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Selling Sex in Honolulu: Prostitution Busts for Men Turn Up Mostly Locals, Few Tourists

By Sara Lin and Robert Brown | 11/22/2010

Editor's Note: This article is part of Civil Beat's ongoing coverage of prostitution and human trafficking in Honolulu. Read our related coverage:

- [Selling Sex in Honolulu: Police Focus Prostitution Arrests on Women, Not Men](#)
- [Selling Sex in Honolulu: Unlicensed Massage Parlors Lack Enforcement Scrutiny](#)



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Honolulu Police appear to be targeting local men instead of tourists for prostitution-related offenses, a Civil Beat investigation found.

A review of the three-month period between July 8 and Oct. 8 shows that police arrested 15 men on prostitution charges, 10 of whom were locals with residential addresses on Oahu and three of whom had either a hotel address, no address listed or an unknown address. This meant that as many as 13 of the 15 could have been local.

Member Content

Whether police are targeting locals or tourists matters because their approach affects how lawmakers think about new laws and punishments to deter prostitution, which is often linked to [human trafficking](#).

Many law enforcement officials across the nation have begun requiring first offenders who solicit prostitutes to attend education programs known as john schools.

In Honolulu, law enforcement officials have cited the logistical difficulties of operating a john school involving arrestees who are tourists.

Honolulu police used the same argument in March to help [defeat a proposal](#) to impound the cars of those who solicit prostitutes. The measure would be a weak deterrent because tourists normally use rental cars, which would have been exempt from the bill.

On some levels, that so few of the male arrests involve tourists isn't surprising, says Meda Chesney-Lind, a criminologist and Professor of Women's Studies at the [University of Hawaii](#) at Manoa.

"I don't think the appetite is there, especially in a tourist destination, the appetite is not there to stigmatize the johns," she said. "This is part of the allure of this destination to some degree."

Civil Beat created a database of individuals who were arrested and charged with prostitution-related offenses using information taken from the police department's daily arrest log, which is a public document.

Residency of Male Prostitution Arrests

Type of Home Address Listed	Number
Local Address	10
Hotel Address	1
"No Local"	2
"Not listed"	1
Unknown	1

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To catch those who solicit prostitution, known as "johns," police often put on reverse sting operations, placing female police officers on the streets to pose as prostitutes.

A review of the data shows Honolulu Police conducted reverse stings in two Downtown locations where few tourists congregate and none in Waikiki. As a result, they netted 10 local men. Of the four male arrests that

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Male Arrests

Age Range	Number of Arrests
Teenager	2
20s	4
30s	3
40s	4
50s	2

The police department declined our request for an interview and instead answered questions submitted in writing.

When asked why the department does not do more reverse stings in Waikiki, Maj. Susan Dowsett, head of the Narcotics/Vice division wrote:

We conduct reverse operations in various locations. That being said, in Waikiki it's much more common for prostitutes to seek out johns, while the opposite is true in Downtown. Like other police operations, prostitution investigations reflect and take into consideration what is happening in a particular area.

Civil Beat asked for clarification on why the Waikiki prostitutes' behavior could preclude the police department from doing more stings there. The department did not respond.

Next: *Read about what the state is doing to regulate massage parlors, which are sometimes used as fronts for prostitution.*

DISCUSSION: *What do you think about the Honolulu Police Department's approach to enforcing prostitution laws? Should the department do more to target demand for prostitution in Waikiki? Read what others have to say about prostitution and human trafficking in our discussion.*

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