

**COYOTE-RI  
Impact Survey  
Results - 2018**

*Analyzed by*  
**SWOP-SEATTLE**

# Survey Results Overview

Results as of 5/26/2018  
*(rolling survey)*

The national survey results cited in this presentation were gathered by COYOTE-RI, a sex worker advocacy group located in Rhode Island.

The purpose of this survey is to assess the immediate impact of congressional bills FOSTA and SESTA on the safety of people in the sex trade. This survey also examines the effect of the FBI seizure of Backpage.com on people in the sex trade.

This data was collected from 4/14 - 5/25 2018. The survey is rolling, but we're focusing on data from this timespan.

People surveyed: **262**

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# What are SESTA and FOSTA?

SESTA and FOSTA are two congressional bills that passed in April of 2018. While these bills purport to abolish sex trafficking, they were opposed by numerous organizations representing people in the sex trade, and received letters of opposition from the Department of Justice, the ACLU, the national Center for Transgender Equality, and many others.

SESTA and FOSTA were opposed by the Freedom Network, the largest network of anti-trafficking organizations in the USA.



These bill seek to abolish sex trafficking by holding the owners of websites accountable for the content that third parties post to their sites. These bills are specifically targeted at websites where ads for prostitution are posted.

**These bills make no distinction between sex trafficking and consensual adult sex work, and their impact has been immediate.** Within two weeks of SESTA and FOSTA passing, 20+ popular websites that sex workers used for advertising and screening shut down.

The enclosed presentation demonstrates the swift and dangerous impact FOSTA and SESTA have had on people working in the sex trade. Data in this presentation was analyzed from an impact survey conducted by COYOTE-RI.

# Freedom Network – Letter of Opposition:

FOSTA expands the criminalization of consensual commercial sex workers under the guise of addressing sex trafficking. This squanders limited federal resources and puts sex workers at risk of prosecution for the very strategies that keep them safe. Consensual commercial sex workers use harm reduction tools such as online forums to screen clients, avoid high risk activities, share resources, and protect each other.

Further criminalizing consensual commercial sex work, where there is no force, fraud or coercion, is no way to protect victims.

The Freedom Network is the LARGEST network of anti-trafficking agencies in the United States.



Freedom Network USA

# What is Backpage?



**backpage.com and affiliated websites have been seized**

Backpage.com (BP) is a popular online classified website which has garnered national attention in recent years for its active “adult” section, which was a place where people would post advertisements for erotic and sexual services.

**In January of 2017, Backpage removed its adult listings section** due to pressure from a long legal battle surrounding concerns over sex trafficking on the site. Many sex workers quickly migrated their ads to the “personals” section of the website.

**On April 6th 2018, Backpage.com was seized by federal agencies.**

The results of the enclosed study review the impacts of both the January 2017 and April 2018 actions involving Backpage.com

To run an ad on Backpage cost between \$2-\$21 dollars (depending on the city), making it one of the most affordable paid advertising platforms for sex workers. Backpage.com was similar to MyRedBook.com and SFRedBook.com, two sites that were free to advertise on, and which included a private forum where sex workers could exchange safety and community information.

**After the 2014 FBI seizure of MyRedBook.com and SFRedBook.com, SWOP-Sacramento interviewed 44 street based sex workers, 18% of whom had recently transitioned to the streets as a result of losing access to advertising websites\*.**

\* SWOP-Sacramento, *Sex Work and Human Trafficking in the Sacramento Valley - A Needs Assessment*:  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ePpL82MjkOAMQszoaJ7rWIUM2V\\_qI\\_gP3Bk32DHFO7s/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ePpL82MjkOAMQszoaJ7rWIUM2V_qI_gP3Bk32DHFO7s/edit)

# SUMMARY OF IMPACT

## DECREASES IN:

- Income for sex workers
- Available clients
- Screening practices
- Worker bargaining power



## INCREASE IN:

- Risk taking by sex workers
- Contact from “pimps”
- Predators preying on desperation
- Demands for cheaper services

# Sex Work as Sole Source of Income

Was Sex Work your only means of income before FOSTA passed?

