



Unseen, Unknown, and Unsolved: Disappearances and Trafficking of Indigenous Individuals in Canada & the United States

Thomson Reuters

July 2026



Reader Advisory

This report contains information relating to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), including real-world examples, case studies, and excerpts from publicly available materials that readers may find distressing. These materials are included not to sensationalize harm, but to document patterns of exploitation and contribute to greater understanding, awareness, prevention, and action. We offer this report with respect for victims, survivors, families, and Indigenous communities whose experiences inform this work.

About Thomson Reuters

Thomson Reuters informs the way forward by bringing together the trusted content and technology that people and organizations need to make the right decisions. Our company serves professionals across legal, tax, accounting, compliance, government, and media. Our products combine highly specialized software and insights to empower professionals with the data, intelligence, and solutions needed to make informed decisions, and to help institutions in their pursuit of justice, truth, and transparency.

About Thomson Reuters Social Impact Institute

The Thomson Reuters Social Impact Institute promotes the company's social impact pillars of access to justice, truth, and transparency by creating opportunities for innovation, community investment, volunteer impact, and sustainable corporate citizenship. Working with its people and through partnerships, the Institute aims to strengthen the foundations of critical institutions and systems, ultimately contributing to a more understanding and trusting world.

About this Report

Thomson Reuters is committed to continuing to expand the eco-system of information, technology and subject matter expertise we offer to support efforts to identify human trafficking networks, facilitate prosecution, and help victims and survivors. We have partnered with TRSS, a Thomson Reuters subsidiary, on this report to uncover unique insights into disappearances and trafficking of indigenous peoples in Canada and the U.S., helping to inform efforts to tackle this human rights issue. This report is based on information found in the public domain.

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Scope and Analysis of the Problem.....	1
Canada Data Refresh.....	3
Disappearance Data.....	3
Sex Ad Data	5
Sex Ad Data: Movement Corridors.....	7
United States Data	9
United States: Scope of the Problem.....	9
United States: Disappearance Data & General Trends.....	11
United States: Sex Ad Data.....	13
Case Study: From Missing to Appearing in a Sex Ad.....	17
The Demand.....	18
Case Study: Little Earth Neighborhood in Minneapolis.....	21
Demand: Exploitative Online Interest in Indigenous Women.....	23
Conclusion.....	26

Introduction

The issues of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and trafficking of Indigenous individuals continue to be, relative to other crime and trafficking typologies, underreported and understudied. We sought to address this by identifying two data gaps through our 2025 report, “Missing and Stolen: Disappearances and Trafficking of Indigenous Peoples in Canada”.¹ In that report, we gathered data surrounding disappearances of Indigenous individuals in Canada as well as sex ads claiming to feature Indigenous individuals. We also explored the connection and overlap between the issues of MMIWG and trafficking of indigenous individuals.

This report builds upon and progresses the findings of the 2025 report, and while it can be read separately from the first edition, we recommend reading the 2025 report as it is the foundation upon which this report is built. Specifically, this edition pulls upon threads discovered in the first year of research, notably the confluence of MMIWG and trafficking of Indigenous individuals and the United States’ role in this issue. As a result, while this report is still focused on Canada, it also contains similar data and analysis for the United States (US). We also wanted to provide a refresh of the data we pulled in 2025, which will allow us to see how disappearance and sex ad trends have changed in the last year. Regarding the data, the first edition contains detailed explanations of the data gathering and analysis process, and if something is not explained in this edition, the reader may assume the process detailed in the first edition may be applied to this report.

We also wanted to explore new angles to the issue of MMIWG and trafficking of indigenous individuals. One novel area detailed in this report is demand by sex-buyers. This is the “flip side of the coin” in terms of potential sex trafficking. Capturing sex ad data is important and helpful, but it is only part of the story and we felt the need to study the demand that provides the impetus for traffickers to act. This report goes through a case study of this for the city of Minneapolis, and in particular how sex buyers target the Little Earth neighborhood, an area of the city with a high proportion of Indigenous individuals.

Our hope and desire for this report to both inform and inspire. First, we want researchers, law enforcement, policymakers, and advocates to be informed and armed with new data regarding these topics. This will hopefully allow for informed decision-making and investigations, leading to impactful decisions and victim-centered outcomes. Second, our aim to inspire is twofold: a desire for individuals to be driven to make a difference in these areas, and a hope to inspire more research, more collaboration, and more critical analysis of these issues.

Scope and Analysis of the Problem

The 2025 report contains a comprehensive overview of the statistics surrounding MMIWG and trafficking of Indigenous individuals in Canada. In sum, there is a deep overrepresentation of

¹ Thomson Reuters, *Missing and Stolen*, <https://www.thomsonreuters.com/content/dam/ewp-m/documents/thomsonreuters/en/pdf/social-impact/thomson-reuters-report-missing-and-stolen-indigenous-people-in-canada.pdf>.

Indigenous women in sex trafficking as well as victims of violence in Canada. The underlying factors behind these statistics can be traced to systemic vulnerabilities, which have roots in colonization and forced displacement. These include unshelteredness, generational trauma, low economic status, high rates of foster care placement, and substance abuse. Please refer to the 2025 report for a fuller picture of the statistics behind these issues in Canada. We will provide a brief overview of statistics for the United States in a later section of this report.

On the topic of statistics in the areas of MMIWG and trafficking of Indigenous individuals, we wanted to walk through some of the difficulty behind researching these issues. A major focus on data gathering in these crime typologies is on outcomes- for instance, how many individuals were trafficked, how many went missing, how many were rescued, how many convictions or prosecutions were achieved, etc. Outcomes matter, and the focus on gathering data pertaining to outcomes is important and justified. However, we would be remiss if we did not point out that these crime typologies, MMIWG and trafficking of Indigenous individuals, lend themselves quite poorly to outcome-driven data.

This is due to several distinct features of these crimes. First, the outcome that is captured often does not reflect the reality of what happened. We have seen many human trafficking cases where this occurs- perhaps the victim went back to their trafficker, maybe the prosecutor didn't accept the case, or perhaps bureaucratic tape or arcane laws meant pursuing the case to be unrealistic. On the MMIWG side, the term "missing" has different definitions depending on jurisdiction, and the threshold to report someone as missing varies as well. Places where there is a "right to go missing" also muddies outcome statistics. Who gets to define someone as missing? The family of the individual? Law enforcement? The victim themselves? There are few clear-cut answers. To give an example of what we mean, Picture One below shows a flyer for a missing Indigenous individual in Canada. However, in the comments, a person claiming to be the missing individual says she's not missing and is "okay". Gray-area situations like these abound, making outcome-driven statistics not only hard to gather, but perhaps less important as well.

PICTURE ONE: MISSING PERSON COMMENTS ON HER OWN MISSING PERSONS ALERT



Second, these crimes are often exerted in the context of human relationships. They are relational crimes in nature, which renders them even more difficult to evaluate. Perhaps to the family of a victim the individual is missing or even trafficked, but to the victim they are safe and pursuing life choices that others simply disagree with. While this calls into the importance of good laws and increased education around human trafficking and disappearances, the problem remains of trying to prove the elements of force, fraud, and coercion with law enforcement or in a courtroom. In some cases, the elements are clear-cut, but in many others it is ambiguous and can lead to outcomes that don't reflect the reality of the situation, particularly in cases without victim witness testimony. Evaluation of relational crimes often relies on person vs. person testimony, and victim testimony in these cases come with significant drawbacks, such as reliving trauma in a public setting, fear of retaliation, and being too soon in the victim recovery process.

What then, is the solution? There is no one answer to this problem, but we feel one solution is to more closely examine and gather information on the environment surrounding the outcome. This way, we are more focused on the precipitating factors that produced the outcome rather than the outcome itself. This is a primary reason why we focus on sex ads and demand. While they are not definitive, black-and-white outcomes in and of themselves, they are important measurements of the environment that can often lead to situations like trafficking and disappearances.

These difficulties provide both constraint and freedom. We are constrained by the limited ability to gather definitive statistics on these issues due to the nature of these crimes. However, this frees us to look past the focus on outcomes and rather adjust our gaze to the environments and precipitating conditions, which can yield important insight.

Canada Data Refresh

One element of this report is to provide an update on the data we gathered and published in the 2025 edition: disappearances of Indigenous women and girls and sex ads claiming to feature Indigenous individuals. This will allow us to see any trends or meaningful shifts in the data.

Disappearance Data

For MMIWG, we collected from a variety of sources 38 disappearance events in Canada since the publication of the first report, a period of roughly ten months.² As a reminder, we restricted our data collection to acute events that still did not have resolution at the time of gathering, leaving out cases where an Indigenous woman disappeared but was later located safe and alive. These cases are no doubt important as they are a significant part of the statistical makeup of the problem, but in order to keep the data purely in the category of

² These sources include *Aboriginal Alert*, *Royal Canadian Mounted Police*, and various news outlets and activist groups.

disappearances and murders, we restricted it to cases where the victim is either still missing or was found murdered.³

As we wrote in the initial report, disappearance and homicide data for MMIWG has many limitations, the greatest of which is that it is entirely dependent on regular and reliable reporting. Cases involving MMIWG are historically underreported due to victim trauma, societal factors, and cases where the ethnicity of the victim is unknown. It is entirely possible that the majority of these cases are never reported. Furthermore, we wrote in the 2025 report that, “the method of reporting these cases can also pose a challenge: while some disappearances will be promptly reported to local law enforcement, some may not and then will make their way to alternative outlets. The distrust of traditional law enforcement by Indigenous peoples is long documented, and disappearances may go unreported to government authorities and instead be referred to activist groups or tribal authorities”.⁴

For the 38 disappearance events collected from May 2025 through March 2026, we found:

- The province with the most disappearances was Manitoba with nine, followed by eight in both Ontario and Alberta. After Saskatchewan with six and British Columbia with four, no other province had above three disappearances.
- Three cities tied with the most disappearances with three: Winnipeg, Toronto, and Edmonton.
- The average victim age was 28 years old. Eleven victims were under the age of 18.

