N8PRP Small Grant - Identifying Sexual Trafficking Online

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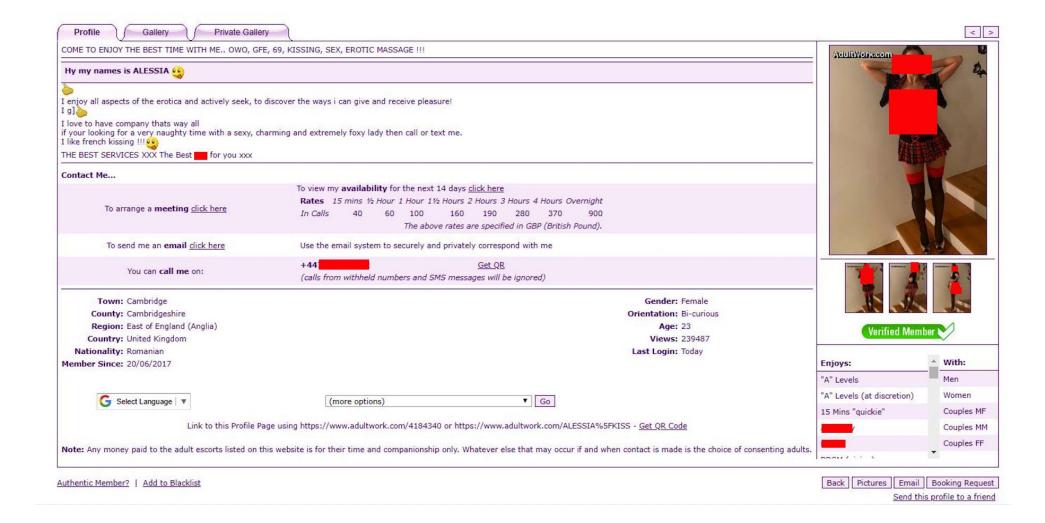
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Human Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation and Adult Services Websites (ASW)

- Over the past two decades, opportunities abound for organised criminals thanks to growth of ICT and online, networked environments (Latonero et al., 2012; Antonopoulos et al., 2020, Diba et al., 2017; Europol, 2016).
- Adult Service Websites have created a 'virtual redlight district as a low-risk environment for buyers to connect with sellers' (Ibanez and Suthers 2014: 1556).
- Growing evidence of use of ASWs by human traffickers – creation of fake profiles to advertise trafficking victims.
- ASWs described as 'the most significant enabler of sexual exploitation in the UK' (JSTAC, 2018).
- Previous research suggests that traffickers using ASW often display similar patterns of behaviour including the use of key words, phrases and other patterns (Wang et al., 2016; Antonopoulos et al., 2020).

ASW profile



The Study

Aim of the study:

To create and test a scoring matrix for the effective identification of high-risk cases of sexual exploitation mediated online, specifically those found on open-source websites such as ASWs.

Methods:

- Review of existing scholarly literature.
- In-depth qualitative interviews with experts (academics, law enforcement practitioners, victim support groups, prosecutors) to inform matrix.
- 3) Matrix tested in live operational context by South Yorkshire Police.
- Feedback received from SYP police officers and analysts.
- 5) Creation of new matrix based on feedback.

Sexual Trafficking Identification Matrix (STIM)*

SEXUAL TRAFFICKING IDENTIFICATION MATRIX				
CASE ID	OFFICER			
WEBSITE	URL			
LAST UPDATED	LINKED PHONE NUMBER(S)			
L				

INDICATOR	V	Explanatory notes	Comments
PEACES-PROTOS			
Proc is familiar or similar to other subjects/ado		You have seen these styles of posses in previous profiles identified as trafficking.	
Neutral expression or subject			
X FACTOR		Apply your professional judgement based on previous experience and other intelligence.	
TOTAL SCORE		See scoring categories below.	
0-10		Low priority.	
11-15		Consider further investigation.	
16 AND ABOVE		Priortise as high-risk.	

^{*}Redacted. For a complete copy, please contact Dr. L'Hoiry.

STIM – Findings

- STIM applied by police officers / analysts over a three week period.
 - Applied to 52 ASW profiles with 13 rated as high-priority.
- What were the most frequently identified risk indicators of trafficking?
 - Very explicit photograph;
 - Use of third person language in the advert e.g. 'she'/ 'they';
 - Poor use of language with spelling mistakes and broken English;
 - A lower price than expected relative to the local marketplace for sexual services;
 - A wide range of sexual services offered with seemingly no limits;
 - Being advertised as 'in-calls only' suggesting lack of independence/autonomy and control of movement;
 - Indicators of recent arrival/movement e.g. 'new in town'/'just arrived'/'in town for a few days'.
- Most of these indicators echo previous literature but some are new.

The STIM – Findings (cont.)

- STIM deemed by users to be highly proficient in identifying highrisk profiles.
- Police users found STIM to be a strong mechanism within a broader suite of risk assessment tools.
- STIM can be moulded around different sex work environments in different geographical areas.
- STIM can be effectively used alongside existing data scraping software (e.g.: Traffic Jam / Spotlight).
- However:
 - Risk of false positives remains.
 - Migrant sex worker collective is a key population that the operation of the STIM needs to account for.
 - Individual officer experience and local knowledge remains critical – STIM must work alongside the 'craft' of policing.

Outputs & Future Plans

Outputs

- Final project report and article in N8PRP annual report.
- Journal article published in *Trends in Organized Crime*.
- Practitioner-oriented article published in *Policing Insight*.
- Evidence given by L'Hoiry to Scottish Parliamentary enquiry on commercial sexual exploitation.
- L'Hoiry interviewed for article in Daily Record.
- 3 conference presentations delivered (+ 1 scheduled in July 2021).
- Off the Shelf festival application submitted.

Future plans

- Currently exploring potential for upscaled project(s).
- Webinar on 22 June 2021 hosting police representatives from ROCUs covering 43 force areas in England and Wales.
- ESRC New Investigator application currently in draft.
- Early discussions with European partners about a cross-European project.

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