



NEBRASKA'S

COMMERCIAL
SEX
MARKET



**WOMEN'S
FUND** of Omaha

ABOUT THIS REPORT

THE HUMAN TRAFFICKING INITIATIVE (HTI)

The Human Trafficking Initiative (HTI) is supported by the Women's Fund of Omaha and funded by The Sherwood Foundation. The research of HTI is conducted through the Heider College of Business at Creighton University.

HTI uses data science to collect, analyze and evaluate the scope of sex trafficking across the United States and to identify effective policy solutions. The research initiative is directed by Crysta N. Price (crystaprice@creighton.edu) and Terry D. Clark (tclark@creighton.edu).

TERMINOLOGY

Agency

Throughout this report the term agency refers to an individual having their own power over their own choices and implies autonomy.

Backpage.com

A classified advertising website, primarily featuring ads for "escorts" and "body rubs."

Individuals sold for sex

Throughout this report, individuals involved in the commercial sex industry are referred to as individuals sold for sex. This refers to everyone being bought and sold in the commercial sex industry without implying voluntary participation. The overwhelming majority of individuals in the analysis are women and girls. This does not

imply that men and boys are not victims of sex trafficking, rather Backpage is not a popular hub for the male commercial sex market.

Sex Acts

In this report, sex act(s) are defined as any sexual encounter with another person with the goal of sexual gratification, which can include erotic massage, stripping, intercourse, etc.

Stable

Two or more individuals sold for sex who are working together.

Survival Sex

The exchange of sex acts for basic needs, i.e. food, housing, money.

On January 9, 2017, Backpage.com shut down its escort section as a result of federal pressure. This report relies on data gathered prior to the shutdown, however, the information will be presented in the present tense. Shutting down Backpage, just as Craigslist ads were shutdown in 2010, does not end the demand for commercial sex nor does it change the number of individuals sold for sex. There is already movement from Backpage to other websites and popular apps. We believe this report provides an accurate depiction of commercial sex and trafficking in the state of Nebraska.

DATA SOURCE

Sex trafficking is embedded in the commercial sex market, the great majority of which occurs online. Data in this report is derived from counting individuals rather than advertisements on Backpage.com.

It can often occur that an individual will post multiple ads in more than one city on the same day. When this happens, an algorithm is utilized to determine the city in which they likely worked.

BACKPAGE AND SEX TRAFFICKING

This report is based on data leveraged from Backpage.com, a website similar to Craigslist, that accounts for 80% of online commercial sex advertising.¹

Backpage is a commercial sex market hub, where both adult and minor sex trafficking victims are advertised.

Backpage does not technically allow advertisements of minors, however, 71% of child sex trafficking reports received by the National Center for Missing and Exploited are linked to ads on the site.² Additionally, the website itself turns in more than 400 potential ads of minors each month.³

Backpage
accounts for



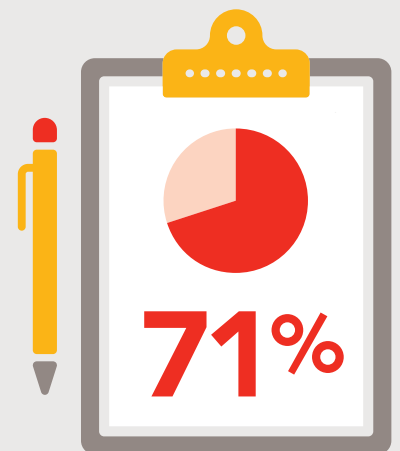
of online commercial
sex advertising

Backpage turns in

more than
400

potential ads of minors

each month



of child sex trafficking reports
received by the National Center
for Missing and Exploited are
linked to ads on Backpage



NEBRASKA'S

COMMERCIAL SEX MARKET

The Numbers	4
Characterizing Individuals Sold for Sex	8
Demand	11
Indicators of Trafficking	13
Findings & Recommendations	14

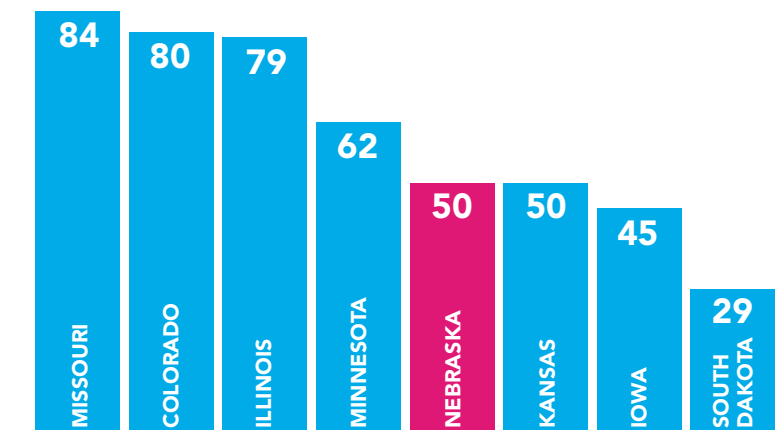
THE NUMBERS

REGIONAL CONTEXT

This report has two purposes: to define the commercial sex industry across Nebraska, and to identify the proportion of the industry where trafficking may be occurring.

