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Sex Trafficking in Nonurban Environments

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates sex trafficking in Pennsylvania with a specific focus on Blair County. It presents what sex trafficking is, the different stages of sex trafficking, the different types of sex trafficking, the actors involved in sex trafficking, facilitating factors of sex trafficking, social media use in sex trafficking, and sex trafficking in nonurban environments. It addresses the following questions: (1) what factors contribute to Blair County having a higher rate of sex trafficking when compared to other counties of the fifth class; and (2) what role did social media play in the cases of sex trafficking in Blair County. The project consisted of a case study of a sex trafficking ring in Blair County. The results demonstrate how the group operated and avoided law enforcement for as long as it did. The conclusion is that: the cooperation of trafficked individuals and witnesses is crucial for prosecuting sex traffickers, the treatment of trafficked individuals as criminals inhibits their cooperation, and that current drug laws potentially inhibit the cooperation of trafficked individuals and witnesses. This project was originally focused on sex trafficking in Northeastern Pennsylvania. However, as is a common theme in combating sex trafficking, there was not enough data available. This led to the project focusing on sex trafficking in nonurban environments.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The fight against sex trafficking is an uphill battle: morally, mentally, and logistically. The dearth of data on sex trafficking in the United States limits research and forces key decision-makers such as law enforcement, non-governmental organizations, and policymakers to make judgements with minimal guidance. Therefore, research on the trends and patterns of sex trafficking in the United States are crucial to designing and maintaining effective countermeasures against traffickers and appropriate support systems for survivors.

Sex trafficking is a complicated process, with distinct stages and types. The separation of sex trafficking to its core parts allows for a more objective understanding of what sex trafficking means. An improved understanding of sex trafficking enables decision-makers to make more informed decisions, and thus, improve countermeasures against sex trafficking in the United States.

While sex trafficking has historically been thought of as an urban issue, it happens in non-urban environments as well. Sex traffickers are highly adaptable and opportunistic; if they perceive an opening for sex trafficking in a nonurban environment, they will exploit it. The narrative that sex trafficking is an urban issue and the bias in perception it induces creates an opportunity for sex trafficking in nonurban environments.

Blair County, Pennsylvania presents a strong opportunity for a case study on sex trafficking in a nonurban environment. Compared to other fifth class counties, defined as a

population *between* 90,000 and 144,999, Blair County has a significantly higher rate of cases involving sex trafficking. This research will examine the following questions:

1. What factors contribute to sex trafficking nationally?
2. What factors contribute to Blair County have a higher rate of sex trafficking when compared to other 5th class counties?
3. What role did social media play in the cases of sex trafficking in Blair County?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

To frame this research, a relevant literature review defines sex trafficking. It then discusses the stages of sex trafficking as well as the legal model for prosecuting sex trafficking. Next it explores the key actors in sex trafficking and other factors that influence demand. It concludes with a review of the roles that social media plays in sex trafficking and the unique challenges of combating sex trafficking in a non-urban environment when compared to an urban environment.

Definition of Sex Trafficking

The difficulties of fighting sex trafficking are numerous; the first is an agreed upon clear and concise definition. While many definitions have overlapping similarities, the differences create room for confusion. Pennsylvania code defines that a person commits a felony trafficking in individuals:

(1) of the first degree if the person recruits, entices, solicits, advertises, harbors, transports, provides, obtains or maintains an individual if the person knows or recklessly disregards that the individual will be subject to sexual servitude;

(2) of the first degree if the person knowingly benefits financially or receives anything of value from any act that facilitates any activity described in paragraph (1);

(3) of the second degree if the person recruits, entices, solicits, advertises, harbors, transports, provides, obtains or maintains an individual if the person knows or recklessly disregards that the individual will be subject to labor servitude; or

(4) of the second degree if the person knowingly benefits financially or receives anything of value from an act which facilitates any activity under paragraph (3). (18 PA C.S. § 3011)

Many cases involving sex trafficking involve the charge of involuntary servitude, § 3012. Involuntary servitude includes both sexual servitude and labor servitude. A person commits a felony of the first degree:

if the person knowingly, through any of the means described in subsection (b), subjects an individual to labor servitude or sexual servitude, except where the conduct is permissible under Federal or State law other than this chapter.

(b) Means of subjecting an individual to involuntary servitude.--A person may subject an individual to involuntary servitude through any of the following means:

- (1) Causing or threatening to cause serious harm to any individual.
- (2) Physically restraining or threatening to physically restrain another individual.
- (3) Kidnapping or attempting to kidnap any individual.
- (4) Abusing or threatening to abuse the legal process.

(5) Taking or retaining the individual's personal property or real property as a means of coercion.

(6) Engaging in unlawful conduct with respect to documents, as defined in section 3014 (relating to unlawful conduct regarding documents).

(7) Extortion.

(8) Fraud.

(9) Criminal coercion, as defined in section 2906 (relating to criminal coercion).

(10) Duress, through the use of or threat to use unlawful force against the person or another.

(11) Debt coercion.

(12) Facilitating or controlling the individual's access to a controlled substance.

(13) Using any scheme, plan or pattern intended to cause the individual to believe that, if the individual does not perform the labor, services, acts or performances, that individual or another individual will suffer serious harm or physical restraint. (18 PA C.S. § 3012)

Sexual servitude is defined as “Any sex act or performance involving a sex act for which anything of value is directly or indirectly given, promised to or received by any individual or which is performed or provided by any individual and is induced or obtained from: (1) A minor. (2) Any other individual by any of the means set forth in section 3012(b).” (18 PA C.S. § 3001)

Serious harm is defined as “any harm, whether physical or nonphysical, that is sufficiently serious, under all the surrounding circumstances, to compel a reasonable person of the same background and in the same circumstances as the victim of human trafficking to perform or to continue performing labor or a service, a commercial sex act or a performance involving sex acts in order to avoid incurring that harm.” (18 PA C.S. § 3001)

Debt coercion is defined as “exploitation of the status or condition of a debtor arising from a pledge by the debtor of the personal services of the debtor or an individual under the debtor's control as a security or payment for debt, if any of the following apply:

(1) The value of those services as reasonably assessed is not applied toward the liquidation of the debt.

(2) The length and nature of those services are not respectively limited and defined.

(3) The principal amount of the debt does not reasonably reflect the value of the items or services for which the debt was incurred.

(4) The debtor is coerced to perform sex acts as payment for the debt.

(5) The creditor controls and determines the movement, housing and services performed by the debtor until repayment of the debt.” (18 PA C.S. § 3001)

Under the Action Means Purpose (AMP) model of human trafficking, a trafficker must have an action, means, and purpose to be prosecuted for sex trafficking. Pennsylvania law breaks up the AMP model into trafficking in individuals (18 PA C.S. § 3011) and involuntary servitude (18 PA C.S. § 3012). § 3011 focuses on the actions of a trafficker, such as recruiting and advertising, while § 3012 focuses on the means traffickers use, such as force or coercion. The AMP model will be discussed in greater detail later in the literature review.

