



**MY MOM'S STORY:
THE BEGINNING OF MY
FIGHT AGAINST
HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

"Her pain became my purpose." — Penny Ronning

The Global Scale of Financial Crime

- \$3.1 trillion in global illicit funds (2023)
- **\$346.7 billion: human trafficking**
- \$782.9 billion: drug trafficking
- \$11.5 billion: terrorism

“Human trafficking is not just a crime—it’s an industry.”

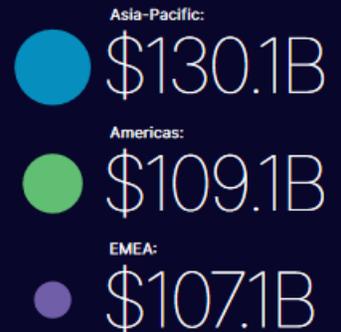
Source: Nasdaq Verafin 2024

A Humanitarian Crisis

At any time, tens of millions of people are coerced into labor or sex work.¹³

In 2023, an estimated
\$346.7B
of illicit funds was linked to
Human Trafficking.

Human Trafficking by Region



19% of Survey Respondents ranked Human Trafficking as a Top Concern, and in deep dive interviews it was elevated as a top concern.

Human Trafficking Myths

- Human trafficking is motivated by bias & hate
- Foreigners must be involved
- Human trafficking is about movement and borders
- All human trafficking is sex trafficking
- All victims are minors
- Victims self-identify
- There must be chains, beatings, or physical restraint

“Believing the myths lets traffickers hide in plain sight.”

Defining Human Trafficking

The White Slave Traffic Act of **1910** Mann Act Amended **1986** to further protect minors and adult males.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of **2000** provides a three-pronged approach that includes prevention, protection, and prosecution.

U.S. federal law defines human trafficking as the use of force, fraud, or coercion to compel a person into commercial sex acts or labor against their will.

THE A-M-P MODEL

Action	Means*	Purpose
Induce Recruits Harbors Transports Provides or Obtains	Force Fraud or Coercion	Commercial Sex <i>(Sex Trafficking)</i> or Labor/Services <i>(Labor Trafficking)</i>

*Minors induced into commercial sex are human trafficking victims—regardless if force, fraud, or coercion is present.

DEFINING A COMMERCIAL SEX ACT

A commercial sex act is the giving or receiving of **anything of value** (money, drugs, shelter, food, clothes, rent payment, etc.) to a person in exchange for a sex act.

In Billings, MT, a 14-year-old girl can sell for \$900 an hour.

“What has value to a vulnerable child? Safety. Shelter. Love.”

Source: FBI

How Traffickers Maintain Control

- **Force:** violence, confinement, starvation, rape
- **Fraud:** false job, love, or marriage promises
- **Coercion:** threats, debt, blackmail, deportation, **FEAR**

"Fear is the currency of trafficking. If they control your fear, they control your freedom."

2023 Montana Flips the Script on Buyers

HB112

- **Sellers:** Misdemeanor, max 6 months jail
- **Buyers:** Now face **felony** charges
- 1st offense: up to 5 years
- 2nd: up to 10 years

*“After **YEARS** of fighting for this, in 2023, we **FINALLY** started holding the buyer accountable.”*

Sex Trafficking. Labor Trafficking.

“It’s not just locked rooms—it’s your neighborhood.”

