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An Overview of John Schools for Arrested Sex Buyers in the United States

(Also referred to as Sex Buyer Education Programs)

Summary Based Upon Research from the
National Assessments of Prostitution and Sex
Trafficking Demand Reduction Efforts



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“John school” is a generic term commonly used to describe education or restorative justice programs for individuals arrested for soliciting commercial sex, that are designed to deter them from that behavior in the future. The generic term covers a broad range of content, delivery modes, and how the programs fit within justice system options for sanctioning and educating offenders. For instance, john schools can be structured as a condition of a criminal sentence, in which mandatory participation may be combined with other criminal sanctions, or may be offered as a diversion option, resulting in reduced penalties, or dismissed charges if successfully completed. John schools can be one-day education classes or designed as multiple-session counseling programs. The programs are financed by the fees or fines that the arrested sex buyers must pay (typically, about \$400, and ranging from \$0 to \$1,500) for soliciting sex. The fees or fines usually cover all program costs, and often produce excess revenue used to fund survivor support programs. In addition to on-site classroom participation, john schools can be accessed from any location as online courses. Several online versions of john school courses are available nationwide, and courts in any jurisdictions can choose to accept online courses to meet sentencing or diversion requirements.

A wide variety of programs are often grouped together and labeled as “john schools.” These programs vary on a number of dimensions, including the number of sessions needed for completion, whether they are offered as diversion options versus sentencing requirements, and in the range of associated fees and fines. John schools also vary greatly – and in important ways - in their program content and curricula. Traditionally, the common elements found in most john schools are that they discuss (a) negative health, safety, and legal consequences that sex buyers may face if they continue engaging in commercial sex, (b) the negative impact on prostituted and trafficked persons exploited within the sex trade, and (c) the negative effects of the sex trade on communities and their residents. With that common foundation, additional topics may be addressed. For example, the [Indianapolis “Red Zone”](#) program featured a community impact panel discussion, followed by participants spending three hours doing community service by picking up trash on city streets with high levels of prostitution activity. Other prevalent curriculum components traditionally offered by john school programs include discussions of healthy relationships, anger management, sexual addiction, pimping and pandering, human trafficking, impact on spouses of sex buyers, and sex buyer vulnerability to criminal victimization while engaged in commercial sex.

For us to classify an education program as a john school, it must cover multiple topics designed to dissuade or deter men from buying sex. Court-ordered or diversion program that focus only on health education, for example, would not be considered john schools. Some states and municipalities within the United States have mandated health education sessions (usually focused on sexually transmitted diseases) for prostitution arrestees - including sex buyers - but we would not consider those to be john school programs, since the objective of the health classes is avoiding infection, and not necessarily to convince sex buyers not to patronize prostituted or trafficked persons sex because of the harm it causes (which is the intent of john school programs).

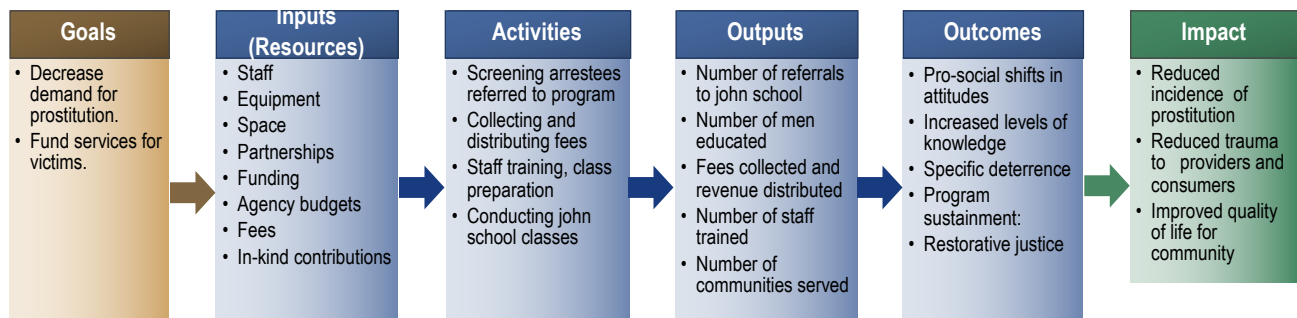
Basic John School Logic Model

Like any program, john schools are grounded in a set of goals. To pursue these goals, programs use resources that support activities intended to produce specific results—from those results that are immediate and focused, to those that are broader and longer-term outcomes and impacts. A logic model is a useful device for illustrating the connections from program *goals* to the *resources* committed to the program, to the *activities* supported by those resources, to *outputs* (the direct representation of activities) program *outcomes* (the manifestation of the change that activities are seeking to accomplish), and finally to *impacts* (the indications that the program’s broader goals have been realized). The logic model for the most common type of john school (modeled in part on [San Francisco](#)’s First offender Prostitution Program (FOPP)) is presented in Figure 1.

The ultimate program *goal* of the FOPP and most other john schools is to decrease the demand for commercial sex, and hence, reduce the amount of sex trafficking and prostitution that occurs. Program goals are pursued by committing *resources* (inputs) that support program *activities* (in john schools, the primary program activity is the educational intervention for arrestees). The measurable indicators of these activities are the program “*outputs*.” The activities are designed to lead to the aforementioned *outcomes* of knowledge and attitude change:

increased awareness of the legal and health risks of engaging in commercial sex, and awareness of the negative impact of the behavior on prostituted persons, communities, and others. These outcomes are intended to reduce the likelihood that men will continue to solicit prostitution (i.e., the program *impact*).

Figure 1: Generic John School Logic Model



Targeting the Educational Intervention

John school directors typically assume that there are several key attitudes and beliefs that cause or allow men to solicit sex, and that the programs reach at least some of the men by countering erroneous beliefs and filling gaps in knowledge. The programs target some or all of the following:

1. The belief that the risks of arrest and legal sanctions are low.
2. Denial or ignorance of the risk of contracting STDs or HIV through purchased sex.
3. Ignorance of the risk of being robbed or assaulted by prostituted persons or sex traffickers
4. Denial or ignorance of the negative impact prostitution has on the neighborhoods in which it occurs.
5. Ignorance of the links between street prostitution and larger, organized systems of sex trafficking.
6. Denial or ignorance of what motivates them to solicit prostituted women or girls (e.g., addictions, compulsions, unmet social or sexual needs).
7. Denial or ignorance of the negative impact of prostituted persons
8. Denial or ignorance of the fact that money is the only reason prostituted persons engage in commercial sex.
9. The mistaken belief that the women men solicit for sex care about them, and that they are in some kind of relationship with them.
10. Denial or ignorance of the anger, revulsion, or indifference that many prostituted women have while they are engaging in commercial sex with sex buyers.
11. Ignorance about how to have the healthy relationships that could replace their reliance upon commercial sex.

Men who solicit sex would be correct in assuming that there is a low risk of arrest and legal sanction. On this point, john schools do not seek to confirm this perception, but instead try to elevate the perceived risk from whatever level exists prior to taking the class. Since many of the men in john schools are first-time arrestees, they may be ignorant of the sanctions they may face if arrested a second time, and the program was designed to provide them with this information. On most of the other points, the program managers usually assume that the men are

ignorant or in denial about the risks and negative impact of prostitution, and the program curriculum was designed to provide them with factual information and “break down their denial systems.”¹

A precondition for a sustainable john school program is a sufficient flow of eligible participants. This requires a proactive approach on the part of law enforcement to conduct operations designed to arrest men for soliciting. Several john school programs have been suspended or discontinued due to an insufficient flow of participants (e.g., [Buffalo, NY](#); [San Francisco, CA](#); [Tampa, FL](#)), even though the program was fully functional and capable of educating arrested sex buyers sent to them by local courts. This flow is determined primarily by whether police have - and choose to commit - the resources needed to conduct reverse sting operations. Programs whose fees are used only to support john school classes can survive with very small numbers (as few as 10 to 20 per year, enough for one class per year), but programs that rely upon the fee revenue to sustain programs for survivors of prostitution and sex trafficking must have a reliable and substantial volume of program participants. A serious, current challenge for all john schools is cutbacks in police budgets that have resulted in reducing the frequency of reverse stings, and minimizing the flow of offenders to be treated or educated.

