# Four Years of FOSTA: The Survey

Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics Rhode Island

www.coyoteri.org

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As a descendent of Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE 1973), **Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics Rhode Island (COYOTE RI)** was founded by Bella Robinson as a response to the state of Rhode Island recriminalizing prostitution in 2009. COYOTE RI is a feminist, sex worker-led organization dedicated to advancing the human rights of women, girls, trans, and intersex individuals within the sex industry.

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## About the survey

In July 2022, COYOTE worked with a small focus group of sex workers and sex trafficking survivors to develop a survey of sex workers and sex trafficking survivors to assess the effects of four years of the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act, commonly known as FOSTA or FOSTA/SESTA. FOSTA modified the Communications Decency Act to allow for prosecution of website owners whose websites contained user generated content that facilitates or aids prostitution, resulting in an immediate widespread loss of advertising and screening resources.

This survey is meant as an updated follow up to the survey that we did immediately after FOSTA went into effect in 2018. The questions were beta tested on a small sample before being distributed. The survey opened on July 11, 2022 and closed on August 21, 2022. COYOTE RI solicited survey participants by posting on social media and emailing and tweeting escorts who advertise online. In the last few days, participants from groups who were under-represented among survey participants (male workers) were offered $10 to complete the survey. Participants were limited to those who had worked before and after FOSTA's enactment, as verified by a qualifying question. 332 people started the survey and 227 completed it. All responses of all qualified participants are included. Survey questions focused on three areas: FOSTA's effect on violence, FOSTA's effect on vulnerability, and FOSTA's effects on public safety more broadly.

## Why the survey?

We believe that the people most impacted by FOSTA have the most insight into its impacts. As a criminalized population, our voices have always been hidden in the shadows. Legislators do not consult us when they make laws that dramatically change our working conditions, and most of us do not choose to risk arrest by reaching out to them, instead choosing to share our experiences and insights anonymously online. One of the primary effects of FOSTA has been to shut down our online speech and make us even more afraid to speak up publicly. This survey is intended to bring the voices of our community, which sociologists call a "hidden population," to our broader community and to the legislative and judicial communities which are empowered to create the safety and fairness of our work conditions by making and changing laws.

## Sex trafficking: a note about language

"Sex trafficking" is a phrase with so many different legal and popular definitions that it has become devoid of any specific meaning. In this report we use the federal definition of sex trafficking: force, fraud, coercion, or minors. Under federal law, minors in the sex industry are victims of sex trafficking even if they are working on their own with no trafficker. For this survey we split the two groups up - victims of force, fraud, or coercion, and those who entered the industry as minors. There is some overlap between the two groups.

It’s important to note that the majority of these people would not call themselves sex trafficking survivors and many would be offended by being called sex trafficking survivors. However, when we discuss federal laws like FOSTA in relation to sex trafficking survivors, these are the people we are talking about. Throughout this report, we have attempted to respect people’s rights to self-definition by using the terms “survivors of force, fraud, or coercion within the industry” or “those who entered the industry as minors,” while also being clear that these are the “sex trafficking victims” that FOSTA was supposed to help.

## Summary

Broadly speaking, FOSTA increased force, fraud, and coercion against sex workers from other actors within the sex trade, and violence from clients and perpetrators posing as clients. At the same time, FOSTA created more vulnerability to violence by reducing income, increasing homelessness, decreasing peer support, and decreasing access to safety information. FOSTA negatively impacted public safety by pushing advertising sites overseas where police are less able to subpoena information from them and by making sex workers and sex trafficking survivors much less likely to report serious crimes, like assault or child pornography, to police. In other words, the real world effects of FOSTA are completely contrary to its stated intent.

The table below gives responses for all participants, as well as for several subgroups: survivors of force, fraud, or coercion, those who entered the industry as minors, people with disabilities, men, and people of color. Because some participants only completed part of the survey or skipped questions, the number of participants in each group is included for each section of the survey.

| Question | All | Trafficking survivor: force, fraud, coercion | Trafficking survivor: entered industry as minors | People with Disabilities | Men | People of Color |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **TRAFFICKING N=** | **248-215** | **56-48** | **26-25** | **90-79** | **17-16** | **69-60** |
| Reported an increase in force or coercion | 40% | **64%** | 56% | 51% | 29% | 43% |
| Reported an increase in fraud | 37% | 58% | 48% | 54% | 38% | 43% |
| Reported an increase in recruitment by pimps (not trafficking) | 55% | 56% | 56% | 46% | **13%** | 43% |
| **DANGEROUS EXPLOITATIVE WORK CONDITIONS** | | | | | | |
| **N=** | | **245-238** | **56-55** | **88-86** | **16-15** | **67-64** |
| Reported an increase in violence from clients or those posing as clients, including stealth condom removal | 39% | **67%** | 52% | 53% | **13%** | 34% |
| Reported increased pressure to provide services outside of their boundaries | 54% | 66% | 68% | 67% | 31% | 59% |
| Lowered rates | 35% | **44%** | 31% | **46%** | 25% | 33% |
| Offered new services that they weren't comfortable with | 41% | **47%** | 42% | **52%** | 31% | 43% |

| INCREASED VULNERABILITY - WORK CONDITIONS<br>N=<br>53-52 | | 228-221 | 26-24 | 87-78 | 15 | 65-63 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Turned to street-based work | 11% | 17% | **24%** | 21% | **0%** | 12% |
| Did not use blacklists before FOSTA | 20% | 13% | 8% | 17% | 67% | 25% |
| Did not use blacklists right after FOSTA | 39% | **44%** | 29% | 38% | 73% | 47% |
| Currently aren't able to access blacklists | 30% | 28% | 28% | 25% | 80% | 36% |
| Used 2+ blacklists before FOSTA | 68% | 72% | 84% | 72% | 27% | |
| Used 2+ blacklists right after FOSTA | 39% | 37% | 38% | 37% | 13% | |
| Use 2+ blacklists now | 43% | 45% | 36% | 49% | 7% | |
| Report that FOSTA prevented them from using screening measures that make them feel safe | 78% | **81%** | 79% | 79% | 80% | 77% |
| Reluctant or unable to express themselves online in a way that attracts customers who want the services they provide because of FOSTA | 75% | 77% | **91%** | 79% | 53% | 78% |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reluctant or unable to express themselves online in a way that would prevent customers they don't want from contacting them because of FOSTA | 50% | 62% | 65% | 50% | 13% | 51% |
| Reluctant or unable to express themselves online in a way that affects their safety because of FOSTA | 43% | 62% | 65% | 59% | 27% | 46% |
| Reluctant or unable to express opinions online because of FOSTA | 60% | 63% | 70% | 60% | 33% | 52% |