Polaris Study: 25 Distinct Business Models

Sex trafficking

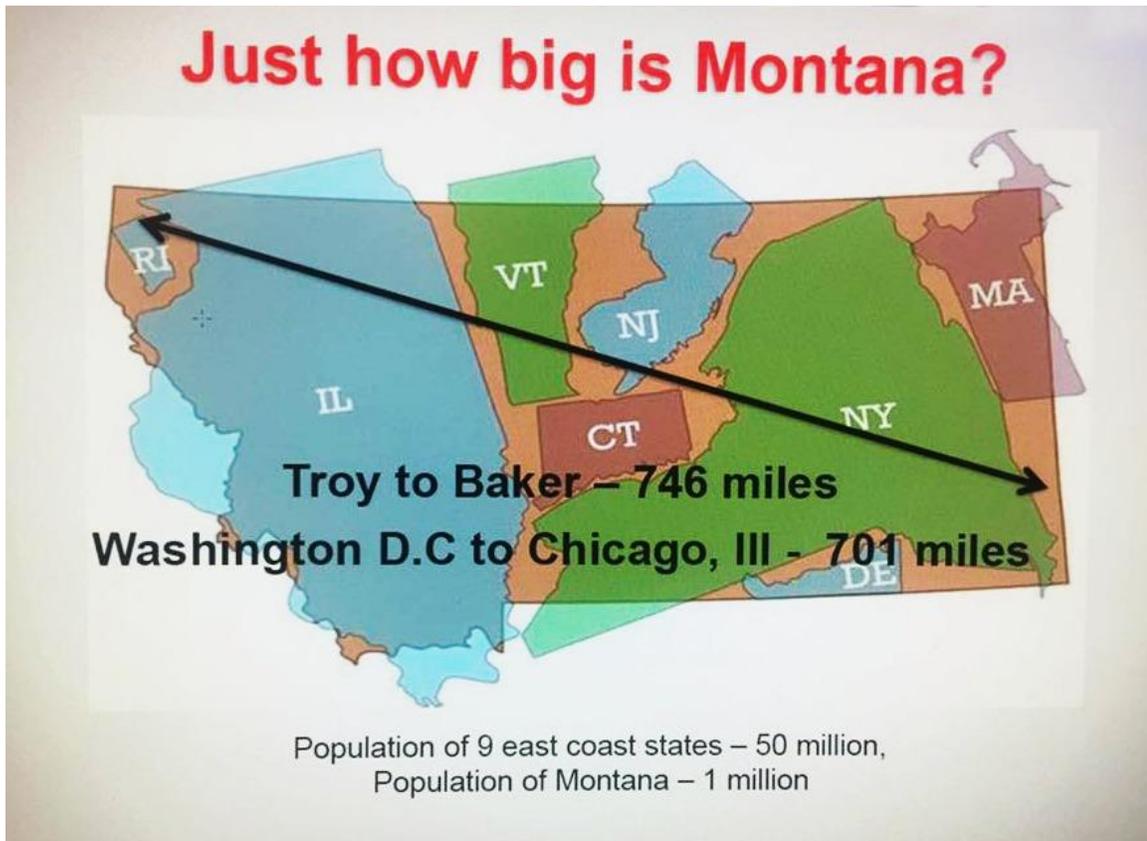
- Commercial Sex
- Pornography/CSAM
- Phone sex lines
- Stripping, live sex shows
- Mail-order brides
- Truck stops
- All ages
- 90%+ are female victims
- Up to 50% are minors

Can be hidden & locked away or **hidden in plain sight**

Labor trafficking

- Domestic servitude (housework/childcare)
- Service industry (restaurants, hotels)
- Hair, nail salons
- Construction
- Small businesses, factories & “sweatshops”
- Agriculture, ranch
- Landscape workers
- Janitorial
- Door-to-door sales
- Panhandling

Why Montana?



- Rural isolation & long highways
- High rates of poverty and addiction
- Native, foster, LGBTQ2S+ youth at greater risk
- Shortage of shelters & trauma-informed care

“Trafficking thrives where support systems fail.”

Where It Starts

- Schools, malls, shelters, bus stops
- Online games, dating apps, social media
- Fake job or modeling offers
- **#1 method: Sold by someone they trust**

“The trafficker isn’t always a stranger. Sometimes, it’s someone you love.”



Grooming: How They Gain Control

Grooming is not random — it's targeted, calculated, and intentional.

Traffickers learn what the child needs--and then becomes it:

- Offer shelter, love, status, or protection
- Mirror the child's hopes, dreams, and fears
- Build trust—then manipulate it

“Grooming doesn't start with force—it starts with friendship.”



Recruitment into Trafficking

- FBI term: **psychological kidnapping**
- **Romeo** pimp – seduce and control with psychological manipulation
- **Seasoning** to ensure compliance – beating, rape, sleep/food deprivation, isolation from family, psychological manipulation, threaten family/friends, eye balling
- **Daddy** – name pimp often requires victim to call them

“They steal their minds before they sell their bodies.”

Warning Signs (Medical & Behavioral)

- Delayed medical care
- Inconsistent stories, coached answers
- Age confusion (appears younger or older)
- Inappropriate sexual knowledge or dress

“The body may whisper what the child can’t say.”

Warning Signs (Social & Control)

- Fearful, submissive, avoids eye contact
- Doesn't speak—someone else answers
- Few personal items, no ID, may be branded

“Watch for who’s silent—and who speaks for them.”

What Buyers Say Behind Closed Doors

Rights4Girls studied 89 conversations divided by region amongst buyers on “Hobby boards.” The report revealed:

- Showed indifference to violence and drug dependency
- Expressed racism and misogyny
- Admitted knowing the people they bought were vulnerable

*“These are not men unaware. These are men who **know**—and buy anyway.”*

Source: Rights4Girls, [Buyers Unmasked \(2025\)](#)

**No Buyers
No Business
No Victims**

Human trafficking doesn't begin with a trafficker.
It begins with a **buyer**.