PICTURE TWO: DISAPPEARANCES OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS FROM MAY 2025-MARCH 2026



Similar to the data we collected from 2010-April 2025, disappearance events in the last year of Indigenous women and girls were concentrated in the Prairie provinces. Ontario and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) remained a notable geographic outlier. As we wrote in the last

³ Organizations like Aboriginal Alert, which keeps an excellent database for MMIWG as well as missing and murdered indigenous men, tracks cases where the victim was later located alive and is an important source for that data category.

⁴ Thomson Reuters, *Missing and Stolen*, <https://www.thomsonreuters.com/content/dam/ewp-m/documents/thomsonreuters/en/pdf/social-impact/thomson-reuters-report-missing-and-stolen-indigenous-people-in-canada.pdf>.

report, some of this geographic concentration is correlated to population density of Indigenous peoples and may be due to better reporting in the Prairie provinces.

While few conclusions can be made from one year, one small outlier to take note of in future years is Prince George, BC. This city had two disappearance events in the last ten months and at least one other Indigenous individual that went missing and was later located. Prince George has a higher proportion of Indigenous individuals and has an economy predicated on natural resources, specifically forestry and mining. A recent study published by the EmpowerMen / Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre surveyed relevant academic studies and showed a link between natural resource extraction areas in Canada and sexual violence or abuse against Indigenous women and girls.⁵

We found little change or variance from the fifteen-year period's worth of data we published in 2025, as disappearances continued to be concentrated in the Prairie provinces and other urban areas of Canada. However, with Canada's natural resource extraction industry likely to increase in the wake of political and trade differences with the United States, areas close to these extraction sites should be monitored closely in the years to come.

Sex Ad Data

In addition to providing current data on disappearances, we also wanted to capture the last years' worth of sex ad data in Canada. These are sex ads that claim to feature an Indigenous woman or girl. Because there are many limitations and caveats to sex ad data, we thought it important to republish what we wrote in our 2025 report:

"Gathering sex ad data featuring indigenous individuals comes with some important limitations. First is the ability to identify an Indigenous individual in a sex ad vs. a non-Indigenous individual. We chose to do this through self-identification; that is to say if an ad stated that the individual shown was Indigenous, we took it at face value. As a result, we may be missing ads where the ethnicity of the individual was not stated, and simultaneously may be capturing ads where the post lied about the ethnicity of the person shown. For our purposes, we captured ads that had text which stated that an individual was "Native American" or "Indigenous". Other terms such as First Nations, Metis, and other specific tribes returned very few results, and sometimes also included Native American and Indigenous.

The other major factor to contend with in compiling this data was duplicate ads. Often a single ad is posted and re-posted numerous times in the same area- usually this indicates the individual is staying in that area and is opting for the simpler option of reposting an ad vs. the creation of a new one. Sometimes, the same ad can be posted hundreds of times and the question then becomes: do we count each one as a distinct post? Do we only count unique ads? If we are counting each duplicate ad as distinct, then it may skew the data. For instance, if a city only has two individuals but each has

⁵ EmpowerMen, *Sex Trafficking and Sexual Violence in Canada's Resource Extraction Industry*, <https://empowermen.ca/empowermen-research-resource-extraction/>.

posted the same ad hundreds of times, it will measure out as more significant than a city with ten individuals that each have a few unique ads.

We opted to count each ad as distinct for a few reasons. First, while the ads may be duplicates, the dates of the posting are not. As a result, while the ad may be the exact same as the previous ad, we can still infer important information by the variables of time and geography. With time, it is helpful to know the timeline of an individual in a given city, and of course with geography, it is crucial to see the movement of an individual through Canada, even if the ad they are posting is the exact same as the previous one. Second, while there were some outliers with many duplicate ads, the prevalence was lower than expected in the data. In general, we tended to see more unique ads from singular individuals than we did hundreds of the same ad from the same individual. Therefore, while we recognize and acknowledge the limitations of counting duplicate ads as distinct, we felt comfortable doing so for the reasons outlined above.”⁶

We opted to keep these same boundaries in place for this year’s edition of the report, and as a result collected 313 sex ads posted in the last year that claim to feature an Indigenous individual. Within this period, we found the following:

- Over 70% of the ads were only posted once.
- 56% of ads were posted in the Greater Toronto Area.
- The top three cities for the most ads were: Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver.

Picture Three below shows the geographic dispersion of where these ads were posted across Canada.

PICTURE THREE: SEX ADS CLAIMING TO FEATURE AN INDIGENOUS INDIVIDUAL IN CANADA FROM MAY 2025-MARCH 2026



⁶ Thomson Reuters, *Missing and Stolen*, <https://www.thomsonreuters.com/content/dam/ewp-m/documents/thomsonreuters/en/pdf/social-impact/thomson-reuters-report-missing-and-stolen-indigenous-people-in-canada.pdf>.

While it is only a one-year departure from the 2016–April 2025 data we collected last year, there are some significant differences apparent in sex ad data from the last year. First is the relative obscurity of Ottawa and Edmonton from the data. These two cities had large presences in the 2016–April 2025 data, and while Edmonton had a presence in this year’s collection, Ottawa did not have a single ad. As this is just a single year, this should be treated as an outlier at this stage, but it is noteworthy nonetheless. It may reflect shifts in demand further south to the GTA or east to Montreal, or it may be a result of different advertising in the capital city– perhaps Indigenous individuals are less likely to identify as such in ads in Ottawa for some reason. Regardless, it will be an area to monitor over the next year. Outside of the lack of ads in Ottawa and Edmonton, the geographic dispersion remained the same as the data collected from the last report.

While both disappearance and sex ad data from this year remained generally similar to the previous report, one area worth mentioning that was prominent in both data sets was the GTA. Ranking second in disappearances, which was an increase from the previous data set, and first in sex ads shows its importance in both the issues of MMIWG and trafficking of Indigenous individuals. While the GTA is the most populous metropolitan area in Canada, it has a lower proportion and raw population of Indigenous individuals than other areas. Winnipeg has a higher raw population of Indigenous individuals than the whole GTA, despite having almost nine times smaller of a population.⁷ This could reflect the economic pull the GTA has, perhaps drawing Indigenous individuals to the city for education or employment before their disappearance or trafficking event. On the sex ad side, it could also reflect the increased demand the GTA has over other areas in Canada.

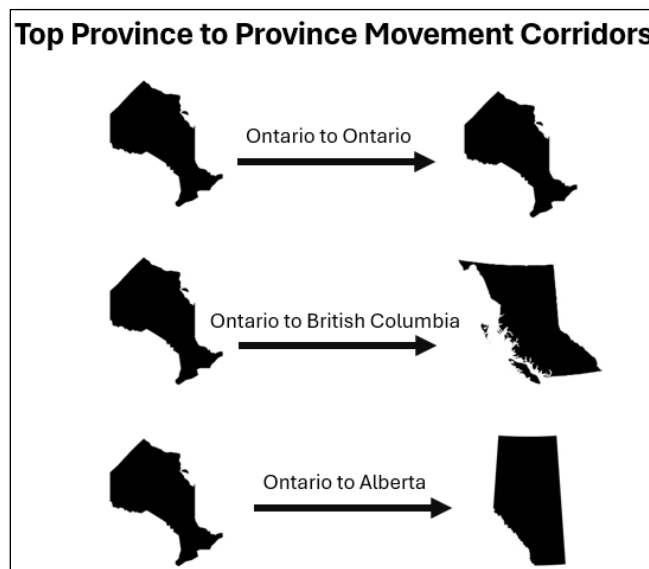
Sex Ad Data: Movement Corridors

One new aspect of our sex ad analysis for this report is the examining of movement corridors for sex ads claiming to feature Indigenous individuals. Movement corridors are common paths of travel inferred from sex ad post locations– for instance, if a person posts a sex ad one day in Toronto, and then three days later in Edmonton, we can reasonably assume that they traveled at some point in that three-day period from Toronto to Edmonton. When examined at scale, we can uncover the most common paths of travel for Indigenous women featured in sex ads. This in turn can help us understand origin locations for potential trafficking incidents as well as popular travel routes for traffickers and victims. This data is vital for awareness, education, and potential law enforcement or NGO intervention.

⁷ Statistics Canada, 2021 Census, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Winnipeg&DGUIDlist=2021A00054611040&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>. For the GTA, we counted the areas of Toronto, Peel, York, Durham, and Halton. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Toronto&DGUIDlist=2021A00053520005&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Peel&DGUIDlist=2021A00033521&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=York&DGUIDlist=2021A00033519&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Durham&DGUIDlist=2021A00033518&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Halton&DGUIDlist=2021A00033524&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>.

