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*St. Catherine University*

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Public Attitudes Toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness

by

Katelyn E. Nichols, B.A.

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Social Work  
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas,  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Social Work

Committee Members  
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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

### **Abstract**

In an effort to measure the public's attitudes related to prostitution and the public's awareness of sex trafficking, the Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey was developed. The Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey was administered to a convenience sample of 185 adult respondents. The results of this study indicate that the majority of respondents were in favor of legalizing prostitution even though they are aware of the dangers and sexual exploitation associated with prostitution. The findings also indicate that respondents overwhelmingly believe that there should be severe legal consequences for individuals who are convicted of paying to have sex with children. Respondents' opinions about what legal consequences there should be for men who are convicted of paying to have sex with women were varied and tended to be less severe. The findings also revealed that nearly all of the respondents have negative attitudes about pimps and sex traffickers believing that: pimps and sex traffickers sexually exploit vulnerable women and children. In addition, the majority of respondents view the women and children used in prostitution as victims of sex trafficking. Thus, the findings indicate that policy changes need to be put in place that educate and sensitize the public about the dangers of the commercial sex industry and to address the socialized concept that commercial sex services need to exist to satisfy men's biological need for sex.

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### **Public Attitudes Toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness**

The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2014) estimates that 21 million people are enslaved/victims of human trafficking worldwide. However, many social scientists believe that the total number of people who are enslaved is closer to 27 million (Human Trafficking Report, 2013). Of the millions of people who are trafficked/enslaved 70-80 percent are female and approximately 50% are children (U.S. Department of State, 2004). The majority of female victims are forced into prostitution/sold into sex slavery. According to researchers the average age of entry into prostitution is 12 to 14 years of age (Estes, & Weiner, 2001).

Women and girls who have been prostituted or trafficked for sex have often been the victim of rape, incest, physical or sexual abuse as a child, assault with a deadly weapon, and kidnapping. As a result of being sexually exploited, women and girls who have been prostituted and trafficked often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and chemical dependency as a result of their experiences (Hossain, Zimmerman, Abas, Light, & Watts, 2010). The majority of victims entering into prostitution die within two to four years as a result of homicide, suicide, as well as HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (Yen, 2008).

Previous attempts to address the problem of prostitution and trafficking have included criminalizing the prostitutes and then requiring the customers, who are commonly referred to as "Johns," to pay a fine, which had little impact on the underlying problem. Since many victims of human trafficking are hidden "in plain sight" and come into contact with many different members in the community on a daily basis, previous research has identified a need for drawing the public's attention

to the issue of human trafficking through public service announcements, billboards, and posters, as well as training members of the community who are transportation personnel, health professionals, social service professionals, and hotel staff to recognize the signs of human trafficking (Wolf-Branigin, Garza, & Smith, 2010).

This problem is important for the field of social work because sex trafficking is becoming increasingly more prevalent and is a direct violation of human rights. Human traffickers prey on the poor and vulnerable, and use coercion and abuse to strip victims of their human dignity; exploiting them for their own personal financial gain. Victims of sex trafficking suffer severe physical and psychological consequences for the profit of others. Social workers must work with both victims and offenders to address the factors that fuel the supply and demand for prostitution and sexual exploitation (Wolf-Branigin, et al., 2010).

A review of previous literature has found that there is ample literature available that emphasizes the need for the following interventions: policy changes, victim identification trainings, increasing public awareness, and a need for increased services available to support victims of human trafficking. Since public opinion directly influences government policy it is important to understand the general public's attitudes towards prostitution and the public's awareness of sex trafficking (Kotsadam, & Jakobsson, 2012). The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the general public's awareness of sex trafficking and to better understand the general public's attitudes related to prostitution, in hopes that social workers and policy makers can use the information gained from this research to inform future interventions and demand reduction strategies.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This research was conducted using feminist standpoint theory as its conceptual framework. Feminist standpoint theory is a modern theoretical construct that analyzes the world, using the experiences of women as its "starting point" (Dominelli, 2002, p. 7). One of the core assumptions of the feminist standpoint theory is that, "less powerful members of society experience a different reality as a consequence of their oppression"(Swigonski, 1994). Much of feminist theory focuses on the concept of marginality, meaning that the people at the "center" of society, the "oppressors," hold positions of social, political and economic power. Whereas the "oppressed groups" of people that are living at the margins of society are farther away from the "center of power." As a result, they have less access to the resources and security needed for social advancement (Forte, 2007, p.515). The goal of feminist standpoint theory is to identify and eliminate the inequalities experienced by marginalized groups of society, such as women, immigrants, persons with disabilities, persons of color, children, and individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, or transgender (Dominelli, 2002, p. 8). Feminist theorists and social workers are committed to improving the quality of life for all members of society (Dominelli, 2002, p.8).

Feminist standpoint theory is beneficial for social work research because it "offers an explanation of how research directed by social values and political agendas can produce empirically and theoretically preferable results" (Swigonski, 1994). The theory also aligns very closely with the values and ethics of social workers as defined by the National Association of Social Workers (Swigonski, 1994). More specifically, feminist standpoint theory aligns with the National Association of Social Workers



(NASW) Code of Ethics, 2008, which states, "Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems" (p. 3) Feminist standpoint theory also aligns with the following sections of the NASW Code of Ethics (2008): "Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people." and "Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person" (p. 3).

Raymond (2004) states, "The most glaring evidence of women's marginalization and social inequality is the rampant commodification of women in prostitution, sex trafficking, sex tourism, and mail-order-bride industries"(p.1184). Thus, social workers need to understand public attitudes related to prostitution and the public's overall awareness of sex trafficking so they are prepared to pursue social change on behalf of the vulnerable women and children that are exploited by the commercial sex industry. Since social policy development is influenced by the ideologies and attitudes of the American people (Alston & Dean, 1972), social workers can use the knowledge gained from this research to pursue social change on behalf of the women and children who are victimized by the commercial sex industry.

### **Literature Review**

The following section will discuss: the criminal justice system's response to sex trafficking, the case for demand reduction, current demand reduction programs, characteristics of men who pay for sex, awareness level of "johns"/commercial sex buyers and male attitudes about prostitution.

#### **The Criminal Justice System's Response to Sex Trafficking**

**Legal consequences** for soliciting sex from a prostituted woman or child/victim of

human trafficking typically include: arrests, fines, mandatory or voluntary participation in a diversion program, and sometimes jail or prison time if the victim is a minor. People who are arrested for engaging in prostitution typically face misdemeanor or gross misdemeanor charges. Although it is not uncommon for prostitution related charges to be dismissed. On rare occasions, individuals arrested for engaging in prostitution will face felony charges. However, felony charges are typically reserved for offenders who engage in prostitution with a minor (Farley, et al., 2011).

In the United States, most criminal justice systems are moving towards a victim-centered approach, where women and children who have been prostituted/trafficked for sex are treated as victims in need of protection rather than criminals. However, it is not uncommon for prostituted/trafficked women and children to be arrested and charged with misdemeanor or gross misdemeanor prostitution charges (Study of Certain Prostitution, 2003). This is evident in a study conducted by the Minneapolis City Attorney's Office that collected and analyzed data from all of the investigations and prosecutions of prostitution crimes committed within the City of Minneapolis in 2002. According to the study, there were 577 prostitution offenses reported which resulted in 512 different cases that were charged within the city of Minneapolis in 2002. Of the 512 cases that were charged, 434 of the charges were against the women who were being prostituted/trafficked and only 78 charges were brought against the "perpetrators acting as a patrons"/ those who are commonly referred to as "johns" by local law enforcement agents (Study of Certain Prostitution, 2003).

### **Diversion Programs**

Two different types of diversion programs were created in order to help prostituted persons/victims of sex trafficking escape "the life" and to reduce male demand for prostitution/sex trafficking life (Minnesota Human Trafficking Task Force, 2014). The first type of diversion program is designed to address the fact that victims of prostitution and sex trafficking are often at risk of facing criminal charges when they come into contact with law enforcement. Thus, pre-court diversion programs have been developed so that victims of prostitution/sex trafficking can choose to participate in local diversion programs that provide: rehabilitation, education, skills training and case management services in lieu of criminal charges (Minnesota Human Trafficking Task Force, 2014).

In order to curb the demand for prostitution and sex trafficking another type of diversion program was developed to educate the consumers/"Johns" on the realities and harms of prostitution/sex-trafficking in hopes that this will decrease the overall demand for commercial sex services and decrease the likelihood that those who have been convicted will re-offend. "John Schools" as these programs are commonly referred to, are considered to be a form of restorative justice because they are intentionally designed to hold offenders accountable for their actions (Minnesota Human Trafficking Task Force, 2014). Offenders who are court ordered to attend "John School" are required to pay a fee to attend the program. The fees that the offenders pay to attend "John School" are then used to fund programs and services that provide assistance to the women and children victimized by prostitution/sex trafficking. Offenders that participate in this type of program, also learn how their

actions have harmed others directly from prostitution/sex trafficking survivors. The survivors, as they are sometimes called, are typically women from the local community who have a history of being prostituted/trafficked. The prostitution/trafficking survivors are a critical part of most “John School” programs because the survivors speak directly to the offenders about what life was like for them while they were being prostituted. The prostitution/trafficking survivors also tell the offenders about the extenuating circumstances that led them into prostitution and how they personally suffered as a result of being prostituted/trafficked (Minnesota Human Trafficking Task Force, 2014).

One of the most well-known diversion programs, the First Offender Prostitution Program (FOPP) of San Francisco, was started in 1995 with of goal of reducing demand for commercial sex through a day-long educational and rehabilitation program for men who have been arrested for soliciting sex. The program was evaluated for effectiveness, return on investment, and transferability by Shively, et al. in 2008. The program evaluation was based on data collection efforts which included: site visits, police ride alongs, interviews, program documents and administrative data, structured observations of john school classes, pre- and post-class surveys of participants, and data regarding the criminal history of the men arrested for soliciting prostitutes in San Francisco and throughout California. The results of the program evaluation found that FOPP significantly reduced the recidivism rates of men previously arrested for soliciting sex from prostituted women and children (Shively, et al., 2008). The program evaluators also concluded that FOPP: is cost-effective, operates without taxpayer revenue, and provides almost one million dollars in funding

for programs that serve victims of human trafficking and commercial sex workers. FOPP was also found to be transferable, and has been replicated in 12 other cities throughout the U.S. (Shively, et al., 2008). In addition, the San Francisco Police Department's data indicates that the recidivism rate for offenders who participated in FOPP program is 0.008% (Yen, 2008), which is 30% lower than the recidivism rates for men who were also arrested for soliciting sex, but did not attend the FOPP program (Shively, et al., 2008). Per contra, some researchers have attributed the reduced recidivism rate to other factors based on the statistical methodology that Shively, et al. used to interpret the data (Lovell & Jordan, 2012). Researchers Lovell and Jordan claim that the researchers who initially analyzed the effectiveness of FOPP utilized a flawed research design that attributed the significant drop in San Francisco's recidivism rate to the FOPP when the recidivism rates actually declined significantly two years prior to the implementation of FOPP (Lovell & Jordan, 2012).