This research will use Pennsylvania statutes 18 PA C.S. § 3011 and 18 PA C.S. § 3012 to designate cases as sex trafficking. It will use the AMP model to analyze said cases. This research will use trafficked individual to refer to a victim of 18 PA C.S. § 3011 or 18 PA C.S. § 3012. It will use trafficker to refer to a perpetrator of 18 PA C.S. § 3011 or 18 PA C.S. § 3012.

Common Misconceptions of Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking is a broad concept. However, there are several things that sex trafficking is not. Sex trafficking is one of the types of human trafficking, the other being labor trafficking. Labor trafficking involves the same methods and means of sex trafficking, but with the end state of exploiting the victim for labor instead of sexual acts. Another common misconception is that all prostitution equates to sex trafficking. While there is a great deal of intersection between the two, some individuals do choose prostitution as a means of generating income. This point is debated among researchers.

Models of Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking itself involves multiple crimes. Separating sex trafficking into distinct stages and types, enables authorities to target specific vulnerabilities in sex trafficking

operations. This project intends to assess the distinct stages, to the extent possible, to understand common and unique features in the region of study.

The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine presents a conceptual model of the stages of sex trafficking: recruitment, travel/transport, exploitation, and integration/reintegration.

Following is the diagram:

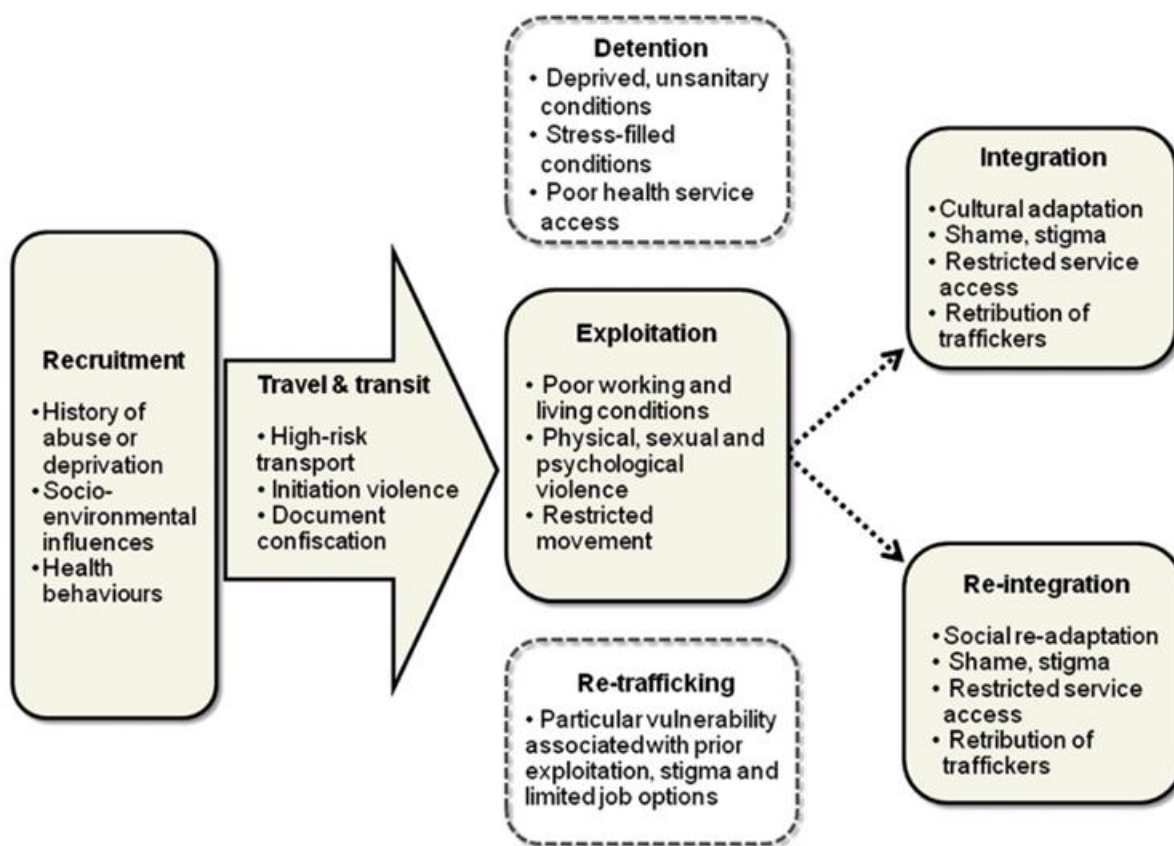


Figure 1 Stages of Sex Trafficking (Zimmerman et al., 2011)

The first stage of sex trafficking is the recruitment stage. The recruitment stage involves the location and manipulation of a victim to create a situation where the victim is vulnerable to be trafficked. (Zimmerman et al., 2011). Traffickers use a variety of entrapment and enmeshment

techniques to manipulate victims. (Reid, 2016) The targeting of victims is usually opportunistic i.e., traffickers look for victims who are the most vulnerable (Cockbain et al., 2011)

After recruitment, the travel and transit stage involves moving the victim to a location where they can be exploited. This stage is recurring, meaning that victims and traffickers frequently move due to shifts in demand and pressure from law enforcement. Sometimes these movements occur in patterns known as circuits. A circuit is a collection of trafficking hotspots, usually cities, that sex traffickers transport their victims between. (Ibanez et al., 2014) The below image is an example of a sex trafficking circuit along the East Coast of the United States.



Figure 2 Example of a Sex Trafficking Circuit (Ibanez et al., 2014)

Following the travel/transport stage is the exploitation stage. It is in this phase that the exploitation of the victim for commercial sex acts begins. This phase is also recurring, meaning that a victim can enter a loop between the travel/transit stage and the exploitation stage.

With publicly available data, it is extremely difficult to determine the loop's longevity. This reflects the challenges of researching this topic.

The integration/reintegration stage refers to the victim integrating into a host country or reintegrating into the victim's country of origin. Integration/reintegration is not achieved until a victim both feels that they have been accepted and has become an active member of the economic, social, and political life of a country. (ECRE 2002) Unfortunately, integration/reintegration is still marked with hardship. Shame and stigma will follow victims for years after they leave a trafficking situation. They also have limited access to services such as healthcare, other government programs, and employment due to a frequent lack of identification documents and health insurance. If the victim is integrating into a host country, they must adapt to the new culture. If they are reintegrating into their country of origin, they must re-adapt socially to what their life was like before they were trafficked.

These difficulties of the integration/reintegration stage can lead victims to be re-trafficked. A small number of victims also end up in the detention stage. This stage occurs when the victim falls into the custody of a government authority.