Prevalence of John School Programs

In-person programs have been established that have served arrested sex buyers in more than **230** cities and counties in the United States. In addition to on-site classroom participation, john schools can be accessed from any location as online courses or as a recorded presentation. At least seven² online versions of john school courses are available nationwide, and courts in jurisdictions without traditional programs may choose to accept online courses to meet sentencing or diversion requirements.

Table 1: Sites with Earliest Known John Schools		
Year	City or County	State
1981	Grand Rapids	MI
1988	Minneapolis/St. Paul	MN
1988	Rochester	NY
1991	West Palm Beach	FL
1992	Kansas City	KS
1995	San Francisco	CA
1995	Portland	OR
1996	Nashville	TN
1997	Las Vegas	NV
1997	Pittsburgh	PA
1997	Santa Clara	CA
1997	Buffalo/Erie County	NY
1997	Phoenix	AZ
1997	Oklahoma City	OK
1998	Fresno	CA

There are approximately 70 separate programs in the United States. We cannot be more precise about the number of programs, because there are questions about whether some that have not been used recently are still intact and available, or whether they have been disbanded. The number of cities and counties that have ever used john schools as a demand reduction measure is far greater, since many programs have served multiple communities. There are at least 235 U.S. cities and counties that have sent arrested sex buyers to john schools. Examples of john schools that are convened in one city but accept arrestees from multiple jurisdictions include the program in [Cincinnati](#), that serves the host city as well as those arrested throughout [Hamilton County](#). [Kansas City's](#) program has served at its venue in Kansas City, KS, men arrested in that city as well as those arrested in [Lenexa](#),

¹ Norma Hotaling, Founder of Standing Against Global Exploitation (SAGE), San Francisco, CA, in discussion with the author, January 27, 2006.

² [American Integrity Courses](#); [Court Solutions Online](#); [Logan Social Services](#); [Life Wisdom Foundation](#); [North American Learning Institute](#); [ProProfs Store](#); [Online Court Ordered Classes](#).

[Prairie Village](#), [Johnson County](#), and [Wyandotte County](#), as well as arrestees from [Kansas City](#), MO. [Salt Lake City](#) serves both the city and [county](#) of Salt Lake, and the john school in [Tacoma](#), WA serves that city plus [Lakewood](#), [Fife](#), and [Pierce County](#). The john school in [Toledo](#), Ohio serves Lucas County as well as the host city. The “Men Breaking Free” program in the twin cities of [Minneapolis/St. Paul](#) also serves the city of [Rochester](#), MN and [Olmsted County](#). Some john schools do not place geographic limits on participants. The S.T.O.P. (Solicitors, Traffickers, & Offenders of Prostitution) in [Dallas County](#), TX, accepts sex buyers from any jurisdiction within all 50 states.

Over time, some cities have had more than one program in succession. For example, [Portland](#), Oregon has had at least three distinct john school programs over a period of more than 25 years:

#1: Sexual Exploitation Education Project. The city's first sex buyer education program was the Sexual Exploitation Education Project (SEEP). It was active from 1995 to 1997 and was run by the Council for Prostitution Alternatives through an informal agreement with [Multnomah County](#) District Attorney and the District Court. SEEP was a three-day classroom program, established as a condition of a sentence rather than as a diversion option resulting in dismissed charges. The program was cancelled due to a lack of support by local law enforcement agencies, including the courts that stopped referring men to the program.

#2: Portland Prostitution Offender Program. The city's second john school was the Portland Prostitution Offender Program (PPOP). It operated from 2003 to 2006, and was led by the Lola Greene Baldwin Foundation, in partnership with the Multnomah County Community and Circuit Courts. The program was designed as a condition of a sentence, rather than a diversion, as was its predecessor – SEEP. In the PPOP, successful completion of the john school would result a reduction in the number of hours offenders were required to perform community service (another standard condition of their sentence). One of the reasons the program was discontinued after two years was that an unusually small program fee was charged to offenders, which resulted in the PPOP not being financially self-sustaining, as are most john schools. The PPOP charged \$83, while the national average john school fee or fine is approximately \$400 and can range as high as \$1,500 ([Norfolk](#), VA).

#3: Sex Buyer Accountability Diversion program. Five years after the PPOP ended, the city of Portland and the Multnomah County District Attorney’s Office initiated a third john school program, the Sex Buyer Accountability Diversion program (SBAD). Launched in January 2011, the program was modeled explicitly after [San Francisco](#)’s FOPP, unlike its two predecessors. It is a diversion program, where meeting all of the requirements results in a case dismissal. The fee is \$1,000, with provisions for a sliding scale based on ability to pay. The program is financially supported entirely by fees from the offenders, and excess revenue is used to support programs for survivors of commercial sex and sex trafficking. In the first two years of the program (January 2011 to May 2013), which was administered by Lifeworks Northwest and the Multnomah County DA’s Office, it served over 200 participants. As of May 2022, the SBAD program was still operating.

San Francisco has also used three separate john school programs between 1995 and 2023:

#1: First Offender Prostitution Program (SAGE, San Francisco District Attorney’s Office, San Francisco Police Department). In 1995, the city launched the First Offender Prostitution Program (FOPP), a program that later became known by the generic term, “john school.” The FOPP is widely regarded as the first john school, although it was not (e.g., programs were active in [Grand Rapids](#), MI and [St. Paul](#), MN a decade before then). However, it did serve as the model or starting point for most of the 70+ programs that followed in the U.S. (plus over a dozen in Canada, approximately 20 in the United Kingdom, and a nationwide program that operated in over 30 sites throughout South Korea). The FOPP’s managing partner was the San Francisco District Attorney’s Office, which led a partnership with the San Francisco Police Department and a non-profit organization (SAGE), that was formalized by a [memorandum of understanding](#). The FOPP also had key collaborators that contributed to the program for years, including a neighborhood organization, Save our Streets (SOS), and the San Francisco Department of Public Health. In addition, important classroom contributions were made by survivors of commercial sex, most of whom were current or former clients of the SAGE program. The FOPP was the subject of an [evaluation](#) sponsored by the National Institute of Justice

(U.S. Department of Justice), which in 2008 found the FOPP to be effective in reducing recidivism by more than 40%. The FOPP was [discontinued](#) and SAGE was disbanded by the fall of 2014.

#2: *First Offender Prostitution Program (Community West Works).* In 2015, Community Works West (CWW) began developing a john school to replace the previous program operated in the city for 20 years by SAGE. In 2018, the CWW website contained a description of their [second generation](#) john school in San Francisco, still describing it as the *First Offender Prostitution Program*, and a court diversion program that seeks to reduce recidivism among first time buyers of prostitution. A news report in July 2019 about the [second](#) john school in San Francisco noted that local police were supplying the program with a robust stream of arrested sex buyers. However, by 2020 the District Attorney's Office had announced it would no longer prosecute prostitution charges and there were very few sex buyer arrests made, and no flow of participants for a john school.

