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Lyons: Juvenile pimping should concern us all

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We didn't get much reaction to coverage of a juvenile pimping trial last week concerning a case where a minor was brought to a home in Lake in the Hills to have sex with men for money.

The involuntary servitude of a minor convictions against Antwanette Atkins and Kari Knox marked the second McHenry County conviction of offenders who at least facilitated prostitution involving minors in two years.

If the fact that adult men in McHenry County are paying to have sex with underaged girls doesn't disturb you, I don't know what would.

Print a story about high school students loosely tied to some left-wing groups fighting a cause few in their right mind would disagree with, Barack Obama, the tea party, Joe Walsh or anything that even mentions an illegal immigrant, and the feedback meter goes berserk.

But women on trial for sex trafficking a then-14-year-old girl reverberated about as much as a story about the reconfiguration of a planning commission board. I'm no Pollyanna. I've seen some things covering crime in McHenry County, but this is a disturbing new trend.

One of many things that web publishing has done for news editors is provide instant feedback via comments and web hits. Now we get cogent thoughts, rants, tangents, honest reaction and traffic counts. It's not all reliable or indicative of the majority of readers, but it definitely tells you something.

Only a fool, or the Huffington Post, would steer all coverage toward items bound to get big web hits. Our readers will have to get heavy coverage of Beyonce's baby bump elsewhere.

Editors must listen to readers, whose feedback is critical, but we're usually left to contemplate the silence. And frankly, the lack of outrage during last week's trial bugged me. Honestly, stories about malnourished horses get more attention.

As the juvenile pimping trial took place in McHenry County, Chicago Police and the Cook County State's Attorney's Office announced the arrests of nine street gang members in connection with the multi-agency "Little Girl Lost" investigation that involved dozens of underaged girls who were forced into prostitution and intimidated with beatings and death threats.

Some of the girls, most of whom were homeless or runaways, were as young as 12. Law enforcement officials said the girls were recruited on public transportation, the Internet and through random meetings.

According to the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, there are more than 16,000 women and girls involved in prostitution in the Chicago area. Research says that the average age of entry for a woman working in prostitution in Chicago is 16.

What's more disturbing is that if there's no demand, there's no supply. So here's hoping that we start to see some arrests for the consumers of this illegal sex trade, particularly if they're living right in our backyards.

• Kevin Lyons is news editor of the Northwest Herald. Reach him at 815-526-4505 or email him at kelyons@shawmedia.com.



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