



Introduction to Human Trafficking

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Human Trafficking Defined

Human trafficking is the use of force, fraud, or coercion to exploit someone for profit.¹ It occurs in many forms across the world, including sexual exploitation, forced labor, debt bondage, and domestic servitude—impacting an estimated 27.6 million people worldwide and nearly half a million people in the United States.² It is the fastest growing criminal industry and is estimated to be worth \$150 billion.³

Human trafficking is a subcategory of modern-day slavery, which is a broader term that includes people in forced marriages. Modern-day slavery is harming a total of 49.6 million people worldwide.⁴

Human trafficking does not require smuggling across borders, kidnapping, nor physical violence. Traffickers tend to use deception, manipulation, and exploitation of others' existing vulnerabilities. Once traffickers recruit victims, they retain control through a variety of means, including psychological manipulation, physical violence, and threats.⁵ Furthermore, inducing a minor to perform a commercial sex act is human trafficking regardless of force, fraud or coercion due to their lack of ability to consent.⁶

Human Trafficking Statistics

Global Estimates

Recently updated estimates from the International Labour Organization found that modern-day slavery increased significantly— from 40.3 million people impacted in 2016 to 49.6 million people in 2021.⁷

Victim demographics vary by location and trafficking type. A snapshot of global statistics finds:

- Labor trafficking — Over 17 million people are forced into labor trafficking.
- Sex trafficking — Over 6 million people are sex-trafficked, including 1.7 million children, the majority of whom are female.
- State-imposed trafficking— Approximately 4 million people are trafficked by state authorities around the world.⁸

- Child trafficking — Involves 12% of total trafficking victims, over half of whom were sexually exploited.⁹

According to the federal Trafficking In Persons (TIP) Report, traffickers in the U.S. exploit victims from almost every region of the world through a range of illicit and illegal industries, including hospitality, agriculture, construction, manufacturing, salons, retail, drug distribution, child care, and domestic work.¹⁰

United States Estimates

Despite many victims remaining undetected, reports to the National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH) offer a glimpse of the issue in the United States.¹¹ According to the most recent 2021 analysis, the NHTH identified 10,360 cases involving 16,710 victims,¹² totaling just under 165,000 known victims since 2007. Of 2021 cases:

- Sex trafficking accounts for 72% of cases. Victims were predominantly female (84%) and both adults (62%) and children (28%).
 - Top venues included pornography, illicit massage businesses, hotel-based exploitation, residence based commercial sex, and online advertising.
- Labor trafficking accounts for 10% of cases, impacting predominantly adults (81% compared to 13% children) and males and females evenly.

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened human trafficking and severely harmed victim identification. This is reflected in trafficking reports peaking in pre-COVID 2018 and 2019, followed by declines in 2020 and again in 2021.¹³

Pennsylvania Estimates

The NHTH has identified over 4,000 trafficking victims in Pennsylvania since 2007. Similar to national trends, identified cases and victims declined from 2020 and from the high set in 2018 and 2019.¹⁴ Specifically:

- In 2021, there were 192 cases, impacting 315 victims. Where known, the majority of victims were female (80%, with 9% male) and adults (67%, with 22% minors).
- Sex trafficking accounted for 80% of cases, which occurred primarily in illicit massage businesses and residence-based commercial sex.
- Labor trafficking accounted for 9% of cases.

Vulnerabilities

Human trafficking can happen to anyone, no matter location, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity. However, traffickers tend to exploit common pre-existing vulnerabilities, including:¹⁵

- Financial instability/poverty or economic need.
- An unstable living situation, including a dysfunctional family environment and young people experiencing homelessness, the juvenile justice system, or foster care.
- A history of enduring domestic violence or sexual abuse, with intimate partner exploitation among leading types of trafficking.
- A mental, behavioral, or neurological disorder or physical disability.
- Being an undocumented immigrant or having recently relocated.
- An addiction to drugs or alcohol, or having a caregiver or family member who struggles with substance abuse.

