



SEX TRAFFICKING FACT SHEET



Sex trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act is under the age of 18 years. Enactment of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) made sex trafficking a serious violation of Federal law. The TVPA also recognizes labor trafficking, which is discussed in a separate fact sheet.

As defined by the TVPA, the term ‘commercial sex act’ means any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person.

The TVPA recognizes that traffickers use psychological and well as physical coercion and bondage, and it defines coercion to include: threats of serious harm to or physical restraint against any person; any scheme, plan, or pattern intended to cause a person to believe that failure to perform an act would result in serious harm to or physical restraint against any person; or the abuse or threatened abuse of the legal process.

Victims of Sex Trafficking and What They Face

Victims of sex trafficking can be women or men, girls or boys, but the majority are women and girls. There are a number of common patterns for luring victims into situations of sex trafficking, including:

- A promise of a good job in another country
- A false marriage proposal turned into a bondage situation
- Being sold into the sex trade by parents, husbands, boyfriends
- Being kidnapped by traffickers

Sex traffickers frequently subject their victims to debt-bondage, an illegal practice in which the traffickers tell their victims that they owe money (often relating to the victims’ living expenses and transport into the country) and that they must pledge their personal services to repay the debt.

Sex traffickers use a variety of methods to “condition” their victims including starvation, confinement, beatings, physical abuse, rape, gang rape, threats of violence to the victims and the victims’ families, forced drug use and the threat of shaming their victims by revealing their activities to their family and their families’ friends.

Victims face numerous health risks. Physical risks include drug and alcohol addiction; physical injuries (broken bones, concussions, burns, vaginal/anal tearings); traumatic brain injury (TBI) resulting in memory loss, dizziness, headaches, numbness; sexually transmitted diseases (e.g., HIV/AIDS, gonorrhea, syphilis, UTIs, pubic lice); sterility, miscarriages, menstrual problems; other diseases (e.g., TB, hepatitis, malaria, pneumonia); and forced or coerced abortions.

Psychological harms include mind/body separation/disassociated ego states, shame, grief, fear, distrust, hatred of men, self-hatred, suicide, and suicidal thoughts. Victims are at risk for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – acute anxiety, depression, insomnia, physical hyper-alertness, self-loathing that is long-lasting and resistant to change (complex-PTSD).

Victims may also suffer from traumatic bonding – a form of coercive control in which the perpetrator instills in the victim fear as well as gratitude for being allowed to live.

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Types of Sex Trafficking

Victims of trafficking are forced into various forms of commercial sexual exploitation including prostitution, pornography, stripping, live-sex shows, mail-order brides, military prostitution and sex tourism.

Victims trafficked into prostitution and pornography are usually involved in the most exploitive forms of commercial sex operations. Sex trafficking operations can be found in highly-visible venues such as street prostitution, as well as more underground systems such as closed-brothels that operate out of residential homes. Sex trafficking also takes place in a variety of public and private locations such as massage parlors, spas, strip clubs and other fronts for prostitution. Victims may start off dancing or stripping in clubs and then be coerced into situations of prostitution and pornography.

Assistance for Victims of Sex Trafficking

When victims of trafficking are identified, the U.S. government can help them adjust their immigration status, and obtain support and assistance in rebuilding their lives in the United States through various programs. By certifying victims of trafficking, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) enables trafficking victims who are non-U.S. citizens to receive Federally funded benefits and services to the same extent as a refugee. Victims of trafficking who are U.S. citizens do not need to be certified to receive benefits. As U.S. citizens, they may already be eligible for many benefits.

Through HHS, victims can access benefits and services including food, health care and employment assistance. Certified victims of trafficking can obtain access to services that provide English language instruction and skills training for job placement. Since many victims are reluctant to come forward for fear of being deported, one of HHS' most important roles is to connect victims with non-profit organizations prepared to assist them and address their specific needs. These organizations can provide counseling, case management and benefit coordination.

If you think you have come in contact with a victim of human trafficking, call the **National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1.888.3737.888**. This hotline will help you determine if you have encountered victims of human trafficking, will identify local resources available in your community to help victims, and will help you coordinate with local social service organizations to help protect and serve victims so they can begin the process of restoring their lives. For more information on human trafficking visit **www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking**.

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