Nebraska's commercial sex market is comparable to the immediate region. Adjusted for population, the state's online commercial sex market is larger than Iowa and equal to Kansas.

As the graph shows, both Nebraska and Kansas average 50 individuals sold for sex per 100,000 inhabitants each month in comparison to 45 in Iowa.



Monthly number of Individuals Sold for Sex per 100,000 Inhabitants by State

A STATEWIDE ISSUE

Nebraska has five Backpage sites: Omaha, Lincoln, Grand Island, North Platte and Scottsbluff. Commercial sex is being sold regularly in each of the five markets across the state.

Every month, 900 individuals are sold for sex, often multiple times, in Nebraska.

The state has an active online commercial sex market, where individuals are advertised a minimum of once a week.

While Omaha is the state's hub, many other locations stand out for their high demand including Grand Island, whose per capita numbers exceed that of Omaha.

Every month,

900



individuals are **SOLD** for **SEX**, often **MULTIPLE TIMES**

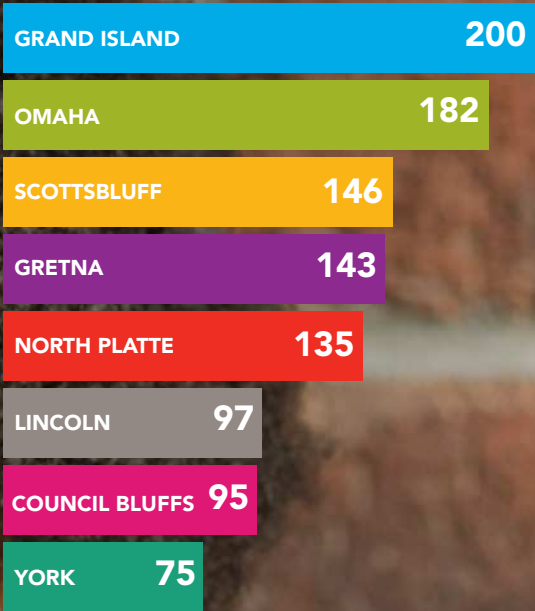
in Nebraska



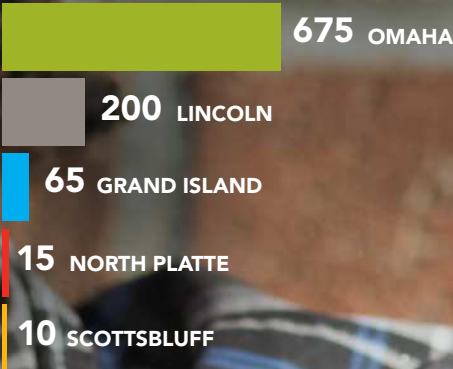
Although there are only five cities listed on Backpage, the commercial sex industry in Nebraska extends out from these centers, affecting the entire state including rural and urban areas.



