

Atlanta child pimping on Craigslist is on rise

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Craigslist.com continues to be a popular site in Atlanta for the sexual exploitation of girls despite law enforcement efforts to curtail it, an Atlanta group that fights child prostitution said Friday.

As recently as February, 176 girls were prostituted for sex on the popular Web-based advertising service, said the group A Future. Not A Past. That's up from 100 girls advertised in November.

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"It's frightening to think more and more of our girls are being exploited over the Internet," said Kaffie McCullough, the group's campaign director. "We need stricter law enforcement, more stings, more arrests."

A Future. Not A Past. is part of the Juvenile Justice Fund, the Atlanta-based child advocacy nonprofit. It works with local law enforcement, including the Atlanta Police Department's child exploitation unit, McCullough said.

The group's findings, culled by researchers who track Craigslist.com, were released a day after two people pleaded not guilty to charges they used the site to pimp a 17-year-old girl.

On Feb. 20, Marvis Nichole Harris, 26, took nude photos of the girl and uploaded them on Craigslist.com. The erotic sex ad falsely claimed the girl was 19, when Harris and her co-defendant, Lawrence Edward Pruitt, 26, knew she was a juvenile, the FBI said.

Harris and Pruitt soon began getting calls for the ad. Over the next two days, they had the girl work as a prostitute at an Atlanta hotel, charging \$50 to \$120 for each session, authorities said. Harris and Pruitt pocketed all the money.

This was the first such case brought in Atlanta, U.S. Attorney David Nahmias said Friday. The FBI will continue to monitor Web sites to identify sex traffickers of both boys and girls, he said.

"Our goal is to make the people advertising and using the services worry that their 'clients' are actually undercover law enforcement," Nahmias said. "It's a shifting problem — child prostitution has moved from the street corners to the Internet."

To crack down on child prostitution, Craigslist.com has required anyone posting erotic ads to provide a verifiable phone number. But businesses selling such numbers quickly sprang up, McCullough said.

In November, the attorneys general of more than 40 states, including Georgia, reached agreement with Craigslist.com to take more action. The site began requiring posters of erotic services to pay a fee

and give a valid credit card. Craigslist.com also agreed to sue 14 software and Internet companies that allowed illegal posters to circumvent the site's defenses.

After this agreement was reached, the number of girls advertised in Atlanta plunged, McCullough said Friday. But since then, the number has increased dramatically, she said.

"Craigslist, despite recent efforts to control the exploitation of minors, continues to be ground zero for pimps to profit from children," McCullough said.