

<http://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/2015/03/20/study-sex-trafficking-march-madness/25104579/>

Study: Sex trafficking up during March Madness



[Kirsten Clark](#), @kirstenlmclark 5:39 p.m. EDT March 20, 2015



(Photo: Getty Images/iStockphoto)

An analysis of more than 20,000 local backpage.com ads for adult "escort" services revealed that likely instances of human trafficking peaked during last year's March Madness tournament, according to a study by University of Louisville researchers.

Dianna Anderson, who recently became the co-chair of the Louisville Metro Human Trafficking Task Force, spent 15 months collecting data from ads posted on backpage.com, a website used to buy and sell goods and services.

The Internet has reduced the need for prostitutes to solicit themselves on the street, she said, so backpage.com is useful for tracking instances in which individuals may have been forced into prostitution.

An email to backpage.com on Friday afternoon did not receive an immediate response.

While Anderson expected activity to peak during the Kentucky Derby, she was surprised to see that two events — Labor Day weekend 2013 and March Madness 2014 — produced more backpage.com ads than Derby weekend of either year.

During last year's March Madness, backpage.com displayed a total of 2,352 escort ads, with the number of ads one day reaching a peak of 164, more than any other day during the year.

The bulk of the research took place as Anderson was completing her graduate studies at U of L. She was aided by U of L criminal justice administration instructor Theresa Hayden.

Anderson said she cannot definitively say that each of the ads she encountered indicated human trafficking activity, but she searched the ads for "red flags" — the same "escort" listed on different days under different names or phone numbers, or listings for the same person in a different city.

Human trafficking often becomes a hot-button issue during large sporting events. Last week, Sister Judy Morris of the Dominican Sisters of Peace wrote in an [letter to The Courier-Journal](#) that the tournament would likely bring a spike in human sex trafficking to Louisville.

But Anderson said people need to understand human trafficking occurs "every single day."

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