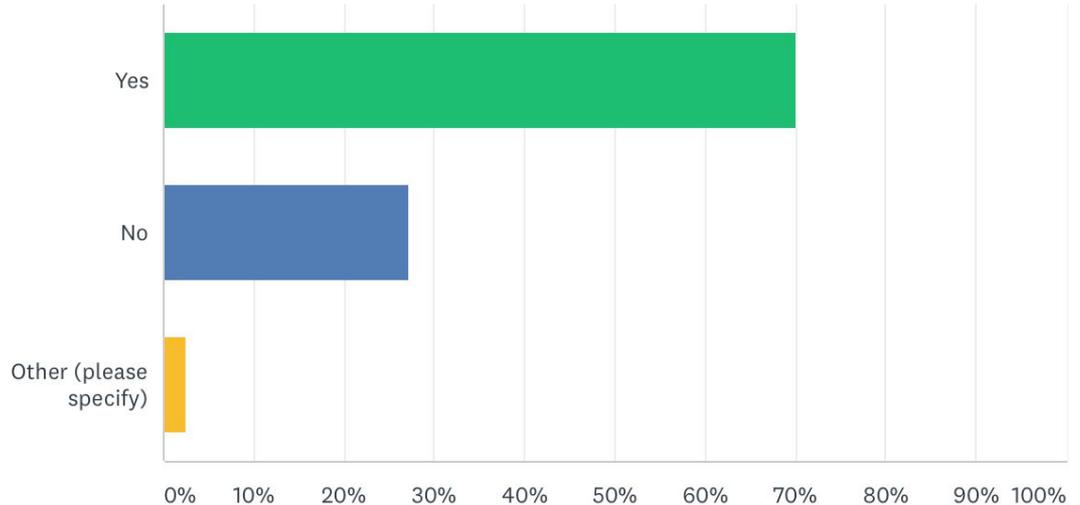
70% of participants (188 people) cited sex work as their sole form of income, before FOSTA passed.

## Testimonials:

*“Being disabled it provided enough money to cover bills that my disability checks could not”*

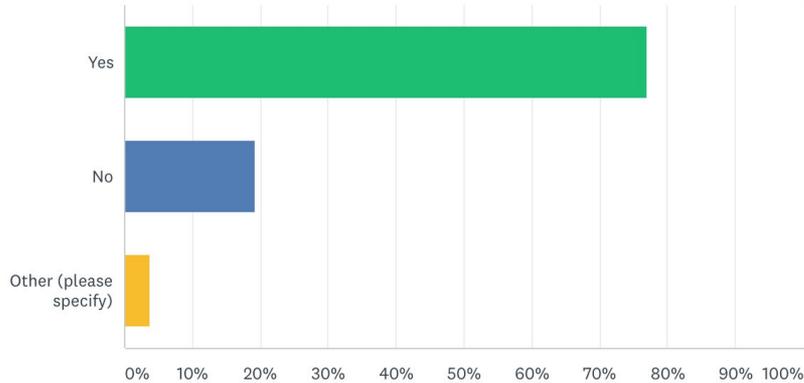
*“I have other side hustles but sex work pays my rent and bills”*

*“I have always had mental and physical disabilities. Suicide is much more tempting now that my income and choice of profession is threatened.”*



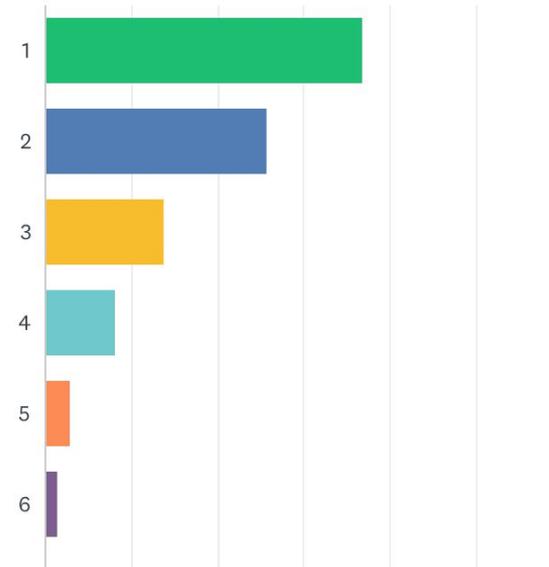
# Sex Worker as a Breadwinner

Are you the sole provider for your family?



