Negative: Spotlight / Human Trafficking Investigation

By “Coach Vance” Trefethen

***Resolved: The United States federal government substantially reform the use of Artificial Intelligence technology***

Case Summary: The AFF plan requires federal agents to use “Spotlight,” an AI tool that improves investigation of human trafficking. Spotlight is an app created by a group called “Thorn” and promoted by actor Ashton Kutcher with a lot of hype about its claims. That’s what most of it is – hype. They claim to be “rescuing” thousands of trafficking victims each year. That’s wrong for 2 reasons: 1) if you read the fine print in Thorn’s own literature, they really claim to be “identifying” (not rescuing) that many; and 2) The number of perpetrators and victims Thorn is claiming simply don’t exist in the crime statistics collected by the FBI nationwide. There just aren’t “thousands” of cases, perpetrators or victims in any given year in the criminal justice system. In 2019, most states reported zero arrests and convictions. If thousands are being caught, where are they? AFF will claim that the States are successfully using Thorn/Spotlight to catch thousands, but the data from the States shows just the opposite. They’re catching very few, and in most states, zero. NEG position is that the reason for this low number is: They don’t exist. Human trafficking, though tragic when it occurs, is way way overhyped and exaggerated. It’s a very rarely occurring crime. The reason some of the numbers appear high is that activists and/or law enforcement are adding into the numbers the cases of consensual prostitution and labeling them as “trafficking victims.” Strange, because they then go ahead and arrest the girls for prostitution, an odd thing to do if they were truly victims.

DISCLAIMER #1: The topic of this brief is somewhat sensitive and difficult to discuss. This NEG brief is written in response to an Affirmative case that is being run in this debate league written by someone else. We didn’t originate this topic. We’re trying to help teams debate against this case by publishing this brief. If you find the topic offensive, you are welcome to throw this brief away, but understand you may then have to debate this topic anyway going Negative, but without any evidence.
DISCLAIMER #2: This brief makes a distinction between consensual activity (e.g. prostitution) and coerced activity (victims of trafficking). This doesn’t imply we’re endorsing improper consensual activity. We’re merely distinguishing it from the harms in the Affirmative case. Consensual activity is a sin, but not necessarily a crime (or not necessarily should be treated as one, given all the “real” violent crimes going on that should get law enforcement’s priority). Time, money and police resources spent chasing after people engaged in consensual sin is bad for society because all of those resources could have been used to fight “real” crime that actually harms others.

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Negative: Spotlight / Human Trafficking

OPENING QUOTES / NEG PHILOSOPHY

The Negative philosophy is summed up by Will Rogers’ famous line

“It isn’t what we don’t know that gives us trouble. It’s what we know that ain’t so.”

The Affirmative team’s case and plan are based on bogus statistics and myths coming from internet memes repeated so often that everyone thinks they’re true. In reality, it’s a plan that doesn’t work to solve a problem that doesn’t exist.

MINOR REPAIR – Increase funding for shelters

We could save a lot more of them by funding emergency shelters and rehabilitation than by any increase in law enforcement

Elizabeth Nolan Brown 2015 (editor, Reason magazine) REASON Nov 2015 The War on Sex Trafficking Is the New War on Drugs <https://reason.com/2015/09/30/the-war-on-sex-trafficking-is/> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

For a fraction of the money spent on these measures, state governments or private foundations could fund more beds at emergency shelters. The resources that churches, charities, and radical feminists use trying to convince people that all sex workers are victims (and their clients predators) could go toward helping that minority of sex workers who do feel trapped in prostitution with job placement or getting an education. For the vast majority of vulnerable sex workers, the greatest barriers to exit aren't ankle-cuffs, isolation, and shadowy kidnappers with guns, but a lack of money, transportation, identification, or other practical things. Is helping with this stuff not sexy enough? As it stands, many of those "rescued" by police or abolitionist groups find that their self-appointed saviors can't actually offer them housing, food, a job, or anything else of urgent value in starting a life outside the sex trade. Awareness doesn't pay the bills.

