

# 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.

September 2017 Volume 3, Issue 7



## Shining a light on trafficking, before and after Super Bowl

By Mark Wollemann

The expression “sunlight is the best disinfectant” is probably most true when confronted with the insidious nature of sex trafficking. Shining a light on a practice that thrives in darkness is one way to help eradicate it.

With the NFL season just beginning and the Super Bowl in February at U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis just a few months away, sex trafficking is getting aired out across the area and the state. WATCH, like many non-profit advocacy organizations working in the areas of sex trafficking and violence against women and children, is playing its part.

In 2016, WATCH completed its [first Sex Trafficking Report](#), which brought together research from following two-and-a-half years of sex trafficking cases in Hennepin and Ramsey counties. The report included specific recommendations for amending statutes, examining charging protocols and rethinking sentencing practices.

Later this year, WATCH will launch the second part of its sex trafficking initiative by looking more closely at the demand side of sex trafficking, which is critical to trying to bring an end to the sale of girls and women in Minnesota.

The University of Minnesota, with funding provided by the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota, [released a study in early August](#) that described the typical buyer of sex in Minnesota. He is a middle-aged white male. He is employed and relatively well-compensated. And he’s willing to travel – but not too far. They are described as husbands and fathers. Doctors and lawyers. Construction workers and truck drivers. Some are older; some are much younger.



The Super Bowl in February will be played in Minnesota. Its presence here has created a lot of conversation about sex trafficking and big events.

### Inside:

In The News	3-4
Offender Chronology	5-8
Volunteers Needed	5

And while the Super Bowl is bringing the subject into a sharper focus, reporting suggests that sex trafficking doesn't really spike all that much around the big event. Instead, it's an ongoing problem. It's here when big events come to town, and it's here when those events leave.

In a [Sports Illustrated story](#) from January 2017, Lt. Kurtis Stenderup of the Santa Clara (Calif.) Police Department says the vast majority of men cited for buying sex before, during or after the 2016 Super Bowl in his city were local residents, buttressing the point made in the University of Minnesota study. "I would argue that sex trafficking occurs all the time, regardless of major sports events," Stenderup is quoted as saying. "If we had the resources all the time, we could make a very significant dent in this problem."

By all accounts, the most significant driver of demand for sex trafficking is the internet, and most specifically websites like Backpage.com. Those sites provide a level of anonymity and also an array of easy-to-access options.

In the face of a [blistering report](#) from a Congressional committee on investigations, Backpage.com closed its "adult ads" section. But advertising for sex, like water into a flooded basement, seems to find the path of least resistance. A [February story in the Star Tribune](#), which detailed a Washington County Attorney's Office investigation, found that shuttering Backpage's adult section just meant that ads for "massage" and "women seeking men" multiplied exponentially.

WATCH's December 2016 sex trafficking report found that 82 percent of juvenile cases and 92 percent of adult cases in Hennepin and Ramsey counties involved Backpage.com or other online media that connected buyers with traffickers or their victims. WATCH's report also found that about half of the victims of sex trafficking were under 18 years old.

"The sad part about this is that it is just so blatant," said Ellen Sackrison, WATCH Program Manager. "They (sex buyers) see the ad and they are able to strike up a conversation within minutes."

But law enforcement has worked hard to use Backpage as a tool to identify and prosecute sex buyers. "Our data thus far shows that ... many law enforcement undercover operations are taking place primarily on Backpages," Sackrison said. "Officers know the language they need to use; the code words to use" so suspects don't know they're speaking to law enforcement officers.

In a [Washington Post article in July](#), some argued that Backpage is a "reliable repository for local and federal investigators," who use it to track illegal activity of all sorts, including sex trafficking. However, lawsuits brought by former survivors of sex trafficking have sought to have the site discontinue its practice

**"The sad part about this is that it is just so blatant. They (sex buyers) see the ad and they are able to strike up a conversation within minutes."**

— Ellen Sackrison, WATCH Program Manager

of hosting sex ads and members of Congress called for a Justice Department investigation.

Minneapolis Police Sgt. Grant Snyder, in the Post article, is quoted as saying Backpage could do better at self-policing, but if the website were eliminated, “it wouldn’t make a difference” in the dark world of trafficking. “There is an assault on our children and it has very little to do with Backpage,” he said.

So as the Super Bowl takes center stage in our community in the coming months, it will be important to keep our eye on the ball as well. Organizations like WATCH must mobilize to make sure the issue gets the attention it deserves around the big game, but we must remember, too, that when the TV lights click off, the crisis of sexually exploited children will still be with us.

