

# **Riding Shotgun**

Supporting Truck Drivers with a Method of Anonymously  
Reporting Incidents of Child Trafficking

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**Abstract** – Anyone under the age of eighteen whom is exploited as a sex worker is a victim of child trafficking. Because victims of sex trafficking are often moved from state to state, the highways are a vital key to getting tips that lead to apprehending traffickers. This constant movement makes it nearly impossible to find traffickers or for the victims to become familiar with their surroundings. With more than three million professional truck drivers on the road, truckers are the eyes and ears of the on the U.S. highways. There are currently two different ways for truck drivers to report incidents, phone or text. With the number of different technologies available to truck drivers how can we utilize this technology as a form of reporting? This research is focused on the question: Would a form of communication through technology enable truck drivers to report incidents at a higher rate?

**Keyword** – *human trafficking; sex trafficking; child trafficking; truck drivers; design research*

## **Introduction**

The purpose of my research is to propose a successful integration of technology into the humanitarian challenge of combatting human trafficking. There are over 100,000 children estimated to be involved in child trafficking inside the United States alone. They are often isolated, abused both physically and emotionally while being moved from state to state. With this constant movement the trucking industry has both the opportunity and the capacity to act as the eyes and ears of the US highways with a front row seat to watch for child trafficking abuse. Because of its unique position, the industry has begun to take on the challenge of increased reporting through education by an organization called Truckers Against Trafficking. My goal is to research the different form of technology truck drivers have access to in order to arm truck drivers with a tool that allows them to anonymous and easily report sex trafficking from anywhere. President Barack Obama spoke about human trafficking at the Clinton Global Initiative in 2012, "...we're turning the tables on the traffickers. Just as they are now using technology and the Internet to exploit their victims, we're going to harness technology to stop them." <sup>i</sup>

While researching human trafficking in the United States (also known as modern day slavery, sex trafficking and labor trafficking) I was astonished by the large number of incidents involving minors. Many victims of human trafficking in the United States come from a range of situations including

runaways, kidnappings, foster care, neglect, abuse, homelessness and lack of support and their perpetrators control their victims through force, drugs and emotional abuse.<sup>ii</sup> While 80% of victims are female, their average age is 12-14 years old and this age is only getting younger based on demand of the men who solicit sex workers otherwise known as “Johns.” In a study conducted by the Northeastern University Institute and School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, they found, “expansive circuits traversing several states and often coasts that traffickers use to move victims (in an effort to evade detection of law enforcement).”<sup>iii</sup> At this point my research turned toward communities who have the ability to interact with victims and who have a history of helping them, such as truck drivers.

The Polaris Project, the leading non-profit organization in the fight against human trafficking, shared a report on the number of phone calls it receives on a yearly basis to their National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC). In 2013 the NHTRC received nearly 32,000 phone calls and only 300 of these calls were from truckers, however this was an increase from the 185 callers who identify themselves as truck drivers in 2011.<sup>iv</sup> The NHTRC believes this increase is due to the work done by the organization Truckers Against Trafficking (TAT). Of the 300 truck drivers who called in 2013, 37% of those say they learned about the hotline from TAT.<sup>v</sup> The Polaris Project recognizes TAT as one of the major reasons there was a 200% increase in the number of truck drivers who called in. “The most effective awareness efforts are those that target a particular caller population, emphasize that human trafficking is a local issue, and provide concrete action steps such as contacting the NHTRC. Good examples of this type of outreach include the work of Truckers Against Trafficking.”<sup>vi</sup> Educating the truck driving industry about child trafficking and getting truckers involved is a critical step in stopping the abuse of children. This report is a qualitative study to help understand the technology truck drivers prefer in order to better create a form of communication through technology to report incidents of human trafficking.

This work is a result of what I learned.

