

SOCIAL MEDIA

# On-Ramps, Intersections, and Exit Routes:

A Roadmap for Systems and  
Industries to Prevent and Disrupt  
Human Trafficking

**Polaris**

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# Acknowledgements

## Lead Researcher and Author:

**Brittany Anthony,**

Manager of Strategic Research at Polaris

## Contributing Survivor Authors:

A'ishah H. Amatullah	Ronny Marty
Julia Anderson	Tajuan McCarty
Efraín Freddy Pérez Arias	Moninda
N.M.B.	Audrey Morrissey
Jessa Dillow Crisp	Ranela P. Placides
Laurin Crosson	Caroline Pugh-Roberts
Harold D'Souza	Jamie Rosseland
Hazel Fasthorse	Ella Smillie
Jo Hollis	Tanya Street
Danielle John	Victoria Thompson
Nancy Johnson	Sawan Vaden
Tiffany Liles	Courtney Wendell
Fainess Lipenga	Shandra Woworuntu
Megan Lundstrom	

*Additional contributing survivor authors who chose to remain anonymous.*

## Other Key Contributing Researchers & Authors:

**Of Polaris:** Sara Crowe, Caren Benjamin, Therese Couture, Elaine McCartin, Elizabeth Gerrior, Lillian Agbeyegbe, and Mary Kate Kosciusko.

**Of Truckers Against Trafficking:** Lyn Leeburg  
**Of HEAL Trafficking:** Dr. Hanni Stoklosa

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# Introduction

Harold D’Souza hardly seemed like an obvious candidate for a five-figure bank loan. He had only just arrived from India, with a wife, two young boys, and a job offer that turned out to be fraudulent. Yet somehow, with just a few signatures on a few dotted lines, Harold walked out the door of a bank with what would have been a small fortune had he been allowed to access it. Of course, he wasn’t. Every dime of that money went to the man who actually arranged for the loan – the trafficker. This was the same man who brought Harold to the United States with the promise of a high-paying professional job and instead forced him to work in a restaurant and live in a virtual prison of debt and desperation. Exactly how the trafficker managed to secure a loan of tens of thousands of dollars in the name of a newly arrived migrant worker with no verifiable source of income remains a mystery to Harold. Clearly though, it was not dumb luck. The trafficker knew exactly how to work within and around a highly regulated and legitimate industry – banking – to maximize the profit he made on Harold and his family. It was all part of his business plan.

The man whose lies and manipulations robbed Harold of his freedom was not unique to his field. A successful trafficker, like any successful entrepreneur, begins with a business plan built on a platform of established business models and best practices. Over time, that plan is chiseled to perfection as the trafficker learns new skills and tests out innovative new ways to monetize the exploitation of human beings.

As with any enterprise, the business plan of a human trafficking venture is not built in a vacuum but rather exists within an ecosystem or matrix, depending on and intersecting with a range of legitimate industries and systems – cultural, governmental, environmental. Examples are abundant. Traffickers use banks to store their earnings and buses to move their victims around; hotel rooms are integral to the operations of some sex traffickers, social media is a vital recruitment trawling ground for others.

This report takes a magnifying glass to such private-sector intersections. The details matter. The more that is known

about the business plans of human trafficking, the more possible it becomes to prevent and disrupt the crime and help survivors find freedom. The insights here are gleaned from those in a position to understand the nuances of each business intersection point – the survivors who lived the experience. They are not definitive scientific conclusions but rather valuable baseline narratives that can spark further exploration and collaboration from other sectors.

Each set of insights is followed by detailed recommendations for turning them into action, industry by industry. Like the insights and information that precede them, these recommendations are also not intended to be definitive. They are a beginning; an invitation. What we have learned is only as valuable as the partners who join us in making the recommendations a reality – and by offering more of their own.

This report builds upon Polaris’s 2017 report, [The Typology of Modern Slavery](#), which analyzed data, gleaned from nearly 10 years of operating the National Human Trafficking Hotline, to show that human trafficking in the United States consists of 25 distinct business models. For each, the Typology report illuminated the basic operational plan - the demographics of both victims and traffickers, and how victims are recruited and controlled.

**This report focuses on the private and public-private sector because fighting human trafficking will require participation by business and industry partners with resources at a comparable scale.**

The sectors explored in this report – **the financial services industry, social media, transportation industry, hotels & motels, housing & homelessness systems, and health care** – are not the only private businesses that intersect with human trafficking. Nor are they “to

blame” in some way for human trafficking. Indeed, as you will read, many stakeholders in each of these systems and industries are already doing innovative work or making powerful commitments to becoming part of the solution.

Clearly, engagement from the private sector alone is not enough. Child welfare agencies, schools and teachers, the criminal justice system, and local, state, and federal government actors are the proverbial tip of the spear, essential to the fight against human trafficking.

But human trafficking is a \$150 billion global industry that robs 25 million people around the world of their freedom. This report focuses on the private and public-private sector because fighting human trafficking will require participation by business and industry partners with resources at a comparable scale to the size of the problem. Participation, in this context, is not a euphemism for making donations to groups that fight human trafficking. The fight against human trafficking requires not just passive support but actual, active commitment and effort on the part of businesses that unwittingly, but regularly intersect with traffickers, victims, and survivors.

The information about how each of these systems and industries are exploited by traffickers as part of their business plans comes from extensive surveys of, and focus groups with, survivors of all types of human trafficking, as well as from the National Human Trafficking Hotline. Those who participated in this work, and in the sometimes painful process of sharing their own stories, did so not to point fingers, but rather to point out opportunities. We are grateful beyond measure to those with the strength to voluntarily speak their truth, again and again, in hopes of keeping others from suffering.

They did so because they know it is possible. Tanya Street lived it. As a recent high-school graduate, Tanya was vulnerable to the machinations of a pimp who showered her with love and attention, then turned her out on the street programmed to believe she was worthless, invisible, unlovable, without him. Most of the doctors at her local health care clinic simply reinforced his brainwashing. Repeatedly, she showed up with urinary tract infections that had her literally doubled over in pain. She felt frowned upon, disapproved of. No

one in the emergency room asked her why this kept happening, if maybe she would like some help beyond antibiotics. She wonders what would have happened if just once during those visits, someone had asked her the right question, or offered her information about getting help or getting out. She wonders how much sooner she would have found her voice, started her life. She wonders what pain she might have avoided.

Harold too knows that if someone at that bank, long ago, had done something a little differently, perhaps everything else would have been different and his family could have avoided some of the pain, fear, and trauma they live with to this day.

**If human trafficking is a business, requiring intense planning and depending on other businesses and partners to flourish, so too must the fight against trafficking be a collective undertaking.**

Today, Harold and Tanya have been honorably appointed to the United States Advisory Council on Human Trafficking. They share their experiences because they believe others truly can learn from them, and systemic change can be achieved. But they cannot be everywhere, talking to everyone, in every hospital emergency room, bus terminal, at every hotel front desk, truck stop parking lot, or monitoring the millions of social media conversations that fly through the ether at any given time. What Harold, Tanya, and all the survivors who contributed to this project have done is recognize the value of mapping the intersections where human trafficking meets legitimate businesses and systems. In doing so, they have staked out new territory, recognizing that if human trafficking is a business, requiring intense planning and depending on other businesses and partners to flourish, so too must the fight against trafficking be a collective undertaking that is painstakingly plotted and thoughtfully implemented, in partnership with the businesses that unwittingly make it possible.

# The Typology of Modern Slavery

## A Summary

In March 2017, Polaris released the ground-breaking report, [The Typology of Modern Slavery](#), which classified the 25 distinct types of human trafficking business models occurring in the United States. The following information includes a short description or definition of each type of trafficking as well as updated statistics on cases and potential victims learned about from the National Human Trafficking Hotline through December 31, 2017. The cases below are based off of analysis of 40,000+ cases of potential human trafficking and 11,000+ cases of potential labor exploitation. The following cases only represent the cases that occurred in the United States and where the type of trafficking or labor exploitation was known. This is not a comprehensive report on the scale or scope of human trafficking within the United States. These statistics may be subject to change. Please see the Typology report and the methodology section of this report for further context.

Type	Definition	DEC. 2007 - DEC. 2017	JAN. 2015 - DEC. 2017
		Number of Cases	Number of Potential Victims
<b>Agriculture &amp; Animal Husbandry</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	A farming business in which potential victims are exploited for their labor in growing/maintaining crops, cultivating soil, or rearing animals.	556 (HT)	609 (HT)
		1,761 (LE)	844 (LE)
<b>Arts, Sports, &amp; Entertainment</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	Potential victims are exploited for their labor in amateur, scholastic, or professional athletics, modeling, or performing arts (including adults in exotic dancing).	135 (HT)	102 (HT)
		40 (LE)	10 (LE)
<b>Bars, Strip Clubs, &amp; Cantinas</b> (Type: Sex & Labor Trafficking)	This category comprises establishments that front as legitimate bars and clubs, selling alcohol while exploiting victims for sex and labor behind the scenes.	992 (HT)	601 (HT)
<b>Carnivals</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	Potential victims are exploited for their labor in operating rides, games, and food stands.	59 (HT)	28 (HT)
		80 (LE)	27 (LE)
<b>Commercial Cleaning Services</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	Potential victims are exploited for their labor in janitorial/cleaning services performed in private households, office buildings, and other commercial/public properties.	128 (HT)	101 (HT)
		362 (LE)	79 (LE)
<b>Construction</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	Potential victims are exploited for their labor in carpentry, masonry, painting, roofing, etc.	202 (HT)	157 (HT)
		458 (LE)	183 (LE)
<b>Domestic Work</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	An industry where an individual works for one specific household/family providing personal household tasks, cleaning, child care, or adult caretaking, often living on-site with the family.	1,437 (HT)	753 (HT)
		487 (LE)	202 (LE)
<b>Escort Services</b> (Type: Sex Trafficking)	Commercial sex acts that primarily occur at temporary indoor locations. Includes: hotel-based operations, internet ads, and out-calls to buyers.	6,418 (HT)	4,555 (HT)
<b>Factories &amp; Manufacturing</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	Potential victims are exploited for their labor in food processing, clothing/shoe manufacturing, factories producing electronic devices, vehicles, and more.	99 (HT)	77 (HT)
		222 (LE)	54 (LE)
<b>Forestry &amp; Logging</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	Potential victims are exploited for their labor as tree farm workers, reforestation planters, loggers, and workers maintaining woodland areas.	57 (HT)	27 (HT)
		173 (LE)	77 (LE)

