

Human Trafficking 101

A Foundational Overview of the Crisis in Washington State

Presented by:

*King County Senior Deputy Prosecutors Braelah McGinnis &
Alexandra Voorhees*



WARNING

**REAL SURVIVOR EXPERIENCES
DOCUMENTED VIOLENCE AND ABUSE
VERBATIM COMMENTS FROM SEX
BUYERS**

Exploitation: Rooted in Oppression

Exploitation is deeply embedded in gaining power and control over another person. It stems from slavery and colonization. It does not require that someone physically forces, abuses, or restrains someone else. When one is not in a position to give consent and it doesn't matter whether or not you're receiving payment when there is a major power imbalance.

Human Trafficking, Defined

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of individuals through **force, fraud, or coercion** for the purpose of exploitation. This exploitation can include forced labor, sexual slavery, or other forms of commercial sexual exploitation. The coercion can be subtle or overt, physical or psychological.

Exploitation of a minor for commercial sex is human trafficking, regardless of whether any form of force, fraud, or coercion was used.

It is considered a form of modern-day slavery, affecting people of all ages and backgrounds.

Washington's Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Laws

Human
Trafficking (RCW
9A.40.100)

Promoting
Commercial Sexual
Abuse of a Minor
(RCW 9.68A.101)

Commercial Sexual
Abuse of a Minor
(RCW 9.68A.100)

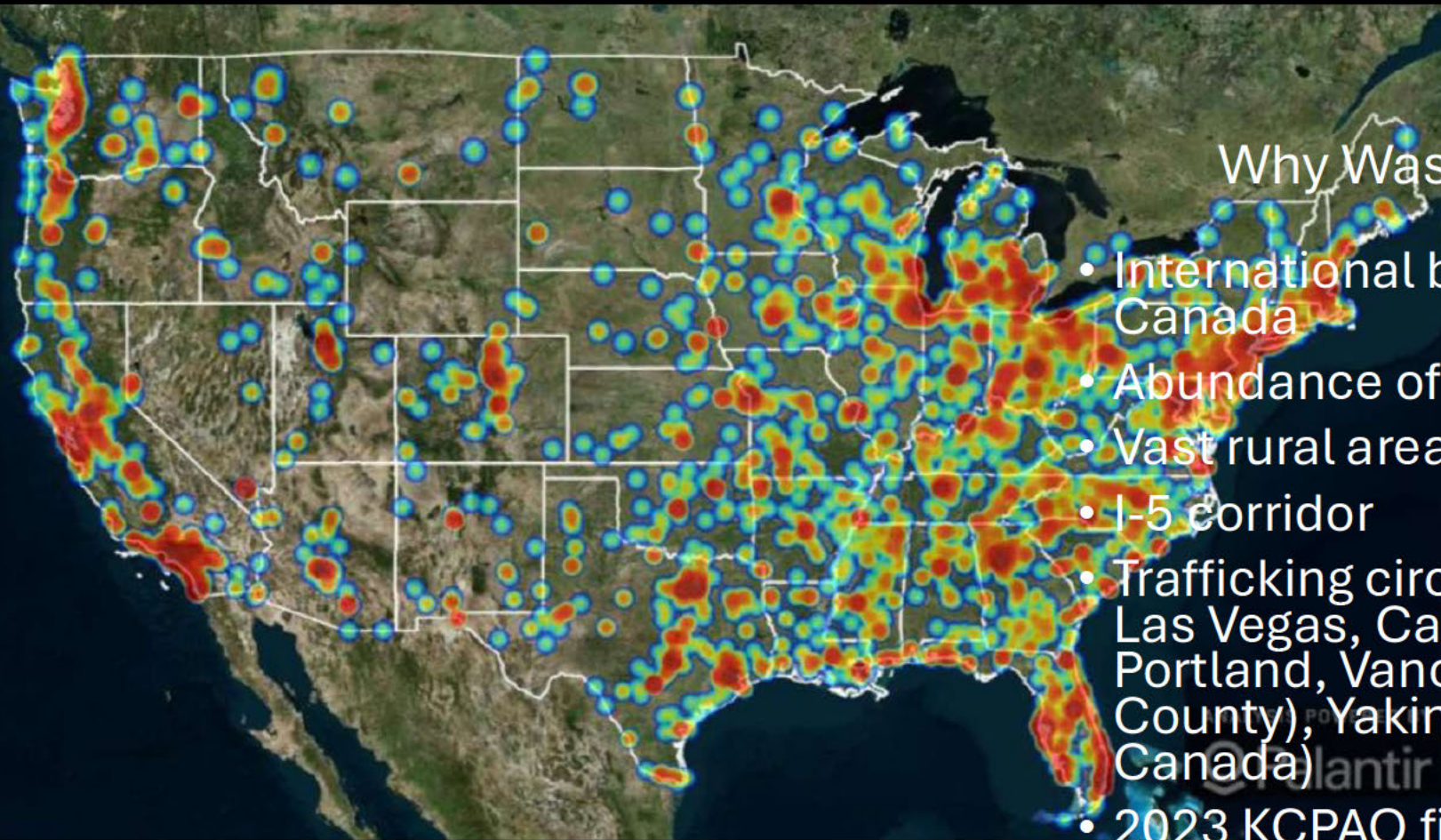
Promoting
Prostitution 1st
Degree (RCW
9A.88.070)