#3: *American Integrity Courses online John School.* In 2022, the District Attorney who championed the de facto decriminalization of prostitution was removed from office in a [recall](#) vote and in early 2023 reverse stings were resumed in the city. San Francisco began sending arrested or cited sex buyers to an online version of a john school. The program school the city currently uses (as of March, 2023) is produced by American Integrity Courses (AIC), which hosts a 10-hour john school as part of its Human Trafficking Awareness & Prevention Program. The AIC John School covers the legal, social and health ramifications of purchasing sex in an effort to deter individuals from solicitation in the future. The San Francisco DA's Office said that the AIC John School had been available as a virtual online course to first-time offenders in the city since the Covid pandemic began (March, 2020). Solicitation suspects in San Francisco are now directed to neighborhood courts, where convicted offenders may then be required to enroll in the john school for a \$50 fee. Through February, 2023, only 14 local sex buyers had taken the AIC John School course.

Other cities that have had more than one john school program include the following examples:

- [Columbus/Franklin County, Ohio](#) has had two john school programs. The *Columbus John Education Program*, operated by the Columbus City Attorney's Office and the Franklin County Municipal Court, was launched in 2005. At the end of 2012, the Columbus City Attorney's Office reported that the program conducted three or four john school sessions per year, depending upon the flow of men provided by police operations. The program functioned as both a diversion and a sentencing option. Some sex buyers were sent to the school as part of a plea agreement arranged by their attorneys, and others were ordered to attend as a condition of their probation. Between 2005 and 2018, the program had over 1,000 participants and only 12 repeat offenders on record, for a recidivism rate of less than 1%. In 2016, a john school program was launched by the non-profit organization "She Has a Name" called, *Reduce Demand*. The program served individuals arrested in central Ohio, and focused on Columbus and Franklin County. From 2016 to 2019, over 200 men had completed the Reduce Demand program. More recently, classes were larger and have included men arrested in other communities in the Franklin County area. For example, in July of 2021, a *Reduce Demand* class had 58 male sex buyers in attendance.
- [Chicago, Illinois](#) has had two john schools. The first was operated by Genesis House and Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and was disbanded in 2005. The second began in 2005, and was operated by Amend and the Chicago Police Department. That john school was still functioning into 2013. As of March, 2023, we have had no confirmation of its continued operation over the prior 10 years, but also have not seen notice of its cancellation.
- [Waco, Texas](#) has had two distinct john school programs. The first program was approved in 2000 and its first class was held in 2002. The program was launched by a Waco Police Department Officer, Anita Johnson and was modeled after [San Francisco's](#) FOPP. At the time of the first program, the police department conducted a small number of reverse stings each year; therefore, WPD decided to hold just one john school class per year. The program shut down in 2013 due to a lack of funding and sufficient flow of participants. In 2017, a second program was initiated by Jesus Said Love, a faith-based

organization, and The Heart of Texas Human Trafficking Coalition. The Stop Demand School program is designed as a sex buyer education program, focused on accountability and positive behavior change. Classes are offered both in-person and online. In-person classes are conducted six to eight Tuesday annually for eight hours. The online course requires participants to pass a final exam with a score of 70% or higher to receive their certificate of completion.

- [Kansas City](#), **Kansas** had a program starting in 1992 that was discontinued sometime between 1997 and 2000. Then a new john school program was started in 2000 by Veronica's Voice in [Kansas City](#), MO, that serves Kansas City, KS as well as several other communities and counties in the region. The Veronica's Voice john school was an adaptation of the basic [San Francisco](#) FOPP model. The program was redesigned in 2018 as a multi-session sex buyer education program, focused on accountability and positive behavior change. The second [Kansas City](#) program was modeled after [Seattle's](#) Stopping Sexual Exploitation: A Program for Men.
- [Minneapolis / St. Paul](#), **Minnesota** has three john school programs: The Restorative Justice Program Prostitution Patrons, operated since 1988 by Project Pathfinder Inc., and the Offenders Prostitution Program, operated by Breaking Free since 1999. The latter program was modeled after [San Francisco's](#) FOPP, while the former program pre-dates the FOPP. The third program began in 2012 and is still operational as of 2022. This program was redesigned in 2018 to more closely model sex buyer education programs focusing on accountability and positive behavior change. Sawyer Solutions provides an individualized intervention program for men who buy sex. The sex buyer education program begins with an introduction and initial assessment session and consists of six weekly group sessions designed to help male sex buyers to choose more productive coping methods.
- [Tucson](#), **Arizona** has had two programs: (1) the STD Program (Safety Through Deterrence), operated in 2004 by the Tucson Police Department, and (2) Odyssey, operated since January 2007 by the Tucson's District Attorneys and Police Department, Southwest Intervention Services, and Cactus Counseling. One of the difficulties in counting the number of currently active john schools is determining what it means to be "active."

Most programs go through periods of greater and less activity, so may schedule classes monthly or bi-monthly, but postpone them if police activity has been low and the numbers are insufficient. Some programs that had been robust and met frequently have gone through fallow periods of one or two years where no classes have been held (e.g., [Buffalo](#), NY; [Waco](#), TX; [Tampa](#), FL). If the program is still hardwired into the system and the capacity to hold classes remains, but classes have not occurred due to an absence of participants delivered by police, we would regard it as active. For example, the S.T.O.P. program in [Dallas County](#), TX, halted classes during the pandemic due to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions. The class referred participants to Waco's online version of the Stop Demand School (SDS) during 2020-2021 while social distancing restrictions did not permit in-person classes to operate. As of 2022, the S.T.O.P. program had resumed live classes. We define as "discontinued" only those programs that have been explicitly cancelled, or that have not been held for many years and there is no remaining infrastructure or intent for the program to hold another class (e.g., [Rochester](#), NY). Another challenge in keeping current on john school programs that are active "now" is that would require an ongoing surveillance or reporting system, which would need resources that have not been made available for that task.

Staff at most of the john school programs launched between 2000 and 2015 have said that they used [San Francisco's](#) FOPP as a model, but all new programs adapted from others require some modifications to accommodate differences in local needs and resources. When we examined other john school's major features, none was found to be structured exactly like the FOPP along all dimensions. For example, the majority of the other programs collect just enough fee revenue to support the john school classes, and are not designed to generate revenue for survivor programs. The FOPP staff (particularly from SAGE) regarded that "restorative justice" component as one of the most crucial elements of their program and believed that it is a serious shortcoming to omit that feature. Other programs are explicitly not modeled on the FOPP, such as the three-day SEEP program that ran in Portland, OR from 1995 to 1997, and [Seattle's](#) 10-week "[Stopping Sex Exploitation](#)" program.