HT = Human Trafficking | LE = Labor Exploitation<sup>1</sup>

Type	Definition	Number of Cases	Number of Potential Victims
<b>Health &amp; Beauty Services</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	Potential victims are exploited for their labor in businesses such as nail salons, hair salons, acupuncture businesses, etc.	345 (HT)	122 (HT)
		140 (LE)	46 (LE)
<b>Health Care</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	Potential victims are primarily exploited for their labor in residential nursing homes, occupational health facilities, or as home health aides.	64 (HT)	53 (HT)
		70 (LE)	29 (LE)
<b>Hospitality</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	Potential victims are exploited for their labor as hotel housekeepers, front desk attendants, bell staff, etc.	151 (HT)	133 (HT)
		585 (LE)	349 (LE)
<b>Illicit Activities</b> (Type: Sex & Labor Trafficking)	A potential victim is forced to provide labor or services to contribute to an illegal/illicit business operation such as drug selling, drug smuggling, drug production, financial scams, gang activity, etc. Potential victims are also often forced into commercial sex acts in addition to this labor.	297 (HT)	294 (HT)
<b>Illicit Massage Businesses</b> (Type: Sex & Labor Trafficking)	Primary business of sex and labor trafficking is concealed under the façade of legitimate spa services.	3,736 (HT)	1,253 (HT)
<b>Landscaping</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	Potential victims are exploited for their labor in gardening, maintaining public or private grounds, or within nurseries.	147 (HT)	112 (HT)
		749 (LE)	250 (LE)
<b>Outdoor Solicitation</b> (Type: Sex Trafficking)	Potential victims are forced to find commercial sex buyers in outdoor locations such as on "tracks"/"strolls," or at truck stops.	1,983 (HT)	1,150 (HT)
<b>Peddling &amp; Begging</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	Potential victims are expected to beg for "donations," or sell small items such as candy, at a stationary, often outdoor locations.	602 (HT)	327 (HT)
		61 (LE)	28 (LE)
<b>Personal Sexual Servitude</b> (Type: Sex Trafficking)	A potential victim is forced to provide sex acts to one/ specific person(s) (oftentimes in a chronic and ongoing situation) in exchange for something of value. The controller and the "buyer" are usually the same person. (See also: <a href="#">Survival Sex</a> , in the Glossary)	587 (HT)	362 (HT)
<b>Pornography</b> (Type: Sex Trafficking)	Pre-recorded sexually explicit videos & images, including child pornography. This can include informally distributed pornographic material, or commercial sex through a formal pornography company. •Note: This type should not be confused with interactive webcam shows. (See Remote Interactive Sexual Acts)	1,107 (HT)	516 (HT)
<b>Recreational Facilities</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	Potential victims are exploited for their labor in amusement/theme parks, summer camps, golf courses, and community swimming pools.	44 (HT)	33 (HT)
		265 (LE)	92 (LE)
<b>Remote Interactive Sexual Acts</b> (Type: Sex Trafficking)	Live-streamed, interactive, simulated sex acts/shows. •Note: This type should not be confused with pre-recorded sexually explicit videos & images. (See Pornography)	146 (HT)	119 (HT)
<b>Residential Sex Trafficking</b> (Type: Sex Trafficking)	In-call commercial sex occurring at a non-commercial residential location.	1,800 (HT)	1,665 (HT)
<b>Restaurants &amp; Food Services</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	Potential victims are exploited for their labor as servers, bussers, dishwashers, cooks, etc.	595 (HT)	274 (HT)
		1,340 (LE)	392 (LE)
<b>Traveling Sales Crews</b> (Type: Labor Trafficking)	Potential victims travel in groups to various cities/states selling items such as magazines door-to-door.	686 (HT)	356 (HT)
		96 (LE)	40 (LE)

HT = Human Trafficking | LE = Labor Exploitation<sup>1</sup>

# Systemic Change Matrix

A strategic approach to ending human trafficking includes understanding the ways each of these systems enables or intersects with potential traffickers or victims. This matrix depicts the 25 types of human trafficking in the United States, cross-referenced with eight highlighted systems and industries, six of which are discussed in-depth in this report. Each system and industry can be activated to help disrupt and prevent the crime in unique and impactful ways.

	 Financial Services Industry	 Hotels & Motels	 Housing & Homelessness Systems	 Social Media	 Temporary Work Visas	 Transportation	 Business Regulatory Systems	 Health Care
Escort Services	●	●	●	●		●		●
Illicit Massage Businesses	●		●	●	●	●	●	
Outdoor Solicitation		●	●	●		●		●
Residential Sex Trafficking	●		●			●		●
Domestic Work	●		●	●	●	●		●
Bars, Strip Clubs, & Cantinas	●	●	●	●		●	●	●
Pornography	●			●		●	●	●
Traveling Sales Crews	●	●	●	●		●	●	●
Restaurants & Food Service	●		●	●	●	●	●	●
Peddling & Begging			●					
Agriculture & Animal Husbandry	●			●	●	●	●	●
Personal Sexual Servitude			●	●				●
Health & Beauty Services	●		●		●	●	●	●
Construction	●		●		●		●	●
Hospitality	●	●			●		●	
Landscaping	●				●	●	●	●
Illicit Activities	●		●			●		●
Arts, Sports & Entertainment	●			●	●	●	●	●
Commercial Cleaning Services	●	●	●		●		●	
Factories & Manufacturing	●		●		●		●	●
Remote Interactive Sexual Acts	●		●	●				
Carnivals	●				●	●	●	●
Forestry & Logging	●				●	●	●	●
Health Care	●		●		●		●	●
Recreational Facilities	●	●			●		●	

# Methodology

## Hotline Data

This report includes data from the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline. The National Hotline is not a research-oriented program. Instead, the Polaris staff who operate the hotline are focused on helping potential victims of trafficking access critical support and services to get help and stay safe. While advocates use detailed protocols to assess for indicators of human trafficking, they adapt their phrasing and scope of questions in response to each individual's answers and the circumstances of the call, text message, or chat signal. Beyond this trafficking assessment, potential victims and third parties reporting these situations are not asked a set of standardized questions and only provide information that they feel comfortable sharing with Polaris's staff to get the help they need. Additionally, asking certain questions during some signals may not be appropriate or possible due to the context of the call. For example, when Hotline staff receive calls from potential victims in crisis situations with limited time to reach out for help, staff focus on the caller's safety and assisting with urgent needs such as emergency shelter or law enforcement assistance, and not on detailed information about the victim's trafficking experience.

As such, the data points in this report represent only what those contacting the National Hotline chose to disclose. The number of survivors or potential human trafficking cases with a particular attribute would likely have been significantly higher if Polaris staff had systematically asked a standardized set of questions to each individual contacting the Hotline.

Since awareness of both human trafficking and the existence of a national victim service hotline is still limited, this data set should be interpreted as a limited sample of actual victim or trafficking case data, rather than a representation of all existent victims or cases of human trafficking. The information reported by the National Hotline is only able to represent who has access to and knowledge of the Hotline, who has the means to reach out, and who is more likely to self-identify as a potential victim or some-

one in need of assistance. The data reported by Polaris should not be compared to the findings of more rigorous academic studies or prevalence estimates.

## A Note about Language:

Polaris recognizes that survivors of human trafficking identify in many ways which can be deeply personal to the individual. Throughout this report, we tend to use the terms 'victim' and 'survivor' fairly interchangeably.

Polaris staff operating the National Human Trafficking Hotline do not investigate reports made by individuals contacting the Hotline and cannot verify the accuracy of the information reported. Therefore, this report uses the term "potential victim" when referring to those individuals learned about on the Hotline, who, through a Hotline trafficking assessment, meet the definition of an individual who has experienced sex or labor trafficking.

This report references data from the National Hotline using two distinct timeframes. The data referencing **cases** is for the timeframe of December 7, 2007 - December 31, 2017. The data referencing **unique potential victim profiles** is for the timeframe of January 1, 2015 - December 31, 2017. Polaris did not begin logging victim profiles until January 1, 2015. Therefore, historic data from before January 1, 2015, is not yet available.

## Cases of Potential Human Trafficking

(December 7, 2007 - December 31, 2017)

Polaris began operating and collecting data on potential cases of human trafficking and labor exploitation from the National Human Trafficking Hotline as of December 7, 2007. Polaris defines a “case” of human trafficking<sup>2</sup> as an individual situation of trafficking which could include one or multiple potential victims. Data on the case level includes, but is not limited to, form of trafficking (e.g. sex vs. labor), the type of trafficking (as defined in the Typology of Modern Slavery<sup>3</sup>), venue location, or geographic location of trafficking, etc. These are the data points that will have the timeframe of December 7, 2007 - December 31, 2017.

## Individual Potential Victim Profiles

(January 1, 2015 - December 31, 2017)

On January 1, 2015, Polaris began logging individual potential victim profiles, for each unique potential victim learned about through trafficking and labor exploitation related-signals to the National Hotline. Data on an individual potential victim profile can include, but is not limited to, demographic information such as current age, adult/minor status, gender, type of work visa (if applicable), and country of origin. These records can also include detailed information on the potential victim’s experience during the potential trafficking or exploitation such as age at entry, methods of abuse endured, recruitment tactics used, recruitment location, relationship of victim to controller(s) and recruiter(s), risk factors/vulnerabilities present before the trafficking situation, and more. Polaris did not have direct contact with all victims represented in this data set. Third parties reporting information about a victim often did not have information about some details of the situation they were reporting. Each case of human trafficking or labor exploitation could identify multiple unique poten-

tial victims, or the signalers may not have had enough information to identify any individual potential victims in the situation.<sup>4</sup> These are the data points that will have the timeframe of January 1, 2015 - December 31, 2017.