### **The Case for Demand Reduction**

Since we live in a capitalistic society that is becoming increasingly more globalized, researchers have theorized that the growing black market business of human trafficking will follow patterns similar to other market supply chains. When the demand for a product increases, the supply must increase to meet the rising demand (Yen, 2008). According to Yen (2008):

Targeting male demand is a more effective way to address sex trafficking because unlike their trafficked partners, the majority of johns voluntarily choose to engage in commercial sex. Many johns are smart rational buyers; they will purchase commercial sex only if the

physical and psychological benefits of doing so outweigh the financial costs, legal risks, and social stigma . . . once johns understand the sobering ramifications of their purchase decision, many will choose to make different choices (Yen, 2008, p. 674).

This concept had led researchers and social service providers to try and combat the problem of human trafficking by attempting to decrease the cause of the demand, which in the case of sex-trafficking means attempting to decrease the likelihood that consumers/"Johns" will pay for the sexual services that victims of sex-trafficking are forced or coerced into providing.

### **The Demand**

Raymond (2004) states that "male demand is a primary factor in the expansion of the sex industry worldwide and sustains commercial sexual exploitation" (p.1157) and "... a prostitution market without male consumers would go broke" (p.1160). This is a view is also supported by the United States Department of State (2013) who states: "If there was no demand for commercial sex, sex trafficking would not exist in the form it does today." (p. 1) and the United Nations who states:

States Parties shall adopt or strengthen legislative or other measures, such as educational, social or cultural measures, including through bilateral and multilateral cooperation, to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons, especially women and children, that leads to trafficking (United Nations 2000 Protocol, Article 9 (5)).

### **Demand Reduction Programs**

In an effort to comply with the United Nations protocol, governments and non-governmental organizations worldwide have developed and implemented various educational programs, public awareness campaigns and legal consequences in an effort to curb the demand that leads to the sexual exploitation of women and children (Yen, 2008). The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) chapter in the Philippines developed one such educational program. In 2004 the CATW started an educational program that aimed to change the "sexual attitudes and behaviors" of the boys and young men in 12 different communities with high levels of prostitution (Yen, 2008). The educational program conducted workshops that educated the boys and young men about the harms of prostitution/trafficking, the role men play in perpetuating the sexual exploitation of women and girls, and ways they can help decrease demand for prostitution. Due to the recent development and implementation of this demand-reduction program, it is too soon to know whether or not the program will have a lasting influence on the "sexual attitudes and behaviors" of the males in the community (Yen, 2008). However, according to Yen (2008) the CATW held a three-day "camp" for a group of local, low-income, truck drivers, most of whom had solicited sex from a prostitute before. The purpose of the camp was to change the sexual attitudes and behavior patterns of Filipino men working in male-dominated work environments (Yen, 2008). Over the course of three days participants learned about the harms of prostitution and about the role male demand plays in perpetuating the sexual exploitation of women and children. Yen (2008) states:

Initially, the men's attitudes towards prostitution were cavalier and nonchalant. These attitudes began to change as the men learned more about

prostitution and men's roles in perpetuating the practice. In discussion groups, some men even made suggestions about how to change attitudes, behaviors and patterns in the male dominated trucking environment (p. 675).

Findings from Yen's (2008) Case Study, suggest that demand reduction programs that focus on educating men about the harms of prostitution/trafficking and the role men play in perpetuating the sexual exploitation of women and girls may discourage men from supporting the commercial sex industry.

### **Characteristics of men who pay for sex**

Researchers have found that the people creating the demand for sex trafficking, those paying for sexual services are predominantly male, ranging in age from 15-90. The “Johns” come from all racial, national, and socio-economic backgrounds and many of them are married (Raymond, 2004). According to Raymond, the percentage of men who have purchased sex acts varies from 7% in Great Britain to 73% in Thailand (2004), whereas, in the United States the percentage of American men who have purchased sex is estimated to be between 16% to 69% (Raymond, 2004).

Since few differences have been found between the backgrounds of men who have purchased sex and men who have not, researchers have analyzed the experiences, attitudes and motivations of men who have been arrested for paying for sexual services (Busch, Bell, Hotaling, & Monto, 2002). Researchers Busch et al. analyzed the: social and legal beliefs about prostitution, narcissistic preferences for sexual relationships, perceptions of prostituted women, aversions to traditional relationships with women, and feelings of inadequacies with women of 1,342



“Johns.” These researchers found that overall, the participants in the study disagreed with justifications of violent behavior against women and with common “rape myths,” which researchers have previously defined as: “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false, yet widely held, and that serve to justify male sexual violence against women”(Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1984, p. 134). These researchers also found that the majority of the participants in their study did not indicate violent, sexual preferences (Busch et al., 2002). However, one percent of the participants in the study reported that they had used violence or threats of violence to have sex in the past. The participants whose scores indicated that they supported the use of violence and control towards women were more likely to have the following characteristics: have less education, think about sex less frequently, view pornographic videos more often, report feeling guilty about sex, be sexually conservative, be at a younger age when they had their first sexual experience with a prostitute, have had a romantic relationship end in the past year, and were more likely to report being physically abused as a child when compared to participants that did not endorse the use of power and control (Busch, et al., 2002).

### **Attitudes and Awareness Levels of "Johns"/Commercial Sex Buyers**

According to Huda (2009), the majority of commercial sex buyers are unable and/or unmotivated to identify between prostituted women who are being forced or coerced into providing sexual services from women who are choosing to do so of their own free will. However, Macleod, et al. (2008) found that half of the men that she interviewed believed that "prostitutes are victimized by pimps." Even more surprising is that previous researchers have found that 28%-41% of men that they

interviewed had previously paid to have sex with women that they knew were under the control of a pimp (Macleod, Farley, Anderson, & Golding, 2008; Farley, et al. 2011). It is also worth noting that even though the majority men interviewed were aware that women were not involved in prostitution by choice they overwhelmingly reported that they were in favor of legalizing prostitution or decriminalizing prostitution (Macleod, et al., 2008). This is especially concerning because researchers have also found that nearly all of the men interviewed believed that “minor children are almost always available for prostitution” (Farley, et al., 2011, p. 22).

### **Comparing Male Commercial Sex Buyers with Non Commercial Sex Buyers**

Farley, et al. (2011) conducted structured interviews in Boston, Massachusetts with 101 men who had previously paid for sex and 100 men who had never paid for sex and then compared the results. The results of Farley, et al.'s (2011) study indicate that *sex buyers* differ significantly in their attitudes and beliefs about prostitution when compared to *non-sex buyers*. Farley, et al.'s (2011) findings indicate that *sex buyers* were less likely to view prostitution as a form of sexual exploitation and were more in favor of legalizing prostitution than *non-sex buyers*. Findings from this research also indicate that *sex buyers* were more likely to describe men who pay for sex as "normal" and were more likely to agree with the statement: "Most men go to prostitutes once in awhile." than *non-sex buyers* (Farley, et al., 2011, p. 26). Where as, *non-sex buyers* were more likely to describe men who pay for sex as: "unethical", "desperate", and "losers" (Farley, et al., 2011, p. 26). However, nearly half of *non-sex buyers* described men who pay for sex as "normal" and over one fourth of *non-sex buyers* agreed with the statement: "Most men go to prostitutes once in

awhile."(Farley, et al., 2011). Thus, previous research indicates that even though there is some negative social stigma attached to prostitution many men still considered it "normal" for men to pay for sex.

Researchers have found that the social stigma attached to paying for sex influences the over all demand for commercial sex (Della Giusta, Di Tomasso, & Strom, 2009). Considering, social stigmas vary from one society to the next and considering how much influence social stigmas have on public attitudes towards prostitution, it is important for researchers to understand the social stigmas currently attached to prostitution in our society (Della Giusta, et al., 2009).

Considering the primary goal of demand reduction programs is to change the mainstream sexual attitudes and practices that lead to the sexual exploitation of women and children, it is important for researchers to understand public attitudes related to prostitution, and the public's overall awareness of sex trafficking. This study will build upon prior research and seeks to identify the public's current attitudes towards prostitution, commercial sex buyers/"johns," pimps/sex traffickers, and prostitutes/victims of sex trafficking. This study also seeks to gain a better understanding of how aware the general public is of sex trafficking. □

## **Methods**

### **Purpose and esign.**

The Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey is an exploratory, descriptive, online, quantitative survey designed to assess public attitudes related to prostitution, commercial sex buyers, and the public's awareness of sex trafficking. The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the

general public's awareness of sex trafficking and to better understand the general public's attitudes related to prostitution, in hopes that social workers and policy makers can use the information gained from this research to inform future interventions and demand reduction strategies.

### **Measures**

In an effort to measure the public's attitudes related to prostitution and the public's awareness of sex trafficking, the author developed the Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey. The survey is based in part on Levin and Peled's (2011) model for examining attitudes towards prostitutes and prostitution. Levin and Peled's (2011) model separates people's views of prostitution and prostitutes into two sub-categories. The first sub-category is the "normative" approach, which includes viewpoints that consider prostitutes and prostitution to be: "inherent functional aspects of a normative society" (Levin & Peled, 2011, p. 584). The normative approach also encompasses the viewpoint that prostitution is: "a profession freely chosen by independent normative women" (Levin & Peled, 2011, p. 584). The second subcategory is the "problem-oriented" approach, which includes the perspective that women who choose to become prostitutes and the men who pay to have sex with prostitutes are "social deviants." The "problem-oriented" approach also includes the perspective that prostitutes are victims of abuse and prostitution leads to the victimization of prostituted individuals (Levin and Peled's, 2011). The Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey expands on Levin and Peled's (2011) model that was designed solely to examine respondents' attitudes towards prostitutes and prostitution, by including survey questions designed to

examine respondents' awareness of sex trafficking and respondents' attitudes towards: commercial sex buyers/"Johns", pimps/sex traffickers, victims of sex trafficking, and legal consequences for engaging in prostitution.

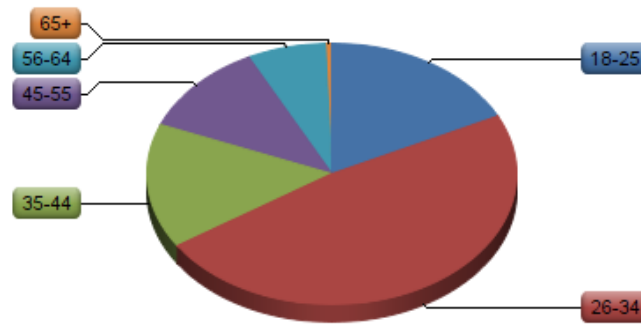
**Data collection instrument.** The Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey (see Appendix A) was created using Qualtrics survey software. The survey contained a total of 57 items and is a combination of likert scales, yes or no questions, and demographic questions. Survey questions were based on structured interview questions from Farley, et al.'s (2011), study that compared men who pay for sex with men who do not pay for sex and Macleod, Farley, Anderson, and Golding's (2008), study that examined the attitudes and perceptions of 110 Scottish men who had previously paid for sex.

