baby girl, daddy’s girl, “ready to play the childish way”, age 18, “never been touched”, straight out, girly, sweetheart, girl next door, amateur, naïve, candy, and novice. A few said that they included their birth year or their actual age in the ad.

Eighty-four percent of respondents (n=127) said that they used photos in the advertisements “most of the time” or “always”, and 37% (n=54) said that they hid their face in the photos “most of the time” or “always.” There is no significant difference between older or younger victims and the likelihood of stating that they hid their face in photos. A majority of respondents (68%; n=99) noted that photos in the ads were actually photos of them “most of the time” or “always” and there is no significant difference in this reporting based on respondents’ age or how recently they entered the life.

Across all respondents, **advertising online is associated with an increased number of buyers per day.** Thirty-three percent of respondents who were advertised on the street reported 1-3 buyers per day, while 22% of respondents who were advertised online reported 1-3 buyers per day. By comparison, while 14% of respondents who were advertised on the street reported more than 10 buyers per day, 25% of respondents who were advertised online reported more than 10 buyers per day.

**FIGURE 16: ONLINE ADVERTISING TO COUNT OF BUYERS**



Phone calls and texting remain the dominant methods of communicating with buyers.

# Interactions With Buyers

Across all respondents, a majority said that they communicated with the buyers themselves (56%; n=139). Among those with a trafficker, 42% (n=85) said that the trafficker communicated with the buyers whereas 51% (n=104) said they (the respondents) communicated with buyers themselves.

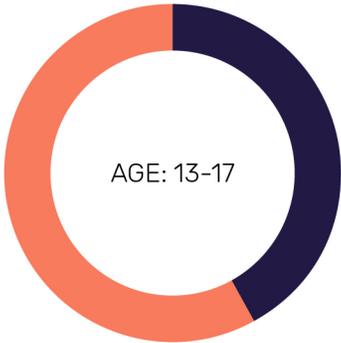
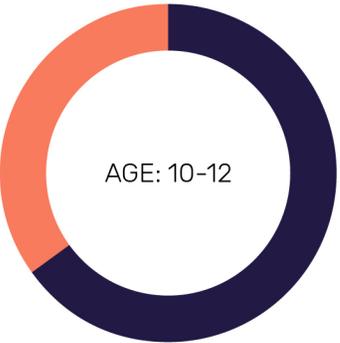
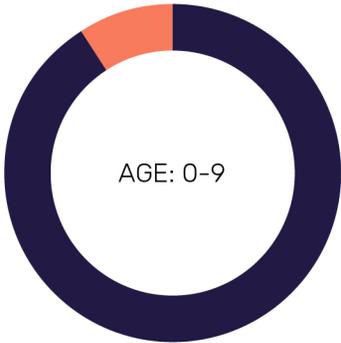
There is a strong indication that when a trafficker is communicating with the buyers, the age of the victim is likely to be younger than 13 years old. Of those with a trafficker who communicated with buyers themselves, those who entered the life when they were older (between 13-17) are significantly more likely than those who entered the life when they were younger to communicate with the buyers themselves. Of the 104 respondents with a trafficker who communicated with buyers

themselves, 87% were 13 to 17 years old when they entered the life. On the other hand, those who report that the trafficker communicated with the buyers are significantly more likely to be younger when they entered the life. Specifically, of the 106 respondents who report their trafficker communicated with the buyers, 40% were 12 or younger. Figure 17 depicts this trend.

Restricting the sample only to those who have entered the life since the year 2000, of those who communicate with the buyers themselves (n=116), 84% (n=97) said they communicate via phone call, 68% (n=79) via text, 49% (n=57) through social media/apps, and 19% (n=26) over email. Those entering the life more recently are significantly less likely to report communicating with buyers over the phone and email.

