An In-Depth Financial Analysis of Sex Trafficking on OnlyFans

Social Research Lab at the

University of Northern Colorado

January 19, 2024

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

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The *Social Research Lab* (SRL) of the *University of Northern Colorado* prepared this report at the request of *Awareness is Prevention (AIP)*. All identifying information has been removed and identified data is stored securely at the SRL only. The SRL is dedicated to assisting individuals and organizations in all stages of data collection and analysis.

Any questions about research projects tailored to your needs should be directed to Dr. Angie Henderson at angie.henderson@unco.edu or 970-351-2195.

Executive Summary

In recent years, researchers and investigative journalists have documented how sex trafficking is being facilitated on *OnlyFans*[1] [2] [3] though it remains difficult to determine how rampant it is on the site. While the Lundstrom (2021) report provided evidence that trafficking has occurred on *OnlyFans*, it left gaps in our understanding of how trafficking and exploitation happen on the site. The present report was designed to fill in those gaps and gain a clearer understanding of the mechanics of trafficking on subscription-based platforms like *OnlyFans*. Specifically, we wanted to better understand *how* sex trafficking occurs on this site, including how traffickers utilize the platform, which payment providers facilitate this activity, and where these activities occur.

To answer these research questions, the research team analyzed case study data provided by survivors of sex trafficking[4]. The data analyzed consisted of a network of accounts provided to our research team. This included the entirety of (1) her (alleged[5]) trafficker's OF account, (2) his bottom's account (the second-in-command in the trafficking operation and often the trafficker's first victim) and (3) the accounts of his other victims (including herself). The dataset included all activity, including logins, subscribers, I.P. addresses for both the account holder and its subscribers, record of all financial transactions, including country of origin, amount spent per transaction, and total revenue that was generated through all related accounts.

Results indicate that this alleged trafficker was able to successfully funnel over $1 million in funds from each of his victims' accounts directly to his own business bank accounts. Both the trafficker as well as the parent company profit from sexual exploitation of trafficking victims. In addition, we highlight the financial systems that participated in this business model as well as the countries where the content was consumed.

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[1] Lundstrom, M. (2021). *OnlyFans: A Case Study of Exploitation in the Digital Age.* Greeley: The Avery Center for Research & Services.

[2] Expert Analysis of Open Source Material relating to Child Sexual Abuse Material and Sex Trafficking occurring on OnlyFans.com. April 3, 2022. Anti-Human Trafficking Intelligence Initiative. Retrieved from https://followmoneyfightslavery.org/expert-analysis-ofbropen-source-material-relating-to-child-sexual-abuse-material-and-sex-trafficking-occurring-on-onlyfans-com/.

[3] National Center on Sexual Exploitation 2023 Dirty Dozen List: OnlyFans -

https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/the-2023-dirty-dozen-list-revealed/

[4] This project is a culmination of data that initially was collected by non-profit organization *The Avery Center (TAC).* Following TAC's dissolution in August 2023, co-founders Angie Henderson & Megan Lundstrom finished the project research through the SRL at UNCO. Bianca Ramos and Niyah Sheffield, former employees of TAC, contributed to early work on this project.

[5] This individual has not been proven to be guilty of human trafficking charges in a court of law. We are using the label "alleged" trafficker to describe how this individual was described to us, the researchers.

Sample & Methods

The data provided to the research team for this project included complete information from 13 *OnlyFans* accounts including subscriber totals, financial statements from revenue generated on OF, and gross revenue. The data includes a trafficker's account, his bottom's account (the second-in-command in the trafficking operation and often the trafficker's first victim) and the accounts of his victims. One of these accounts is the trafficker's own account where he sold content he generated with his victims. Three of the accounts were controlled by the trafficker's second in command or bottom. The remaining accounts were other victims of the same trafficker that he at one time or another had managed and received money from their content sales to his LLC. The final *OnlyFans* account in this data set with financial and behavior information appeared to be the trafficker's legal business front and used to promote and generate indirect revenue for all his victims' individual pages under the guise of a management company.