To evaluate the most popular movement corridors, we collected roughly the last ten years of sex ads claiming to feature Indigenous individuals in Canada and calculated movement on both a province-to-province and city-to-city level. As shown in Picture Four below, the most popular movement corridor from a province-to-province level was Ontario to Ontario, followed by Ontario to British Columbia, and then Ontario to Alberta. Given the highest score was for movement within Ontario, the overall highest province-to-province was Ontario to British Columbia. As for the most popular city-to-city movement corridor, one rose above the rest: Toronto to Vancouver. While there were others that were tied for second place, this corridor was the most used by a significant margin. Other notable corridors that appeared were Edmonton to Fort McMurray, Calgary to Edmonton, and Belleville to Edmonton.

PICTURE FOUR: MOST POPULAR PROVINCE-TO-PROVINCE MOVEMENT CORRIDORS



PICTURE FIVE: MOST POPULAR CITY-TO-CITY MOVEMENT CORRIDOR



Clearly, Ontario is an origin province in some way- sex ad posters appear to begin their movement in Ontario and go to somewhere else in Ontario, British Columbia, or Alberta. That it is an origin province does not necessarily mean that the Indigenous individuals are from there- in some ways it could be read as the opposite as true, that they are there because Ontario has the largest population center of the country and therefore the most demand. Thus, it may make more sense for traffickers and sex ad posters to start their advertisements in the place where the demand is highest, and from there move as desired. Geographic distance did not seem to play a major role in either province-to-province or city-to-city movement, with large

distances being reflected in the most popular corridors. This points to the likelihood of air travel being used for these corridors, which can inform our education and awareness campaigns, as well as law enforcement intervention.

Another finding of this movement analysis was the temporal concentration in the pre-COVID years. After COVID, general movement of sex ads decreased significantly to lower levels that have remained consistent since 2020. While the early COVID period's impact on travel levels is understandable, that it has not risen back up inspires more questions than answers. Perhaps there is less desire to travel in general or that the expense of travel has risen and affected the rate. In sum, these corridors are important windows into the most popular movement routes for Indigenous individuals in sex ads, and the findings can inform several areas of action.

While there will be more data later in the report that is Canadian-centric when it comes to demand, this concludes the report's section on the refresh of Canadian data pertaining to disappearances and sex ads claiming to feature Indigenous individuals. Trends from the previous study largely held true over the last year, though several outliers such as the GTA gave us some areas to monitor in the years to come.

United States Data

One of the major ways we seek to build upon last year's report is by incorporating more data as it pertains to the US, as a major finding of the 2025 report was the cross-border element to the sex ad data. To summarize, we found that phone numbers that posted sex ads in Canada which claimed to feature Indigenous also posted sex ads under the same phone numbers in the United States. This brought to the surface the transnational nature of this issue- the United States also has a large Indigenous population with many of the same underlying vulnerabilities as the Indigenous population in Canada. Furthermore, some tribal lands exist on both sides of the border, and the very concept of modern borders are not prominent perspectives within Indigenous communities. This increases the importance of capturing data in both the US and Canada.

There are similarities and differences when it comes to data gathering for the US vs. Canada. It is similar to Canada in its concentration of Indigenous populations in certain geographic areas, and due to historical violence and colonization the same set of vulnerabilities exist for American Indigenous populations. Like Canada, the US has no one repository for cases of MMIWG, and instead the data is captured in different ways by different levels of government as well as activists. However, unlike Canada, the US is larger in population, with more states and therefore unique laws and criminal justice systems, all of which result in an even more challenging landscape to get data.

United States: Scope of the Problem

Perhaps a more foundational question is necessary here: do these issues even exist in the US? If so, in what proportion? This question is not easily answered due to the fractured and various places the answers reside in- state task force websites, national crime statistic repositories, activist social media sites, to name a few. From the national level, studies found that:

- Over 84% of Indigenous women experienced violence in their lifetime, with over 55% experiencing sexual violence.⁸
- In a single year's time, a study found that almost 40% of Indigenous women experienced violence and 14% experienced sexual violence.⁹
- An arrest is made in only 13% of the sexual assaults reported by Indigenous women.¹⁰
- Homicide is the third leading cause of death for Indigenous women in the US.¹¹
- Indigenous women are murdered at a rate ten times higher than the national average in the US.¹²

As shown, national level statistics point to a similarly dire problem for the US as in Canada when it comes to the issue of MMIWG. Though general, they paint a picture of systemic violence that prominently overrepresents Indigenous women and girls. While there are national level statistics, data on trafficking of Indigenous individuals and more granular data on MMIWG can be found at the state level. Despite the US comprising of 50 states, Indigenous populations are concentrated in the American Midwest and West, much of which is due to colonization and forced population resettlement in the 18th-20th centuries.

To that end, we will survey some of the statistics gathered by these states with higher proportions of Indigenous peoples. Several of them, such as Washington and Minnesota, have well-established task forces and offices predicated upon MMIWG and data gathering. In Minnesota, Indigenous women make up only one percent of the total population. Despite this, they account for 10% of all missing women in the state, and from 2010-2018, 8% of all murdered women and girls were Indigenous.¹³ In the last year, Minnesota counted 405 total missing Indigenous women.¹⁴ Over an eight year period from 2012-2020, anywhere from 27 to 54 Indigenous women were missing in any given month.¹⁵ Lastly, in Hennepin County, which is home to Minneapolis, a 2015 report found that 25% of women arrested for prostitution were Indigenous.¹⁶

Minnesota also collects valuable data that gives visibility to underlying vulnerabilities amongst Indigenous youth. State educators administer an optional survey to students on a range of social, home, and health topics. In the most recent edition, 26% of Indigenous ninth grade girls said they were in foster care at one point, and 16% of Indigenous female eleventh graders reported having to stay in a shelter at some point in the last year.¹⁷ Furthermore, in response to

⁸ Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Crisis*, <https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-people-crisis#:~:text=Here%20are%20some%20statistics%20on%20missing%20and,and%20murdered%20cases%20that%20have%20gone%20unsolved.>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *New York Times*, *Native American Women Are Facing a Crisis*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/12/us/native-american-women-violence.html>

¹¹ National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, *Data and Statistics*, <https://www.niwrc.org/mmiwr-awareness#:~:text=For%20more%20resources%2C%20visit%20the,the%20MMIW%20Family%20Advisory%20Workgroup.>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Office of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives, <https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ojp/offices-missing-murdered/mmir-office/about-mmir.>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ National Congress of American Indians, *Tribal Insights Brief Spring 2016*, <https://archive.ncai.org/policy-research-center/research-data/prc-publications/TraffickingBrief.pdf>

¹⁷ MCHS Survey, <https://www.health.state.mn.us/data/mchs/surveys/mss/docs/statewidetables/aianalone.pdf>

the question, “Has anyone who was not a relative/family member ever pressured, tricked, or forced you to do something sexual or done some sexual to you against your wishes?”, 17% of female Indigenous eighth graders said yes and 18% of Indigenous female ninth and eleventh graders also answered in the affirmative.¹⁸ Finally, 4% of Indigenous female eleventh graders said they traded sex or sexual activity for food, money, a place to stay, or some other good.¹⁹

Elsewhere, the state of Washington reported that the unsolved homicide rate for Indigenous peoples was over 2.5 times higher than non-Indigenous populations and two times more likely to be homicide victims.²⁰ Wyoming reported Indigenous women to be murdered at almost ten times the rate of white females.²¹ The state of Wyoming also generated a unique and important statistic: the amount of time that a case of a missing Indigenous person is unsolved. They found that, on average, Indigenous people are missing for twice as long as white people.²² While similar statistics are not available for other states with significant Indigenous populations, it is encouraging that more task forces and studies are being commissioned in states such as Montana and New York.²³

These studies and statistics can vary from state to state and exist in siloed pockets, but they nevertheless paint a consistent picture: Indigenous women in the US are at a higher risk of being victims of violence, sexual exploitation, and unsolved cases than other people groups.

United States: Disappearance Data & General Trends

Due to both the fractured nature of the data and overall exponentially higher figures than Canada, we decided not to undertake the task of collecting each disappearance event of Indigenous women and girls in the United States. Groups such as the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI) have attempted this in previous years and found themselves having to file Freedom of Information Act FOIA requests to local and state level governments for the data.²⁴ In addition to having to FOIA these agencies, some of these FOIA requests required funds to complete, and UIHI incurred over \$4,000 in FOIA fees from these agencies for even attempting to get the data- there was no guarantee that the data the agencies would then provide would be what UIHI asked for or wanted.²⁵ This siloing of data remains a major barrier to data collection in the US. Some national numbers do exist, such as the FBI’s data repository, and in 2024 they stated that 5,614 Indigenous women and girls went missing, with 4,179 of those being under the age of 18.²⁶ To compare with the 2024 statistic of 5,614 MMIWG, the UIHI study

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ 2025 Report of the Washington State Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People Task Force, <https://agportal-s3bucket.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/2025%20MMIWP%20Report.pdf?VersionId=EWOBkwNGTAT30wGEjPCDwR3WndcHH6To>.

²¹ Indigenous Victims of Homicide and Missing Persons in Wyoming, 2025 Update, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_PMJovWk492dTiWsRuYA9X-zmkQ_HVQ/view.

²² Ibid.

²³ 2025 Report of the Washington State Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People Task Force, <https://agportal-s3bucket.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/2025%20MMIWP%20Report.pdf?VersionId=EWOBkwNGTAT30wGEjPCDwR3WndcHH6To>.