## **Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking has seen an increase in public awareness in the U.S. since 2000, when the Trafficking Victims Protection Act became federal law. Sara Ann Friedman, from the organization End Child Prostitution and Trafficking USA (EPCAT) said, “The public, by and large, has come to view prostitution as a victimless crime and makes little distinction between adults and adolescents under eighteen. Advocates argue that juvenile prostitution is a crime, but not victimless... the majority of prostituted girls do not see themselves as victims until many years later and only then if they are well out of the life. They often cling to the false belief that they are doing what they want.”<sup>vii</sup>

A paradigm shift needs to occur in the name of roles people play in the human trafficking of minors.<sup>viii</sup> Instead of a “child prostitute” it should be called what it is, child rape. Instead of calling the people who solicit these minor “Johns”, they should be called sexual predators. It was not until 2005 when the US government legally recognized the importance of changing the term from juvenile prostitution to commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) or child sex trafficking.<sup>ix</sup> This would apply to anyone

eighteen and younger who has transacted sex for money, food or a place to stay, etc. In a study conducted by the University of Toledo on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking, they report; “Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 and its revisions in 2005 and 2008 has done much to change the perception of child sex trafficking at the federal level. According to the TVPA, “...children are manipulated into trafficking and may be perceived as willing participants.... Courts do not have to prove that any force, fraud, or coercion took place in order to prosecute traffickers... any child under the age of eighteen that is trafficked into prostitution is a victim of child sex trafficking.”<sup>x</sup>

Young children who are forced into child trafficking have been limited in social encounters.<sup>xi</sup> They are moved from place to place making it difficult for them to become familiar with their surroundings. It is difficult for law enforcement to find victims for both of these reasons. It is up to citizens who encounter these young girls to be familiar with the signs and once they recognize those signs to have an easy and accessible way to create a report.

Truck stops are a common location for human trafficking to occur. The Polaris Project lists the streets, hotels, residential brothels, strip clubs, some massage parlors, online, truck stops and private parties as common locations for domestic networks of operation. They report of 5932 cases 2492, or 42.01%, that occur are pimp-controlled prostitution at hotels/motes, streets, and truck stops, etc.<sup>xii</sup> Over 40% of the cases of pimp-controlled prostitution involved a child under the age of eighteen. The NHTRC reports 52% of calls from callers who identify themselves as truck drivers are potential cases of human trafficking and 70% of those calls reference a minor.<sup>xiii</sup>

### **Truck Drivers**

This process began with an idea to create an app intended to help victims who needed help. This was not a realistic expectation when I learned more and realized the fear and manipulation victims receive from their trafficker dominates their natural instinct to fight or flight. In a study conducted by the Northeastern University Institute and Justice School of Criminology and Criminal Justice one detective explained it well, “Law enforcement has treated them [prostituted women] so badly, all these years, that it’s hard for them to trust law enforcement. That tagged along with their pimp, reinforcing law enforcement isn’t going to do anything about it, it’s hammered into their heads, and they don’t want to talk to us.” How can a piece of technology benefit someone who feels defeated?

How would professional truck drivers prefer to report incidents? What technology do truck drivers currently use in their every day lives on the road to report incidents of sex trafficking? Could using technology generate a higher number of reports by allowing those who prefer to remain anonymous? It was imperative to gain an insider understanding of the trucking industry and how drivers operate their daily lives while on the road. It was important to understand the type of technology they currently used and how they used it in order to create anything that would be successful. Conducting the research with a participatory design method would ensure it is designed *with* the population for which it is intended.

### *Training School*

After contacting a local truck driver training school the school director was very generous with his time. He explained some of the day-to-day operations of how drivers are trained in order to get a Commercial Drivers License (CDL). The first step in the process of training is learning in a classroom, the second step is being assigned a rig at the driving range where they practice driving before going out on the highway with a qualified instructor.

Many of the trainers have been in the industry for 30 plus years, and one driver with more than 50 years of experience. It was easy to see the respect they had for one another by the way they interacted with each other. They would defer to one another for different information and whom they felt would have the most experience to answer a particular question. One gentleman had owned his own tractor, was able to contract his work and had more control over when he was on the road or working at truck driver training school. This also allowed him to stay home for longer periods of time compared to the time he would spend on the road when he was working for a corporation.