**FIGURE 17:**  
**COMMUNICATION WITH BUYERS BY AGE ENTERED THE LIFE**

- Trafficker communicates with buyer
- Victim communicates with buyer

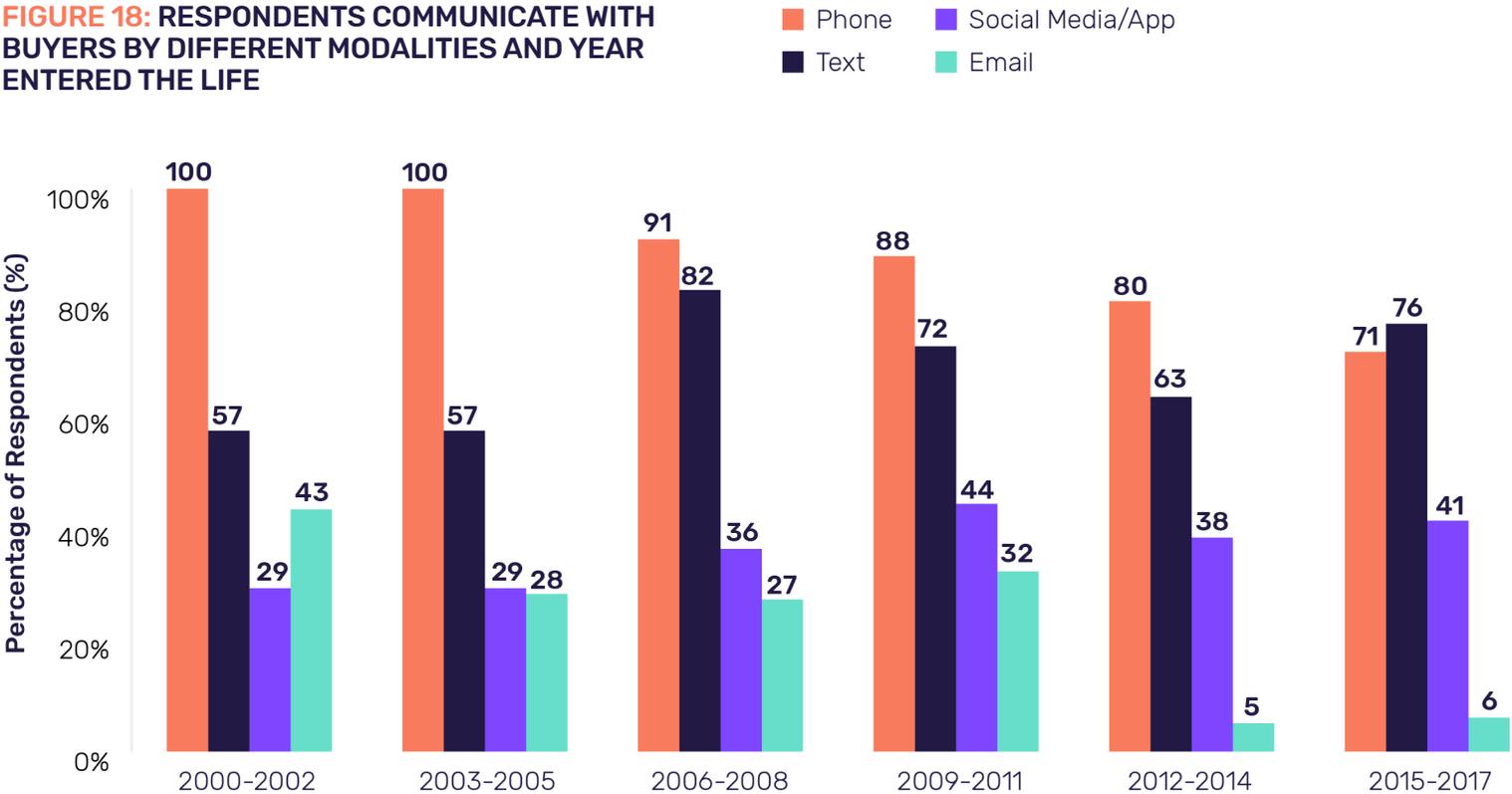


Although phone calls remain a dominant method of communicating with buyers, the popularity of phone calls is declining. Communicating with buyers via text reached its peak for those entering the life between 2006 and 2008 and then started to decline; nevertheless, as with the phone, **text remains a dominant method of communicating with buyers**. Communicating with buyers via social media/apps appears to be very slowly increasing in frequency, while communicating with buyers via email is declining.

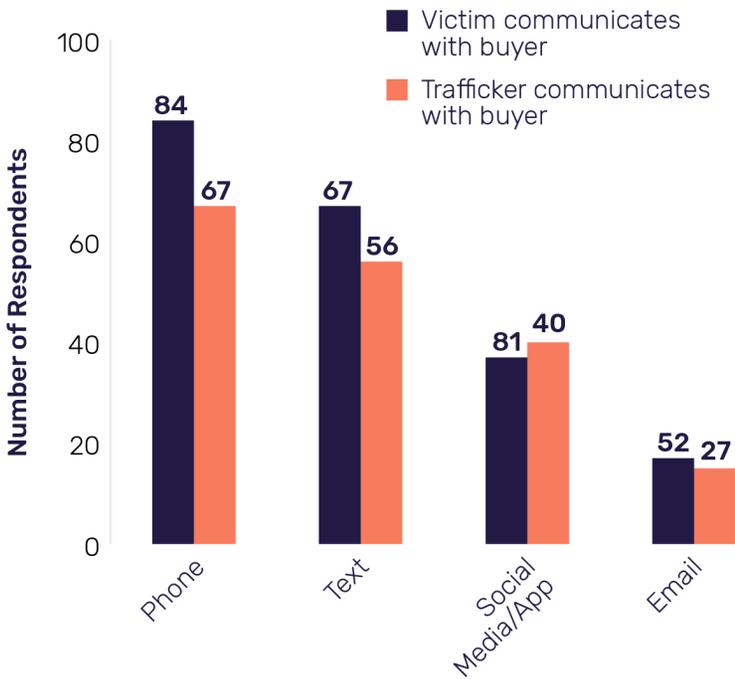
For respondents that entered the life in 2000 or later and reported their trafficker communicates with buyers (n=52), 67% (n=35) said the trafficker uses phone calls, 56% (n=29) said text, 40% said social media/apps (n=21), and 15% (n=8) said email.

As shown in Figure 18, the most common way to communicate with buyers, for those entering the life since 2000, is via phone call, followed by text, social media/apps, and email.