77% of participants (207 people) reported being the sole providers for their families.

How many family members are you supporting?

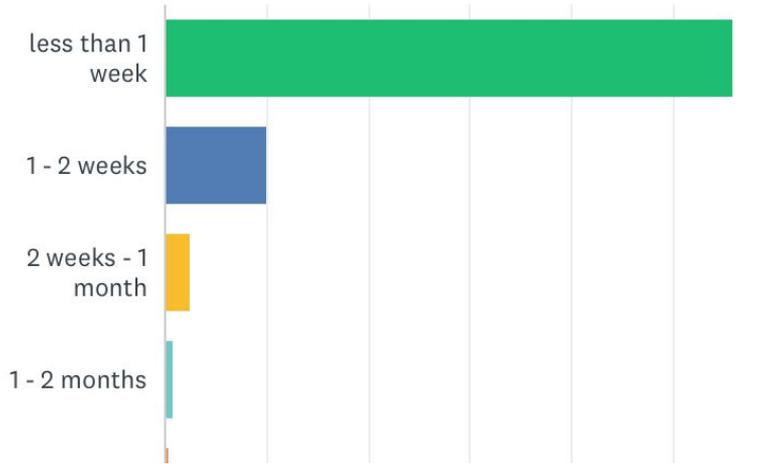


89% of participants (239 people) claimed to be supporting between 1-6 dependants.

\* 11% (30 people) claimed no dependants.

# Backpage Closure and Loss of Income

How long after Backpage closed did you observe a change in your income?



**70% of participants (186 people) affected**

*\* 70 people reported not yet being affected*

How long was after backpage closed where you unable to support yourself and those dependent on you?



**45% of participants (117 people) affected**

*\* 130 people reported still being able to support themselves and dependants*

# SEX WORKER TESTIMONIALS: DECREASE IN INCOME & FINANCIAL STRESS

“Encouraged to engage in activities outside my comfort zone because I need the income”

“My gas is shut off and I'm cleaning myself with hot water from my coffee maker.”

“...I don't have any way to pay future housing costs starting for may.”

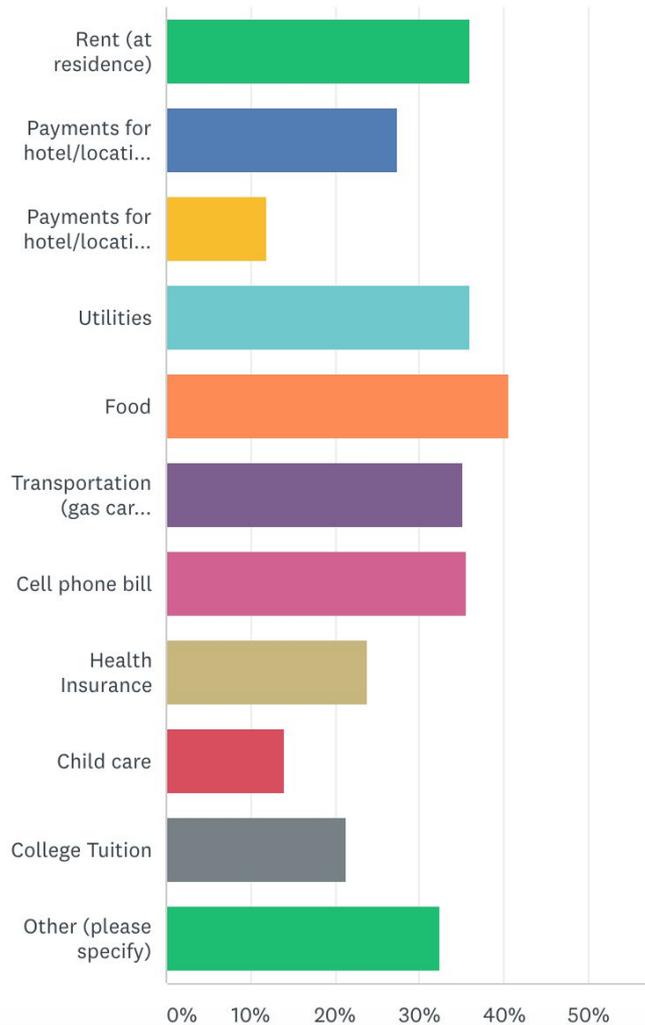
“I stopped advertising on BP after they removed the erotic services section last year (*Jan 2017*). It was my main source of income at that time, business dropped by 2/3rds immediately.”