Table 2: Key Characteristics of Select John School Programs

Site	Date Began	Diversion or Sentence	Fee/Fine	Format	\$ Supports Survivor Programs
Aurora, IL	2009	Diversion	DK	DK	
Brooklyn, NY	2002	Diversion	\$250	1 class, 5 hrs.	◆
Buffalo, NY	1997	Diversion	100	1 class, 8 hrs.	
Charlotte, NC	2006	Diversion	220	5 group sessions, 10 hrs.	
Chicago, IL	2006	Diversion	500**	1 class, 8 hrs.	
Cincinnati, OH	2006	Either	500	1 class, 8 hrs.	◆
Columbus, OH	2007	Sentence	156	1 class, 8 hrs.	
Dayton, OH					
Denver, CO	1999	Diversion	200	2 sessions, 4 hrs. 20-40 hrs. comm. service	
Fife, WA	2005	Diversion	600	1 class, 8 hrs.	◆
Fresno, CA	1998	Diversion	500	1 class, 8 hrs.	◆
Grand Rapids, MI	1981	Sentence	500	5 sessions, 10 hours	
Hartford, CT	2000	Either	0	1 class, 2 hrs.; 10 days community service	
Indianapolis, IN	1999	Diversion	150	1 class, 3 hrs.; 5 hrs. community service	
Kansas City, MO	2000	Diversion	DK	1 class, 8 hrs.	◆
Lakewood, WA	2005	Diversion	700	1 class, 8 hrs.	◆
Las Vegas, NV	1997	Sentence	450	1 class, 8 hrs.	
Los Angeles, CA	2008	Diversion	600	1 class, 8 hrs.	
Madison, WI	2005	Diversion	676	1 class, 2.5 hrs.	
Minneapolis, MN	1997	Diversion	650	4 sessions, 6 hrs.; 40 hrs. community service	
Nashville, TN	1996	Diversion	250	1 class, 8 hrs.	◆
Norfolk, VA	2001	Sentence	1,500 ^a	1 class, 1 hr.; plus 1 day community service	
Orange County, NY	2003	Either	125	1 class, 5 hrs.	◆
Phoenix	1997	Diversion	788	1 class, 8 hrs.	◆
Pierce County	2005	Diversion	600	1 class, 8 hrs.	◆
Pittsburgh	1997	Diversion	348 ^b	1 class, 8 hrs.	◆
St. Paul (John School)	1999	Diversion	325	1 class, 8 hrs.	
St. Paul (Project Pathfinder)	1988	Diversion	650	4 sessions, plus 6 hrs. restorative justice	
Salt Lake City	1999	Diversion	350	10 weekly sessions, 15 hrs.	◆
San Diego	2000	Sentence	200	1 class, 2.5 hrs.	
San Francisco	1995	Diversion	1,000**	1 class, 8 hrs.	◆
Seattle	2009	Either	150	1 class, 7 hrs.	◆
Tacoma	2005	Diversion	600	1 class, 8 hrs.	◆
Tampa	2001	Diversion	350	6 sessions, 6 hrs.	
Waco	2002	Sentence	225	1 class, 8 hrs.	
Washington	2001	Diversion	300	1 class, 8 hrs.	◆
West Palm Beach	1999	Diversion	50	1 class, 4 hrs.	
Worcester	2007	Either	200	1 class, 8 hrs.	
Ypsilanti	2003	Sentence	500	1 class, 8 hrs.	◆

Fees are on a sliding scale.

a Added to the fine are auto impound fee of \$400 and a community supervision fee of \$30/day.

b Added to the john school fee is \$117.50 for court costs and a \$230 fine.

We have gathered descriptive information on every john school known to us as having been implemented in the United States. About some programs we know little. For example, regarding the john schools in [Rochester](#), NY in 1988 and South Bend, IN, we have information obtained only through single stories in news archives that provided little detail, which we have been unable to verify or expand upon through interviews. We spent over three years evaluating [San Francisco](#)'s FOPP, and have a great deal of detailed information about it that is presented in the evaluation [final report](#) and posted on the [city's](#) webpage on Demand Forum. Most of the information falls between these extremes. For example, we have information acquired through interviews, site visits and observations of programs in [Indianapolis](#), [Los Angeles](#), [Norfolk](#), [Phoenix](#), [San Diego](#), and [Worcester](#)

MA. The illustrate the range of variation in how these programs are conducted, a summary of key traits of a sample of john schools is provided in Table 2.

“When the Red Zone Program was created it was because we wanted to change these defendants’ behavior. That’s what you really want to instill in a traditional prosecutor; you want them to start thinking about impacting this person’s behavior in low-level cases so that they’re not back in front of us again.”

Deputy Prosecutor Michelle Waymire, chief of the Marion County
Community Prosecution Unit, 2007³

Community Impact Panels

Several communities have been found to rely upon residents and other representatives of communities to appeal directly to the buyers of commercial sex, in hopes of dissuading them from that behavior. Usually, this occurs in john school programs, since that is often the context in which known buyers of commercial sex are “captive audiences,” accessible to community members and required to listen to their views. In john school classes we observed in [Indianapolis](#), IN, [Norfolk](#), VA, [Phoenix](#), AZ, [San Diego](#), CA, [San Francisco](#), CA, and [Worcester](#), MA, community representatives from local organizations discussed a range of negative effects that prostitution has on communities. Among the most common messages conveyed to sex buyers is that where prostitution occurs, residents and businesses usually experience the following problems:

- Public illicit drug abuse, violence, and neighborhood disorder.
- Condoms, syringes, and broken bottles on sidewalks and in parks that children and others can contact.
- Screaming, fighting, and loud cursing late at night.
- Inebriated people sleeping in residential and business doorways.
- People defecating and urinating in yards, sidewalks, and near doorways to homes and apartment buildings.
- People engaged in sex in parked cars, on sidewalks, in yards, and near residential doorways.
- Sex buyers and Sex traffickers/pimps assaulting prostituted persons
- Prostituted women, trafficking victims, and pimps assaulting sex buyers.

In most communities, residents complain of fear of personal safety, property damage, and sleep deprivation because people choosing to commit violent and destructive crimes there. There can also be repercussions for women and girls who have been propositioned by sex buyers. Community representatives have asserted that women and girls within specific ethnic groups may face dire consequences from their husbands, fathers, or brothers if it was learned that they had been propositioned by a male sex buyer, even if they did nothing to encourage it and it was unavoidable. Residents argue that sex buyers “can do their business there and leave,” but residents must stay in their neighborhood and deal with the aftermath. In one presentation observed by our research team, the community representative asked whether the male sex buyers in the class were arrested in the neighborhood in which they lived. None of the 27 men present in the class that day said they had been arrested in their home neighborhood. Demographic information provided by evaluations of other programs demonstrate similar sentiments. A 2015 evaluation of [Kansas City’s Johnz School](#), (now *SSE: A Program for Men in Kansas City*) revealed that among the 200+ *Johnz School* participants about whom residence and arrest county data were available, 102 participants, or almost half (49.3%), had travelled outside of their counties of residence to purchase commercial sex.⁴ Members of the communities also emphasized that sex buyers contribute to the problems of prostitution and neighborhood degradation, and in fact are the chief cause of these problems, since without sex buyers there would be no prostituted persons or sex traffickers/pimps.

³ Robert V. Wolf, *Breaking with Tradition: Introducing Problem Solving in Conventional Courts* (Center for Court Innovation, 2007), http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/Breaking_With_Tradition1.pdf

⁴ Kristy Childs and Alexandra Pierce, *Veronica’s Voice Johnz School Evaluation Report: Program Operations November 2008-September 2014* (Othayonih Research, 2015), <https://demand-forum.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Johnz-School-2008-2014-Evaluation-Report.pdf>.

More Recent Sex Buyer Education Programs

Since the first [National Assessment](#) report was published in 2012, there has been an increase in the number of john school programs offered in the United States, and a shift in the types of formats used. Many of the newer programs have been structured as therapeutic or educational interventions involving multiple group sessions. Some of the operators of these newer programs also specifically avoid calling them “john school” or any kind of school, instead stressing that they seek a therapeutic intervention involving interactivity occurring personal processing and accountability, rather than a one-way communication of information in a classroom format.