The Action-Means-Purpose (AMP) model, rather than provide a continuum of stages like the previous model, is a representation of the federal definition of sex trafficking per the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000. Furthermore, the framework the AMP model proposes allows for more structured analysis of sex trafficking cases. Under the AMP model, a trafficker needs to have an action, means, and purpose to be prosecuted. The only exception to this is in cases of minor sex trafficking. Any individual under 18 years of age who is a participant in a commercial sex act is a victim of human trafficking. (Polaris) Pennsylvania law

divides the AMP model into two statutes, 18 § 3011 (Trafficking in Individuals) and 18 § 3012 (Involuntary Servitude). 18 § 3011 refers to the actions of traffickers whereas 18 § 3012 refers to the means traffickers use. Both statutes require that the perpetrator of either 18 § 3011 or 18 § 3012 have the purpose of sex trafficking.

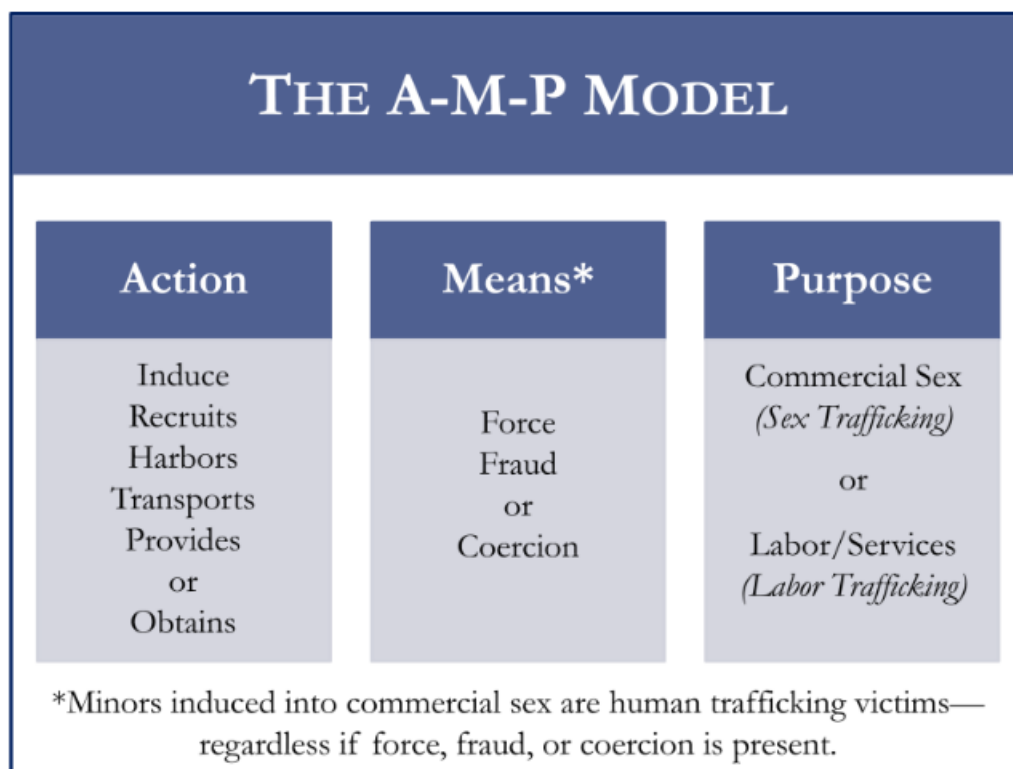


Figure 3 AMP Model (Polaris)

Types of Sex Trafficking

In addition to having distinct stages, sex trafficking can be broken down into multiple types. The Polaris Project, a nonprofit organization that has done extensive research on human trafficking. “Between December 7, 2007, and December 31, 2016, Polaris operated hotlines

received 32,208 cases of potential human trafficking and 10,085 potential cases of labor exploitation in the United States.” They analyzed this data and created 25 types of human trafficking. The four most common types of sex trafficking are escort services, illicit massage, health, and beauty businesses, outdoor solicitation, and residential operations.

The most common type of sex trafficking is sex trafficking relating to escort services. Out of 16,951 cases, 4,651 were classified as escort services. Escort services refer to commercial sex acts that occur at a temporary indoor location. They can be either “in-call” or “out-call.” This refers to when buyers come to the victim’s location and when the victim is brought to the buyer’s location respectively. Traffickers for this type of sex trafficking can either work alone or be part of networks of traffickers. Victims are usually exploited via force, fraud, or coercion. Traffickers often use excessive physical and sexual violence to maintain control over victims.

The second most common type of sex trafficking is sex trafficking relating to illicit massage, health, and beauty businesses. There were 2,949 reported cases. It should be noted that victims, in addition to being exploited for commercial sex acts were also exploited for their labor. While not all massage, health, and beauty businesses are illegitimate, Polaris estimates that there are at least 7,000 locations nationwide that are used for sex trafficking. While some of these businesses are stand-alone, many are part of larger networks, operated by multiple individuals. Most victims are immigrants that range in age from their mid-thirties to late fifties. Traffickers maintain control via threats, exploitation of communication barriers, and constant monitoring.

The third most common type of sex trafficking is sex trafficking relating to outdoor solicitation, accounting for 1,643 cases. Outdoor solicitation is what most people picture when

they think of sex trafficking. It consists of victims being forced to find their own buyers. In urban areas, this is done in specific locations such as certain blocks of a street. In rural areas, it is often done at truck stops. Traffickers in outdoor solicitation often operate alone. Traffickers opportunistically target victims, offering false promises of emotional and economic stability. Extreme physical violence, isolation, and substance dependency are all tactics used by traffickers to maintain control.