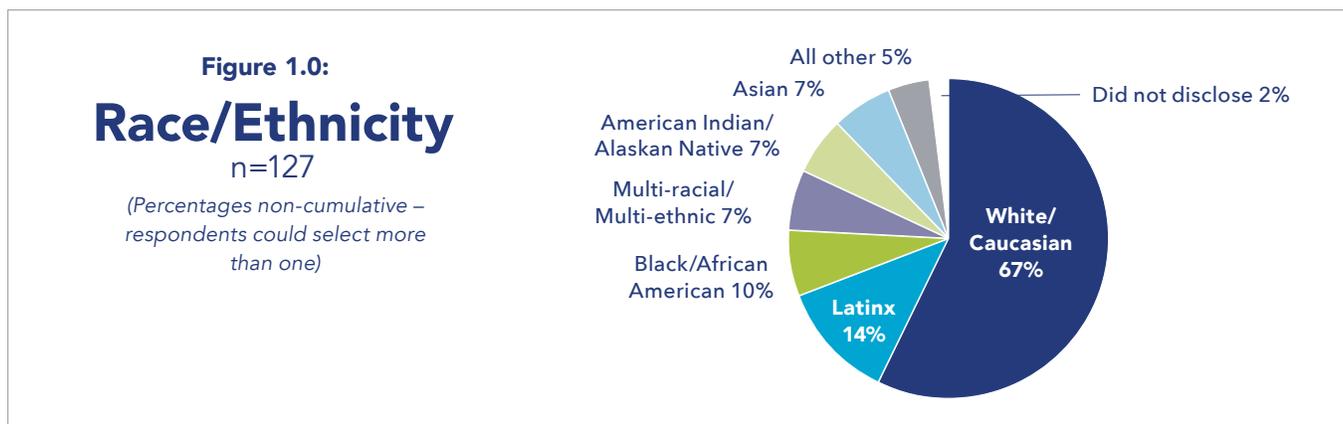
## Polaris Survivor Survey

During the time period of **August 22, 2017 - September 18, 2017**, Polaris sought human trafficking survivor participants for a paid online survey entitled “*Trafficking Survivor Experiences with Systems & Industries*.” The survey, available in both English and Spanish, was nationally distributed to over two dozen non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which either directly serve victims and survivors of human trafficking, or organize survivor leadership. Although some of the individual NGOs which Polaris worked with to distribute the survey may specialize or exclusively interface with survivors of specific demographics or types of trafficking (e.g. some organizations only serve sex trafficking survivors, some organizations mainly serve foreign nationals, etc.), the survey was sent to a diverse range of NGOs representing many geographies, survivor demographics, and types of trafficking.

The survey was open to any adult who self-identified as a victim or survivor of sex or labor trafficking. Survey participants were not asked for any kind of confirmation of victim status. The completion of the survey was also completely voluntary, and survivors were compensated for their time. Therefore, the survey was not anonymous. Polaris collected personal contact information in order to send payment.

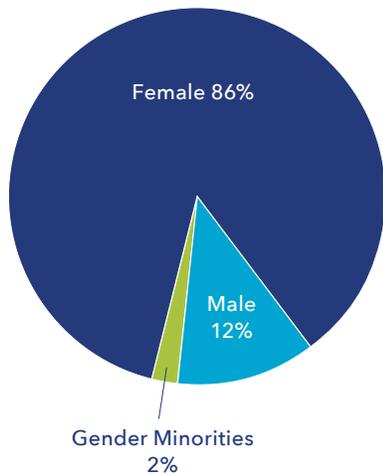
The survey resulted in **127 individual survivor respondents**.

For all 127 survey participants, basic demographics and information on what type of human trafficking they experienced was collected. See Figures 1.0 - 1.5



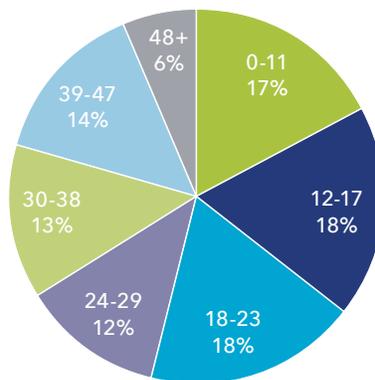
**Figure 1.1:  
Gender**

n=127



**Figure 1.2:  
Age at trafficking entry**

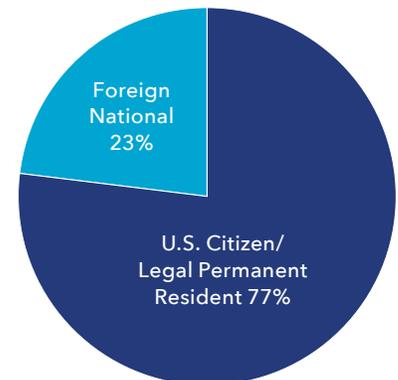
n=127



**Figure 1.3:  
Immigration Status**

n=126\*

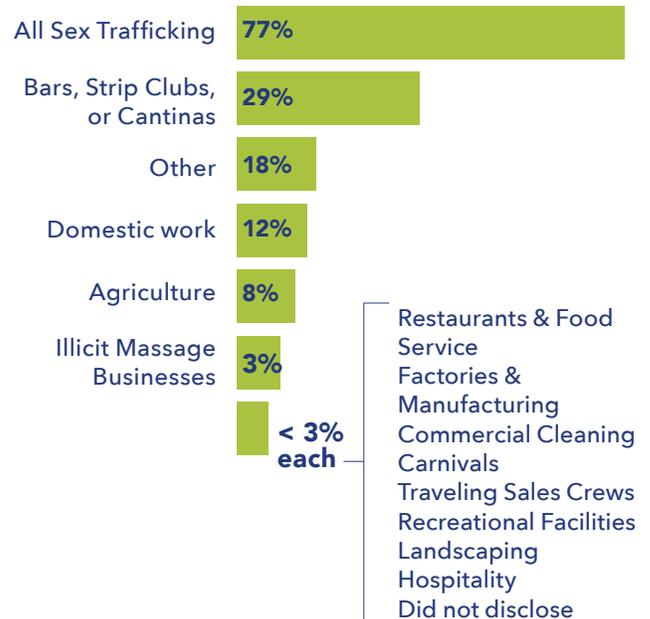
\*One respondent did not answer.



**Figure 1.4:  
Types of Trafficking**  
n=127

All Sex Trafficking	77% (98)
Bars, Strip Clubs, & Cantinas	29% (37)
Other	18% (23)
Domestic Work	12% (15)
Agriculture & Animal Husbandry	8% (10)
Illicit Massage Businesses	3% (4)
Restaurants & Food Service	< 3% <sup>5</sup>
Commercial Cleaning	< 3%
Factories & Manufacturing	< 3%
Carnivals	< 3%
Hospitality	< 3%
Landscaping	< 3%
Traveling Sales Crews	< 3%
Recreational Facilities	< 3%
Not Specified	< 3%

**Figure 1.5:  
Types of Trafficking**  
n=127



Data is non-cumulative. Survey participants could select multiple options.

After the demographic questions, the survey walked respondents through separate sections dedicated to the systems and industries addressed in this report: the financial services industry, social media, transportation, hotels & motels, housing & homelessness systems, and health care.<sup>6</sup>

Each of these sections began with a “screening question” asked of all respondents to assess whether or not they, (or their traffickers in some cases) had any inter-

action or access to the system/industry pertaining to that section. Each screening question also provided some necessary definitions, common examples, and/or framing context to clarify the intent of each section. If respondents answered “Yes” or “Not Sure,” the survey advanced them to that section’s set of survey questions. If respondents answered “No,” the survey skipped that section altogether and navigated them to the next system/industry’s screening question. An example screening question is below:

**Example Screening Question:**

**Trafficking Survivor Experiences with Systems & Industries**

**Hotels & Motels**

**Did you ever come into contact with any hotels or motels during your exploitation? This includes but is not limited to staying nights, living there, working/being trafficked as a hotel employee or contractor, contracting with a hotel, being forced to engage in commercial sex at hotels/motels, etc. \***

Yes  
 No  
 Not sure

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**Figure 1.6: Survey Sections**

Therefore, each individual section pertaining to each system/industry has a different total responding sample, depending on how many of the 127 total survey respondents answered “Yes” or “Not Sure” to that section’s screening question. Figure 1.6 breaks down the total number of respondents that “screened in” to each system/industry section along with the percentage of total survey respondents:

Survey section	Total # of survivors that “screened in” to section	% of total survey respondents
<b>Financial Services Industry</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>78%</b>
<b>Transportation</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>82%</b>
<b>Social Media</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>57%</b>
<b>Hotels &amp; Motels</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>79%</b>
<b>Health Care</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>69%</b>
<b>Housing &amp; Homelessness Systems</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>39%</b>

## Survey Limitations

The survey and focus groups were not required to, nor did they undergo, a formal institutional review board (IRB) approval process. Despite the project not formally going through this process, Polaris conducted appropriate due-diligence measures to ensure that every step of the research project, including the development of the survey questions, analysis of the participants' benefits and risks, informed consent/voluntary participation procedures, data collection and security standards, compensation norms, and other participant safeguards, were survivor informed, trauma-sensitive, and thoughtfully approached to protect the research participants.

This survey was not the result of a random sample. A central limitation to diverse sampling was the finite network to which Polaris was able to distribute the survey. Although Polaris works with a wide variety of anti-trafficking NGOs throughout the United States, and every effort was made to diversify the types of NGOs to whom the survey was distributed, distribution was limited to Polaris's partners and contacts. Moreover, the distribution of the survey was at the discretion of the NGOs, and therefore, the final sample population was entirely dependent on each NGO's willingness and ability to distribute the survey to the populations it had contact with.

The survey was facilitated through accredited organizations whose networks are also finite and limited to their scope. This naturally caused a response bias leaning toward survivors of human trafficking who were already removed from their trafficking situation and receiving services or engaging in survivor leadership. As the survey did not ask about the years during which the respondent was trafficked, it is impossible to determine how long respondents were removed from their trafficking situation. Therefore, social, cultural, or environmental changes may impact the current significance of some of these results. For example, some survivor respondents may have experienced trafficking during a time which pre-dates the general availability or pervasive use of social media.