One of the first sex buyer education programs launched after the National Assessment report was published in 2012 began in [Seattle](#), WA, in 2013. “*Stopping Sexual Exploitation: A Program for Men*” (SSE) served all of [King County](#) and focused on promoting sex buyer accountability and positive behavior change, examined the root causes of sex buying behaviors, and involved conducting longitudinal assessments of participant behaviors. Several subsequent programs in four states were modeled after SSE (Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, and Washington). The other programs are not exact replicas of SSE, but are local adaptations guided by the SSE as a model. The SSE’s basic values, goals, and approach are evident, but the subsequent programs vary on a number of dimensions, including (1) the number of sessions, (2) their place with local just systems as diversion versus sentencing options, (3) associated fees or fines, (4) course evaluations, and (5) program curricula and session content. Encouraging accountability among participants is a core concept common across these programs. SSE promoted accountability through an inflexible course fee (i.e., no sliding scales), mandatory group participation/discussion, strict attendance policy, and sharing personal reflections of their actions and the harm they have caused. However, not all programs promote accountability in the same manner. One of [Houston](#)’s sex buyer education programs, “*Sex Buyer Transformation and Restoration* (S.T.A.R.),” requires participants to bring a family member/friend (18+), to register for the course and to each class session as an ‘accountability partner.’ While sex buyer education programs similarly seek to reduce demand for commercial sex, these programs have somewhat different processes and objectives than the FOPP-based john schools. The newer multiple-session programs are designed to support three process-based goals that ultimately should result in a personal decision by participants not to purchase sex again:

1. Reframe sex buying from a “victimless crime” to a practice of gender-based exploitation and violence.
2. Change beliefs and attitudes regarding the cultural construction of masculinity and promoting men’s accountability in stopping the harm of prostitution.
3. Support healthy alternative conceptions of masculinity.

Many of the newer sex buyer education programs are successors to previous FOPP-based john schools that served the same areas. For example, beginning in 2002 [Kansas City](#) had a john school program modeled after the FOPP. In 2018, Modeling Equality and Veronica’s Voice partnered with Peter Qualliotine to replicate a more extensive model that he had implemented in [Seattle](#) through Organization for Prostitution Survivors (OPS), called Stop Sexual Exploitation (SSE). Since 2018, the program has been known as *SSE: Program for Men in Kansas City*. More details about this transformation can be found [HERE](#).

Similarly, the [St. Paul/Minneapolis](#) program, *Men Breaking Free*, which originated in 1999, as a FOPP-based john school, was known as *The John School at Breaking Free* until its transformation to a revised sex buyer education program in 2018. At that time, Breaking Free entered into a partnership with the organization “[Building Peaceful Community](#)” to review and revise the then-current john school approach. The re-conceptualized program was called “[Men Breaking Free](#).” A more detail explanation on this transformation is provided in the document “Building Authentic Partnerships to Reduce Sex Trafficking and Heal and Rebuild Lives, Families, and Communities.”⁵

⁵ Donald Gault, “Building Authentic Partnerships to Reduce Sex Trafficking and Heal and Rebuild Lives, Families, and Communities,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies* 7, no. 1 (2020): 5, doi:10.24926/ijps.v7i1.2973.

John School Curriculum Items

John school curricula vary, as one would expect. The FOPP curriculum has been represented elsewhere⁶ and represents a “baseline” for john school topics covered since so many of the subsequent programs used the FOPP as a model. To address the informational needs of offenders, the FOPP established a curriculum that was designed to be delivered in one eight-hour day. The outline below captures most of what the program has addressed since its inception. The current curriculum is divided into six main sections, which are outlined briefly here:

1. ***Prostitution Law and Street Facts***, focusing on the legal consequences of subsequent offenses and addressing sex buyer vulnerability to being robbed or assaulted while involved in prostitution.
2. ***Health Education***, describing the elevated risk of HIV and STD infection associated with prostitution, and stressing that many STDs are asymptomatic and/or difficult to detect and have long term negative impacts on health.
3. ***Effect of Prostitution on Prostituted Persons***, focusing on numerous negative consequences for women engaging in prostitution, such as vulnerability to rape and assault, health problems, drug addiction, and various forms of exploitation.
4. ***Dynamics of Sex Trafficking/Pimping and Recruiting***, featuring discussions of how sex traffickers/pimps and traffickers recruit, control, and exploit women and girls for profit, and the links between local street prostitution and larger systems of human trafficking.
5. ***Effect of Prostitution on the Community***, describing the drug use, violence, health hazards, and other adverse consequences that co-occur with street prostitution.
6. ***Sexual Addiction***, focusing on how involvement in commercial sex may be driven by sexual addiction, and where help for this condition can be sought.

Although not listed as a core component of the FOPP curriculum, many of the classes contained a section on *policing prostitution*. The discussions focus on police surveillance of all types of commercial sex (street, brothels, escort services, massage parlors, storefronts, and web-based), and are intended to provide participants with the impression that they will stand a great chance of rearrest if they continue involvement in any type of commercial sex.

Other john schools have shorter educational programs than the eight hour day of the FOPP. [Norfolk](#)’s john school was only one to two hours, and covered just three topics (health, community impact, survivor impact) The Cook County Sheriff’s Office previously offered a video john school that covered the basic elements of the FOPP in under 15 minutes with an expanded set of information on john school curricula provided on their website.

Other programs have multiple sessions and more total hours of instruction or therapy. The Louisiana John School’s *John School Recovery Skills Program*, located in Shreveport, LA, was a multi-day intervention offered to “habitual offenders” (those with two or more “soliciting prostitution” charges) as part of their pre/post sentencing or probation. The program length varied and was based on case-by-case evaluation and assessment results. The Sexual Exploitation Education Program (SEEP) that operated in Portland, Oregon from 1995-1997 was a three-day, 15-hour intervention. The most extensive program, in terms of the number of sessions, was the 10-week program in [Salt Lake City](#). It involved 10 weeks of group counseling work, with each week having a theme. Admission to the program was on a rolling basis, and new participants would enter at any point in the cycle of sessions:

⁶ Michael Shively et al., *Final Report on the Evaluation of the First Offender Prostitution Program* (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, 2008).

Week 1: Male Socialization

Purpose: to gain understanding of male socialization process and its impact on male-female relationships.

Week 2: Female Socialization

Purpose: to identify differences between male and female socialization; understand how female socialization affects female relationship behavior; and gain insight into personal treatment of women.

Week 3: Sexual Messages

Purpose: to gain perspective about how familial relations, upbringing, religion, peers, and the media impact our sexual relationships and behavior.

Week 4: Prostitute Panel

Purpose 1: to dispel myths about why women prostitute and educate about prostitution's impact on women.

Purpose 2: to encourage class participants to evaluate their sexual treatment of women and to recognize and respect their sexual partners limits.

Weeks 5 and 6: Communication

Purpose: to make class participants aware of the relational impacts of different communication styles and to introduce new interpersonal skills.

Week 7: Anger

Purpose: to help class participants identify the way they express anger and the relational impact of their anger style; and increase awareness of alternative anger management choices.

Week 8: Healthy Intimate Relationships

Purpose: to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy interpersonal and sexual relationships.

Week 9: HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infection Prevention

Purpose: to decrease the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections between prostitutes, sex buyers, and their partners.

Week 10: Personal Power

Purpose: to encourage class participants to make healthier decisions about their lives.

Sex buyer education programs vary in the number of sessions needed for completion, being offered as diversion versus sentencing options, associated fees or fines, and the program content and range of curricula items. Sex buyer education programs are usually eight-to-ten-week intervention programs, such as those implemented in [Seattle](#), WA, [Kansas City](#), MO, and [Houston](#), TX. These programs share common elements, such as beginning with two individual 60-minute sessions of Motivational Interviewing (MI) before participation in the group. Eight weekly group classes follow. The group size is limited and the eight, three-hour learning modules are highly interactive, utilizing exercises and group discussion to engage participants in a process of self-reflection and critical analysis:

Week 1: Sexuality and Gender Socialization

Week 2: Harm to Victim/Survivors

Week 3: The Sexual Violence Continuum

Week 4: Pimping, Trafficking, and Intimate Partner Violence

Week 5: Power and Violence

Week 6: Shame and Vulnerability

Week 7: Mutuality in Relationships

Week 8: The Will to Change

"Like some of our other diversion programs, this [Prostitution Offender Program of Lucas County, or john school] is a great way for some of the first-time offenders to really learn the consequences of their actions and to give them an opportunity to examine what may have led to that behavior."