A federal analysis finds that U.S. traffickers often target those who experience compounding forms of discrimination and vulnerabilities such as homelessness, foster care, incarceration, and immigration.¹⁶

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, adolescents/young adults exploiting younger schoolmates, and even governance-type groups using violence or threats to control victims in a community or region.¹⁷

In addition to physical and emotional threats and abuse, means of coercion include:

- Economic abuse, such as withholding pay.
- Isolation from family and friends.
- Promising to provide for victims' needs to impose control, including "grooming" tactics premised on false love and provision, isolation, and dependency.
- Perpetuating a cycle of emotional, psychological, and physical trauma, unhealthy attachment, and control.
- Taking victims' identity documents, including birth certificates, passports, and drivers' licenses.

Disturbingly, increasing numbers of U.S. victims are exploited by family or intimate partners.¹⁸ An analysis of 2020 NHTH calls found the majority of trafficking was committed by family members or intimate partners:¹⁹

- Of total cases, 31% were exploited by family members or caregivers—a 47% increase from the previous year—and 27% by intimate partners.
- Of sex trafficking victims, 81% of victims were exploited by family or intimate partners.

Traffickers increasingly use social media to recruit and advertise victims.²⁰ Case data finds that 26% of surveyed human trafficking survivors were exploited via their social media accounts on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, chat groups, and dating websites. That percentage has been increasing for younger victims.²¹

Conclusion

Amidst these concerning statistics and the prevalence of human trafficking, every community member has a crucial role to play.

First, family, friends, and neighbors can be a vital helpline to those in need. Consistently highlighted as a means of reporting and connecting victims to services, community members should look for notable indicators of trafficking. These include: signs of physical abuse, neglect, malnutrition, and fear; a controlling employer (such as providing transportation or housing), a worker receiving little to no wages, a young person romantically involved with an older individual or in commercial sex, and sudden changes in appearance and/or behavior, including drug use.

Second, by contributing to societal awareness and advocating for private and public sector changes, communities can bring accountability to traffickers and increase services for victims.

These simple steps can help create a world in which every person has a chance at freedom and restoration.

Suspect a case of human trafficking?

1. Call 911.
2. Contact ChildLine if a minor is involved.
3. Call or text the National Human Trafficking Hotline, which operates 24/7 and offers over 200 languages.
 - a. Call: 1 (888) 373-7888
 - b. Text: 233733 (Text "HELP" or "INFO")

We believe that together, we can make a difference.

Works Cited

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- ⁷ "Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking," International Labour Organization (2017), <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>. Of this total, 22.8 million are men and 26.7 million women; 37.2 million are adults and 12.2 million are children; "Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage," International Labour Organization, Walk Free, and International Organization for Migration (2022), https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_854733.pdf.
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- ¹¹ "National Statistics," National Human Trafficking Hotline, <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en/statistics>
- ¹² "2021 National Human Trafficking Hotline Data Report," National Human Trafficking Hotline (2023), <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/National%20Report%20For%202021.docx%20%283%29.pdf>.
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- ¹⁴ Pennsylvania State Report for 2021," NHTH (2023), <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/Pennsylvania%20State%20Report%20For%202021.docx%20%281%29.pdf>
- ¹⁵ "Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, 2020," UNODC (January, 2021), https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTIP_2020_15jan_web.pdf#page=10; Office on Drugs and Crime, "Global Report on Trafficking in Persons," United Nations (2020), https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTIP_2020_15jan_web.pdf; "Human Trafficking Trends in 2020," Polaris Project (2022), <https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Human-Trafficking-Trends-in-2020-by-Polaris.pdf>. In the U.S, the leading identified vulnerabilities include: substance use; unstable housing, including youth who run away or are unhoused; mental health concerns; recent migration/relocation; economic hardship; and criminal history.
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