Results of the survey also lean disproportionately to sex trafficking survivors (77 percent). This indicates that NGOs with a focus on sex trafficking were either more willing or able to widely distribute the survey to the populations they serve, or the anti-sex traf-

ficking NGOs had a much more expansive network of interested survivors. Relatedly, some NGOs which serve large populations of labor trafficking survivors indicated that unforeseen environmental and political events, which coincided with the open period for survey submissions, impeded their ability to distribute the survey to their networks. The need for these providers and their networks to focus on more urgent matters likely impacted the number of labor trafficking survivors who had access to the survey.

There were other design limitations which likely impacted the response rate and response content of the survey results. First, the limited languages in which the survey was distributed likely prevented survivors of certain types of trafficking from participating in the survey. Due to resource limitations, Polaris was unable to distribute the survey in other languages but would ideally have expanded the language services if possible. Second, the online platform of the survey likely excluded some individuals who did not have the resources available to access the internet or to do so in private locations. Third, the survey's lack of anonymity may have deterred people who would have otherwise chosen to take the survey but remain anonymous.

**Finally, neither the Polaris survivor survey, nor the follow up Polaris focus groups should be compared to the findings of more rigorous academic studies or prevalence estimates.**

## Polaris Focus Groups

For Phase II of the research project, researchers sought to dive deeper into select areas of the survivor survey to gather personal narratives and survivor recommendations for systems and industries to enhance the report. To do this, five focus groups were assembled from the pool of survey respondents. Due to the extensive number of respondents who were sex trafficking survivors, four groups consisted of sex trafficking survivors and one group consisted of labor trafficking survivors.

The focus groups primarily sought to supplement the data Polaris already had access to from the National Human Trafficking Hotline. Therefore, the selection of focus group participants was strategic to ensure researchers were able to collect the specific type of information needed to gain necessary insights for each system/industry.

First, researchers identified the specific systems/industries where deeper information was needed:

**Sex trafficking Groups:**

- 1) Financial Services Industry
- 2) Social Media
- 3) Transportation
- 4) Hotels & Motels
- 5) Health Care

**Labor Trafficking Groups:**

- 1) Financial Services Industry
- 2) Transportation
- 3) Health Care<sup>7</sup>

Second, researchers then identified individual respondents whose survey answers indicated that they had significant interactions with or knowledge of these specific industries during their exploitation. Every survey response was reviewed individually, and each section of the survey (finance, transportation, etc.) was ranked on a scale of 0-2 in terms of how significant the respondent's interaction with that system/industry was:

- 0= Very little/no interaction or knowledge
- 1= Moderate interaction or knowledge
- 2= Significant interaction or knowledge

To determine this significance, researchers weighed some questions in the survey stronger than others, based on the specific research needs. For example, researchers prioritized a survivor's understanding of

how the finances were managed in his or her situation, as this information is not often revealed during regular Hotline interactions.

Based on their answers, 26 survey respondents were invited to attend one of five focus groups hosted in various cities across the country.

- Los Angeles, CA - 5 participants
- Denver, CO - 5 participants
- Dallas, TX - 4 participants
- Atlanta, GA - 5 participants
- Washington, DC - 5 participants

Due to unforeseen and extenuating circumstances, two participants intended for the focus groups could not attend, and therefore provided their input through remote one-on-one interviews with researchers.

Each focus group was two hours long and covered as many prioritized systems/industries as time would allow. Of course, due to the natural flow of discussion of focus groups, not every group addressed every question or every system or industry.

Each focus group or interview was transcribed and analyzed using basic content analysis to identify common themes across groups. These themes, in combination with the quantitative survey data, and findings from the National Hotline, informed the general structure and content of this report.



# Social Media

The following matrix is meant to be an overview of some of the intersections that diverse social media platforms may have with victims and traffickers of various types of trafficking (See [Typology of Modern Slavery: A Summary](#) section of this report). Each dot can represent one or more touch points throughout a trafficking life cycle including during recruitment, to facilitate advertising, abuse, or overall business operations, or to support survivors during or after their trafficking experiences. All intersections were informed by Polaris’s operation of the National Human Trafficking Hotline since 2007, Polaris survivor survey, Polaris focus groups, or additional, but not exhaustive, external research and analysis which may include service provider and stakeholder knowledge sharing, scholarly research, media articles, documented civil and/or criminal cases of human trafficking, or analysis of external data sets and/or public records. This matrix is by no means comprehensive, as potential traffickers and victims have the potential to access many social media platforms. The absence of a dot may mean there is insufficient data or research on the intersection. Polaris omitted the types of trafficking where research and data were lacking.

**“Technology is being used [to hurt us]. Why can’t we use technology as a way to get resources to survivors?”**

		Types of Social Media Platforms					
		Facebook	Instagram	Snapchat	Chat apps (Kik, KakaoTalk, WeChat, WhatsApp)	Dating Sites & Apps	YouTube
Types of Trafficking	Agriculture & Animal Husbandry	●			●		●
	Arts, Sports, & Entertainment	●	●				
	Bars, Strip Clubs, & Cantinas	●	●				●
	Domestic Work	●			●		
	Escort Services	●	●	●	●	●	
	Illicit Massage Businesses	●	●		●		
	Outdoor Solicitation	●	●	●			
	Personal Sexual Servitude	●	●	●	●	●	
	Pornography	●	●		●		●
	Remote Interactive Sexual Acts			●	●	●	
	Restaurants & Food Service	●			●		
	Traveling Sales Crews	●	●	●			●

Over the last two decades, the internet has dramatically reshaped how we buy and sell literally everything – including each other. With a credit card and a couple of clicks, anyone can shop for virtually anything they want, from the comfort and privacy of their own homes. In the commercial sex realm, this ease of access has created at least the appearance of a massively expanded marketplace. Federal legislation passed in April 2018 cracking down on the online facilitation of prostitution may reshape that marketplace, but is unlikely to end it. And because trafficking is a business, and the laws of supply and demand apply, it would then stand to reason that the explosion of advertising options on the internet have led to more sex trafficking. But we do not know for sure whether someone who buys sex from an escort service via an online classified ad would not have sought out a similar service from the Yellow Pages, a printed circular, or the street.

What we do know is that the internet has forever blurred the once bright lines between the social and the commercial and that traffickers have taken notice and adjusted their business models accordingly. The most obvious example is the creation of a whole new product for human traffickers to sell – remote, interactive sexual acts streamed directly to individual purchasers. But every aspect of the trafficking business has been to some extent adjusted to exploit the opportunities for expansion afforded by social media.

While this section briefly addresses intersections of human trafficking with platforms like classified sites and consumer review sites, which have some “social” aspects, the majority of focus is on what most internet users understand to be “social media” – online platforms whose intended purpose is to foster the connection of people to share ideas, interests, and information. This has some crossover. A site like Craigslist, for example, at one point offered both transactional commercial sex advertisements as well as a forum for people looking to form romantic relationships.

Understanding how both human traffickers, victims and survivors interact with social media as it is commonly understood – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. – offers a new realm of insights that are potentially more actionable for a wider range of players, from trafficking victims looking for help, to law enforcement seeking to disrupt trafficking networks, to technology companies looking to keep their users safe on their platforms. Human trafficking, like technology, is a dynamic business, endlessly innovative and infinitely adaptable. Only by understanding how these two sectors interact can we get the best out of the one and begin to shut down the other.

# How Social Media may be Used in Recruitment

The National Human Trafficking Hotline has recorded recruitment in all types of both sex and labor trafficking on mainstream social media platforms including, but not limited to, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Kik, Meetme.com, WhatsApp, and dating sites/apps like Plenty of Fish, Tinder, and Grindr.

Potential victims who have contacted the National Hotline have also been tricked into trafficking through job advertisements on commercialized websites like Craigslist. Voluntary individuals in the commercial sex industry, who had been operating independently, have been recruited into being under a trafficker's control through Backpage.com.

Online recruitment has existed for as long as there has been widespread access to internet platforms. Sex trafficking survivors who attended Polaris focus groups

and who were trafficked in types such as escort services, outdoor solicitation, remote interactive sexual acts, pornography, and in strip clubs and bars, even discussed their common experience of being recruited on MySpace in the early-mid 2000's.

Today, the options have expanded.

By way of scope, case data from January 2015 through December 2017 records 845 potential victims recruited on internet platforms. This includes:

- 250 potential victims recruited on Facebook,
- 120 recruited on a dating site,
- 78 recruited on Instagram,
- 489 recruited on another type of Internet platform such as Craigslist, chat rooms, or a website that could not be identified during the hotline call.<sup>8</sup>

**"[As a survivor advocate, I've seen] a huge influx [of social media recruitment] now... I was recruited off a dating website. I don't think they had direct messaging on social media platforms back [when I was recruited]. But a lot of my clients are recruited off Facebook or Instagram. [Recruiters] send them direct messages... I have girls who are flown from all over the country... and they think they are coming to see a modeling agent."**



## Online Relationship Recruitment

Trafficking by an individual – generally a pimp or an intimate partner – often begins with the trafficker and potential victim building a relationship through social media. Contact and ensuing conversations take numerous forms but generally follow patterns. There are few instances where some individual sex traffickers will capitalize on the anonymity of the internet and use fake profiles to conceal their true identity, or impersonate their bottom girl (a term some pimps use to refer to a victim still under their control but who has “earned” a higher ranking among the other potential victims). However, more often than not, cases from the National Hotline show many traffickers have no qualms about using their own personal social media profiles for recruitment communication. Unfortunately, for most victims, that’s where the truth about who their traffickers are ends.

Online recruitment may begin with commenting on potential victims’ photos and sending direct messages, carefully building the rapport and intimacy needed to entice victims into a false sense of trust. The next phase is often “boyfriending” – manipulations such as feigned romantic interests, extreme flattery, promises of gifts or other financial assistance, assurance that they, and they alone can care for the potential victim, or even perceived salvation from domestic violence or child sexual abuse.

In these cases, the online relationship will generally culminate with the trafficker purchasing travel tickets for the potential victim in order to finally unite face-to-face.

In a slightly different and accelerated version of this recruitment model, geography is factored in before the online relationship begins. Traffickers can connect with potential victims using location-based apps such as Meetme.com, Grindr, or Tinder. Victims use these apps for their intended purpose, to seek out a potential romantic partner. But some vulnerable youth, struggling with issues such as homelessness, previous victimization, or alcohol and/or substance use, also use the apps to seek out someone with the means to provide them with what they need to survive. As with any commercial sex situation, survival sex exists on a spectrum. It can be voluntary (with adults 18+), involve

some exploitative conditions, or constitute sex trafficking in the form of personal sexual servitude if the exploiter begins to coerce the victim (often a minor) with money, drugs, transportation, shelter, food, gifts, etc. all while typically employing elements of control over his or her day-to-day life.