Following the discussion with these trainers it seemed crucial to learn more from truck drivers who are on the road every day and could share the different types of technology they like to use. The technology that would be created as a result of this research had to operate with absolute efficiency. Should it be incorporated with a current device trucker driver's use every day or should it stand on its own?

### **Truck Driver Interviews**

There are four different common themes in each one-on-one interview I conducted, they are:

- technology, Qualcomm computer, mobile phones/iPads;
- truck stops and safety;
- driving time vs. break time and expectations of delivery time;
- human trafficking/prostitution/lot lizards.

### *Mobile Office*

When I asked truck drivers what type of technology they like to use while on the road it ranged from a flip phone to having a mobile office in their rig. One said, "Truck drivers are pretty tech savvy, you have to get your info somewhere. Many drivers use a 5GB hot spot. I use an iPad and an iPhone. Everyone is trying to cut down on idling because of the price of diesel, now we just use a generator, it has a 1/10 outlet, cooler and heater, cable, TV, and the Internet." There are many other pieces of technology drivers use while on the road, such as;

- Citizens Band Radio (CB)
- Qualcomm- an on board computer)
- Garmin GPS
- iPhone
- iPad
- Laptop Computer
- Mobile hot spots
- Apps on a phone or tablet

Truck drivers have used a form mobile communication much longer than any other industry, citizens band radio(CB). It became an industry standard in the 1970s and at one point 400,000–500,000 of CBs were being sold every month.<sup>xiv</sup> In December of 1973 truck drivers went on strike for eight days to protest the increasing rates of gas and diesel.<sup>xv</sup> The strike caused the supply of food, gasoline and other products to be scarce. According to Jeremy Packer at Pennsylvania State University, this event “[it] spawned the popular culture of culture representations of the truckers as [an] American Hero.”<sup>xvi</sup> Skip to 2014 and law enforcement are regularly monitoring CBs for the solicitation of sex workers. The Academy for Educational Development wrote, “monitoring CB radio traffic [you] regularly hear girls ask, ‘Hey truckers, anyone want some commercial company?’ If someone responds, they switch to a different frequency, then get down to business. ‘I’m blond-haired, blue-eyed, 34C... if you want to play with this baby doll, tell me what color your house is,’ she will say, referring to his truck. He will often flash his lights so she knows where to go.”<sup>xvii</sup> All of the drivers who I interviewed mentioned hearing solicitation on a CB. “The CB has gotten to the point where guys are rude and many people just don’t mess with it anymore. It is good for accidents, I especially keep it on when I am carrying 80,000 pounds... it is good to know what is ahead of you,” said one truck driver in regards to the CB.

The on board computer, Qualcomm, is attached to the front dashboard in the tractor. It has the capacity to send messages to the company they are delivering for, login, hours of service, performance monitoring, navigation, scanning, trailer management and a media manager. Some of the drivers I spoke with said they did not have all of these functions at their disposal. One driver mentions, “I use to be able to send emails home through the Qualcomm, however now with mobile devices that function is no longer available since it is easier to use a mobile phone or iPad.” Many drivers mentioned using Qualcomm to log their location and how long they have been driving. There is a concern of trust when using the Qualcomm for this purpose. One of the interviewees said, “There is this idea of big brother watching them while they are on the road. Many men are told to abide by the laws with driving times, however once they are handed their times they realize they don’t have any other option not to follow the legally bound times of driving times. They prefer to use logs on their phones or paper logs, this way they don’t have big brother watching their every move.”

While some do use the Qualcomm to figure out the best route all of the drivers I interviewed also used other devices to determine their route. Many of them mentioned using an instrument called the Garmin, a Global Positioning System (GPS). The Garmin allows them to put in the height of their tractor trailer and will route them appropriately in order to avoid bridges without enough clearance. The driver who seemed to have every gadget at his disposal also like to used his phone to determine a route because he could use the satellite view to determine how he would need to pull into the delivery site. He even says, “Sometimes Google Satellite will catch the delivery site while a trailer is delivering a load and then you can see what angle you need to be in to deliver the load.”

