

Human Trafficking

What is Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery in which victims are used for labor or sexual exploitation. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) is a federal law that criminalizes the act of human trafficking. The TVPA was first signed into law in early 2000. The act focuses on combating human trafficking through prevention, protection and prosecution. According to U.S. law under the TVPA, human trafficking is defined as “sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age; or the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery”. The TVPA was reauthorized in 2003, 2005 and in 2008.

The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons defines human trafficking as the action of “recruiting, transporting, transferring, harboring or receiving persons by means of threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person for the purposes of exploitation”. The Protocol clearly states that if a person under 18 years of age is subjected to any of the trafficking acts for the purpose of exploitation, then that minor is a victim of human trafficking even if the means of trafficking were not employed. Stated differently, a minor is a victim of trafficking whenever someone commits an act of trafficking against the minor for the purpose of exploitation regardless if the minor had previously consented to the act. In the United States and in much of the international community, it is generally accepted that in the case of trafficking minors, initial consent to the act of trafficking is considered irrelevant.

The U.S. Department of State estimates that about 600,000 to 800,000 people, mostly women and children, are trafficked across national borders annually. If trafficking within a country’s borders is included, this figure drastically increases to approximately 2 to 4 million people, according to official U.S. estimates. Furthermore, it is estimated that 17,500 to 20,000 victims are trafficked into the U.S. annually, with Florida receiving a high percentage of those victims. Trafficked victims generally tend to flow from less developed countries to more industrialized nations or to neighboring countries with higher standards of living.

The impact of modern-day slavery goes beyond the individual victims; it undermines the health, safety and security of all nations it touches. It is currently estimated that there are 27 million people living in slavery around the world today. The selling of human beings has become a lucrative industry, generating approximately \$9.5 billion annually, according to estimates by the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI). Human trafficking is the third largest criminal industry after the drug trade and arms dealing. It is also one of the fastest growing international crimes.

Who are the Victims of Human Trafficking?

Victims of human trafficking can be of any sex, race or age. It is important to understand that human trafficking can occur to anyone, anywhere and in any situation. However, certain demographical trends have been observed, and it is estimated that about 80% of the victims of human trafficking are female and up to half are minors. Trafficked women are typically under 25 years of age, with the majority being in their mid to late teens. For the most part, children tend to be trafficked within their own countries, while women aged 18-30 tend to be trafficked internationally, mostly for commercial sexual exploitation purposes.

Each year, millions of women and children are exploited for sexual purposes such as prostitution or forced labor without compensations in homes. Victims of commercial sex are typically trafficked from Asia, the former Soviet Union and southeast Europe to the Middle East, Asia and North America. However, due to the fluidity of economic and political conditions, these major source regions and destination sites are constantly changing. Regardless of the location victims are being trafficked to and from, traffickers generally prey on the vulnerability of their victims. This often means that they exploit the fact that the victim is alone, in an unfamiliar culture or does not speak the language of the country in which they have been trafficked into. Through the use of force, fraud and coercion, victims are forced to work in the sex industry or exploited for intensive labor purposes.

Florida: A Modern Slavery Hub

Florida is commonly known amongst law enforcement personnel to have one of the highest incidences of human trafficking in the country. In fact, Florida is commonly cited along with New York and California as being one of the top three destinations for trafficking victims in the United States.

Sex trafficking victims tend to wind up in large cities, vacation and tourist spots, and near military bases, where the demand for sex trafficking is incredibly high. Additionally, labor trafficking victims are typically utilized in areas in which there is a demand for unskilled laborers in sectors such as seasonal agriculture, garment manufacturing, construction and domestic servitude. Being that Florida's economic climate depends highly on the agriculture and tourism industry, Florida is an ideal destination for human trafficking victims. Additional factors creating a high demand for victims of human trafficking include Florida's eight military bases along with the south Florida's geographical location, which makes it an ideal entry point for traffickers bringing victims from Latin America and the Caribbean into the United States. In fact, Miami International Airport is ranked as one of the top entry points in the United States for foreign human trafficking victims. Finally, the rich demographic composition of Florida, ranking third for the number of immigrants living within its borders, provides a steady supply of vulnerable victims for traffickers to prey on.

The three main categories of human trafficking, sexual exploitation, forced labor and

domestic servitude, are all represented in Florida. From prostitution to indentured servants to migrant farm workers, Florida exhibits a uniquely high demand for traffickers. In January 2008, Shared Hope International conducted a comprehensive assessment of domestic minor sex trafficking in Clearwater, Florida. Their key findings were as follows:

“In the Clearwater/Tampa Bay area, domestic minor sex trafficking victims are rarely identified and often misidentified. There is an acute lack of awareness about the crime of domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST), and professionals seldom identify its victims.”

