



Department of Public Safety Human and Sex Trafficking Enforcement

House Judiciary Committee

Presentation by
Lieutenant Tony Wegrzyn
March 13, 2023



The Importance

“Prostitution is not a victimless crime, and is often financially intertwined with sex trafficking, drug trafficking, violent crimes, and sexual assault.”

**Bryan Barlow, Deputy Commissioner,
Department of Public Safety and Chair of the
Council on Human and Sex Trafficking**



Reasons Sex Trafficking Exists in Alaska

- Low risk, high reward
- Demand
- Vulnerabilities of Alaska's population
- Gaps in services and resources for victims and survivors
- Money (drugs versus humans)
 - Car date/QV (Quick Visit): \$100-\$150
 - HH (Half an Hour): \$150
 - Hour: \$200-\$300
 - Two hours: \$300-\$400



Location

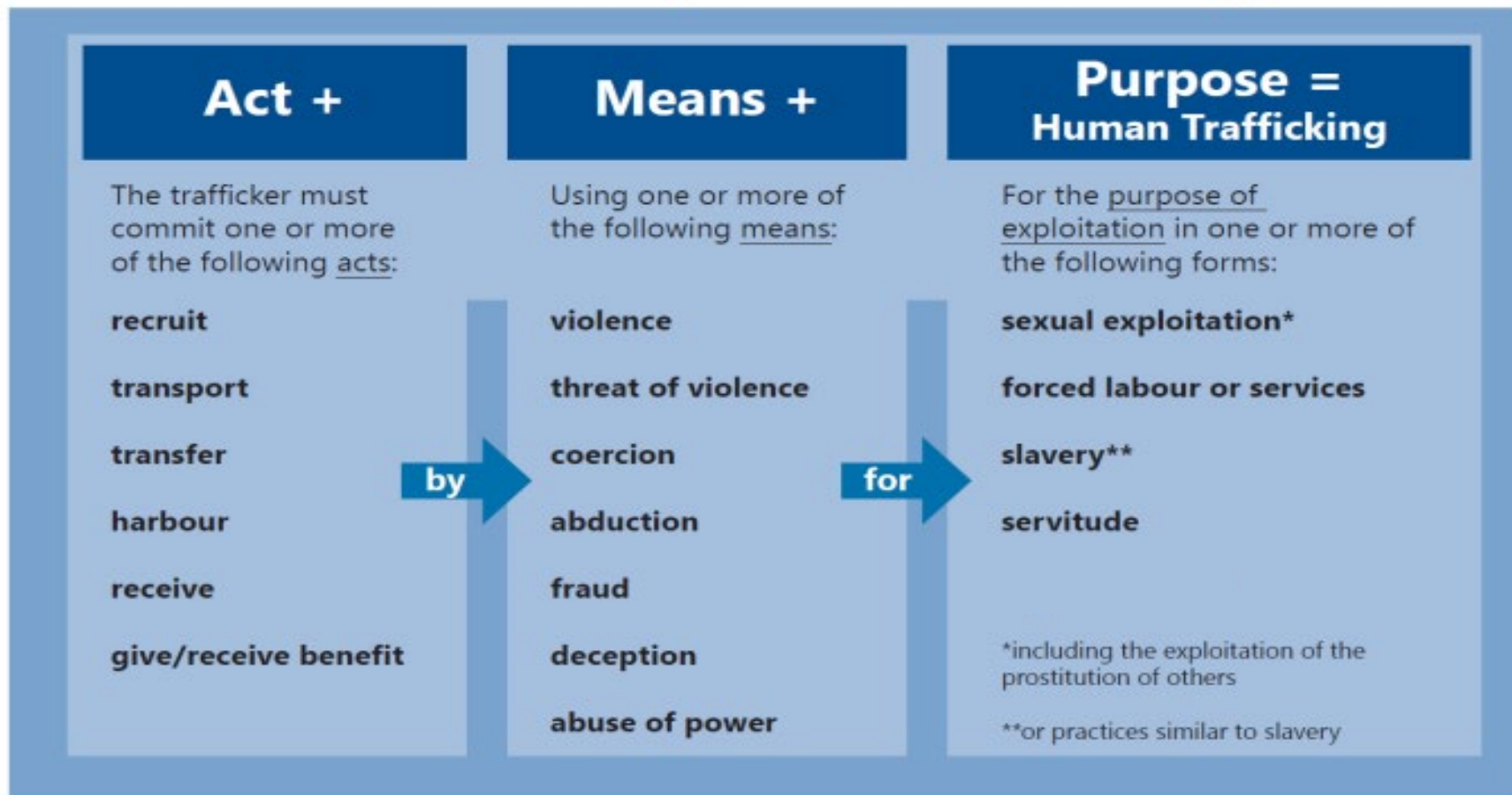
Primarily internet based

- Sex trafficking victims are working less on the streets
- Online sites have become the primary method of advertising
 - Adultlook
 - Skip The Games
 - Megapersonals
 - Not as many ads, but the numbers are rising for:
 - OneBackPage
 - Adult Search
 - USAsexguide



A General Overview of the Law

Act + Means + Purpose = Human Trafficking





Key Elements Within Criminal Code

Force

- Physical and sexual assaults
- Confinement
- Violence against others as punishment

Fraud (deception)

- False/Deceptive employment
- False marriage, false promise

Coercion

- Threats to family
- Threats of criminal process
- Supplied drugs or extorted addiction

Threat can be implied



Prostitution

Prostitution is a class B misdemeanor offense defined in Alaska Statute (AS) 11.66.100:

- a) A person commits the crime of prostitution if the person
 - (1) engages in or agrees or offers to **engage in sexual conduct** in return for a fee; or
 - (2) offers a fee **in return for sexual conduct**

Prostitution is a class C felony (AS 11.66.100(e)) if:

- (1) the defendant violates (a) of this section as a **patron** of a prostitute;
- (2) the prostitute is under 18 years of age; and
- (3) the defendant is over 18 years of age and at least three years older than the prostitute