Financial Data

For the financial analysis, there were a total of seven document types available. These documents included registration documents from when the account was first created, as well as earnings and payout statements. In total, 60 documents across 12 trafficking victims and one trafficker were analyzed for this report. This data provides sufficient context to describe and explain how this trafficker operated on the *OnlyFans* platform, and better understand the patterns associated with third party-controlled accounts and trafficker behavior patterns on the *OnlyFans* platform. See Table 1 for a description of the accounts and revenue generated.

Table 1. Case Study Data: A Trafficker's Business Operations on OnlyFans

Subscribers	Association with Other Accounts (if applicable)	VIP	Gross Revenue
6	NA	N	$60
5	NA	N	$140
112	NA	N	$1754.15
1	Victim of Trafficker	N	$10
5,000	Trafficker	N	$74,138.99
61	Bottom of Trafficker	N	$2,769.46
64,607	Bottom of Trafficker	Y	$834,252.36
24,939	Bottom of Trafficker	Y	$220,722.77
2	Victim of Trafficker	N	$20
1	Victim of Trafficker	N	$5
1	Victim of Trafficker	N	$6
1	Victim of Trafficker	N	$10
0	Trafficker's Legal Business Front Using Bottom's Information (used for promotion, not generating direct revenue)	N	$0

Note: VIP indicates the content creator's status according to OnlyFans.

As those familiar with trafficking crimes know well, trafficking is often difficult to identify. Investigators typically focus on a series of patterns, which, when analyzed collectively, indicate that trafficking is occurring. These indicators constantly evolve as traffickers develop new methodologies to evade detection of law enforcement. When traffickers choose to monetize their crimes by broadcasting them digitally over a paywall protected medium such as *OnlyFans*, it presents an additional challenge to investigators- traffickers commonly use their victim's accounts to publish content. This means that it is exceedingly difficult to prove coercion, and that a crime is or was committed. Thus, while the victims physically carry out the actions on their account and appear to be direct beneficiaries of compensation, they are operating under duress or direct instruction from their abuser rather than of their own free will. Despite these challenges, the data set analyzed included enough contextual information to begin a preliminary exploration of potential behavior patterns of traffickers for financial and tech crimes experts to consider as they perform investigations and develop more precise identification and deterrence systems.

The primary portion of the data set that was analyzed for potential trafficker behavior indicators started with the login activity entries. This data subset contained 5,443 unique user activities across 12 *OnlyFans* accounts. Of these activities, 208 were *OnlyFans*' automatic monthly renewals of the content creator's accounts and therefore contained no relevant information about trafficker behaviors. This left 5,235 unique user activities for analysis. For each activity, the date and time, type and description of activity was available in the login activity entries.

Additionally, I.P. addresses were available in the data set, but were de-identified and coded

using an Excel function to remove all individual-level identifiable information (e.g., USA1, USA2, Canada3) from the data set before it was analyzed by the research team. We did generate a code that kept the addresses' country of origin only.

Using this subsample, two assumptions were made by the researchers to define the parameters of the data subset that they would explore as being associated directly with the trafficker physically taking actions.

First, it was assumed that unique coded (IP) addresses would be primary in identifying the devices used to manage the accounts. This assumption was based on existing knowledge of pimp-controlled sex trafficking operations that it is typically the trafficker that manages online accounts of victims using their own device(s). It is also possible, based on existing knowledge, that the trafficker might have directly instructed and supervised his bottom on the management of online accounts using the bottom's device(s). Regardless, activity across accounts coming from the same concentration of IP addresses would suggest physical trafficking activity as opposed to independent content creator decisions, or decisions made along the spectrum of choice and at varying levels of force, fraud, and/or coercion. It is quite likely that both the trafficker and his victims in this network had multiple devices with other IP addresses not
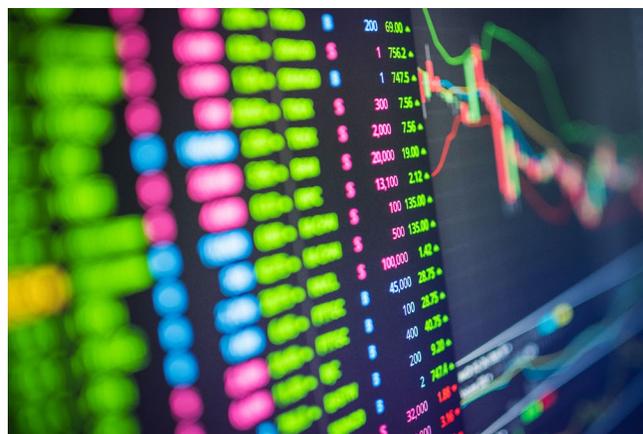
found in the main information sheet from each account. However, starting with this specific dataset ensured trafficker behavior patterns could be as closely tracked and applied to the larger data subset as possible.