## Online Fake or Deceptive Job Recruitment

The ability to tightly target a desirable audience also makes social media an ideal venue for serving deceptive or fraudulent job advertisements to a vulnerable population. Some individual sex traffickers will recruit victims through an illegitimate job offer for modeling or dancing, sometimes facilitated through fake business profiles, event pages on Facebook, or on Craigslist. Traffickers may also contact the potential victim directly, claiming to be a recruiter for a modeling agency or the owner of another kind of legitimate business seeking staff. Often these interactions also include some elements of building trust and a relationship online before the actual job offer is made.

In Polaris’s research into recruitment within the context of illicit massage businesses (IMBs), WeChat and KakaoTalk, immensely popular platforms among Chinese and Korean users respectively, were cited frequently. With KaKaoTalk, recruiters create attractive ads which elicit responses from potential victims eager for worthwhile employment. Employment ads on these platforms and other recruitment websites have demonstrated indicators of fraud such as inflated earning potential, extreme promises regarding immigration benefits, same day pay, no need for experience or training, housing and transportation costs provided, and vague and elusive conditions regarding the job itself. Alternatively, on WeChat, recruiters are able to utilize geographic location data to connect with users in their area, making this particularly convenient for fiendish recruiters in IMB networks.<sup>9</sup>

In labor trafficking through traveling sales crews, in-person recruitment is still most common, but traffickers also rely heavily on Facebook and Craigslist to expand their base of “independent contractors.”<sup>10</sup> Although some crews have established a business page on Facebook, or communicate as a business via Facebook profiles intended for individuals, this practice seems to be on the wane.

Instead, today, it is perhaps more likely for crews to have individual members recruit new members directly from their personal friend or follower lists. In such cases, crew members typically post brazen photos or videos typically involving excessive displays of cash and exaggerated claims about job conditions. When curious potential victims inquire about what they see, the poster will generally follow up with a direct message with further details. There are also public and private “mag crew” (a colloquial term used by crews who primarily sell magazine subscriptions) Facebook groups, where people on various interconnected crews can gather to discuss travel plans, upcoming parties, and to push out recruitment information. Finally, although not a traditional social media platform, Craigslist is frequently referenced in reports to the National Hotline as a potential victim’s first introduction to a fraudulent job.



↑ Typical sales crew recruitment post by an individual user on Facebook. Based on actual public comment threads, but recreated with name changes to protect any potential victims involved.



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↑ The above image was obtained from a public Facebook post of a potential door-to-door sales company.

In the case of trafficked migrant workers from the Philippines, who are among the top potential victims cited in domestic work, health care, and hotels and hospitality, job postings on Facebook are thought of as highly influential and trustworthy. In fact, according to one qualitative case study, some Filipino survivors have noted that migrant workers are more inclined to trust the validity of a job posting if it appeared on an online job forum or on Facebook, rather than the official ratings from the Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), a government regulatory agency for job recruiters.<sup>11</sup>

In trafficking types that target migrant labor from Latin America, online recruitment has traditionally been less prevalent as the victims tend to come from rural and impoverished communities without easy access to technology. However, Polaris's research into the agricultural industry suggests that may be changing. For example, a recent research project found several large agricultural labor recruitment agencies seeking workers from southern Mexico were utilizing Facebook to advertise recruitment events and then turning to WhatsApp to communicate logistical details about those events to potential workers. This suggests the potential shift in recruitment operations to online platforms and is an important trend for labor rights advocates to watch.

While these two examples highlight the influence that Facebook and WhatsApp may have on migrant job seekers, there is no doubt that more research is needed to understand how social media and online platforms are used or trusted in other regions or industries.

# How Social Media may Be Used in Trafficking Operations

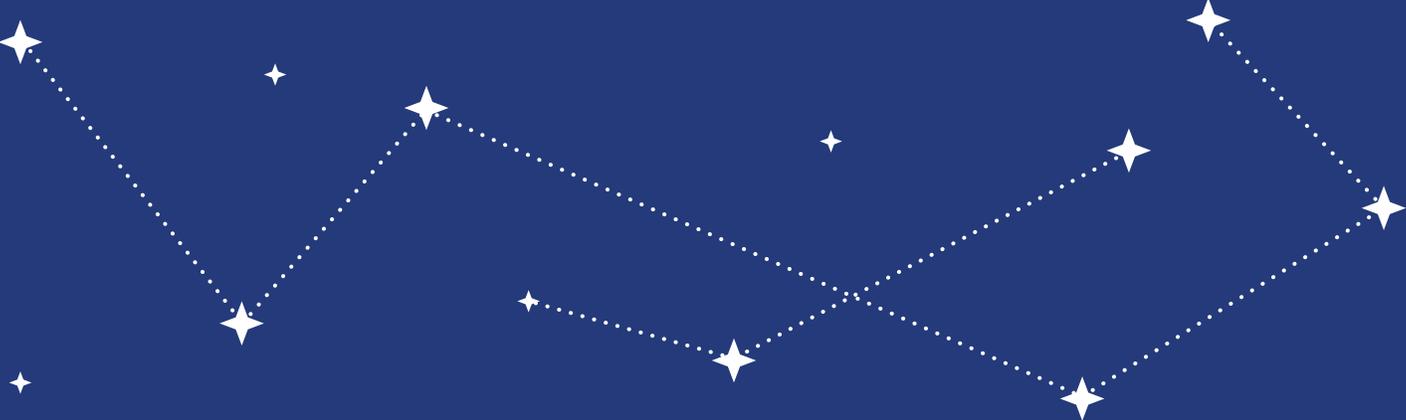


**In 2017, nearly 8% of active federal online sex trafficking cases prosecuted in the United States involved advertisements for sex on Facebook.**

## Advertising and Sales via Social Media

As online sex marketplaces such as Backpage.com (see the accompanying box for more information) are facing increasing scrutiny and criminal and civil liability, traffickers have reacted by moving to less controversial – and less obvious – mainstream social media platforms and dating sites. Among those most commonly mentioned in reports to the National Hotline are Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Kik, Plenty of Fish, OKCupid, and Tinder. In fact, in 2017, nearly 8 percent of active federal online sex trafficking cases prosecuted in the United States involved advertisements for sex on Facebook.<sup>12</sup> Other mainstream dating sites used in escort services referenced on the National Hotline include Meetme.com, Grindr, Adult Friend Finder, and SeekingArrangement.com.<sup>13</sup>

The sale of sexual services via Facebook and Instagram and other social media is often less blatant than on a traditional advertising site. For example, within the escort services business model, thinly veiled captions are tacked under explicit photos or live-streams of both children and adults. Information about prices, location or contact information for traffickers is threaded into comments sections. Sometimes the advertisements are on the traffickers' personal accounts but often victims are forced to own the actual posting, using an account under their name. **In Polaris's survivor survey, 26 percent of participants stated their trafficker exploited them via their own personal social media accounts.**



## Liability for Online Sex Trafficking and a Massive Shift in the Marketplace

In spring 2018, the Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act became the law of the land. The legislation includes two major components. The first component creates a new civil right of action as well as state criminal and civil prosecutorial authority against online marketplaces that knowingly participate in sex trafficking. For example, a 2017 investigation by the U.S. Senate found that the online classified site Backpage.com had actively worked with traffickers to knowingly facilitate sex trafficking by editing their advertisements so that they would draw less law enforcement scrutiny when posted on the site – despite the fact that the original advertisements clearly suggested the person being advertised was a minor.<sup>14</sup>

In some of those cases, the families of those minors sued Backpage, only to be told in court that Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act protected the web company – and all web companies – from liability for anything on their sites that is created by others. The bill – which encompassed the provisions of the Senate companion bill, the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act, or SESTA, narrowly amends the Communications Decency Act, the landmark law designed to encourage the growth and development of the internet. The change clarifies that sites can be sued civilly and prosecuted at the state level if they knowingly actively facilitate sex trafficking.

The second major component of the new law amends the Mann Act, a criminal statute related to prostitution and sex trafficking. This 21st century version of the Mann Act prohibits using the internet with the intent to promote or facilitate prostitution of another

person. Its enactment led many websites that include or revolve around advertisements for commercial sexual services to reconsider their business models. Sites that existed solely to advertise commercial sex began to voluntarily shut down en masse. Sites like Craigslist closed down sections that were used by some to advertise commercial sex.

Just a few days before the law was officially signed, federal law enforcement seized Backpage.com and announced the indictment of major Backpage executives. The website, which in 2013 was estimated to have controlled at least 80 percent of the entire online sex market,<sup>15</sup> was immediately taken offline. Backpage hosted ads that resulted in at least 73 percent of all online child sex trafficking reports made to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)<sup>16</sup> and 44 percent of all online sex trafficking cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline. Its closure sent a powerful message to exploiters. It also created some very real fears among sex trafficking survivors about the safety of individuals still in the life who would have a harder time meeting sales quotas and therefore may face serious repercussions from violent traffickers.

The timing of the indictment created the impression that the new law made the charges against Backpage possible where they were not before. In reality, the charges were based on a lengthy investigation into allegations of criminal activity including money laundering and conspiracy to facilitate prostitution. At the time of this publication, the case is still pending.

While escort services are the most common business model for sex trafficking using social media, remote interactive sexual acts – more commonly known as webcam or “cam shows” – also market through these platforms. Once a buyer is engaged on a social network or dating site, the actual remote interactive sexual act will typically take place on a more sexually explicit live streaming site where buyers can purchase show credits.