∞

---

## In the news

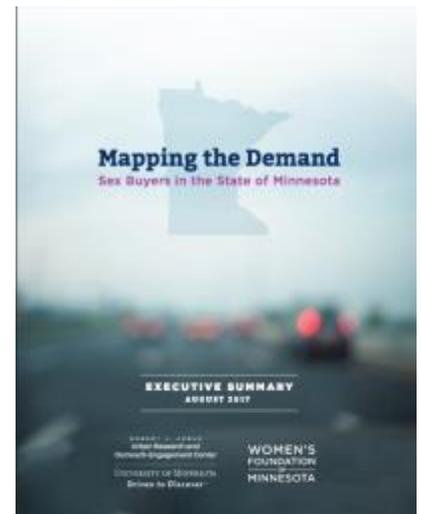
### U sex trafficking report details who is buying sex in our community

Law enforcement, in conjunction with nonprofits like WATCH, is focusing on prostitution customers, many of them middle class white males, as a way of putting a dent in sex trafficking in our communities, the Star Tribune reported in early August.

Among the anti-sex-trafficking tactics being employed are prevention programs aimed at teenage boys and at-risk kids in the metro area, a public awareness campaign to discourage men and boys from buying sex in Duluth, and police stings that snare men who solicit girls and women for sex via the internet.

WATCH has been a contributor to the efforts to raise awareness and work to prevent sex trafficking in advance of the 2018 Super Bowl. [WATCH also published its own report](#) on sex trafficking cases, which includes specific recommendations for amending the sex trafficking statute, instituting a charging protocol for sex trafficking cases and re-thinking sentencing practices. WATCH will launch Part 2 of that sex trafficking initiative later this year.

The link to the Star Tribune story is [here](#).



For a link to the entire University of Minnesota report, title “Mapping the Demand,” [go here](#).

## 📄 In the news (cont.)

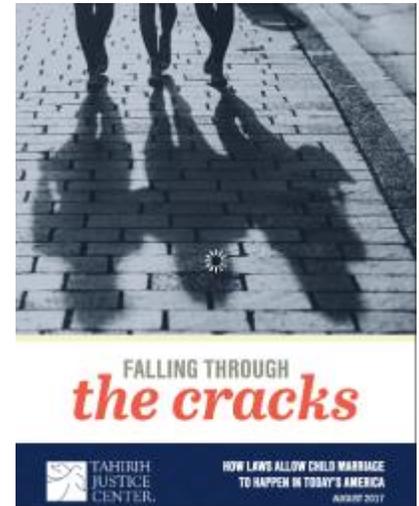
### Tahirih releases report on child marriage

The [Tahirih Justice Center](#) in Falls Church, Va., released a report in late August that outlined how state laws “are failing to protect children from the devastating effects of child marriage.”

The report looks at the laws in all 50 states and Washington, D.C., that in some cases allow marriages to children under the age of 18. The center reported that between 2000 and 2015, 200,000 children under the age of 18 were married in the United States.

The majority of such marriages involve girls who marry adult men, the report says. While most states set the minimum age of marriage at 18, many allow exceptions to that standard and, according to the report, only three states (Virginia, Texas and New York) limit marriage to legal adults.

The Tahirih report asserts that early and child marriage is linked to “maternal and child mortality, domestic and sexual violence, human trafficking, and HIV infection.” The report includes safeguards and recommendations for state governments to protect children.



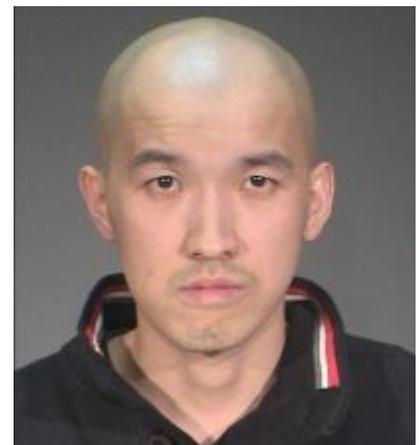
For a link to the Tahirih Justice Center report entitled “Falling Through the Cracks,” [go here](#).

### Man pleads guilty to sex trafficking charge

Investigators from both Washington and Ramsey counties broke up a human trafficking ring that had been in operation from 2015 to 2017 and involved nearly 20,000 advertisements for sexual services on the website Backpage.com, authorities said.

According to a story in the St. Paul Pioneer Press, a Blaine man reached a deal with prosecutors in the case in late August, pleading guilty in Washington County District Court to felony-level sex trafficking and racketeering. The man, Dongzhou Jiang, 29, was accused of being the Minnesota manager of an international sex-trafficking ring that exploited foreign-born women from China. He was expected to be sentenced to between 3.5 and five years in prison. Another defendant, Fangyao Wu, 23, of Irvine, Calif., had pleaded guilty to racketeering earlier in August in Washington County.