The real root of trafficking?

Demand for sex and cheap labor--not race, immigration, or runaway youth.

"We cannot stop supply without confronting demand."

Backpage: Profiting from Abuse

- Revenue jumped from \$5.3M (2008) to \$135M (2014)
- Over 90% of revenue came from adult ads
- Ads often featured victims of trafficking—many underage

backpage.com and affiliated websites have been seized

as part of an enforcement action by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division, with analytical assistance from the Joint Regional Intelligence Center.

Other agencies participating in and supporting the enforcement action include the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona, the U.S. Department of Justice's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California, the office of the California Attorney General, and the office of the Texas Attorney General.

Additional information will be provided at around 6:00 pm EST on Friday, April 6, by the U.S. Department of Justice, and all media inquiries should be directed to the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Public Affairs at 202-514-2007 and press@usdoj.gov.

April 6, 2018

Worcester Harrisburg

“It wasn’t a website. It was a marketplace for rape.”

Source: California DOJ

Montana Statistics Gathered by FBI

October 2016 – October 2017

Ad Numbers for 6 Top Websites

- Billings 19,226
- Bozeman 5,133
- Missoula 4,615
- Great Falls 2,931
- Butte 2,548
- Helena 2,274
- Kalispell 2,223

September 2020 – September 2021

Ad Numbers for 6 Top Websites

- Billings 11,853
- Bozeman 7,663
- Missoula 7,642
- Helena 7,052
- Great Falls 6,400
- Butte 4,165
- Kalispell 3,804

May 2021 – May 2022

Ad Numbers for 6 Top Websites

- Billings 5,703
- Bozeman 4,116
- Missoula 3,629
- Great Falls 2,726
- Helena 2,465
- Kalispell 1,882
- Butte 1,820



Illicit Massage Businesses

Victims

- Live on-site, 24 hours a day
- Victims typically 30 – 75 years old
- \$60 house fee
- Sex and labor trafficking
- VW have state license
- One female victim = \$3,800 - \$18,000 a month for IMB in Billings, MT
- Victims may be mail-order brides; domestic violence victims; smuggled into the country; debt-bondage victims

IMBs

- Located in strip malls; converted houses; office buildings
- Security cameras
- Locked doors; buzzer system
- Windows covered or darkened
- Sexually suggestive advertising
- Neon OPEN sign; ATM machine
- Open 10 AM – 2 AM or 24 hours



“These women don’t clock out—they’re trapped. Behind neon signs and wellness words are lives held hostage.”

Source: FBI, MT DOJ, USAO

Facebook Ad for Health Massage



♥ Don't keep your body in pain!
relieve build up stress! ♥

Dec 30, 2020 - Feb 28, 2021

★ 🌸 🌸 ♥ Health Massage ♥ 🌸 🌸 ★



Posted on Dec 30, 2020

★ 🌸 🌸 ♥ Health Massage ♥ 🌸 🌸 ★

(Licensed massage Therapist)

🎉 🧑🏻 GRAND OPENING! 🧑🏻 🎉



♥ Have muscle pain? Asian Massage
may be right for you! ♥

Dec 30, 2020 - Feb 28, 2021

★ 🌸 🌸 ♥ Health Massage ♥ 🌸 🌸 ★

Common Emojis in Trafficking

COMMON EMOJIS IN TRAFFICKING

	Money, Bag, or Trap		Vagina
	Money, Dollars, or Cost of Service		Penis
	Money, symbol often used by pimps		Buttocks
	Pimp, can be accompanied by initials		Male ejaculation
	Victim is a minor		Seeing something X-rated
	Victim is young or near 18th birthday		Condom
	Underage		Wife or sister prostitute
	Victim is a minor and/or a virgin		Prostitute
	Victim is white female		Red light special or prostitution
	The victim may be new to the area or in a town for a limited time. Can also mean the buyer must travel for services.		Kissing or oral sex
			69 sex act

Source: Collective Liberty



BREAKING NEWS

DETERMINE WHETHER RAMPAGE A HATE CRIME

NIGHTLY NEWS
 NEWS

A Spa—or a Crime Scene?

