

Human Trafficking Course

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4 CE Credits / Contact Hours*

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Chapter 1. Introduction:

Source: <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/202469.pdf>

While there is a significant amount of information regarding the magnitude, causes and practices of trafficking, little information exists on the needs of trafficking victims and the service providers working to meet those needs. In fact, no studies have been



conducted on a national scale to systematically assess the needs of victims and those service providers working with them. With the passage of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, it is increasingly important to better understand the needs of trafficking victims and service providers.

In response, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) commissioned assistance from Caliber Associates Inc. (Caliber) under a task order contract to conduct a National Needs Assessment of Service Providers and Trafficking Victims that would provide the Office of Justice Programs and the field at large with information needed to develop more effective programs to service trafficking victims and ensure existing and new programs are both responsive and effective in meeting the needs of

trafficking victims. Specifically, the needs assessment was designed to answer the following questions:

- **What services currently exist for trafficking victims?**
- **How responsive are these services to victims? Are they meeting their needs?**
- **What are the barriers to providing services to trafficking victims? Barriers to accessing services?**
- **What assistance/support do service providers need to effectively serve trafficking victims?**

The following is a report of the findings from the National Needs Assessment of Service Providers and Trafficking Victims. It begins with a review of current literature on the issue of trafficking, continues with a description of the research design and methodology of the needs assessment and presentation of the findings.

Chapter 2: Background and Understanding

2.1 Human Trafficking Defined

The United States Congress defines trafficking in persons as encompassing all acts involved in the recruitment, transport, harboring, or sale of persons, whether within national borders or across international boundaries, when accomplished through coercion, force, kidnapping, deception, or fraud. The purpose of these acts is to place individuals in situations of forced labor or services, such as sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, debt bondage, or other slavery-like practices (U.S. Department of State, 2023). **Importantly, physical movement from one location to another is not required for an act to fall under this definition.** What matters is the **type of work** performed and the **means** used—force, fraud, or coercion.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA, 2020) provides a legal definition of “severe forms of trafficking in persons.” It includes:

- *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 is under 18 years of age.*
- *The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjecting that person to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021).*

Human trafficking is a **global crime** affecting virtually every country. The **International Labour Organization estimates that more than 27 million people worldwide are currently trapped in situations of forced labor or sexual exploitation** (International Labour Organization, 2022). Traffickers often exploit vulnerable individuals, particularly women and children, who face poverty, unemployment, discrimination, or political instability. “Push” factors such as government corruption, weak rule of law, illiteracy, violence, civil unrest, and lack of economic opportunities make individuals and communities especially susceptible (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2023). Victims are frequently deceived by false promises of legitimate employment, education, or migration opportunities in more affluent nations, only to be coerced into exploitative conditions.

Once trafficked, victims experience egregious human rights violations. They may be held in **slavery-like conditions** and subjected to physical violence, sexual assault, starvation, debt manipulation, and psychological abuse designed to erode autonomy and induce compliance (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024). The consequences are severe, often including chronic physical health problems, posttraumatic stress, depression, substance misuse, and complex emotional trauma (Zimmerman & Kiss, 2022). Such abuses highlight why human trafficking is increasingly recognized as not only a crime but also a profound **public health crisis** requiring coordinated responses from legal, medical, and social service professionals.

Trafficking in persons is the world’s fastest growing criminal enterprise, with

profits that rival the illegal drugs and arms trades. In the mid-1990s, global profits from human trafficking were estimated at roughly \$7–9 billion a year, a figure that at the time seemed staggering. Yet, in the decades since, both the scale of exploitation and the financial rewards traffickers reap have grown dramatically. According to the International Labour Organization, forced labor in the private economy now generates approximately **236 billion U.S. dollars in illegal profits every year**, reflecting a nearly 40 percent increase compared to earlier baselines (International Labour Organization, 2024).

These profits are not spread evenly across industries. The most lucrative form



remains forced commercial sexual exploitation, where traffickers earn an average of more than **\$27,000 per victim each year**, compared to around **\$3,600** per victim for other forms of forced labor (International Labour Organization, 2024). The sheer disparity underscores how the commodification of human bodies for sex continues to be one of the most profitable crimes in the world.