HARMS / SIGNIFICANCE

1. “Human Trafficking” epidemic is exaggerated

A lot of so-called “trafficking” cases are really consensual. All those consensual cases get reported in the statistics, making “trafficking” look like a huge problem

Elizabeth Nolan Brown 2016. (editor, Reason magazine) Sex-Trafficking Victim Arrested for Selling Sex 16 Feb 2016 <https://reason.com/2016/02/16/kansas-sex-trafficking-victim-arrested/> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

The idea behind America's strict laws against sex-trafficking is, theoretically, to punish activity that goes beyond consensual prostitution between adults; implicit in the crime of sex trafficking is supposed to be some element of force, fraud, or coercion employed by the perpetrator. But all too often, prosecutors have started using anti-human-trafficking statutes to go after people for whom this glove doesn't fit. And even when they don't actually bring sex-trafficking charges against adults engaged in prostitution, they both use them for leverage in getting pleas to lesser charges and talk to the press and public as if they have—thereby further sowing the seeds of sex-trafficking "epidemic" in everyone's minds.

Big investigations and sting operations find few, if any, trafficking victims, child or adult

Elizabeth Nolan Brown 2015 (editor, Reason magazine) REASON Nov 2015 The War on Sex Trafficking Is the New War on Drugs <https://reason.com/2015/09/30/the-war-on-sex-trafficking-is/> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

The goal of Operation Cross Country, according to the FBI's website, is "to recover victims of child sex trafficking." In 2014, more than a dozen cities took part. Knoxville, Tennessee, to cite one participant, uncovered zero underage victims of sex trafficking, but it did arrest eight women for prostitution, four women for promoting prostitution, two women for human trafficking, and four men for solicitation. In Newark, New Jersey, one 14-year-old victim was identified and 45 people were arrested for prostitution or pimping. Richmond, Virginia, found no child victims but charged 26 people with prostitution and two with pimping. In Atlanta, dozens were arrested for prostitution, loitering, soliciting, and drug possession.

A lot of those “thousands of cases” aren’t actually trafficking. They’re consensual sins, not violent crimes

Elizabeth Nolan Brown 2015 (editor, Reason magazine) REASON Nov 2015 The War on Sex Trafficking Is the New War on Drugs <https://reason.com/2015/09/30/the-war-on-sex-trafficking-is/> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

Forcing others into sex or any sort of labor is abhorrent, and it deserves to be treated like the serious violation it is. But the activity now targeted under anti-trafficking efforts includes everything from offering or soliciting paid sex, to living with a sex worker, to running a classified advertising website.

Example: Samir Elias. US Justice Dept. declared he was “sex trafficking” – and then didn’t charge him with it. It was just another case of prostitution

Elizabeth Nolan Brown 2016. (journalist) Sex-Trafficking Victim Arrested for Selling Sex 16 Feb 2016 <https://reason.com/2016/02/16/kansas-sex-trafficking-victim-arrested/> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

The owner of the massage parlor, Samir F. Elias, 60, was also arrested. Last Friday, he was charged in federal court with one count of transporting an illegal alien, one count of harboring an illegal alien, one count of harboring an alien for the purpose of prostitution, and two counts of money laundering. Though headlines on [a Justice Department press release](http://www.justice.gov/usao-ks/pr/wichita-massage-parlor-owner-charged-sex-trafficking-case) and local-[news reports all announce](http://www.kansas.com/news/local/crime/article60102061.html) that [he was arrested for sex trafficking](http://ksn.com/2016/02/12/wichita-massage-parlor-owner-charged-in-sex-trafficking-case/), no such charges were actually brought.

2. Christians being deceived

It’s good to be concerned about the suffering of others. But Christians are being exploited by politicians and activists manufacturing a crisis to get more federal money

Elizabeth Nolan Brown 2015 (editor, Reason magazine) REASON Nov 2015 The War on Sex Trafficking Is the New War on Drugs <https://reason.com/2015/09/30/the-war-on-sex-trafficking-is/> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

What's more, these new laws aren't organic responses by legislators in the face of an uptick in human trafficking activity or inadequate current statutes. They are in large part the result of a decades-long anti-prostitution crusade from Christian "abolitionists" and anti-sex feminists, pushed along by officials who know a good political opportunity when they see it and by media that never met a moral panic they didn't like. The fire is fueled by federal money, which sends police departments and activist groups into a grant-grubbing frenzy. The anti-trafficking movement is "just one big federal grant program," Michael Hudson, a scholar with the conservative Hudson Institute, told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. "Everybody is more worried about where they're going to get their next grant" than helping victims, Hudson said.