²⁴ Urban Indian Health Institute, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report, <https://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/UIHI-Missing-and-Murdered-Indigenous-Women-and-Girls-Report-20191009-1.pdf>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ FBI, Missing American Indian – Alaska Native Repository, <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/missing-american-indian-alaska-native-2024-final.pdf/view>

found a total of 5,712 MMIWG being reported across the US in 2016, showing the relative consistency of those figures. It is likely that there are many cases that go underreported due to lack of knowledge about the victim's race or distrust of law enforcement authorities.

As mentioned above, some states do publish data on MMIWG regularly- in 2024 Washington found a total of 52 missing or murdered Indigenous persons²⁷ (they did not distinguish gender) and Minnesota had a total of 405 MMIWG the same year.²⁸ Washington's statistics also show a breakdown of how many were recovered, still missing, or deceased; while other states do not publish these specific categories. The need for better and more comprehensive data collection on MMIWG and trafficking of Indigenous individuals was the subject of a 2017 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, which found that three of the four federal agencies that investigate or prosecute human trafficking did not require their agents to collect the race of victims in their cases.²⁹ The report also found that despite having over 6,000 federal human trafficking investigations from 2013-2015, there were only 14 cases in tribal lands in the same period.³⁰

One unique pattern seen in the United States in the MMIWG and trafficking of Indigenous individuals that is less prominent in Canada is the connection with hunting season. News stories and academic studies alike cite the confluence of big-game hunting season in the American Midwest with increases of sexual exploitation and human trafficking of Indigenous peoples. For instance, the Associated Press in 2018 wrote how pheasant season in South Dakota creates an influx of wealthy males, creating an impetus for seasonal strip clubs to appear and create an environment where Indigenous women are targeted by traffickers.³¹

A study done by the Minnesota American Indian Women's Resource Center surveyed Indigenous women about this phenomenon and one respondent said, "Deer hunting season. Big stripping time. And they're set-up joints. Like every little small bar has strip nights then and that's part of that circuit".³² Other respondents described these circuits as networks of strip clubs throughout the Midwest where Indigenous women are recruited to dance, and then quickly taken over by a pimp who eventually prostitutes them out of said clubs and bars.³³ Another study by the University of Minnesota cited general outdoor activities as venues for soliciting sex from Indigenous women as well- these included lake recreation, fishing and ice fishing, and rural vacations.³⁴

In sum, while we do not have definitive disappearance data that encompasses all of the US, the data and trends that are available point to an equally sobering picture in the US as

27 2025 Report of the Washington State Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People Task Force, <https://agportal-s3bucket.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/2025%20MMIWP%20Report.pdf?VersionId=EWOBkwNGTAT30wGEjPCDwR3WndcHH6To>.

28 Office of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives, <https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ojp/offices-missing-murdered/mmimr-office/about-mmimr>.

29 Government Accountability Office, *Investigations in Indian Country*, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/687396.pdf>

30 Ibid.

31 Associated Press, *Hunting Season lures strip clubs, trafficking to small towns*, <https://apnews.com/8e069b318feb467cb04c8bc10cce2f5e>.

32 Minnesota American Indian Women's Resource Center, *Shattered Hearts*, <https://www.niwr.org/sites/default/files/images/resource/Shattered-Hearts-Full.pdf>.

33 Ibid.

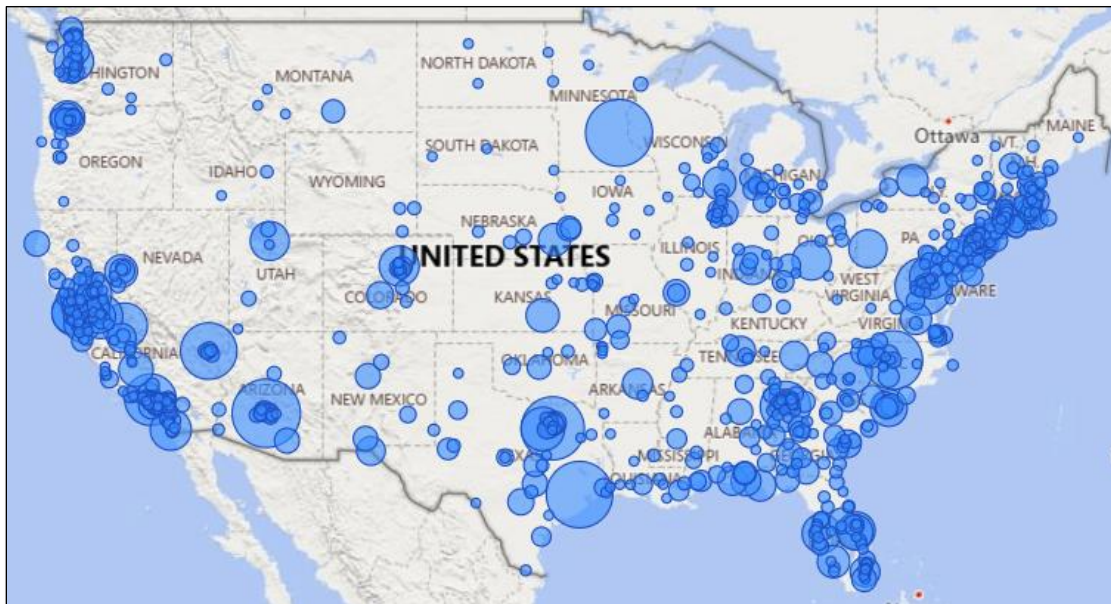
34 University of Minnesota, *Mapping the Demand*, <https://conservancy.umn.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/0f5e9f22-de66-43a6-948c-6b99243e2bd2/content>

Canada. Some differences do exist in the environments through which violence and sexual violence is perpetuated, with hunting season a notable factor in the US.

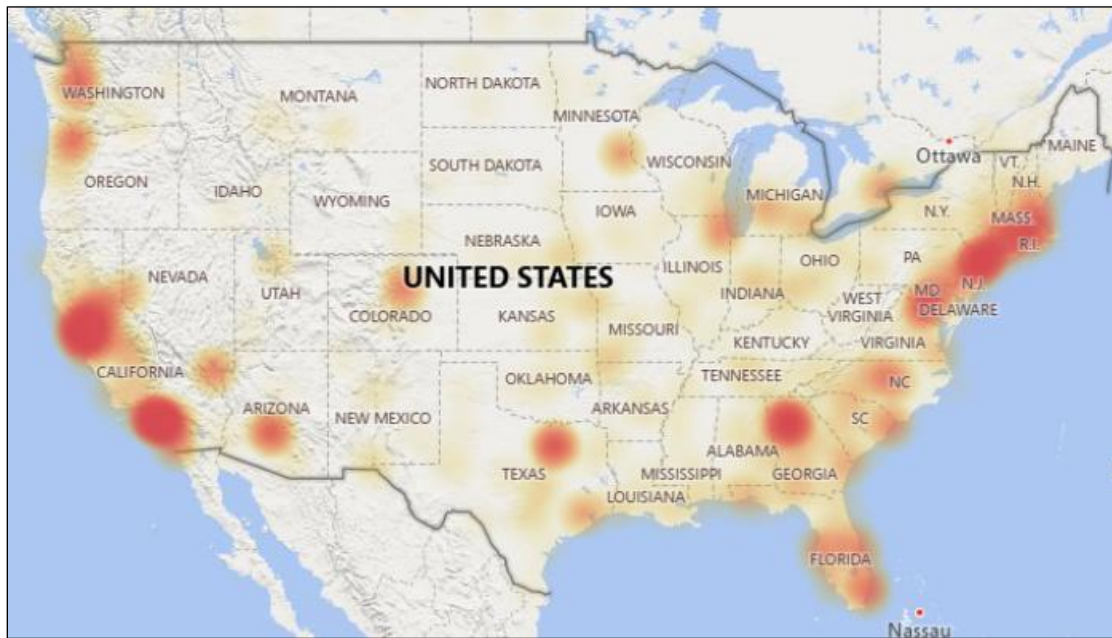
United States: Sex Ad Data

We gathered US sex ads that claimed to feature Indigenous individuals from a period of March 2025 to March 2026. We chose to restrict the data to a one-year period because the volume of ads far outpaced what was seen in Canada- the single year yielded 15,662 sex ads that claimed to feature an Indigenous individual. To remain consistent, we kept the same counting methodologies and constraints as with the Canada data, with one exception: super posters. These were sex ad profiles that posted in the hundreds and even thousands of ads in the last year, a number that is not realistic when accounting for change in geography- these were not duplicate ads, but rather unique posts. Given geographic constraints and what could be described as “bot-like” behavior, we chose to take profiles out of our data set if they posted more than 250 ads within a calendar year. The geographic dispersion of these ads is shown below in Picture Six. The same map is visualized as a heat map in Picture Seven. The top five cities with the most sex ads is shown in Picture Eight.