| INCREASED VULNERABILITY - NETWORKS OF SUPPORT | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N= 25-24 | | 226-225 | 53-52 | 81-79 | 15 | 64 |
| Less knowledge of local colleagues | 55% | 60% | 60% | 52% | 33% | 55% |
| Less likely to help new worker with safety info now | 43% | 33% | 50% | 43% | 27% | 34% |
| FOSTA prevented them from networking LOCALLY | 71% | 77% | 76% | 72% | 53% | 70% |
| FOSTA prevented them from organizing/attending a conference | 42% | 52% | 48% | 47% | 27% | 38% |
| FOSTA prevented them from participating in online forums | 58% | 65% | 68% | 63% | 33% | 60% |
| FOSTA prevented them from self-identifying in efforts for reform or political change | 58% | 65% | 48% | 58% | 53% | 57% |
| FOSTA prevented them from publishing letters to the editor, essays, etc | 31% | 30% | 24% | 37% | 27% | 40% |

| INCREASED VULNERABILITY - HOUSING | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N= 53-25 | | 228-93 | 25-8 | 81-40 | 15-3 | 65-35 |
| FOSTA caused homelessness | 10% | 11% | 8% | **14%** | 13% | 9% |
| FOSTA caused unstable housing | 28% | 34% | 28% | 37% | **7%** | **40%** |
| *Of those who became homeless or unstably housed:* | | | | | | |
| Were offered housing by a pimp | 20% | **36%** | **38%** | 25% | 0 | 9% |
| Had children living with them at the time | 18% | 16% | 25% | 15% | 0 | 17% |
| Offered housing by someone trying to exploit them for free sex | 43% | 64% | 50% | 55% | 0 | 37% |
| Received help from non exploitive client | 34% | 20% | 38% | 30% | 0 | 43% |
| Shelters discriminated against them because of sex work | 22% | 24% | **63%** | 25% | 0 | 20% |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Had to rely on someone who was trying to exploit them | 30% | **48%** | 25% | 38% | 0 | 23% |
| Everything spiraled out of control, still have not recovered | 18% | 20% | **37%** | 25% | 33% | 14% |

| **INCREASED VULNERABILITY - INCOME** | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **N = 53-49** | | **227-220** | **25-23** | **81-78** | **15** | **64-61** |
| Received new public assistance | 31% | 33% | 26% | **44%** | 33% | 39% |
| Applied for public assistance, did not receive | 17% | 20% | 26% | 22% | 20% | 23% |
| Able to be only somewhat financially secure with FOSTA in place | 42% | 42% | 32% | 38% | 33% | 35% |
| Not able to be financially secure with FOSTA in place | 40% | 44% | 52% | 51% | 20% | 48% |
| Income dropped | 82% | 81% | 80% | 86% | 67% | 81% |
| **PUBLIC SAFETY** | | | | | | |
| **N=** | **225-221** | **52-51** | **24-22** | **80-79** | **15-14** | **64-61** |
| Less likely to go to police if assaulted now | 70% | 63% | **78%** | 67% | 52% | 63% |
| Less likely to go to police if client brought child porn | 50% | 57% | **77%** | 54% | 14% | 48% |
| Reported a crime and | 3% | 4% | 4% | 3% | 7% | **8%*** |

FOSTA affected investigation

**this is 100% of the POC who reported crimes to police - for other groups about half of their reports weren't affected by FOSTA*

## FOSTA increased violence and trafficking within the sex industry

Although FOSTA was intended to decrease sex trafficking it did just the opposite. Results show that 40% of participants reported an increase in force and coercion and 45% reported increased recruitment by pimps after FOSTA. For participants who had been or were currently victims of trafficking, the numbers were 64 and 56% respectively. 36% of participants said that there was an increase in fraud (trickery or lies used to change the amount or way that someone worked), and 58% of trafficking victims noted an increase in fraud. Women experienced more force, fraud, and coercion than men. Workers who entered the industry as minors or who were homeless growing up were also more vulnerable to force, fraud, and coercion.

Why did so many workers receive more force, fraud, or coercion, and more contact by would-be traffickers? Participants frequently answered that because many forms of safe advertising (especially Backpage) had disappeared or were cracked down on, pimps and violent offenders posing as clients knew that workers were more vulnerable. Additionally, the disappearance of screening sites, or "blacklists," which allowed workers to identify and report bad clients to the sex work community, made it impossible to differentiate a safe client from a violent one. Pimps took advantage of this, claiming to be able to provide "protection." As one participant stated: "I had pimps attempting to stalk/harass/recruit me on social media dozens of times. I had actually never been contacted by one prior to FOSTA. They were trying to fly me out, get me to work for them, find out where I live, etc."

The loss of safe advertising and screening databases led to the loss of money, and an increase in people that were willing to exploit financial hardship to control workers.

## FOSTA created dangerous work conditions, increasing violence and exploitation

FOSTA not only increased sex trafficking and recruitment by pimps–it actively made the workplace more dangerous. Because many forms of safe advertising had disappeared, and because safe clients became more paranoid about giving out personal details commonly used in screening, workers lost their resources to vet clients for their safety. The results show that 39% of participants stated that they experienced more physical and sexual assault after FOSTA. For trafficking survivors, this was 67%, and for people with disabilities, it was 53%. Participants reported being robbed, raped, beaten, and locked into rooms. Yet, despite the increase in violence, workers were less likely to go to the police for assistance, because they were afraid of being arrested. FOSTA caused more harm for our most vulnerable groups while empowering and enabling violent perpetrators.