One driver mentioned using his phone to communicate via text or phone call with clients, however the most important use of their technology for them is to figure out their route for the next day. One driver had

over 30 years of experience in the industry and he did not use any of the mobile devices mentioned above. He had a cell phone, however he did not email or text. While others had all of the technology listed above and used them quite frequently.

One interviewee had thought about his interview before it occurred and he was excited to talk about the apps he like to use, his exact words, "I love Apps!" He said many drivers like to use apps especially those that allowed them to earn money by spending money at specific locations. Loves, TA Petro and Pilot all have a rewards program. Some of the apps allow drivers to earn money for every gallon of diesel that is bought. Since most trucks can carry up to 180 gallons the money can add up pretty quickly. If a trucking company has a plan setup with a particular gas station than a driver could potentially earn even more money per gallon, creating more of an incentive to stop at peticular truck stops.

Another benefit to using an app such as the one from *Love's*, *Petro* or *My Pilot* is the convenience of finding a location within a particular proximity to your current location. Once a truck stop is found some of the apps will even route you from your location to the truck stop of your preference. This route can even filter into account restaurants, fuel types, if its only a gas/diesel station or if it's a travel stop. A travel stop will often have many anemities for the truck drivers convince. Personal conveniences include; more than one option for dining, a motel or hotel, The Truckers Chapel which is run by Truckstop Ministires, movie theatre, a place to take a private shower and the truck stop may even have items of clothing for any forgotten or needed items. Convenience for the tractor trailer include; lube station for any repairs, a truck wash, certified scales for drivers to weigh their loads, brake service, wheel alignments, DEF 2.5 gallon containers, island fueling, inspections, electrical service, HVAC service, J-Pro Diagnostics, light duty truck repair, lighted parking, tire chains and tire sales and repairs. The travel stops will often have enouhg parking spots for up to 200 professional truck drivers in one night. Some of them provide preferred parking or reserved parking. Instead of wasting time driving around looking for a parking spot, drivers are able to reserve a parking spot for them to conveniently save when they arrive at the truck stop. This enable the drivers to drive later and not have to stop early to save a safe parking spot.

### *Safety*

Cargo safety is the next important topic for many drivers. The biggest safety concern is fear of theft of the load they are carrying. One driver commented, "no one likes to talk about the cargo they are carrying, "...especially if its Best Buy." Many of the bigger truck stops do employ off duty police officers to ensure safety, however truckers have to get off the road early enough to get a spot at a nice truck stop and that isn't always an option to make sure you get your product to the client on time. Using an app produced by a truck stop is one way for drivers to reserve a parking spot for them to park. One driver said, "They (TA Pilot, Petro and Loves) are getting creative, they have reserved parking for \$10 or \$15, you have to take a 10 hour break, Lets say you know your going to the East Coast, to reserve a parking spot at a truck stop on the route to where your going by going on the truck stops app to reserve the parking spot for when you think you will be there and when you pull up someone comes out and moves your reserved sign and you park." One driver

mentioned cargo theft has been known to occur while a driver is with a sex worker who is working as a decoy to keep the driver occupied during the theft.

#### *Expectations of Driving Time vs Break Time*

One driver mentioned the difficulties of getting to the intended location on time compared to expectations. A driver, by law, is not allowed to drive longer than 10 hours unless they have taken a half hour break between the fourth and eighth hour after coming on duty. If these requirements are met a driver is then allowed to drive for 14 hours. Once the 14 hours is complete they are required to take another 10-hour break. Many drivers have to report back to their home base every couple of weeks for maintenance on their tractor-trailer. During this time they are sometimes required to take a refresher course on the legal requirements for drivers to abide by while on the road. Many of them mentioned these courses occur right before they are given a new load assignment. Many of the interviewees knew they would not be able to stay within the legal guidelines they had just reviewed in order for them to deliver their load on time. This discrepancy in communication creates a sense of distrust in the on board computers provided by the drivers company. One of the trainers at the truck driving training school mentioned the best advice he could give a new driver would be to create a good relationship with the person handling their load assignments.