3. A/T “Even if it’s exaggerated, we should still DO SOMETHING!”

Using exaggerated numbers makes a huge difference in public policy, and inflicts real-world damage

Elizabeth Nolan Brown 2015 (editor, Reason magazine) REASON Nov 2015 The War on Sex Trafficking Is the New War on Drugs <https://reason.com/2015/09/30/the-war-on-sex-trafficking-is/> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

"Regardless of whether the number is 300,000 or 30,000, something must be done to protect these children at risk of exploitation and trafficking," said Moira Bagley Smith, a spokeswoman for Rep. Wagner, when Kessler challenged the figure. But it's exactly this kind of thinking that inflicts real-world policy damage. Whether there are 30,000 or 300,000 crime victims makes a great deal of difference in terms of fashioning an appropriate response, as does the context of the victims' circumstances. Separating the mythology of sex trafficking from the facts is crucial for addressing problems as they exist, not problems as we might want, fear, or imagine them to be.

4. A/T “Hundreds of thousands of kids!”

No, there aren’t thousands of kids being trafficked. Those numbers are totally bogus

John Stossel 2019 (journalist) REASON magazine 15 May 2019 “The Sex Trafficking Panic’ <https://reason.com/2019/05/15/the-sex-trafficking-panic/> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

Politicians tell us that thousands of children are forced into the sex trade. "Three-hundred thousand American children are at risk!" said Rep. Ann Wagner on the floor of Congress. That 300,000 number comes from just one study, and that study's lead author, Richard Estes, has disavowed it. "The National Crimes Against Children Center says, 'Do not cite this study'!" says Brown. It's "total bull."

Numbers and estimates on trafficked kids are bogus. Originator of the numbers has retracted his claims

Elizabeth Nolan Brown 2015 (editor, Reason magazine) REASON Nov 2015 The War on Sex Trafficking Is the New War on Drugs <https://reason.com/2015/09/30/the-war-on-sex-trafficking-is/> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

For instance, Rep. Joyce Beatty (D–Ohio) declared in a May statement that "in the U.S., some 300,000 children are at risk each year for commercial sexual exploitation." Rep. Ann Wagner (R–Mo.) made a similar statement that month at a congressional hearing, claiming the statistic came from the Department of Justice (DOJ). *The New York Times* has also attributed this number to the DOJ, while Fox News raised the number to 400,000 and sourced it to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). But not only are these *not* DOJ or HHS figures, they're based on 1990s data published in a non-peer-reviewed paper that the primary researcher, Richard Estes, no longer endorses. The authors of that study came up with their number by speculating that certain situations—i.e., living in public housing, being a runaway, having foreign parents—place minors *at risk* of potential exploitation by sex traffickers. They then simply counted up the number of kids in those situations. To make a bad measure worse, anyone who fell into more than one category was counted multiple times. "PLEASE DO NOT CITE THESE NUMBERS," wrote Michelle Stransky and David Finkelhor of the respected Crimes Against Children Research Center in 2008. "The reality is that we do not currently know how many juveniles are involved in prostitution. Scientifically credible estimates do not exist." A lengthy 2013 report on child sex trafficking from the Justice Department concluded that "no reliable national estimate exists of the incidence or prevalence of commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking of minors in the United States."

SOLVENCY

1. Thorn’s bogus numbers disprove its effectiveness

THORN (maker of SPOTLIGHT) claims they caught 6,553 traffickers in 2 years leading up to 2018

THORN Technology quoted by Human Trafficking Search 2018. (non-profit human trafficking research/awareness organization) “THONRN’s Spotlight Technology” <https://humantraffickingsearch.org/resource/thorn-spotlight-impact/> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

Our web-based tool is now used by over 5,000 officers in all 50 states and Canada. According to our most recent survey, it is helping find more human trafficking victims, faster. Spotlight has been used in 21,044 cases — identifying 12,328 adults, 5,791 children, and 6,553 traffickers in the past two years. With only a 25% response rate, we’re confident these numbers represent the low end of our impact.

Those perpetrators and victims don’t actually exist. 2019 statistics for the U.S. show: 1,883 incidents, 708 arrests.