2014 Investigation: Alaska Naughty Maids

- Special Crimes Investigative Unit investigation into online sites for commercial sex
- Marketing of women for commercial sex in Anchorage, the Mat-Su Valley, Juneau, Fairbanks, and Kenai Peninsula
- Prices ranged from \$200-\$650
- Main suspect was convicted of sex trafficking in the 2nd degree in 2015



2016 Murder of 16 Year Old

- Advertisement placed on a well-known online sex-for-money site
- A man responded to the advertisement
- Instead of the woman he thought he was meeting, several males attacked and robbed him, stealing his handgun (reportedly brought for protection)
- The man later reported his handgun had been stolen from his unlocked vehicle in the driveway
- The stolen handgun was used to kill a 16 year-old young man, resulting in a Murder 2 conviction by the perpetrator



Examine the Real-Life Risk to the Patron and the Worker

Class A Misdemeanors: characteristically involve less severe violence against a person, less serious offenses against property interests, less serious offenses against public administration or order, or less serious offenses against public health and decency than felonies

Class B Misdemeanors: characteristically involve a minor risk of physical injury to a person, minor offenses against property interests, minor offenses against public administration or order, or minor offenses against public health and decency



Recent Trooper Cases

2021 Case:

- A woman responds to an “in-call” for a potential patron at a local hotel
- Instead of the man she thought she was meeting, she was met by Alaska State Troopers screening for potential sex trafficking victims
- While being interviewed by Troopers, her trafficker responds to the hotel room, tries to gain entry, and is taken into custody

2022 Case:

- An undercover operation targeting patrons is conducted
- Over 100 responses to the advertisement within the first 24 hours of being published; over **250 responses in 48 hours**
- Two responses are from men attempting to traffic the *woman*