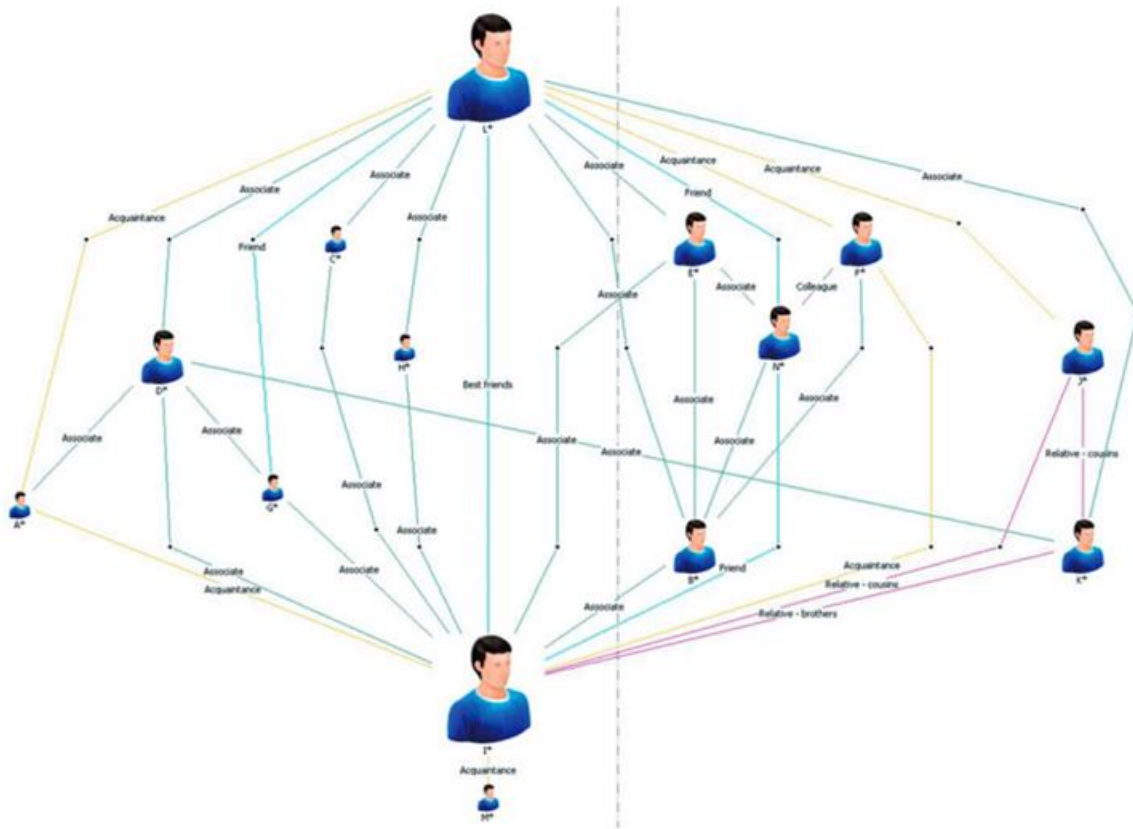
The fourth most common type of sex trafficking is residential sex trafficking, accounting for 1,290 cases. Residential sex trafficking refers to places of residence being used informally for commercial sex acts, or as more established residential brothels. For the more informal type of residential sex trafficking, the victim and the trafficker are usually relatives or romantic partners. For the more formal type, traffickers usually operate in networks and may have ties to organized crime. Threats, violence, and emotional manipulation are all tactics used by traffickers to maintain control.

Actors of Sex Trafficking

There are three key actors in sex trafficking: the trafficker, the trafficked individual, and the consumer. Understanding each actor's role is essential to forming effective countermeasures against sex trafficking.

The end goal of all sex traffickers is financial gain. A successful sex trafficker's system is adaptable, changing in response to forces such as shifts in supply and demand or pressure from

law enforcement. (Wheaton et al., 2010) Sex traffickers most commonly operate alone or in small networks. This is usually dictated by the type of sex trafficking occurring. Traffickers engaged in outdoor solicitation often operate alone while traffickers engaged in illicit massage businesses or escort services operate in networks. (Polaris) In these networks, traffickers are often connected by pre-existing social networks. A social network analysis of child sex trafficking networks in the UK found that links between traffickers were not random but rather were rooted in a pre-existing link such as being relatives, neighbors, or coworkers. Furthermore, it found that networks were decentralized and do not always have definitive “ringleaders” The study also conducted a social network analysis of the victims of sex trafficking networks. It found that traffickers targeted victims opportunistically. (Cockbain et al., 2011) The opportunistic targeting of victims was most likely dictated by which individuals appeared most vulnerable to manipulation tactics used by sex traffickers. Common tactics used include false promises of work or money (Deshpande et al., 2013), false relationships, and supplying victims with narcotics. (Raymond et al., 2001) Below is a diagram of social network analysis on a child sex trafficking ring from the study done by Cockbain et al. There is no central “ringleader”, but rather multiple “key players” scattered throughout the diagram.



**Figure 4 Example of a Social Network Diagram
of a Sex Trafficking ring**

There is no set mold or stereotype for a victim of human trafficking. However, they often share multiple factors that increase the likelihood that they will be trafficked. (Schauer et al., 2006) These factors can be separated into macro and micro-levels. Examples of macro-level factors are economic injustice and poverty. Examples of micro-level factors include a history of familial abuse, substance abuse, mental illness, (Roby, 2005), homelessness, and unaccompanied youth/kidnapping. (Aguirre et al., 2018) Regardless of whether the factor is on the macro or micro level, they push individuals to seek out better situations; this is where they become vulnerable to trafficking.

The third and final actor in sex trafficking is the consumer. As with the other two, there is no standard consumer; they come from all socioeconomic backgrounds. (Raymond et al., 2001) Before the advent of the internet, consumers rarely communicated. However, sites such as MyRedBook.com, TheEroticReview.com, CityVibe.com, and NaughtyReviews.com allow consumers to review the providers of commercial sex acts as well as warn each other of potentially police activity. (Ibanez et al., 2014) MyRedBook.com was shut down by the FBI in 2015 and its owner was convicted of facilitating prostitution. (DOJ)

Facilitating Factors of Sex Trafficking

Certain factors can facilitate sex trafficking by either increasing demand or lowering perceived risk. Factors that drive demand all result in an increased population of consumers of commercial sex acts. (Edlund et al., 2002) Examples of factors that can increase demand include military bases, major roadways and truck stops, conventions, and other large gatherings of people such as highly attended sporting events (i.e., Superbowl but also less high-profile high attendance events such as college football games). Researchers found that sex businesses such as illicit massage parlors thrive near military bases. Between Fayetteville and Greensboro North Carolina, there were 25 massage parlors. (Raymond et al., 2001) Fort Bragg, one of the US military's largest bases, is a 30-minute drive from Fayetteville and a two-hour drive from Greensboro.

The Superbowl and its attendance provides a massive opportunity for sex trafficking. Researchers found a significant increase in online advertisements in host cities prior to both the

2020 and 2021 Superbowl. In 2020, the rate at which new advertisements were posted was 1.6 times greater than in other periods of the year. In 2021, the rate was 7.4 times greater than in other periods of the year. (Huang et al., 2022)

Regarding conventions, researchers found that there was an increase in online advertisements during the 2008 Democratic and Republican National Conventions. In Minneapolis, the location of the 2008 RNC, there was a 29%-44% increase in advertisements for commercial sex acts during convention days. In Denver, the location of the 2008 DNC, there was a 44%-77% increase. (Cunningham et al., 2011) The increased demand for commercial sex acts also increases the demand for sex trafficking.

Major roadways such as interstate highways give both consumers and traffickers entry and escape routes, greater anonymity due to increased traffic, and centralized meeting locations. (Mletzko et al., 2018) This is supported by findings in a study of sex trafficking patterns in Austin, Texas. Researchers found most sex trafficking offenses in the city were clustered around Interstate 35. (Mletzko et al., 2018) Additionally, the truck stops provide a transient consumer population which reduces the risk of the network being exposed. Altoona is the largest city in an 80-mile radius, making it a hub of Southwestern Pennsylvania. Connecting it to the surrounding area are I-99 and US-22. Sites such as the Logan Valley Mall and the Blair County Convention Center further cement Altoona's role as a hub in the region. The increased traffic gives traffickers greater anonymity and more potential consumers.