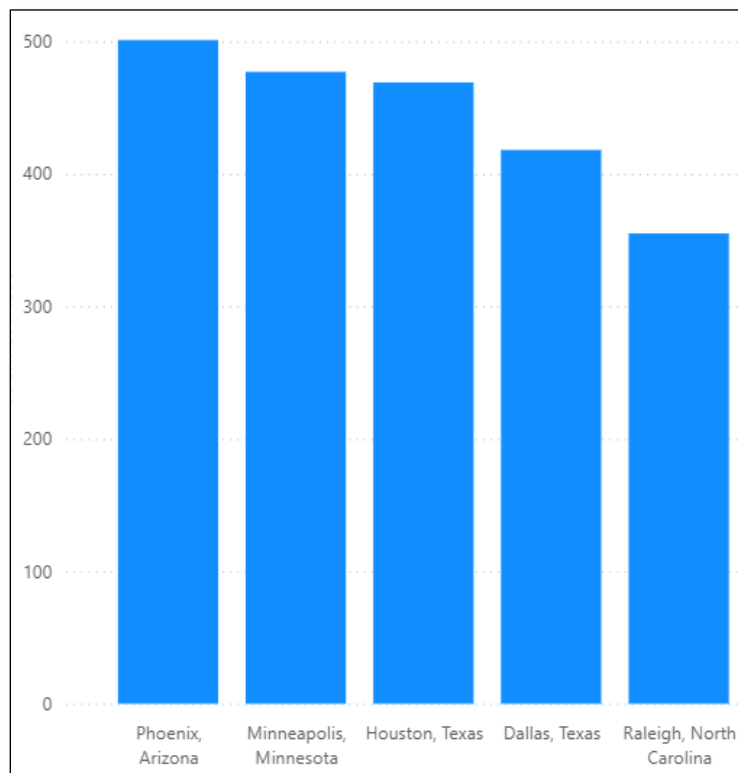
PICTURE SIX: US SEX ADS CLAIMING TO FEATURE AN INDIGENOUS INDIVIDUAL FROM MARCH 2025-MARCH 2026



PICTURE SEVEN: HEAT MAP OF US SEX ADS CLAIMING TO FEATURE AN INDIGENOUS INDIVIDUAL FROM MARCH 2025-MARCH 2026

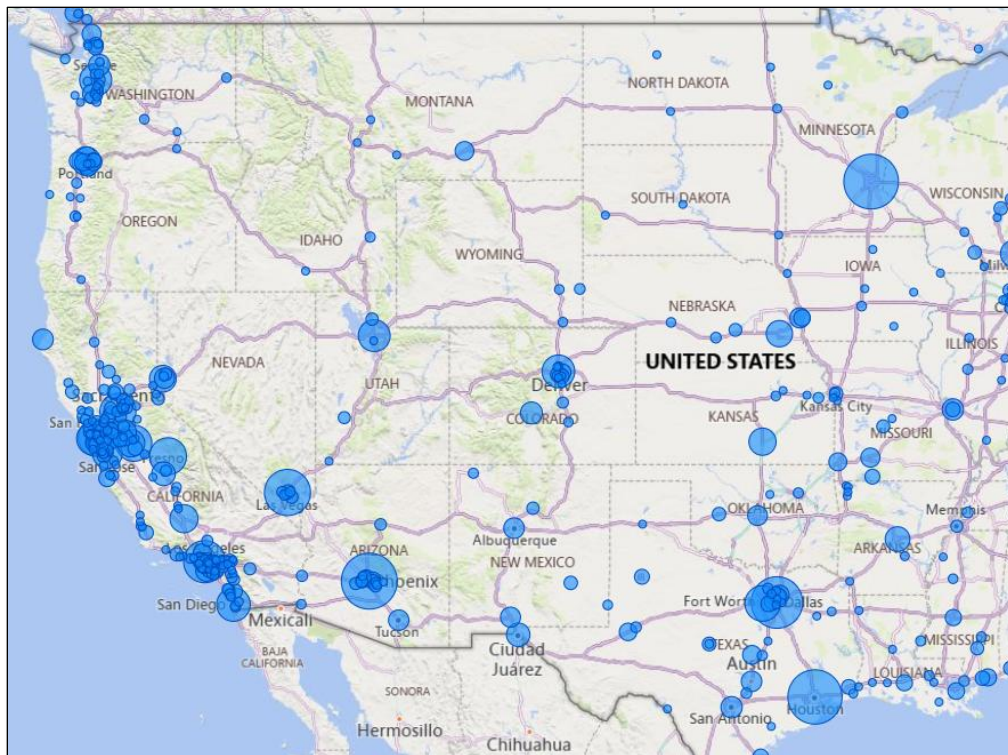


PICTURE EIGHT: TOP FIVE CITIES FOR SEX ADS CLAIMING TO FEATURE AN INDIGENOUS INDIVIDUAL FROM MARCH 2025-MARCH 2026



Right away, we can see that urban areas are overwhelmingly more popular places to post ads than rural ones. This correlates with the general principle of going where the demand is for purchasing sex or where the buyer lives. One particularly striking aspect of this urban concentration is found in cities in the Midwest and West. The previously cited UIHI report cited that as of 2017, over 70% of Indigenous peoples in the US lived in urban areas.³⁵ As shown in the zoomed-in Picture Nine, the cities of Minneapolis, Dallas, Houston, Denver, Phoenix, Las Vegas, Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles all had high amounts of these ads. While ads do exist in rural areas in the Midwest and West, they are usually near interstate highways. We can infer from this, that at least from a sex ad perspective, the activity is overwhelmingly urban.

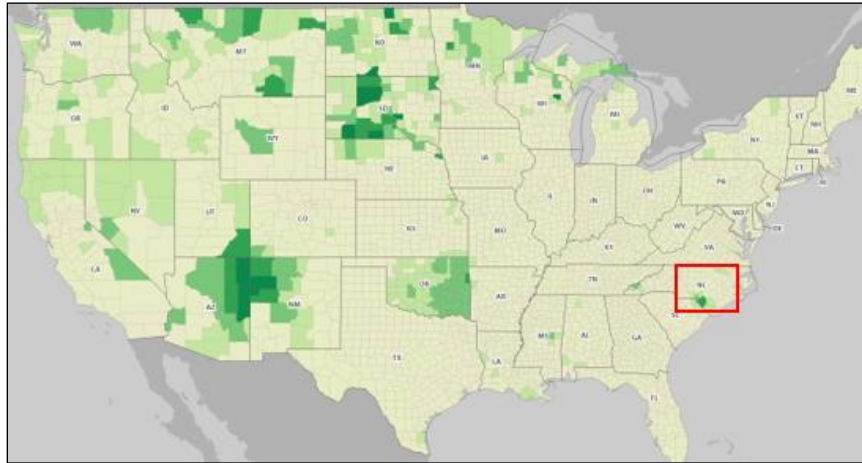
PICTURE NINE: ENHANCED PHOTO OF THE MIDWEST AND WEST



The one geographic outlier in the top cities for sex ads was Raleigh, North Carolina. It was fifth in the US for having the most sex ads that claimed to feature Indigenous women, with over three hundred ads in the last year. One of the reasons may be due to Indigenous population location in the US- North Carolina has the highest number of counties with significant Indigenous populations in the Eastern US, as seen below in Picture Ten.

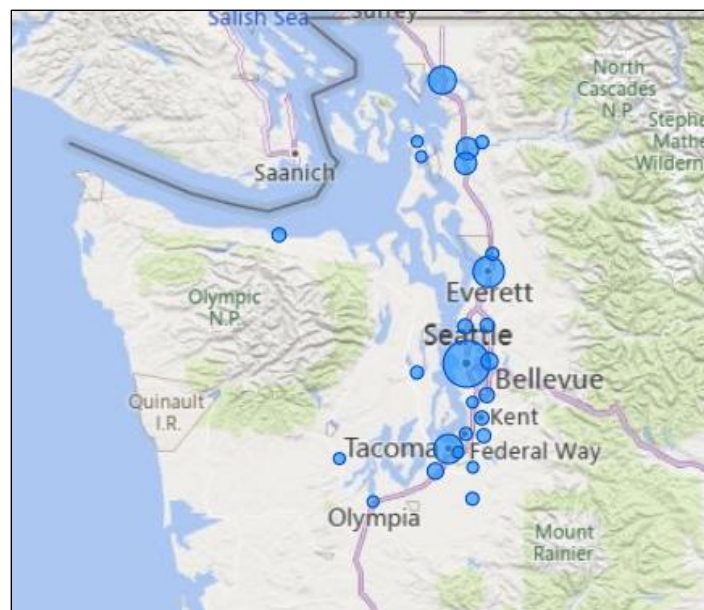
³⁵ Urban Indian Health Institute, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report*, <https://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/UIHI-Missing-and-Murdered-Indigenous-Women-and-Girls-Report-20191009-1.pdf>.

PICTURE TEN: POPULATION PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE US³⁶



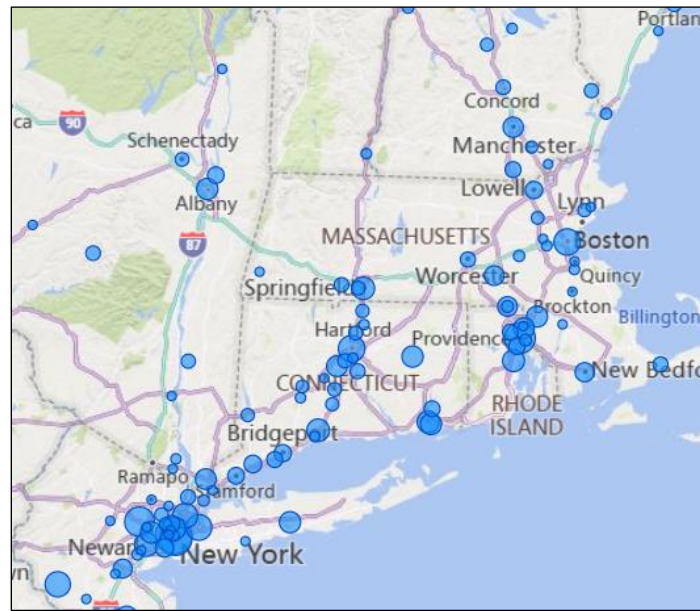
In addition to urban areas, interstate travel corridors were also reflected in the gathered data. Travel can be an important component for trafficking, as even though one can be trafficked out of one's own home, it is often an element of the process used to avoid detection by local authorities or family members. Two places in the US that had high numbers of sex ads along highways was the Seattle crescent, Interstate 5, and the corridor from New York to Massachusetts along Interstate 91. These are shown below in Pictures Eleven and Twelve.