Individuals Sold for Sex per 100,000 Inhabitants by Advertised Location



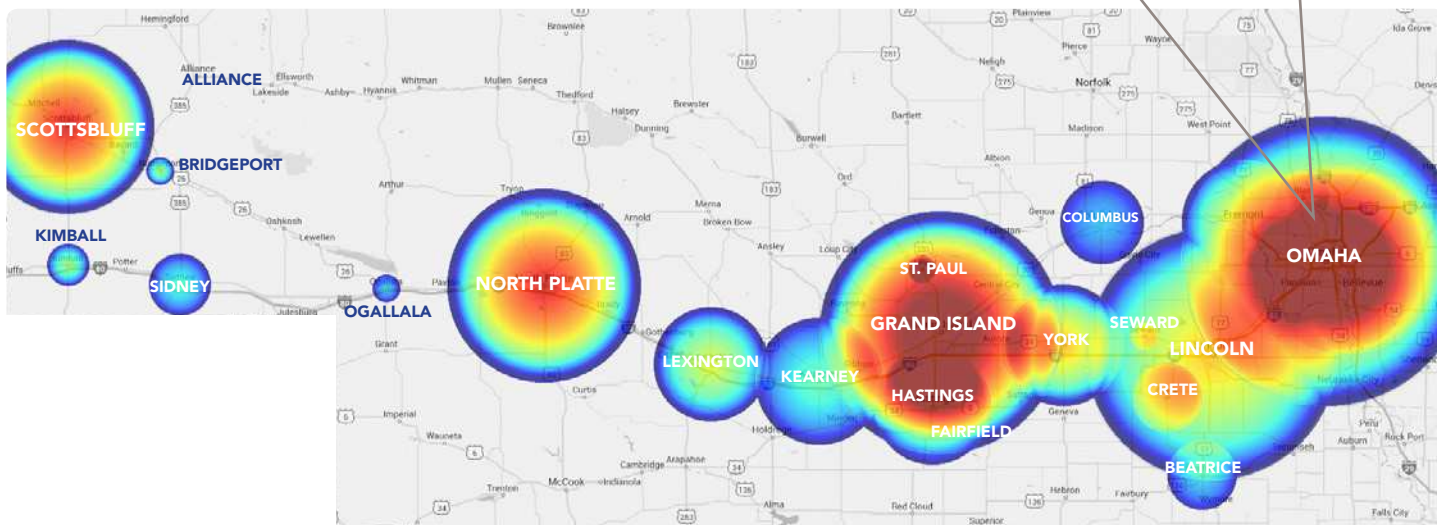
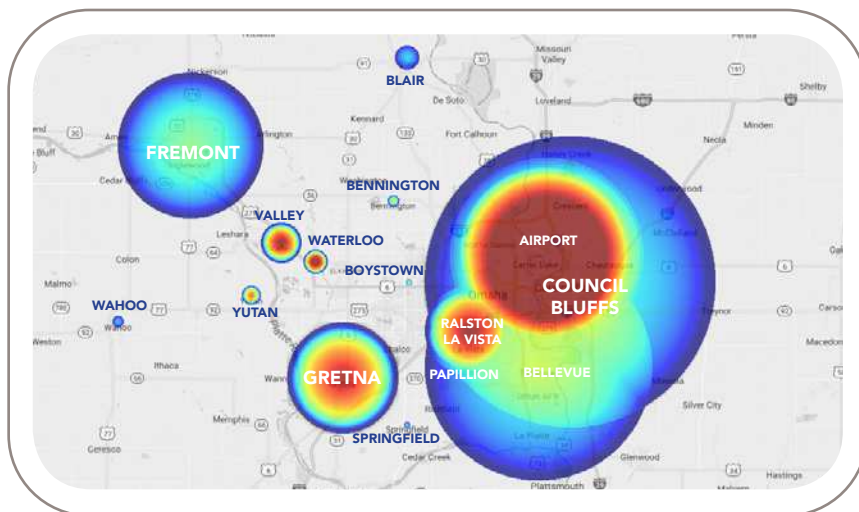
Average number of Individuals Sold for Sex per Month





Many locations without their own Backpage sites—such as Gretna, Council Bluffs and York—have similar per capita numbers of individuals sold for sex as those with sites. The heat map⁴ illustrates that commercial sex advertising reaches nearly every town and city along I-80.

Advertising in western Nebraska extends out to Sidney, Kimball and Bridgeport. In the central part of the state, Lexington and Hastings stand out.



AN INTERCONNECTED MARKET

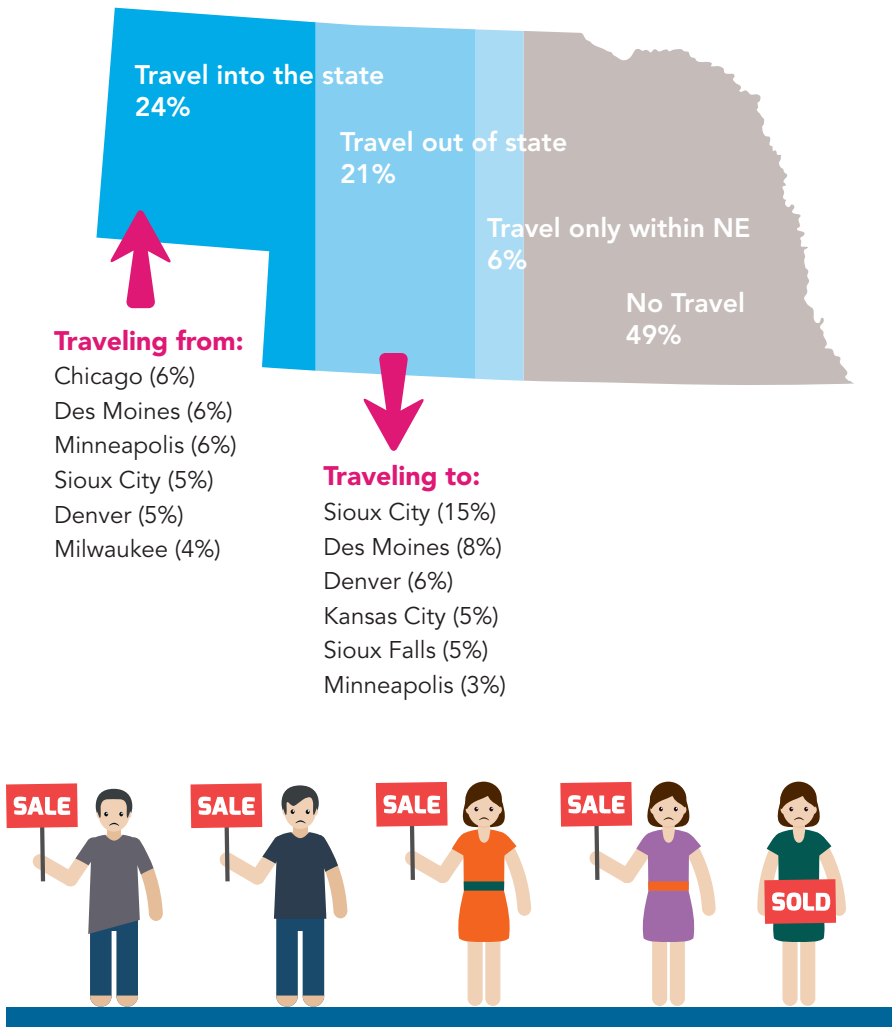
Not only does Nebraska exist within the larger national system, but its cities are part of an integrated state-wide system with a clearly defined structure.