The first section of the Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey consisted of eight questions designed to measure respondents' attitudes related to prostitution and their opinions about legalizing prostitution. The second section contained seven questions designed to assess how aware respondents are of sex trafficking. The third section of the survey consisted of four questions designed to measure respondents' attitudes towards pimps/sex traffickers. The fourth section is comprised of eight questions designed to measure respondents' attitudes towards prostitutes/victims of sex trafficking. The fifth section of the survey is comprised of 19 questions designed to measure respondents': attitudes towards commercial sex buyers/ "johns", opinions about legal consequences for individuals who pay for sex, and acceptance of "rape myths." The final portion of the Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey included six demographic

questions. The demographic questions were designed to gather information about respondents': age, gender, relationship status, religion, education level and what state they live in. The final section of the survey was comprised of three yes or no questions. The first of which asked respondents to indicate whether they or not they have been exposed to any information regarding sex trafficking in the media. The second asked the respondent if they know anyone who has paid for sex and the final question asked respondents if they themselves have ever paid for sex.

### **Sample**

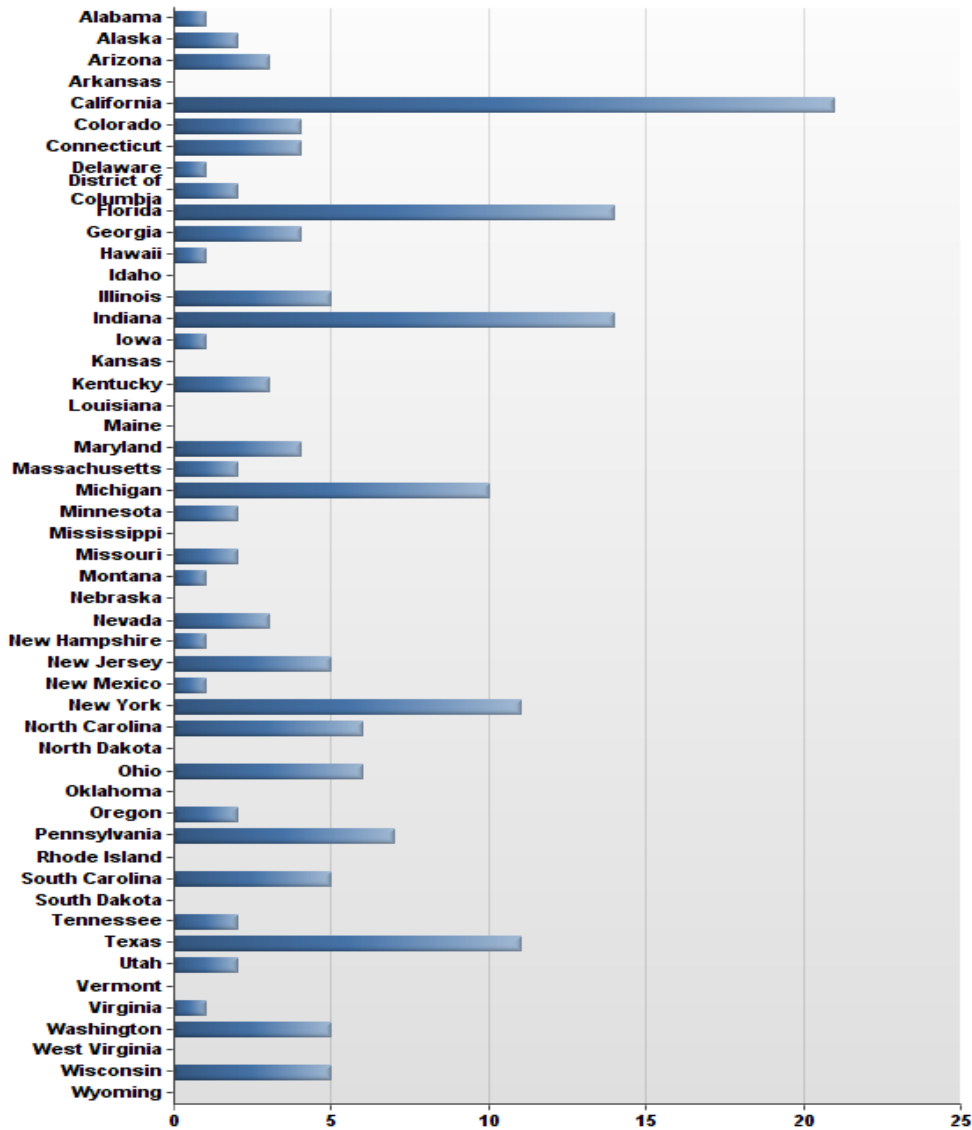
The Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey was administered to a convenience sample of 185 adult respondents via the Mechanical Turks website: <https://www.mturk.com>. The sample was comprised of 65% (n=113) male respondents (n=113) and 35% female respondents (n=62). The ages of respondents in the sample, which is depicted in Figure: 1 below, was comprised of: 18% of respondents (n=31) between the ages of 18-25, 48% of respondents (n=84) between the ages of 26-34, 15% of respondents (n= 27) between the ages of 35-44, 11% of respondents (n=20) between the ages of 45-55, 7% of respondents (n=12) between the ages of 56-64, and (0.57%) of respondents (n= 1) reported being 65 years of age or older.

**Figure 1.** Age of Survey Respondents

The self-reported education level of respondents is as follows: 1% of the sample (n=2) completed some high school, 9% of respondents (n=15) completed high school/earned their GED, 33% of respondents (n=58) completed “some college,” 43% of respondents (n=76) had attained Bachelor’s Degree, and 14% of respondents (n=24) had attained a Master’s degree or higher. The majority, (66%) of respondents (n=10) reported that they were married or in a committed relationship, 28% of respondents (n=49) reported that they were single, and 5% of respondents (n=10) identified their relationship status as divorced, separated or other.

Respondents from this study represent 36 of the 50 states in the United States of America. The following states were not represented: Arkansas, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, West Virginia and Wyoming. The bars in table below represent how many respondents were from each state. Please refer to Table 1 for further details about states represented by the survey respondents. The bars in Table 1 represent how many respondents were from each state; the length of the bar corresponds to the number of respondents from each of the fifty states.

**Figure: 2** Location of Survey Respondents



The sample for this study was collected from respondents via the Mechanical Turk website, which is an online labor market created in 2005. The web service allows researchers to recruit participants to complete various surveys, which the website refers to as "Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs)" in exchange for payment (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). Mechanical Turk has recently become



popular source of data for social scientists because it provides many advantages over traditional research methods including: reducing the overall cost of research, simplifying the recruitment process, reducing non-response bias, and by reducing threats to internal validity (Paolacci, et al., 2010). Findings from the Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis (2010) study indicate that respondents recruited from Mechanical Turk are often more representative of the U.S. population than samples drawn from undergraduate college students and internet samples. Paolacci, et al. (2010) also found that research conducted through Mechanical Turk was less susceptible to coverage error than other recruiting methods. Since respondents and researchers are both anonymous, respondents recruited from Mechanical Turk are less likely to provide dishonest responses and there is no risk of experimenter effects. Another advantage of Mechanical Turk is that researchers are less likely to receive multiple responses from respondents because each work ID must correspond to a unique financial account (Paolacci, et al., 2010).

There are also disadvantages of research conducted through Mechanical Turk and other online survey websites. One such disadvantage is that unsupervised research participants may be less attentive and less motivated than the participants of more traditional, lab-based, research studies (Paolacci, et al., 2010). Other disadvantages of Mechanical Turk include the fact that respondents can sort through HITs by payment amount. Thus, the payment rate offered could lead one to question whether or not survey respondents will be biased by the amount of payment (Ipeirotis, 2010). Mechanical Turk has also been criticized for allowing researchers to offer disproportionately low wages. However, thus far the quality of data collected via

Mechanical Turk does not appear to be influenced by Mechanical Turk's current payment norms (Paolacci, et al., 2010).

Survey data was collected from each respondent at only one point in time. The Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey link was posted as a "HIT" on Mechanical Turk. The HIT was accessible only to Mechanical Turk respondents considered to be residents of the United States. Each survey respondent was paid \$0.25 for participation in the survey, which was a comparable rate for similar surveys. The survey took respondents five to ten minutes to complete, which equated to a payment rate of \$2.00 per hour. Due to the nature of the Mechanical Turks website, survey respondents self-elected themselves to participate in the study. Thus, participation in the survey was completely voluntary. Once respondents completed the survey they were given a completion code that was automatically generated by Qualtrics. Respondents were then instructed to enter the completion code into the box labeled "Provide service code here" located on the original Mechanical Turk HIT. Once the respondent submitted the completion code they received payment for completing the survey.

#### **Measures for protection of study participants.**

The survey and administration process was approved by the University of St. Thomas's Institutional Review Board prior to data collection. Before taking the survey, the respondents were presented with a letter of informed consent (see Appendix B) that explained the purpose of the study. The letter of informed consent also informed potential research participants that there are no known risks for participation in this research and the only benefit for participating in the study was the

\$0.25 reward that would be deposited into the respondent's Amazon Payment account as payment for participating in the study. The letter of informed consent also informed the research participants that if they decided to participate in the study that they were free to stop taking the survey at any time and they could also skip any questions that they did not wish not to answer. Participation in this study was completely voluntary and anonymous. The surveys did not contain or ask for any identifying information. The electronic dataset derived from this survey is being stored on a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. Only the researcher and the researcher's advisor named on the letter of informed consent will have access to the surveys.

### **Data Collection**

The survey data was collected and recorded in Qualtrics. Due to the descriptive nature of this research descriptive statistics were used to organize, summarize and interpret the collected survey data. The following variables were analyzed to gain a better understanding of:

1. What are the general public's beliefs and attitudes about prostitution?
2. What are the general public's attitudes towards commercial sex buyers/"johns"?
3. What are the general public's attitudes towards pimps/sex traffickers?
4. What are the general public's attitudes towards prostitutes/victims of sex trafficking?
5. What are the general public's opinions about the legal consequences for engaging in prostitution?

6. How much does the general public agree with the common rape myth?:  
"Men are less likely to commit rape if they can pay to have sex with a prostitute."
7. How aware is the general public about the issue of sex trafficking?
8. Are the current legal consequences for engaging in prostitution reflective of the general public's attitudes towards prostitution?
9. How common is it for members of the general public to pay for sex?

## **Findings**

### **Public Beliefs and Attitudes about Prostitution**

The first section of the Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey consisted of eight questions designed to measure respondents' attitudes related to prostitution and their opinions about legalizing prostitution. The first research question that was addressed by this study was: What are the general public's beliefs and attitudes about prostitution? The findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 1, show that of the 185 study participants who responded to the statement: "Prostitution should be legalized in the state where I live.": 52% of respondents (n=98) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 12% of respondents (n=23) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 34% of respondents (n=64) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that the majority of respondents (52%) believe prostitution should be legalized.

The findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 1, also show that of the 186 study participants who responded to the statement: "It is ok for consenting adults to exchange money for sex": 60% of respondents (n=113) agreed or strongly agreed

with the statement, 13% of respondents (n=24) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 26% of respondents (n=49) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that the majority of respondents (60%) believe that it is ok for consenting adults to exchange money for sex.

The findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 1, also show that of the 185 study participants who responded to the statement: “Prostitution is ok, as long as the health risks can be minimized”: 60% of respondents (n=111) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 11% of respondents (n=20) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 30% of respondents (n=54) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that the majority of respondents (60%) believe that prostitution is ok, as long as the health risks can be minimized.

The findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 1, also show that of the 184 study participants who responded to the statement: “Demand for prostitution increases when prostitution is legalized”: 37% of respondents (n=67) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 27% of respondents (n=50) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 36% of respondents (n=67) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that respondents’ beliefs about whether the demand for prostitution increases when prostitution is legalized vary.

The findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 1, also show that of the 183 study participants who responded to the statement: “Legalizing prostitution promotes sex trafficking.”: 43% of respondents (n=79) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 15% of respondents (n=28) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 41% of respondents (n=76) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the

statement. Thus, the findings show that nearly half of respondents believe that legalizing prostitution promotes sex trafficking.

The findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 1, also show that of the 183 study participants who responded to the statement: “When prostitution is legal men are more likely to pay for sex.”: 55% of respondents (n=102) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 23% of respondents (n=43) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 20% of respondents (n=38) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that over half of respondents believe that men are more likely to pay for sex when prostitution is legal.

The findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 1, also show that of the 182 study participants who responded to the statement: “Legalizing prostitution protects the women used in prostitution.”: 57% of respondents (n=103) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 13% of respondents (n=23) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 31% of respondents (n=53) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that the majority of respondents believe that legalizing prostitution protects the women used in prostitution.

However, the findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 1, also show that of the 182 study participants who responded to the statement: “Prostitution is a necessary evil in our society”: 32% of respondents (n=58) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 25% of respondents (n=46) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 43% of respondents (n=78) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that respondents’ beliefs about whether or not prostitution is a necessary evil in our society vary.

The findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 1, also show that of the 181 study participants who responded to the statement: “Prostitution is a form of sexual exploitation”: 56% of respondents (n=101) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 20% of respondents (n=37) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 23% of respondents (n=43) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that the majority of respondents’ believe that prostitution is a form of sexual exploitation.

The findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 1, also show that of the 181 study participants who responded to the statement: “Prostitution and sex trafficking are the same thing.”: 29% of respondents (n=53) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 13% of respondents (n=24) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 57% of respondents (n=104) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that the majority of respondents do not believe that prostitution and sex trafficking are the same thing.

The findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 1, also show that of the 181 study participants who responded to the statement: “Without male demand prostitution would cease to exist.”: 55% of respondents (n=99) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 14% of respondents (n=25) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 32% of respondents (n=57) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that the majority of respondents do not believe that prostitution would exist without male demand.

The findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 1, also show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: “If prostitution is legalized,

there will be an increase in child prostitution.”: 34% of respondents (n=60) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 24% of respondents (n=42) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 42% of respondents (n=73) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that nearly half of respondents do not believe that child prostitution increases when prostitution is legalized.

**TABLE: 1** Public Beliefs and Attitudes about Prostitution

Statement:	Agreed	Disagreed
Prostitution should be legalized in the state where I live.	52%	34%
It is ok for consenting adults to exchange money for sex.	60%	26%
Prostitution is ok, as long as the health risks can be minimized.	60%	30%
Demand for prostitution increases when prostitution is legalized.	37%	36%
Legalizing prostitution promotes sex trafficking.	43%	41%
When Prostitution is legal men are more likely to pay for sex.	55%	20%
Legalizing prostitution protects the women used in prostitution.	57%	31%
Prostitution is a necessary evil in our society.	32%	43%
Prostitution is a form of sexual exploitation.	56%	23%
Prostitution and sex trafficking are the same thing.	29%	57%
Without male demand prostitution would cease to exist.	55%	32%
If prostitution is legalized, there will be an increase in child prostitution.	34%	42%

\*Please note that the “Agreed” column is comprised of “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” responses and the “Disagreed” column is comprised of “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree” responses.

### **Public's attitudes towards commercial sex buyers/"johns"**

The second section of the survey contained seven questions designed to assess how aware respondents are of the issue of sex trafficking. Therefore, the second



research question that was addressed by this study was: What are the general public's attitudes towards commercial sex buyers/"johns"? The findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 2, show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: "It is normal for men to pay to have sex.": 27% of respondents (n=48) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 26% of respondents (n=45) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 47% of respondents (n=82) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that nearly half of the respondents believe that it is abnormal for men to pay for sex.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 2, also show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: "Men from "all walks of life" pay for sex.": 79% of respondents (n=139) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 9% of respondents (n=15) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 12% of respondents (n=21) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that respondents overwhelmingly believe that "men from all walks of life pay for sex."

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 2, also show that of the 174 study participants who responded to the statement: "Men who pay for sex are often married.": 51% of respondents (n=88) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 33% of respondents (n=58) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 16% of respondents (n=28) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that just over half of respondents believe men who pay for sex are often married.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 2, also show that of the 175 study

participants who responded to the statement: “Men who pay for sex are lonely.”: 35% of respondents (n=61) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 40% of respondents (n=70) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 25% of respondents (n=44) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that just over one-third of respondents believe that “Men who pay for sex are lonely.”

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 2, also show that of the 174 study participants who responded to the statement: “There is something wrong with men who pay for sex.”: 30% of respondents (n=53) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 30% of respondents (n=70) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 39% of respondents (n=54) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that just over one-third of respondents believe that there is nothing wrong with men who pay for sex.”

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 2, also show that of the 173 study participants who responded to the statement: “I would be ashamed to have a family member or friend who paid for sex.”: 44% of respondents (n=76) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 18% of respondents (n=32) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 37% of respondents (n=65) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that nearly half of respondents would be ashamed to have a family member or friend who paid for sex. However, the findings also show that just over one third of respondents would not be ashamed to have a friend or family member who paid for sex. Thus, it is clear that a significant portion of respondents do not believe that there is not a social stigma attached to paying for

sex.

**TABLE: 2** *Public Attitudes towards Commercial Sex Buyers/"Johns"*

Statement:	Agreed	Disagreed
It is normal for men to pay to have sex.	27%	47%
Men from all "walks of life" pay for sex.	79%	12%
Men who pay for sex are often married.	51%	16%
Men who pay for sex are lonely.	35%	25%
There is something wrong with men who pay for sex.	31%	39%
I would be ashamed to have a family member or friend who paid for sex.	44%	37%

\*Please note that the "Agreed" column is comprised of "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses and the "Disagreed" column is comprised of "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" responses.

### **Public's attitudes towards Pimps/Sex Traffickers**

The third section of the survey consisted of four questions designed to measure respondents' attitudes towards pimps/sex traffickers. Thus, the third research question that was addressed by this study was: What are the general public's attitudes towards pimps/sex traffickers? The findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 3, show that of the 182 study participants who responded to the statement: "Pimps often use physical force to control the women they prostitute.": 82% of respondents (n=149) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 11% of respondents (n=20) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 7% of respondents (n=13) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that respondents overwhelmingly believe that pimps use physical force to control the women they prostitute.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 3, also show that of the 181 study participants who responded to the statement: "Pimps should be considered legitimate

businessmen and entrepreneurs”: 17% of respondents (n=30) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 15% of respondents (n=28) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 68% of respondents (n=123) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that the majority of respondents do not believe that pimps should be considered legitimate businessmen and entrepreneurs.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 3, also show that of the 181 study participants who responded to the statement: “Pimps sexually exploit vulnerable women and children”: 83% of respondents (n=150) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 6% of respondents (n=10) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 8% of respondents (n=13) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that overwhelmingly respondents believe that pimps sexually exploit women and children.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 3, also show that of the 179 study participants who responded to the statement: “Human Traffickers prey on the weak and vulnerable and then exploit them for their own financial gain.”: 87% of respondents (n=156) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 8% of respondents (n=14) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 5% of respondents (n=9) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that overwhelmingly respondents believe that human traffickers prey on the weak and vulnerable and in order to exploit them for their own financial gain.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 3, also show that of the 180 study participants who responded to the statement: “Human Traffickers use physical and psychological abuse to control and sexually exploit their victims.”: 87% of

respondents (n=156) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 9% of respondents (n=16) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 4% of respondents (n=8) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that overwhelmingly respondents believe that human traffickers use physical and psychological abuse to control and sexually exploit their victims.

**TABLE: 3** Public's attitudes towards Pimps/Sex Traffickers

Statement:	Agreed	Disagreed
Pimps often use physical force to control the women they prostitute.	82%	7%
Pimps should be considered legitimate businessmen and entrepreneurs.	17%	68%
Pimps sexually exploit vulnerable women and children.	83%	8%
Human traffickers prey on the weak and vulnerable and then exploit them for their own financial gain.	87%	5%
Human traffickers use physical and psychological abuse to control and sexually exploit their victims.	87%	4%

\*Please note that the "Agreed" column is comprised of "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses and the "Disagreed" column is comprised of "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" responses.

### **Public's attitudes towards prostitutes/victims of sex trafficking**

The fourth section of the survey was comprised of eight questions designed to measure respondents' attitudes towards prostitutes/victims of sex trafficking.

Therefore, the fourth research question that was addressed by this study was: What are the general public's attitudes towards prostitutes/victims of sex trafficking? The findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 4, show that of the 181 study participants who responded to the statement: "I believe that the majority of girls used in prostitution are controlled by a sex trafficker or "pimp.": 59% of respondents (n=106) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 20% of respondents (n=36) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 22% of respondents (n=39) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that the

majority of respondents believe a sex trafficker or “pimp” controls the majority of girls used in prostitution.