Social Media Use in Sex Trafficking

Social media and online solicitation and recruitment has changed the sex trafficking world. Social media facilitates both the communication between the three actors in sex trafficking and the progression of the stages of sex trafficking. In 2020, recruitment via social media increased by 22% with a 95% and 120% increase in reported recruitment on Instagram and Facebook respectively. (Polaris)

In 2021, Pew Research Center found that 84% of adults between the ages of 18 and 29 and 81% of adults between the ages of 30 to 49 have used social media. Social media has given sex traffickers an extremely powerful tool to facilitate their recruitment efforts – picture a fishing trawler dragging a net across the ocean. With enough attempts, some individuals will get caught in the metaphorical “net.” Recruitment efforts through social media take two dominant forms; false relationships and false job offers. (Polaris) In recruiting via false relationships, traffickers will take the role of a romantic interest. They build their relationship with the victim through communication via social media. Once the trafficker has gained a certain degree of trust of the victim, the trafficker and victim come into physical contact. After this point, a variety of manipulation tactics are then used by the trafficker to maintain control over the victim. (Reid., 2016) The process for recruiting via false job offers follows a similar progression. Traffickers make fake profiles posing as legitimate businesses seeking workers, usually centered around modelling or dancing. Traffickers both wait for victims to contact them and reach out to others directly. Traffickers build relationships with victims and then make a fraudulent job offer. (Polaris) The victim then would accept said offer and make physical contact with the trafficker.

Sex traffickers must maintain control over victims to both maintain profit and avoid law enforcement or other intervention. Traffickers use a variety of physical and psychological tactics to manipulate victims; traffickers have proven that social media can also be used in this process. A survey of 73 survivors of sex trafficking found that 34% of respondents had their social media restricted in some way. This ranged from traffickers completely restricting access to social media to traffickers reading private messages. (Polaris)

Like the analogy of the fishing trawler used earlier, social media allows traffickers to advertise to an exponentially greater number of consumers, all while maintaining a high degree of anonymity. (Polaris) The most notable example of a website being used on a large scale to advertise commercial sex acts was Backpage.com. The site saw an increase in popularity after Craigslist shut down the “Adult Services” section of the site in 2010. (CBS) Backpage was ultimately seized in 2018 and 7 individuals were charged with a 93-count indictment. (DOJ) Despite the seizure of Backpage.com, traffickers have only adapted to the changing environment and have moved to other sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, messaging apps such as WeChat and dating sites. (Polaris) Furthermore, traffickers have adapted the verbiage of their advertisements to covertly communicate with consumers and avoid detection by law enforcement. Examples include rose emojis being used as indicators of price and terms such as “fresh”, “young”, or “college” being used to communicate that the victim is a minor. (Whitney et al., 2018)

Sex Trafficking in Non-Urban Environments

Non-urban environments present unique challenges in combating sex trafficking. The physical geography of non-urban environments means that resources such as hospitals, welfare offices, available law enforcement, and shelters for at-risk individuals and trafficking victims are fewer in number and further apart when compared to urban environments. Furthermore, non-urban environments are often underserved by public transportation, directly inhibiting at-risk individuals and trafficking victims from seeking assistance. (Edwards et al., 2009; Aguirre et al., 2018)

The culture of non-urban environments can also impact resources and opportunities available to at-risk individuals and trafficking victims. Non-urban environments such as small towns and rural areas are often romanticized as quaint and safe. (Edwards et al., 2009) Thus, sex trafficking is not seen as an issue in these locations. A study done by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago found that law enforcement personnel and social workers in non-urban environments lacked awareness and training on human trafficking when compared to their urban counterparts. (Newton et al., 2008) Other cultural factors present in non-urban environments, such as political and religious conservatism, can reenforce narratives of idyllic “small town” life and inhibit awareness of sex trafficking on a community-wide level. (Edwards et al., 2009)

Due to the lower population of non-urban environments, the likelihood of pre-existing relationships between traffickers and victims is higher. Most youth in non-urban environments were trafficked by a family member, someone they knew, or someone from the neighborhood who knew them. (Perkins et al., 2017; Aguirre et al., 2018)

Chapter 3

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative case study approach to analyze a sex trafficking ring in Blair County, Pennsylvania. While a quantitative approach would have been preferred, there is simply not enough data available on sex trafficking in the United States. This is compounded by the fact that most of the research on sex trafficking in the United States focuses on urban environments as opposed to non-urban. (Aguirre et al., 2018)

Data was drawn from docket sheets, affidavits of probable cause, and related public records of sex trafficking cases in Blair County, Pennsylvania after the year 2014. To be considered as a sex trafficking case, the charge 18 PA C.S. § 3011 (Trafficking in Individuals) or 18 PA C.S. § 3012 (Involuntary Servitude) must be present on the docket sheet associated with the case. The current laws on human trafficking in Pennsylvania were implemented in 2014 via Act 105. Therefore, cases prior to 2014 were not considered. Cases that involved minors under the age of 18 were not included.

The specific aspects of each case that were examined are:

1. Why was the case categorized as sex trafficking.
2. What actors were involved.
3. What type of sex trafficking does the case fall under if any.
4. What role did social media play in the case.

To determine why a case was categorized as sex trafficking, the AMP Model was used to determine the presence of the trafficker's actions, means, and purpose. Cases were also analyzed

to see if the stages of recruitment, travel and transit, exploitation, or re-trafficking were present.

Actors in cases were then designated as traffickers, victims, consumers, or other. Cases were

designated by type as either escort services, illicit massage/health and beauty, outdoor

solicitation, residential, or other. The role of social media in cases was then examined. If social

media was present, its use was designated either for recruitment, control, or advertisement.

Chapter 4

Data

Five individuals are being tried as co-defendants for the operation of a sex trafficking ring in the city of Altoona, Pennsylvania. They are:

Name	Relevant Charges
Donald Dargan	18 § 3011 §§ A1 and 18 § 3012 §§ B12
Quincy Wilson	18 § 3011 §§ A1
Sean Atkins	18 § 3011 §§ A1 and 18 § 3012 §§ B12
Tony Ross	18 § 3011 §§ A1 and 18 § 3012 §§ B12
Derrick McNeal	18 § 3012 §§ B12

Table 1 Codefendants

However, a closer examination of the data provided an expanded list of participants particularly as the case moved to trial. The following chart lists all the actors mentioned in the affidavit as having a role in the sex trafficking operation. The “Relations” column denotes how many connections an actor has with other actors. The “Role” column denotes the actor’s specific role in the trafficking operation if applicable. Possible designations are “Trafficker”, “Facilitator”, and “Other”. Traffickers were further designated as “Leader”, “Major Associate”, and “Associate” based on their involvement in the group’s operations with “Leader denoting most involved and “Associate denoting least involvement. The names of victims and witnesses have been omitted to protect their identity.