Traffickers in various types of labor trafficking have also learned to use business pages on Facebook and review sites such as Yelp to facilitate their operations. Otherwise legal and legitimate venues such as bars and restaurants, nail salons, landscaping services, cleaning services, etc., can actively use a Facebook or Yelp business page to grow their customer base, but traffic their employees for their labor or services behind the scenes. This is also a common trend in sex and labor trafficking in bars, strip clubs, and cantinas, and more rarely with illicit massage businesses (IMBs). These Facebook pages are just some of many ways commercial front sex trafficking venues enhance the guise of their businesses’ legitimacy online and in their communities. The difference is, on these pages, sex buyers will actually add reviews regarding the sexual services they received at the location. It’s worth noting, however, that Polaris research has indicated buyer reviews on mainstream social media sites are generally less explicit than on websites like Yelp, or even the more sexually graphic reviews on sites such as Rubmaps.com. While most evidence of potential trafficking may not be discoverable in a business’ Facebook footprint, the platform is unfortunately still unknowingly aiding the trafficker’s illicit behavior and fueling the demand for exploited sex and labor.

## Online Behavior of Traveling Sales Crews

While some videos and photos are not much different from any other group of boisterous friends, the online content from door-to-door sales crews aims to promote a cash-chasing lifestyle of relentless sales, partying, travel, and drug and alcohol use. Each crew varies in its social media use, but many use distinct slang terms, hand signals, and catch phrases. Some crews even use their own numbered hashtags unique to their “mag fam.”

These sales crews also leave another unique online digital footprint in the form of online customer complaints about products they purchased and never received. Sites like Better Business Bureau, Complaintsboard.com, Reddit, and RipOffReport.com could be valuable open sources of data when attempting to identify and target potential trafficking activities.

# How Social Media may be Used as a Means of Control

As social circles have moved online, traffickers have kept pace. Isolating victims from their support networks has long been a go-to method for traffickers seeking to assert or strengthen their control. In Polaris's survivor survey, **34 percent of respondents who had accessed social media noted that their trafficker restricted their social media use in some way.** In some cases, this meant actively keeping victims away from their online networks. In others, the methods are more insidious.

One survivor of sex trafficking in a Polaris focus group explained how although her trafficker allowed her access to social media, it was just another tactic to maintain his all-encompassing control over her.

**"Social media really was a piece of reinforcing all that grooming that was happening. Because I felt like I was connected with the outside world, but I was only allowed to follow other girls in the game, so it reinforced all of those social norms."**

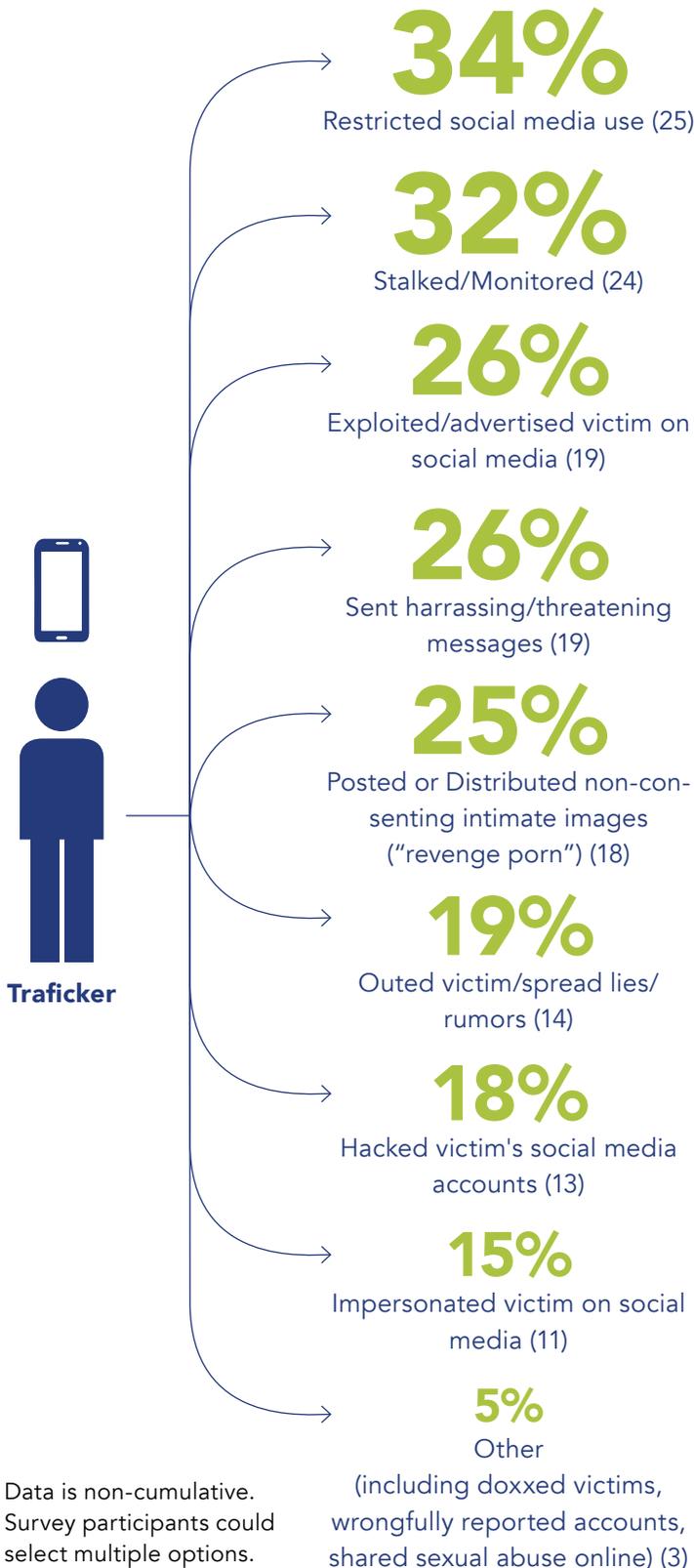
In another model of coercion, **32 percent of survivors in Polaris's survey indicated that their traffickers stalked or monitored their social media accounts,** most commonly checking up on victims' private messages. Other tactics reported include traffickers using social media to post or send threatening messages to victims, "outing" victims or spreading lies or rumors, even hacking accounts, or creating accounts to impersonate victims. Figure 2.0 breaks down responses of trafficker social media abuse from Polaris's survivor survey.

Interestingly, a recent survey of domestic minor sex trafficking victims by the non-profit group Thorn found that victims with traffickers who have entered the life more recently may experience less monitoring of their cell phones and internet use.<sup>17</sup>

Threats to distribute non-consensual intimate images, aka "revenge porn," is another method traffickers have reportedly used to control their victims in various types of sex trafficking. Additionally, the National Hotline has recorded numerous cases in which an intimate partner of a potential victim will financially benefit from the victim's sex act by selling the record of it to pornography sites.

Coercion and control do not necessarily end when the victim gets out of the situation. Cases learned about through the National Hotline, mostly in regards to sex trafficking, have highlighted incidences of potential traffickers using social media to stalk and abuse their victims long after they have left the trafficking situation. Potential traffickers will often use a survivor's friend lists, tagged photos, location "check-ins," and meta-data of GPS coordinates embedded in online photos, to check up on their activities and whereabouts.

**Figure 2.0: Social Media Abuse**  
Polaris Survivor Survey (n=73)



The age range and demographics of traveling sales crew members mean that social media sites like Facebook and YouTube are extremely important in controlling victims in this type of trafficking business.

Crew leaders use these platforms as an extension of their extreme bullying and torment of their victims. For example, if a former crew member or survivor dares to leave the situation (or even worse – speak out online), other crew members and leaders will publicly shame, verbally abuse, and even sometimes go as far as threaten the victim via social media. Although there have been some reports on the Hotline of victims’ phones being confiscated by crew leaders, based on external research and the obvious digital footprint crew members leave online, Polaris believes that most victims have social media access during their trafficking situation. This puts investigators, service providers, and social media platforms in an advantageous position to directly reach victims and offer assistance when it counts the most.

# How Social Media may be Used by Victims & Survivors

**“When I was in the life, I had social media and I was allowed to use it, but it was highly monitored. But when I got out, I kept my accounts open and just started sharing about my process. Now as a service provider, my non-profit organization uses social media to connect with women still in the life. That has really been a unique and special thing for me.”**

One need only type #MeToo into a search engine to witness the incredible cascade of possibilities born of survivors of sexual violence finding their voices and finding each other through social media. This very public reckoning makes clear that sexual harassment exists on the same spectrum of violence and gender inequity that culminates with the worst forms of exploitation and abuse - including sexual assault, sex trafficking, and labor trafficking. It also belies the sweeping generalization that social media is a net negative in the fight against sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Indeed survivor experiences paint a much more nuanced picture.

The clearest examples of how social media can be used against bad actors is the creation and use of photo detection tools, such as PhotoDNA by Microsoft. PhotoDNA attempts to identify victims by scanning photos uploaded to the platform and attempts to match them against a set of known child sex abuse images from illicit child pornography websites and online sex marketplaces. After identifying a match, the platform typically then reports the photo and user to organizations such as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).<sup>18</sup>

Beyond identifying victims, social media has a vital role in keeping survivors connected to loved ones and service providers during their trafficking situation.

## **Connecting with Support Systems**

A victim may not have cell phone service to call or text a hotline, but they might be able to connect to wifi at their hotel or employer’s home to access social media for help. The National Hotline has received countless calls from family members who have had their trafficked loved one’s reach out to them via platforms including but not limited to Facebook Messenger, direct messages on Instagram, or through Kik.

Overall, **more than three quarters of survivors in Polaris’s survey stated they used internet platforms during their exploitation and 27 percent reported that they were on social media “very frequently.”**

Although the respondent pool involved survivors who may have been removed from their trafficking experience as new and emerging platforms gained popularity, **Facebook was still the number one reported social media platform used by 37 percent of victims.** Instagram ranked second most common with 22 percent, and 15 percent of survivors reported using Google Hangouts/GChat/Google Voice and dating sites/apps.

In the National Hotline data set from January 2015 through December 2017, 950 potential victims reported having access to mobile apps or social media during their trafficking situation. However, as always, since this information is not consistently revealed on Hotline communications, the numbers could be even greater.

