

Sex trafficking and family breakdown, is there a link?

The Twin Cities, like many areas around the country, has been the host to horrifyingly high levels of sex trafficking. Most recently, thirteen men were involved in several sex traffic stings in which they were [charged](#) with “hiring or engaging in prostitution of a minor.”

According to the [Pioneer Press](#), “Two of the men were netted after responding to an ad in which officers posed as a 32-year-old woman and her 14-year-old deaf daughter.” They were told to bring Skittles for the 14-year old in subsequent texts, which they did.

Washington County Attorney Pete Orput is in charge of the cases against the men. Yesterday he gave an interview to a local radio show, *Up and At 'Em* on AM 1130 KTLK, which reveals how horrifyingly prevalent the demand for sex with children is these days.

A portion of the interview is transcribed below, which is worth reading. (You can listen to the whole thing [here](#).)

Pete Orput: Last year we tried a sting aimed at those who prey on kids, not necessarily prostitution, but prostitution involving a child. And we put up some fake ads on the usual suspects – Backpages, Craigslist, etc. – and the phones rang off the hook. ... There’s no entrapment here. An example would be “30 year old mom with her 14 year old deaf daughter – wanna do a threesome?” ... The sad thing, however, I didn’t realize the great extent of the market to sex traffic kids. ...

[Sex-trafficking] is a huge problem in MN, in the country, and unfortunately it’s a problem I have [in Washington County] as well. ...

We do have some cases involving victims of child sex-trafficking and we're working with them. I remind everybody, they're the victims. ... I don't think a kid is going to make a choice to go into that life of pure exploitation.

Host: Is there a profile of someone who gets caught up in this?

Pete Orput: On the victim's side, if I made generalizations, it's typically a runaway kid, a kid from a dysfunctional home, looking for love, looking for some attention, along comes a pimp, and the next thing you know, they're being sold to people multiple times and they move them around, and it's just beyond awful. ...

Host: Have you found that the people that are out there looking for underage prostitutes are specifically looking for underage prostitutes, or is it "I'm looking for a prostitute and this is the one I happened to fall upon and they don't really care whether or not they're underage?"

Pete Orput: I suppose it would be both ... People are out looking for prostitutes – I guess they're that alienated and lonely that they find that attractive. And some, among that group, would prefer to have sex with a kid. And it isn't sex. It's pure exploitation.

Host: The victims here – is it all female?

Pete: No, Jack, good point. I asked people doing the stings about putting up one for a young boy – because they're being trafficked, not to the extent, but they are. And amazingly we picked up three more. That was after the article was in the paper, so obviously these people aren't literate. ...

Some [freed victims] are very difficult to deal with – some of the victims who have been caught up in the

lifestyle for a while. They've developed a significantly misplaced loyalty – sometimes to their pimps who are amazingly controlling. They'll feel such loyalty that they'll do anything for some of these pimps.

Host: Is it the same type of thing [as gangs, Muslim terrorist groups] where people feel they are looking for a type of family, some type of place they belong, affection, whatever – a sense of belonging? And they get it from a pimp who sells them for sex so they go do that?

Pete: Often, that's how empty the victim's cup is. That they would find – what appears on its surface at least in the beginning to be love and attention – and it never is, it never lasts long – then once they've got the victim hooked, the beatings, the exploitation starts and it's really a master/slave when you look at the relationship between them.

What is striking is how the county attorney zeroes in on the victims coming from broken homes and looking for love. While perhaps not always the case, the man has the experience working with victims to see such a consistent trait. One wonders, too, about the backgrounds of the men exploiting children.

Indeed, it seems that we are in a gilded age of technology and material progress that hides a fundamental problem in our society: family breakdown.

As Elizabeth Marquardt writes in [*Between Two Worlds*](#):

“Tragically, it is well documented that children are at significantly greater risk of abuse after their parents' divorce. More than seventy reputable studies document that an astonishing number – anywhere from one-third to one-half – of girls with divorced parents report having been molested or sexually abused as children, most often by their mothers' boyfriends or stepfathers. A separate

review of forty-two studies found that the 'majority of children who were sexually abused ... appeared to come from single-parent or reconstituted families.' Two leading researchers in the field conclude, 'Living with a stepparent has turned out to be the most powerful predictor of severe child abuse yet.'

...

Compared to those of us from divorced families, young people from intact families are far less likely to cite safety as a concern when growing up. Children seem to find the presence of their fathers especially reassuring when they are worried about their safety. Not only did people from intact families usually recall feeling safe but some noted, in contrast to those from divorced families, that it was the presence of their family that made them feel safe despite threats outside the home.

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Having married parents does not offer sure protection to children. Some children are victimized by their own parents, like Crystal, who was abused by her father as well as her mother's boyfriend. Tragedies within or outside the family can happen to any child, no matter what kind of family they live in. But on the whole, having both a father and mother who will look out for you, and not having unrelated adults passing often through the home, makes things safer."

It's not popular to talk about, but the repercussions of the disintegration of the traditional family cannot be ignored. If we want to fix our decaying culture, we will have to confront this issue.