FOSTA also made work conditions more dangerous in other ways; largely because of increased financial hardship and more difficulty in finding reliable clients, 35% of participants had to lower their rates (44% of trafficking survivors and 46% of those with disabilities) and 41% started offering services that they were not comfortable with (47% of trafficking survivors and 52% of those with disabilities). Workers reported that clients pressured them to have sex without condoms or to participate in illicit drugs. Clients are demanding more services and lower rates, causing workers to have to see more clients and perform more services to support themselves and their dependents, increasing the risk that they are going to have a bad encounter.

## FOSTA increased street-based sex work

The loss of advertising and increased financial hardship after FOSTA forced many sex workers onto the streets. This report shows that 11% of participants who had not previously engaged in street-based work turned to it after the passage of FOSTA. That number was much higher for vulnerable groups–17% of trafficking survivors, 24% of those who entered the industry as minors, and 21% of people with disabilities turned to street-based work.

Street based sex work is significantly more dangerous. Workers often do not have time to adequately vet their clients to ensure their own safety before getting in their cars. Being in a moving vehicle with child safety locks decreases a worker’s safety. The driver has control, thus

power to violate sex workers. Workers can rarely bring friends or security along with them for safety, and there can sometimes be more people in a car than expected. It is incredibly easy, then, for a bad encounter to happen, and street-based workers often have little they can do to prevent it. As one participant stated: “When working on any street, us workers are in danger from everyone. Whether it’s teens driving by in a car, throwing baseballs and slurs at us; or it’s the violent client kicked out of every club in town, coming to where he knows he’s ‘allowed to hurt women.’ street based sex work is so dangerous for the workers involved.”

By forcing more workers onto the street, FOSTA  puts more people (often young, homeless, and/or with a disability) in extreme danger, with no institutional safety nets to support them.

## FOSTA decreased blacklist access

Blacklists–community made databases that warn workers of unsafe clients–are vital to keeping workers safe. Especially when workers are traveling to new cities or do not have many regulars in an area, being able to identify whether a potential client is violent or otherwise dangerous before meeting with them in person is of the utmost importance.

Yet innumerable blacklists disappeared or were deleted after FOSTA. Prior to FOSTA, 68% of participants stated they used two or more blacklists. More vulnerable populations were more likely to use blacklists; 72% of trafficking survivors, 72% of people with disabilities, and 84% of people who entered the industry as minors used two or more blacklists. Immediately following FOSTA, only 39% of participants used two or more blacklists, and 38% of participants used no blacklists at all, dramatically increasing their risk. Trafficking survivors, people with disabilities, and people who entered the industry as minors were *more likely* to lose access to blacklists, increasing their nexus of vulnerability.

While access to blacklists has increased in the years since FOSTA, progress has been marginal, and many workers have nowhere near the same amount of access to blacklists that they had prior to FOSTA. Moreover, these new blacklists are often less comprehensive, as years of data have been wiped from the internet. Without reliable blacklists warning of rapists, robbers, or kidnappers, sex workers are in the dark about who they are meeting. Safety tools such as these are needed and necessary, and working without them can be terrifying for many.

One participant explained, “my access to blacklists disappeared so a lot of predators got a fresh slate.”

## FOSTA made screening less possible

In addition to blacklists, many workers advertising online make use of other screening techniques, such as requiring a customer to email them from their work email address to prove their identity, checking court system databases for violent charges, or using other information provided by the client to look them up  in various databases. This screening system relies on trust - because customers don’t want to be arrested, they have to trust that any information about themselves that they send to an escort will be kept confidential and will not be intercepted by police. Events like FOSTA that increase customers’ fear of police decrease their willingness to provide screening information.

Another formerly popular screening technique was to require a reference from another worker before meeting a new client. However, increased fear of police makes workers fearful of providing information about their clients to other workers and makes clients fearful of providing information about other escorts they’ve seen. Additionally, in many states, providing a reference for a client can be prosecuted as felony sex trafficking or promoting prostitution.

Prior to the passage of FOSTA, 51% of participants stated that they were always able to use screening procedures that made them feel safe, and an additional 26% stated that they were usually able to do so. Only 6% of participants never used screening procedures for their work. However, 78% of participants stated that FOSTA negatively impacted their ability to use screening procedures, and 15% of participants stated that after FOSTA they were no longer able to use safe screening procedures at all. Again, FOSTA increases the risks that workers undertake to stay financially stable, and loss of screening abilities harms already vulnerable groups: people with disabilities, people who entered the industry as minors, people who have been victimized within the industry, and those who experienced homelessness growing up.

## FOSTA decreased community support among sex workers

After FOSTA, workers became fearful of being prosecuted for doing nothing more than helping keep other workers safe. As such, many sex workers felt uncomfortable or unsafe organizing with other workers. Seventy-one percent of participants stated that FOSTA hindered their willingness or ability to organize with other sex workers for safety purposes, ranging from outreach activities to community brunches. Vulnerable populations, including survivors of trafficking and those who had entered the industry as minors were even less willing to organize locally. Most concerningly, 43% of participants indicated that they were less likely to help a new worker that asked for safety tips. Many participants expressed fear that a worker reaching out for tips may be an informant, an undercover cop, or a violent offender looking to use those tips against them. As one worker stated: “Now I am screening those new workers just like I screen new clients. I need to know who they are before I interact. I fear that cops and informants are everywhere now. I used to be the first to mentor a new girl but not any more, sorry to say.”

Other participants expressed fear of being labeled a pimp if they provided assistance to new workers. For example, one commented, “the law can prosecute under FOSTA/SESTA for helping other full service sex workers.” Another wrote, “I cannot help other sex workers or do outreach publicly without the danger of being labeled a pimp.” FOSTA is the first federal law that we know of since the MANN act to expand the definition of pimping/trafficking to include standard prostitution practices. Now, not only will workers not seek police assistance if they are in danger, they also fear sharing potentially life-saving safety information with other sex workers. This results in decreased public safety and health.

Similarly, FOSTA prevented participants from organizing or attending a conference (42%), participating in online forums (58%), identifying as a sex worker in public advocacy for reform or legislative change (58%), and publishing articles, essays, and op-eds (31%). Survivors of trafficking, disabled persons, those who entered the industry as minors, and people of color were generally less willing or able than the average participant to identify publicly as a sex worker after FOSTA. The silencing effect of FOSTA prevents workers’ stories and opinions to be heard, makes it less likely that public opinion or legislation will become more favorable to sex workers, and continues to criminalize workers’ lives and livelihoods.