- The overwhelming majority of individuals sold for sex in Nebraska are based in the state.
- Individuals from 27 states are sold for sex throughout Nebraska on a monthly basis. These individuals are located in other states including New York, Massachusetts, Florida, Oregon and California.
- 51% of individuals travel and 45% cross state lines in order to be sold for sex.

The local markets in central and western Nebraska operate like a revolving door, facilitated by I-80.



51% of individuals travel and 45% cross state lines in order to be sold for sex.



One in every five individuals sold for sex in Nebraska is sold in **multiple markets** across the state.

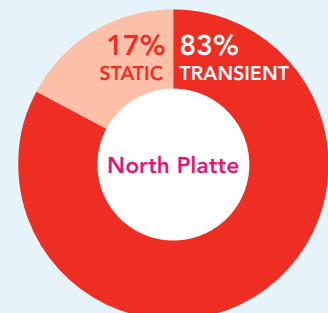
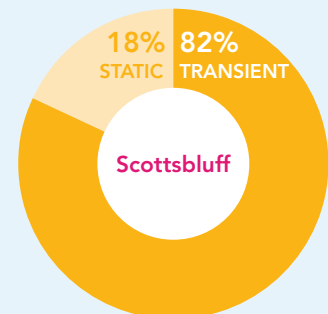
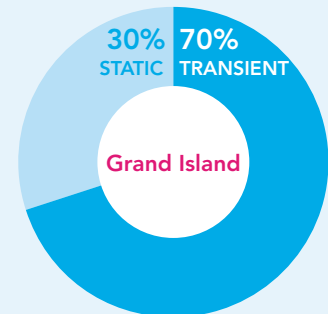
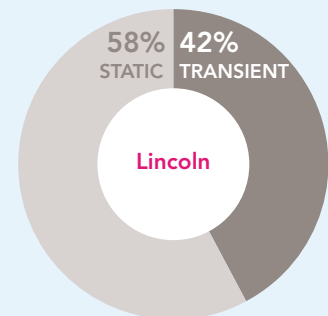
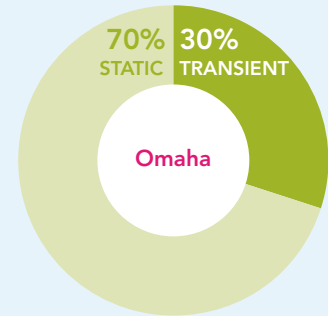
Backpage advertisements rarely specify that they are looking for buyers by occupation. However, in Nebraska, ads are posted seeking truck drivers as buyers, indicating the importance of the state's highway system. In Grand Island, North Platte and Scottsbluff, anti-trafficking efforts should focus on truck stops, gas stations and hotels along major highways.

Individuals sold for sex in central and western Nebraska are regularly traveling to and being sold in Omaha. Since 65 individuals per month single out Council Bluffs, Iowa, and the casinos, Omaha is presented with a unique challenge to extend collaboration on anti-trafficking efforts into Iowa.

Given the transient nature of individuals sold for sex statewide, no single location is likely to have all the information necessary either to identify or assist trafficking victims across the state.

Anti-trafficking efforts will require a collaborative approach bringing together statewide public and private agencies sharing information and working together.

The smaller the local population is, the higher the likelihood that individuals sold for sex will travel in and out of the given market as buyers have a preference for new individuals.