**FIGURE 18: RESPONDENTS COMMUNICATE WITH BUYERS BY DIFFERENT MODALITIES AND YEAR ENTERED THE LIFE**



**FIGURE 19: COMMUNICATION WITH BUYERS BY VARIOUS MODALITIES**



Among the 30 respondents reporting that they communicated with buyers themselves over social media and who entered the life after 2000, 70% (n=21) use Facebook. Among those reporting they used apps (n=27), 52% (n=14) use Kik, 59% (n=16) use Tagged, 41% (n=11) use Snapchat, 33% (n=9) use Whatsapp, and 19% (n=5) said they use Tinder.

For respondents reporting the trafficker communicated with buyers using social media who entered the life after 2000 (n=19), the most commonly reported platform was Facebook (95%; n=18). For those whose traffickers used

**TABLE 6: PLATFORMS USED TO COMMUNICATE WITH BUYERS**

PLATFORM	RESPONDENTS COMMUNICATED	TRAFFICKERS COMMUNICATED
Facebook	70%	95%
Kik	52%	69%
Tagged	59%	not commonly used
Snapchat	41%	not commonly used
WhatsApp	33%	46%
Tinder	19%	not commonly used

apps (n=13), 69% (n=9) said the traffickers used Kik and 46% reported use of Whatsapp (n=6). Snapchat and Tinder were not commonly used by the traffickers.

The vast majority, 81% (n=198) of respondents noted that they met the buyers at hotels, and 59% (n=145) said they met buyers in houses. Fifty-three percent of respondents (n=129) said they met buyers in cars. Other less common venues included strip clubs (19%; n=48), casinos (15%; n=38), massage parlors (6%; n=16), and brothels (6%; n=15).<sup>9</sup> An examination of the trends based on the age reveals that older victims (>15 years old when they entered the life) are significantly more likely than younger victims to meet buyers in hotels, but significantly less likely than younger victims to meet buyers in brothels.

<sup>8</sup> In addition to those listed, respondents entered many other types of locations where they would meet buyers, including: truck stops/trucks, motorcycle events, stores, restaurants, bars, businesses, virtual (watching online), church basements, universities, parks, alleys, train stations, abandoned buildings, campgrounds, members-only groups, malls, hunting and fishing camps.



It's not easy leaving something  
that you are so used to.

— Survey Respondent

# Exiting The Life

Eighty percent (n=201) of the sample said that they had permanently left the life at the time that they took the survey. Many respondents provided insight into the dynamics and difficulty of leaving the life, and reasons why many victims do not want to leave.

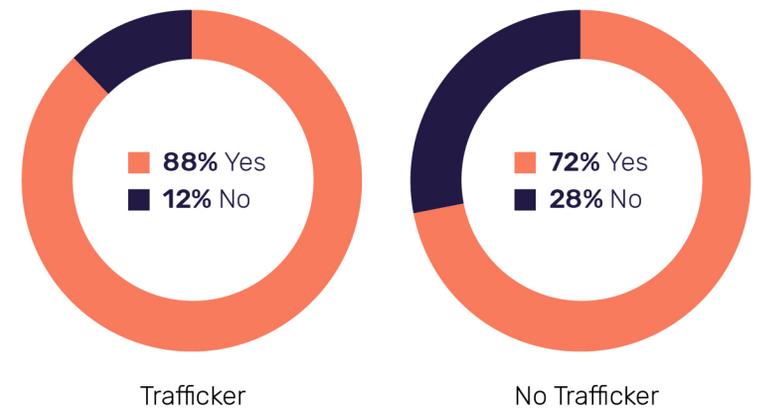
“It is a very addictive life...the money, the love, the old men give you the attention, the control...it very hard to walk away from.”

“It’s hard to get out. Even if I could what would I do in the regular world. What would help you guys would be to understand not everyone wants to leave.”

“Mostly of why individuals don’t leave is because they are too worried or because they feel as if no one would truly care what they would be doing anyway.”

Eighty-four percent (n=212) said that they wanted help when they were in the life. Only 16% (n=40) reported that they never wanted help when they were in the life. Not surprisingly, those with a trafficker are significantly more likely to report that they wanted help than those that did not have a trafficker.

**FIGURE 20: HOW OFTEN RESPONDENTS WANTED HELP WHILE IN THE LIFE**



When asked what type of help they wanted while in the life, 69% (n=145) said they wanted help escaping the life, 65% (n=137) said mental health needs (e.g., counseling), 62% (n=130) said basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, etc.), and 45% (n=94) said medical needs.

Despite the fact that the majority of victims wanted some type of help while in the life, 44% (n=111) said that no one ever reached out to them to offer help, and another 26% (n=66) said they rarely had someone reach out for help. Only 29% (n=73) said someone occasionally or frequently reached out to help.