Promoting
Prostitution 2nd
Degree (RCW
9A.88.080)

Prostitution
(RCW
9A.88.030)

Patronizing a
Prostitute
(9A.88.110)

Not Somewhere Else. Here.



Why Washington?

- International border with Canada
- Abundance of ports
- Vast rural areas
- I-5 corridor
- Trafficking circuit (Honolulu, Las Vegas, California, Portland, Vancouver (Clark County), Yakima and Canada)
- 2023 KCPAO filed 75 Child & Adult exploitation charges

Reported by Polaris Project Sex Trafficking in the U.S.:
A Closer Look at U.S. Citizen Victims 2014

In the News

FOX 13
SEATTLE

'Pimps fighting over turf': Concerned neighbor attributes Aurora drive-by to sex crimes

Published March 9, 2024



KOMONews

NEWS

WEATHER

REFINED

GAME CENTER

CHIME IN

WATCH LIVE

Seattle World Cup efforts tackle sex, human trafficking concerns amid coming travel influx

by Chris Daniels, KOMO News Senior Reporter | Mon, October 6, 2025 at 7:57 PM
Updated Mon, October 6, 2025 at 7:58 PM

K5

Former assistant principal among those arrested in Renton child sex trafficking sting

Published: 5:41 PM PST December 11, 2024

K5

CRIME

'Pimp' sentenced to prison in Seattle for sex trafficking, gun violence

When a victim tried to escape, authorities said the suspect started a "rolling gun battle" on Aurora Avenue North.



Washington: The First State to Criminalize Human Trafficking

Washington was the first State to enact a criminal Human Trafficking statute modeled on the Federal crime of Human Trafficking (2003)

Safe Harbor Laws - Protects minors from being prosecuted for prostitution (2020)

Vacating Convictions - Allows survivors to clear records tied to trafficking (RCW 9.94A.640)

Affirmative Defense Prosecution for Prostitution - that the actor committed the offense as a result of trafficking (RCW 9A.88.040) (2012)

Survivors FIRST – a KCPAO program that declines to file charges against victims of trafficking, facing criminal charges—refers culturally responsive, trauma-informed services.

Vulnerable Populations: Who's Most at Risk

BIPOC Women & youth
experiencing self-esteem
issues, immigration,
instability, history of
sexual abuse or runaway,
LGBTQ+, homelessness,
normalization of
prostitution



Disproportionate Impact of Human Trafficking on BIPOC Girls and Women

- Of the more than 10,000 cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, nearly 40% were Black women and girls—the highest of any racial group. (

- Rights4girls – Child Sex Trafficking & Black Girls

- According to the National Criminal Justice Training Center, 40% of sex trafficking victims in the United States identified as Native American, despite being only 3% of the population.

- Rights4girls - Sexual Violence Among Native Women & Girls

- In Seattle, 94% of Native women were forced or coerced into sex in their lifetimes.

- Rights4girls - Sexual Violence Among Native Women & Girls)

Adultification of Black Girls in the Sex Trade

Rights4girls – Child Sex Trafficking and Black Girls

Adultification - form of intersectional bias against Black girls that perceives them as older and less innocent than their white peers.