Addressing Demand

- The reason traffickers traffic their victims is MONEY
- Patrons are the funding source for traffickers
- Conducted numerous interviews with patrons: not one has considered the person they are set to meet could be being forced to have sex
- Nearly all of the patrons considered they could be robbed during the event and took countermeasures to reduce the chances: armed, wanted to meet in a public place, etc.
- Demand reduction ads:
 - Young adult fictitious female
 - 200 unique phone numbers wishing to meet
 - 54 numbers soliciting account for sex – **after only 18 hours**



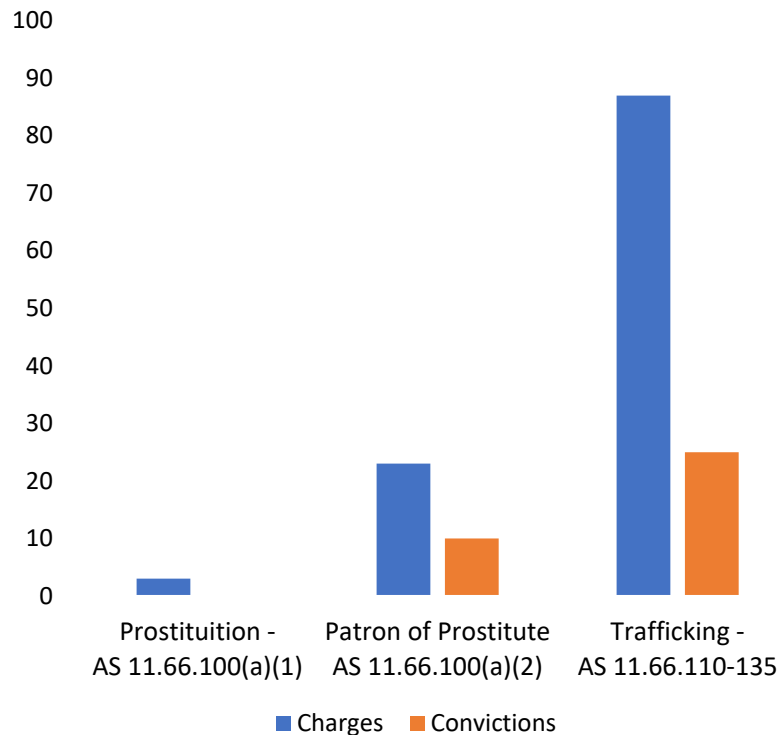
2022 Demand Reduction Operation

- 22 patrons are contacted when they arrive at a meeting location after agreeing to trade sex for money
- Two are armed with a handgun when they arrive; one man arrives with a rifle and a handgun
- One man arrives carrying a duffel bag containing duct tape and rope, claims they are props for the event
- All 22 patrons contacted during the operation were charged under AS 11.66.100(a)(2), a **class B misdemeanor** that prohibits payment for sexual conduct

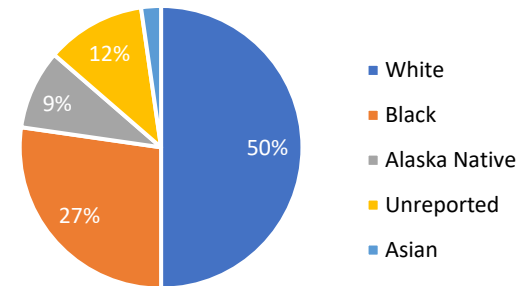


Trooper Criminal Cases and Arrestees

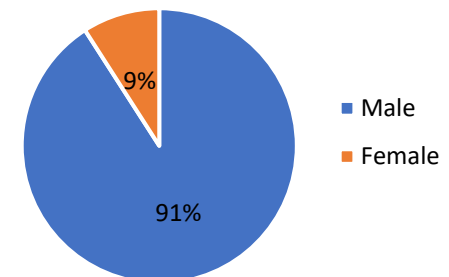
Trooper Criminal Charges Jan 2014 to May 2022



