



Introduction to Human Trafficking Fact Sheet

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Human Trafficking Defined

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), human trafficking is “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit.”¹

It occurs in many forms, including sexual exploitation, forced labor, debt bondage, forced marriage, and domestic servitude—impacting an estimated 40.3 million, or 5.4 victims per 1,000 people worldwide.²

Human trafficking does not always require force nor “transportation” and “transfer” across state or national borders to qualify as trafficking. Further, inducing a minor to perform a commercial sex act is considered human trafficking even if there is no force, fraud or coercion.³

A common misconception is that human trafficking means someone uses kidnapping and physical force to recruit and maintain victims. The fact is: human trafficking does not require use of force. **In fact, recruitment of victims rarely involves violence.**⁴ Instead, traffickers tend to use deception, through means like false job advertisements or false offers of friendship. Once traffickers recruit victims, they exploit and retain control over victims through a variety of means, including physical violence, confiscation of travel documents, manipulation of migrant status, and threats.

Victim Demographics

Globally

The typical victim profile varies upon the type of trafficking and location. However, traffickers tend to exploit common pre-existing vulnerabilities, including:⁵

- Financial instability/need.
- A child having a dysfunctional family environment.
- An intimate relationship with a trafficker.
- A mental, behavioral, or neurological disorder.
- Immigration status.

Most victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation, and seven out of 10 detected victims in 2018 were women or girls. Children also accounted for one-third of detected victims in the UNODC's 2020 Trafficking in Persons report, with children in low-income countries disproportionately affected.

Migrants and individuals with extreme financial need are also more likely to experience forced labor.

Nationally

Within the U.S., the Polaris Project identified key vulnerabilities of victims in 2020.

For **victims of sex trafficking**, the top five risk factors were:⁶

- Substance use concern.
- Runaway/homeless youth.
- Unstable housing.
- Mental health concern.
- Recent migration/relocation.

For **victims of labor trafficking** in the U.S., the key vulnerabilities were:⁷

- Recent migration/relocation.
- Self-reported economic hardship.
- Unstable housing.
- Criminal record/history.
- Substance use concern.

Victim Demographics Cont.

Pennsylvania

The National Human Trafficking Hotline recently released human trafficking statistics for each state. Of all the Pennsylvania tips made to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in 2020:⁸

- 62% identified **adult victims**, and 26% cited **minors**.
- 83% indicated women as victims; 13% listed men; 2% identified gender minorities.
- 10% cited U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents; 9% listed foreign nationals.

While there is no current data about the most common trafficking vulnerabilities in Pennsylvania, these 2020 findings are a step toward better understanding.

Trafficker Profile

Though traffickers' backgrounds and positions vary, they tend to have a power advantage over victims. Some examples include business owners exploiting workers, intimate partners exploiting their significant other, parents exploiting their children, and adolescents/young adults exploiting younger schoolmates. Two-thirds of convicted traffickers in 2018 were men, although women participate in human trafficking at higher rates than other crimes.⁹

Trafficking within organizational structures can vary, ranging from a business-type organized criminal group of three or more traffickers, to governance-type groups using violence or threats to control victims in a community or region.¹⁰

However, in America the majority of known human trafficking cases are committed by family members or intimate partners. According to an analysis of 2020 Human Trafficking Hotline calls in which recruitment relationships were known:

- Of total trafficking cases, 31% were exploited by family members or caregivers—a 47% increase from the previous year and particularly pronounced for child victims¹¹—and 27% by intimate partners.
- Of sex trafficking victims whose trafficking relationship was known, over 80% of victims were exploited by family or intimate partners.¹²

Works Cited

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