Eventually, that connection through social media could become a lifeline. In Polaris’s survivor survey, **19 percent of survivors stated that social media played a role in their exit and 20 percent disclosed that they utilized private messages on social media apps to communicate with service providers.** One survey respondent explained her experience:

*“A woman approached me one day in a hotel and gave me her contact information on a piece of paper. She told me that if I ever needed help that she would help me. At that time, I didn’t know that she was a service provider with a safe house for human trafficking victims, but several weeks later I called. Talking on the phone was not safe, instead we did a lot of private messaging over Skype and Facebook which felt safer for me (due to the fact that it was easier to hide than phone calls) and eventually months later those private message conversations lead to my first escape/exit.”*

This method of communicating with possible outside assistance beyond the National Hotline is particularly common among service providers who specialize in assisting victims of illicit massage businesses through WeChat and KaKao Talk.<sup>19</sup>



↑ Example private social media message thread of a potential victim reaching out to family for help. Based on real conversations expressed to the National Hotline, but recreated with name changes to protect any potential victims involved.

**“I messaged my mom on Facebook and told her I couldn’t leave.”**

## Getting and Staying Safe

Social media and particular technologies within those platforms also play a critical role in survivors' safety plans, during their trafficking situation, in their plans to escape or exit the situation, and in efforts to lead a normal life, free of abuse, post-trafficking.

Survivors may use the disappearing messages feature, for example in Snapchat, Instagram, or Facebook Mobile, in order to communicate discreetly with their support system without the fear of their trafficker discovering the message history in their logs. Potential victims from the National Hotline have also sent disappearing pictures or videos of abuse via Snapchat to loved ones, in a creative and fast way to signal for help. This may well be an area social media platforms could expand upon.

The National Hotline has also heard of potential victims who may not know their current location due to their frequent travel and isolation, but have used a social network's location discovery services to figure out what city they are in or publicly "check in" to signal their whereabouts to loved ones. Survivors who have exited their situation are some of the most savvy when it comes to using social media features to keep them safe. Using features such as blocking, audience selectors, friends/follower sub-groups, tagged photo requests, disabling location services, and removing their profile from general search results are integral pieces of a survivor's ongoing safety plan. However, it's important for social media platforms to make these and other privacy features available, intuitive, and easy to navigate, since a victim may have very little time to plan for their safety. The accessibility and ease of safety and privacy features were a recurring theme in Polaris focus groups.



## INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT: Safety Net Project, National Network to End Domestic Violence

The National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV)'s Safety Net project provides expertise and technical assistance at the intersection of technology and abuse. Specific products include trainings, resources, and tools to help survivors of violence, victim service providers, and leading tech companies address how technology impacts survivors and how to create online spaces in which survivors can participate without fear of abuse and harassment.

Representatives from Safety Net currently sit on Facebook's Safety Advisory Board and on Twitter's Safety Council. These committees are specifically designed to gather input and consultation on the websites' policies, protocols, user features, and initiatives around safety. NNEDV is just one of many esteemed organizations on the committees, which aim to ensure the unique needs of survivors are considered in programmatic decisions and new product roll-outs. Two of their many important contributions have been publications created in collaboration with Facebook and Twitter that provide guidance for survivors on the available privacy settings and resources and how survivors can utilize them to stay safe.

Another high-quality resource from the Safety Net Project is the Tech Safety App which compiles tech safety information, safety and privacy tips, and specific resources to report abuse or seek help.

### **Additional NNEDV Social Media Resources for Survivors and Service Providers:**

- [Privacy & Safety on Facebook: A Guide for Survivors of Abuse](#)
- [Safety & Privacy on Twitter: A Guide for Survivors of Harassment & Abuse](#)
- [Tech Safety App](#)
- [NNEDV Resource Highlight: Safety on Social Media \[Blog post\]](#)
- [WomensLaw.org: Abuse Using Technology](#)
- [WomensLaw.org: Safety While Using Social Media](#)

*For additional tools and resources created by Safety Net, or to contact them for more information, please visit [www.techsafety.org](http://www.techsafety.org)*



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## Healing, speaking out, and helping others

Survivors of labor trafficking have also used internet platforms as a powerful tool to elevate their experiences. For example, despite traffickers on traveling sales crews using social media to try to discredit and publicly humiliate their victims, survivors have taken to sites like Facebook, YouTube, Complaintsboard.com, Reddit, and RipOffReport.com to challenge the public portrayal of adventure, fast money, and glamour.

This includes one anonymous individual who in 2012 used the open complaint forum, RipOffReport.com, to detail their experience working for a potentially abusive traveling sales company. The former employee

took to the website to allege that they were paid \$20 per day for the first three days working 12-15 hours. However, after that, the former employee claimed that they only got paid if sales were made, and that when employees didn't make the expected sales, they were allegedly either abandoned or were physically assaulted by multiple senior members of the crew. The former employee also told of how the 18-year-old young women who would join the crew would often be coerced into having sex with the managers. The former employee even closed the post by thanking the company for making them that much stronger to find the voice needed to rise up and speak out against the abusive practices of magazine crews.<sup>20</sup>



↑ Screen capture of Contratados.org home page.

Along similar lines, Centro de los Derechos del Migrante (CDM) has created Contratados.org, a powerful online platform that allows migrant workers to post Yelp-like reviews of employers and recruiters, detailing their own experiences. Before committing to

or spending money on recruitment or travel for H-2 and J-1 guestworker programs, which are commonly riddled with fraud, abuse, exploitation, and trafficking, potential workers can log onto Contratados.org and research their recruiter and the job they are interested in accepting to verify their legitimacy.

## Summary of reviews



### Recruitment conditions

**They charged me for the job offer:**

YES (2) NO (5)

**They charged me money but didn't get me the job:**

YES (0) NO (4)

**They gave me a loan:**

YES (0) NO (5)

*Did they charge interest?**With high interest (0)**With low interest (0)**Without interest (0)***They gave me a work contract:**

YES (5) NO (0)

**The work was what I was promised:**

YES (5) NO (0)



### Recruitment practices

**They treated me the same as everyone else:**

YES (6) NO (0)

*I think it was because of my:**Race (0)**Nationality (0)**Language (0)**Sex (0)**Age (0)**Sexual Orientation (0)**Other (0)***They punished me for making a complaint or for defending my rights:**

YES (0) NO (5)

*The punishment was:**They didn't hire me again (0)**Now they don't hire my relatives (0)**They retained my personal documents (0)**They threatened me (0)**Other (0)***They retained my personal documents:**

YES (2) NO (5)

**They threatened me:**

YES (0) NO (5)

**They physically assaulted me:**

YES (0) NO (5)

**They verbally assaulted me:**

YES (2) NO (5)

**They sexually assaulted me:**

YES (0) NO (5)

**They kept me somewhere against my will:**

YES (0) NO (5)

↑ A sample of a Contratados review where a migrant worker can detail potential recruitment fees, lending practices, the accuracy of the job description, and potential discrimination, retaliation, fraud, and abuse.

The platform also supplies users with interactive tools that equip migrant workers with valuable information about their rights, and even industry- or region-specific resources. CDM created the platform in collaboration with migrant workers themselves, taking into account varying levels of literacy, tech savviness, and existing knowledge-sharing practices in migrant communities. Contratados helps workers have more control in the labor recruitment process, which for so long has placed the power in the hands of unscrupulous recruiters and employers.

Much like the #MeToo movement, these platforms are providing alternative pathways to justice, and creating an online footprint to chronicle the abuse and fraud of traffickers.

# Social Media: Recommendations and Opportunities

Websites and social media networks have made laudable efforts and contributions toward combating human trafficking, including, most notably, the creation and distribution of tools to detect child pornography. But there is room to do more. Many of the tools, policies, and procedures originally created to combat child pornography specifically could, with minor adaptations, be adapted to keep human trafficking from thriving on social media platforms. Outlined here, are some recommendations on how to tackle human trafficking from a similar, yet tailored lens.

**“I think nowadays the younger generation is not apt to having phone conversations or even in-person conversations. They don’t know how to articulate “I need help,” but they could text or put it in writing... So, I think to reach the populations that are most vulnerable right now, [a social media platform for support] is needed.”**

## 1. Call out Human Trafficking in your Terms of Service

[adapted from Thorn]

Explicitly state in the Terms of Service that any use of the platform to facilitate exploitation, human trafficking (including types of labor trafficking), non-consensual intimate images (NCII), or child pornography is strictly prohibited and enforced to the highest extent.<sup>21</sup> To ensure the prohibitions are clear, platforms would define the terms and provide examples of what might constitute a violation. Social media platforms are also encouraged to review existing policies on related crimes such as cyber bullying and harassment. These existing policies can often be slightly modified to more intentionally include the cyber abuse occurring in the context of human trafficking, domestic violence, and stalking. Having a written policy is important not only as a contractual obligation to users, but can help establish that the platform is in compliance with the applicable laws. It also acts to inform users of the platform's ethical commitment to ending violence. This builds trust with users which ultimately encourages them to continue their patronage. However, simply writing a blanket policy does nothing unless the policy is backed up with consistent, data-driven response and enforcement protocols like the additional recommendations provided here. Enforcement for violations may include but may not be limited to, removal from the platform as well as law enforcement involvement.

## 2. Identify High-Risk Users and Business Pages

[adapted from Thorn]

Conduct proactive identity and risk checks against national sex offender registries, banned labor recruiters, media articles, human trafficking convictions, online buyer boards, and business complaint sites.

Platforms are also urged to implement basic identity checks to verify ages, email addresses, and phone numbers. Thorn also suggests creating algorithms “to flag users over a certain age who befriend or follow numerous underage individuals, or send messages to many strangers. Even if the user’s age is not known, individuals whose friend requests are rejected at a high rate can be flagged for review.”<sup>22</sup>

### 3. Invest in PhotoDNA or other Photo Hash Systems [adapted from Thorn]

Conduct pre-screens on all photos at the time of upload (especially for any high-risk users) to prevent the photo from being posted on your platform, as well as screen photos at rest.<sup>23</sup> Run the screens not only against a known database of child exploitation images, but against data sources unique to commercial sex and trafficking such as sex ads, buyer boards, and missing persons. Get creative and explore if a similar hash system or photo-match technology could be used to identify the distribution of NCII, or other previously banned images.

### 4. Implement Innovative Safety Features for Survivors

Offer features and tools that survivors (and users at large) can access to manage their ongoing safety and privacy needs. Features like disappearing messages, passcode protected folders or photo albums, the ability to customize privacy settings for individual posts, and easy to follow and accessible safety and privacy guides are just some tangible ideas that can equip survivors with the power to remain safe on your platform. Consider defaulting to “opt-in” features instead of requiring users to “opt-out” when rolling out new features that could be used to stalk or harm survivors (such as geo-location services). If your platform doesn’t already have a safety advisory committee, consider implementing one and inviting anti-trafficking organizations and survivors to the conversation.