CHARACTERIZING INDIVIDUALS SOLD FOR SEX

RACE

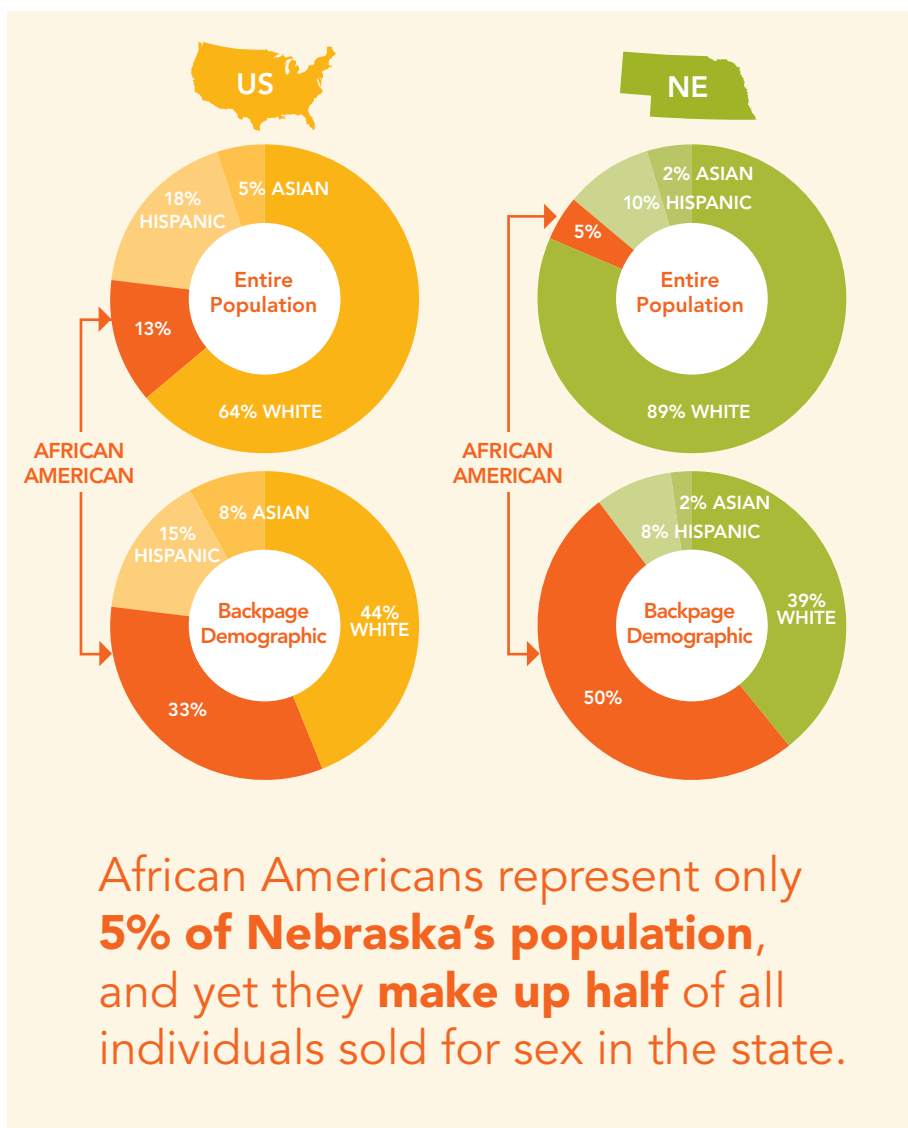
Nebraska has a racially imbalanced online commercial sex market. There is an extreme disproportion of African Americans sold for sex in the state.

African Americans represent only 5% of Nebraska's population, and yet they make up half of all individuals sold for sex in the state.

This is even more than the national average, where African Americans make up 33% of individuals sold for sex. Because Nebraska has a disproportionately high rate of African Americans being bought and sold for sex, there is also likely a disproportionate number of African Americans being trafficked.

In general, refugee, asylum-seeking and immigrant individuals are less likely to be advertised online. The Hispanic community in particular is more likely to use word of mouth advertising. As a result, Backpage is likely to under-represent the real number of Hispanics sold for sex.

The relationship between race and the commercial sex industry requires further study to create comprehensive solutions for all populations.



CONNECTING INDIVIDUALS SOLD FOR SEX: REDUCED AGENCY

Many individuals advertised on Backpage work together in groups. This introduces the possibility that they are under third-party control, such as an escort agency, massage parlor or a "stable" facilitated by a pimp. When a third party is involved, an individual's freedom is likely to be constrained. Since escort agencies, call services and massage parlors are not the norm for Nebraska, data indicates that a significant portion probably works for a pimp/trafficker. This is especially the case for the state's younger girls, who are likely to work in groups. This aligns with research showing that young girls rarely enter into the commercial sex industry without a facilitator, or pimp, actively recruiting them and breaking them in to the industry.

A YOUNG MARKET

In Nebraska, 11% of those being sold for sex online are advertised under the age of 21.



This means that more than **1 out of every 10** individuals sold for sex in the state is too young to buy alcohol, yet buyers are purchasing them for sex.