Actor (n=22)	Relations	Role
Quincy Wilson	15	Trafficker (Leader)
Sean Atkins	14	Trafficker (Leader)
Tony Ross	9	Trafficker (Major Associate)
“Victim A”	9	N/A
Donald Dargan	6	Facilitator (Drug Supplier)
Rayvon Strange	6	Trafficker (Major Associate)
“Victim B”	6	N/A
“Witness W”	6	Other (Mother of “Victim A”)
“PITTSBURGH”	5	Trafficker (Associate)
William Carolus	5	Facilitator (Landlord)
“FRESH”	4	Trafficker (Associate)
“Victim C”	4	N/A
“Witness U”	4	Other (Paramour of Quincy Wilson)
“Victim E”	4	N/A
“Witness Z”	4	Other (Friend of “Victim A”)
“Witness T”	3	Other (Initial Source of Information)
“Victim D”	3	N/A
“Witness V”	3	Other (Spouse of “Victim E”)
“Witness Y”	3	Other (Father of “Victim A”)
Derrick McNeal	2	Trafficker (Associate)
“Victim F”	2	N/A
“Witness X”	1	Other (Rented Room to Sean Atkins)

Table 2 Actors Involved

The group targeted individuals that were vulnerable due to drug addiction, outstanding warrants, or other prior contact with law enforcement. Specifically, the group would weaponize the individuals' drug withdrawals by withholding the drugs until the victims agreed to prostitute themselves for the groups own financial gain. To maintain control over victims, the group threatened them with violence or to cut off their supply of drugs. Furthermore, many victims felt they could not report the crimes to police because they themselves had outstanding warrants.

The group operated in the city of Altoona at three different residences, all within a 0.17 square mile radius. The group would move in response to evictions or pressure from law enforcement. Consumers would come to residences to purchase sex with one victim being brought to hotels for “out-calls” in addition to “in-calls”. The area where the group operated is shown in red in the images below.

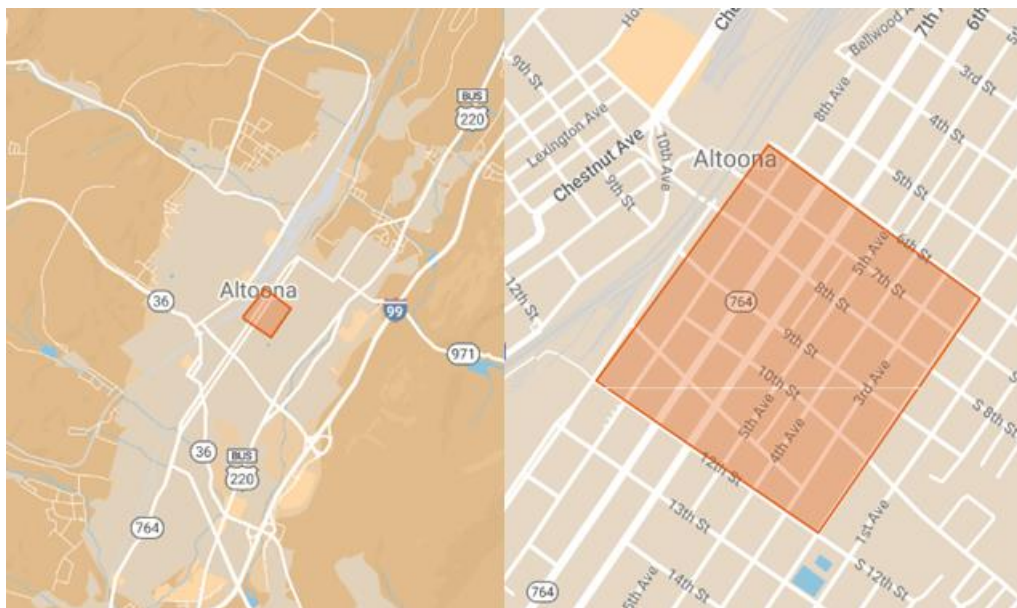


Figure 5 Area of Operations

The area the group operated in consists of sections of the Center City and Dutch Hill neighborhoods of Altoona. The area's property values are below Altoona's mean with many buildings showing signs of deterioration. (Zillow) Penn-Lincoln elementary school and Altoona Area High School

are only a few blocks Southwest of the area. This is concerning as two witnesses mention young girls having contact with members of the group.

Chapter 5

Analysis

The data analysis will examine the structure and operations of network involved in the trafficking, an assessment of how and why the traffickers operated in a relatively small geographic area, and how the group used social media to facilitate their operations. In this case, the traffickers had a clear purpose, actions, and means as outlined by the AMP model of sex trafficking. Before this group began sex trafficking, they were drug traffickers and users.

The key leaders of the sex trafficking ring were Quincy Wilson and Sean Atkins. They used sex trafficking to generate income to maintain their own drug habits. Their actions that constituted sex trafficking were the recruiting and harboring of victims for the purpose of sex trafficking. Coercion is a key component of sex trafficking. This group coerced the victims by controlling their access to drugs.

The stages of recruitment and exploitation are clearly present. The group's drug trafficking meant a constant flow of individuals coming to their residences seeking drugs. This provided many opportunities to recruit potential victims. Once an individual was deemed to have sufficient vulnerability i.e., drug use, the group would attempt to recruit and then exploit or immediately exploit that individual. This was done in two ways. The group would primarily provide a victim with free drugs. This caused the victim to become dependent on the group as a source of drugs. Once this occurred, the exploitation of the victim began. The group would withhold the drugs and use withdrawal symptoms to coerce victims into prostitution. If victims refused, drugs were withheld so the victim suffered further withdrawal. Sometimes the

withdrawal leverage was combined with physical abuse. Victim and witness statements in the affidavit also mention that individuals who would come to residences occupied by the group to use drugs would be locked in closets until withdrawal symptoms began. To be let out of the closet, the victim would have to agree to prostitute themselves. If they refused, they were forced to stay in the closet and sometimes faced further physical abuse. The group's drug trafficking also served as a conduit to new potential sex consumers. On multiple occasions individuals wanting to purchase drugs were also interested in purchasing sex. This can be seen in text conversations between Ross and unknown individuals where both drug prices and purchasing sex are discussed. Ross would usually call potential consumers after he received a response.

While only five individuals were tried as codefendants, this fails to paint a full picture of the sex trafficking ring. Quincy Wilson and Sean Atkins were the two leaders of the group. They directed when and where the group moved in addition to selling victims and attempting to recruit victims via providing them drugs. While Sean Atkins rented a room from "Witness X", "Witness X" would return home and find unknown males having sex with "Victim A". "Witness X" noted that Atkins was the only individual that could have let the unknown males into the residence, implying that he was sex trafficking "Victim A". Tony Ross and Rayvon Strange were major associates of the group. They sex trafficked, attempted to recruit victims via providing them drugs, and advertised victims. Both Ross and Strange would advertise via cell phone. Ross would typically start conversations with potential consumers, either about drugs or prostitutes, and then call the potential consumer upon getting a response. Strange would use multiple cell phones and would pretend to be the girls he was selling. One victim stated that he would also use an app to "scramble" his number. "PITTSBURGH", "FRESH", and Derrick McNeal were

associates of the group. While their roles are unclear, multiple statements by witnesses and victims indicate they were involved in the sex trafficking operation in some way.