“After two months I took a regular 9-5 job, and still do some SW on the side, but am constantly going deeper into debt.”

“Business is super slow. I'm still hanging in there. I using some of my savings”

“SESTA/FOSTA in general killed my business for about a month”

“Not completely unable (*to support myself*) but worsening daily”



What bills have you been unable to pay?

\_\_\_\_\_

# 60%

Percentage of sex workers who said they've had to take on less safe clients, to make ends meet.



# SEX WORKER TESTIMONIALS: FEAR & INCREASED DANGER

*"I stopped taking clients for fear of being arrested."*

*"I've gotten lots of vague requests, predatory, messages from people claiming to have a history with me who don't."*

*"I've been getting lots of requests from less reputable clients."*

*"I have had an increase in pimps contacting me and known manipulative clients but I refuse to take them."*

*"A client threatened me with a knife."*

*"I keep getting many people asking for discounts and no wanting to screen."*

*"Too scared to work."*



# 65%

Percentage of sex workers who said someone had tried to threaten, exploit, or get freebies from them, recently.



**ONLY RIGHTS CAN  
STOP THE WRONGS**

# SEX WORKER TESTIMONIALS: INCREASE IN PREDATORS

**“Men calling themselves gorilla pimps** have been trying to access all the girls since this has passed.”

“I have been met with **more folks trying to coerce me into work I don’t want to do.**”

**“I had a pimp contact me. That’s unusual for me.”**

**“I felt forced to offer discounts** to a client in order for him to refer friends.”

“Tried to negotiate my rates - **sniffing for desperation.**”

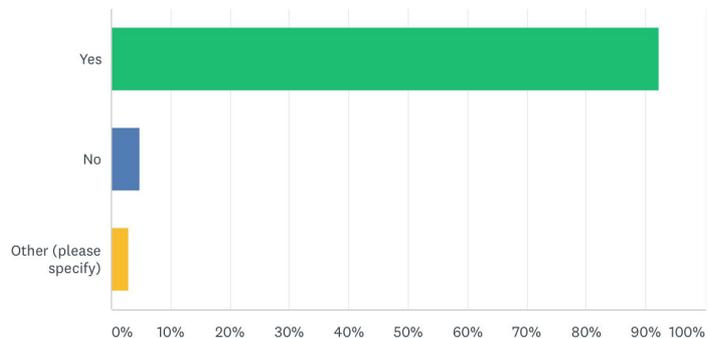
“Threatened by pimp to work for him.”

DANGER

DANGER

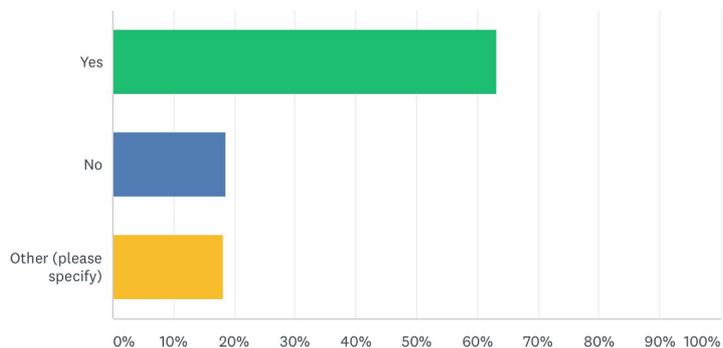
Did you screen your clients before FOSTA passed?

– 92% said YES



Did you still screen your clients after FOSTA passed?