Stereotypes attributed to Black women are projected onto Black girls, leading to their hyper sexualization and the perception that Black girls exercise more agency when engaging in the commercial sex trade even when they are too young to consent.

On average, only 30% of Black youth are characterized as victims compared to 66% of their white counterparts.

R.I.S.E. Report - Impacts of the Commercial Sex Industry on Black/African American Communities in Washington

- Data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline shows that among sex trafficking victims in Washington who reported their age of entry into exploitation, **89% reported that they were children when first exploited.**
- **Nearly all participants exploited by a third party reported multiple, concurrent vulnerabilities**, ranging from the need for shelter, food, and clothing to gaining access to controlled substances or previously unattainable items, and fulfilling emotional needs such as love, family, and belonging.

R.I.S.E. Report Cont.

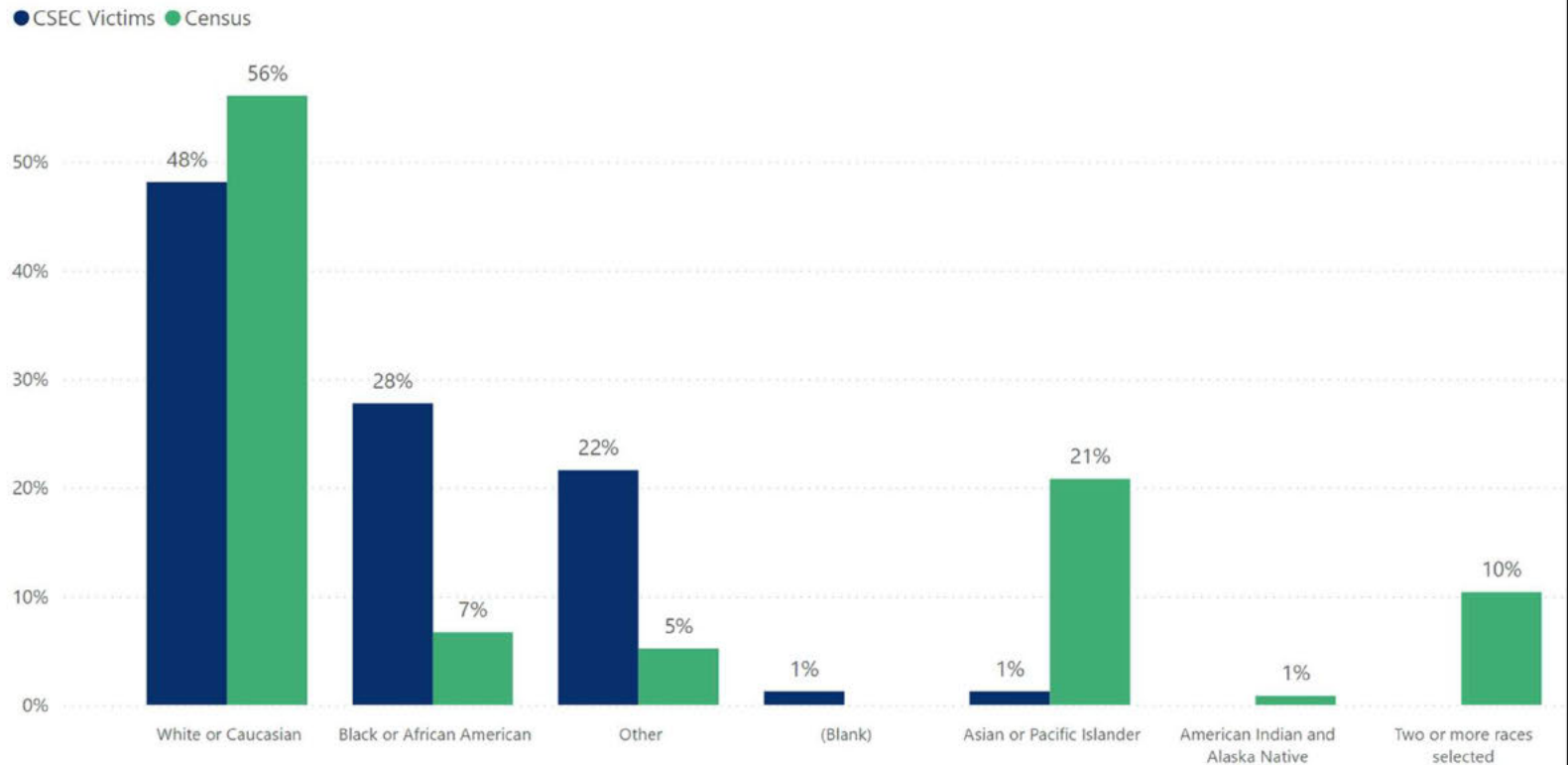
- Most survivors spoke at length about the normalization of sex work in their childhood homes and in their surrounding communities. These survivors primarily talked about their mothers' and other female role models' involvement in the commercial sex industry, and to a lesser extent, their fathers and male role models as pimps.
- “Almost all of the children that I've served have been recruited or solicited online almost exclusively - like I can think of in the last year every single one has been an online solicitation.” – *Statement from a study participant speaking to the frequency of online solicitation*