## FOSTA increased homelessness

Because FOSTA has decreased our income and safety, many sex workers have lost their homes. 10% of participants reported homelessness due to FOSTA, and 28% experienced unstable housing. Survivors of trafficking, those with disabilities, and people of color were more likely to experience unstable housing (34, 37, and 40% respectively). While some were able to recover in the years since FOSTA, many were not. Of those who experienced homelessness or unstable housing in the wake of FOSTA, 20% were offered housing by a pimp, 43% were offered housing by someone trying to exploit them for free sex, 22% were denied services or discriminated against by homeless shelters because they were a sex worker, and 18% expressed that everything spiraled out of control, and they were never able to recover.

Those who entered the industry as minors had the lowest rates of relying on someone who was trying to exploit them for help, but the highest rates of being discriminated against at shelters. They also had the lowest rate of recovering from homelessness. Other vulnerable groups were impacted in different ways; survivors of trafficking were more likely to be contacted by a pimp, and persons with disabilities were particularly likely to be exploited or offered housing for free sex. As such, even those who were able to find housing after homelessness were not necessarily safe. As one participant stated: “Lost my housing due to lost work after FOSTA and inability to advertise. Bad housing situation now. Not safe or stable but it’s better than homelessness. I’d rather stay living here where they take advantage of my disabilities and inability to move and often use coercion to get free work out of me than go to a pimp.”

While losing a home is a devastating experience for anyone, it is especially difficult for sex workers. For workers who’ve had a prostitution charge, it can be impossible to rent a home - in some states, like Rhode Island, landlords who rent to known sex workers can be charged with felony Pandering or Sex Trafficking.

## FOSTA Negatively Impacted Public Safety

Only 12 of the survey participants had reported a work-related crime to police since FOSTA passed. For 5 of them, FOSTA had no effect, but 7 of them reported that police were unable to subpoena information to aid in their investigation because FOSTA had moved websites overseas. For people of color who reported crimes to police - 5 of the 12 reports - FOSTA

impeded all police investigations. While this small sample size indicates the rareness of sex workers turning to police for help, it also indicates that FOSTA is likely impeding at least half of investigations into sex work related crimes.

Survey participants were asked how FOSTA affected the likelihood of them reporting serious crimes to police. If they were assaulted at work, 70% said they are less likely to report to police because of FOSTA. One explained, “I no longer have as much info on who I see or ability to give contact points. The cops won’t care, and it will open me to targets.” If a client showed them child pornography, 50% said they are less likely to report to police because of FOSTA. Several participants left comments similar to this one: “I'm so sorry, really wish it were different and I would find a way to do something but walking into the police department myself wouldn't be it!” While FOSTA does not target individual sex workers reporting crimes to police, to sex workers it represented a significant increase in hostility towards them by the federal government and law enforcement community. This might explain why FOSTA so heavily impacted the likelihood of sex workers and sex trafficking survivors reporting serious crimes.

Individual sex workers may rarely or never be the victim or witness of a serious crime. It is also true that serial predators, who represent significant threats to public safety, target sex workers because they know we are afraid of police. It is in everyone’s best interest to create policy that incentivizes the reporting and investigation of these kinds of predators in our communities.

## FOSTA Harmed Survivors More

Survivors of force, fraud, or coercion within the sex industry and those who had entered the sex industry as minors faced more violence, exploitative work conditions, and vulnerability due to FOSTA than the larger group of survey participants. Their economic outcomes and recovery from homelessness were much worse.

Those who had been victims of force, fraud, or coercion within the industry faced the largest increases in violence: 64% - 24% more than all participants - reported more force and coercion within the industry after FOSTA, and 58% - 21% more than all participants - reported an increase in fraud within the industry after FOSTA. 67% - 22% more than all participants - reported an increase in violence by clients or those posing as clients, while 44%- 9% more than all participants - reported lowering their rates and 47% - 6% more than all participants - reported

offering new services that they weren't comfortable with to survive the post-FOSTA market. Only 1% more of these survivors reported an increase in recruitment by pimps than the whole group of survey participants did. Those who are successfully targeted by sex traffickers are typically vulnerable people with multiple intersecting marginalized identities, and it is these same factors that make them more likely to be targets of and other kinds of violence.

Of those who had entered the industry as minors, 56% - 16% more than all participants - reported an increase in force and coercion within the industry after FOSTA, and 48% - 11% more than all participants - reported an increase in fraud within the industry. Fifty two percent - 13% more than all participants - reported an increase in violence from clients or those posing as clients. Those who entered the industry as minors lowered their rates less often than the rest of the survey participants and started offering new services that they were uncomfortable with only 1% more often.

Twenty four percent of those who entered the industry as minors reported turning to street-based work after FOSTA - more than twice the 11% of the larger group, and substantially more than the 17% of survivors of force, fraud, or coercion. Both groups reported elevated levels of FOSTA preventing them from organizing with other sex workers or communicating online.

Of those who became homeless or unstably housed due to FOSTA, 37% of those who entered the industry as minors - 19% more, or almost twice as much, as all participants - reported that everything spiraled out of control, and they still haven't recovered. The survey found that 63% - almost three times as much as the whole group - reported that they were discriminated against at shelters or other assistance programs, reducing public safety. When homeless, they relied on someone who was trying to exploit them for help five percent less than all participants, and 38% reported being offered free housing by a pimp, more than any other group.

Of those who had been victims of force, fraud, or coercion within the industry and become homeless or unstably housed due to FOSTA, 36% - 16% more than all participants - were offered housing by a pimp. 64% - that's 21% more than all participants - were offered housing by someone who was trying to exploit them, and 48% - 18% more than the whole group - accepted help from someone who was trying to exploit them.

Again, the same factors that make a person more vulnerable or likely to be targeted by sex traffickers also make them more likely to be discriminated against when accessing services or exploited when desperate for housing.

## Men were less impacted

Only 18 men took the survey, with only 15 completing it. More male survey participants would be needed to draw strong conclusions. Still, the differences are dramatic and warrant attention.