– Only 63% said YES



# 28% drop in screening

Screening is a method sex workers use to verify the identity or reputation of a client, before agreeing to see them. **One of the biggest safety benefits to working online is having the time and ability to screen new clients.**



# SEX WORKER TESTIMONIALS: CURRENT SCREENING PRACTICES

"It's much harder because **now it's face-to-face.**"

"FOSTA made it hard to find and screen suitable respectful clients."

"I try to, but have moved to "dating" websites that are in denial about sex work. **It's much, much harder to screen since so many sex worker sites went down.**"

"No longer have verifyhim and **am forced to take appointments with no notice or time to screen.**"

"Now it's **face-to-face and within arm's length** of someone and **locations that are not desirable for safety**"

"**I've taken on more new clients without screening.** My best clients and regulars are equally terrified to engage in our consensual time together."

"Not nearly as much.. **when ur desperate u make exceptions.**"

"My standards had to be lowered because I am worried about not having enough clients"

"I try to still screen, but sometimes I just can't because I truly need the money."

"**I can no longer screen without a safe platform.**"



# CRIMINALIZED COMMUNICATION:

Sex workers sometimes use references from other sex workers, as a means of screening clients. **References are word-of-mouth reviews of a client's behavior** that enable sex workers to make informed decisions about whether or not they will see a new client.

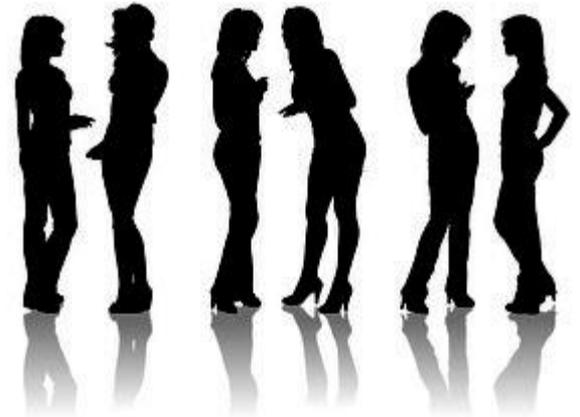
*"I will only see people now who have solid references from people I know well."*

*"I used TER as my main source of screening and it was also what gave me my reputation and clients. That resource is no longer available. I now will have to rely more on provider references and just be extra careful."*

*"I take references from other providers. Many providers won't give refs now because they are afraid it violates FOSTA."*

*"I talk with other sex workers about clients and we try to gather as much info as we can, but a lot of the time we just don't know now that our online resources are disappearing"*

What these sex workers may or may not know is that communicating about their history with a client, or encouraging another sex worker to see a safe client, can be considered "promoting prostitution". **In some jurisdictions, this communication can even be considered trafficking.**



We are not being alarmist.  
Sex workers are in crisis.

The following testimonials are from sex workers wishing to report  
and document crimes via the COYOTE survey:

*“Since FOSTA passed I've been working mostly with regular clients,  
but I can't make my living off of just regulars and it's hard to screen now.*

***So I met with a new client that I had only met that night.***

*I got in his car and we went to his place a town over from where I live.*

***We got to his place and there were four other men there.***

*I was terrified but I was afraid to try to leave because I knew they would probably follow me.*

*I knew I would get hurt if I stayed and I would get hurt if I tried to leave.*

***I was gang raped that night by five men.***

*I was not paid. They stole everything I hadn't on me (which was not much.)*

*I was covered in bruises and scrapes and cuts. I did not go to the hospital because I was afraid.*

***I did not tell anyone** (except for fellow sex workers so they know not to go with him)*

***because I was afraid.”***

*“I received a text from a SW that said she did not know what to do now that bp (Backpage) was gone and was about to lose her motel room and that she would have to start walking the streets in order to survive.”*

*“Unsure of exact date and time my friend turned to work in the street and was brutally raped”*

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# Please help us stay safe.

## Immediately:

Repeal SESTA and FOSTA

Stop attacking our advertising and screening websites

## Ultimately:

Decriminalize consensual adult sex work

Consult with us (sex workers) on the issues that affect us