**“My trafficker did not use to monitor my phone unless I was acting kind of funny. Then he’d be like, “give me your phone.” I wouldn’t have a chance to delete anything. At least with [disappearing messages], I know there’s nothing there.”**

### 5. Use High-tech Solutions to Offer Assistance to Survivors

Social networks are in a unique position to leverage their unsurpassed expertise in technological solutions, and push their counter-trafficking scope beyond identification, to create more creative and inclusive methods for supporting and empowering survivors that use their platforms. For example, Facebook has already implemented such creative tech solutions in suicide prevention, where artificial intelligence software can detect language of possible self-harm and suicidal ideation in a user’s posts and offer the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for assistance.<sup>24</sup> Although there are serious privacy considerations that must be explored further, and opt-in user agreements in place, similar algorithms could potentially be used to detect common words, phrases, and behavior patterns used by individuals at-risk for human trafficking and push out messaging for the National Hotline, or a country’s equivalent. Consulting with survivor leaders will result in the strongest criteria and response protocols.

## 6. Use of Targeted Ads for Anti-Trafficking Organizations

When permitted by user agreements, social networks are already accessing users' search histories, "likes", and other online behaviors to offer tailored ads and suggested content to enhance their experience on the platform. This same technology can be used to intelligently offer sponsored ads or posts from local anti-trafficking organizations or the National Hotline/Polaris. All survivors in Polaris focus groups were vastly supportive of this idea. Most focus group participants even supported an option to explore technology needed to facilitate secure and confidential communications directly with the National Hotline through Facebook or Instagram, or linking an ad directly to the National Hotline's online chat website. Survivors offered further suggestions on how such sponsored or suggested content could effectively reach trafficked individuals on the platform including suggested messaging, images, safety precautions, and criteria used. These innovative ideas further emphasize the fundamental need for survivor inclusion when developing such content.

## 7. Create Easy and Accessible Reporting Options

Streamlined reporting options, like those already in place for users to flag hate speech or child exploitation, should be put in place for users to report potential trafficking on the platform. Whether it's reporting a potential sex trafficker recruiting girls, a business with a suspicious and potentially dangerous job offer, or a victim posting clues that they are suffering, the reporting option should be easily available to users on all kinds of posts, messages, and pages/profiles. All reports can be triaged by platform professionals who ideally would have strong training and protocols in place and developed with survivor leaders, to guide appropriate responses either to NCMEC, the National Hotline, or simply offering a potential victim support services like mentioned above.

## 8. Consult and Collaborate with Survivors and NGO Professionals

As mentioned throughout all of these recommendations, it is essential to team up with survivors and other experts in the fields of human trafficking, the sex industry, child pornography, NCII, domestic violence, and stalking to create consulting partnerships or advisory boards. Such partnerships can help develop and improve internal policies, create seamless reporting relationships, create smarter safety and privacy tools for survivors, and ensure traffickers and abusers are less able to misuse the benefits of social media products.

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*If you work with a social networking site and want to learn more about partnering with Polaris, please contact [corporateengagement@polarisproject.org](mailto:corporateengagement@polarisproject.org)*

# Glossary

<b>Systems and Industries</b>	
<b>Financial Services Industry</b>	Encompasses anything within the purview of the formal financial services industry including institutions and initiatives such as retail banks, commercial banks, financial crimes monitoring, money transfers, formal paychecks/payroll, credit/debit cards, investments, virtual currency exchanges, etc.
<b>Health Care</b>	Includes but is not limited to, preventative care, emergency health, reproductive health, other medical specialties, mental health, dental, vision, and substance use disorder treatment. This report also includes the services and benefits afforded to individuals with disabilities.
<b>Hotels/Motels</b>	Business establishments whose primary purpose is to provide short-term lodging and accommodations for travelers.
<b>Housing &amp; Homelessness Systems</b>	Encompasses either: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Any institution or agency whose primary purpose is providing safe and operational housing for a community. This includes governmental agencies like HUD and local housing authorities, and private entities such as apartment management companies, landlords, etc. OR;</li> <li>b. Any system or agency which provides safe shelter services to individuals experiencing homelessness or unstable housing. This includes, but is not limited to emergency shelter, transitional shelter, domestic violence shelters, and long-term supportive housing.</li> </ol>
<b>Social Media</b>	Encompasses online websites or platforms whose intended purpose is to foster the connection of people to share ideas, interests, and information. Examples include: Facebook, Instagram, chat services, dating sites, etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NOTE: This DOES NOT include online platforms whose primary intended purpose is to connect people to commercial goods or services (e.g. Backpage, Craigslist, john boards, Yelp, Groupon, etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>Transportation Industry</b>	Encompasses any type of publicly or privately owned and operated mass transportation systems including buses, subways, trains, airlines, taxis, and ridesharing services, as well as private transportation like a personal vehicle or rental car.

## Miscellaneous Terms

<b>"Bottom"/"Bottom girl"</b>	A slang term used by some American pimps to refer to a victim still under their control but who has "earned" more "privileges" and a higher ranking among the other potential victims. Bottoms are typically manipulated into sharing some the recruitment and enforcement responsibilities with the actual trafficker, but are often still victims themselves. For more information on the plight of a bottom girl, Polaris recommends reading the four-part blog series, Unavoidable Destiny, by survivor leader Shamere McKenzie on the Shared Hope International blog. <sup>170</sup>
<b>Case</b>	A data record from the National Human Trafficking Hotline which refers to an individual situation of potential human trafficking. Polaris and the National Hotline use the U.S. federal definition of human trafficking when assessing cases. (Data timeframe of December 7, 2007 - December 31, 2017)
<b>In-calls</b>	Occurs when buyers go to the victim's location for commercial sex acts.
<b>Individual potential victim profile</b>	A data record from the National Human Trafficking Hotline which refers to a potential victim uniquely identified in potential human trafficking and labor exploitation cases. (Data timeframe of January 1, 2015 - December 31, 2017)
<b>Labor exploitation</b>	A labor situation involving workplace abuse and/or related labor violations, which does not contain at least moderate elements of force, fraud, or coercion compelling the person to remain in the situation.
<b>"The Life"/"The Game"</b>	The commercial sex industry.
<b>National Hotline</b>	National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888 or Text BeFree (233733)
<b>Out-calls</b>	Occurs when a victim goes to or is delivered to a buyer's location for commercial sex acts.
<b>Survival sex</b>	The exploiter is supplying the victim with basic living necessities (shelter, food, clothing, drugs, medication, etc.) in exchange for sex. This arrangement could be voluntary (with adults 18+), exploitative, or rise to the level of sex trafficking (See: <a href="#">Personal Sexual Servitude</a> ), depending on the conditions. However, unless otherwise stated, when referenced in this document, it is solely regarding instances of sex trafficking.
<b>Track/Stroll/Blade</b>	An outdoor section of a street block used to solicit sex.

## Miscellaneous Terms

<p><b>Trauma-informed care</b></p>	<p>“A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;</li> <li>• Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;</li> <li>• Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and</li> <li>• Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.”<sup>171</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>“Trick”/“John”/Buyer</b></p>	<p>A buyer of commercial sex acts.</p>
<p><b>Type</b> (e.g. Type of Human Trafficking)</p>	<p>Polaris has defined a particular type of human trafficking as a unique industry or business model used to exploit people for commercial sex or labor/services. Each type becomes distinct when aspects regarding business operations, trafficker and victim profiles, recruitment, and institutional systems and industries used are sufficiently different from another. Please see our preceding report, <a href="#">The Typology of Modern Slavery</a> for more information.</p>
<p><b>Voluntary services model</b></p>	<p>“Voluntary services, as opposed to mandatory services, means that clients do not need to complete a program or take part in other services as a condition of receiving housing. Services are offered based on each person’s specific needs.”<sup>172</sup></p>

# References

## Methodology

1 Labor exploitation statistics are non-cumulative. A single labor exploitation case may involve multiple types.

2 Polaris uses the United States federal definition of human trafficking as defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Action (TVPA) to determine if a situation described through the Hotline has indications of human trafficking. Cases which fully meet the TVPA's standard are labeled as having "high-level indicators of trafficking." Cases which partially meet the TVPA's standard but are missing pieces of information needed to make an assessment are labeled as having "moderate-level indicators of trafficking."

3 Please see the methodology for *The Typology of Modern Slavery*, which can be found at: <https://polarisproject.org/sites/default/files/Polaris-Typology-of-Modern-Slavery.pdf> (pg. 7).

4 In these cases, the signaler could have been reporting a situation that had at least moderate indicators of human trafficking, but the signaler's proximity to the situation prevented him or her from being able to identify individual victims. For example, a signaler could report a known potential trafficker, but not have any details about the trafficker's potential victims.

5 In order to protect the identity of survey respondents, Polaris chose not to disclose information about types of trafficking associated with fewer than three survivors.

6 The survey also had sections dedicated to the child welfare system, business regulatory systems, and temporary work visas to help inform other/future Polaris initiatives. This data is omitted from this report.

7 Labor trafficking focus group also covered discussion on temporary work visas in order to inform other Polaris initiatives.

## Social Media

8 Statistics are non-cumulative. Each potential victim can be recruited on multiple internet platforms.

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10 Traveling sales crew businesses often misuse the independent contractor classifications in order to shed responsibility for various abuses. For more information, please read our full report, *Knocking at Your Door: Labor Trafficking on Traveling Sales Crews*, <https://polarisproject.org/sites/default/files/Knocking-on-Your-Door-Sales-Crews.pdf>

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21 Thorn. (2014, August). *Sound Practices Guide to Fight Child Sexual Exploitation Online*. Retrieved from: <https://www.wearethorn.org/sound-practices-guide-stopping-child-abuse/>

22 Ibid., 14.

23 Ibid., 14.

24 Constine, J. (2017, November 27). *Facebook rolls out AI to detect suicidal posts before they're reported*. Retrieved from: <https://techcrunch.com/2017/11/27/facebook-ai-suicide-prevention/>

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