In 2021, a shooter targeted multiple massage spas in Atlanta.
The tragedy revealed:

- The normalization of illicit massage businesses
- The racialized, gendered dehumanization of Asian women
- The connection between sexual exploitation and violence

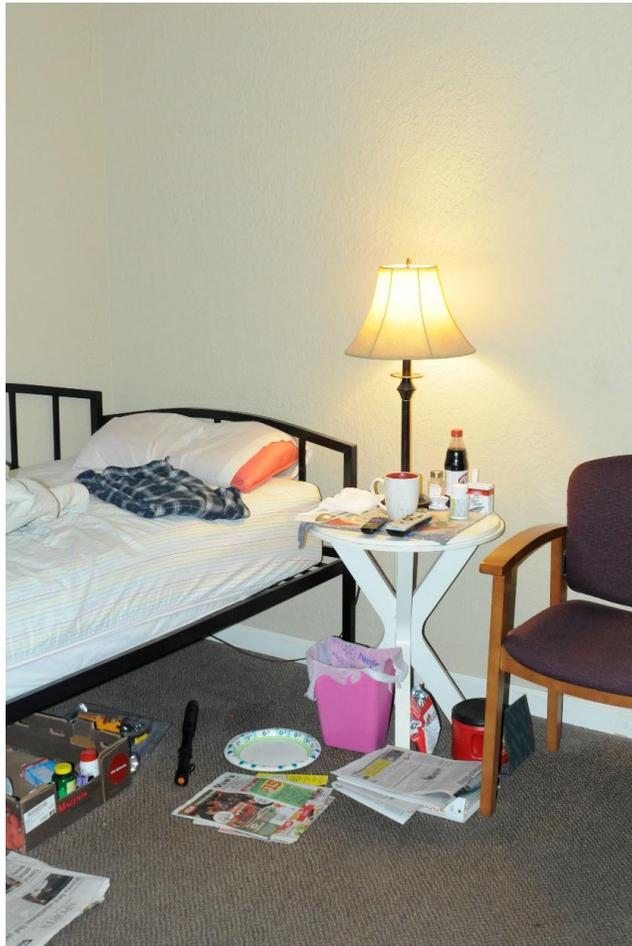
“These weren’t just shootings. They were the result of a culture that profits from exploitation.”

A Spa

IMBs often hide in plain sight—offering facades of legitimacy while trapping victims behind closed doors.



A Spa



King Spa



PORNHUB

PORNHUB.COM

**PORNHUB:
ONE OF THE
TOP 10 MOST
POPULAR
WEBSITES IN
THE WORLD**

DATA FROM
OCTOBER 2019

Google YouTube
facebook. WIKIPEDIA twitter
Instagram
YAHOO! Bai 百度
Pornhub

THERE ARE OVER 1.5 BILLION WEBSITES ON THE INTERNET TODAY.

TRAFFICKINGHUB.COM
A CAMPAIGN TO HOLD PORNHUB ACCOUNTABLE

Source: <https://www.traffickinghub.com/press/number-of-websites/>
Website made in 2016. Screenshot via statista.com. statista

6 CORE AREAS OF CRIMINAL CONTENT ON PORNHUB include:

1. Sex Trafficking
2. Child Sexual Abuse Material and Child Sex Trafficking
3. Rape
4. Incapacitated Sexual Assault where the Victim is Drugged or Drunk
5. Image-Based Sexual Abuse
6. Hidden Camera/Spycam

“This isn’t just porn. It’s evidence of crimes—monetized, normalized, and streamed worldwide. If we wouldn’t allow it in real life, why is it hosted online for profit?”

Source: Traffickinghub Movement

Pornography by the Numbers

- **40 MILLION** Americans are regular visitors to porn sites
- **25%** of all online searches are porn-related
- **35%** of internet downloads are pornographic
- **9 – 11 YEARS:** Average age of first Internet porn exposure

“We are not protecting our children—we are handing them a screen.”

Source: Culture Reframed

What are Kids Seeing?

Top Acts in Popular Porn:

- Gagging (the #1 act)
- Strangulation
- Rough anal sex
- Ejaculation/spitting on face
- Hair pulling
- Spanking

“What’s normalized in porn is often criminal in real life.”

Source: Culture Reframed

This is Not Fantasy— This is Grooming

Selected Category Counts on Pornhub:

- **305,000+** Amateur
- **263,000+** Teen
- **97,000+** Solo Female
- **84,000+** Step
- **55,000+** Daddy
- **15,000+** Babysitter
- **9,000+** Teacher
- **5,000+** Stepdad

“When abuse is disguised as entertainment, we train an audience to accept it.”