“Estimates suggest that more than 400 DMST victims have had contact with professionals in Florida in the past six years but were not identified as victims of sex trafficking. Significant barriers exist preventing professionals from identifying DMST victims. Specific barriers include: lack of training in identifying DMST victims, the hidden nature of sex crimes, the inability or unwillingness of victims to self-identify, and the lack of systematic data tracking of DMST victims, which makes it difficult to establish an accurate estimate of the total number of victims.” (*Emphasis added*)

Read the entire report [here](#).(pdf)

These findings highlight that there is significant room for public intervention on behalf of human trafficking victims. While the crimes are concealed in nature and occur behind closed doors, the victims exist in the same space in which everyone else goes about their daily lives. Consequently, it is inevitable that community members encounter victims of human trafficking as they go about their day. The staggering number of victims who are located but not identified as victims of human trafficking shows that there is a significant gap that can be addressed by everyday community members in order to abolish modern day slavery.

What Exactly Can You Do?

At the moment, human trafficking is considered a highly profitable industry because of the high demand and low risk associated with it. The lack of a multiplicity of factors such as community awareness around the issue, comprehensive legislature, resources and concern for victims all work together to make the industry relatively low-risk. Human trafficking victims exist in plain sight and yet there is a relatively low number of investigations, prosecutions and community involvement around the issues. This allows traffickers to make significant profits while exposing themselves to minimal risk of being caught.

Additionally, the investment a trafficker makes in a victim is also quite low, rendering the activity of trafficking to be that much more profitable. Unlike the drug trade in which once the substance is sold it is used up, people can be sold over and over again. Human trafficking victims are ultimately perceived as a reusable commodity by those that seek to profit off of them.

There is a critical need for the increased rescuing of trafficking victims and prosecutions of traffickers. This is not a victimless or harmless crime, and the public should be informed of the risks involved with it. Community members often come across labor and sex trafficking situations in their day-to-day routines. Informing yourself and other on how to recognize and report a human trafficking situations is the first step to making human trafficking a high-risk industry. By increasing the number of community-based tips, more victims will receive help from law enforcement and social providers to get out of exploitative situations and into safe environments. Furthermore, the identification of victims often leads to the prosecution of their traffickers, thereby bringing these criminal to justice.

For a comprehensive account of how to identify potential victims of human trafficking, please visit the following links generated by the US Department of State:

[How Can I Recognize Trafficking Victims](#)

[Identifying and Helping Trafficking Victims](#)

If you feel that you have come into contact with a victim of human trafficking, contact the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) at 1-888-3737-888. This number should be stored in your cell phone, as you never know when you will come into contact with a potential victim. The NHTRC is a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week toll-free hotline that provides callers with a range of services including tip reporting, training and technical assistance and referrals for victims.

In an effort to increase the number of tips generated to the NHTRC, every effort should be made to publicize this number in one's community. These efforts can range from telling family and friends to put this number into their cell phones to funding billboards placed on highways with the number and its purpose.

FAQ's

1. How are traffickers able to control victims and prevent them from calling law enforcement or alternative forms of assistance?
 1. Trafficking victims are often subject to mental and physical abuse by their traffickers in order to ensure their cooperation. These acts can range from rape, abuse, beatings, forced drug use, confinement, starvation, seclusion, threats against themselves or their families back home and by creating a distrust in local law enforcement.
2. How do traffickers obtain their victims?
 1. Traffickers acquire their victims through numerous methods. They can be kidnapped and taken forcibly or they can be lured by false job offers in other countries. In some cases, after victims have been willingly trafficked into another country based on false promises, their trafficker will charge them a previously undisclosed fine to cover the expenses of transporting them to another country. This subsequently creates a life-long debt the

victim must work off (through either commercial sexual exploitation or forced labor) to pay their trafficker back.

3. What makes people vulnerable to becoming victims of trafficking?
 1. While trafficking can occur to anyone in any situation, some factors have been known to contribute to people's vulnerability to being trafficked. These factors include poverty, the lack of an education or job opportunities, race, social caste, internally displaced people and refugees.
4. How is human trafficking different from human smuggling?
 1. Smuggling involves a transaction in which a service is provided to a willing and consensual individual who seeks the illegal entry into a country in return for a fee or service. Smuggling ends with the arrival of the migrant to their destination. According to the United Nations Smuggling Protocol, migrants that are smuggled are considered to be willing participants in a criminal activity in contrast to people who have been trafficking, who are considered victims of a criminal activity.