Some researchers believe the problem is even larger than the ILO's estimates suggest. A recent analysis by the Global Coalition to Fight Financial Crime proposed that the annual proceeds of modern slavery and human trafficking could be closer to **\$498 billion worldwide**, an almost incomprehensible sum (Global Coalition to Fight Financial Crime, 2024).

Taken together, these numbers reveal more than cold statistics—they paint a picture of a global black market thriving on human suffering. Where once the billions earned already shocked the conscience, today the profits have ballooned to hundreds of billions, illustrating both the entrenched nature of trafficking networks

and the urgent need for coordinated global responses.

The crime receives its name because the perpetrators often move or 'traffic' victims from their home communities to other areas - either domestically within the country of origin or to foreign countries - to make money from their forced labor. Victims are often brought to areas where the demand is highest and most consistent, such as large cities, vacation and tourist areas, or near military bases. Also, in many cases, the trafficker charges the unknowing victim an exorbitant smuggling fee or "employment" fee. These fees range anywhere from hundreds to thousands of dollars. When the victim cannot pay this fee up front, the trafficker locks the victim in a vicious cycle of debt bondage or indentured servitude that prevents victims from ever paying off the original fee.

Traffickers capitalize on victims' indebtedness and isolation and combine the use of threats, intimidation, violence, and manipulation to control victims, break their will, confine them in captivity, and force them to engage in sex acts or to labor under slave-like conditions. **Types of trafficking include forced begging, bonded labor, forced prostitution, servile marriage, false adoption, domestic servitude, and work in sweatshops. In addition, trafficking may also feed into the industries of agricultural labor, food processing, pornography, sex tourism entertainment, construction, organ, harvesting, and restaurant work.**

The networks of international organized crime are attracted to the trade in humans precisely because of low risk and because the criminal penalties for sex trafficking are light in most countries. This year's Trafficking in Persons Report June 2003 reiterates this fact, describing how traffickers enjoy "virtually no risk of prosecution" by using dramatic improvements in transportation and communications to run their trafficking operations. The report describes how traffickers avoid punishment for their crimes by operating in locations where there is little rule of law, lack of enforcement of anti-trafficking laws, and corruption of government and law enforcement institutions. Moreover, trafficking is uniquely lucrative because traffickers can receive steady profits from forced labor or sexual exploitation for prolonged periods of time, as compared to smugglers who receive only one payment for transporting one person. Unlike the sale of drugs, human victims can be sold

repeatedly, which creates high profit margins for perpetrators. Furthermore, the practice of trafficking does not require a large capital investment on the part of the trafficker. As a result, the crime of trafficking in persons offers international organized crime syndicates a low-risk opportunity to make billions in tax-free profits by exploiting a system of seemingly unlimited supply and unending demand for a relatively low cost.

2.2 Trafficking in the United States

Human trafficking remains a persistent problem in the United States and globally. The International Labour Organization estimates that traffickers exploit roughly **27.6 million** people worldwide at any given time (International Labour Organization, 2022). Within the U.S., the federal government no longer publishes a reliable annual estimate of how many people are trafficked into the country; early 2000s figures (e.g., 18,000–20,000) were derived from limited data and have since been retired because accurate national-level inflow counts are not currently feasible (U.S.



Department of State, 2023).

Today, prevalence is monitored through victim-service contacts, law enforcement activity, and other indicators rather than a single national inflow number (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

The United States functions as a **source, transit, and destination** country for both sex and labor trafficking.

Common settings for exploitation identified by federal investigations include residence-based commercial sex, hotels and motels, illicit massage businesses, bars and

clubs, truck stops, farms and agricultural sites, restaurants, construction, and domestic work, with traffickers increasingly using **social media and online platforms** to recruit and advertise (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2024; U.S. Department of State, 2023).

Enforcement activity underscores the scope of the problem. In **FY 2024**, the Department of Homeland Security reported more than **2,500 trafficking-related arrests**, over **900 indictments**, **405 convictions**, and assistance or protections for tens of thousands of victims and family members across DHS programs (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2024). Investigations continue to uncover brothel networks and illicit massage businesses operating across multiple states, reflecting both sex and labor trafficking typologies (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2024).