King County Prosecutor's Office Data on Victim Demographics



CSEC Real Life Victim Race 2014 through 2023

KCPAO data compared to the 2020 Census data



*Race information is what is reported to the KCPAO by law enforcement.

**For clarifying information on Race/Demographics please visit: <https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/pao/about-king-county/about-pao/data-reports/dashboard>

Hidden in Plain Sight: Where Trafficking Happens



MegaPersonals
personals classifieds



It Starts Here: The Hidden Recruitment Zones to Trafficking

- Strip clubs
- Aurora Avenue
- Job offers
- At home
- Shelters
- Foster care
- Streets
- Social media
- Transportation hubs
- Prostitution-related websites
- Track/Circuit
- Victim Service Facilities
- Shopping Malls
- Schools
- Anywhere

Recruiting: Experts at Finding Vulnerabilities

- Material things
- Love
- Family structure
- Drugs and alcohol
- Foster children
- Runaway children
- Attention
- Affection
- Low self-esteem
- Developmental disabilities
- School dropouts



Selling The Dream

- Glamorous lifestyle
- Travel
- Clothes
- Cars
- Money
- Fame
- Modeling
- Love and affection
- Filling that void

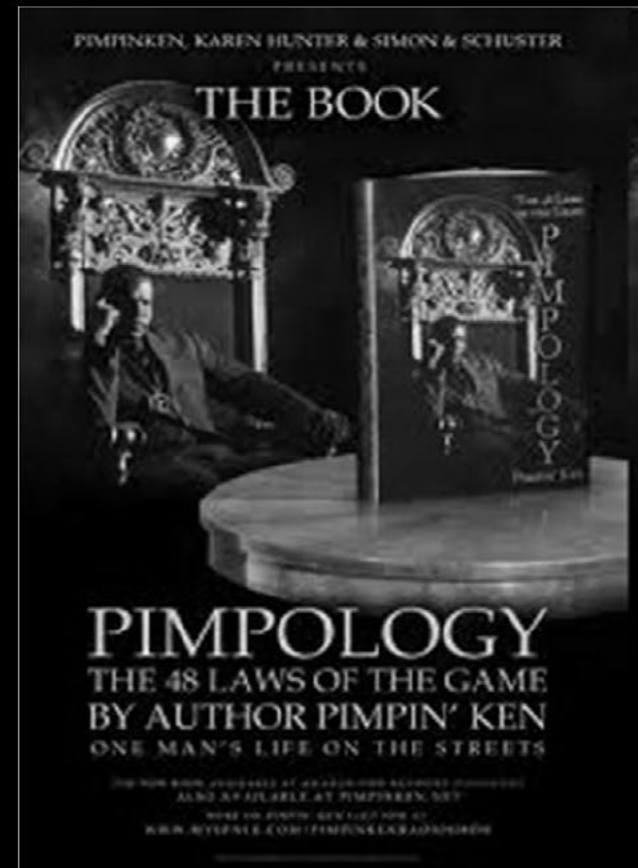


Control & Manipulation: Pimpology

Law 5: Prey on the weak

Pimpin' Ken:

“Weakness is the best trait a person can find in someone they want to control. If you can't find a weakness, you have to create one. You have to tear someone's ego down to nothing before they will start looking to you for salvation.