The findings of this study, which are depicted in Table 4, show that of the 178 study participants who responded to the statement: “Most people who engage in prostitution choose to do so of their own free will.”: 28% of respondents (n=51) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 35% of respondents (n=63) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 36% of respondents (n=64) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that about a quarter of respondents believe that most people who engage in prostitution choose to do so of their own free will. However the findings also show that just over a third of respondents do not believe that most people who engage in prostitution are choosing to do so freely.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 4, also show that of the 177 study participants who responded to the statement: “Women and children used in prostitution are victims of sex trafficking.”: 66% of respondents (n=116) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 23% of respondents (n=41) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 12% of respondents (n=20) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that the majority of respondents believe that the women and children who are used in prostitution are victims of sex trafficking.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 4, also show that of the 178 study participants who responded to the statement: “Nearly all of the women and children used in prostitution are victims of child abuse, rape or incest.”: 42% of respondents

(n=76) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 27% of respondents (n=48) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 30% of respondents (n=54) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that nearly half of respondents believe that the women and children who are used in prostitution are victims of child abuse, rape or incest.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 4, also show that of the 177 study participants who responded to the statement: “The majority of the women and children who have been prostituted are chemically dependent.”: 37% of respondents (n=65) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 30% of respondents (n=53) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 34% of respondents (n=59) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that respondent’ beliefs about chemical use among women and children who have been prostituted vary.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 4, also show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: “I believe that the majority of the women and children who have been prostituted have mental health issues.”: 36% of respondents (n=63) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 23% of respondents (n=41) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 40% of respondents (n=71) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that respondent beliefs about the mental health of women and children who have been prostituted vary.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 4, also show that of the 177 study participants who responded to the statement: “Nearly all of the women and girls used

in prostitution want to *escape the life* but don't know where to turn for help.”: 52% of respondents (n=63) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 29% of respondents (n=91) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 20% of respondents (n=35) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that just over half of respondents believe that the women and girls used in prostitution want to *escape the life* but don't know where to turn for help.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 4, also show that of the 176 study participants who responded to the statement: “Women and children used in prostitution should be arrested for breaking the law.”: 25% of respondents (n=44) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 24% of respondents (n=43) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 50% of respondents (n=89) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that while half of all respondents do not believe that the women and children used in prostitution should be arrested for breaking the law the findings also show that a quarter of all respondents do believe that the women and children used in prostitution should be arrested for breaking the law.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 4, also show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: “Women and children used in prostitution should be treated as victims not criminals.”: 64% of respondents (n=112) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 24% of respondents (n=42) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 12% of respondents (n=21) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that the majority of respondents believe that the women and children used in prostitution should be



treated as victims rather than criminals.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 4, also show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: “I believe that the majority of women and children who have been prostituted/trafficked are psychologically damaged.”: 62% of respondents (n=109) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 25% of respondents (n=43) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 13% of respondents (n=23) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that the majority of respondents believe that the women and children who have been prostituted/trafficked for sex are psychologically damaged.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 4, also show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: “I believe that the majority of individuals used in prostitution are 18 years old or older.”: 48% of respondents (n=84) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 23% of respondents (n=40) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 29% of respondents (n=51) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that nearly half of respondents believe that the majority of individuals used in prostitution are 18 years old or older.

**TABLE: 4** Public's attitudes towards prostitutes/victims of sex trafficking

Statement:	Agreed	Disagreed
The majority of girls used in prostitution are controlled by a sex-trafficker or “pimp”.	59%	22%
Most people who engage in prostitution choose to do so of their own free will.	28%	36%
Women and children used in prostitution are victims of sex trafficking.	66%	12%
Nearly all of the women and children used in prostitution are victims of child abuse, rape or incest	42%	30%
The majority of the women and children who have been prostituted are chemically dependent	37%	34%
I believe that the majority of the women and children who have been prostituted have mental health issues	36%	40%
Nearly all of the women and girls used in prostitution want to <i>escape the life</i> but don’t know where to turn for help.	52%	20%
Women and children used in prostitution should be arrested for breaking the law	25%	50%
Women and children used in prostitution should be treated as victims not criminals	64%	12%
I believe that the majority of women and children who have been prostituted/trafficked are psychologically damaged.	62%	13%
I believe that the majority of individuals used in prostitution are 18 years old or older.	48%	29%

\*Please note that the “Agreed” column is comprised of “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” responses and the “Disagreed” column is comprised of “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree” responses.

### **Public opinions about the legal consequences for engaging in prostitution**

The fifth section of the survey was comprised of 19 questions designed to measure respondents’: attitudes towards commercial sex buyers/ "johns", opinions about legal consequences for individuals who pay for sex, and acceptance of "rape myths." Which leads to the fifth research question that was addressed by this study which was: What are the general public's opinions about the legal consequences for engaging in prostitution? The findings addressing the aforementioned research

question can be found in Table 5. The findings of this study show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: “The current penalties for engaging in prostitution are appropriate.”: 40% of respondents (n=149) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 35% of respondents (n=61) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 43% of respondents (n=74) disagreed or strongly disagreed the statement. Therefore, findings show that respondent opinions about the current legal penalties for engaging in prostitution vary.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 5, also show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: “The names of people who are convicted of paying to have sex should be publicly released”: 30% of respondents (n=53) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 18% of respondents (n=32) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 52% of respondents (n=90) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that over half of respondents do not believe that the names of individuals who are convicted of paying to have sex should be publicly released.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 5, also show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: “People convicted of paying to have sex with women in prostitution should face stiff penalties”: 43% of respondents (n=75) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 15% of respondents (n=26) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 43% of respondents (n=74) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that an equal number of respondents believe that people who are convicted of paying to have sex with women in prostitution should face stiff penalties as those who do not believe that

people who are convicted of paying to have sex with women in prostitution should face stiff penalties. However, findings of this study also show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: "People who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should face stiff penalties": 88% of respondents (n=153) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 7% of respondents (n=13) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 6% of respondents (n=9) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Therefore, the findings show that respondents overwhelmingly believe that people who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should face stiff penalties whereas, less than half of the respondents believe that the men who are convicted of paying to have sex with women should face stiff penalties. Thus, the findings show that respondents hold different beliefs about the legal consequences that individuals who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should face versus individuals who are convicted of paying to have sex with women.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 5, also show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: "Men convicted of paying to have sex with women should be registered sex offenders": 24% of respondents (n=41) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 15% of respondents (n=26) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 62% of respondents (n=108) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that the majority of respondents do not believe that men who are convicted of paying to have sex with women should be registered sex offenders. However, findings of this study also show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: "People who are convicted of

paying to have sex with children should be registered sex offenders”: 84% of respondents (n=148) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 8% of respondents (n=14) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 7% of respondents (n=13) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Therefore, the findings show that respondents overwhelmingly believe that people who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should be registered sex offenders whereas, the majority of respondents do not believe that the men who are convicted of paying to have sex with women should be registered sex offenders. Thus, the findings show that respondents tend to hold different beliefs about the legal consequences that individuals who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should face versus individuals who are convicted of paying to have sex with women.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 5, also show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: “Men convicted of paying to have sex with women should be required to pay a fine”: 46% of respondents (n=81) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 15% of respondents (n=27) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 38% of respondents (n=67) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that nearly half of respondents believe that men who are convicted of paying to have sex with women should be required to pay a fine. However, findings of this study also show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: “People who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should be required to pay a fine”: 82% of respondents (n=144) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 8% of respondents (n=14) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 10% of respondents (n=17) disagreed or

strongly disagreed with the statement. Therefore, the findings illustrate that survey respondents overwhelmingly believe that people who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should pay a fine whereas, less than half of survey respondents believe that people who are convicted of paying to have sex with women should be required to pay a fine. Thus, the findings show that respondents tend to hold different beliefs about the legal consequences that individuals who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should face versus individuals who are convicted of paying to have sex with women.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 5, also show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: "Men convicted of paying to have sex with women should spend time in jail.": 29% of respondents (n=52) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 15% of respondents (n=26) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 56% of respondents (n=97) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that the majority of respondents do not believe that men who are convicted of paying to have sex with women should spend time in jail. However, findings of this study also show that of the 174 study participants who responded to the statement: "People who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should spend time in jail.": 90% of respondents (n=156) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 6% of respondents (n=10) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 4% of respondents (n=8) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Therefore, the findings show that respondents overwhelmingly believe that people who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should spend time in jail whereas, the majority of respondents do not

believe that men who are convicted of paying to have sex with women should spend time in jail. Thus, the findings show that respondents tend to hold different beliefs about the legal consequences that individuals who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should face versus individuals who are convicted of paying to have sex with women.

**TABLE: 5** Respondents Beliefs Regarding the Legal Consequences for Engaging in Prostitution

Legal Consequences for Engaging in Prostitution:	Agreed	Disagreed
The current penalties for engaging in prostitution are appropriate.	23%	43%
The names of people who are convicted of paying to have sex should be publicly released.	30%	52%
People convicted of paying to have sex with women in prostitution should face stiff penalties.	43%	43%
Men convicted of paying to have sex with women should be registered sex offenders.	24%	62%
People who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should face stiff penalties.	88%	6%
People convicted of paying to have sex with children should be registered sex offenders.	84%	7%
People who pay to have sex with children should be required to pay a fine.	82%	10%
Men convicted of paying to have sex with women in prostitution should be required to pay a fine.	46%	38%
Men convicted of paying to have sex with women should spend time in jail.	29%	56%
Men convicted of paying to have sex with children should spend time in jail.	90%	4%

\*Please note that the "Agreed" column is comprised of "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses and the "Disagreed" column is comprised of "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" responses.

**How much does the general public agree with the common rape myth?: "Men are less likely to commit rape if they can pay to have sex with a prostitute."**

The sixth research question that was addressed by this study was: How much

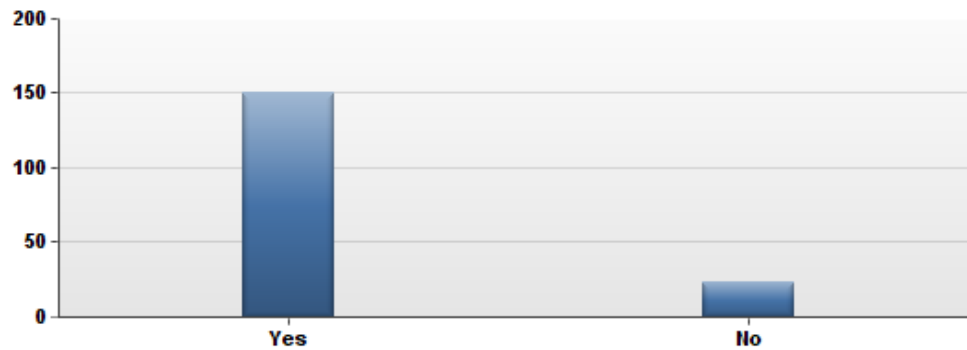
does the general public agree with the common rape myth?: "Men are less likely to commit rape if they can pay to have sex with a prostitute." The findings of this study show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the previous statement: 35% of respondents (n=60) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 23% of respondents (n=40) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 43% of respondents (n=75) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that while nearly half of respondents do not believe that: "Men are less likely to commit rape if they can pay to have sex with a prostitute" more than one-third of respondents do hold the believe that: "Men are less likely to commit rape if they can pay to have sex with a prostitute," and nearly a quarter of participants indicated that they neither agreed or disagreed with the common rape myth. Thus, the findings indicate that there was not consensus among the respondents' beliefs about whether prostitution reduces the likelihood that men will commit rape.