Hotline data also illustrate where cases are most frequently **reported** (not prevalence). In **2024**, the National Human Trafficking Hotline identified the most cases in: **California (1,733 cases)**, **Texas (1,360)**, **Florida (832)**, and **New York (570)** (Polaris, 2025). Polaris emphasizes that hotline statistics reflect situations reported to and documented by the hotline and should not be interpreted as comprehensive prevalence estimates—yet the pattern of these states ranking among the highest has been consistent in recent years (Polaris, 2025).

Current federal practice avoids citing a single “people trafficked into the U.S. each year” figure. Instead, it is important to understand that the U.S. is simultaneously a source, transit, and destination country; that exploitation occurs across a range of venues (with heavy online facilitation); that enforcement and victim-services data provide our best ongoing indicators; and that California, Texas, Florida, and New York routinely account for the largest shares of **reported** cases to the national hotline (U.S. Department of State, 2023; Polaris, 2025).

While some trafficking victims do enter the United States through legal means, many trafficking victims are transported across America’s borders in a variety of ways, such as by plane, boat, car, train, or on foot. Traffickers also deceive BICE

personnel by bringing women and children in under the guises of educational visas, tourist visas, or fraudulent entry papers. Furthermore, traffickers enjoy a low risk of prosecution or deterrence from the American criminal justice system. A review of prominent and recent trafficking court cases revealed that criminal penalties for traffickers appear light and harmless compared to sentences given to drug or weapons dealers. For example, the statutory maximum for sale into involuntary servitude is only ten years per count, whereas the statutory maximum for dealing ten grams of LSD or distributing a kilo of heroin is life in prison. Previously convicted traffickers charged with forced prostitution and forced servitude have received relatively light sentences, ranging from seven months to fifteen years of jail time.

Due to its underground nature, the issue of trafficking in persons has received widespread attention within the last decade in the United States, and legislation specifically geared toward trafficking into the U.S. has only recently become a salient issue for U.S. policymakers. Unfortunately, conditions are prime for the trafficking industry to continue to thrive in this country. International trafficking to the United States is likely to increase due to weak economies, unemployment and scarce job opportunities in foreign countries of origin, the low risk of prosecution and enormous profit potential for traffickers, and improved international transportation and communication infrastructures.

2.3 Responses to the Trafficking Problem

Both domestically and internationally, various groups and institutions have made efforts to combat the trafficking problem on multiple fronts. The Federal government, domestic and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations, and social service providers have all responded with an array of prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies to address the crime. Because the crime and effects of trafficking in persons have only recently become a salient issue, the national response to the issue is still in its early stages. Consequently, although the groundwork for a coordinated infrastructure of social services is new and developing, noticeable progress has been made during a

relatively short period of time.

2.3.1 The Federal Legislative Response

The 106th Congress passed the **Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000**, signed into law by President Bill Clinton on October 28, 2000. This landmark legislation was composed of three divisions, with Division A known as the **Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA)**. The TVPA represented the first comprehensive U.S. law to address trafficking in persons, creating a three-pronged framework of **prevention, prosecution, and protection**. Its goal was to correct the inadequacies of prior laws, strengthen penalties against traffickers, and provide



explicit recognition of trafficking as a contemporary manifestation of slavery. Congress stated its purpose clearly: to combat trafficking in persons, ensure just punishment of traffickers, and protect victims, most of whom are women and children (U.S. Department of State, 2023). The Act also acknowledged that legislation prior to 2000, both in the U.S. and abroad, failed to reflect the severity of the crime. To strengthen prevention, Congress directed the President to establish international initiatives designed to reduce vulnerability to trafficking. Examples

included micro-lending programs, job training and counseling, educational initiatives, public awareness campaigns, and grants to non-governmental organizations to enhance women's social and economic opportunities in source countries (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021). The TVPA also allocated funds for research and evaluation to improve understanding of trafficking practices and their impacts.

