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### Sex Work in the United States

Brittany had an argument with her parents one night and decided to run away, little did she know this was going to be the biggest mistake of her life. She arrived in Las Vegas to stay with her friend's cousin. She soon found out that he expected her to become part of an escort service. Shortly after she hopped on a greyhound bus back home. On the bus, she met her trafficker. Though he was more than twenty years older than her she felt drawn to him. He was sweet and kind and soon she saw him as her boyfriend. She got off the bus to stay with him in a hotel. There he encouraged her and taught her how to make ads on a website called [backpage.com](http://backpage.com), a common sex work page. From then on she started answering calls and providing services for other men. Everything she earned was handed over to her boyfriend. She saw no issue with this because he always paid for everything and she believed he loved her. She even saw herself having a future with him. During a California Sting, she spent one night in jail. While she was there the police told her that she was a victim of human trafficking. They asked her if she knew her boyfriend was a pimp. She denied these accusations and claimed they were in love. It took Brittany a long time to realize she was not in a healthy relationship. She began to be physically beaten and eventually she ran away and was put in a safe house (Talamo).

Brittany was trafficked in a very common method. Men make their victims believe that they love them. They are conned into a fake relationship that is controlled by the man. Stories like Brittany's are not commonly shared. This is because many victims are too scared to share

their own experiences. They may fear criminalization or that their pimp could find them.

Brittany's story was shared in the Shreveport Times, a local newspaper in Louisiana. This news source is a legitimate non-bias source. Unfortunately, the topic of sex work in the United States does not seem to be talked about. Americans know about this issue in other countries but they do not have knowledge of the severity of sex work and trafficking within the United States. Sex work and trafficking are far more severe in the United States than people think. This is due to manipulation, use of technology, and negative effects on criminalization which has a serious impact on the mental and physical health of sex workers.

This identification of the severity of sex work in the United States uses six sources of information. Meredith Dank is the author of the article, "Estimating the Size and Structure of the Underground Commercial Sex Economy in Eight Major US Cities." This article serves to educate us on how and why sex workers get involved in this line of work. Lucy Platt is the author of "Associations between sex work laws and sex workers' health: A systematic review and meta-analysis of quantitative and qualitative studies." Platt's article contributes to this research because she explains why criminalization deepens the issue of sex work in the United States. Havocscope is a government group that collects information about the black market including a lot of information about sex work. This information helps to determine how many people are involved with sex work based on reports. Here we can also compare the number of sex workers compared to other countries. Danielle Sawicki A et al examine the risks and stereotypes of women and children involved in sex work. Next, Lex Talamo published a story about a woman named Brittany who shared her personal testimony of involvement in sex work and trafficking. This contributes to understanding, from a first-hand account, how detrimental the manipulation to a sex worker can be. Derek Thompson published an article that lists the facts

about sex work in the United States including where it is the most prevalent. More importantly, he helps to gain an understanding of where pimps may target victims to work for them. Lastly, the Federal Bureau of Investigation adds to the sex work investigation by providing in-depth information on child trafficking in the United States.

What is known about the underground sex work community is likely the tip of the iceberg. Due to the sensitivity and privacy of this work line, the actual number of individuals involved is unknown. The United States can only make an educated guess based on the matters that have been reported (Dank). Even during other circumstances such as child trafficking, it is common that the trafficker is not revealed. These cases are not brought to light because the child involved is likely too scared to speak up. In many situations, the child may be abused or could be treated oppositely, very well. The child may be too scared to speak up or may not speak up because they do not believe anything is wrong (*United States, Congress, Federal Bureau of Investigation*). Although the true number of individuals involved in sex work is not fully known, “The estimated number of prostitutes in the United States in 1 million” (“Prostitution Statistics”). The accurate number is likely far higher. The estimate of 1 million is based on only reports. The United States has the third largest number of those involved in sex work, following China and India. This is a very large issue in the United States that needs to be brought to light.

It is not very difficult for individuals to get involved with sex work due to manipulation tactics. This contributes to the severity of sex work in the United States because women and children do not initially know what is going to happen to them. Unfortunately, this tactic draws many people into sex work which creates a larger issue that affects even more people. According to Urban Institute,

“Though pimps are usually not the sole reason for an individual's entry into sex work they play a role in manipulating the person. A pimp may do this by discouraging the individual to have sex for free and persuading them to be employed by him. He may also strike up a romantic interest with the individual. In some instances, family and friends can persuade an individual”(Dank).

The involvement of underground sex workers in a family can have heavy effects on individuals connected to them. A person is much more likely to get involved with sex work if they are encouraged by a family or friend. These are the people that we trust. It is common that individuals are persuaded by family friends because “social circles and home neighborhood are more likely venues for pimps” (Thompson). It is common and likely that individuals will be coaxed into sex work from their own neighborhood. This threatens involvement with sex work because we least expect to get involved in such a vulgar line of work with those who are close to us. Sex work is far more severe in the United States than people think, any person could be subjected to this type of manipulation without their knowledge.

Though sometimes friends and family persuade an individual into the sex work line there are other ways of manipulation. Sometimes the pimp takes a romantic interest in a woman or child he wants to work for him. The relationship can blind the individual from the reality of what they are doing. Initially,

“The pimp will start a relationship with the victim. It may be harmless at first but soon after the person will become dependent on the pimp. The pimp may provide them food, shelter, and money. Eventually, the victim does not know how to leave the pimp because they do not believe they could survive on their own. Typically the pimp will also change to look at the victim and move them around a lot. It is unfortunate the way these pimps

treat their victims. It is very hard to leave sex trafficking when the individual is conditioned to believe they do not have a life apart from the pimp” (*United States, Congress, Federal Bureau of Investigation*).