#### *Human Trafficking or Prostitution*

Each interviewee had at least one memory of a girl they knew who they believed to be too young walking around a truck stop and knocking on the doors of the different tractors. One driver said, "You know it is hard to tell between that (human trafficking) and prostitution, it seems like they have hidden it more than it use to be, I can remember years ago in Florida, it was horrible, really young girls knocking on the door, one girl couldn't have been 14, it was pouring down rain, after a while you get hardened by it because it happens a lot." He also mentioned, "...if you want to see young girls working at truck stops you can go to Oklahoma City, Florida and the East Coast, those places are the worst." When the drivers were asked if they had ever reported an incident of human trafficking to the police many of them would say no followed by an explanation. One explanation stood out, "You have three options 1) invite the girl in, 2) offer to help her 3) or call the national hotline. If you call the police then you create a third situation where you are involved. When this happens the girls often turn on you (the driver that makes the report) the cops get there to ensure they will not get in trouble with their trafficker." Another explanation I heard was, "I don't mean to be insensitive, however don't lot lizards need to make a living?" While conducting research the term *lot lizard* was mentioned in interview, this term refers to a sex worker on a truck stop. There are even t-shirts that have, *I love Lot Lizards*, on them. They looked very similar to what you would expect an, *I love NY*, t-shirt to look like. Does the sale of this t-shirt suggest some professional truck drivers see a sex worker as a prostitute without first wondering if this person is a victim of human trafficking? Why is there such a difference between the populations of drivers who see sex workers as human trafficking and for others to see them as prostitutes? What is this difference? Training drivers is imperative and this would need to occur before introducing a new form of reporting sex trafficking incidents to a user group.

In a media kit of Human Trafficking Trends in the United States, National Human Trafficking Resource Center 2007-2012 produced by the Polaris Project it was reported in 2009 Truckers Against Trafficking launched a campaign to educate truck drivers on human trafficking. In direct relation truck drivers have reported 160 cases of potential sex trafficking at truck stops to the NHTRC. While the numbers are very encouraging, it calls the question: How much better could these numbers be if truckers had a mobile device through which to report human trafficking anonymously? The Polaris project included a vignette in their NHTRC Annual Report in 2011 of a driver who reported an incident of human trafficking to the NHTRC of a young girl and boy approaching several trucks at a truck stop. Once they solicited him, he proceeded to ask them if they needed help. They refused and he called the NHTRC whom contacted the local human trafficking task force who was then able to connect with the young children and get them to a safe place.

### **Engaging the Community**

When this research began I expected to learn about the technology truck drivers prefer to use while they are on the road and this goal was met thanks to the many drivers I was able to interview. The responsibility of conducting contextual research to find out if a solution is relative to the problem allows designers to identify opportunities that may have been overlooked otherwise. There needs to be a form of communication that is integrated with the current technology professional truck driver's use while on the road. Educating the industry on the life of children who are smuggled or coerced into the life of a prostitute is imperative for a paradigm of mindset to occur. It will be imperative to educate a driver on the training of any mobile app in order to ensure they understand the circumstances most girls are in when they are forced to work as a sex worker and then feel trapped by the trafficker.

One way to provide more support to those fighting human trafficking is by providing data that shows why this help is imperative. One way to ensure the gathering of data is successful is to design a product directly for the individuals reporting the incidents, engage the community. How do they want to submit a report? Does it need to be anonymous? Do they need that option? The information in this report has helped determine the technology truck drivers would prefer to report incidents of human trafficking. The goal for this research is to increase the number of truck drivers reports on human trafficking. It is premature to ask what kind of information we should be asking, but can we count on truck drivers to report incidents of sex trafficking? What will need to occur before reporting incidents of human trafficking becomes one of the industry standards. Along with any technology that is created to submit reports will need to be an educational tool to inform the trucking industry on child trafficking. With truck stops being one of the top locations to see human trafficking the number of incidents being reported to the NHTRC should be higher. Once this education begins drivers will need the capability of reporting any incidents. This is a critical step in stopping the abuse of children manipulated to work as sex workers as they are moved from truck stop to truck stop.

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