

NZ girls selling themselves on notorious sex trafficking site

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'Submissive Samantha', 'Doll-faced Jenny' and 'Pretty Maori girl Danny' are young women in New Zealand selling themselves on a website notorious for sex trafficking across North America.

Every day in New Zealand hundreds of new escort advertisements are posted on the classified ad website Backpage.co.nz, the *Herald* has found.

Some of the women are only teenagers: for example an 18-year-old is offering unprotected sex in a respectable downtown hotel in Wellington.

The advertisements include explicit photos of the women and a short biography explaining their physical features, what kind of sexual services they are willing to provide and how much they will charge.

The website Backpage - which sells everything from appliances to real estate - has come under fire in the United States recently. Four US senators have called for the immediate shutdown of the site because they claimed "its victims - often children - are repeatedly purchased and raped by customers".

Reports detail how traffickers target vulnerable young women, pose as their boyfriends and then coerce them into entering the sex trade. These traffickers post ads on Backpage and move the women from city to city and hotel to motel, selling them for sex.

Mounting public pressure against sex trafficking in North America has seen major credit card companies cut ties with Backpage's adult section because of the repeated links to criminal trafficking rings.

In Washington State, three young teens advertised for sex on Backpage filed a lawsuit against the website claiming it played a role in allowing them to be "bought and sold" as prostitutes.

Two of the girls were in seventh grade and one claims she was raped multiple times by men who responded to her online ads, according to court documents.

Backpage, which is owned by a Dutch holding company, tried to dismiss the lawsuit, arguing it wasn't liable because it only operates as a host to content posted by others, but last year a Supreme Court Judge ruled in favour of the victims, giving them the right to sue. The trial is ongoing.

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