Control and Manipulation: Tactics

- Isolation
- Drugs
- Love and affection
- Providing and withholding
- Keeping them off balance
- Threats
- Fear
- Violence

Violence & Coercion

Grabbed his gun pointed it at her head, knee, stomach, and vagina. "Which one do you wanna get shot off first? Bitch, we're getting your money and your choosing me."

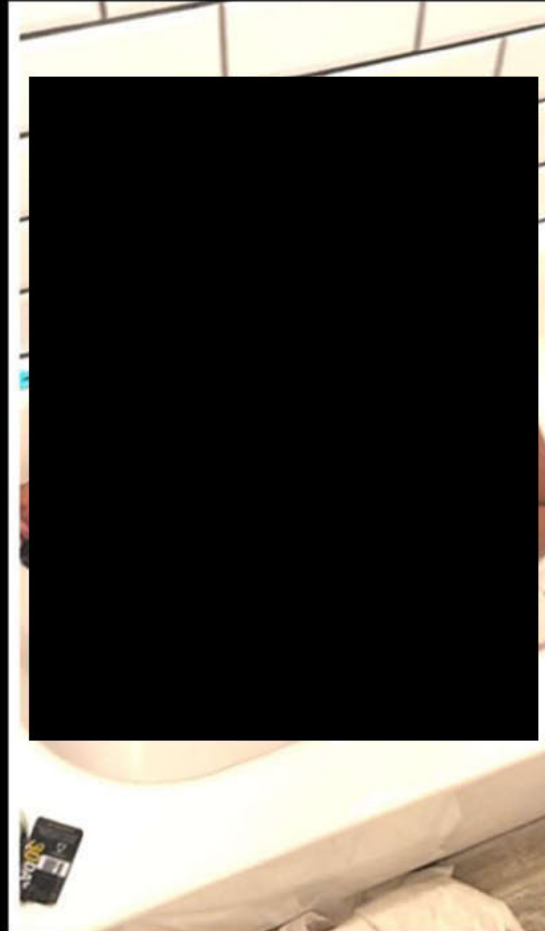


He hit her repeatedly with a belt, kicked her in the mouth caused teeth to chip, wrapped the belt around her neck, filled the bathtub with cold water and then submerged her head with the belt wrapped around her neck in the water.