While Donald Dargan and William Carolus did not directly sex traffic, they played key roles in the group's operation. Donald Dargan supplied Quincy Wilson and Sean Atkins with heroin, the primary means used to control victims. William Carolus was the landlord of one of the residences the group operated at. Not only was he fully aware of what the group was doing, he had multiple empty mattresses in his basement to facilitate the group's sex trafficking operations.

Below are two charts of the social network of the sex trafficking ring. The first chart displays the entire social network while the second chart displays only traffickers and facilitators. Traffickers and facilitators are blue, victims are red, and witnesses are green.

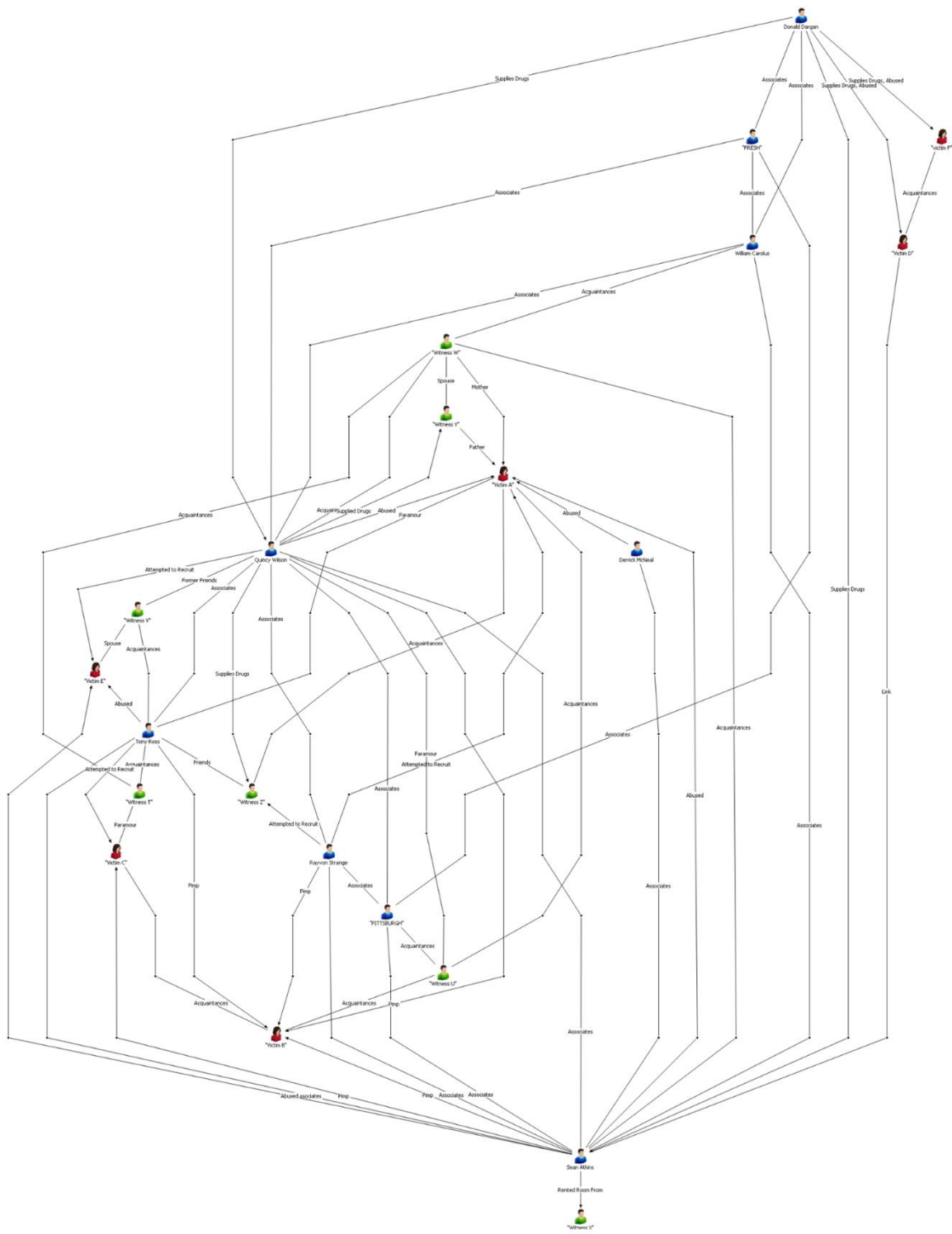


Figure 6 Social Network Diagram of the Sex Trafficking Ring

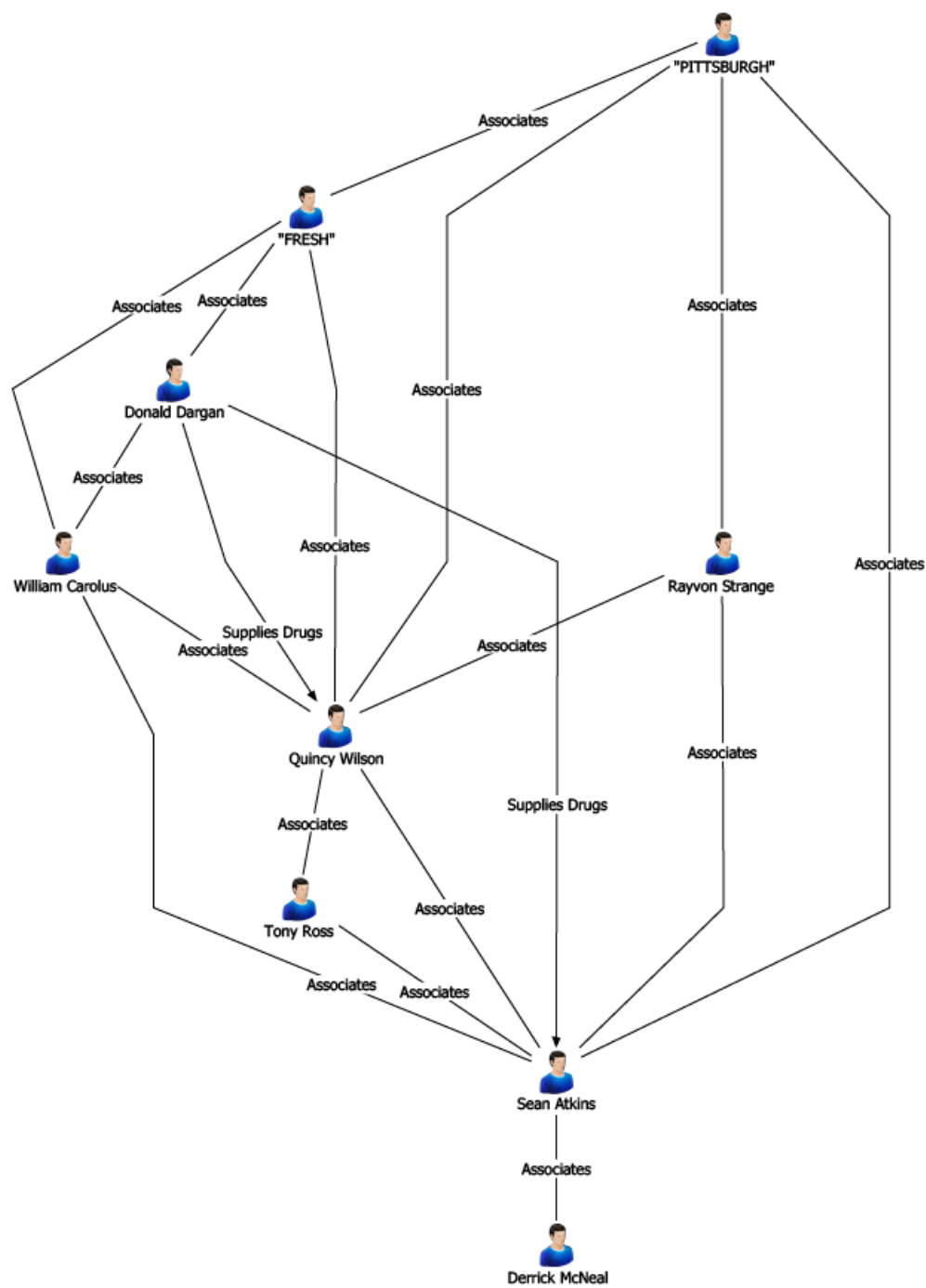


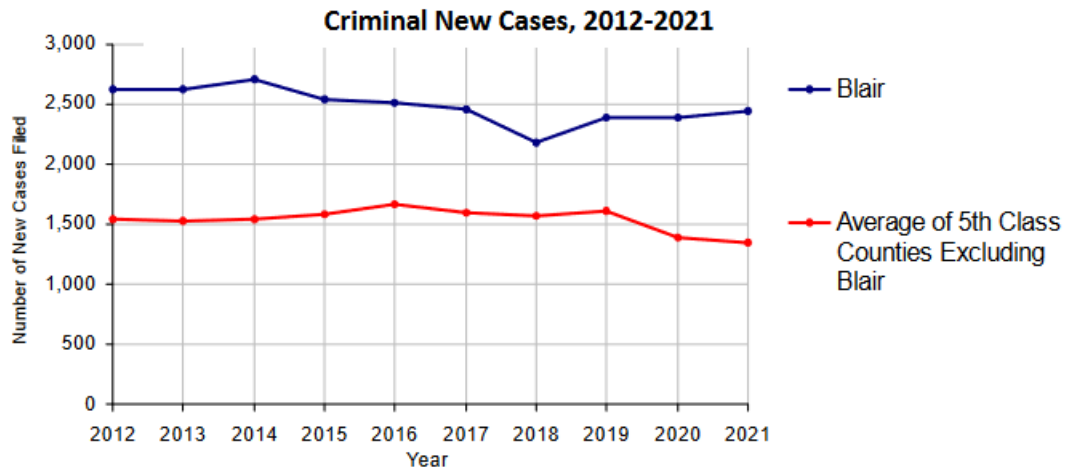
Figure 7 Social Network Diagram of Traffickers and Facilitators

The group operated residential brothels at three different residences in the city of Altoona. Drugs were used as the primary means to control victims with threats and violence as secondary means.

One victim stated that Atkins possibly used a site called “Skip The Games” to advertise victims. Other than this instance, there is no indication in the court affidavits that the group used social media in their operation. However, communications with individuals familiar with prostitution in the Altoona area, it was clear that social media sites such as Craigslist were popular means for soliciting “Johns”.

While this research cannot answer this question, it can point towards further possible research. There is a myriad of reasons why Blair County might have a higher prevalence of sex trafficking when compared to other counties of the fifth class. However, two more plausible explanations are Blair County’s crime rate and Altoona’s unique location in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

When compared to other 5th Class Counties, Blair County has had a consistently higher rate of criminal cases. While it is possible that law enforcement agencies in Blair County are more effective in prosecuting criminals, it is also possible that the higher overall rate of crime is related to higher rates of sex trafficking.



**Figure 8 Annual Rate of New Criminal Cases in Blair County
vs. Other Counties of the 5th Class (UJSPA)**