### **Public awareness of sex trafficking**

The final section of the survey was comprised of three yes or no questions. The first of which asked respondents to indicate whether or not they have been exposed to any information regarding sex trafficking in the media which, addresses the seventh research question: How aware is the general public about the issue of sex trafficking? The findings of this study, depicted in Figure 3, show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: "Have you ever seen anything in the media about sex trafficking?": 86% of respondents (n=151) responded "yes" and 14% of respondents (n=24) responded "no". Thus, the findings show that most of the respondents have previously seen something in the media about sex trafficking.

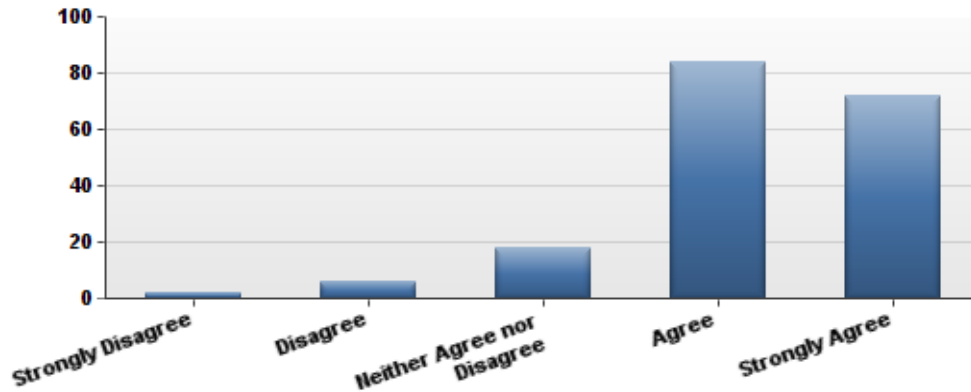


**Figure 3.** Number of Respondents who Have Seen Something in the Media about Sex Trafficking?



The findings of this study, depicted in Figure 4, also show that of the 182 study participants who responded to the statement: “Pimp-controlled prostitution is a form of human trafficking.”: 86% of respondents (n=156) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 10% of respondents (n=18) neither agreed or disagreed with the statement, and 4% of respondents (n=8) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thus, the findings show that respondents overwhelmingly believe that pimp-controlled prostitution is a form of human trafficking.

**Figure 4.** Number of Respondents who Believe that Pimp-Controlled Prostitution is a Form of Human Trafficking



### Paying for sex

The final section of the survey also asked the respondent if they know anyone who has paid for sex and if they themselves have ever paid for sex, thus, addressing the ninth research question: How common is it for members of the general public to pay for sex? The findings of this study, depicted in Table 6, show that of the 175 study participants who responded to the statement: “Do you know anyone who has paid for sex?”: 38% of respondents (n=66) responded “yes” and 62% of respondents (n=109) responded “no”. Therefore, the findings show that while the majority of respondents did not know anyone who has paid for sex, more than one-third of respondents did know someone who has paid for sex.

The findings of this study, depicted in Table 6, show that of the 174 study participants who responded to the statement: “Have you ever paid for sex?”: 13% of respondents (n=22) responded “yes” and 87% of respondents (n=152) responded “no”. Thus, the findings show that while most respondents reported that they have not

paid for sex, more than one-tenth of respondents reported that they had previously paid for sex.

**TABLE: 6** How common is it for members of the general public to pay for sex?

Question:	Yes	No
Do you know anyone who has paid for sex?	38%	62%
Have you ever paid for sex	13%	87%

### Discussion

The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of the general public's awareness of sex trafficking and to better understand the general public's attitudes related to prostitution, in hopes that social workers and policy makers can use the information gained from this research to inform future interventions and demand reduction strategies. The Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey expanded on Levin and Peled's (2011) model that was designed solely to examine respondents' attitudes towards prostitutes and prostitution, by including survey questions designed to examine respondents' awareness of sex trafficking and respondents' attitudes towards: commercial sex buyers/"Johns," pimps/sex traffickers, victims of sex trafficking, and legal consequences for engaging in prostitution.

After analyzing the descriptive, online, quantitative survey data the results the of this study indicate that even though the majority of respondents are aware of the dangers associated with prostitution, believe that prostitution is a form of sexual exploitation and that the women and children used in prostitution are victims of sex trafficking, the majority of respondents were still in favor of legalizing prostitution. Thus, the findings indicate that even though respondents' attitudes and beliefs about

prostitution tended to fall into the "problem-oriented" approach of Levin and Peled's (2011) model, respondents still were in favor of legalizing prostitution, which would fall into Levin and Peled's (2011) model's "normative" approach sub-category.

Thus, the findings suggest that even though respondents believe that prostitutes are victims of abuse and that prostitution leads to the victimization of prostituted individuals the respondents of this study still believe that that prostitutes and prostitution are: "inherent functional aspects of a normative society" (Levin & Peled, 2011, p. 584).

The findings from this study also indicate that respondents overwhelmingly believe that there should be severe legal consequences for individuals who are convicted of paying to have sex with children. Where as respondents' opinions about what legal consequences there should be for men who are convicted of paying to have sex with women were varied and tended to be less severe.

### **Public's attitudes towards prostitution**

Findings from this study regarding public attitudes about prostitution indicate that the majority of respondents believe that prostitution should be legalized even though the majority of respondents also believe that prostitution is a form of sexual exploitation, the majority of girls used in prostitution are under the control of a sex trafficker/"pimp", and that nearly all of the women and girls used in prostitution want to "escape the life" but do not know where to turn for help. This finding supports Macleod, et al. (2008) finding that even though the majority of men interviewed were aware that women were not involved in prostitution by choice they overwhelmingly reported that they were in favor of legalizing prostitution or decriminalizing

prostitution. This finding is especially concerning because the majority of respondents were aware of the harm that prostitution causes, yet they still believed that prostitution should be legalized.

The findings also show that the majority of respondents also believe that when prostitution is legalized the women being prostituted will somehow be protected however; by legalizing prostitution the reverse is true. When prostitution is legalized, governments often use a public health approach and provide health checks and testing the women used in prostitution for sexually transmitted diseases. However, the men paying to have sex with the prostituted women are not tested for sexually transmitted diseases and the women are provided with very little if any protection from the buyers' violent assaults (Raymond, 2004). Thus, legalizing prostitution protects the interests of the sex buyers, not the women being prostituted (Raymond, 2004).

#### **Public's attitudes towards commercial sex buyers/"johns"**

Findings from this study regarding public attitudes toward commercial sex buyers/"johns" indicate that while there is some social stigma associated with men who pay for sex less than half of the respondents reported that they would be ashamed to have a family member or friend who paid for sex. As far as the attitudes, stereotypes and stigmas associated with commercial sex buyers/"johns" are concerned, approximately one-third of respondents reported believing that there is something wrong with men who pay for sex and that men who pay for sex are lonely. This finding indicates that approximately one-third of respondents fall into the "problem-oriented" approach of Levin and Peled's (2011) model, which includes the perspective that men who pay to have sex with prostitutes are "social deviants."

However, the fact that the majority of respondents believe that men from all “walk of life” (including married men) pay for sex indicates that respondents believe that there is nothing at all that different about the men who pay for sex and the men who don’t. The findings of this study also indicate that nearly half of respondents disagreed with the statement: “It is normal for men to pay to have sex” which is different from Farley, et al.’s (2011) study that found that nearly half of the men in the study, who had not paid for sex, believed that it is normal for men to pay to have sex. Therefore, findings from this study and previous research indicate that there is a lack of consensus on whether or not it is “normal for men to pay to have sex.”

### **Public's attitudes towards Pimps/Sex Traffickers**

Findings from this study regarding public attitudes pimps/sex traffickers indicate that most (82%) of the respondents believe that pimps often use physical force to control the women they prostitute which is significantly higher than Macleod, et al.’s (2008) finding that only half of the men who participated in their study believed that prostitutes are victimized by their pimps. This difference in findings could possibly be contributed to the fact that there has been more media attention given to the dangers associated with prostitution/sex trafficking. The findings of this study also show that nearly all of the respondents have negative attitudes about pimps and sex traffickers believing that: pimps sexually exploit vulnerable women and children, human traffickers prey on the weak and vulnerable and then exploit them for their own financial gain and human traffickers use physical and psychological abuse to control and sexually exploit their victims. This finding indicates, that most of the respondents fall into the "problem-oriented" approach of

Levin and Peled's (2011) model, which includes the perspective that prostitutes are victims of abuse and prostitution leads to the victimization of prostituted individuals (Levin and Peled's, 2011). These findings are also supported by Farley, et al.'s (2011) findings that show that many of the men interviewed were very familiar with the coercive, recruitment tactics used by pimps to sexually exploit the women and children they prostitute and two thirds of the men who participated in their study were aware that: “. . . a majority of women are lured, tricked or trafficked into prostitution.”

### **Public's attitudes towards prostitutes/victims of sex trafficking**

Findings from this study regarding public attitudes toward prostitutes/victims of sex trafficking indicate that the majority of respondents believe that a sex trafficker or pimp controls most of the girls used in prostitution. The findings also show that approximately one third of respondents believe that most people who engage in prostitution are not choosing to do so of their own free will, which is similar to Macleod, et al.'s (2008) finding that the majority of men were aware that women were not engaging in prostitution by choice. The findings of this study also show that the majority of respondents view the women and children used in prostitution as victims of sex trafficking and believe that they should be treated as victims not criminals. The majority of respondents also believe that nearly all of the women and girls used in prostitution want to escape the life but don't know where to turn for help and that the majority of women and girls who have been prostituted/trafficked are psychologically damaged. Findings from this study also indicate that nearly half of the respondents believe that the women and children used in prostitution are often the victims of child abuse, rape or incest and approximately one third of

respondents believe that the majority of women and children who have been prostituted are chemically dependent and or have mental health issues. These beliefs are supported by Hossain, et al.'s (2010) findings that women and girls who have been prostituted or trafficked for sex have often been the victim of rape, incest, physical or sexual abuse as a child, assault with a deadly weapon, and kidnapping. Hossain, et al.'s (2010) findings also indicate that as a result of being sexually exploited, women and girls who have been prostituted and trafficked often suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and chemical dependency as a result of their experiences. Thus, the findings of this study indicate that respondents mostly fall into the "problem-oriented" approach of Levin and Peled's (2011) model, which includes the perspective that prostitutes are victims of abuse and prostitution leads to the victimization of prostituted individuals (Levin and Peled, 2011).

### **Public opinions about the legal consequences for engaging in prostitution**

Findings from this study regarding public opinions about the legal consequences for engaging in prostitution with women show that respondent opinions about the legal penalties for engaging in prostitution vary. The findings from this study indicate that while nearly half of the respondents believe that: "People convicted of paying to have sex with women in prostitution should face stiff penalties" the majority respondents do not believe that the names of individuals who are convicted of paying to have sex should be publicly released or that the men convicted of paying to have sex with women should be registered sex offender or that men who are convicted of paying to have sex with women should spend time in jail.



The findings also show respondents' beliefs about whether or not the men who are convicted of paying to have sex with women should have to pay a fine vary.