Many women involved with sex work were manipulated into the situation. Like in Brittany’s story, she believed that her pimp loved her. Many individuals are brainwashed to believe their future is with their pimp. In some cases, they are not aware that they are a part of sex work. Men learning how to perfectly manipulate women into sex work poses a great risk to society. This contributes to the severity of sex work in the United States because it means that more women are getting involved with this line of work, sometimes without knowledge.

Technology is affecting sex work and trafficking. The internet has given sex work in the United States a significant advantage. Meredith Dank offers some information on how pimps access and get involved with sex work through technology.

“Prostitution is decreasing on the street, but thriving online. Pimps and sex workers advertise on social media and sites like Craigslist.com and Backpage.com to attract customers and new employees, and to gauge business opportunities in other cities. An increasing online presence makes it both easier for law enforcement to track activity in the underground sex economy and for an offender to promote and provide access to the trade” (Dank).

Technology is allowing individuals to hide behind their screens. The internet is inhibiting the exchange of sex work. Although technology is being used in a terrible way this also has one benefit. Pimps using technology has helped law enforcement to track them down. It is not widely known that technology is used for sex work due to the fact that pimps are using the dark web.

Technology has also significantly involved child trafficking. Pimps are using the internet to

“provide a convenient worldwide marketing channel. Individuals can now use websites and social media to advertise, schedule, and purchase sexual encounters with minors.

The Internet and mobile devices also allow pimps and traffickers to reach a larger clientele base than in the past, which may expose victims to greater risks and dangers”(United States, Congress, Federal Bureau of Investigation).

Sites are being used for sex work and trafficking. Unfortunately, the use of technology in the United States is being used to the advantage of sex work. Technology has made it easier for individuals to buy and sell work. Among these websites, it is common for pimps to share child pornography for free. Technology has involved minors and therefore has made trafficking more severe in the United States.

Criminalization is not helping the issue of sex work in the United States. It is putting the sex workers and trafficking victims at a bigger risk. It is

“estimate[d] that, collectively, lawful or unlawful repressive policing practices linked to sex work criminalization (partial or full) are associated with increased risk of infection with HIV or STIs, sexual or physical violence from clients or intimate partners, and condomless sex” (Platt).

The targeting of sex workers can make them fear criminalization. When this happens the individuals will usually flee to another area or hide. In these isolated areas the sex workers are at greater risk for violence and sexually transmitted diseases. There are a lot of other ways law enforcement can stop sex work instead of criminalizing all the workers. Instead, the government is working on ways to help sex workers speak up. Many people think criminalization will help to

solve sex work and put it to an end. This has the opposite effect, criminalization puts sex workers in a far more dangerous situation when they flee. Criminalization contributes to the severity of sex work in the United States.

Women and children are affected by sex work mentally and physically. The longer a woman is involved in sex work the worse the situation can get. It is not uncommon for pimps to beat their employees. Adding abuse into the issue of sex work poses an even bigger threat to society. Surprisingly,

“most pimps believe that the media portrayals exaggerat[e] violence. Some even saw the term "pimp" as derogatory, despite admitting to the occasional use of physical abuse for punishment. Although pimps may have underreported the use of physical violence, they did cite frequent use of psychological coercion to maintain control over their employees" (Dank).

This proves that pimps in many situations are both physically and mentally abusive to their employees to keep them around. This is dangerous for individuals involved in sex work because it will affect the individual in the long term. Though physical violence is not always reported, manipulation of the mind has been expressed. This is a long-term severe effect of those involved with sex work in the United States.

Although pimps didn't always admit to physical abuse there is a lot of evidence supporting it. According to the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation,

“It is not uncommon for traffickers to beat, rape, or torture their victims. Some traffickers also use drugs and alcohol to control them. In addition, many child victims suffer from physical ailments, including tuberculosis, infections, drug addiction, malnutrition, and physical injuries resulting from violence inflicted upon them. Venereal diseases also run

rampant. Children may also suffer from short-term and long-term psychological effects such as depression, low self-esteem, and feelings of hopelessness.”

Physically those trafficked or involved in sex work are abused. When children are abused from a young age it can influence disease and other physical ailments. Similarly, children suffer psychological effects when trafficked. These effects are serious and contribute to the severity of sex work in the United States.

Sex work and trafficking are far more severe in the United States than people think. This is due to manipulation, use of technology, and negative effects on criminalization which has a serious impact on the mental and physical health of sex workers. Though this is a large issue in the United States there are some efforts to stop the ongoing underground sex work. The efforts made are as follows:

“Recent policy changes in the U.S. include the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) and Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA). These policies seek to stop the assistance, facilitation, or support for sex trafficking by making website providers liable for any usage of their platforms that facilitates sex trafficking, knowingly or unknowingly” (Sawicki).

The United States is doing everything in its power to combat this life-altering issue. Hopefully, these efforts will be enough to decrease the amount of individuals involved in sex work. Sex work and trafficking are very big problems in the United States. Many people do not know about these issues because of the secrecy. This problem needs to be brought to light because it is serious and can easily draw more people into it without their knowledge.

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