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## Social networking sites used for human-trafficking

Hundreds of Albertans get targeted each year

By [ANDREW HANON](#), SUN MEDIA

City cops are investigating two suspected human-trafficking rings believed to be part of an international network that enslaves hundreds of young Albertans each year, many of whom are forced into the sex trade in Las Vegas.

Staff Sgt. Kevin Galvin, head of the Edmonton police organized crime and gang units, said because the investigations are still underway, he wouldn't give specific details.

He said that while human-trafficking "criminal enterprises" have operated in Western Canada for at least 20 years – and for decades longer in central Canada – they're more sophisticated than ever before.

They do most of their recruiting on social networking websites like Facebook and MySpace, choosing naïve or vulnerable victims for "grooming" who are right around 18 years old in order to avoid detection by authorities looking for predators after underage kids.

Asked how many young Albertans are caught up in this web each year, Galvin replied simply, "hundreds." Most are women, he said, but young men are also targets.

Galvin said that typically, a man will develop an online relationship with the victim, selling himself as a glamorous high roller.

Once he's begun to reel in the victim, he makes a date to meet her. A whirlwind romance follows.

"She gets the red carpet treatment," Galvin explained, "Limos, expensive restaurants, VIP rooms at night clubs. Everything mirrors the pop culture ideal of good times. These guys can read the girls really well. She thinks he's her boyfriend."

After four or five dizzyingly spectacular dates, the predator will invite her to a private party.

When she arrives, however, she might be the only woman there. There are never more than one or two other women who are also victims.

She will be gang-raped and subjected to unspeakable humiliation. She might be drugged.

“Her ‘boyfriend’ will tell her what’s expected of her,” Galvin said. “She’s told the event will occur anyways. She can either fight or submit to it, but it’s going to happen.”

She will be threatened with death if she goes to police. Her family might also be threatened.

Victims are typically taken to another city, where they’re further groomed by a group of women already in the sex trade. They’re taught how to dress, act and how to avoid police. At the same time they’re further broken down by beatings and threats.

Once they’re deemed ready and compliant, the victims are taken to the U.S. and pimped as high-priced call girls.

Galvin said Canadian women often end up in Las Vegas, and can be pimped to rich johns for up to \$10,000 per weekend.

It’s a scenario that makes Crystal Foster’s blood run cold.

The 24-year-old Edmonton woman’s sister, Jessie, vanished while visiting Las Vegas in March 2006 and is believed to be a victim of human trafficking.

“Sometimes it’s hard to think about what’s going on,” Crystal said. “I just pray that if she’s stuck in this that she’s cooperating and keeping herself safe.”

Officials with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department were unavailable for comment.

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