PICTURE ELEVEN: SEX ADS CLAIMING TO FEATURE INDIGENOUS WOMEN ALONG INTERSTATE 5



³⁶ US Census Bureau, 2020 Census, <https://maps.geo.census.gov/ddmv/map.html>.

PICTURE TWELVE: SEX ADS CLAIMING TO FEATURE INDIGENOUS WOMEN ALONG INTERSTATE 91



California by far had the most sex ads posted, almost double the second-place state, Texas. The reason as to why may be straightforward: California is not only the most populous state in the US, but also the state with the largest Indigenous population as well, with almost double the amount of the next closest state, Oklahoma. Despite the heavy concentrations in the American West and Midwest, the East Coast hotspots of Atlanta, Raleigh, and New York City do show that to a certain extent, local Indigenous population did not necessarily correlate with higher amounts of ads. Instead, total population and urban areas seemed to be a more consistent correlation with the number of ads being posted. This can help inform policy and trafficking investigations on which areas to prioritize searching- if an individual is suspected of being trafficked for sex, urban areas are more likely to be their location than rural. This also has implications for MMIWG and not just trafficking of Indigenous individuals, and we will cover this in the Minnesota Case Study section.

To recap, we gathered over 15,000 US sex ads in the last year that claimed to feature an Indigenous individual. We saw heavy concentrations in urban areas, particularly in the Midwest and West as well as along travel routes, such as interstates. This shows the sheer scale of what is being faced: while not every sex ad shows a victim of sex trafficking, we do know that sex trafficking victims are often featured in sex ads. This in turn means that the more sex ads, the better the probability that the number of victims also increases, and with such a large total for the US, that is likely the case here.

Case Study: From Missing to Appearing in a Sex Ad

Latent in this report thus far is the explicit connection between MMIWG and trafficking of Indigenous individuals- we explored this at length in our 2025 report, but until now in this year's edition they have been kept side-by-side. However, to conclude this section and further

reinforce how these issues are interrelated, we will describe a recent case study that took place in early 2026.³⁷

As mentioned in a previous section, the state of Minnesota had over 400 Indigenous women considered missing at some point during 2024.³⁸ After our 2025 report that explored the connection between these issues, Minnesota's Office of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR) began to incorporate sex ad searches in its workflow for working MMIWG cases. Minnesota Office of MMIR Intelligence Specialist Taylor Wencel stated, "This methodology has been proven successful in identifying individuals who were acutely missing, as well as those who have been missing long-term, including juvenile Indigenous girls."

One case of a missing Indigenous woman from Minnesota showcased this new methodology in early 2026. A standard missing persons report was filed by the victim's mother to Minnesota's MMIR Office, which included a police report and old photo. The mother indicated the daughter had mental health challenges and unsheltered living conditions. According to Minnesota's MMIR Office, her last location was an area known for trafficking activity. The analyst ran her photo in sex ad data which yielded positive results- the victim was seen in numerous sex ads in Minneapolis. Through the subsequent investigation, it was discovered that the victim had been trafficked multiple times by different individuals and was in severe distress due to substance abuse and mental health challenges. Minnesota's MMIR Office was able to work with law enforcement and the victim's family to ensure that she received intervention and access to the care she required.

This case shows the connection between the issues of MMIWG and trafficking of Indigenous individuals- they both share many of the same underlying vulnerabilities, and in cases like above, disappearance is a part of being trafficked. While not every case of MMIWG ends in sex trafficking, utilizing methodologies like Minnesota's MMIR Office ensures that if a missing Indigenous woman or girl appears in a sex ad, they will be identified. While it is difficult to assess how common these issues overlap, they do in some cases. In addition, as they share the same risk factors, it is possible that trafficking may simply be a different ending of the same journey for MMIWG, whereas other stories end in homicide, physical abuse, or unsolved cold cases. Siloing these issues limits, as seen in the case of sex ad analysis, constrains the tools and methodologies we approach the problem with; leaving the potential for cases to go unsolved because there are still stones left unturned.

The Demand

Studying sex ads gives us a particular window into a potential trafficking situation, but it is one that is controlled by the trafficker or poster. We see what that individual wants us to see, be it the picture posted, location revealed, or message written. We can glean much from this, but if sex ads are the marketing, we must ask: who is the target for this marketing? What about the sex buyers, the demand, and what can their behavior and thinking tell us about this issue?

³⁷ We have permission from Minnesota's MMIR Office to share this information in the shown format.

³⁸ Office of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives, <https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ojp/offices-missing-murdered/mmir-office/about-mmir>.

After all, the ultimate goal for traffickers is to make money, so it behooves us to examine who they are making money off of and whether the trends we see can inform policy and action.

We aimed to study this in both a qualitative and quantitative manner. For our qualitative approach, we utilized posts on sex review forum websites. These sites are dark corners of the web where sex buyers go to discuss their sex buying encounters, preferences, and experiences. By studying these posts we can gain important insight into the psychology of the demand and what it is buyers are looking for, as well as how intentional they are about choosing specific experiences. For instance, are they deliberately seeking out sex from Indigenous women? If so, how are they viewing these women? Does it increase the vulnerability of Indigenous women to sexual violence?

We will start with examining posts in Canada, followed by a case study of Minneapolis. These posts appeared in city-specific threads for an international-focused sex review forum- this forum has also existed since the early 2000s and therefore has archived data going back over twenty years. The posts reveal a dehumanizing attitude towards and targeting of Indigenous women, which are shown in the pictures and quotes below. Explicit words and phrases will be blurred out. The acronym “SW” is used frequently in these posts and stands for the term ‘streetwalkers’, which are individuals who sell sex on the street, sidewalks, or areas outside.

PICTURE THIRTEEN: SEX FORUM POSTER LOOKING FOR INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN WINNIPEG³⁹

Visiting Winnipeg Looking For Native Girls (or any girls)

I'll be visiting Winnipeg tomorrow and I was hoping someone could tell me about the SW areas around Winnipeg. Info such as street names and areas of town would be great. I don't feel like driving all over the city or going up and down every single street.

I know there are a lot of native girls in Winnipeg and was wondering where the areas where young and attractive native girls are easy to find. (if any)

We see here this individual is traveling to Winnipeg and is explicitly stating his desire for Indigenous women, notably mentioning that he wants to know where “young” girls are. Another poster in the Winnipeg forum displayed outright racism, saying “Anyone living in Winnipeg should know enough to be extra careful around Indians/Natives....I deal with them all the time....they tend to be less educated, less likely to plan for the future, more likely to be unemployed and on welfare”.⁴⁰

One consistent theme we saw in the Canadian posts was sex-buyers taking advantage of Indigenous individuals who were intoxicated. This is a multi-faceted issue: not only does it take away any notions of consent, substance abuse may also indicate a controlling person or trafficker behind the woman. It is common for traffickers to get their victims addicted to a substance or alcohol to be able to “get through” what they’re being forced to do, and it is

³⁹ These posts were identified on a sex review forum. Due to the explicit nature of the website, we decided to anonymize the site's name and exact URL. This information is available upon request via the contact email at the beginning of the report.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

possible this is what is happening in the posts below. Traffickers may also get a victim addicted and withhold the substance intentionally until the victim cooperates.

PICTURES FOURTEEN THROUGH SIXTEEN: SEX REVIEW FORUM POSTS SHOWING SUBSTANCE-INVOLVEMENT⁴¹

Picked up a nice looking tall native girl in the West End. Was pretty drunk and still had a bud in one hand. [REDACTED] and wanted way too much so I showed her the door.

I probably would of been better off just parking my car and waiting for something new to come out. The native girl was a little intoxicated already and we agreed on \$20 [REDACTED] On the way back to dropping her off she tried to steal some alcohol from my car and was let out. She also didn't get the extra \$10. All in all a pretty mediocre pickup with mediocre results.

Took a trip down East H. – between Princess and Hawk.
Picked up a native girl from Prince George.
She was new to Vancouver and more drunk then I realized.
Hard to judge at night also hard to find a private place to park.

Another theme we saw on the Canada threads involved avoiding white women due to the possibility they may be connected to police operations, and instead seeking out Indigenous women. This is an unintended, problematic effect of trying to evade these law enforcement sting operations- the singular use of white women by law enforcement had the consequence of sex buyers seeking out Indigenous women due to a perceived lower risk associated with the Indigenous population.

One post regarding Saskatchewan stated, “If a SW is white, chances are she’s not really a SW, but a cop. There aren’t too many white SW’s in Sask. I’d say...97.5% of them are Native”.⁴² The screenshot below echoes this sentiment, saying they “know to avoid” white women and instead target Indigenous women for their sex-buying.

