

Sex Trafficking 101

WHAT IS SEX TRAFFICKING?

Sex trafficking is a form of modern day slavery that exists throughout the United States and globally. The Federal Trafficking Victims and Protection Act of 2000 defines sex trafficking as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, where such an act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, **or** in which the person compelled to engage in such acts is under 18 years of age.

HOW PREVALENT IS SEX TRAFFICKING?

Incidents of sex trafficking are difficult to estimate and often under-reported due to the crime's hidden nature. However, we know that **human trafficking is the fastest growing enterprise in the world**. Criminals have learned that selling women and children for sex is more profitable and less risky than selling drugs because they can be "re-used" and easily replaced. In New York State, more than 4,000 underage youth are bought, sold and trafficked for sexual purposes and profit each night.

WHO IS AT RISK OF BEING TRAFFICKED?

Adults, teens, and children can all be victims of sex trafficking and can be trafficked from abroad, or within their own communities in the United States. Though trafficking exists among people of all races, religions, and ethnicities – racial, economic and gender inequality make certain populations disproportionately vulnerable. Immigrants, runaway and homeless youth and LGBTQ individuals are also targeted. Common recruiting locations include public places such as shopping malls, courtrooms and bus stations; youth shelters where runaway and homeless youth gather; and in the vicinity of schools and playgrounds. According to the FBI, girls can be trafficked as young as 12 years old; boys and transgender youth between the ages of 11-13. **The majority of victims in the U.S. are American citizens.**

WHAT TACTICS DO TRAFFICKERS USE TO LURE AND CONTROL THEIR VICTIMS?

Pimps initially lure their victims with false promises of a better life, a job, warmth, intimacy and gifts. But ultimately they resort to other forms of **manipulation and control** including violence, debt bondage, threats of harm to the victim's family and friends, shaming, forced drug or alcohol abuse, isolation, degradation and food and sleep deprivation.

WHERE DOES SEX TRAFFICKING OCCUR?

The National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline receives reports of cases of human trafficking in all 50 states and Washington D.C. **Sex trafficking commonly takes place through online escort services like backpage.com, where buyers can purchase sex with ease, anonymity, and impunity and on mainstream social media sites like Instagram and Facebook.** It also takes place in residential brothels, brothels disguised as massage parlors or spas and in street prostitution.

WHY DON'T TRAFFICKING VICTIMS LEAVE "THE LIFE?"

Traffickers often use violence, threats, shaming, drugs, deception, debt bondage, and other manipulative tactics to trap their victims. Also, traffickers provide security including food and shelter. **If a victim escapes, they are often unable to support themselves, have few shelter options, and lack a support system.** Victims face many other challenges,

including: confiscation of money and forms of identification; victims may not speak English; victims are often prevented from communicating with family and friends; and may experience powerful emotional attachments to their abusers. Consequently, victims often return to their traffickers time and again. Without addressing the systemic issues that allow trafficking to exist, including lack of education and opportunities, we will never fully eradicate the problem.

HOW DO I RECOGNIZE A VICTIM OF SEX TRAFFICKING?

According to Polaris, these are some of the most common signs of human trafficking: the individual in question is not free to leave or come and go as she/he wants; **is under 18 and providing commercial sex acts**; is unpaid, paid very little or paid only through tips; works excessively long and/or unusual hours; owes a large debt; is fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, or tense; lacks healthcare; shows signs of physical and/or sexual abuse, physical restraint, confinement, or torture; has few or no personal possessions; is not in control of her/his own money and/or identification documents; and is not allowed or able to speak for themselves.

WHO IS PENALIZED?

Punishment for traffickers and buyers is minimal. Buyers are rarely charged or convicted for solicitation or pandering, let alone statutory rape or child endangerment. **Often, it is the sexually exploited child who ends up in jail for “prostitution,” despite not being of age to provide consent.**

WHAT DOES NEW YORK STATE DO TO COMBAT SEX TRAFFICKING?

In 2013, New York created a statewide system of Trafficking Intervention Courts designed to assist individuals charged with prostitution and related crimes. Recognizing these individuals as victims rather than criminals, judges, prosecutors, and defense lawyers work together to link victims with the services they need to break the cycle of exploitation and avoid jail time.

In 2015, New York State passed the Trafficking Victims Protection and Justice Act (TVPJA). The TVPJA provides greater protection for victims, particularly sexually exploited children; increases accountability for buyers and traffickers who fuel this criminal industry; and defends those trafficked from criminal prosecution.

If you suspect a person has been trafficked, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or text INFO or HELP to: BeFree (233733).