Ten of the 13 accounts were all registered through one IP address, one did not have an IP address provided, and the other two accounts had two additional unique IP addresses. The primary IP address that had been the origin of the registration for most of the accounts was used for an exploratory process, with 833 unique activities occurring on that IP address between April 2019 and September 2021 across 10 of the accounts. These primary IP addresses all originated within the U.S. and came from five different cities.

Second, it was assumed that the trafficker managed his own *OnlyFans* account to retain control over his reputation and to increase revenue generation of his victims. It would be too risky for the trafficker to have one of his victims manage his account in the event they were able to escape his control. In exiting the trafficking operation, they could potentially delete his content or expose him as a trafficker by editing the information in his profile. By delegating its management to his bottom or other victims, they would end up spending less time themselves generating and promoting their content, which is where most of his profits were made. By looking at the IP addresses the trafficker used to access his own account, it was observed that the trafficker had 454 unique user activities from 79 different IP addresses. The eight IP addresses from the main registration information sheets on each account were removed from the trafficker's account subset, and then 90 unique activities that did not contain city-level information for the IP addresses were also removed. This left 327 unique activities logged from the

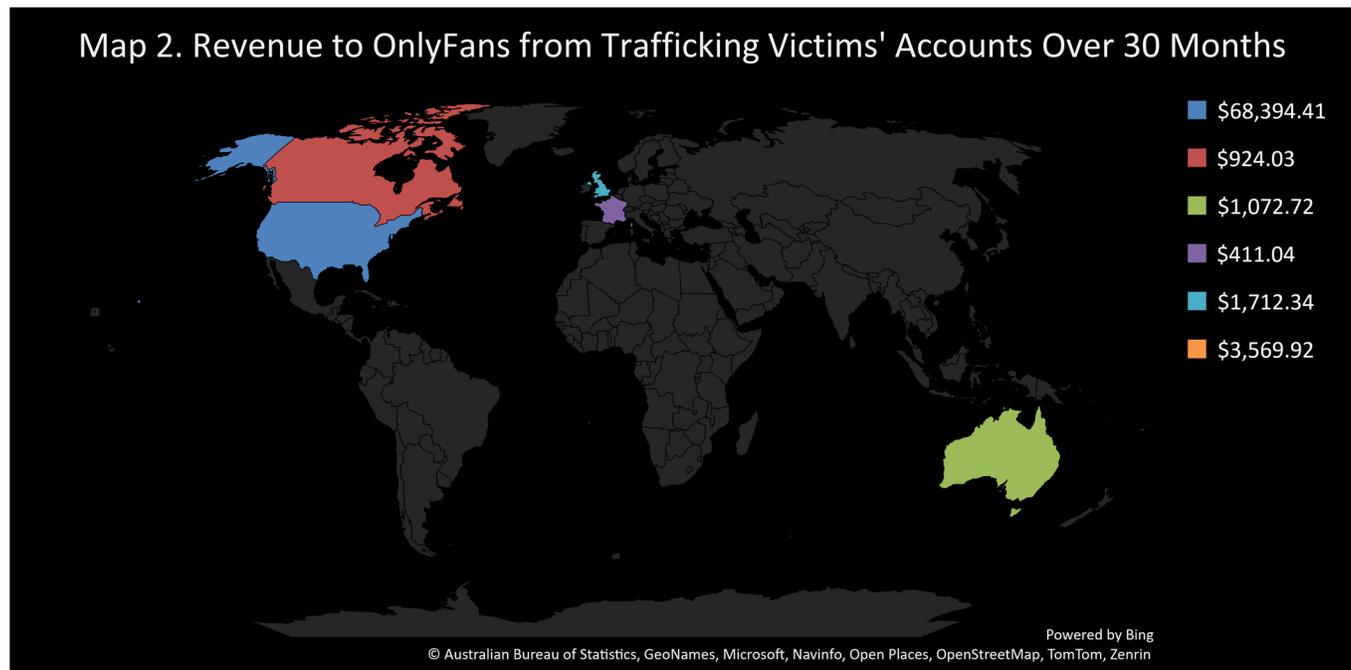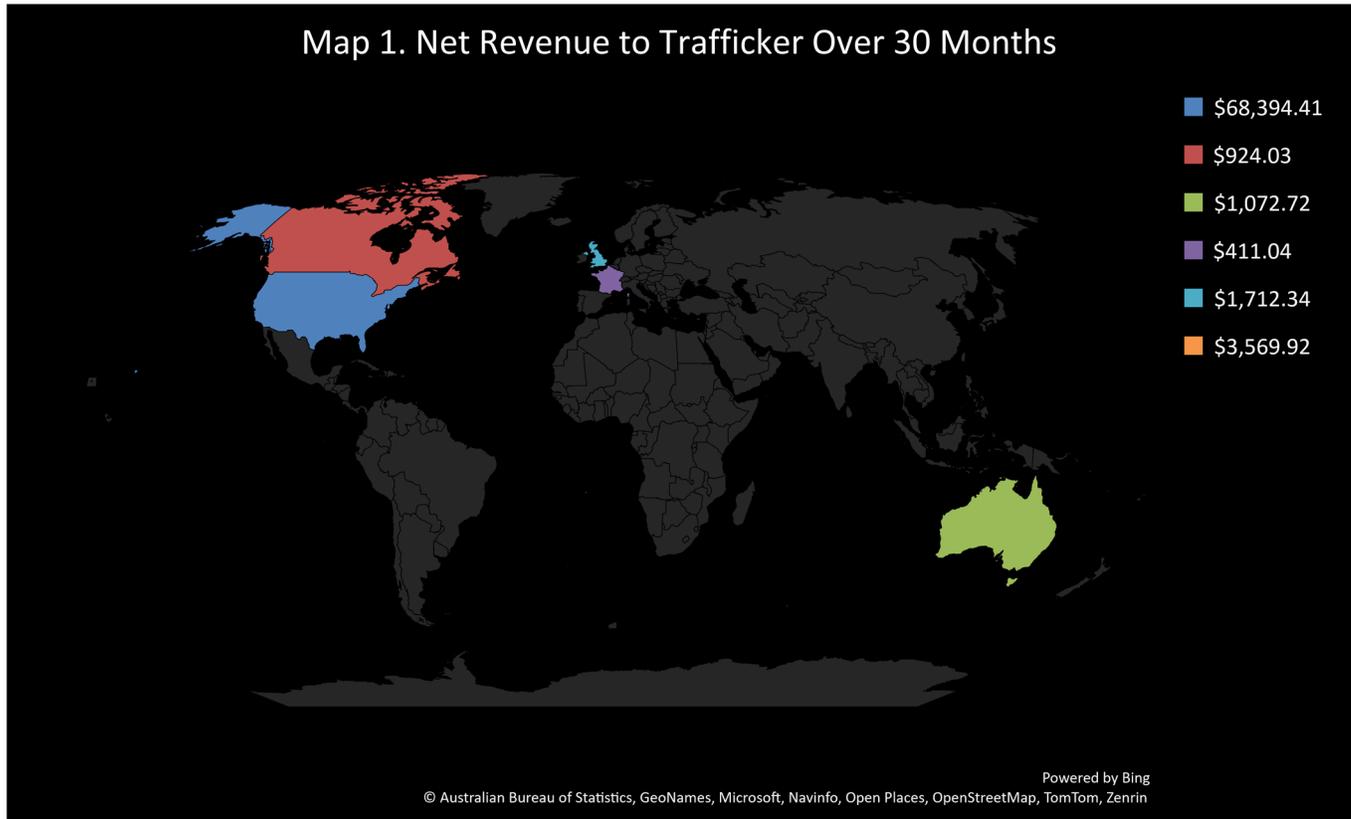traffickers' account for review, and then to be added to the exploratory data subset.