An individual is considered a minor in Nebraska until the age 19, and Backpage does not allow listings for anyone under the age of 18. As a result, 10% of those 21 and older are marketed using phrases such as “just hit 18” and “fresh meat” to get around the minimum age requirement.

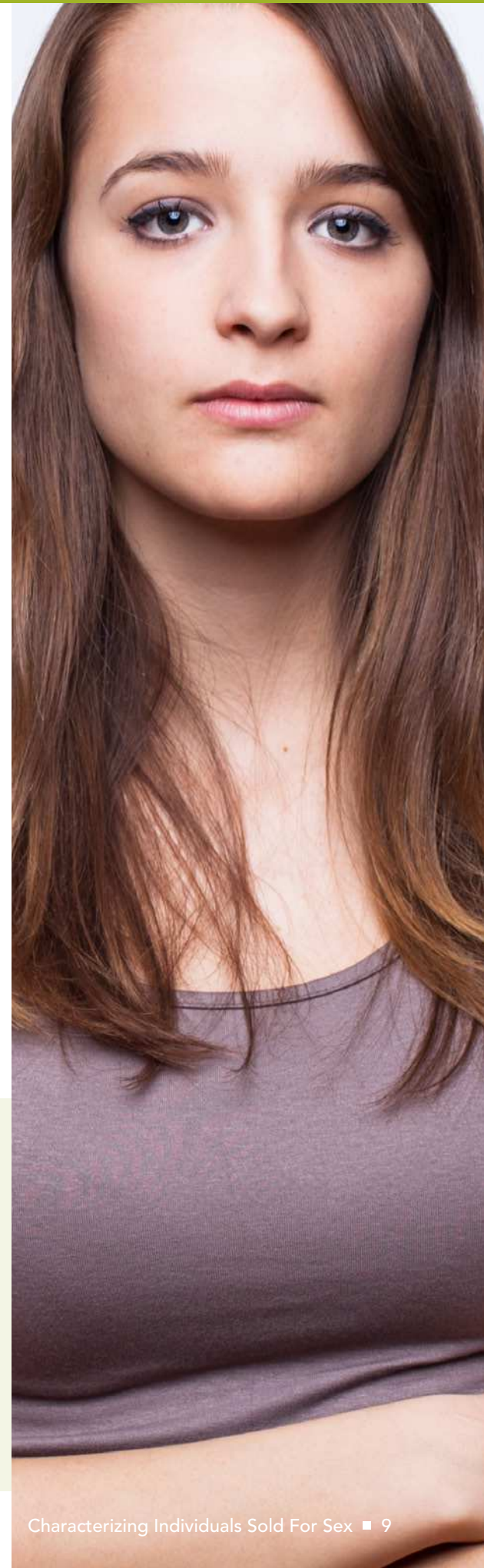
Overall, 20% of individuals sold for sex in Nebraska are advertised as “very young” based on keywords or their posted age.

These findings support the need for law enforcement to look beyond the posted age as the percentage of minors being trafficked online is likely higher.

POVERTY

Backpage features the low-end of the market with an average advertised rate at under \$200 per hour nationally and \$210 in Nebraska. These lower hourly rates are associated with those being sold more frequently for sex. This strongly suggests a Backpage commercial sex market where survival sex is often the only means of meeting basic needs. Since Backpage advertises individuals trapped in survival sex as well as those sold by traffickers, shutting down the website will not result in individuals having the opportunity to leave the commercial sex trade.

60-65% of individuals sold for sex in Nebraska are affiliated with at least one other individual advertised on Backpage. Of these, 18% are advertised in multiple girl specials as a “package deal.”





DEMAND

Buyers' preferences create the trafficking environment.

Advertisements cater to the tastes and preferences of buyers, and provide insight on the individuals being sold for sex as well as the buyers that create the demand. For example, in smaller markets, buyers want new individuals, or "fresh faces," making it important for individuals sold for sex to regularly travel out to new locations and into new markets. As a result, the smaller the local population, the higher the likelihood that individuals sold for sex will travel in and out of the given market.

Buyers also influence the market through preferences related to age. Individuals sold for sex are often advertised with euphemisms suggesting their youth, despite the legal consequences. Individuals advertised as youthful are sold at higher prices, indicating age is an important characteristic sought by buyers.

The younger the individual, the higher the hourly rate they can advertise. This creates incentives for traffickers to recruit younger women and girls.

The industry experiences relatively high turnover because of the dramatic decline in demand as an individual is less able to be marketed as "young" and "youthful."

Buyers of commercial sex often utilize online forums to rate and review individuals they have purchased for sex acts (for example, rating whether an individual is young or not). While some in the industry may attempt to deceive buyers into believing that the individual being sold is much younger, the prevalence and reliance of review forums makes this a bad marketing strategy.