Municipal Court Presiding Judge Michael Goulding, Toledo, Ohio, 2011⁷

Online John Schools

There have been at least seven⁸ online versions of John school programs that have been established in the United States. They each have brief descriptions on their websites, but the content of these courses is proprietary and behind pay walls, and typically offered only to arrested sex buyers, so we have not accessed detailed information about their content. This model of program has not been evaluated, and we do not have an empirical basis for determining the relative effectiveness of these online programs.

Common Misconceptions about John Schools

The john school paradigm has become controversial, with adamant advocates and detractors. In our review of the literature on prostitution and human trafficking, it is clear that some of the john school discussions are based upon misconceptions about the range of variation in program structure and content, the types of offenders served, and the inability to distinguish weaker from stronger forms of evidence of effectiveness. While information about the actual range of programs and the people they served is presented in the National Assessment report and the Demand-Forum.org website, we thought it would be useful to address several errors or misunderstandings about these programs directly. This discussion is not intended to advocate for or against john schools, but instead to place debates about them on firmer empirical ground.

Misconception #1: All john schools are, and must be, diversion programs, allowing arrested sex buyers to avoid a criminal record or punishment.

The most common criticism of john schools is that they are diversion programs that allow men arrested for attempting to purchase sex to avoid an arrest record and/or criminal sanctions. While it is true that the model program that most people refer to when they are speaking about john schools ([San Francisco's FOPP](#)) is a diversion program that results in dismissal of charges upon completion, the structure of these programs as diversion versus sentencing options is independent of the educational component that is the core element of the john school model. In other words, it is mistaken to believe that john schools are all – and must be – structured as diversion programs.

Attendance in john schools is not voluntary in many U.S. john schools: courts sentence men to participate in the program if they feel it is inappropriate treatment or punishment, and in such systems participation is mandatory, and charges are not dismissed for successfully completing the program. Our research on john schools over the past 15 years finds that approximately half of the programs (52%) in the United States are structured exclusively as diversion programs, where participation is voluntary and successful completion results in charges being dismissed. A program model that mandated class attendance, that contained a mix of both punitive and rehabilitative elements was the [Norfolk](#), VA john school. The program involved paying a fine of \$1,500, and mandated community service, and charged a supervision fee of \$40 per day while on community service detail, and mandated completion of the john school class. Completing the john school did not result in dismissed charges. The program provided an educational intervention and applied relatively severe criminal sanctions (particularly for an offense classified as a misdemeanor) for those arrested for soliciting prostituted persons. For the remaining

⁷ Erica Blake, "John School' Offers New Perspective," *The Blade*, April 4, 2011, <http://www.toledoblade.com/local/2011/04/04/John-School-offers-new-perspective-2.html>.

⁸ [American Integrity Courses](#); [Court Solutions Online](#); [Logan Social Services](#); [Life Wisdom Foundation](#); [North American Learning Institute](#); [ProProfs Store](#); [Online Court Ordered Classes](#).

half of john schools, the type of entry into the program is at the discretion of the local courts: participation can be either a mandatory condition of a sentence, or can either be a required or voluntary, and in any given class there may be some ordered to attend and others who opted in through a plea agreement or through a diversion program.

In April 2021, a new state law in Ohio took effect that established the crime of “engaging in prostitution.” Previously, Ohio had a single statute addressing prostitution, one that focused on penalizing prostituted persons rather than sex buyers. Under the new statute ([Ohio Revised Code Section 2907.231](#)), sex buyers are required to attend an education or treatment program, “aimed at preventing (them) from inducing, enticing, or procuring another to engage in sexual activity for hire in exchange for the person giving anything of value to the other person.” The passage of this new law required the state to create a set of standards for Sex Buyer Education (SBE) programs. In 2022, the Ohio Attorney General’s Office created a guide for cities and counties to create Sex Buyer Education programs in accordance with statewide regulations. Two types of programs are outlined in the report: single day programs and lengthier, therapy-based programs. Cities/counties interested in implementing a program, could apply for funding from the AGO, by filling out this application: [John School Funding Application](#). For further information, click here: [John Schools: Guidelines for Sex Buyer Education Programs](#).

For those debating the merits of john schools, it is important to consider whether it is fair or just for men arrested for soliciting to have access to a program that allows their charges to be dismissed and avoid a conviction appearing on their records. In jurisdictions where men arrested for soliciting have the option of diversion, but women arrested for prostitution do not have equivalent options, the inequity is manifest. However, it is not logical to oppose all john schools because one disapproves of diversion programs. The educational component of john schools is independent of being structured as a diversion or sentencing option. Those believing that diversion programs such as the FOPP let men escape with “a slap on the wrist” should argue against having john school participation be voluntary and allowing participants to avoid criminal charges and conviction. However, those features do not provide a legitimate basis for opposing the john school concept, which is built around educating men who have been arrested for buying sex about the harm of such behavior.

On September 1, 2021, a Texas state law took effect that made simple solicitation of prostitution between adults a felony level crime and was the first state to do so. [HB 1540](#) made solicitation of prostitution a state jail felony on the first offense and made it punishable by up to two years in jail upon conviction. One year afterward, in October 2022, a [KHOU 11 Investigates](#) analysis of court records showed that the [Harris County District Attorney’s Office](#) (Houston, TX) rarely obtained felony convictions in those cases, but the leverage created by the felony charge resulted in most of the sex buyers agreeing to participate in an educational program and to pay a substantial fine or make a donation to a survivor program. In the year after the law took effect, an analysis of court records showed that 518 felony solicitation of prostitution cases had been filed. Of the 232 cases that had been disposed of, just 11 (5%) ended in felony convictions, while 178 cases (77%) of those that were disposed of were dismissed under a pretrial diversion program. In those deals offered by prosecutors, defendants generally were required to take a “John school” class and either pay a fine or make a donation to the [Houston Area Women’s Center](#). In return, those sex buyers were later given an opportunity to have the criminal charge expunged from their record. In [Montgomery County](#), TX, (Houston, TX extends into three counties [Harris](#), Montgomery, and [Fort Bend](#) Counties) according to the Assistant District Attorney, of the 39 disposed of cases since the law went into effect, 33 resulted in criminal convictions.

Misconception #2: Men arrested for soliciting the paid sexual abuse of children who attend john schools will have their charges dismissed.

It is inappropriate and unjust for men who pay to sexually abuse children to have the option of attending a john school that would result in the dismissal of criminal charges upon completion. No rational person would disagree that this would be unfair and destructive - but the premise that this happens has no basis in fact. Individuals who are arrested for soliciting the paid sexual assault sex of minors do not have the option of john schools as a form of diversion that results in dismissed charges. It is possible that there have been isolated incidents of offenders who have solicited a minor being allowed into a john school program after having the felony charges reduced to

misdeemeanors, but none of the john school diversion programs are designed for such offenders or allow them to have felony charges dismissed through program participation.

At the time of the 2012 report, none of the john schools known to us allowed individuals arrested for soliciting sex from minors were permitted to attend john school programs (sentencing or diversion). We also reported that none of the publicly available information about john schools suggested that any of these programs were designed for individuals arrested for soliciting sex from minors. However, since 2012, in response to the expansion of demand reduction efforts targeting individuals seeking to solicit sex from minors online such as web-based reverse stings and IT-based tactics, critiques by opponents of john schools, and suggestions from the 2012 National Assessment, we have identified numerous sex buyer education programs that allow individuals arrested for soliciting sex from minors as a part of their sentencing.