The Pioneer Press story is [here](#).



Dongzhou Jiang



## OFFENDER CHRONOLOGY: The cycle of domestic abuse

In 1997, Roosevelt Mikell, then 25 years old, faced his first felony conviction of possession of small amount of marijuana. Over a span of the next 20 years, Mikell has been in and out of court for 31 separate incidents. Mikell's long criminal history includes at least 13 incidents of violence and violations of contact.

From 1999 until 2010, WATCH was unable to obtain criminal complaints and other relevant court documents that contained more detailed information about Mikell's offenses and probation violations. The information used in this chronology is based on available public records.

### 1999-2005

Between 1999 and 2005, Mikell was charged with at least eight crimes related to domestic violence. His charges included: assault in the fifth degree, interference with a 911 call, domestic assault, disorderly conduct, damage to property, aggravated robbery, violation of an order for protection, assault in the third degree and domestic assault by strangulation. Out of the seven domestic violence convictions, the highest sentence Mikell received was 15 months in prison.

From 2007 through 2009, Mikell did not pick up any new domestic violence charges. Instead, he was in court seven different times for charges related to driving after suspension, open bottle, marijuana, failure to provide proof of insurance and speeding.

### 2010

According to the criminal complaint in 2010, MPD officers responded to a report of a domestic incident in Minneapolis. They spoke with the victim, who reported that Mikell had arrived at her apartment around 11:30 p.m. and had begun pounding on her door. Mikell was the victim's ex-boyfriend. When she wouldn't let him in, he began to forcefully push himself into the door and to yell about a supposed other man the victim was seeing. He also demanded that she drop her restraining order against him. Mikell finally left, but later called the victim and threatened to return if she didn't drop the restraining order. He continued to obsessively call her, leaving over 60 minutes of voicemail messages, which were used as part of the ensuing investigation.

In October of 2010, Mikell was charged in Hennepin County with one count of felony violation of order for protection. A warrant was issued for his arrest and it was not until the end of December that Mikell made his first appearance in



## Volunteers and interns needed

WATCH is a court monitoring and research organization based in Hennepin County. It is focused on improving the justice system's response to crimes of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and neglect and human trafficking so victimized women and children can rebuild their lives. Its secondary aim is to create a more informed public.

**Position description:** Volunteers visit courtrooms in Hennepin County (Minneapolis), Ramsey County (St. Paul) and Washington County (Stillwater) to observe and take notes on cases pertaining to violence against women and children. Volunteers fill out WATCH forms that are provided, and turn them into the WATCH office after each shift.

WATCH volunteer shifts are Monday through Friday, either 8:45 a.m.-12:45 p.m., or 12:45-4 p.m.

Online training sessions are required. Applicants must fill out a volunteer application, interview with the Program Manager and pass a background check.

**How to apply:** Please contact the Program Manager Ellen Sackrison at [watchvolunteer@watchmn.org](mailto:watchvolunteer@watchmn.org).

There is a link to our application in the volunteer section on our website <http://www.watchmn.org/>. Please complete the form and e-mail it to the above e-mail or send via mail.

this case. In March of 2011, Mikell pleaded guilty to a felony violation of an order for protection and was sentenced in April.

Mikell received 21 months in prison, stayed for three years. The order also included 240 days in the Hennepin County Workhouse, with credit for 120 days, and three years of supervised probation, an order to complete domestic abuse treatment and a domestic abuse no-contact order.

In January of 2012, Mikell violated probation and the court ordered him to complete his sentence. Mikell appealed this decision, and his appeal was granted in October of 2013.

### 2010

According to a criminal complaint, on October 13, 2010, an officer reported to Abbott Northwestern Hospital where a female victim claimed that Mikell had come to the hospital to find her. The victim worked in the hospital's imaging department and held a harassment restraining order against Mikell. According to the criminal complaint, Mikell had arrived at the main desk of the imaging department and left a note for the victim, telling her to call him. Before the restraining order had been filed, the victim and Mikell had been in a serious romantic relationship.

Mikell was charged with felony violation of a harassment restraining order, but the case was ultimately dismissed in April of 2011.

### 2011

According to the criminal complaint in late September of 2011, police officers pulled over a vehicle on Nicollet Avenue in Minneapolis. The driver was discovered to be the Mikell's girlfriend. He was in the passenger seat. The officers discovered she held an order for protection against Mikell. When questioned, Mikell gave the officers the false name of "Frank Smith."

In January of 2012, Mikell was charged and convicted of violating an order for protection, a felony. He was sentenced to 32 months in the St. Cloud Correctional Facility, for which he had 76 days of credit, and 240 days in the Hennepin County Workhouse, for which he had 120 days of credit. This matter was ordered by the court to be served consecutively with the previous case.