In terms of prosecution, the TVPA worked alongside the **Immigration and Nationality Act (INA)** to broaden federal statutes addressing human trafficking. The TVPA provided the first federal definition of a "victim of trafficking" and expanded the scope of involuntary servitude beyond the limited interpretation of *United States v. Kozminski*. The INA introduced tougher penalties for crimes involving peonage, slavery, involuntary servitude, or forced labor. These offenses now carry sentences of up to 20 years, and when aggravated circumstances such as kidnapping or sexual assault are involved, penalties may extend to life imprisonment. For sex trafficking of children by force, fraud, or coercion, the maximum sentence was raised to 40 years (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021).

The TVPA also introduced a broad range of **victim protections**, marking a significant shift in federal policy. Victims of trafficking were made eligible for federal and state benefits comparable to those available to refugees, regardless of their immigration status. Through the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement, certified victims could access employment authorization, housing, healthcare, mental health services, and financial support (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024). In cases where victims were assisting in federal prosecutions, the Act also provided access to the Federal Witness Security Program.

Another major protection created under the INA was the **T visa**, which offers temporary legal status to trafficking victims who meet specific criteria. Eligible victims must demonstrate they are survivors of severe trafficking, are present in the United States as a result of trafficking, have cooperated with law enforcement when applicable, and would face extreme hardship if removed from the country.

Derivative T visas are also available for spouses, children, and—when the victim is under 21—their parents. This provision represented a major shift in U.S. immigration policy, which historically prioritized deportation without considering the coercive circumstances of victims' entry (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021).

The TVPA also mandated new roles for federal agencies. It established the **Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking**, chaired by the Secretary of State, and required the creation of the **Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons** within the State Department. The Act further required the Secretary of State, in collaboration with the Task Force, to submit the annual **Trafficking in Persons Report**, ranking foreign governments on their efforts to address trafficking. Countries that fail to meet minimum standards may face sanctions, while those making progress can receive targeted assistance (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

Since its enactment, the TVPA has been reauthorized multiple times (2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2017, and 2019), each time broadening protections for victims, enhancing law enforcement tools, and reinforcing U.S. leadership in the global fight against trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2023). Overall, the TVPA continues to represent a bold and evolving framework that addresses human trafficking domestically and internationally, ensuring that the United States maintains a comprehensive strategy grounded in prevention, prosecution, and protection.

2.3.2 Other Responses to Trafficking

Non-governmental Organizations

Numerous domestic and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have taken up the cause of trafficking in persons and are addressing the issue from multiple angles ranging from direct service to policy research.

Although few domestic NGOs have formed for the explicit purpose of serving only trafficking victims, other organizations, such as domestic violence shelters, sexual assault clinics, human rights advocates, and/or refugee services have responded

by providing various direct services to trafficking victims whom they have encountered in their work with other victim populations. These organizations may be Federally-funded, State-funded, and/or privately funded through various foundations. Local advocacy and cultural organizations designed to serve a particular ethnic group also may encounter trafficking victims in their work. Because human trafficking is a complex, multi-dimensional, and often an international crime, trafficking victims present characteristics and needs that overlap and can fit into many areas of service including immigration, legal, health, and/or mental health services. Notably, agencies in these areas vary by scope, size, specialization, and location, which affects the number of trafficking victims that any organization can serve, or the specific needs that any organization can meet. Consequently, because many service agencies specialize in one particular area, these agencies collaborate and piece services together to best meet the numerous needs of trafficking victims. Cooperation between Federal and State government agencies and the NGOs that serve this population is vital for the well-being of trafficking victims. Overall, regardless of whether or not they were formed for the explicit purpose of serving trafficking victims, many non-governmental organizations have responded to the crime of trafficking in persons by offering critical and much-needed direct services to trafficking victims.

Other NGOs that do not provide direct services to trafficking victims also play an important role in the response to the crime of trafficking in persons. These organizations may provide policy research, legislative advocacy, information dissemination, or public awareness campaigns. Efforts of these agencies combat trafficking on many of the necessary fronts that supplement direct services. For example, Vital Voices, a global partnership NGO that supports women's issues, has partnered with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to launch a global television campaign to combat human trafficking, which includes the distribution of two public service announcements (PSAs) that were released on July 31, 2003. These PSAs have aired in over 35 countries and are being distributed to broadcasters throughout the United States.