None of the programs known to us in the United States allow individuals arrested for soliciting sex from minors to attend a sex buyer education program in lieu of punishment. We have found that several programs in the United States permit individuals arrested for soliciting sex from minors to attend a sex buyer education program as a condition of sentencing. To reiterate, in no instance has an individual arrested for soliciting sex from a minor had their charge(s) dismissed as a result of their completion of a sex buyer education program.

Misconception #3: There is no evidence that john schools reduce recidivism.

Some researchers and other critics have argued that evidence of an impact of john schools on reoffending is either absent or inconclusive. While there have been many studies⁹ of john schools, there have been few formal evaluations capable of assessing the key outcomes of these programs, such as their impact on reoffending (e.g., measured via recidivism rates or longitudinal self-reports). The first evaluation of program effects recidivism was conducted by Monto and Garcia,¹⁰ who examined a sample of 91 participants in the Sexual Exploitation Education Project (SEEP), a john school program that operated in Portland, Oregon from 1995 to 1997 and was then discontinued. The recidivism rates of the SEEP participants were compared to a group of 100 men arrested locally for soliciting sex who did not attend the program. Monto and Garcia found no significant difference in the recidivism rates of the two groups, but the data were insufficient to support any conclusion about the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of SEEP. The chief limitation of the study is that ***there were only three recidivists in the treatment and comparison group combined***. There was simply insufficient statistical power to detect any program effect: three offenders could not be distributed in a way that would attest to a treatment effect, or to support a conclusion of no effect. Aside from the sample limitations, the SEEP program did not provide a sound basis on which to assess the efficacy of the john school model. The Portland program studied by Monto and Garcia was atypical of john schools in the U.S. (or anywhere else), being a 15-hour, three-day program that was discontinued in 1997 due to disagreements between the program staff and the government sponsors,¹¹ and amid complaints that it was an ideological presentation rather than an educational program.¹²

⁹ Pierce, Alexandra, Johnz School Evaluation Report, Othayonih Research.

https://www.veronicasvoice.org/files/ugd/b1dc72_502c2a499ce64886b6ae2cd0fcc8392a.pdf

Scot Wortley, Benedikt Fischer, Cheryl Webster, "Vice lessons: A survey of prostitution offenders enrolled in the Toronto John School Diversion Program," *Canadian Journal of Criminology* 44.4 (2002): 369-402.

Robin Valenzuela, "The Nashville John School: Affective governance and the reintegrative shaming approach," *Human Organization* 75.3 (2016): 249-257.

¹⁰ Martin A. Monto and Steve Garcia, "Recidivism Among the Customers of Female Street Prostitutes: Do Intervention Programs Help?" *Western Criminology Review* 3, no. 2 (2001): 1-10,

<https://www.westerncriminology.org/documents/WCR/v03n2/monto/monto.html>.

¹¹ Donna M. Hughes, *Best Practices to Address the Demand Side of Sex Trafficking* (University of Rhode Island, Women's Studies Program, August 2004), 1-69,

https://www.popcenter.org/sites/default/files/problems/trafficked_women/PDFs/Hughes_2004a.pdf; Melissa Farley et al., "Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Don't Buy Sex: 'You can have a good time with the servitude' vs. 'You're supporting a system of degradation'" (Paper presented at Psychologists for Social Responsibility Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, July 15, 2011), <https://www.demandabolition.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/ComparingSexBuyersReport.pdf>.

¹² R. Franzen, "New Program Gives Johns an Education," *The Oregonian*, November 3, 2003.

Brewer and colleagues¹³ and others¹⁴ have used the Monto and Garcia study's results¹⁵ to argue that john school programs do not add any independent deterrent effect, and any impact from the combination of arrest and education program is produced by the arrest. At the time Brewer and colleagues' research was underway, the prior study of the SEEP program was the only evaluation of a john school's impact on recidivism, and it is true that Monto and Garcia did not find a program effect. But *failing to find an effect is not the same as finding no effect*. Given the acknowledged limitations of a comparison group study of one atypical, quickly discontinued john school program,¹⁶ when the study had a sample of three recidivists to study across both treatment and comparison groups, it was premature for anyone to use those findings to conclude that the john school approach has been demonstrated to be ineffective in lowering recidivism. It is also a misrepresentation of the Monto and Garcia results to assert that the program was found to be ineffective; instead, the data were insufficient to support any findings regarding a program effect, either positive or negative.

From 2005 to 2008, an evaluation of San Francisco's FOPP john school was conducted that found a substantial program impact, reducing recidivism among arrested sex buyers in the city by at least 40%. The research methodology and findings are presented in the project's final report¹⁷ to the National Institute of Justice (U.S. Department of Justice). To evaluate the program's impact on recidivism, researchers analyzed time series data for San Francisco and the rest of California for 10 years prior to implementation (1985-1995) and 10 years after implementation (1995 through 2005). In San Francisco, there was a sharp drop in recidivism rates in the year of implementation (1995), and these lower levels were sustained over the subsequent 10 years. The 10-year average annual recidivism rate in the city prior to 1995 was 8.8%, immediately fell sharply in 1995 when the program was launched, and then stayed at the far lower rate (4.5%) during the following decade when the FOPP being was continuously implemented in the city. A similar pattern was observed in San Diego, where recidivism rates following implementation of a john school in 2000 were less than half of the pre-program levels. There were no significant statewide shifts in either 1995 or 2000 that might explain the recidivism declines in either San Francisco or San Diego as simply being part of a wider pattern. The results were repeatedly confirmed when applying various statistical modeling techniques and examining different subsets of arrestees over different timeframes. Alternative explanations that were analyzed and then dismissed as unable to explain the recidivism findings included (a) displacement of prostitution from San Francisco to other cities, and (b) sex buyers in the city shifting their soliciting activities online rather than the streets.

The collective evidence strongly supports the conclusion that the FOPP significantly reduced recidivism.

Misconception #4: The deterrent effect of arrest was the real cause of the reduction in recidivism attributed to the San Francisco john school.

One could argue that the arrest process alone – and not the john school program – taught men how to avoid recapture. It is virtually impossible for arrest to have produced the decline in recidivism observed in the FOPP evaluation. **First**, arrest was constant across all of the cases in the database used to evaluate the program.¹⁸ Since all of the 84,000+ men in the samples had the experience of arrest from 1985 to 2005, something besides arrest produced the sustained post-1995 reduction in recidivism rates in [San Francisco](#) that were not observed elsewhere in the state.

Second, the decline in recidivism rates could be the result of FOPP graduates taking their commercial sex activity elsewhere (displacement). This is unlikely to explain more than a small portion (if any) of the observed effect. The data supplied by the California Criminal Justice Statistics Center (the state's central repository for criminal offender data) allowed us to capture rearrest anywhere within the state of California and can therefore measure

¹³ Devon D. Brewer et al., "A Large Specific Deterrent Effect of Arrest for Patronizing a Prostitute," *PLoS ONE* 1, no. 1 (2006): e60, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0000060.

¹⁴ Farley et al., *ibid*.

¹⁵ Monto and Garcia, *ibid*.

¹⁶ Monto and Garcia, *ibid*.

¹⁷ Michael Shively, Sarah Kuck, Ryan Kling, William Rhodes, et. al., "Final Report of the First Offender Prostitution Program," *National Institute of Justice* (2008): NCJ Report #221894. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/221894.pdf>

¹⁸ Shively et al., *ibid*.

recidivism that may have been displaced by the FOPP to areas outside of San Francisco (except that pushed out of state). In addition, one must ask whether the FOPP would produce greater crime displacement than would occur without the program. The FOPP is a voluntary program that allows offenders to have the charges against them dismissed. The participants must see the program as less punitive than traditional adjudication, or they would not choose that option. If so, it is reasonable to ask why the less punitive FOPP would be more likely to displace crime than the more punitive traditional sanctions. A possibility is that the class informs men of the increasingly harsh sanctions they will face for subsequent offenses, and that those men who are either ineligible for the FOPP or who decline the option are not provided with the same information about the more severe consequences of reoffending.