The findings from this research show that respondent opinions about the legal consequences for engaging in prostitution with children are much stronger. The findings from this study indicate that respondents overwhelmingly believe that: "People who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should face stiff penalties." For instance, findings show that respondents overwhelmingly believe that people who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should be registered sex offenders, should be required to pay a fine and should spend time in jail. Thus, it is clear that respondents feel that men who pay to have sex with children should face stiffer penalties than men who pay to have sex with women.

**How much does the general public agree with the common rape myth?: "Men are less likely to commit rape if they can pay to have sex with a prostitute."**

Findings from this study regarding how much the general public agrees with the rape myth indicate that approximately one third of respondents agree with the common rape myth: "Men are less likely to commit rape if they can pay to have sex with a prostitute." This finding is similar to Farley, et al.'s (2011) finding that 32% of sex buyers and 20% of non-sex buyers believe that prostitution reduces rape and Macleod, et al.'s (2008) finding that 41% of the men interviewed believe that when prostitutes are available men are less likely to rape other women. However, there is no supporting evidence for this common rape myth (Macleod, et al., 2008).

**Public awareness of sex trafficking**

Findings from this study regarding public awareness of sex trafficking show

that most respondents have seen something in the media about sex trafficking. However, there were participants from: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas and Washington who reported that they had never seen anything in the media, which could possibly be an indication that there are less public service announcements about sex trafficking in the previously mentioned states. Findings from this study also show that respondents are also overwhelmingly aware that pimp-controlled prostitution is a form of human trafficking.

### **Implications**

The finding of this research has implications for social work practice, social policy, education, and future research. More specifically the findings of this study indicate that there is disparity between the public's perception of prostitution and what previous research has shown about the dangers associated with prostitution. When one considers the fact that the majority of respondents believe prostitution should be legalized even though they believe that prostitution is a form of sexual exploitation indicates that the public needs more education about how sex trafficking and prostitution overlap and why prostitution is harmful to society as a whole. Public education campaigns need to inspire men to reflect on their beliefs about sex and their behaviors and draw attention to the harms of prostitution and sex trafficking. The public educational campaigns also need to help the public emotionally connect to the victims of prostitution and sex trafficking by focusing on the physical and emotional trauma experienced by victims of prostitution and sex trafficking.

It would also be helpful for the mainstream media to draw attention to the

harms of prostitution and sex trafficking to further increase public awareness and to increase public concern about the issue of sex trafficking. The mainstream media could help draw attention and increase public concern by producing more documentary or fictional films that accurately depict the coercion, exploitation and suffering that victims of prostitution and sex trafficking experience on a daily basis. It would also be helpful for the media to draw attention to the male demand that fuels both the legal commercial sex industry and the illegal sex trafficking industry that hides in its shadows. In addition it could also be helpful for the media to draw attention to the consequences of legalizing prostitution that have occurred in areas where prostitution has been legalized.

The consequences of legalizing prostitution have led to a dramatic expansion of both the legal and illegal commercial sex market. Legalizing prostitution has also made it harder for women to earn enough money to support themselves financially via prostitution because when prostitution is legalized there is an influx of women who enter into prostitution, which leads to an increase in competition for clients (Sullivan & Jeffreys, 2001). This increased competition for clients and the fact that many of the legal brothel owners and club owners take 50-60% of the women's earnings makes it difficult for the women to earn a living wage (Sullivan & Jeffreys, 2001). According to Sullivan and Jeffreys (2001):

. . .prostitution cannot be made respectable. Legalization does not make it so. Prostitution is an industry that arises from the historical subordination of women and the historical right of men to buy and exchange women simply as objects for sexual use. It thrives on

poverty, drug abuse, the trafficking of vulnerable women and children. Prostitution teaches men how to mistreat women and damages the lives of both the women who are used . . . and the status of all women in the state. Legalization causes the business of sexual exploitation to flourish. As more and more women and children are drawn into the industry, and more and more men become abusers, the profits from the abuse become an indispensable part of the state's revenue (p.12-13).

The findings of this study also imply that there is a need for young people to be educated about the dangers of prostitution and sex trafficking. When young people are educated about the dangers and harms of prostitution they will be less vulnerable to the recruitment and exploitation tactics of pimps/sex traffickers and will hopefully be less tolerant of the sexual exploitation of others. Thus, the researcher would like to propose that schools incorporate curriculum into their schools that educates young people about the dangers of prostitution and sex trafficking. In addition, it would also be helpful for public awareness campaigns to target young women through literature or television commercials that inform young women of the recruitment and exploitation tactics commonly used by pimps/sex traffickers.

The findings of this research have implications for social policy as well. More specifically, lawmakers can help implement social policies and introduce new legislation at the state and national level that expands

protection for victims of prostitution and sex trafficking. Since, previous research has shown that the average age of entry into prostitution is between 12-14 years of age it is important that state laws recognize prostituted individuals and individuals who have been trafficked for sex as victims not criminals (Estes, & Weiner, 2001). Chris Swecker, Assistant Director in the Criminal Investigation Division of the FBI indicated that he also shares this view when he stated that: “Children can never consent to prostitution. It is always exploitation.” (Exploiting Americans on American Soil: Domestic Trafficking Exposed, 2005, p. 1). With this in mind; state lawmakers need to enact “safe harbor” laws for children who have been trafficked for sex. Safe Harbor laws have been designed to provide protection for children who have been trafficked for sex from being prosecuted for prostitution- related offenses. Safe Harbor laws are also supposed to define “trafficked and sexually exploited children as victims of abuse and neglect.” (Polaris Project, 2013, p. 1). Therefore, rather than being prosecuted, sexually exploited children should be granted protection and access to specialized social services that are designed to meet the unique needs of sex trafficking victims (Polaris Project, 2013).

According to the Polaris Project (2014), 22 states have enacted Safe Harbor laws that provide some level of protection to commercially sexually exploited children. However, current Safe Harbor laws vary from state to state, meaning that in some states anyone under the age of 18 is

granted immunity for engaging in prostitution-related offenses where as, other states may define a “minor” as anyone under 16 years of age (Polaris Project, 2013). Other states allow minors or first-time offender to participate in diversion programs in lieu of prosecution (Polaris Project, 2013). This however is not enough, all 50 states should enact Safe Harbor Laws that provide immunity to anyone under the age of 18 from being prosecuted for prostitution-related offenses and all 50 states need to provide funding for services for sex trafficking victims.

Law enforcement officials also need to continue to combat sex trafficking by identifying and protecting victims of sex trafficking and by aggressively pursuing those who sexually exploit them. It is important that offenders be arrested, prosecuted and issued stiff penalties because previous research has shown that prostitute-users would be most deterred from paying to have sex if they: are added to a sex offender registry, publicly exposed by having their name or photo published on a billboard, in the newspaper or online, are given time in prison, have a letter sent to their family members, have their driver’s license suspended, have their car impounded, and are required to pay fines greater than \$1,000 (Farley, et al., 2011). Thus, in the interest of social justice it is important that law enforcement officials, prosecutors and judges, follow best practices by combining arrest, prosecution and participation in restorative justice programs. The purpose of restorative justice programs like “John School” is to hold offenders accountable for their actions (Minnesota Human

Trafficking Task Force, 2014). Offenders who are court ordered to attend "John School" learn how their actions have harmed others directly from prostitution/sex trafficking survivors and the fees that offenders are required to pay to attend "John School" are then used to fund programs and services that provide assistance to the women and children victimized by prostitution/sex trafficking.

It is also important for law enforcement to continue to use a victim-centered approach in their efforts to combat sex-trafficking, meaning that the primary objective is to rescue and protect victims. It is important for law enforcement and prosecutors to ensure that "the needs of the victim extend beyond the closure of any criminal investigation or proceeding." (Minnesota Human Trafficking Task Force, 2014, p. 3). Lastly, it is important for law enforcement agencies to enforce previously existing state and federal laws that are designed to prevent "sexually exploitive businesses" such as strip-clubs and massage parlors from engaging in or allowing illegal activities. These illegal activities can include: "sex trafficking, child abuse, prostitution, obscene performances, and lewd and lascivious behavior" (Minnesota Human Trafficking Task Force, 2014, p. 4).

The findings of this research also have implications for social work practice, as well. It is important for social workers to focus on identifying and rescuing victims and on connecting victims of sex trafficking to resources such as social programs, health care and housing programs that

are designed to meet their unique needs. It is also important for social workers to learn how to best prevent vulnerable women and children from being recruited and trafficked for sex and how to best reduce male demand for commercial sex. Social workers should also work to form coalitions between local service agencies to analyze how they can better meet the needs of victims of sex trafficking. Lastly, social workers should advocate/lobby for increased funding for services for victims of sex trafficking and for policies that expand legal protections for individuals who have been trafficked for sex.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Future researchers should focus on conducting research on public attitudes toward prostitution and the social stigmas affixed to prostitution at the state and local levels since, social stigmas vary from one society to the next (Della Giusta, Di Tomasso, & Strom, 2009). Future research in this area is important because of the influence social stigmas have on public attitudes towards prostitution and the over demand for commercial sex (Della Giusta, et al., 2009). It is also important for future research to be conducted at the state and local level to assess public awareness and understanding of the dangers and harms of prostitution/ sex trafficking so that policy makers and social workers can use this information when creating future interventions at the local level such as: public service announcements that are designed to educate the public about the dangers and harms of prostitution/sex trafficking, demand reduction strategies and laws and legal consequences for those who choose to sexually exploit the women and children used in prostitution/sex



trafficking .

### **Limitations**

Due to the preliminary nature of the aforementioned study some limitations should be considered before the findings can be generalized to the general population.

The limitations of this study are: time, resources, sample size, the representativeness of a sample, and response bias. Due to the time constraints surrounding the nature of this study the researcher was not able to administer the survey via other online survey recruiting websites. Time constraints and resources also limited the size of the sample used in this study. Given more time and resources, the researcher would have been able to recruit and pay for more survey respondents. The study's sample size is also a limitation of this study because smaller sample sizes typically result in samples that may not be representative of the overall population and therefore one must use caution before generalizing the results of this study. The representativeness of this sample is also a limitation of this study for several reasons. The first reason is due to the fact that 65% of survey respondents identified themselves as male and only 35% of respondents identified themselves as female. The representativeness of this sample is also a limitation for this study because the majority of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 34 years of age, which is younger than the adult population of the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The sample of survey respondents is also more educated than the U.S. adult population, with the majority of respondents reporting having earned a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Another limitation of this study is that questionnaire response rates vary greatly and response rates less than 100% can result in a biased sample. This is because

individuals who choose to complete the survey may differ in some way from individuals who choose not to complete the survey and this difference could affect the research findings (Monette, 2011). Response bias could also be influenced by the fact that the survey was only available on the Mechanical Turk website and not everyone has equal access to the Internet nor, is everyone is familiar with the website (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2010). Since, all study respondents were recruited through an online web service that allows users to sort through HITs by payment amount it is possible that survey respondents could have been biased by the payment rate associated with this survey (Ipeirotis, 2010). This study is also limited by the fact that surveys only measure what respondents report about their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Thus, researchers cannot know for certain whether respondents' survey responses are an actual reflection of the respondents' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Monette, et al., 2010). Another limitation of online surveys is that "the researcher has no assurance that the person who should answer the questionnaire is the one who actually does" (Monette, et al. 2010, p. 177). Also, due to the nature of online surveys, the researcher was not able to observe the respondents' non-verbal behaviors or ask respondents any follow-up questions. Nor, was there the opportunity for survey respondents to ask the researcher any clarifying questions they may have had about the survey administration process or survey content (Monette, et al. 2010).