**If Spotlight identified 6,553 traffickers, why were there only 708 arrests? If Spotlight found 18,000 adult and child victims, why didn’t they tell the States, who only found 1,883 victims? Maybe they weren’t really traffickers after all. Or maybe Thorn is exaggerating the numbers. Or maybe Spotlight is useless at actually leading to arrests of perpetrators and rescue of victims.**

FBI Uniform Crime Report for Human Trafficking in 2019. <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/additional-data-collections/human-trafficking/human-trafficking.pdf> (accessed 11 Jan 20220

Human Trafficking, 2019, is the seventh report from the national Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program’s Human Trafficking data collection. Forty-eight (48) states and the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico participated. The 2019 report shows a total of 1,883 incidents of human trafficking were reported: 1,607 were in the category of commercial sex acts, and 274 were instances of involuntary servitude. (Puerto Rico submitted two incidents in the Total column and did not specify whether those incidents were under the category of commercial sex acts or involuntary servitude.) Agencies arrested 708 offenders in correlation with these incidents. Of these, 684 were adults and 24 were juveniles.

2. Finding, not rescuing

Finding 6000 victims? Where are they? Clueless actor Ashton Kutcher (founder of Thorn) makes ridiculous claims

John Stossel 2019 (journalist) REASON magazine 15 May 2019 “The Sex Trafficking Panic’ <https://reason.com/2019/05/15/the-sex-trafficking-panic/> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

Actor Ashton Kutcher even promotes an app that he claims rescues victims. He told Congress, "We have identified over 6,000 trafficking victims this year." Really? Where are they? Kutcher's representatives did not respond to our repeated emails. "If Ashton Kutcher is finding all those victims, he's not turning them over to police," said [Elizabeth Nolan] Brown.

Internet myth-busting site SNOPES destroys Thorn and Ashton Kutcher’s claims. It did NOT rescue 6000 victims!

Dan MacGuill 2018. (fact checker at Snopes, a well known web site that investigates rumours, urban legends and internet stories; BA in philosophy from Univ of Scranton and MA in political science from Villanova Univ.) 4 Sept 2018 “Did Ashton Kutcher’s Software Help Rescue 6,000 Children from Sex Trafficking?” <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/kutcher-software-child-trafficking/> (accessed 12 Jan 2022)

What's True

According to Thorn, the non-profit organization started by Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore, the use of their digital tools by law enforcement agencies had helped identify almost 6,000 child victims of sex trafficking between September 2015 and September 2017.

What's False

The software had helped rescue (as opposed to identifying) 103 child victims of sex trafficking.

Impact: Spotlight has 98.3% failure rate

Even if it’s true that Spotlight found 6000 victims (and we seriously dispute that number because it doesn’t match the official crime statistics) it only proves what a failure it is. 103 rescues out of 6000 means 98.3% failure. On top of that, AFF has to prove that “helping” rescue means “they wouldn’t have been found otherwise.”

3. States handle most trafficking cases, not federal government. AFF plan’s impact will be miniscule

States in 2019 handled 1,883 human trafficking cases

FBI Uniform Crime Report for Human Trafficking in 2019. <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/additional-data-collections/human-trafficking/human-trafficking.pdf> (accessed 11 Jan 20220

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Federal government filed only 149 trafficking cases in 2019, and the federal numbers are steadily declining

Human Trafficking Institute 2020. (report was written by Kyleigh Feehs and Alyssa Currier, associate legal counsel for the Human Trafficking Institute, an advocacy and training organization combatting human trafficking) “2019 Human Trafficking Report” <https://www.traffickinginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2019-Federal-Human-Trafficking-Report_Low-Res.pdf> (accessed 12 Jan 2022)

One hundred and forty-five (23.9%) of the human trafficking cases active in 2019 were new cases, meaning prosecutors filed the first charges in 2019. This is a 14.7% decline from 2018, when prosecutors filed 170 new cases. The decrease follows an even bigger decline during the preceding year, from 218 new cases in 2017 to 170 in 2018. Altogether, prosecutors filed 33.5% fewer new cases over the past two years, which the available data indicate is the longest decline since the enactment of the TVPA in 2000. The decline in new cases is due to prosecutors filing fewer sex trafficking cases—not fewer forced labor cases.

Do the math: That works out to 7.3% at the federal level (and steadily declining)

Total cases were 1883+149 (States + Federal) or 2032. Federal percentage was 149/2032 or 7.3%.

4. Doesn’t save police manpower

Spotlight should be used to complement, not replace, law enforcement efforts because of its limitations

Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) 2020. (non-profit research organization of police executives primarily from the largest city, county and state law enforcement agencies in the United States, August 2020 How Local Police Can Combat the Global Problem of Human Trafficking: Collaboration, Training, Support for Victims, and Technology Are Keys to Success <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/CombatHumanTrafficking.pdf> (accessed 12 Jan 2022)

Other participants at the PERF meeting cautioned that Spotlight, while a useful tool, has limitations. For example, Spotlight analyzes only 16 websites and has data going back only to 2014. Therefore, some participants said Spotlight should be used to complement other investigative efforts.