## STAT HIGHLIGHTS

2/3

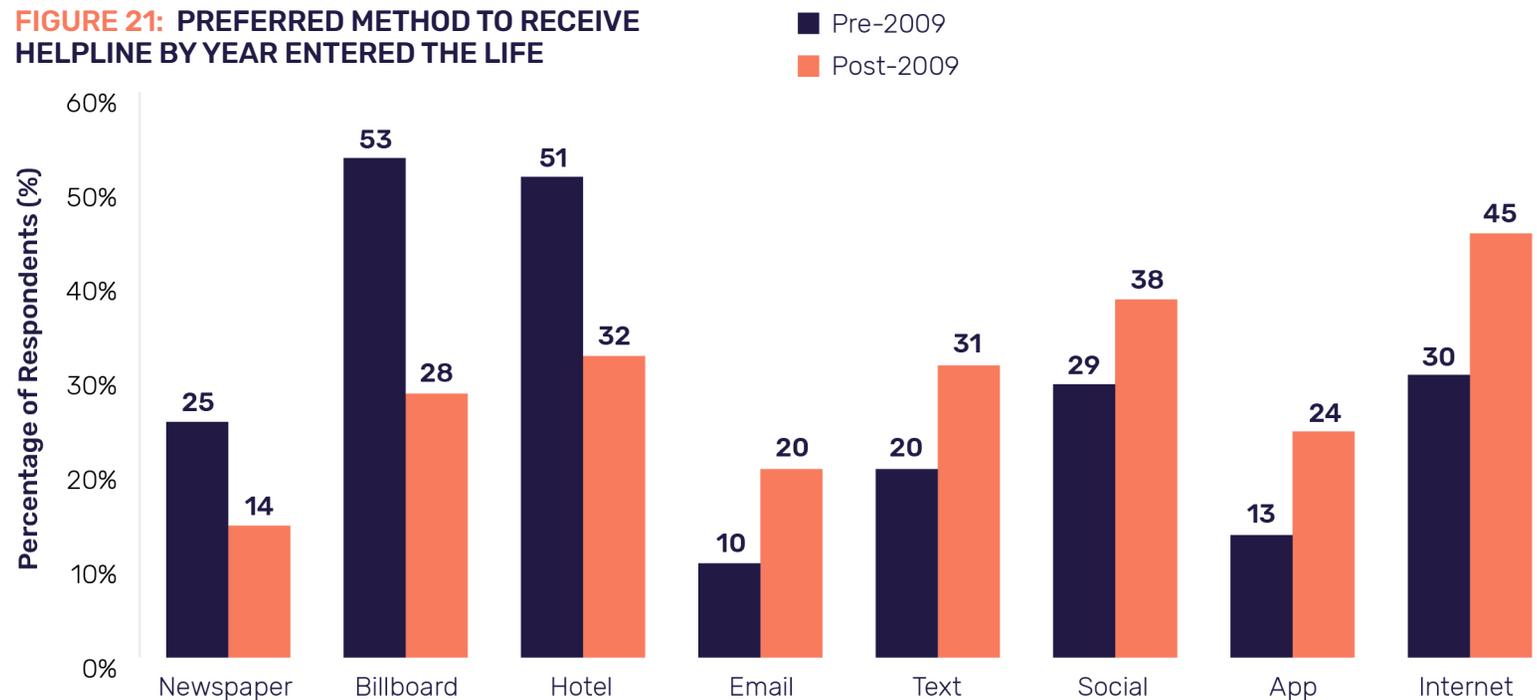
Of participants never saw a helpline number

Over two-thirds (67%; n=168) of the sample said they never saw a helpline number that they could call for help, even though 74% (n=185) stated that they would have wanted to receive a helpline number. Of those that did see or hear about a helpline (n=83), the most common ways for them to see or hear about the number was for someone to tell them about it (n=53), to see it online (n=24), or posted on a billboard (n=18). Very few said that they saw it posted in a hotel (n=6), at a truck stop (n=7), or at a bar (n=8).

Those who never or rarely saw a helpline number (n=182) reported that the most effective outlets

to receive the number would have been posting it in hotels (41%; n=75), on billboards (40%; n=73), online (38%; n=69), or on social media sites (34%; n=61). Figure 21 shows that newspapers, billboards, and hotels are reported less among those who entered the life after 2009 than those who entered the life before as helpful modalities for receiving the hotline number. Conversely, email, text, social media, apps, and the Internet are reported more among those who entered the life after 2009 than those who entered the life before as helpful modalities for receiving the hotline number.

**FIGURE 21: PREFERRED METHOD TO RECEIVE HELPLINE BY YEAR ENTERED THE LIFE**



## STAT HIGHLIGHTS

88%

Said they are not interested in pursuing prosecution of their trafficker

In addition to increased access to helpline numbers, several respondents noted that school could have played a larger role in identifying them as victims and intervening on their behalf.

For example:

“Teachers knew I would come to school high and yet never asked me how I was doing.”

“A teacher would have been the most helpful to either give me the number [of the helpline] or call for me.”

Technology was used very minimally in exiting the life for the majority of respondents. The most common technological device used in exiting the life was a cell phone, with 28% (n=69) stating that they used one to exit (most likely to call someone). Significantly less reported using text (n=20), social media (n=17), landline (n=13), email (n=7), or an app (n=3).

Despite the fact that respondents rarely received offers of help while they were in the life, most reported that, since exiting the life, they have gotten help with mental health needs (81%; n=194), basic needs (80%; n=193), medical needs (62%; n=149), and education or employment (71%; n=172). Eighty-five percent (n=211) of respondents said that they wanted to go back to school and 33% (n=83) report that they are currently employed.

