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## Human Trafficking in Native American Communities

When people think of human trafficking usually the image that comes to mind is pretty girls tied up on cages and sent out across the world to be used and raped. Maybe in your minds eyes you see women in chains, bloody, battered and scared crying out for help. And you probably see criminal masterminds, the type that just exude evil, behind it all. Most who worry about being trafficked think that they will be taken from their lives and sent abroad, only really concerned with foreign trafficking. What most people don't know is that human trafficking and sex crimes are an epidemic in the United States of America, and it isn't happening like in the movies. Pretty girls are not being taken from their beds by devilish looking men in biker jackets to be sent far away never to be seen again. Real women are being forced to sell their bodies in order to survive on the streets of major cities as well as small towns.

Across the United States Native and Indigenous women are going missing, recruited into a life of prostitution or murdered. Many indigenous women live in fear of being targeted due to their ethnicity (Sullivan 2016). This paper will delve into the specifics of human trafficking and the sex trade of indigenous women, specifically looking at Minnesota. There are three goals to this paper: to discern the cause of the disproportionate number of indigenous women as victims of the sex crimes, to understand the effects that this sex trade has on the Native American cultures, and finally to determine what the effects that these crimes have on the women themselves.

For the purpose of this paper, I am focusing on human trafficking and sex crimes in Minnesota. This is not to say that the sex trafficking of indigenous women is not an issue in other places around the United States and Canada, because it is, but Minnesota, with the help of National Indigenous Women Resource Center (NIWRC), has been the most open in their attempts to rectify these criminal enterprises.

There are eleven tribal reservations in Minnesota, seven are for the Anishinaabe tribes (The largest being Red Lake Reservation) and four are for the Dakota peoples. Most women interviewed through the various studies read say that they are affiliated with the Anishinaabe tribes. However, in Minnesota many of the women who are being targeted are from major cities, such as Minneapolis, Twin Cities, St. Paul and Duluth. Most who live in these areas are there due to the "relocation" era in American History. From the 1940s to the 1970s government officials encouraged indigenous people to leave the reservation and come to major cities, there they were left in a culturally unfamiliar place without the necessary skills for the culture to survive (Farley et. al 2011).

The historical context of Native Americans in the Americas after colonization is important to note before delving into the current crimes. During the period of colonization white Americans sought to destroy all aspects of native life, this was done through systematic genocide, and forced assimilation. Many tribes viewed women as sacred beings and due to this, women had control over their sexual choices, something which was irregular in the eyes of the colonizers, who thought women should be chaste and demure. Seeing these women so sexually free, white colonizers had few qualms about sexually assaulting and raping native women. When native peoples were sectionalized in reservations they became completely dependent on the US military, and the soldiers knew this, often demanding sexual favours. One agent from 1885 writes that the women were. “half clad and half starved, they bartered their honor . . . for something to cover their limbs and for food for themselves and their kin” (Deer 2010). Due to this systematic abuse many native women developed what is known as “colonial trauma response” (Pierce 2009). This is when a native woman experiences a current event which is connected to previous cultural and historical traumas of her people and exhibits a PTSD-like response.

To fully understand the crimes that are being committed I think it would be best to first define sex trafficking as well as prostitution. In the first interdisciplinary conference on human trafficking, the roundtable discussions used the following definitions. Sex trafficking was defined as

“The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act is under 18 years of age” (Pierce et. al 2012).

The definition of prostitution at the same event is as follows:

“The act of engaging in sexual intercourse or performing other sexual acts in exchange for money or other considerations, including food, shelter, transportation and other basic needs” (Pierce et. al 2012).

Human trafficking is a crime that affects everyone, and no matter who is being trafficked it is a terrible and terrifying experience. Indigenous women are disproportionately affected by these crimes. A report from 2005 states that 25% of prostitution arrests made in Minneapolis are of Native / Indigenous women, while they make up less than 2% of the population in that area (Koeplinger 2008).

Many women who were victims of sex trafficking have participated in the studies being conducted to stop these crimes. Prostitution is a dangerous life-style, many women get hurt or are murdered on the streets because of this. Of 105 women, 92% said that they had been raped. 84% had been physically assaulted in prostitution, and 74% experienced serious brain trauma due to these assaults (Farley et. al 2011). Most of the time the perpetrator of the crime is not punished for their actions and the woman is left with no place to turn to. In the same study they found that of the women who had been prostituted just over half the women (52.4%) of the women suffered

from symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) because of the prostitution (Farley 80). PTSD is a mental disorder marked by flashbacks to the traumatic event, through intrusive 'visions' or nightmares, avoidance or emotional numbing of the trauma, and hyperarousal. Women who suffer from PTSD are more likely to have poor health than a woman who is not suffering from PTSD. In the same study they researchers reported that 80 (77%) of the women have a substance abuse problem. Many of the women use the drugs in order to dissociate from the sex, one interviewed woman stated she uses "so [the drugs] can numb me, so I can do what they want me to do" (Farley et. al 2011).

Women who are prostituted often develop physical health problems. Of 106 participants in a study, 92% had a neurological health problem, 86% had a general health problem and 69% had physical injuries. Two thirds of the victims have contracted a type of sexually transmitted diseases or infections (Pytalski 2016). All of these conditions were developed or aquired because of their time as a prostitute or as a victim of human trafficking. Most of these women are without healthcare and can not receive care for these ailments and it can go untreated for years, or are too embarrassed to receive help. The stigma around sex workers makes their pain something they often have to bare alone. One woman said "I had a broken nose from being beaten by a pimp. [I experienced] sexual torture from my boyfriend so I have problems in my left hip. How do you tell a doctor about this?" (Farley et. al 2011).