5. Failed in most states that have tried it

Link: Spotlight is used in all 50 states

Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) 2020. (non-profit research organization of police executives primarily from the largest city, county and state law enforcement agencies in the United States, August 2020 How Local Police Can Combat the Global Problem of Human Trafficking: Collaboration, Training, Support for Victims, and Technology Are Keys to Success <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/CombatHumanTrafficking.pdf> (accessed 12 Jan 2022)

Spotlight scans online advertisements for sex and compares phone numbers and images to open-data sources on missing children, including the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children’s register of missing children. Spotlight is used by 1,796 agencies in all 50 states and Canada.

Example: Delaware. They created a special Human Trafficking Court to handle the crisis… then shut it down a few years later because they didn’t have any victims

**[Either Spotlight didn’t help… or the victims don’t exist]**

Elizabeth Nolan Brown 2018 (editor, Reason magazine) “Human Trafficking Court in Delaware Shuts Down for Lack of Human-Trafficking Victims” 8 May 2018 <https://reason.com/2018/05/08/human-trafficking-intervention-court-in/> (accessed 13 Jan 2022)

Human Trafficking Court in Delaware Shuts Down for Lack of Human-Trafficking Victims
The Delaware Criminal Justice Council found it difficult to "justify the resources that have been expend on so few" participants with such a "low rate of success."
After just a few years in operation, [Delaware's Human Trafficking Court is shutting down](https://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/2018/05/05/human-trafficking-court-merged-other-treatment-courts/570948002/).[**END QUOTE**] The court's rise and fall offers valuable lessons for similar systems across the country and shines a light on how trending problems lead to stupid policy—something those in the throes of the "opioid epidemic" panic would do well to remember. The court was killed by Judge Alex Smalls, chief of Delaware's Court of Common Pleas, citing a plan to consolidate several community court programs into one multipurpose court. The shift will save money and streamline responses to cases with a social-service component, said Smalls. But the trafficking court's closure goes beyond simple bureaucratic shuffling. [**SHE GOES ON LATER IN THE CONTEXT QUOTE:**] It comes following a 2016 report from the Delaware Criminal Justice Council, which found less than a third of people who started the alternative-to-jail program actually completed it and that there was "little evidence to suggest the defendants of this court are the subjects" of sex-trafficking enterprises.

Failure: All states report very few human trafficking cases solved. (Despite Spotlight!)

**We have a chart published by the FBI Uniform Crime Report for Human Trafficking in 2019. We can’t hold up the chart and show you, but we can read numbers from it and make it available to the Affirmative team and to you Judge, to verify we’re reading it correctly.**

**The state with by far the highest number of cases solved in 2019 was Texas with 213. Out of those, only 10 involved victims under 18 years old. That’s strange, considering the AFF and Spotlight are claiming thousands every year. Alabama, despite using Spotlight, reported zero cases, zero solved and zero victims for all of 2019. Florida reported 72 cases solved with zero involving victims under 18. The entire state of Ohio reported 8 cases, of which 1 was solved, with zero victims under age 18. If trafficking really involved tens of thousands of victims and if Spotlight is so good at catching them, these numbers should be in the thousands. There’s simply no epidemic of child or adult human trafficking, and if there is, Spotlight isn’t catching it.**

FBI Uniform Crime Report for Human Trafficking in 2019. <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/additional-data-collections/human-trafficking/human-trafficking.pdf> (accessed 11 Jan 20220



DISADVANTAGES

1. Punishing victims (if that’s what they are)

Law enforcement punishes the “trafficking victims” for the crime of prostitution

Elizabeth Nolan Brown 2016. (journalist) Sex-Trafficking Victim Arrested for Selling Sex 16 Feb 2016 <https://reason.com/2016/02/16/kansas-sex-trafficking-victim-arrested/> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