Although the vast majority of victims are eager to get help to improve their lives through counseling, education, and employment, few want to prosecute their trafficker. Only 24% (n=47) said that they have participated in the prosecution of their trafficker. **When asked in a follow up question if they are interested in pursuing a prosecution of their trafficker, 88% (n=134) said they are not interested.**



I felt that selling myself was all that I was worth because I had been sexually abused.

– Survey Respondent

# Discussion & Implications

## STAT HIGHLIGHTS

# 14

Median age entering the life

# 15

Most common age entering the life

There are several key takeaways from this survivor survey with implications for the way in which policymakers, practitioners, the public, and the private sector partner together to combat DMST. Two central themes of interest emerged from findings spread across topics including victim demographics, experiences in the life, and use of technology.

First, although face-to-face contact remains a dominant method of recruiting, grooming, and controlling victims in the life, use of technology is on the rise and seems to complement in-person contact. Technology is increasing a trafficker's access to and impact on both victims and buyers.

Second, less familiar forms of DMST, including those trafficked by family members or without a clear trafficker, emerged in the DMST landscape. However, consistent across all types of DMST are adverse childhood experiences including abuse and neglect.

These themes suggest an important understanding about the nature of DMST and the role of technology. The need for human connection, and the vulnerabilities that arise in the absence thereof, are central to the recruitment, control, and recovery of DMST

survivors. Use of technology is likely to continue to increase; however, technology is unlikely to extinguish the fundamentally human element of DMST.

## Key demographic & background findings

The first key finding is that the median age entering the life was 14 years old. This corroborates other research on DMST showing that the average age of entry into commercial sexual exploitation is roughly 12 to 14 years old. It is critical to understand the physical, emotional, and mental maturity of this particular age group in order to develop effective prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation strategies.

Another important finding is that **children may be born into sex trafficking, or be forced into it as a toddler**. Sex trafficking of those that are younger than 10 years old when they entered the life is perpetrated almost exclusively by family members. This early entrapment in the life colored their understanding of individual value or purpose with one respondent stating it was explained to them as "what all little girls and boys do for their parents". Another underscored that being trafficked by a family member made escape

seem impossible, stating “I could never escape. I never have anyone to turn to. I didn’t have a choice. I was born into this.”

Even among those that were not trafficked by their own family, the survey results reveal that many DMST victims experienced some form of childhood abuse and neglect, reporting high rates of verbal, physical, or sexual abuse. This also supports previous research that reveals that the most DMST victims have various adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that make them vulnerable to the coercive tactics of a trafficker.

Given these adverse childhood experiences of abuse and neglect, there is significant overlap between DMST and foster care, with **41% of respondents reporting that they had been in foster care.** The abuse and neglect DMST victims experience at home not only makes them vulnerable to the coercive tactics of a trafficker, but also makes them more likely to end up in foster care, which in itself can serve as a recruitment ground for trafficking. In other words, the same factors that make people vulnerable to being victims of trafficking also make them vulnerable to being in foster care, and once in foster care, the vulnerability increases given the social and emotional environment. In one case, a respondent reported that her foster parent was her trafficker.

There also appears to be an important racial component to DMST with 45% of the sample identifying as black, despite the fact that this demographic represents only 12% of the female population in the United States and roughly 7% of the overall U.S. population. Moreover, the black respondents in the sample had much lower levels of education, were significantly more likely to experience juvenile detention and not grow up with their fathers. This racial element of DMST appears to reveal that the risk factors and interventions for DMST victims may differ based on racial and/or ethnic background. One of the black respondents stated:

“The one thing I want to add is at the very core of why I was singled out to experience what I experienced was the color of my skin...Even now in 2016 we need to address impacts of race and development in children related to race. Race matters a whole lot in this country and I don’t think it’s at all healthy.”

Almost half of the sample had less than a high school diploma or GED, although 85% said that they wanted to go back to school. Additionally, the majority of the sample reported that they were in school at least part of the time that they were in the life, yet school did not play much of a role in identifying them as victims of DMST or assisting them in exiting the life. Schools

sometimes serve as a recruiting ground for DMST, but they can also be key venues of identification and intervention.

Finally, throughout the report there are some significant differences between those who had a trafficker while in the life and those who reported that they did not. The psychological dynamics of a victim's relationship with her trafficker are complex and often lead to the inability to characterize the trafficker as such. This is probably the case for some of the respondents who reported not having a trafficker. Indeed, one survey respondent demonstrates this when she states, "My controller' never controlled anything but my money. We had a great relationship."

However, those reporting not having a trafficker also appeared to have significantly more freedom, evidenced by having fewer buyers per day, being able to use their phones more frequently, having unmonitored Internet access, advertising less, and being less likely to say that they wanted help exiting the life.

It may be the case that some of the DMST victims that reported not having a trafficker are those that are engaging mostly in survival sex. They have fewer buyers and do not advertise as much, which indicates that they may be trading sex for food, drugs, or something else when they need to. This group of DMST victims is different from those with a trafficker and these factors must be

considered when developing intervention and rehabilitation strategies.

## Key recruitment & grooming findings

Recruitment experiences differ based on the relationship to the trafficker and whether the respondent reports having a trafficker at all. Three distinct experiences emerged: familial trafficking, non-familial trafficking, or the perception of no trafficking.