Clearly, being trafficked is a serious detriment to a person's mental and physical health. What is worse it that many of these women who are survivors of human trafficking and prostitution often have little choice. 75% of the women interviewed engaged in prostitution in exchange for basic needs, including food, shelter, and/or drugs which is known in legal terms as "survial sex"(Farley et. al 2011). Many others were threaten either by a weapon (which occurred for 78% of these women) or with physical violence (occurred for 84% of the women) (Farley et. al 2011). This means that these women will most likely experience intense, and often physically detrimental, repercussions if they do have sex as well as if they don't. It is a dangerous cycle with no way to escape unscathed.

The true perpetrators of these crimes are the pimps, and often times these people are not the cartoonish caricatures from the cinema, in many ways they are far more terrifying. Pimps target at vulnerable people to exploit, these vulnerabilities are, but not limited to: age (being a minor), homelessness, addictions, and poverty. Indegenous peoples are all at a greater risk of these vulnerabilities than other races, and this fact is often exploited by pimps. Some survivors described men or women pimps coming to their reservation and luring the girls to the city with the promises of making her a model, dancer, or actress. Often pimps use emotional attachments to lure these girls away, becoming a boyfriend or girlfriend and promising these young women safety (Pierce 2009). These pimps explicitly seek out underage girls from reservations, usually the poorer ones, promise the girls a better more exciting life, and then force them to stay a prostitute. They do this with both the treat of violence and the implementation of it. The average

age for a woman beginning prostitution is between 12-16, well before the legal age of consent (Farley et. al 2011).

Perhaps worst of all is that many victims of human trafficking are being arrested and brought into courts on criminal charges (Pytalski 2016). Instead of helping women who have suffered sexual abuse, and often physical abuse, the United States Government puts them in jails and prison without attempting to help them. When the women get out of jail, they have no prospects and little else to do besides return to prostitution.

The NIWRC, located in Saint Paul, Minnesota, has been offering aid to women who wish to escape a life of prostitution. Usually, the women interviewed are discovered through the NIWRC center. This outreach center provides classes on health, both reproductive and physical, and has an entire resource library available for people. This center has helped people in many ways, and is considered one of the leading places for helping native and indigenous women.

The United States government has taken steps to reduce human trafficking. They have made policies in relationship only to indigenous women, as well as more general human trafficking laws. However, human trafficking is difficult to prosecute, many victims do not wish to come forward and relive their exploitation. And even if the woman did make a claim against her pimp, she has to prove the use of “force, fraud, or coercion” by the pimp to get her into the trade, unless she is under the age of 18 (Koeplinger 2008). The government has little it can do for punishing the pimp, but they are taking steps to stop prostitution. The old method of stopping prostitution was to arrest the prostitute, but new methods are arising in which the police have shifted their focus from arresting the prostitute to arresting solicitor, as well as issuing heavy fines on vehicles used in sexual services. The logic is, if there is no one to buy the sex, the women will not need to continue to prostitute (Shivley et. al 2012).

Many different tribes are putting new laws into place to deter human trafficking. In 2017 the United States Government granted 150 million dollars to be dispersed through different Native American tribes in an attempt to help women and survivors (Brewer 2017). This money has been used in a variety of ways, sometimes to establish outreach centers, like the NIWRC. Other tribes have created their own laws to stop trafficking. Across the country in the Snoqualmie tribe, located just east of Seattle, a new law has been added to their tribal code, in the section referring to sex trafficking, it is illegal (and punishable with jail time) to buy sex or to recruit for sex. In the Snoqualmie tribe they will punish both native people as well as visitors to the reservations (Pytalski et al 2016). But most of these laws have little power, the jurisdiction of the tribes end at the border, and if someone leaves the reservation there is no way for the tribal leaders to enforce their laws.

Tribal way of life has been greatly effected by the increase of women and girls recruited into sex trafficking. In many tribes, like the Anishinaabe peoples, have partnered with outreach centers and have began to educate their young girls more on the dangers of sex trafficking and prostitution. People have taken to activism in the hopes that no more of their young girls will be systematically targeted. But for many tribes, those who suffer from extreme poverty and

degradation, little can be done, because sometimes women would rather be away from the tribal land in the hopes of earning some money.

The sex trade of Native American women and girls is a terrible injustice which has been going on for decades. There have been movements to decrease the trafficking of these women, but these measures are not enough. Human trafficking is a horrid crime happening within the cities across this country, yet it is often overlooked and ignored. Hopefully in the future both tribal and the United States governments can work together to stop these crimes.

For now the epidemic of forced sexual slavery continues. These crimes are far worse than those that happen in film; because the women are not being stuck in cages, instead they are walking the streets, eyes begging for help and they are ignored. Nobody cares about these women, because the way they are being abused is not as clearly seen. From the outside it doesn't look like the terrible image we have of human trafficking, and so instead people ignore it. So the next time that someone mentions human trafficking, do not picture pretty girls tied up in rotting cages, picture the thousands of Native American women who have to sell their bodies in order to put food in their bellies and roof over their heads.

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