

The WATCH Chronicle



WATCH is a court monitoring and judicial policy non-profit located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. WATCH works to make the justice system more responsive to crimes of violence against women and children, focusing on greater safety for victims of violence and greater accountability for violent offenders.

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Native Minnesota women tell their stories of prostitution, trafficking

By Pamela Schmid

Nicole Matthews carries many stories told to her by Native women living in Minnesota. One that still haunts her came from a woman who told of being kicked out of her house at age 16 after letting her parents know she'd been gang-raped.

Less than 24 hours later, the woman recalled, she was picked up by a "john."

"That was how she got into prostitution," said Matthews, executive director of the Minnesota Indian Womens Sexual Assault Coalition (MIWSA).

A total of 105 Native trafficked women told their stories as part of a first-of-its-kind study led by MIWSA. The resulting report, "[The Garden of Truth: The Prostitution and Trafficking of Native women in Minnesota](#)," was published in October, 2011.

Recently, Matthews and Guadalupe Lopez, two of the study's co-authors, sat down with WATCH to talk about the unique needs and challenges of Native trafficked women.

Q: Were you surprised by the extent to which the women you interviewed were willing to share about what they had lived through?

Nicole Matthews: I was struck by how open some women were about sharing their experience about being used in prostitution and trafficking, and we also asked them about their earliest sexual experience. Seventy-nine percent were survivors of child sexual abuse, by an average of four perpetrators. That was a much more difficult conversation. It really struck me how unresolved trauma as a child carries on and how that can sometimes lead to multiple victimizations throughout our lifetime.



Amanda Watson (far left), Guadalupe Lopez and Nicole Matthews of the Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition.

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Q: Since this report was released, what kind of changes have you seen in the services provided for Native women in prostitution?

Nicole Matthews: I've seen much more awareness around prostitution and trafficking of Native women. There are many more conversations around it. I've seen more service providers getting involved. ...

We have also received a grant from the Office on Violence against Women at the Department of Justice to provide technical assistance and training to tribes around trafficking. We're in our second year (of a three-year project). It's the first time there's been some efforts toward training service providers in Indian country around trafficking.

Q: The women you interviewed spoke of ways in which their culture and heritage could help lead them out of prostitution. Can you talk about that?

Nicole Matthews: One question we asked was, has their culture, connection to culture, helped them in escaping? Many said yes. It's connecting to our whole selves. Sometimes, when you experience trauma, you get disconnected from certain pieces of who you are. By reconnecting to your cultural community, your spirit, whatever your belief system, it can be very healing and lets you feel less alone.

Q: What about homelessness? What role has that played in Native women becoming involved in prostitution?

Guadalupe Lopez: Homelessness was predominant in the lives of these women. Ninety-eight percent had been homeless.

Nicole Matthews: But there's no cause and effect. There are risk factors.

Guadalupe Lopez: We have to look at the way we're pulling kids out of homes, at the way our social services are set up, child protection and criminal justice systems, our school system. There's a lot of things that help those kids fall through the cracks.

We have two ways of looking at it. Oh, these poor Indians. This happened, and that happened and they fall into all these deficits, right? But we don't look at the institutional racism that helps perpetuate this and keeps this alive. You see it in the courtroom. You know what's going to happen to this family just based on what they look like when they walk in.

Q: Can you talk about some of the stories the women told you? What stories were particularly haunting for you?

Nicole Matthews: One story for me was a woman who was 19 and whose mother went into a battered women's shelter. She'd been living with her mom and because she was over 18 the shelter wouldn't let her stay with her mom. So she was homeless and out on the street and had nowhere to go.



“By reconnecting to your cultural community, your spirit, whatever your belief system, it can be very healing and lets you feel less alone.”



IN THE NEWS

U.S. Senate holds Backpage.com in contempt over sex trafficking ads

The U.S. Senate has taken the rare step of holding a company in contempt of Congress—Backpage.com, which has refused to comply with a Senate-issued subpoena in a sex trafficking probe.

On March 17, [the Senate unanimously voted to invoke the measure](#) for the first time since 1995 amid allegations that the site facilitates sex trafficking, especially of children. Backpage is the nation's largest classified ad marketplace for sex services.