Although there was one year (2015) in which the majority of respondents reported that they met their trafficker through a tech interface (text, website, app), across the entire sample the vast majority of victims first met their trafficker in person. It is unclear whether 2015 is the start of a trend or whether it represents an anomaly; therefore, online victim recruitment must continue to be assessed, including specific platforms and methods.

Most said that they could not tell that the person they were communicating with was a trafficker, and the relationship with the trafficker breaks down into three categories: family, social network, and stranger. The majority reports that their trafficker was a complete stranger, with social network being second most common and family third. Nevertheless, all three of these groupings appeared very clearly in the survey results, and all three must be considered when discussing DMST issues with the public, as well as when working

with the victims. A victim's relationship to the trafficker may be a significant factor in her ability and willingness to exit the life, and certainly in her rehabilitation and reintegration.

For the majority of respondents, **the grooming process took less than 4 months**, and the relationship with the trafficker was cultivated mostly in person. However, and importantly, technology-based modes of developing a close relationship with the trafficker appear to be increasing in usage. With the advent of texting apps, including those with video capabilities, traffickers appear to increasingly use virtual communication to develop the perception of a close, trusting relationship with their victims. Whether the trafficker is a stranger or someone in the social network, this ability to chat virtually may increase the vulnerability of victims. In addition, use of virtual methods for grooming victims allows traffickers to connect with multiple victims simultaneously, thereby increasing the number of victims they can be recruiting at any given time.

### Key findings regarding experiences in the life

It is important to understand that victims are fluid between different commercial sex venues and often move between them. The most common commercial sex outlets and venues in descending order are street prostitution, online prostitution,

escort services, and strip clubs, and many of the respondents engage in multiple of these at the same time.

The results also reveal that DMST victims experience severe and frequent abuse by their trafficker while in the life. Thus, not only are they psychologically coerced, but also they are physically harmed through various forms of force, including rape and substance abuse. This highlights the severe levels of trauma DMST victims experience, beyond the trauma of commercial sexual exploitation itself. The level of physical and psychological control is also evidenced by the fact that the vast majority of respondents said they kept very little or none of the money that they earned.

The vast majority of traffickers are inflicting this type of abuse onto more than one victim, with the average number of victims per trafficker is 3.6. The number of victims per trafficker may be reflective of the extent to which the trafficker forces the victims to recruit others on his behalf. The majority of respondents said that the trafficker asked them to recruit other girls; most likely if they do not comply, they will face more severe abuse by the trafficker. Although their recruitment responsibilities may be—and have been—viewed as a form of complicity, conspiracy, or aiding and abetting by law enforcement, it is imperative to understand force,

fraud, and coercion of sex trafficking victimization in order to understand the dynamics behind forced recruitment.

### Key findings on victim access to technology

The majority of respondents had access to a telephone while in the life. However, the level of monitoring of phone activity varied across the sample given certain subsets of the sample and the time span of when they entered the life. The overall level of monitoring of cell phones, regardless of type, is high; however, there is a consistent downward trend in those that report the trafficker monitors their phone use. In developing a tech intervention strategy for cell phones, it is important to consider the level and type of monitoring of phone activity, but the results do indicate that cell phone access is being monitored less than it was in the past, so this could be a promising means of intervention.

A majority also reports having access to the Internet while in the life, and access to the Internet was monitored less than the phone. One potential reason the Internet is monitored less than the phone is that, with a few exceptions, the websites the respondents access most often are sites where commercial sex is advertised. Thus, their Internet access facilitates the trafficker's business and he may therefore view it as less threatening than the phone.

Importantly, 90% of respondents said they had access to social media accounts, indicating that social media may be a promising method of identifying victims, disseminating information to victims, and intervening on their behalf.

### Key findings on technology and advertising

The survey results reveal that the trend for street advertising has slowly decreased over time while the trend for online advertising has increased. Those entering the life beginning in 2009 are more likely to report advertising online than on the street, whereas most of those entering the life prior to 2009 reported advertising on the street.

However, there was a dip in online advertising for those who entered the life between 2011 through 2014. This dip may be attributed to the increased scrutiny of Craigslist and Backpage during this time period. This tentatively suggests that increased monitoring and legal scrutiny of online advertising sites decreases online advertising.

**A majority of respondents who were advertised on the Internet report that they write the text of the ads themselves**, and there are a variety of keywords that the traffickers have them use to signal they are young. Law enforcement should continue to use certain software and algorithms to sift through the text of the ads for these words to pinpoint which are most likely to be DMST victims.

The results of the survey demonstrate that online advertising clearly facilitates volume for DMST. The results reveal that advertising online is highly correlated with more buyers per day, and online advertising allows for greater access to buyers regardless of geographic location.

### Key findings on technology and interaction with buyers

A majority of respondents said that they communicated with the buyers themselves, but those that entered the life between 14 to 17 are much more likely to communicate with the buyers themselves than those that entered when they were 13 or younger. This is a strong indication that **when a trafficker is communicating with the buyers, the age of the victim is likely to be younger than 14 years old.**

For both the victims and the traffickers, the most common way to communicate with buyers, in descending order, is over the phone, text, social media/apps, and email, although phone appears to be decreasing overtime and social media/apps appears to be increasing. Future research must continue to monitor the most common ways that victims and traffickers communicate with buyers, as this is critical information for law enforcement as they consider deploying various strategies for reverse stings.