Another week, another example of how topsy-turvy our understanding of "sex trafficking" has become in America. This latest case comes out of Kansas, where a Chinese woman offering sexual services from a Wichita massage parlor has both been described by law enforcement as a victim of sex trafficking and been convicted of prostitution.  The owner of the massage parlor, Samir F. Elias, 60, was also arrested. Last Friday, he was charged in federal court with one count of transporting an illegal alien, one count of harboring an illegal alien, one count of harboring an alien for the purpose of prostitution, and two counts of money laundering. Though headlines on [a Justice Department press release](http://www.justice.gov/usao-ks/pr/wichita-massage-parlor-owner-charged-sex-trafficking-case) and local-[news reports all announce](http://www.kansas.com/news/local/crime/article60102061.html) that [he was arrested for sex trafficking](http://ksn.com/2016/02/12/wichita-massage-parlor-owner-charged-in-sex-trafficking-case/), no such charges were actually brought.

Anti-trafficking efforts end up arresting and punishing the “victims,” making them worse off

Elizabeth Nolan Brown 2015 (editor, Reason magazine) REASON Nov 2015 The War on Sex Trafficking Is the New War on Drugs <https://reason.com/2015/09/30/the-war-on-sex-trafficking-is/> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

What's more, many of the policies in place to fight trafficking actively work against their own stated mission. The criminalization of prostitution keeps sex workers from reporting abuse and keeps clients from coming forward if they suspect someone is being trafficked. Victims themselves are afraid to go to police for fear they'll be arrested for prostitution—and indeed, they often are. In 2012, 579 minors were reported to the federal government as having been arrested for prostitution and commercialized vice. Prosecutors say they need this as a "bargaining chip" to make the victims testify against their perpetrators. We're just using state violence and the threat of incarceration against children in order to save them!

2. Failed Drug War II

Link: Escalating the war on human trafficking makes the same mistakes as the failed “War on Drugs” and produces the same bad results

Elizabeth Nolan Brown 2015 (editor, Reason magazine) REASON Nov 2015 The War on Sex Trafficking Is the New War on Drugs <https://reason.com/2015/09/30/the-war-on-sex-trafficking-is/> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

The tactics employed to "get tough" on drugs ended up entangling millions in the criminal justice system, sanctioning increasingly intrusive and violent policing practices, worsening tensions between law enforcement and marginalized communities, and degrading the constitutional rights of all Americans. Yet even as the drug war's failures and costs become more apparent, the Land of the Free is enthusiastically repeating the same mistakes when it comes to sex trafficking. This new "epidemic" inspires the same panicked rhetoric and punitive policies the war on drugs did—often for activity that's every bit as victimless.

Impacts: Waste, violence, corruption and death

Prof. Christopher J. Coyne and Prof. Abigail R. Hall 2017. (Coyne – prof. of economics, George Mason Univ. Hall – prof. of economics, Bellarmine Univ.) 12 Apr 2017 “Four Decades and Counting: The Continued Failure of the War on Drugs” <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/four-decades-counting-continued-failure-war-drugs> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

 Since the War on Drugs began more than 40 years ago, the U.S. government has spent more than $1 trillion on interdiction policies. Spending on the war continues to cost U.S. taxpayers more than $51 billion annually. While the domestic impact of the War on Drugs is profound, its consequences do not stop at the border. American‐​backed anti‐​drug operations in Mexico, for example, have resulted in some of the bloodiest years in Mexican history.  In fact, since former Mexican president Felipe Calderón began using the military to fight cartels, more than 85,000 people have been killed.  Efforts by the U.S. government to eradicate opium cultivation in Afghanistan have not only failed to reduce global supply but have also empowered and funded the Taliban. The U.S. War on Drugs, like the ill‐​fated war on alcohol of the early 20th century, is a prime example of disastrous policy, naked self‐​interest, and repeated ignorance on the part of elected officials and other policymakers. From its inception, the drug war has repeatedly led to waste, fraud, corruption, violence, and death.

Pure motives don’t matter: War on trafficking makes all the same mistakes as the “War on Drugs” and will have the same bad consequences

Elizabeth Nolan Brown 2015 (editor, Reason magazine) REASON Nov 2015 The War on Sex Trafficking Is the New War on Drugs <https://reason.com/2015/09/30/the-war-on-sex-trafficking-is/> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