Only 13% of male sex workers and sex trafficking survivors reported an increase in violence from clients or those posing as clients after FOSTA - only a third as much as the whole group reported. Thirty one percent of male sex workers and sex trafficking survivors reported an increase in pressure to provide services they were uncomfortable with - a little more than half of the 54% of the whole group who did. They lowered their rates and began offering new services they were uncomfortable with 10% less than the whole group. None of them reported turning to street-based work after FOSTA. Their free speech and networks of support were also dramatically less impacted.

The subgroup of male sex workers and sex trafficking survivors who became homeless due to FOSTA is too small to draw any conclusions from, but the differences are again dramatic.

## Differences in impacts for other groups

While people of color had relatively similar responses throughout the survey, investigations of crimes they reported to police were more than twice as likely to be hindered by FOSTA. In fact, investigations of 100% of crimes reported by people of color were hindered by FOSTA, while only about half of investigations of crimes reported by other groups were hindered by FOSTA. Sex workers can be valuable partners in public safety, preventing and reporting serious crime. FOSTA allows sex traffickers, rapists, child pornographers, and other predators to commit these crimes without prosecution.

Thirty seven percent of survey participants reported having a disability, and were disproportionately impacted by FOSTA, with elevated rates of violence throughout and the

highest percentage of lowering the rates for their services being forced by post-FOSTA conditions to offer services they were uncomfortable with. They turned to street-based work almost twice as often as the whole group, and reported the highest rates of homelessness and unstable housing. Further, those with disabilities had the highest rate of receiving new public assistance.

A major predictor of violence before and after FOSTA was homelessness growing up.

## Resiliency and distrust in those who entered the industry as minors

Those who had entered the industry as minors and those who have been victims of force, fraud, or coercion within the industry are both defined federally as sex trafficking victims. While there is some overlap between the groups, the survey found some interesting differences in their experiences that can be summarized as worse experiences with “the system,” more distrust of the system and other people, and more resilience in terms of pursuing income and avoiding potential predators.

While they were more likely than other participants to be victimized within the industry or by clients or those posing as clients, they were less likely to be victimized than those who had been victims of force, fraud, or coercion within the industry.

They lowered their rates less than other survey participants and were by far the most likely to turn to street-based work. They had the highest rates of blacklist usage, and if they became homeless, they were less likely than any other group (except men) to accept help from someone trying to exploit them, however they reported the worst outcomes after homelessness. They received less new public assistance after FOSTA but were denied public assistance more than any other group. They reported the highest rate of being unable to be financially secure with FOSTA in place.

They reported being less likely to report crimes to police because of FOSTA more than any other group and were the only group who wasn’t significantly more likely to report child pornography than an assault on themselves. They reported being less likely to help another sex worker with safety information because of FOSTA at the highest rates, and also reported the highest rates of being reluctant or unable to express themselves online in a way that attracts customers who are looking for the sorts of services they provide because of FOSTA.

## Vulnerability and mutual aid in survivors of FFC

Survivors of force, fraud, or coercion within the sex industry reported increased violence within the industry and from clients or those posing as clients at the highest rates. They were more likely than those who entered the industry as minors to lower their rates or start offering new services they weren't comfortable with. They reported using blacklists more than any other group other than those who entered the industry as minors but had the highest drop in rate of blacklist accessibility after FOSTA.

They were more likely than any other group to help a new worker with safety information, more likely than any other group to report to police if they were assaulted, and most likely to accept help from someone who was trying to exploit them if they became homeless. These numbers may reflect less bad experiences with "the system" and more trust in other people.

## Other interesting demographics

- Entry to the sex industry:
    - 93% reported entering the industry willingly.
    - 2% reported being forced or coerced to enter the industry.
    - 5% reported being tricked or manipulated into entering the industry.
    - 10% reported entering the industry as a minor.
- Work conditions:
    - 77% reported having worked independently without being victimized.
    - 66% reported having worked with others without being victimized.
    - 14% reported having been a victim of force or coercion within the industry.
    - 16% reported having been a victim of lies or manipulation within the industry.
- Of the transgender people who took the survey (34) a little more than half (18) use a cis gendered persona for work.
- 37% of survey participants reported having a disability.
- 26% of survey participants reported experiencing homelessness growing up.

## Stories participants shared

We asked if participants had any stories about the effects of FOSTA that they wanted to share with policy makers. Here are some of the responses:

*Exiting sex work has become significantly less viable because I am never in a position to save money after the income drop*

*Mostly my friends with tentative document status are affected. They really try to stay under the radar.*

*FOSTA made safety screening impossible and illegal. It's terrifying how lawmakers don't care about our safety even though the effects of FOSTA were clearly predicted by those in the industry.*

*All you did was prevent women like me, who have made the choice willingly from making an income. Of those that are truly trafficked all you did was push it further underground and you can't help them, if you can't see them. This was the most stupid inconsiderate law of those that are truly trafficked. I've been a working girl since 1987 and not once have I encountered someone that's been trafficked.*

*As somebody who was trafficked, it's incredibly insensitive that lawmakers pushed this kind of thing under the guise of lowering traffic. All it did was remove a degree of separation for safety that we use and push more providers into the arms of traffickers and pimps. The hypocrisy is unreal. They don't care about us, it's just about control. And I could tell you many stories about the Republicans that have come to me for my services but still support FOSTA.*

*Before FOSTA, there was a whole network of experienced workers who could help newbies learn about things like screening, deposits, blacklists, etc. You took all that away, so now people are even more vulnerable to predators.*

*Before FOSTA I mostly worked at massage parlors and felt so much safer working with others and knowing that there was always at least 1-2 other people looking out for me. It became decidedly more dangerous to work with others (particularly in the same physical space) after FOSTA so I've only worked solo since then and ultimately had to quickly transition to full service/escorting full time.*

*When I tried to submit my ad on Backpage and saw that it was shut down, I had to start stripping and saw customers from the strip club instead. But, since it was in person I wasn't able to screen them as well so it was a lot more dangerous.*

*In Seattle we saw a direct correlation between websites being shutdown after FOSTA and strip clubs being flooded with displaced sex workers and clients. This work conditions in the strip clubs to become imbalanced and less profitable for strippers. Safety decreased as clients from websites tried to get services that strippers didn't supply. As a result, strippers organized and passed legislation to increase safety in the clubs, but this did not address the imbalanced caused by displaced sex workers.*