Third, the FOPP may motivate participants to stop pursuing commercial sex on the streets and to use escorts or solicit prostitutes in brothels or via the web. This displacement indoors or online is a plausible explanation and may account for some of the FOPP's effect. Since the SFPD conducts reverse stings almost exclusively as street operations, men who solicit sex online have had very little chance of being arrested in San Francisco. But again, there is no reason to expect that the FOPP would cause crime to be displaced online, beyond whatever displacement may be produced by arrest alone. Since john school presenters tell participants that police monitor prostitution transacted over the web, and this message is not conveyed to men adjudicated normally, we would expect the opposite effect: if affected at all, the participants of the FOPP should be less likely than others to shift their activity online.

Misconception #5: John schools are costly.

One of the recurring criticisms of john schools is that they are costly and divert scarce resources away from pursuing more serious crime. There is little empirical support for any part of such criticisms. First, john school programs are not costly, and the modest resources that are necessary to support them are normally fully supported by fees or fines that are paid by arrestees. A few of the john school programs that charge smaller fees do not fully support themselves, but still cover most of their costs.

In 2012, we found that most of the john schools in the U.S. were one-day programs from 4 to 8 hours in length, that primarily meet four to six times per year, with some a few as once per year. Most of the presenters who were not public servants were paid modest stipends of \$50-\$200 per day, and many of which were presenting as unpaid volunteers. There were usually one or two people from the local police department or prosecutor's office who stayed for the entire session, and sometimes other public servants (e.g., from a public health department) came for one hour or so and made brief presentations. We have not found any john school program to cost more than \$3,500 per class to conduct; and single classes have been found to yield over \$40,000 in revenue.

There is little substance to fiscal criticisms of programs with low annual costs that typically cover all of those costs through participant fees or fines and can generate additional net revenue used to subsidize police enforcement operations and survivor support programs. The typical john school does not cost taxpayers anything, making them one of the most cost-effective offender interventions. In some instances, the fees sex buyer's pay to retrieve their impounded car are used to fund john school programs. For example, in the state of Washington, in the Revised Code of Washington mandates that at least 50% of each of the following fees must be spent on prevention such as educational programs for offenders, like john schools or rehabilitative services for victims; [additional fees assessment](#) (\$1,500 first offenders), [vehicle seizure](#) (\$500), and pay the cost of attending a [john school](#). Individuals john school programs have also utilized this fees and fines to help support the sustainability of local john school programs.

“This program is useful and runs at little to no cost. If we did not have this program, the john would most likely pay a small fine and then get his case expunged. The point of this program is to educate them and let them know that this is not a victimless crime.”

Columbus Assistant City Attorney Michael C. Allbritain,
speaking about the Columbus Ohio john school, December,
2012¹⁹

Misconception #6: John schools are designed to shame.

John schools have been portrayed as being shame-based or built around the intent to humiliate or publicly berate men who buy sex. Whether this is true depends upon the john school program, the separate presentations within the program, and what is meant by “shaming.” If one defines shame as the personal feeling of *shame* about one’s own behavior, then the programs may promote shame. All of the john schools we have observed work hard to convey the message that buying sex is harmful, and that the men – knowingly or otherwise - contribute to a wide array of social ills with their behavior. We have observed individual presenters and community impact panels in john schools in [Phoenix](#), [San Diego](#), [San Francisco](#), [Indianapolis](#), and [Worcester](#) (MA) whose style could be regarded as confrontational, and their intent could be to embarrass the men or make them feel ashamed of themselves. However, the empirical record shows that buying sex results in harm, and it is difficult to avoid pointing out the harm in the behavior when pursuing an education agenda. Shame in response to learning that one’s behavior harms others may be a prosocial response and provide motivation to change.

If one defines shame as public censure, or social stigma, then most John schools work in the opposite direction. Since over half of john schools are either exclusively diversion programs, or can be either diversion or sentencing options, diversion from normal prosecution helps arrestees to avoid being publicly shamed. Diverse programs allow arrestees to avoid a conviction by having charges dismissed, making it easier to escape having one’s employer, family, or friends learn about the arrest. However, about one-third of the john schools in the United States are structured as conditions of sentences where participation is not optional and does not result in avoiding conviction. When sentenced to a john school, the program has neither more nor less of an impact on public shame than most other sentencing options, and far less than efforts to purposely publicize identities.

Sex buyer education programs are designed in response to this misconception. We have seen that these programs specifically address how to promote positive behavior change in addition to recognition and understanding of one’s actions. These programs focus on demonstrating to participants that they are not defined by their actions but rather can use their actions as lessons to understand why they resorted to sex buying behaviors in the first place and how to overcome those desires.

Additional Observations about John Schools

The john school model is one of a handful of tactics that is a programmatic response designed to address the buyers of commercial sex. Most of the other tactics we discuss are standard criminal justice procedures applied to the crime of purchasing sex, such as seizing autos used in the commission of a crime, community service programs, and fines are not tactics developed particularly for combating demand for prostitution. John schools are an innovation specifically designed to intervene with known buyers of commercial sex, attempting to reduce the incidence of reoffending through education or behavior change.

John schools have become controversial among those working to address the problems of sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. While there are strengths and weaknesses for any sanction or response to crime, many of the objections about the programs appear to be based upon misconceptions or incomplete information.

¹⁹ Theodore Decker, “John School’ Lesson: Prostitution has Victims,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, December 17, 2012, <https://www.dispatch.com/story/news/crime/2012/12/17/john-school-lesson-prostitution/23759469007>.

Objections can stem from legitimate concerns about john schools, but people may reject the whole educational paradigm based on features of one john school program (usually, the FOPP in [San Francisco](#), the model for most john schools) that are not inherent to the model. For example, some object to men being allowed to have their charges dismissed if they attend a john school.²⁰ One third of the john schools in the United States are structured as sentencing options, in which participation is mandatory for men sentenced to attend, and attendance does not result in the dismissal of charges. In this report, we present evidence about the range of configurations of john schools and discuss common misperceptions about them.

The john school model is one of the few interventions designed to combat commercial sex markets for which there is strong empirical evidence of effectiveness. If communities wish to pursue “what works” and promote evidence-based practices, its leaders and coalition members should be well-informed about such practices.

The john school programs vary substantially, and this variability points out a need to gather and provide information about why alternative models have been developed, and how they operate on a number of dimensions: diversion versus sentenced, partners leading and participating, presenters, content of presentations, structured as brief single classroom sessions versus counseling programs meeting weekly for up to 10 weeks. The expanding use of online versions of sex buyer education programs also should be thoroughly evaluated to determine whether it is a productive means of engaging sex buyers and changing their behavior.

“Both the disease aspect and the safety aspect were huge to me. It wasn’t judgmental. It was about understanding the situation, and I appreciated that. I can’t say it’s going to work for everyone. You’re going to reach some, and that’s better than not doing it at all.”

Anonymous sex buyer, speaking about the Columbus, Ohio john school, December 2012²¹

Additional References and Examples

To access additional information about specific programs and the U.S. cities and counties where john schools have been used, you may go to www.demand-forum.org, open the “[Browse Locations](#)” window, and then select “John School” from the “Tactics” list. Similarly, the locations where john schools have been used may be [mapped](#) on Demand Forum by choosing “John School” from the list.

²⁰ Farley et al., *ibid.*

²¹ Decker, *ibid.*