As a whole, regardless of their specific focus or mission, NGOs play an extremely important role in the response to human trafficking. Through the combined efforts of NGOs, a coordinated infrastructure of services for trafficking victims is growing in response to the crime.

Faith-Based Organizations

Faith-based organizations have mobilized to help address the trafficking in persons problem in the United States in various ways. First, two national faith-based agencies, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, administer the Federal government's resettlement program for unaccompanied refugee minors in multiple locations throughout the country.⁸⁰ The program was formed in the late 70's and early 80's and was originally intended solely for the care of unaccompanied refugee entrant minors (UR/EM). However, the program has adapted in recent years to serve trafficking victims under the age of 18. The Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) works with these two, national faith-based agencies to shelter and resettle trafficking victims who are minors. Although the incorporation of trafficking victims into these programs is a relatively new phenomenon, linkages and partnerships are in the process of forming, and these shelters now represent a new available service for trafficking victims.

In addition to administering this national resettlement program, faith-based organizations also offer a variety of social services to trafficking victims in general. Both of the aforementioned national faith-based agencies attempt to meet the needs of trafficking victims through the provision of immigration and refugee services, legal services, and services for basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Because these agencies have multiple locations throughout the country, the USCCB and the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services play a valuable and integral role in responding to the trafficking in persons on the domestic front. Other faith-based organizations, such as the Salvation Army, are beginning to work with trafficking victims by providing shelter and temporary housing services to victims of trafficking. In some locations, the Salvation Army permits its trafficking residents to

utilize other social services that the Salvation Army provides (e.g., drug and alcohol treatment, primary health care, employment services, life skills classes).

Social Service Providers

State and local social service providers also play a role in the response to the crime of trafficking in persons. For example, trafficking victims may require services from city hospitals and city and State Health Departments for numerous physical and mental health needs. As collaboration among providers increases to meet the multiple needs of trafficking victims, social service agencies offer another important resource and are often included in the overall nexus of necessary services.

As the various sectors of providers have gained more knowledge of the necessary elements of meeting the needs of trafficking victims, a concurrent recognition has occurred that no one agency can do it alone. Not only do trafficking victims present a comprehensive host of needs, but also trafficking investigations and prosecutions require the coordination of efforts from a multitude of Federal, State, and local agencies. These agencies may include law enforcement entities, government agencies, health services, mental health organizations, legal services, non-governmental organizations, shelters, and social service providers.⁸¹ In response to the need for collaboration, many major cities have formed citywide task forces or formal coalitions to address the trafficking problem in their particular locale or region. Examples of cities that have pioneered such coalitions include Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco. In addition, the Freedom Network is a national coalition of non-governmental agencies dedicated to advocating for and empowering trafficking victims. As human trafficking grows in prevalence in the United States, domestic service providers are responding with the necessary steps to build a coordinated and collaborative infrastructure of effective services that meets the comprehensive needs of trafficking victims. While no one agency can complete the task alone, service providers collaborate to help piece their existing services together in an attempt to provide trafficking victims with the unique blend of services they require.

Chapter 3. Evidence-based Mental Health Treatment

Introduction

In 2008, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services published an issue brief, entitled [*Treating the Hidden Wounds: Trauma Treatment and Mental Health Recovery for Victims of Human Trafficking*](#), which focused on the mental health needs of victims of human trafficking.^[1] This issue brief highlighted the impact of trauma on this population **and the need for trauma-informed care**. The same year, ASPE sponsored a National Symposium on the Health Needs of Human Trafficking Victims, which reiterated the complex health issues of this population and discussed the role of healthcare workers in addressing these needs. While these forums, as well as others, have served an important role in documenting the mental health needs of victims of human trafficking, questions regarding the best treatment options for this population remain. To date, limited research has been conducted to assess the impact of various mental health therapeutic treatments, hindering mental healthcare providers understanding of which therapeutic methods work best when treating this population. To begin addressing some of the questions regarding mental health treatment, this issue brief examines the evidence-based research for treating common mental health conditions experienced by victims of human trafficking.