The most common place for victims to meet buyers is at hotels, followed by houses and cars. This comports with other research on common meeting places of commercial sex. Given the large role that hotels and motels play in DMST, conversations about hotel and motel education and intervention must continue to be part of the dialogue on DMST.

### Key findings on exiting the life

Regarding exiting the life, it is important to note that 20% of the respondents said that they have not permanently left the life at the point they took the survey. This is significant as it reveals the tendency to return to what is familiar, and also reveals the psychological subtleties of not identifying as a victim of sex trafficking.

The vast majority said they wanted help when they were in the life, but only 29% said someone reached out to help. Those reporting that they did not have a trafficker are significantly less likely to report that they wanted help than those that did have a trafficker. Once again, this reveals that, whether or not these victims actually had a trafficker, the fact that they reported that they did not impacts their ability to view their situation as one of DMST and therefore their ability to identify as a victim of DMST. These factors need to be taken into consideration when communicating with these victims about their situation.



Regarding the best modes of getting information out to the victims while they are in the life, those who entered the life after 2009 said email, text, social media, apps, and the Internet would be the most helpful. However, the majority of respondents reported that technology was used very minimally in exiting the life. There appears to be a major gap between what they view as the most helpful modalities of intervention to exit the life and how they are currently exiting the life. There is clearly substantial room for new, innovative, and effective tech interventions for DMST victims.

Only 24% of respondents said that they have participated in the prosecution of their trafficker, and of those who have not, 88% said they are not interested. There are a number of possible explanations for this, including continued loyalty, love, fear of retribution, or the pain of providing testimony and reliving the traumatic experiences. What is clear is that most of these victims do not necessarily view justice in terms of the law, but perhaps more in terms of their own ability to achieve healing and fulfillment. One survivor said, *"I just need to heal."*



Technology makes help so much more accessible to people.

– Survey Respondent

# Recommendations

Findings of the survey support many initiatives currently underway to combat DMST – such as supporting stable and loving homes, increasing awareness in the community, and expanding available support resources such as shelters and job training. These efforts play an important role in protecting vulnerable children and identifying traffickers, and should be sustained and grown when possible.

In addition, the following recommendations stem from the unique insights afforded by survey data and the explicit messages of the participating survivors. The recommendations will be divided into three different sections: prevention, intervention, and recovery.

## Prevention

There are several key avenues for prevention. **To the extent possible, prevention programs must be aimed directly at children and youth,** and therefore require examining those places where children and youth—especially the most vulnerable—are likely to be. The first is schools. The survey results and open-ended responses from the participating survivors make it very clear that schools must do more to prevent DMST.

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“If someone would have taught us when we were in school it would have helped us. They teach us not to talk to strangers but don’t teach us not to talk to traffickers.”

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“To reach out to troubled children, especially in school.”

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“I just feel getting more education to our youth, not just specifically females, in order to know what to look out for and be aware of the dangers and realities of life. One of my biggest things in prevention is if they don’t know, how can they protect themselves. If I had known what to look for I could have identified what was going on.”

Schools should explore strategies to increase DMST awareness within the community. Via internal curriculum and partnerships with local organizations, schools have an opportunity to educate youth on what trafficking looks like and how a student may be vulnerable. In addition, it is important to include information for young boys who may view pimping as a viable option.

The second major target for prevention should be foster care and juvenile justice. Given that childhood abuse and neglect are strong predictors of foster care and juvenile delinquency, as well as DMST, there is clearly much prevention work that needs to take place within the foster care and juvenile justice systems. This means educating the children that are currently in foster care and juvenile detention on commercial sexual exploitation, as well as programs on empowerment and self-worth.

Finally, with the amount of time that children and youth spend online, there should be much greater consideration for online prevention messaging and programming. The ubiquitous use of social media and apps, including Facebook and Snapchat, among young people offers an important opportunity to engage rather than limiting prevention programming face-to-face encounters.

## Intervention

As with prevention, there are several key areas of intervention. These recommendations discuss training the most likely first responders for the purposes of identification of victims and intervening on their behalf to avoid the situation described by this survivor who made an outcry and was not believed:

“I then chose to speak to a detective and tell him my story - his response - “This story is BS. You are only telling me this because you got busted!” 1) I chose to seek him out to speak to him 2) I never had a record of any kind.”

The research highlighted the role of educators in particular in helping to identify victims. School faculty and staff must be trained in DMST so that they can not only recognize victims, but also know what to do to most effectively intervene.

Additionally, given the very high likelihood of DMST victims being in either foster care or the juvenile justice system, it is imperative that all people that interact with these children are trained on DMST and how to identify victims and intervene on their behalf. Both locations offer considerable opportunity for vulnerable children to be recruited into the life. Training must include: CPS professionals, juvenile probation officers, juvenile court judges, family court judges, foster families, and police officers, among others. The training should be mandatory and ongoing and must be trauma-informed.