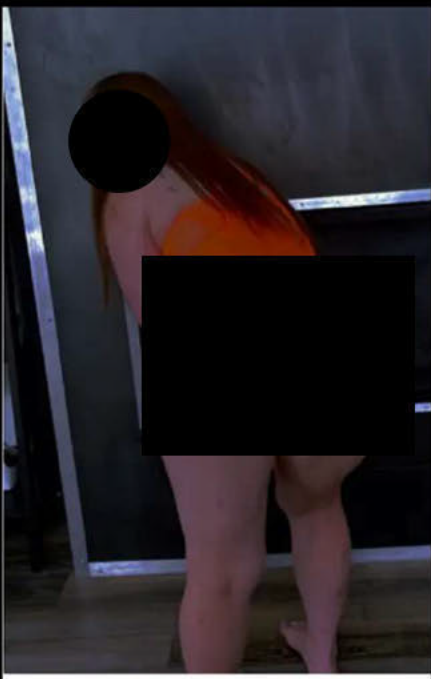
Control & Manipulation: Violence



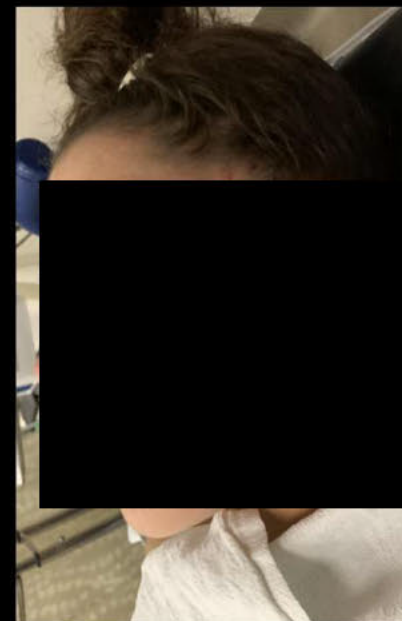
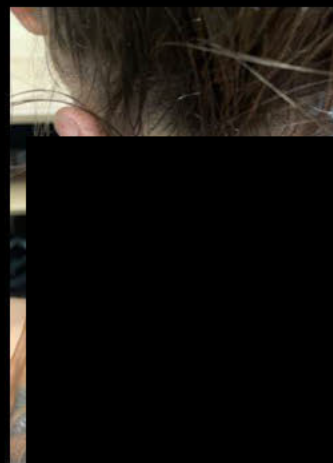
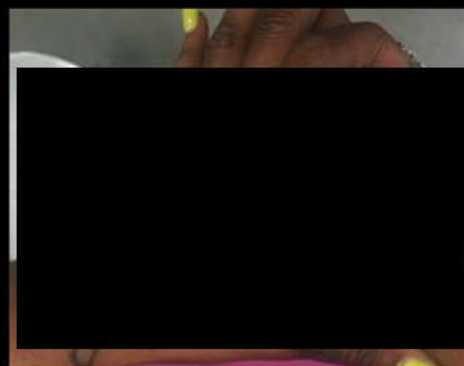
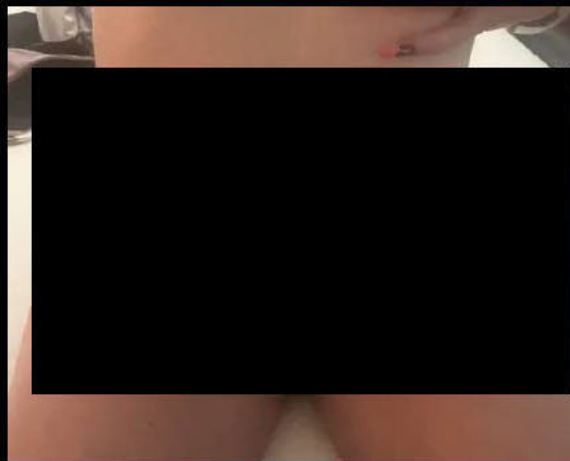
Control and Manipulation: Violence



Marked for Control: The Branding of Human Trafficking Victims



***Spokane County
Victims***



***King County
Victims***



The Buyer

- Come from all age groups
- All occupations
 - Doctors
 - Lawyers
 - Teachers
 - Police/firefighters
 - Students
 - Average Joe
 - Tech Workers

The Demand Driving Trafficking: Sex Buyer Demographics

- In King County between 2014-2023 71% of men charged with attempting to buy sex from minors were white males.

- KCPAO CSEC Data

- Buyers are found across all income groups; however, currently active, high frequency buyers are much more likely than other men to make \$100,000 or more annually

- *Who Buys Sex? Understanding and Disrupting Illicit Market Demand*

Dehumanized and Disposable: The Cruel Perceptions Fueling Human Trafficking

A review of posts on a sex buying chat room found that the majority of the posts expressed contempt for prostituted women and girls, often referring to them as “meat” or “merchandise.”

Buyers in online chat rooms in Illinois admitted to being violent or aggressive to women in prostitution; recognize the harm they and pimps/traffickers do to women but continue to buy sex despite the harm; recognize the extreme youth of some prostituted women but are not deterred from buying (raping) children.

- *WWE Get The Facts*

Johns Aren't Gentlemen: The Violent Truths About Sex Buyers

- One study found that:
- 43% of men believed that if men pay for sex, the women should do anything they ask.
- 75% of men have seen women with a pimp.
- 40% of men knowingly bought a woman in prostitution who was under pimp/trafficker control.

- *WWE Get the Facts*

Johns Aren't Gentlemen: The Violent Truths About Sex Buyers cont.

- 21% of women in escort services stated they had forced sex ***more than 10 times***, virtually the same percentage for women in the streets and in their own private homes.
- *WWE Get the Facts*

- One woman reported that the following objects had been shoved into her body, 'fruit, broomstick, a ferret, perfume bottle, nightsticks, nunchucks, a sex toy with tape on it, and a hand with bracelets still on.'

- *Torture and Its Sequelae Among Prostituted Women in the United States*

- Research done in Chicago found that moving prostitution indoors does not make prostitution "safe." The severity of violence in indoor venues in this study was high, and in some types of violence even higher than for street prostitution.