The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs permanent subcommittee on investigations, led by Chairman Rob Portman, an Ohio Republican, and ranking Democrat Claire McCaskill of Missouri, has issued two subpoenas demanding documents on Backpage's activities. Senators said the company flouted both subpoenas. Backpage insists it takes steps to moderate ads, but senators say the company has failed to detail how it's doing that.

- Read the *CNN.Money* report [here](#).
- Read the Reuters article [here](#).

- What is the practical effect of the Senate's move to hold Backpage in contempt?
- Suspected child sex trafficking has skyrocketed in the past five years, according to the U.S. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. How much has it risen, and what are the likely reasons for this?

Read the [Reuters report](#) to find out.

Law shielding Backpage.com makes it easier to traffic teens, columnist says

A recent U.S. Appeals Court ruling dismissing the claims of underage girls who said they were sex trafficking victims was a "tragic" decision—even if it was correct, according to a Bloomberg News columnist.

The panel ruled on March 15 that the lawsuit against Backpage.com couldn't continue, citing the federal Communications Decency Act. The law essentially shields apps or websites from liability for third-party material published using their platforms. The young women claimed Backpage intentionally set up its website to enable illegal sex trafficking by enabling phone numbers to be masked and photos stripped of metadata to make them harder to trace.

The "tragic" result [shows Congressional action might be appropriate](#), writes columnist Noah Feldman, a constitutional and international law professor at Harvard. "Such bad-faith efforts to use privacy to enable illegal conduct shouldn't be protected by Congress."

- Read Feldman's column [here](#).



Grant will help medical workers detect and prevent child abuse

Doctors and nurses at the Masonic Children’s Hospital in Minneapolis will get help with the difficult task of distinguishing between accidental injuries and child abuse, thanks to a \$2.5 million grant announced last month.

[The grant from the St. Paul-based Otto Bremer Trust](#) will fund training for hospital staff and medical workers, as well as at other hospitals. Despite being frequent and legally mandated reporters of suspected child abuse, few doctors in Minnesota are trained to identify the types of injuries that point to maltreatment of young patients.

Medical professionals filed 10.8 percent of the 20,167 abuse or neglect allegations that the Minnesota child protection system investigated in 2014—the most since at least 1993.

- Read the *Star Tribune* report [here](#).

- Bruises to which parts of the body are predictive of child abuse, according to experts?
- Of the more than 20,000 abuse or neglect allegations investigated by the Minnesota child protection system in 2014, how many involved physical abuse?

Read the [Star Tribune](#) report to find out.

Growing up amid domestic violence: Why naming it matters so much

While most people have heard of physical child abuse, sexual or emotional abuse, one childhood adversity has practically no awareness at all — [Childhood Domestic Violence \(CDV\)](#) — which is when a person grows up in a home living with domestic violence.

In a March 22 blog post, *Huffington Post* writer Brian Martin explains why there is so little understanding of the impact of growing up with violence between parents or toward a parent: Until recently, it hasn’t had a name.

Martin, author of [INVINCIBLE: The 10 Lies You Learn Growing Up with Domestic Violence, and the Truths to Set You Free](#), describes how not having a name for CDV means “a person can’t know what to search and find the information to understand and learn about the impact or the resources available that could help. Those who grow up living with domestic violence need to be able to name it before they can address it.”

- Read Martin’s blog post in the *Huffington Post* [here](#).



COURT MONITORING BULLETIN



“The emotional scene from the defendant was handled respectfully by the judge.”

Words of praise, room for improvement

Over the past month, WATCH monitors have had a chance to sit in on a number of hearings and trials in Hennepin County. Their observations on court proceedings ranged from highly complimentary to identifying opportunities for improvement. Below is a sampling:

PRAISE

- “The judge in the jury trial I observed was very efficient in structuring the trial, and he was very attentive to jury members and witnesses called to the stand. The prosecutor seemed like a great advocate and asked great questions during the cross-exam.”
- “Both judges were very willing to work with defendants and make things fairly clear.”
- “All courtroom personnel displayed proper behavior and respect when the court was in session.”
- “Very efficient court experience, everything on time and things flowed smoothly.”
- “The emotional scene from the defendant was handled respectfully by the judge.”
- “Straight-to-the-point judge. Very professional atmosphere.”
- “A clerk came up to us and talked a little bit about why things were not happening as planned.”