Arrestee Race



Arrestee Sex





Information Gathering/Interviews

Victim/survivors and independent sex workers

- Experienced sexual assault
- Experienced physical assault
- Know other women who are being trafficked
- Almost never report their own trafficking



Recruiting Victims

- Traffickers search common sex-for-money advertising websites to recruit potential victims
- Controlled substances can be used as a recruiting tool, or at a minimum, a tool to coerce the victim to perform
- Drug trafficking and sex trafficking commonly overlap



Exploiting Vulnerabilities

- Traffickers profit from finding and recruiting people to exploit
- Often, traffickers identify and leverage their victims' vulnerabilities in order to create dependency
- They make promises aimed at addressing the needs of their target in order to impose control



Characteristics Traffickers Target

- Low self-esteem
- Drug or alcohol use/addiction
- Relationship issues (e.g. domestic violence)
- Family issues
- Someone seeking to leave current situation
- Prior victimization (as a child or adult)
- Mental health issues
- Naiveté or innocence
- Particular cultures or ethnicities



2021 Multistate Investigation

January 2021: Undercover operations identified a male trafficker and a victim. The trafficker was described as a very violent pimp who took all of the victim's money and beat his victim regularly.

February – March 2021: Investigative means determined trafficker and victim were traveling between Portland, OR and Wenatchee, WA areas.

April 2021: Interagency cooperation resulted in the arrest of the suspect in Wenatchee, WA.

Subsequent to the arrest: Trafficker was coordinating with a local female contact to assist the victim with continued prostitution activities to fund the trafficker's bail. The local female was later arrested and confessed to promoting prostitution. Victim continued to contact her trafficker while he was in jail where he continued to push her to continue her prostitution activities for his bail money. Trafficker charged with second count of promoting prostitution.



Traffickers Span Of Control

- In many cases, the trafficker maintains control of the victim through threats, violence, fear, or blackmail
- In this case, the victim continued to speak to her trafficker and avoid law enforcement
- The trafficker meets some of the most basic needs of the victim, every hour of every day
- The trafficker, through force and/or coercion, has control over nearly every aspect of the victim's life, and is likely the source of supply for the victim's addiction



Grooming



TARGETING: Traffickers target victims who have some noticeable vulnerability: emotional neediness, low self-confidence, or economic stress.



GAINING TRUST & INFORMATION: Obtaining information about the victim is key. This can be done through casual conversations with the victim or with parents. Traffickers often mix well with other adults.

“Up to this point, they had never tried to touch me, never made me feel uncomfortable or unsafe, or that they would harm me.”



FILLING A NEED: The information gained allows the trafficker to fill a need in the victim's life, making the victim dependent on them in some way: buying gifts, being a friend, beginning a romantic relationship, or providing drugs and alcohol.



ISOLATION: The trafficker creates times to be alone with the victim. The trafficker will also begin taking a major role in the victim's life and will attempt to distance the victim from friends and family.



ABUSE BEGINS: The trafficker begins claiming that gifts or services given to the victim must be repaid, whether it be money, drugs, car rides, or mobile phones. In most cases, the trafficker demands sex as the method of repayment.

“I trusted them, they were my friends as I saw it, until one night my main perpetrator raped me, quite brutally as well, in front of a number of people.”



MAINTAIN CONTROL: In many cases the trafficker maintains control of the victim through threats, violence, fear, or blackmail.

“Well if I didn’t go out and see them they are going to get my mum and are going to rape her.”



Victim/Survivor Needs

Law enforcement can provide protection and safety, but victims and survivors need:

- Protection and safety
- Food
- Housing/shelter
- Clothing/personal items
- Transportation
- Childcare
- Crisis intervention
- Mental health counseling
- Job training
- Substance abuse treatment
- Advocacy
- Information and referral
- Service coordination
- Legal services
- Court orientation
- Education
- Life skills
- Medical/dental services
- Employment



Thank You



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