Let's play just turned 18!!! - 18

Posted: Saturday, June 25, 2016 5:37 PM

2 Gurl show \$160 ANYTHING GOES....book now.... - 19

Posted: Saturday, April 2, 2016 10:26 AM

Don't miss us sexy young fresh snow bunnies who love to put on a show for u and b.l.o.w ur mind in to extacy

•Your • Favorite • Secret 🐼🐼🐼 Outcall 🍷 Young• 🍷!! 🍷hot• dirty blonde🍷 - 19

Posted: Friday, March 4, 2016 4:30 PM

wETT Young Mixed NEW Hottie🍷 Real Pictures SMOKING HOTT 🍷🍷 - 18

Posted: Thursday, June 16, 2016 6:53 PM

Special 100:•NEW GIRL ALERT🍷🍷FRESH MEAT🍷🍷HoT aNd Eger To PLEasE YoU!Sweet 🍷_#1_🍷 Treat!

Posted: Tuesday, May 31, 2016 11:25 AM

!!PLEASE NO APPOINTMENTS!!! BE READY WHEN YOU CALL!!!

Hi my name is 🍷🍷Kara Lyn and I'm a hot young black Puerto rican girl that wants to have serious fun with no strings attached. Here are some of my requirements

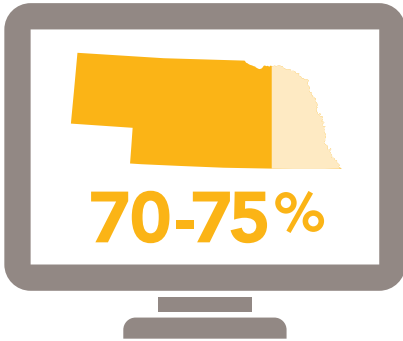


About 25-30% of Nebraska's online commercial sex market includes adults working independently with no signs of being trafficked.

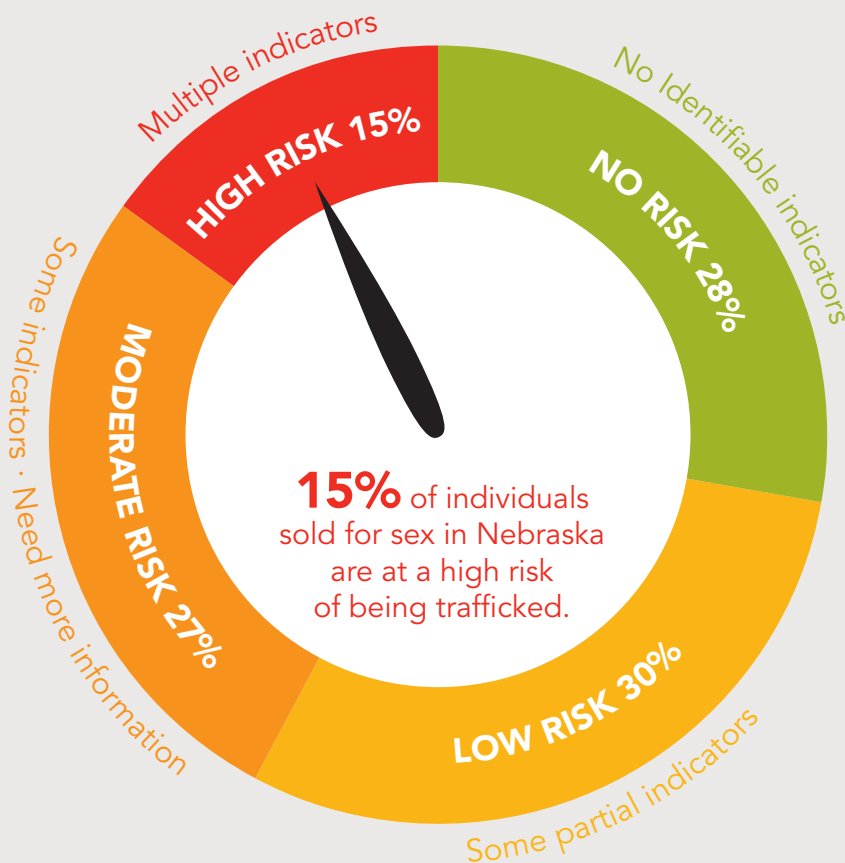
This research demonstrates that some individuals are at a higher risk of being trafficked than others.

INDICATORS OF TRAFFICKING

Based on Backpage alone,



of individuals sold for sex in Nebraska show **some sign** of being underage or controlled by a third party— both indicators of trafficking.



Since **900** individuals are **SOLD** for sex each month in **Nebraska**

this means **135** of them are at **high risk** of being trafficked.

FINDINGS

SIZE OF THE MARKET

There is a large and persistent demand for commercial sex across the state of Nebraska, fueling a market of 900 individuals sold for sex multiple times each month.