Of the 1,160 data points for the trafficker behavior exploration, the subsample was further cleaned to remove any rows with missing data points to ensure a quality sample. This left a subsample of 823 unique activities on the trafficker's IP addresses.

Results

To ascertain where the trafficked victims' OF content from our sample was being consumed, we analyzed the coded IP addresses by country. Overall, the United States was the largest consumer of the trafficked women in this dataset in total revenue to the trafficker (Map 1) and to *OnlyFans* (Map 2). That is, subscribers from the U.S. generated $273,577.96 in revenue to the victims' trafficker over 30 months. The U.K. came in second at $6849.37, followed by Australia at $4290.74,

Map 1. Net Revenue to Trafficker Over 30 Months

- $68,394.41
- $924.03
- $1,072.72
- $411.04
- $1,712.34
- $3,569.92

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Map 2. Revenue to OnlyFans from Trafficking Victims' Accounts Over 30 Months

- $68,394.41
- $924.03
- $1,072.72
- $411.04
- $1,712.34
- $3,569.92

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Canada at $3696.03 and France at $1644.14. These figures are based on the victims' financial statements provided to the lead researcher. All other countries not listed here combined equaled $14,279.52.

From those figures, a percentage of the revenue went to *OnlyFans,* as is part of their business model. Again, subscribers from the U.S. generated $68,394.41 for OF during this time, followed by the U.K. ($1,712.34), Australia ($1,072.72), Canada ($924.03) and France $411.04). All other countries combined equaled $3,569.92.

We analyzed revenue generated by type of content consumed on OnlyFans (See Table 2). Interestingly, when we cross-tabulated the type of content consumed by the top consuming countries in the data set, the U.S. was the only country consuming live streams

Table 2. Profits by Content Type

Revenue Source	Total Gross Revenue Generated
Chat message	$172,580.30
Subscription	$760,518.40
Post	$104,115.02
Live Stream	$2223.00
Tips	$17,534.46
Unknown	$76,908.45
TOTAL	**$1,133,879.17**

($25.49 per transaction, on average). This was the highest average cost per transaction, with chat messages averaging around $8, Posts around $7, subscriptions around $14, and tips ranged from $18.20 in the U.S. to $94.46 in the U.K.

Corporate Facilitation of and Profit in Online Trafficking

Anti-trafficking efforts have historically focused on companies such as Craigslist, Backpage, PornHub and Mind Geek, and more recently Meta, TikTok, Twitter, and OnlyFans as corporate facilitators of online sex trafficking. While these are the public-facing component of the supply chain for traffickers to advertise and sell their victims online to consumers, there are a series of companies operating behind the scenes that connect the end consumer to the victim and facilitate the movement of illicit funds from the consumer through the financial systems to the trafficker. These companies are complicit in, and profit from, online sex trafficking, despite the lack of public attention to them.

This data set allowed researchers to explore in greater detail how payment companies facilitated funds transfer to the trafficker's accounts. For this analysis, the payment companies were pulled from the total sample as well as separated out for the primary countries with large subsamples. A total of eight payment companies were utilized to facilitate the transfer of funds from the consumer's bank accounts to the victims' and trafficker's OnlyFans account and then on to the trafficker's bank account.

Payment companies Inovio, CC Bill and Securion Pay were the top three payment processors both in volume of unique transactions as well as in total gross revenue for the trafficker (See Table 3). The profits this trafficker received from the sale of his victims' content on OnlyFans would not have been possible without payment companies' products and services.