*1. A woman I know was working out of town when all the sites went down. Because she couldn't advertise herself she started working with an agency. The agency sent her to see a man at a casino who assaulted her and took all her money. The police said they could only arrest him for assault if they also arrested her for prostitution. She was stuck in this faraway city with no money and her face was all bruised up so she couldn't work even if there was a way for her to get clients. 2. Another woman I know was living day to day in a cheap hotel. Within two days of all the sites coming down she was outside in the cold trying to find customers. She became homeless and lived in a tent for over a year. 3. After FOSTA I traveled to a rural oil boom town I sometimes work in. I found that a couple pimps had abandoned several sex workers each in this little town. They had no money to leave or pay for their rooms or find new customers and customers knew it. Most of them started offering bareback services for half of their normal rate just to make the money to get out of town. I can't imagine how many STIs were transmitted. Because bbfs for $100 was the new standard there, I made no money and was lucky that I had the money to travel home and still pay my bills.*

*I have a friend who was put out on the street by her pimp when the websites fell. The very first night she was robbed and raped at gun point. When she got back to her pimp, he beat her because her money was stolen. She had never experienced this before and kept telling me how out of control she felt. Another friend called me and told me she was going to choose up. (Get a pimp) because she was losing her home.*

*I have been kicked off of social media platforms for even attempting to discuss rights related to sex work.*

*One of the street based POC trans sex workers I advocate for lost her housing as a result of FOSTA. When she lost her housing and started doing street sex work was raped brutally by a client and now has HIV because of the rape. When I started working with her she was being repeatedly exploited. We were able to get her interim housing but she is sick and now disabled. She still does sex work to survive but can not disclose her status for fear of being beaten or killed. Thank you FOSTA.*

*The bottom line is digitally discriminating and deplatforming sex workers is an act of violence. Not listening or collaborating with the very communities you*

*are writing policy about has life altering repercussions for said communities and those apart of them. Some of us are being forced into more dangerous lines of work because we cannot work safely online or utilize safe working practices such as screening or Decriminalization. It's unacceptable and sex workers need protections now. Our voices have been left out of policy and legislation for too long, we don't need legislators speaking for us when we have voices. It's time to start collaborating with sex workers and reflecting our needs in everyday life. Sex work is work and we need human rights.*

*A good friend who had made his income using ads online had all his ads taken down and immediately had to stay in a house with people who triggered his addiction. I had three different SWers stay with me while they tried to figure out new ways to bring in income and had lost their housing. Also, the level of anxiety and feeling scared, hunted, oppressed, run down, and burnt out just skyrocketed. I've seen a LOT of people who were ground down in the past few years because of how hard it is to get good clients now, and some of them ended up taking their own lives. The mental health toll has been astronomical.*

*FOSTA put the power in the hands of pimps and exploitative clients. Taking away online platforms means not being able to set prices in advance and sometimes having to argue with clients in the moment.*

*Because she was unable to advertise for or screen new clients, my sister was forced to move in with a client to have shelter. The client took her to Hawaii under the guise of a getaway vacation, but abandoned her there without her shoes, phone, or ID. She was homeless for 6 months before we could find her and get her. She died a month after she came home from suicide.*

*A client hired me and wanted to show me child pornography. I said no and asked him if he was concerned about FOSTA/SESTA increasing his risk of being prosecuted. He laughed at me. It was chilling. "Now it's even easier, " he said. "We have our own code and still get what we want, we have our own networks without websites." I didn't report it because I was afraid I would be arrested for being with the client to come to the knowledge in the first place. Other people online have used the law to increase harassment, threats and deplatforming for me. I just want to do my job and have a peaceful life with my family.*

*He saw my ads online. I didn't know he knew. I took my car to the garage for my appointment...when I got it back the air conditioner was broken, I had severe asthma, and the headlights had been intentionally shorted out. The appointment was for an oil change and to fix a part in the driver's side window mechanism. There was no need to be near the headlights or the air conditioner. He then spent months sexually extorting me, sharing my photos with his friends at work, coercing me to make illegal content in Pennsylvania*

*and promising to fix my car. I took it to a BMW mechanic who said the damage done to my headlights would cost over $5,000 to fix. I couldn't afford that. It was a big mess. I tried to call the owner of the garage, I just wanted my car fixed, and they laughed claiming I'd be the one arrested for prostitution. And he was not wrong. The cops wouldn't even have investigated him...they likely would have arrested me. FOSTA/SESTA didn't help end sex trafficking, it made sex workers and non sex workers more susceptible to violence. I lost over $4,000 when I had to trade my car in 7 months after the abuse started. It was the only way I could end the abuse and still survive. No car = no work = no survival.*

*Not being able to keep platforms keeps you behind in not only organizing but also groups to get involved in. It feels more dangerous to self identify even in academic or organizer spaces because of whats going on online.*

*There's not many forums where you can connect with other sexworkers. Having a connected community keeps us together and safe and we need to connect with likeminded adults because like LGBQ we hold a stigma with people who don't understand our life choices. It can get very lonely.*

*I used to be a lot more outspoken about sex worker's rights online, but ever since FOSTA, I've been wary about referencing the work so explicitly. I tiptoetip toe around topics I would much prefer to just speak openly about*

*I lost my home, my savings, everything. I was forced to move back home with a family who was abusive because I had no other options until I was able to get a factory job and save up my money and then head out to a brothel so I can get back on my feet. Going to the brothel was a very awful experience, the one that I went to there was a lot of drama that ensued and it was not a safe place. I was able to move down the road to another brothel, save my money and eventually make my way back to San Francisco. My life has been a wreck since FOSTA. I do not work well with the public, I also prefer staying home, and working from home on my own schedule was how I enjoyed my life.*

*Last month [an] escort who had quit screening her clients after FOSTA, was robbed and the man punched out both of her front teeth. As soon as I arrived on the scene I asked her if she wanted to make a police report and she said no. She told me that a few years before she caught a prostitution case and DCYF threatened to take her kids and made her jump through all kinds of hoops to keep her kids and it took her almost 2 years to have that case closed.*

*I used to share helpful information about sex work and sex worker issues before FOSTA. Doing so after FOSTA resulted in social media accounts being disabled and shadow banned.*