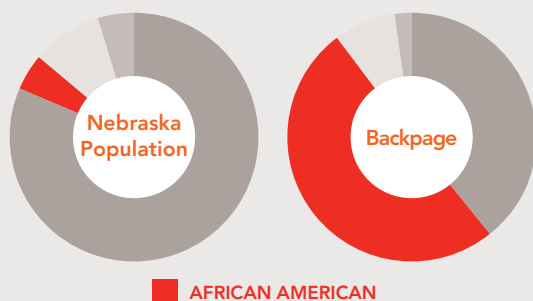
7 in 10 individuals sold for sex in Nebraska each month have some indicator of potential trafficking, and **135** individuals a month on Backpage are at high risk.

25-30% of Nebraska's online commercial sex market comprises adults working independently with no risk of trafficking.

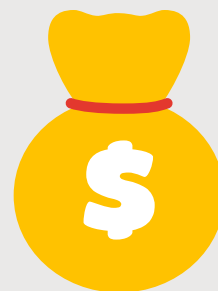


VULNERABLE POPULATION

Often individuals sold for sex are recruited from vulnerable populations. Nebraska's commercial sex market is extremely skewed toward youth, low socio-economic status and minorities.



Race - The population of individuals sold for sex online in Nebraska is largely African American (50%). Other research identifies a survivor population that is only 18% African American in Nebraska.⁵ This discrepancy suggests that service providers and law enforcement across the state are under-identifying this racial group as potential victims.



Poverty – Advertisements on Backpage are primarily comprised of individuals working at low hourly rates who are sold frequently. This indicates a lower-end of the commercial sex market where survival sex is often the only means of meeting basic needs.

A STATEWIDE ISSUE

Sex trafficking is embedded in the state's highly interconnected commercial sex market. Demand is strong in each of the five Nebraska Backpage cities, but it spills over to nearly every town and city along I-80.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The shutdown of the adult escort section on Backpage will not affect either the supply or demand for individuals sold for sex. The question is not whether the market will be reduced, but rather where the individuals will now be advertised until a new hub emerges. In the interim, the industry will be highly decentralized, making monitoring by law enforcement and outreach by service providers more difficult. For example, some may be forced by their traffickers to find buyers on

the street, while others may turn to third parties for assistance in finding buyers. Given that many in the industry could easily become more vulnerable to coercion, while at the same time becoming more difficult to identify, agencies will need to work together to monitor emerging venues selling individuals for sex. The only way to end sex trafficking is to address the demand which fuels the industry.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Policies for systems change that create meaningful alternative employment opportunities provide the most viable path out of the commercial sex industry for these individuals. Without creating accessible job options or economic opportunities, approaches such as shutting down Backpage are unlikely to end trafficking. In fact, such approaches may force individuals in the commercial sex trade to seek assistance from pimps and traffickers to find buyers.



SYSTEM COLLABORATION

Collaboration and information sharing with other states and across jurisdictions between private and public agencies is critical. Nearly half of individuals sold for sex in Nebraska cross state lines, and 51% travel within the state. The transient nature of individuals sold for sex statewide makes victim identification difficult unless system collaboration occurs.



GREATER NEBRASKA

Anti-trafficking efforts in the central and western parts of the state should focus on truck stops, gas stations and hotels along major highways. Moreover, since some ads seek truck drivers as buyers of commercial sex, increased awareness by working with groups like Truckers Against Trafficking and efforts enlisting them in identifying potential trafficking would be useful strategies.



INCREASE PENALTIES FOR BUYERS

As long as there is a demand for commercial sex, there will be a market for it. Those purchasing others for sex are willing to pay a premium for younger, newer individuals. This is what creates the market for traffickers. In order to reduce the incentive for trafficking, serious efforts to curb demand, such as increasing the penalty and likelihood of being caught, are needed.



ENDNOTES

- 1 AIM Group. 2013. Online Prostitution Ad-Revenue Crosses Craigslist Benchmark.
- 2 Human Trafficking Investigation Hearing, Testimony of Yiota G. Souras For the United States Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (Feb. 15, 2011), available at <http://www.missingkids.org/Testimony/11-19-15>.
- 3 Letter from NAAG to Samuel Fifer, Esq., Council for Backpage.com LLC (Sept. 16, 2011), available at <http://www.kirk.senate.gov/pdfs/naagbackpage.pdf>.
- 4 The size of the circle represents the number of individuals sold for sex that advertise the given location, and the color indicates the intensity of demand, measured as the number of individuals sold for sex per 100,000 inhabitants.
- 5 Rajaram, S.S. & Tidball, S. (2016). Nebraska Survivor's Speak—A Qualitative Research Study. Report submitted to the Women's Fund of Omaha.



1111 N. 13th St. Suite #106
Omaha, NE 68102
OmahaWomensFund.org