Yet when it comes to the way we talk about commercial sex, you have to be a victim or a predator. We've created a narrative with no room for nuance. We traffic not in facts but in melodrama. In TV broadcasts, campus panels, and congressional hearings, the most lurid and sensational stories are held up as representative. Legislators assure us that their intent is noble and pure. But remember: Tough-on-drugs legislation was never crafted or advertised as a means to send poor people to prison for life over a few grams of weed. It was a way to crack down on drug kingpins, violent gang leaders, evil crack fiends, and all those who would lure innocent children into addiction, doom, and death. Yet in mandating more police attention for drug crimes, giving law enforcement new technological tools and military gear with which to fight it, and adding ever-stricter prison sentences and punishments for drug offenders, we unleashed a corrupt, authoritarian, biased, and fiscally untenable mess on American cities without any success in decreasing drug rates or the violence and danger surrounding an activity that human beings stubbornly refuse to give up. Unless we can learn the lessons of our past failed crusades, the war on sex trafficking could result in every bit as much misery as its panicky predecessors.

Impact: US at war with its own citizens. And it explains some of the hype and exaggeration in our Harm responses: Law enforcement agencies use the “crisis” to inflate their budgets

Prof. Christopher J. Coyne and Prof. Abigail R. Hall 2017. (Coyne – prof. of economics, George Mason Univ. Hall – prof. of economics, Bellarmine Univ.) 12 Apr 2017 “Four Decades and Counting: The Continued Failure of the War on Drugs” <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/four-decades-counting-continued-failure-war-drugs> (accessed 11 Jan 2022)

The “enemies” in the War on Drugs however, consist not only of external threats (such as the Latin American drug cartels), but also American citizens on domestic soil. This addition of a domestic “enemy” links a variety of government agencies, including state and local law enforcement, to the broader missions of the U.S. federal government. Domestic law enforcement, recognizing that linking their missions with the drug war could increase their discretionary budgets and number of personnel, would benefit from joining the operations. Federal authorities would have additional personnel to fulfill their goals. The War on Drugs has created a domestic battle zone where U.S. citizens are viewed as potential enemies to be defeated by an array of government agencies working in conjunction to enforce prohibition.

3. Distracts us from real solutions

Increasing “trafficking” law enforcement doesn’t get results, it just makes things worse by distracting us from real solutions

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Sixty-eight percent of minors engaged in street-based prostitution in New York City say they've sought help from youth services organizations, according to Kate D'Adamo of the Sex Workers Project. "New York City funds roughly 200 beds for a population of 4,000 unaccompanied, homeless youth," D'Adamo told *TechCrunch*. "When all the beds are full, it is street economies like the sex trade which they turn to in order to provide basic needs. If we want to identify the most vulnerable, all we have to do is provide support when someone stands up and says 'I need a place to sleep tonight.'" Instead, we fund police task forces to monitor Internet ads for weeks in search of suspect code words or tattoos. We pass laws mandating more prison time for pimps. We set up elaborate sting operations for both sex workers and their customers. We hang "Are you being trafficked?" signs at strip clubs and highway rest stops, and train airport staff on how they can spot the signs of sex trafficking. We act as if sex traffickers are organized, jet-setting, diabolical, and legion. We are chasing our own mythology, to the detriment of actual results.

Increased enforcement diverts attention and money away from programs that actually help victims

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Undoubtedly, many lawmakers do legitimately want to help trafficking victims and hold bad guys accountable; political point-scoring is just a happy side effect. But a less happy side effect is a slew of bad laws, violated rights, and squandered money. The federal government has given away scores of millions in grant dollars for this quixotic crusade. The resources spent on prostitution stings and public awareness campaigns are resources diverted from mundane but more effective strategies for helping at-risk youth, such as adding more beds at emergency shelters. The State Department's latest *Trafficking in Persons* report notes that "shelter and housing for all trafficking victims, especially male and labor trafficking victims, continue to be insufficient." Advocates routinely say the biggest barrier to escape for many trafficking victims is simply a lack of places to go.

4. Crackdown on “escort” advertising makes things worse

Crackdown on the classified escort ads moves the activity from indoors to the streets, making it more dangerous

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Another misguided government target is the classified advertising website Backpage, home to many an "escort" ad. Lawmakers accuse the site of "profiting off of child exploitation," even though only a miniscule percentage of Backpage ads—which anyone can put up—are posted by traffickers rather than adult sex workers. Both legislators and anti-trafficking groups have long been intent on shutting the site down. Yet "street-based sex workers, across studies, face much higher rates of violence than indoor sex workers," says Serpent Libertine, a Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP)-Chicago board member. "It's hard to understand how eliminating a low-barrier way to work indoors would promote safety."