Findings also indicate there may be investigative value in how a trafficker communicates with buyers. Younger victims with traffickers were significantly more likely to report the trafficker communicated directly with buyers (rather than

the victim communicating with buyers). As such, factoring in who is communicating with buyers may facilitate investigative risk assessments and victim identification.

Finally, given the increasing use of technology for grooming victims and advertising to buyers, **there is a significant amount of room for the technology industry to develop advanced and sophisticated tools to combat DMST.** For example, findings suggest increasing use of social media and apps by buyers to communicate with traffickers and victims. Further examination of patterns in this process could help industry identify bad actors on their platforms. Tech companies could also deliver online help advertisements via platforms frequented by victims. Most victims are not seeing helpline numbers while in the life, and those that did not encouraged use of social media for placement. Improving visibility of help resources such as helplines on platforms known to be frequented by DMST victims could increase opportunities for exiting the life.

## Recovery

With a significant amount of resources going to investigating and arresting traffickers, as well as identifying and intervening on behalf of victims, it is imperative that more time, attention, and resources are put into ensuring that services are in place after the victim leaves the life. Survivor participants in the survey stated:

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“providing more services for victims and being able to have more safe places to go.”

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“A lot of girls that are in the life have substance abuse issues. The two go hand in hand.”

---

“We need to find more funding so that we can have housing and education for survivors for long term success for survivors.”

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“We need help with school and providing educational opportunities.”

Collectively, these survivors note that protection programs need to include: safe, short- and long-term shelter and housing, substance abuse rehabilitation programs, and educational and vocational assistance.

Among the most important types of support needed is counseling and mental health services. Many of the survey respondents highlight the need for counseling in order to address deep questions around identity and purpose, self-esteem, and self-worth.

“It’s been a journey. A lot of what I know about myself comes from sex work. It’s been a large part of my world. It’s easy because no one really knows me. I’m whoever they want me to be. I’m an illusion that way. A product of an aroused imagination. And so sometimes because that’s been such a substantial part of my life I think I myself don’t have such a concrete understanding of when it’s ok to completely be myself or not. It’s a switch that turns on and off.”

“I think people need to understand that people who are trafficked has ‘lost their identity’ and can only relate to their controller at that time.”

“I felt that selling myself was all that I was worth because I had been sexually abused.”

“Never felt like I was seen or heard. That I wasn’t worth anything. Also, I did try to commit suicide 5 times before the age of 17.”

One respondent noted that there is room to establish a virtual therapy community for DMST survivors. For survivors that do not live in areas where there are specialized trauma-informed counselors who work with DMST victims, these virtual communities would facilitate access to such services.

“There are so many survivors that are very active online with advocacy and receiving and giving peer support. This makes it really possible for survivors to get help when they don’t have services available. I live in a rural area and while there are therapists, there isn’t much in the way of help for sex trafficking victims and survivors. Technology makes help so much more accessible to people.”

Finally, acknowledging the quickly shifting landscape in any area involving technology, it is important to continuously review how technology is being used by traffickers, victims, and buyers. Thorn plans to continue its efforts on this front and is reviewing methods for ongoing monitoring of technology trends in DMST.

## Final Remarks

The stories shared by DMST survivors about their experiences offer critical insights into DMST and must be included in any strategy to combat DMST. Their responses to the 2016 Survivor Survey provide invaluable insight into recruitment and grooming tactics, use of technology, and challenges to exiting the life.

These findings affirm the belief that the use of technology is increasing in all aspects of DMST. It is being used to expand the reach and influence of traffickers and to promote the sale of minors for sex. Perhaps more importantly, the survey also highlights the potential for technological interventions to identify illegal online activity and elevate help resources to those in the life.

These findings also serve as a reminder that although the use of technology is exacerbating DMST, it remains an inherently social crime in which human connection plays a dominant role. Children are at their most vulnerable when lacking healthy, loving relationships. Traffickers twist this need to their advantage and leave a lasting mark on their victims. **Successful interventions must not treat all cases of DMST as the same and recovery efforts must acknowledge the deep, psychological harm victims endure.**

This report was made in collaboration with Dr. Vanessa Bouche, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Texas Christian University. Dr. Bouché is currently a co-principal investigator on three federally-funded grants on human trafficking, two from the National Institute of Justice and one from the United States Agency on International Development. Her research has been published in the Journal of Politics, Journal of Public Policy, Politics & Gender, among other outlets.

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Without the dedication of the following individuals, this work wouldn't have been possible: Leah Treitman, Melissa Stroebel, Brooke Istook, Kristy Kosak, and Sarah Potts.

Designed by Kelsey Lesko

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## **THANK YOU**

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**Allies Against Slavery**

**Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition**

**Breaking Free**

**City of Refuge**

**Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking**

**Covenant House**

**End Slavery Tennessee**

**Generate Hope**

**Grace Haven**

**Janus Youth**

**Journey Out**

**More Too Life**

**My Life My Choice**

**Phoenix Dream Center**

**Rebecca Bender Initiative**

**Recovery Agents of Hope**

**Redeeming Joy**

**Safe Harbor/Center for Youth Services**

**Saving Innocence**

**The Hope Project**

**The Link-Passageways**

**The Well House**

**There Is Hope For Me**

**Traffick911**

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