Table 3. Unique Transactions by Credit Card Processing Country, by Top Countries

	TOTAL	U.S.	Canada	Australia	France	U.K.
Inovio	8641	7429	69	53	17	88
CC Bill	4739	4568	7	11	16	19
Securionpay	3588	1672	150	94	60	237
Internal	1024	795	38	27	9	29
Checkout	766	499	0	67	18	53
Emerchantpay	4	2	0	0	0	1
Optile	4	3	0	1	0	0
Stripe	1	0	0	1	0	0
TOTAL	17,042	14,968	264	254	120	427

Table 4. Gross Trafficking Profits by Credit Card Processing Country, by Top Countries

	U.S.	Canada	Australia	France	U.K.
Inovio	$104,538	$746	$697	$152	$1,467
CC Bill	$63,123	$84	$121	$171	$280
Securion pay	$23,287	$2,085	$1,223	$640	$2,523
Internal	$11,260	$395	$275	$97	$299
Checkout	$7,119	$0	$975	$225	$800
Optile	$45	$0	$20	$0	$0
Emerchant pay	$21	$0	$0	$0	$15
Stripe	$0.00	$0	$15	$0	$0

*Rounded to the nearest dollar

Additionally, we analyzed revenue generated by type of content consumed on OF (See Table 4). Interestingly, when we cross-tabulated the type of content consumed by the top consuming countries in the data set, the U.S. was the only country consuming live streams ($25.49 per transaction, on average). This was the highest average cost per transaction, with chat messages averaging around $8, Posts around $7, subscriptions around $14, and tips ranged from $18.20 in the U.S. to $94.46 in the U.K.

Discussion

The findings of this exploratory project suggest that U.S. men are among the top consumers of commercial sex worldwide. It is important to note that the data set provided to the lead researcher for this project came from a victim based in the U.S., which explains the overrepresentation of U.S. consumers in the data. U.S.-based sex buyers have openly admitted on sex buyer forums that they use OnlyFans to "window shop" or verify an individual being sold for sex online before soliciting them for the purposes of prostitution in person.

While most studies around purchasing sex focus on the purchase of in-person sexual acts from people in prostitution, this dataset suggests a causal link between viewing pornography and other sexually explicit digital content, and in-person transactions.

U.S. buyers generate the most money for trafficking on OnlyFans simply due to sheer volume of unique subscribers, however they spend the least per subscriber and per transaction when compared to other countries. They also spent the most on content types other than subscriptions, most of which required a higher level of personalization by the content creator to their fan base, direct interactions with their subscribers, and as such demands far more emotional labor on the part of the content creator. This could suggest that U.S. buyers have higher desensitization to sexually explicit content due to higher levels of general consumption and the normalization of the behavior, and as a result higher levels of entitlement to accessing women's bodies and their attention at the lowest cost. This finding was contrasted by U.K. buyers, who purchased more subscriptions per subscriber, and spent the most per person and per transaction.

While U.K. buyers are a smaller portion of worldwide consumers than the U.S., they are likely also a smaller portion of consumers within their own country as well. Potentially due to different social norms, U.K. buyers are a smaller proportion of the population and pornography consumption is less normalized, perhaps driving U.K. buyers to spend more on this unique and/or secretive experience.

The sale of sex through force, fraud and coercion would not be possible in the digital age without payment companies. While companies like OnlyFans attract higher levels of attention regarding child sex abuse material (CSAM) and sex trafficking on their platforms, there are hundreds of companies behind the scenes connecting funds from consumers to the pockets of traffickers in exchange for the sale of vulnerable and marginalized people without their true consent. These technology companies should also be held accountable for their roles in the gross negligence of activities occurring through their products and services.

In this one trafficking operation alone, OnlyFans executives and stakeholders profited just over $226,000 USD during the time period of analyzed. This trafficking operation's profits to the company accounts for only 4% of the $157 million in dividends that OnlyFans owner [Leonid Radvinsky was paid during the same period](). The trafficking observed in this project that is occurring on OnlyFans is certainly not the only trafficking continuing to happen on its platform. Company stakeholders benefit immensely from trafficking thus creating a conflict of interest for the company when it comes to business decisions. They are faced with the choice of protecting the welfare of marginalized and vulnerable individuals and making their stakeholders happy.