*I worked in hotels on backpage and was a good girl with really good clients. When they took that down I didn't know what to do. I am disabled with a traumatic brain injury so I'm not working a real job*

*Conditions became extremely unsafe and definitely made it less likely for myself or others to help*

*We have been targeted by social media platforms for censorship, even when our expression does not violate any of the platform's terms of service. It's harder to share safety information, harder to warn others of active predators, and harder to have a normal, non-sex-work related social media presence.*

*I stopped working in a secure location and had to move around to avoid the risk of suspicion. It cost more in overhead. See fewer clients. Less income.*

*When FOSTA first hit, it directly caused the deaths of half a dozen sex workers (that I heard of via Twitter). That a law that was supposed to "save" us only created literal victims should be proof that criminalization does not work.*

*Just talking about sex work can get you suspended from social media, financial institutions like PayPal or Bank of America can close your account, landlords can put you on the street.*

*I grew up in an abusive and isolated religious cult, which forced me into homelessness at 15yo. This abandonment from my family and community resulted in years of homelessness, sexual abuse, and substance abuse. After getting sober, I tried desperately to retain steady employment, and housing, but with my lack of education due to being raised in a religious cult which refused adequate education, and having no family or community support, keeping employment that covered my bills was not possible, especially when I tried to go to college. I ended up having to drop out, and ultimately lost my employment due to trying to juggle financially self-supporting, and education. I entered the sex work industry at the age of 20 years old (2013), when I lost my decent job, and was 2 months late on rent. I was applying to jobs nonstop for 2 months, but the only response I got was a Craigstlist ad, which turned out to be a body rub agency. I made my 2 months rent in the span of less than a week, and I was finally back on track with my bills! I worked with the industry for a short time, but after experiencing a few violent interactions with clients who the industry lied about screening, I figured out how to advertise, and went independent. When the lease on my room ended a few months later however, I was unable to prove my income for a new apartment, and went on to experience housing insecurity, as well as exploitative/dangerous housing for 1 year, until I was finally able to find someone to be a guarantor for an apartment, and I got my own place (2015) - This guarantor "favor" ended up being an attempt at exploitation, which later (2017) caused me to experience*

*housing insecurity once again, when the attempt at exploitation was denied. I was also sexually assaulted by a client for a loan to cover the massive downpayment required for that apartment, because I did not have traditional proof of income. During the 1.5 years that I was able to retain stable housing, I was experiencing a lot of PTSD. This resulted in an attempt to leave the industry, get a day job, and go back to college, which ultimately proved unsuccessful, and I was back to housing insecurity (Summer 2016). This is when I re-entered the industry. I was very inexperienced with technology. Even though I had left the religious cult years ago, and finally had access to secular reading material, and the internet, I could never afford a computer, or modern smart devices, and was very socially isolated. This made growing in the industry, and building community, quite difficult. In late 2016, I found [an online] group that connected me with other SWs, and I was finally starting to build some momentum in sex work. Then FOSTA happened. Backpage, my only source of advertising, was shut down, and the [online] group was gone. For the next 3+ years, I experienced homelessness, and complete loss of employment. I had no income for months at a time, or worked grueling shifts for minimum wage with no benefits. I was able to retain some housing through an abusive partner. I was forced to stay for a roof over my head, and thankfully had Food stamps and cash assistance for the bare bare necessities. In 2019 I was introduced to a group of sex workers in Alcoholics Anonymous. I had been sober for years, but was still really struggling financially. These providers gave me life saving information, including new advertising platforms (which cannot be easily found online due to FOSTA - If I didn't meet those other providers, I do not know how I ever would have found this information. Information that was the difference between financial security and homelessness & abusive connections) which allowed me to re-enter the industry, including learning much safer screening practices. I was finally able to build some semblance of financial security, and leave that abusive relationship. Then COVID happened. I hadn't reported my income yet, so I couldn't apply for unemployment, and the clients were gone. I couldn't even afford to advertise, which further affected my ability to get work. This caused 2 years of housing insecurity. However, I persisted. I connected with other sw's as much as possible, and exchanged information on tricks to working in this industry post FOSTA, and pre-decriminalization. Since then I've been able to experience more financial security than I ever have, but I want to discuss the few challenges that I experience in this industry that are directly related to FOSTA. 1. Advertising is astronomically expensive. If I'm not doing amazing financially, I have to weigh eating, and advertising. Advertising in a large city can cost a whopping $800/month for just 1 website. Now post FOSTA, getting clients usually requires advertising on at least 3. 2. Free platforms like social media often include being shadowbanned for months at a time, and having accounts shut down, causing a loss of work for months, and thousands of dollars. 3. Due to the changes in advertising platforms, it has been harder to*

*advertise anonymously, this meant sacrificing my anonymity and having my photos used all over the internet without my consent, making it much harder to have future prospects outside of this industry if I want to move on to something else. This also risks my tender relationship with my family. 4. Screening and blacklisting boards are still very limited. This means having stricter screening requirements, limiting clients I can see, and for others who can't afford to turn clients away, being put into dangerous situations. 5. I have been fortunate to be able to shift from survival work to "high-end" work, however, I have spent upwards of 30k over the last few years to make that possible. This has significantly hindered my ability to build long-term financial security. I can't write off expenses that any other non-sex work business could. 6. I have very limited options for accepting deposits securely. Deposits can be another form of screening, and limits our liabilities for travel, time, and expenses. (Without deposits clients are unreliable, and can cancel or no-show, costing the provider money in prep time, travel, and other expenses).*

*I was the victim of a pimp in my first year of sex work. There was no correlation with FOSTA. The only factor in my vulnerability to this kind of abuse was that I was new and isolated. Since getting out of that situation I have been able to find community & safety in the industry. I would not consider myself in danger of experiencing anything like that again.*