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

- “Counsels got snippy with each other; that was clear and distracting.”
- “The prolonged wait times seem like a necessary improvement.”
- “The judge appeared tired/bored during some portions; he would lean back in his chair and wasn’t always focused on the witness/who was speaking.”
- “I observed a public defender talk about her client in a not-so-respectful manner (he did not understand English).”
- “Judge wanted to ‘push through’ the trial.”
- “This jury looked especially bored and uninterested. At one point a juror’s cell phone went off. Two jurors would lean toward each other and make comments. Another would stretch distractingly while yawning. They seemed very restless and it made me nervous that the fate of the case was in their hands.”
- “Being more understanding to the victim even when she is frustrating to deal with.”
- “Many attorneys were laughing and swearing.”



SEX TRAFFICKING UPDATE

Minneapolis woman sentenced to 90 months after violating probation



Judge Brandt handed down the 90-month prison sentence on March 31 after finding that Warborg had violated two conditions of probation: maintaining contact with her probation officer and staying away from illegal substances.

A 33-year-old Minneapolis woman has been sentenced to 90 months in prison after violating the terms of her probation on a felony conviction of sex trafficking. **Meranda L. Warborg** is the tenth defendant tracked as part of WATCH's sex-trafficking project found to have violated terms of probation.

In June 2013, Warborg agreed to plead guilty to sex trafficking as part of a plea negotiation that also called for Hennepin County District Court Judge Gina M. Brandt to stay a 90-month prison sentence. Under the plea agreement, two other felony charges were dropped. The agreement also called for Warborg's prison sentence to be stayed for five years, during which she would remain on strictly supervised probation and serve 365 days in the Hennepin County Workhouse.

Judge Brandt imposed the 90-month prison sentence on March 31 after finding that Warborg had violated two conditions of probation: maintaining contact with her probation officer and staying away from illegal substances. In addition, Warborg was found in possession of heroin in January.

Warborg's original sentence stemmed from her arrest in July 2012, in a north Minneapolis residence that officers had linked to advertisements on the website Backpage.com. According to a criminal complaint, officers had used GPS to track a phone number listed in the Backpage.com ads, which had included photos of two underage females, ages 15 and 17, dressed in lingerie. Both victims, who had been reported missing from their Eau Claire, Wis. residences earlier in the month, were also found in the residence.

The victims later told police that they had run away together and met a man who encouraged them to engage in prostitution. They said they were "pimped out" by several people at Twin Cities-area motels while living with Warborg, and that Warborg posted ads for them on Backpage.com. They also said she provided them with drugs, including cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine.

Warborg will serve her 90-month sentence concurrently with a sentence of a year and a day for the drug charge.

Another probation violation in a sex-trafficking case resulted in an arrest warrant issued for **Antoine Lee Page**, 35, of Minneapolis. Page had pleaded

Of 66 defendants sentenced in sex-trafficking cases, at least ten have violated their terms of probation. All but one did so after receiving stayed sentences.



guilty in Hennepin County District Court to one felony count of sex trafficking and on Nov. 4, 2014 received a stayed prison sentence of 57 months with 180 days served in the workhouse. Four counts were dismissed, including promoting the prostitution of a minor.

At the time of his sentencing, one of Page's victims told the court: "I want to explain what prostitution does to a woman. It changes your life and it will never be the same again."

Since then, Page was arrested for second-degree DWI and driving without a license, violating his terms of probation. A warrant was issued for his arrest on September 4, 2015; as of April 18, it was still outstanding.

Of the 66 defendants sentenced since WATCH began monitoring sex-trafficking cases in 2013, at least ten have violated their terms of probation. All but one violated probation after receiving stayed sentences. Nine of the ten were prosecuted in Hennepin County; the other was prosecuted in Ramsey County.

Clarification: Tony Satterlund sentencing

In our February newsletter, WATCH reported on the Feb. 3 sentencing of **Tony T. Satterlund** in Hennepin County District Court following his guilty plea to one felony count of promoting the prostitution of an individual under 18. To clarify, the 10-year sentence was the result of a plea agreement reached between the prosecution and defense that was approved by Hennepin County Judge Hilary L. Caligiuri, as she determined it was in the range of reasonableness. The downward durational departure was based on the defendant's acceptance of responsibility and the agreement of the parties.

WATCH's goals include increasing the transparency of the justice system, and making our judicial system aware of how its functioning is perceived by the public. WATCH is in favor of having as much information about plea bargains placed on the record in open court as possible.