- *WWE Get the Facts*

Dehumanized and Disposable: Sex Buyers Own Words

WWE Get the Facts

“Once with a petite little spinner abt 40 who told be [sic] no bj [blowjob], but then I simply insisted firmly ‘yes. You suck.’ and I grabbed her head and she didn’t resist. That was one of the wildest mp [massage parlor] experiences I’ve had because I completely face fucked her to where she puked on the floor twice and would clean it up then come back to me where I would fuck her face silly again. I even had her licking my asshole that time...I think I gave her .80.”

Dehumanized and Disposable: Sex Buyers Own Words

Rights4girls Buyers Unmasked

**"She is an object
that's placed there by
society for men like
us to use and move on
with life."**



SEX BUYER

**Find them, fuck them, forget them. This is
the gold standard for men's spiritual health.
Probably for women's, too, though I really
don't care about that.**

**When you see a pig, let it in your car and
shoot in it. It's that simple. It's not rocket
science.**

SEX BUYER: So are u gonna suck my dick or not?

SEX BUYER: Stupid fucking whore spread your legs and that's it

SEX BUYER: That's all your worth a cum dumpster

Dehumanized and Disposable: Sex Buyers Own Words

“Prostitutes are like a product, like cereal. You go to the grocery, pick the brand you want, and pay for it. It’s business.”

“She has no rights because you are paying for a sex act- she gives up the right to say no.”

-WWE Get the Facts

The Cost of Exploitation: Health Impacts on Victims

According to a Colorado medical study examining two decades of evidence, the mortality rate of women in prostitution is 200 times the rate of the general population.

*- Mortality in a Long-term Open Cohort of Prostitute Women
(2004)*

Individuals engaged in prostitution suffer from PTSD at 53% compared to a 51% prevalence of PTSD among combat veterans.

*- Torture and its sequelae among prostituted women in the United States
by Melissa Farley & M. Alexis Kennedy*

The Cost of Exploitation: Health Impacts on Victims cont.

Women also face exposure to STDs, HIV, and difficulties in access to treatment. Coercion into abortions, sterilization, or forced pregnancy. They may also suffer from pelvic floor degradation, urinary tract infection, bladder inflammation, fecal incontinence, infertility, cervical cancer, oral illnesses, or sleep disorders.

Voices of Survival

*Torture and Its Sequelae Among Prostituted Women
in the United States*

“When a pimp says he’s going to torture you, what I’ve seen is girls in dog cages, girls being waterboarded, stripped down naked and put in the rain and cold out-side and having to stand there all night, and if you move, you’ll get beaten. I’ve seen girls get hit by cars and stunned with stun guns...I’ve seen girls burned and strangled...If you want to use the restroom, you have to ask. If you want to eat, you ask, and if you don’t get permission, you just don’t do it. It’s more than physical domination. It’s emotional and mental, and that’s the domination that tends to linger.”

Voices of Survival

“A week into the job, I started vaginal bleeding, probably due to overworking my body, so I informed her, saying I couldn’t continue. But, she pressed me to keep working with cotton pads packed in the vagina during intercourse, saying that customers wouldn’t notice. So I repeated every hour the process of packing in and removing the bloody cotton pads from my vagina so as to hide the bleeding from customers per her instruction.”

- Survivor From Bellevue PD Case

What can be done to protect survivors?

HB 2526: a bill to stop the extreme physical and sexual violence against children and women that is directly driven by sex buyers using their money to buy sexual access to vulnerable people.



**Heard by the House Community Safety Committee on January 20.
Needs Committee vote of approval by February 4**

What can be done to protect survivors? (cont.)

"Patronizing prostitution" currently carries less of a penalty than stealing a candy bar.

By raising the penalty to a class c felony and doubling the fines/fees, **HB 2526 will 1) protect survivors, 2) discourage demand** by holding sex buyers accountable, **3) incentivize law enforcement to investigate** more cases, and **4) generate revenue for survivor services.**

This is a critical moment to enact this policy before the World Cup.



Lawmakers push to toughen sex trafficking laws in Washington before World Cup

Washington lawmakers are pushing to toughen sex trafficking laws before the World Cup in June.



Author: Tess Wagner (KING5)

Published: 4:48 PM PST January 21, 2026

Updated: 4:48 PM PST January 21, 2026

What can be done to protect survivors? (cont.)

Additional resources for
survivor services at
every stage

Additional SPD
detectives dedicated to
addressing commercial
sexual exploitation

Additional prosecutors
and case development
specialists dedicated to
commercial sexual
exploitation