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of the general public's awareness of sex trafficking and to better understand the general public's attitudes related to prostitution, in hopes that social workers and policy makers can

use the information gained from this research to inform future interventions and demand reduction strategies.

Sex trafficking is an important issue for the field of social work because according to the NASW Code of Ethics (2008): "Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people" (p. 3). Thus, social workers are required to "pursue social change . . . on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people" (p. 3) and since Raymond (2004) states: "The most glaring evidence of women's marginalization and social inequality is the rampant commodification of women in prostitution, sex trafficking, sex tourism, and mail-order-bride industries"(p.1184). Thus, it is clear that social workers must pursue social change on behalf of the vulnerable women and children that are exploited by the commercial sex industry because it is increasing at an alarming rate. In order to pursue social change social workers must work with both victims and offenders to address the factors that fuel the supply and demand for prostitution and sexual exploitation (Wolf-Branigin, et al., 2010).

Given that previous research has shown that the majority of men who pay for sex are aware of the abuse and exploitation that goes along with prostitution/sex trafficking and that legalizing prostitution has only led to a dramatic expansion of both the legal and illegal commercial sex market it is important that we get the word out that:

“. . . Prostitution cannot be made respectable. Legalization does not make it so. Prostitution is an industry that arises from the historical subordination of women and the historical right of men to buy and

exchange women simply as objects for sexual use. It thrives on poverty, drug abuse, the trafficking of vulnerable women and children. Prostitution teaches men how to mistreat women and damages the lives of both the women who are used . . . and the status of all women in the state. Legalization causes the business of sexual exploitation to flourish. As more and more women and children are drawn into the industry, and more and more men become abusers, the profits from the abuse become an indispensable part of the state's revenue (Sullivan, & Jeffrey, 2001, p.12-13).

Therefore, if we want the United States to be a modern, democratic society with full-gender equality we as a society need to reject the idea that women and children can be bought and sold for the sole purpose of satisfying the sexual urges of men (Ekberg, 2004). Thus, the United States should adopt the Swedish Model that officially acknowledges that prostitution is a "form of male sexual violence against women and children" (Ekberg, 2004, p. 1189). By refusing to separate prostitution and sex trafficking into two different categories; Sweden considers both prostitution and sex trafficking to be "harmful practices that are intrinsically linked" (Ekberg, p. 1189). Sweden has also established "a zero-tolerance policy for prostitution and trafficking in human beings" (Ekberg, 2004, p. 1187) with the belief that when the individuals who pay for sex risk punishment, the demand for prostitution and sex trafficking will decrease (Ekberg, 2004).

As long as society tolerates prostitution and the adult sex industry women and

children will continue suffer tremendous abuse by the men who sexually exploit them. Thus, policy changes need to be put in place that educate and sensitize the public about the dangers of the commercial sex industry and to address the socialized concept that commercial sex services need to exist to satisfy men's biological need for sex.

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## Appendix A

### Attitudes Toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness

Q1 Are you 18 years of age or older?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q2 Are you a resident or citizen of the United States?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Please state the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

#### Questions of Legalizing Prostitution:

Q3 Prostitution should be legalized in the state where I live.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat Agree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Disagree (5)

Q4 It is ok for consenting adults to agree to exchange money for sex.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat Agree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Disagree (5)

Q5 Prostitution is ok, as long as the health risks can be minimized.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat Agree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Disagree (5)

Q6 Demand for prostitution increases when prostitution is legalized.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q7 Legalizing prostitution promotes sex trafficking.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q8 When prostitution is legal men are more likely to pay for sex.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q9 Legalizing prostitution protects the women used in prostitution.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q10 Prostitution is a necessary evil in our society.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Human Trafficking Awareness:

Q11 Pimps often use physical force to control the women they prostitute.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q12 Pimp-controlled prostitution is a form of human trafficking.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q13 Prostitution is a form of sexual exploitation.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q14 Prostitution and sex trafficking are the same thing.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q15 I believe that the majority of girls used in prostitution are controlled by a sex trafficker or "pimp."

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q16 Without male demand prostitution would cease to exist.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Attitudes towards pimps/sex traffickers:

Q17 Pimps should be considered legitimate businessmen and entrepreneurs.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q18 Pimps sexually exploit vulnerable women and children.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q19 Human traffickers prey on the weak and vulnerable and then exploit them for their own financial gain.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q20 Human traffickers use physical and psychological abuse to control and sexually exploit their victims.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Attitudes towards prostitutes/victims of sex trafficking:

Q21 Most people who engage in prostitution choose to do so of their own free will.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q22 Women and children used in prostitution are victims of sex trafficking.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q23 Nearly all of the women and children used in prostitution are victims of child sexual abuse, rape, or incest.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q24 I believe that the majority of women and children who have been prostituted are chemically dependent.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q25 I believe that the majority of women and children who have been prostituted have mental health issues.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q26 Nearly all of the women and girls used in prostitution want to “escape the life” but don’t know where to turn for help.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q27 Women and children used in prostitution should be arrested for breaking the law.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q28 Women and children used in prostitution should be treated as victims not criminals.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Q29 I believe that the majority of women and girls who have been prostituted/trafficked are psychologically damaged.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)

Attitudes about Commercial Sex Buyers/"Johns":

Q30 It is normal for men to pay to have sex.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q31 Men are less likely to commit rape if they can pay to have sex with a prostitute.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q32 The current penalties for engaging in prostitution are appropriate.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q33 The names of people who are convicted of paying to have sex should be publicly released.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q34 People convicted of paying to have sex with women in prostitution should face stiff penalties.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q35 Men convicted of paying to have sex with women should be registered sex offenders.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)



Q36 Men from “all walks of life” pay for sex.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q37 People who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should face stiff penalties.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q38 Men who pay for sex are often married.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q39 People who are convicted of paying to have sex with children should be registered sex offenders.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q40 Men who pay for sex are lonely.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q41 People who pay to have sex with children should be required to pay a fine.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q42 Men who pay to have sex with women in prostitution should be required to pay a fine.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q43 Men who are convicted of paying to have sex with women should spend time in jail.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q44 People convicted of paying to have sex with children should spend time in jail.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q45 There is something wrong with men who pay for sex.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q46 I would be ashamed to have a family member or friend who paid for sex.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q47 If prostitution is legalized, there will be an increase in child prostitution.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q48 I believe, that most of the individuals used in prostitution are 18 years old or older.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Demographics:

Q49 In which state do you currently reside?

- Alabama (1)
- Alaska (2)
- Arizona (3)
- Arkansas (4)
- California (5)
- Colorado (6)
- Connecticut (7)
- Delaware (8)
- District of Columbia (9)
- Florida (10)
- Georgia (11)
- Hawaii (12)
- Idaho (13)
- Illinois (14)
- Indiana (15)
- Iowa (16)

- Kansas (17)
- Kentucky (18)
- Louisiana (19)
- Maine (20)
- Maryland (21)
- Massachusetts (22)
- Michigan (23)
- Minnesota (24)
- Mississippi (25)
- Missouri (26)
- Montana (27)
- Nebraska (28)
- Nevada (29)
- New Hampshire (30)
- New Jersey (31)
- New Mexico (32)
- New York (33)
- North Carolina (34)
- North Dakota (35)
- Ohio (36)
- Oklahoma (37)
- Oregon (38)
- Pennsylvania (39)
- Rhode Island (40)
- South Carolina (41)
- South Dakota (42)
- Tennessee (43)
- Texas (44)
- Utah (45)
- Vermont (46)
- Virginia (47)
- Washington (48)
- West Virginia (49)
- Wisconsin (50)
- Wyoming (51)
- I do not live in the continental United States (52)

Q50 Do you consider yourself to be:

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Transgender (3)

Q51 How old are you?

- 18-25 (1)
- 26-34 (2)
- 35-44 (3)
- 45-55 (4)
- 56-64 (5)
- 65+ (6)

Q52 Do you consider yourself religious?

- Yes Very (1)
- Yes (2)
- Somewhat (3)
- Not really (4)
- No (5)

Q53 Highest completed level of education:

- Some High School (1)
- High School Diploma/GED (2)
- Some College (3)
- Bachelor's Degree (4)
- Master's Degree or Higher (5)

Q54 What is your current relationship status?

- Single (1)
- Married/Committed Relationship (2)
- Divorced (3)
- Separated (4)
- Other (5)

Q55 Have you ever seen anything in the media about sex trafficking?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q56 Do you know anyone who has paid for sex?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q57 Have you ever paid for sex?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

## **Appendix B**

### **Letter of Informed Consent University of St. Thomas**

#### **Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey**

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating public attitudes regarding prostitution and awareness of sex trafficking. This study is being conducted by Katelyn Nichols, graduate student of the School of Social Work at the College of St. Catherine/University of St. Thomas. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are an adult member of the general public. Please read this form before you agree to be in the study.

#### **Background Information**

The Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey is designed to measure public attitudes related to prostitution, commercial sex buyers, and awareness of sex trafficking. The survey and data collection serves three purposes: 1) to assess public attitudes about prostitution and commercial sex buyers/"Johns", 2) to assess the general public's awareness of sex trafficking, and 3) to disseminate findings and outcomes to professional audiences.

#### **Procedures**

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey, which will take approximately 5 -10 minutes to complete. The survey will include questions asking how much you agree or disagree with specific statements and a brief section with general demographic questions.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

There are no known risks in this research. The only benefit of participation in this research is the \$0.25 reward that you will receive as payment via Mechanical Turk for participating in the study.

#### **Confidentiality**

The data from this survey is completely anonymous. The surveys will not contain or ask for any identifying information. The electronic dataset derived from this survey will be kept in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. Only the researchers named in this form will have access to the surveys. Electronic data files containing numerical data from this study will be saved and may be used for future research.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research study, you are free to stop at any time. You may also skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you do not wish to participate in this study, please exit the survey now. Completing and submitting the survey implies your consent to

participate in this research. Once you have submitted your survey, there is no way to exclude your data from the project as surveys and data are anonymous.

**Contacts and Questions**

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the researcher listed above:

Katelyn Nichols, MSW Student: 651-269-0211 ([nich2229@stthomas.edu](mailto:nich2229@stthomas.edu))

If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6038.

You may keep this copy of this form for your records.