Up until now, OnlyFans has danced the delicate line of acknowledging individual instances of

trafficking on their platform as law enforcement and reporting agencies notify them but doing very little to be proactive in their education and prevention of future trafficking. Additionally, OnlyFans should be held to a considerably higher standard because its business model has instituted a paywall preventing law enforcement and NGOs from proactive analysis of sex trafficking across the platform. OnlyFans has evaded preemptive measures using the defense that they cannot act if they are not aware of trafficking. This study demonstrates the reality that traffickers have infiltrated the platform and can operate seemingly legitimate companies. OnlyFans can no longer look the other way, as to do so would be in direct violation of FOSTA/SESTA and an act of willful negligence on their part. As a company, OnlyFans has a significant amount of work to do to identify and remove trafficking that is occurring on its platform. The choice to operate and generate revenue in the adult services sector of the market ensures that they will forever deal with trafficking and other abuses happening to creators on their platform as trafficking and the sex trade are inextricably linked. Owners and stakeholders are enjoying immense profits at the expense of marginalized and vulnerable individuals.

While this particular study focuses on OnlyFans and the countless interrelated companies, there are other such adult content platforms presently operating, or venture capitalists ready to create the next platform for traffickers to dominate. These companies can utilize the information in this study to explore the risks and reality of making money in the sex trade and the guarantee that investors and stakeholders *will* be directly complicit in the trafficking in persons at a global scale.

Limitations & Future Research

This dataset, while significant in volume in some regards, has limitations. This dataset was limited to only one type (pimp-controlled) of trafficker's operation during a relatively short period of time of his trafficking activities, and this was only one venue through which he profited from the sale of his victims. Future research should explore many other pimp-controlled trafficking operations to better understand trend level behaviors. Future research should also branch out beyond pimp-controlled trafficking to other typologies such as gang and familial-controlled trafficking operations to understand commonalities and variations across typologies.

There is substantial opportunity for future research. As mentioned above, traditional research and law enforcement tools for proactively scraping websites cannot penetrate the paywall associated with each OnlyFans account. Thus, it is challenging to analyze the prevalence of trafficking and abuse on OnlyFans (or for that matter, any subscription-based site). However, this research demonstrates how traffickers have infiltrated the platform, their methodologies, and the various corporate players that profit from these activities.

About the Research Team

Megan Lundstrom was the lead researcher on this project. Megan is a survivor of pimp-controlled sex trafficking and has published and presented on her expertise regarding the intersection of commercial sex and financial crimes. Megan is an expert in the field of anti-trafficking and currently works at Polaris as the Director of The Resilience Fund, a direct cash assistance program for survivors of human trafficking. In 2016, Megan published the only financial wellness curriculum for survivors of commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking, the Survivor's Guide to Money. Megan first collaborated with Polaris in 2020 to analyze a portion of her bank statements from the time of her trafficking, and the findings can be read in the co-authored publication: How Survivor-Led Collaborations Can Lead Anti-Money Laundering Efforts. Megan has been a Network Consultant through the Office for Trafficking in Persons since 2019 and has had the honor of contributing to projects such as the Department of Treasury's Report to Congress on An Analysis of Anti-Money Laundering Efforts Related to Human Trafficking. Megan holds a B.A. in Finance and an M.A. in Sociology from the University of Northern Colorado.

Dr. Angie Henderson is a Professor of Sociology and the Executive Director of the Social Research Lab at the University of Northern Colorado. She has published over 30 peer-reviewed journal articles, 4 book chapters, and two co-authored textbooks. Dr. Henderson regularly teaches courses on sex trafficking and global perspectives of prostitution at the University of Northern Colorado, and as part of her research has interviewed over 100 survivors of sexual exploitation and gathered data on sex buyers at both diversion programs and at point of arrest. She has most recently presented results of this work at the United Nations' Commission on Crime Prevention & Criminal Justice in Vienna, Austria in May 2023. Dr. Henderson helped with writing and editing this report.

About the Social Research Lab

The Social Research Lab at the University of Northern Colorado was founded in 2007 and has experience conducting a wide array of research projects including market research, focus groups, policy analyses, report writing, program evaluation, phone, mail and email surveys, interviews, needs assessments and quality of life studies. The SRL is staffed by professionally trained, unbiased researchers who tailor projects to the unique needs of individual clients in the public and private sectors. The lab works to simultaneously provide good data to clients so they can make better, more informed decisions while also providing hands-on learning experiences for UNC students. Furthermore, we understand that data security is of utmost importance. SRL computers operate on a secured server, and each terminal requires login credentials to ensure that data are accessed only by specified SRL staff.