PICTURE SEVENTEEN: SEX REVIEW POSTER TARGETING INDIGENOUS WOMEN⁴³

Appreciated any info. (yes I have RTFF, but not much here. Not big into SW, but know to avoid white gals and go for the Natives)

The area of sex review forums appears to be an underutilized tool in studying these issues, and what is seen in the posts above is a devaluing and singling out of Indigenous women by sex buyers in Canada.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

Case Study: Little Earth Neighborhood in Minneapolis

Relative to Canada, we identified a significant volume of posts regarding Indigenous women on American sex review forums. This data led us to focus on the city of Minneapolis which ranked among the top cities for sex review posts featuring Indigenous women, and specifically the Little Earth complex and surrounding neighborhood in Southeast Minneapolis where we noted particularly high numbers. Little Earth refers to a specific complex run by Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as subsidized housing and is the only Indigenous-preference, project-based Section 8 rental assistance community in the US.⁴⁴ It was apparent that buyers were targeting this community and individuals were well-acquainted with this neighborhood, and would often post the specific street corners and areas where they went to seek sexual encounters. In the two posts shown below, Little Earth is specified as an area for buyers to find ‘streetwalkers’.

PICTURES EIGHTEEN AND NINETEEN: LITTLE EARTH AS AN AREA TO TARGET BY SEX BUYERS⁴⁵

Franklin

Franklin between Park and Chicago and going down towards Bloomington and / or Cedar but especially the one block between Park and Chicago is a guarantee on foot or at least always was. On foot around Little Earth should be a good chance. Not saying they'll look good necessarily but get the job done cheap yes.

Could somebody point me to the right direction?

Thank you

31st one block over from lake. Franklin from 5th to about Bloomington. Cedar possibly around Little Earth housing. Potentially park, Portland, Chicago and Bloomington between 31st and Franklin. This is

Another post, shown below in Picture Twenty, mentioned the “native projects”, likely referencing Little Earth, as a place to target Indigenous women.

PICTURE TWENTY: SEX REVIEW POSTERS IDENTIFYING INDIGENOUS HOUSING AREAS AS A PLACE TO PURCHASE SEX⁴⁶

But head to casinos [REDACTED] theres always some action going on in them. Also if you want some native streetwalkes take a trip to minneapolis, we got a ton of them up here near the native projects.

When we examine the posts a few themes are present. First, we see a dehumanization of individuals through reducing them to mere numbers- buyers will drive around this area in a predatory manner and report figures back to the forum of how many women on the street they saw and what ethnic category they belonged to, typically Indigenous, African-American,

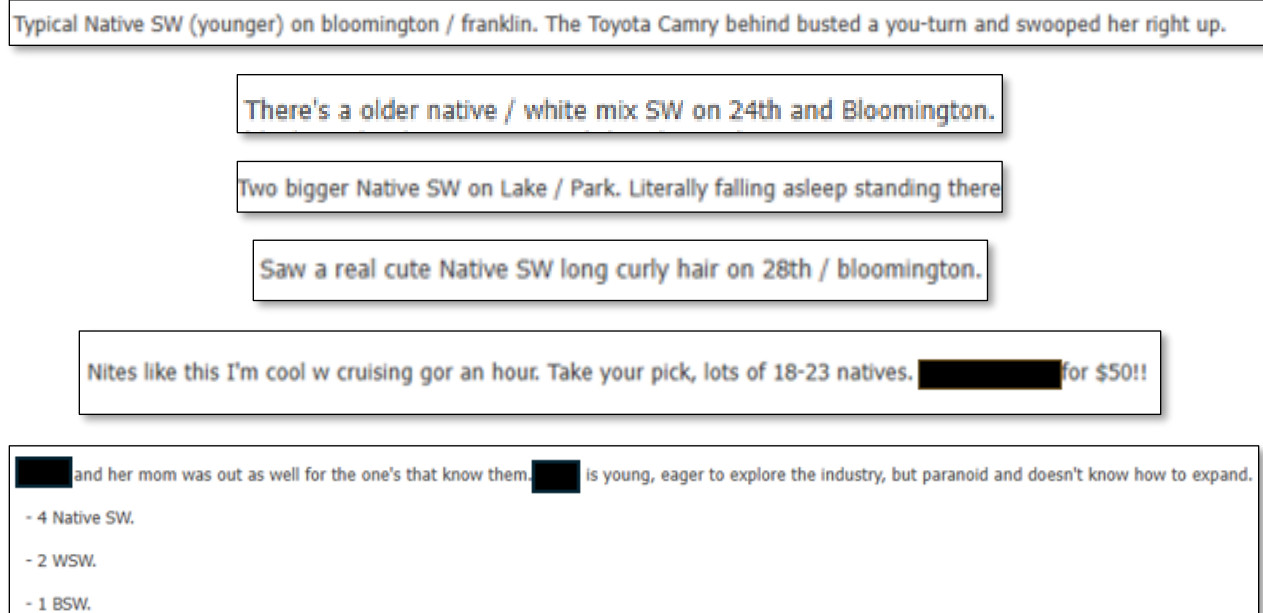
⁴⁴ Native American Community Development Institute, “Little Earth of United Tribes and LERA”, <https://nacdi.org/directory/item/little-earth-of-united-tribes/>.

⁴⁵ URL available on request..

⁴⁶ Ibid.

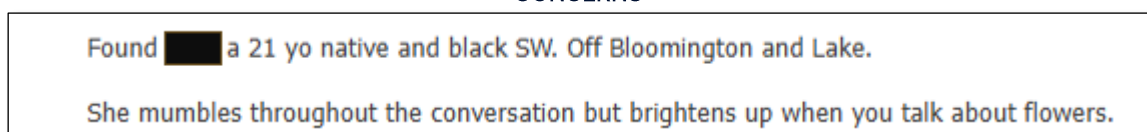
or white. The posts below show examples– due to the layout of the sex review site, some screenshots may be a part of the same post but were separated for ease of reading.

PICTURES TWENTY-ONE THROUGH TWENTY-SIX: COUNTING AND LOCATIONS OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN LITTLE EARTH AS POSTED ON SEX REVIEW FORUMS⁴⁷



The term “paranoid” is used in the post above and may be an indicator of mental health problems or presence of a trafficker. Another post, shown below, clearly depicts an individual in a poor state of mental health. Instead of helping this individual, the poster appears to have initiated a sexual encounter.

PICTURE TWENTY-SEVEN SEX REVIEW POSTER DESCRIBES INDIGENOUS WOMAN WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS⁴⁸



We also identified a post indicating the likely presence of a trafficker, shown below in Picture Twenty-Eight. The poster describes pulling up in his car to initiate a sexual encounter, but as the woman approached the car, a male also approached from the other side, potentially to try and negotiate price on behalf of the female or to dictate terms with the sex buyer. The sex review poster later says upon seeing the male, he decided not to pursue the encounter.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

PICTURE TWENTY-EIGHT: PRESENCE OF A POTENTIAL TRAFFICKER IN SEX REVIEW POST IN LITTLE EARTH NEIGHBORHOOD⁴⁹

13th and 21st had a young native, but when she walked up to my passenger side, a gentlemen was over on my driver side.

These posts reveal a general awareness and singling out of Indigenous women, as well as the degrading lens through which they are seen by these posters. It is clear that the Little Earth neighborhood is well-known and kept track of for this purpose, and we saw in some posts concerning information regarding the potential presence of traffickers and mental health issues. These posts are important to study from a research perspective as we're able to gain unique insight into these encounters and the exploitative behavior behind them. It is also valuable from a victim advocacy and law enforcement standpoint, as it shows where this activity is taking place and how vulnerable populations may be targeted. While these are more qualitative, anecdotal pieces of evidence and therefore the conclusions we can make from them are limited in scope, these posts are still important to study as they are from viewpoints which are rarely collected or seen, which is from the sex-buyer.

Demand: Exploitative Online Interest in Indigenous Women

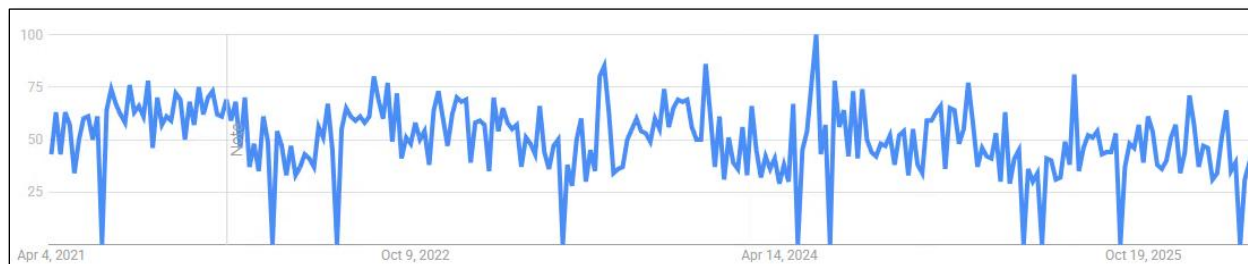
As we saw above, the demand is important to take into account when studying MMIWG and trafficking of Indigenous individuals. In addition to sex review posts, another way to attempt to capture demand is by measuring online interest in sexually exploitative content that features Indigenous women. One way of doing this is through using the Google Trends tool. Google Trends is a tool that displays levels of interest in a certain topic over time and over geography. It does this via the measuring of search traffic that a given topic generates- it is important to note that it does not provide raw search traffic metrics, but rather search traffic measurements in relation to itself. As a result, while we cannot measure the overall popularity of a search term, we can see when and where terms become more popular in relation to its own baseline. However, it is worth mentioning that a term has to be at least somewhat popular for Google to capture metrics around it, otherwise it will not have any data.