Source: Culture Reframed

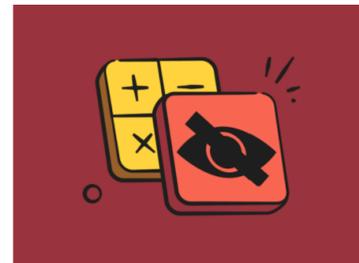
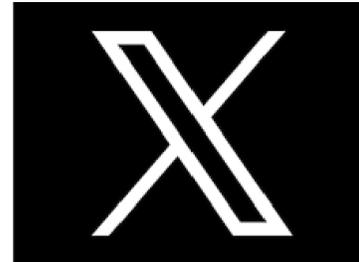
The 12 Most Dangerous Apps for Kids



Snapchat



Instagram



Source: [The Bark Blog](#)

The Cost of Early Exposure

- 1 in 3 kids see hardcore porn by age 12
- Platforms: **Roblox, Fortnite, TikTok**
- Children aged 6–12 see more **non-photographic sexual content** than adults
- Kids exposed are **3.3x more likely** to engage in sexual harassment or violence
- Rising **child-on-child abuse**, often recorded and shared

“When children learn about sex through violence, they repeat what they see.”

What Porn Teaches Boys

- Frequent porn use is linked to:
- Buying sex
- Believing abuse is normal
- Expecting domination
- Porn frames **violence as desire** and **abuse as pleasure**

“The message isn’t just sexist—it’s dangerous.”

Source: Culture Reframed

What Are Girls Learning?

Online content teaches young girls:

- Your value is in how you look
- Being hurt means being wanted
- Violence is love

“We’re raising girls to be victims—that is not empowerment.”

Source: Culture Reframed

How Local Policy Disrupts Trafficking

City of Billings Ordinance (2021)

- Created local licensing & oversight for spas and massage businesses
- Targeted the IMB model by requiring transparency and inspections
- Empowered city code enforcement as a frontline prevention tool

“One ordinance can close the door on exploitation in your own neighborhood.”



2019 MT State Legislature

SB 147

- Criminalized all sexual acts for pay—not just intercourse
- Added enhanced penalties for trafficking and knowingly purchasing from victims
- Classified sex trafficking as a **Crime of Violence**

“No more excuses. No more leniency.”



2019 MT State Legislature

HB 749

- Allowed city & board officials to verify massage licenses
- Funded **Montana DOJ's first dedicated anti-trafficking staff**

Before HB 749, Montana had **zero** full-time state investigators focused on trafficking.

“This law turned policy into protection.”



YHTTF
Yellowstone Human Trafficking Task Force

Federal Legislative Priorities

Online Safety & Accountability

- **SHIELD Act** – Non-consensual image removal
- **DEFIANCE Act** – AI-generated exploitation remedy
- **TAKE IT DOWN Act** – Removal of explicit content within 48 hours

Victim-Centered Support

- **Trafficking Survivors Relief Act** – Criminal record relief

“When Congress acts together, children are safer. We are all safer.”

Civil & Legal Remedies

- **EARN IT Act** – Allows victims to sue platforms that host child abuse material
- **STOP CSAM Act** – Expands civil remedies and requires removal of exploitative images

Child Safety & Enforcement

- **Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA)** – Creates a duty of care for platforms to protect children
- **Project Safe Childhood Act** – Enhances DOJ efforts against online child exploitation
- **REPORT Act** – Expands CyberTipline and improves evidence retention

What to do if You Suspect Human Trafficking

Emergency Protocol:

- If someone is in **immediate danger**: CALL 911

Report Suspected Trafficking:

- **In Montana:**
 - FBI: (406) 254-8108
 - MT DOJ: (406) 413-0035
- **Nationally:**
 - Homeland Security Tip Line: 1-866-347-2423

“Never approach a suspected trafficker. Call law enforcement.”

Talk Trafficking Podcast

A national podcast that brings together survivors, advocates, and experts to expose exploitation and ignite change.

Available at: <https://yhttf.org/>

“Because silence is the trafficker’s greatest ally.”



Take Action Today

Donate

- YHTTF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit
- Online at: yhttf.org
- Mail: 27 N 27th St, Ste 1900, Billings, MT 59101

Book a Training

- Email: stoptraffickingmontana@gmail.com
- Request presentations for schools, workplaces, agencies

Contact Officials

- Urge support for bipartisan federal and state legislation

“Every voice matters. Every action counts.”

Resources

- Yellowstone Human Trafficking Task Force
- Shared Hope International
- National Center on Sexual Exploitation
- Digital Childhood Alliance
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security – Blue Campaign
- Polaris
- Culture Reframed
- Protect Young Eyes
- Bark
- Paving the Way Foundation
- TAT (Truckers Against Trafficking)
- Uprising

“Education is prevention. Prevention is power.”

Contact Us

- Follow us on *Facebook* at Yellowstone Human Trafficking Task Force
- Website: yhddf.org

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- *Penny Ronning*
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Yellowstone Human Trafficking Task Force

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“Together, we shine a light on the darkest corners.”

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