

Demand Abolition

Best Practices for Reducing the Demand for Commercial Sex

The average age of entry into prostitution in the United States is 12 to 14 years old, with 100,000 to 300,000 children at risk for commercial sexual exploitation each year. By federal law, any minor involved in a commercial sex act is considered a trafficking victim. These *children* don't suddenly become willing participants in the sex industry on their 18th birthdays! To stop this exploitation and enslavement, we must eliminate the demand for illegal commercial sex.

The sex industry operates by standard supply-and-demand dynamics. Those who buy sex (usually men) fuel the demand that traffickers and pimps supply with victims (mostly women and girls). The commercial sex trade drives both the international and domestic sex trafficking markets. While it's critical to rescue the victims and pursue traffickers, growing recognition worldwide and within the US reveals that in market terms, tackling demand addresses illegal commercial sex at its core.

A number of successful initiatives within the United States are combating demand. A landscape analysis conducted by Abt Associates Inc. found that demand-reduction best practices include public awareness campaigns, law enforcement initiatives, and prevention education curricula. Public officials can play a key role in supporting demand-reduction efforts and have been instrumental in their implementation—and they can work with laws already on the books that outlaw the purchase of sex. These innovative best practices are critical to eradicating the commercial sex industry, which is dangerous to victims, degrading to perpetrators, and harmful to society. Until demand is eliminated, the sexual enslavement of children, women, and even men will continue.

Public Awareness

Through education and consciousness raising, public awareness initiatives generate the political will necessary to advance social change. Such initiatives include:

- **Atlanta:** The “**Dear John**” campaign led by the fearless former Mayor of Atlanta Shirley Franklin. Billboards and public-service announcements geared toward buyers of commercial sex announced “**Dear John, It’s over,**” sending the message that sexual predators aren’t welcome in her city. This no-tolerance campaign received national press attention
- **Chicago:** Sheriff Thomas Dart of Cook County recently launched a billboard campaign targeting buyers. Messages read, “**Dear John, if you’re here to solicit sex, it could cost you \$2,150. We’re teaming up to bust you.**”
- **Cleveland:** A neighborhood-initiated campaign targeted buyers with residents who took turns carrying signs that stated, “**Dear Johns, your plate number is being recorded. Yours truly, the neighbors.**”
- **Rochester, NY:** A grassroots neighborhood group put up billboards reading, “**Dear John, your relationship with this community is over.**”
- **San Antonio:** A neighborhood-initiated campaign involved residents who photographed buyers in cars, recorded license plate numbers, and sent the photos and information to police.

Law enforcement

In 2005, congressional findings in the End Demand for Sex Trafficking Bill stated that eleven females used in

commercial sex acts were arrested in Boston for every one arrest of a male purchaser. These kind of gross disparities nationwide illustrate the need for law enforcement to hold the buyers of illegal commercial sex accountable through more systematic arrests, stiffer penalties, and education programs. Law enforcement–led practices to reduce demand include:

First-time offender education programs or “john schools”

- These programs for men arrested for soliciting commercial sex must cover topics designed to deter men from buying sex again.
- John schools have been evaluated and proven effective:
 - A Department of Justice–funded study by **Michael Shively of Abt Associates** found that men who attended a first-time offender education program (FOPP) in San Francisco **were 40 percent less likely to be rearrested** for engaging in prostitution than arrested men who didn’t attend such a program.
 - Abt analyzed data that covered the 10 years prior to implementation and the 10 years after implementation, which showed a **sharp drop in recidivism** during the year of implementation that was sustained over the subsequent 10 years.
 - The **total fee revenue** generated by San Francisco’s FOPP was over **\$3.1 million**. This program pays for itself and covers social services for victims and survivors. Approximately **\$980,000 in fee revenue** was generated to **support programs for women and girls who were victims of prostitution.**

- Colorado Senate President Brandon Shaffer (D-Longmont) plans to introduce a bill in early 2011 to implement statewide classes for first-time offenders arrested for soliciting prostitution.

Reverse stings and arrests

- The most widespread demand-reduction strategy is the police decoy operation, or “reverse sting”; more than 650 sites nationally have conducted street-level reverse stings.
- In these stings, female officers pose as prostituted women who await being approached by men attempting to purchase sex. In web-based reverse stings, officers post a decoy ad online, and when potential buyers respond with a phone call or an email, the officers arrange for a meeting.
- In a study of men who buy sex in London conducted by Dr. Melissa Farley, **84 percent said they would be deterred from buying sex if they faced prison time.**
- Other law enforcement demand-reduction initiatives include neighborhood collaborations, such as tip lines and citizen patrols used to provide intelligence about sex buyers to police automobile seizure, community service programs, geographic restraining orders, letters sent to arrestees’ homes, and driver’s license suspensions.

Prevention Education

Curricula reaching a variety of groups must be implemented, particularly targeting school-age children, populations of boys and men more likely to become patrons of the sex industry, policymakers, and practitioners in professions combating sexual exploitation. Key demand-reduction curricula include:

US Department of Defense program

- Over the past 10 years, **DOD** has taken decisive action to ensure that the armed forces are part of the solution, rather than part of the problem.
- The military code of justice and policies has been strengthened, clarifying the language and imposing substantial penalties on any military personnel, including civilian staff and contractors, engaging in commercial sex.
 - The armed forces has zero tolerance for contributing to commercial sexual exploitation or trafficking.
 - A key message in the training materials addresses demand: The “bad guys” are “not just

the people who operate the trafficking enterprise. They’re also their customers,” who can be contractors, government civilians, or military personnel.

- **“Prostitution and human trafficking are demeaning acts toward women. By participating in this, a Soldier is contributing to the enslavement of women and girls from all over the world.”** – Capt. Kent Bennett, US Army, 2nd Infantry, Division Preventive Medicine Officer, 2004.

Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation’s demand-deterrence curriculum

- “Empowering Young Men toward Ending Sexual Exploitation” teaches high school boys about the exploitative and violent realities of the sex industry to prevent them from becoming patrons.

Resources:

- Estes, J. & Weiner, N.A. “The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the US, Canada and Mexico. Executive Summary” (of the US National Study), Univ. of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 2001.
- Farley, M., Bindel, J. & Golding, J.M. .“Men Who Buy Sex: Who They Buy and What They Know.” Prostitution Research & Education, San Francisco. Eaves, London, 2009.
- Shively, M., Kuck-Jalbert, S., Kling, R., Rhodes, W., Flygare, C., Finn, P., Tierney, L., Squires, D., & Dyou, C. “Final Report on the Evaluation of the First Offender Prostitution Program.” US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, 2008.
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- United States. Cong. House. End Demand for Sex Trafficking Act of 2005. HR 2012. Available at <http://www.theorator.com/bills109/hr2012.html>.
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Hunt Alternatives Fund, a family foundation based in Cambridge, MA, provokes sustainable social change through a blend of operating and grant-making programs. Since its founding in Denver in 1981, the Fund has contributed more than \$90 million toward a wide spectrum of social issues. Currently strengthening youth arts organizations, supporting social movement leaders, advocating for inclusive peace processes, combating the demand for illegal commercial sex, and inspiring women to political leadership, the Fund convenes allies, builds their capacity, and empowers them to achieve systemic change.