*It was a really scary, anxious time when FOSTA passed. I remember having panic attacks and suicidal ideation because I was afraid I was going to lose my livelihood. I had just bought a house for the first time and was trying to get out of an unhealthy relationship, and was terrified I wouldn't be able to pay for my mortgage or the renovations that were already underway. I remember spending hours reviewing my Twitter feed, deleting any tweets that referred to "sex work" because many of us were afraid we'd have our accounts shut down, which we rely on for advertising and marketing. I cried a lot because I felt like I was losing an important part of my identity and my online expression. I used to be a lot more outspoken about sex worker's rights online, but ever since FOSTA, I've been wary about referencing the work so explicitly. I tiptoe around topics I would much prefer to just speak openly about. There was a lot of administrative trouble that came with FOSTA because of elevated concerns around online privacy. Like many full service workers who advertise online, I switched all my email communication from Gmail to encrypted email and began requiring clients to only correspond using an encrypted email address themselves. It has often been a huge administrative headache to try to convince ignorant clients who are unaware of the risks of FOSTA to set up new email addresses, and then remember to check their inboxes. I have lost thousands and thousands of dollars in potential work because of clients forgetting to check their encrypted email accounts. I also moved all of my domain registration offshore as another security precaution and started using VPNs religiously to protect my privacy online. I am much more vigilant about*

*online privacy as a result of FOSTA and worry more about potential legal repercussions around basic things that are necessary to make my living. Like many of my colleagues, I took down my duo / friends page (a page on my website that profiled friends I enjoy working with) because it could be perceived as (now felony-level) trafficking. I feel like the industry used to be much more social and more collaborative before the fear instilled in us by FOSTA, which put a stop to a lot of community events and online connections. And shadowbanning has become a huge problem on Twitter, which reduces the visibility of our accounts and impacts our income. It's not clear why this happens, but there is certainly a pattern of escorts' PG-rated tweets being buried / hidden for no apparent reasons. Overall, I've been very lucky and privileged among sex workers as a whole. I'm highly educated, white, able-bodied, conventionally attractive. I still make 6 figures annually, can afford to own a house, travel, pursue continuing education, while trying to build a secondary business. But I feel censored by FOSTA and have heightened privacy and security concerns in a way that I didn't before, and I'm sad to have lost the sense of community and collaboration that was more common before FOSTA passed. And I worry endlessly about additional bills inspired by FOSTA and so-called anti-trafficking, anti-money laundering efforts that could cause my bank accounts or payment processing to get shut down, which would effectively destroy my business and my ability to make a living. I have had to learn how to navigate the (expensive) world of cryptocurrency, just to be able to pay for my online ads, because banks and credit card companies are scrutinizing accounts more (which I think is indirectly connected to the legal climate FOSTA has created) and I fear my accounts being shut down for using my credit card. I believe FOSTA has also contributed to the loss of prepaid Visa cards as an option for paying for ad sites, which many of us used to do in order to protect our privacy. Ad sites are also requiring more and more proof of identity to protect themselves, which is another privacy/security risk for workers, and makes me quite nervous. Despite my relative stability and privilege within this risky industry, everything feels much more precarious than before FOSTA and that is very, very unfortunate. And to think that so many workers are much worse off than me, have died to be left homeless or forced to return to street work and be exploited by pimps, directly as a result of FOSTA, is just devastating.*

*Fosta took away backpage which at the time was a major resource to advertise and find clients . Providers living day by day were devastated and our futures were unknown leaving us in hurt and confusion.*

*If policy makers want to stop trafficking, they have got to make the work safer for independent workers. When independent workers feel under threat from law enforcement, we are not going to risk helping the new girl who is unknown. Without our help she *will* fall under the control of a pimp and be exploited.*

*I'm a single mother. I have court order child support that's never paid or collected. I am raising the children completely on my own with no help and I'm struggling worse than I ever was. I was 25 when I started working in the massage parlors and now I'm 50 and I plan to be here for another 25 years as I don't have any other choice. Signed SWSWM SINGLE WHITE SEX WORKING MOM*

*I currently live gig to gig instead of having a financial safety net since fosta/sesta*

*As a result of FOSTA, one of my colleagues had her income plummet. The house she owned went into foreclosure, and she eventually lost it. Working hard to put her life back together, she rented out a small apartment. She still has to make hard decisions between paying a bill or refilling prescriptions.*

*My business at the brothel dropped to virtually nothing and the madam became even more paranoid and controlling, all of which prompted me to work as an independent provider. On the whole, I've been much happier, healthier, and more prosperous on my own.*

*I am severely mentally ill. I'm under care but unable to function in normal society for long periods of time. I need to be able to do this. I'm good for short bursts. I have been denied disability despite doctors' recommendations.*

*Not only was my life, my safety, my voice, and my ability to speak freely on social media threatened or at risk. But the lives of my Fellow workers in the industry that I know across America, and in other countries as well. I know women who've had to resort to doing things they've never wanted to do to survive, because they have children to take care of, or themselves. I know woman who've been beaten and robbed and raped just like me. I know women who've had to flee the country to find work in other countries, only to face similar dangers and stigma in a new place. If you care about sex workers, you will repeal FOSTA/SESTA. Both of these bills target us, are based in stigma and whorephobia, and harm working citizens. FOSTA/SESTA has done absolutely NOTHING to save or aid the lives of women and young girls who are being trafficked against their will. Consensual sex work and sex trafficking are two completely different things. Bills like this only conflate them, and kill or ruin the lives of working women in the process. There is a way to save victims of human trafficking, and it is not targeting consensual sex workers!*

*I had difficulty making ends meet, got offers from wannabe pimps, and had to work harder to attract good clients.*

*I can't afford to have a social media presence or personal website so clients confirm my identity as a worker through reviews. After a grueling time under*

*my latest work persona at a rate I didn't like with clients I didn't like, I finally became established enough via reviews that I could increase my rate and go back to a city I preferred. Then FOSTA hit. I had no choice but to keep seeing my old clients, including a rapist and other boundary crossers, at less than half of what I wanted to charge (and used to charge under a previous persona.) I had to travel to see clients I did not like in this one particular city. I had to work more hours because of the low rate. I had no choice, because all my reviews were deleted after FOSTA and this was leveraged against me by prospective clients.*

*Before Fosta, I was ok. I could pay all my bills, I had stable housing and clients who I could screen. When Fosta came into law, I lost everything. I lost my clients and my advertising platforms that let me work indoors and safely when I wanted to. I was desperate and pimps were the only ones who promised me an out, an option that would let me survive and do well. I paid in blood and tears for the money. I was forced to take clients they chose, and to offer services they wanted because I couldn't find my own clients.*