Altoona, the most populous city in Blair County, could also serve as a hub city for criminal activity. Altoona is intersected by I-99 and US-22, connecting it to surrounding non-urban and rural communities. Furthermore, the next city with a greater population is Harrisburg, 80 miles to the East. Altoona's greater population when compared to the surrounding region provides a more attractive environment for criminals to operate in. First, the higher population means a greater market for illegal goods. Second, the higher population could convey a greater sense of anonymity and lower perceived risk to criminals.

Chapter 6

Discussion & Conclusion

The greatest challenge in combating sex trafficking is the dearth of information on the issue. The case study presents strategic-level issues in the approach to countering sex trafficking. All actionable information presented in the affidavit, information that led to further interviews or arrest warrants, was from human sources. Without the cooperation of witnesses and victims, no basis for a case would exist. However, none of the victims who were sex trafficked would admit it when interviewed by police. While there could be multiple potential reasons for this, it raises the question of the dominant narrative of sex trafficking. Specifically, are trafficked individuals victims or criminals? If trafficked individuals feel that they will be prosecuted for being sex trafficked, they will not come forward to authorities.

This case study also presents the conflict between drug laws and combatting sex trafficking. Many witnesses of the sex trafficking ring were drug users, with some having outstanding warrants. Multiple victims chose not to come to law enforcement with information due to their drug use and warrants. A witness even chose to not come forward with information on his own daughter's sex trafficking due to his outstanding warrant. In this specific case study, drug laws directly inhibited the investigation and prosecution of the individuals involved in the sex trafficking ring. While this cannot be generalized to all cases of sex trafficking, the conflict between drug laws and combatting sex trafficking demands further exploration.

This research investigated sex trafficking through a case study of a sex trafficking ring in Blair County, Pennsylvania. It demonstrated why the group's actions constituted sex trafficking, what actors were involved, what type of sex trafficking was present, and how the group used social media. What this research also presented was the importance of victim and witness

cooperation with law enforcement and potential barriers that victims and witnesses faced. The fight against sex trafficking is morally, mentally, and logistically exhausting. Not only do the actions of sex traffickers need to be analyzed, but current approaches to counter sex trafficking demand more intense analysis as well.

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