When we think about what specific search terms can be used to capture interest in the sexual exploitation of Indigenous women, we suggest using terms relating to pornography. This will likely be the first reflection of sexual interest on behalf of the demand- users want to see if this specific content exists and this is their way of seeking it out. Seeing pornographic content related to Indigenous women that is popular with the demand may provide the impetus for traffickers to act as well, as they may realize there's money to be made by targeting Indigenous women.

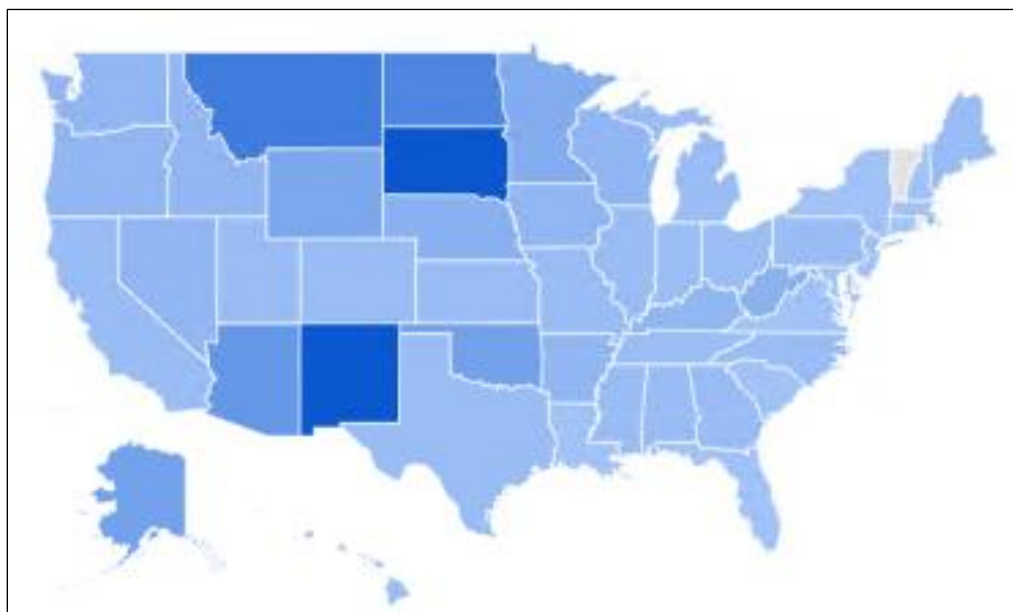
The term that had the most available data behind it was "Native American porn", which reflects Americans' broader usage of the term "Native American" vs. "Indigenous". The data we captured is for the last five years, and below in Pictures Thirty and Thirty-One is a timeline of search term popularity and geographic popularity of the "Native American porn" search term.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

PICTURE TWENTY-NINE TIMELINE OF POPULARITY FOR “NATIVE AMERICAN PORN” SEARCH TERM IN THE US⁵⁰



PICTURES THIRTY AND THIRTY-ONE: GEOGRAPHIC POPULARITY FOR “NATIVE AMERICAN PORN” SEARCH TERM IN THE US⁵¹



1	New Mexico	100	
2	South Dakota	100	
3	Montana	66	
4	North Dakota	57	
5	Arizona	42	

⁵⁰ Google Trends, “Native American porn” <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&geo=US&q=%22Native%20American%20porn%22&hl=en-US>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

We see a consistent level of search interest for “Native American porn” in the US over the last five years, along with a few dips and increases that don’t appear to have much pattern to them. This tells us that demand for this search term is consistently gaining new searchers. We can infer this through the way users search with Google- in this case, they are primarily searching for new websites for this content, or to see if this content even exists. Once a user sees that a) it does exist, and b) sees where it exists, it is likely that instead of searching that term again in Google the next time they desire that content, they will usually go straight to the website(s) they went to last time. As a result, a single user’s search metrics for a specific term typically goes down over time, if not disappearing entirely after the first search entry. That we see in the graphic above a relatively consistent level of searching may indicate new users are continually being captured.

In terms of geography, the Midwest and Southwest are, relative to the others, the dominant areas, where this content is being searched. New Mexico and South Dakota are overwhelmingly the most popular places for the “Native American porn” search term, registering almost double the proportion as the next highest states, Montana and North Dakota. This is instructive in telling us where the demand for sexually exploitative content featuring Indigenous women is higher in proportion than other areas, and as a result may feed into the issues of MMIWG and trafficking. While there was robust data for the US, there was not as much available for Canada, even accounting for different search terms and other terms used for Indigenous peoples. The terms that did have enough data to register a search measurement from Google indicated that the search volumes for sexually exploitative content featuring Indigenous peoples was concentrated in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.⁵²

As we conclude this section, it is worth emphasizing that we cannot ignore the demand in these issues. Studying, understanding, and addressing it will be vital parts of what it takes to make significant progress in the issues of MMIWG and trafficking of Indigenous individuals. Ignoring it means we only focus on one side of the story and eliminating a core root cause of the problem. We recommend an increase of studies, rehabilitation programs, and focus on this aspect. One organization working on demand reduction is the EmpowerMen organization based in Winnipeg, Canada. They are housed within the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, an Indigenous resource organization that provides community-based programs and resources for the local Indigenous population. EmpowerMen conducts studies, programs, and thought leadership on male sex-buyers with the intent to prevent sexual exploitation of women, girls, people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.⁵³ In a landmark study on male sex-buyers conducted by EmpowerMen and the University of Manitoba, they found 74% had previously downloaded sexually explicit content, which emphasizes the importance of the above study on internet search demand.⁵⁴ They also found 70% of sex buyers believe that women who sell sex were exploited.⁵⁵ Despite this, only 40% believed that Indigenous women

⁵² Google Trends, “Native American porn”, <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&geo=CA&q=%22Native%20American%20porn%22&hl=en-US>.

⁵³ EmpowerMen, About Us, <https://empowermen.ca/about-us/>.

⁵⁴ EmpowerMen Research, EmpowerMen and University of Manitoba Research Survey, <https://empowermen.ca/empowermen-research/>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

and girls were vulnerable to sexual exploitation.⁵⁶ Studies like these allow us to connect the dots and add color and context to the environment and mindset that leads up to the sexual exploitation of Indigenous women and girls, and therefore provides opportunities to strengthen prevention efforts further upstream of the process. Organizations like EmpowerMen should be studied for modeling other communities and brought into the conversation regarding the issues of MMIWG and trafficking of Indigenous individuals.

Conclusion

This report sought to further and progress upon the 2025 edition– namely a refresh of the data pertaining to Canada and incorporate data and analysis from the US. The findings of this edition naturally beget several recommendations. First, sex ads should continue to be incorporated into the methodologies and workflows for MMIWG cases. Though the overlap between the two issues may still be in the minority, it is apparent that there are MMIWG cases that could either be cracked open or solved if sex ads are canvassed for the victim.

Second, there must be an emphasis on better data gathering in both Canada and the US. Currently, the Canadian data gathering is currently led by advocacy groups, and in the US we see state task forces beginning to take the lead in data gathering practices. Federal efforts– such as Operation Lady Justice (a multi-agency initiative established to strengthen coordination, protocols, and resources for missing and murdered American Indian and Alaska Native cases)– can complement these state-level approaches by helping set standards and improve cross-jurisdictional collaboration. These developments are encouraging and must continue in each state, particularly with an emphasis on urban areas that are not currently associated with a high proportion of Indigenous peoples. This would apply to cities such as Toronto in Canada and Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Las Vegas in the US. Each had high amounts of sex ads claiming to feature Indigenous women and has been noted at various points, with the exception of Las Vegas, in MMIWG data as being cities where these cases occur. UIHI made the point that San Francisco and Los Angeles in particular are located on Indigenous homelands that belong to tribes that aren’t federally recognized, and as a result there may be systemic miscounting when it comes to the ethnicity of the city’s respective victims.⁵⁷

Third, there needs to be an incorporation of research and study as it pertains to a major underlying vulnerability for these cases: substance abuse. We touched on this briefly in our 2025 report, but a continued theme we see in our research and available academic or media studies is the impact of drug addiction and drug trafficking has in these cases. While there would need to be precautions due to sensitivity for the victims, authorities could make a general note if substance abuse was present in the case and then produce a general percentage or figure of how many MMIWG or trafficking cases were touched by addiction or abuse. The aim would be less focused on the victims’ specific substance usage, though that should be part of any rehabilitation or healing process, but rather to bring attention to the drug trafficking organizations and people behind it. This matters because drug-facilitated

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Urban Indian Health Institute, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report*, <https://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/UIHI-Missing-and-Murdered-Indigenous-Women-and-Girls-Report-20191009-1.pdf>.

exploitation can be considered as a form of coercion by a judge and therefore help prove the elements of force, fraud, or coercion in a courtroom.

Lastly, the momentum must continue. Our short, frenetic news cycles mean whenever MMIWG or trafficking of Indigenous peoples does break through into popular media, it is extremely short-lived. The answer to this is continued, deliberate engagement of not just stakeholders, but the public as well. This can be done through education, legislation, and corporate days of action and remembrance. The flurry of created state task forces in the US is an important step, but once the data is gathered, it should inform action. Most importantly, Indigenous voices need to be heard and platformed. Without their stories, insights, and leadership, any effort will ultimately flounder because it has not prioritized the victims and those it seeks to protect. We hope this report serves all these aims- to educate the public, to inform legislation, and to prioritize victims.