### 2012

According to a criminal complaint in August of 2012, Mikell was charged with felony domestic assault. Around 10 p.m. on Aug. 11, a Bloomington police officer was monitoring "no turn on red" violations at the intersection of 78th Street and 5th Avenue. The officer noticed a vehicle driving erratically on a nearby street before parking at a gas station. A witness approached the vehicle while yelling, and it became clear that a fight was occurring within the vehicle.

"Mikell was in the living room of the residence, and the victim told the officers that he had pushed and punched her. She also reported that Mikell had held her face in a bathtub full of water and forcefully cut her hair. When the officers approached Mikell, he gave a false name, "Fred White." He admitted that the victim was his girlfriend of eight or nine years. He claimed that he had accidentally hit her in the face with a board."

— From the Offender Chronology

Mikell emerged from the vehicle and walked east. Suddenly, the vehicle went into reverse, striking the officer's vehicle, which had approached the scene. The officer left his squad car and found the victim seated in the driver's seat of the vehicle, her lip bloody and her eyes swollen. She had a cut on the left side of her forehead, beneath her hairline. Mikell and the witness had begun arguing near the vehicle, and the officer approached them. The witness told the officer that he had seen Mikell punch the victim in the face several times. Mikell argued that the witness was lying and that the victim should be arrested for hitting the squad car. Mikell was arrested.

The domestic assault charge was dismissed in January of 2013.

#### 2014

In May of 2014, Mikell was charged with felony domestic assault, felony stalking, and giving a peace officer a false name, a misdemeanor offense. On May 1, police officers reported to a residence in Bloomington. There, they found the victim crying with her left eye severely bruised and swollen. Mikell was in the living room of the residence, and the victim told the officers that he had pushed and punched her. She also reported that Mikell had held her face in a bathtub full of water and forcefully cut her hair. When the officers approached Mikell, he gave a false name, "Fred White." He admitted that the victim was his girlfriend of eight or nine years. He claimed that he had accidentally hit her in the face with a board.

Ultimately, in January of 2015, Mikell was convicted of felony domestic assault. The other two charges were dismissed. He was sentenced to a "durational departure" of 24 months in prison, for which he had 251 days of credit. He was also ordered to pay restitution of \$15,116.89. In June of 2016, Mikell was released from prison.

#### 2017

In June of 2017, one year after his release from prison, Mikell was charged in Hennepin County with one count of felony domestic assault. In the late afternoon of June 4, Minneapolis police officers reported to Broadway Avenue where Mikell was in the backseat of a parked squad car. The alleged victim in this incident was standing on an adjacent sidewalk, crying and bleeding from her mouth and nose. The victim told the officers that she and the defendant had been in a romantic relationship for nearly 12 years. In the previous three weeks, the victim reported that she and Mikell had frequently argued and that Mikell had been making violent threats. The day of this incident, Mikell had accused the victim of cheating on him. He began to punch her while he drove the vehicle. The victim attempted to escape, but the defendant grabbed her hair and punched her in the face and head several times. She attempted to escape through the passenger window when several people assisted her.

"The day of this incident, Mikell had accused the victim of cheating on him. He began to punch her while he drove the vehicle. The victim attempted to escape, but the defendant grabbed her hair and punched her in the face and head several times. She attempted to escape through the passenger window when several people assisted her."

— From the Offender Chronology

On Friday, Aug. 18, Mikell was arrested in Minneapolis and charged with two counts of felony violation of a no-contact order and two counts of misdemeanor tampering with a witness in the third degree. According to the new criminal complaint, Mikell allegedly called the female victim from the previous case from the Hennepin County Jail several times from other inmates' phone numbers.

Mikell appeared in court for his first appearance on Monday, Aug. 21, the day his trial was scheduled to begin in the other open case.

WATCH volunteers observed the jury trial where Mikell represented himself. On Friday, Aug. 25, Mikell was convicted by a jury of felony domestic assault; his sentencing date is scheduled for Sept. 22 in front of Judge Karasov. A hearing date has also been set for his unresolved case for Sept. 22.

\* \* \*

### How can you help the justice system become more responsive to crimes of violence against women and children?

- You can share the **WATCH** mission and vision with your family and friends!
- You can boldly address issues of domestic violence prevention with those closest to you!
- You can volunteer to be a **WATCH** court monitor! Click [here](#) for the link to apply!
- You can graciously offer a financial donation to help support our work on behalf of the entire community!

Contact Nick Cichowicz to learn more: [nick@watchmn.org](mailto:nick@watchmn.org)