3.1 Mental Health Needs Of Victims of Human Trafficking

A number of studies have identified the serious and often complex mental health needs of victims of human trafficking. The majority of research related to the mental health needs of this population focuses on the significant levels of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (International Organization for Migration, 2006; Pico-Alfonso, 2005; Zimmerman et al., 2006). Victims of human trafficking have often experienced, witnessed, or [been] confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of

self or others and their response to these events frequently involves intense fear, helplessness, or horror. This exposure and common reaction are two of the main criteria for PTSD (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2005, p. 467). While there is some evidence that preexisting conditions related to social supports, history, childhood experiences, personality variables, and preexisting medical disorders can factor in the diagnosis of PTSD, **exposure to trauma is the most important feature in the development of PTSD.** An official



diagnosis requires that symptoms be present for more than 1 month, before which a differential diagnosis of acute stress disorder may be made (APA, 2005). PTSD often presents itself within the first 3 months after a traumatic event; however, it can also have a delay in presentation for months or even years (APA, 2005). While both adults and children can be diagnosed with PTSD, studies have demonstrated that women tend to be more vulnerable than men to developing PTSD upon exposure to life-threatening events (Seedat, Stein, & Carey, 2005). In about half of patients, a complete recovery occurs within 3 months (APA, 2005); however, PTSD has been shown to last significantly longer in women than men (Breslau et al., 1998).

PTSD Associated Symptoms and the Percent of Trafficked Women Ranking These Symptoms as Severe	
Recurrent thoughts/memories of terrifying events	75%
Feeling as though the event is happening again	52%
Recurrent nightmares	54%
Feeling detached/withdrawn	60%
Unable to feel emotion	44%
Jumpy, easily startled	67%
Difficulty concentrating	52%
Trouble Sleeping	67%

Feeling on guard	64%
Feeling irritable, having outbursts of anger	53%
Avoiding activities that remind them of the traumatic or hurtful event	61%
Inability to remember part or most of traumatic or hurtful events	36%
Less interest in daily activities	46%
Feelings as if you didn't have a future	65%
Avoiding thoughts or feelings associated with traumatic events	58%
Sudden emotional or physical reaction when reminded of the most hurtful or traumatic events (Zimmerman et al; 2006)	65%

In addition to PTSD, victims of human trafficking have been found to suffer from other anxiety and mood disorders including panic attacks, obsessive compulsive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and major depressive disorder (Alexander, Kellogg, & Thompson, 2005; APA, 2005; Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2005; Zimmerman et al., 2006). One study found that survivors of human trafficking reported the following anxiety and depression symptoms: **nervousness or shakiness inside (91%), terror/panic spells (61%), fearfulness (85%), feeling depressed or very sad (95%), and hopelessness about the future (76%) (Zimmerman et al., 2006).**

Individuals with traumatic histories of physical and/or sexual abuse have also been found to be at increased risk for the development of dissociative disorders (International Society for the Study of Dissociation, 2004). The correlation between dissociation and human trafficking has been demonstrated through both research and the testimony of mental healthcare providers (Williamson, Dutch, & Clawson, 2008; Zimmerman, 2003). **Dissociative disorders are characterized as a disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity, or perception (APA, 2005, p. 519).** One study conducted in Europe found that 63 percent of victims of trafficking have memory loss (Zimmerman et al., 2006). Dissociative disorders can present themselves suddenly or gradually and can be either transient or chronic (APA, 2005). Some victims may simply not be able to recall certain events or details of events while

others may continue to disassociate in an effort to prepare for future threats (Zimmerman, 2003). When making a diagnosis of dissociative disorders, mental healthcare providers should assess dissociative states through a cross-cultural perspective as they are common and accepted in many societies. For example, in some societies, dissociative states such as voluntary trances are not pathological and do not cause clinically significant distress or functional impairment. Local instances of culturally normative dissociative states vary cross-culturally in terms of the behaviors exhibited during altered states, the presence or absence of dissociative sensory alterations (e.g., blindness), the various identities assumed during dissociation, and the degree of amnesia experienced following a dissociative state. By assessing dissociative states through a cross-cultural perspective, providers can identify whether individuals are undergoing culturally normative dissociative states that align with their cultural beliefs or whether they are experiencing states causing clinical distress or impairment (APA, 2005).

Substance-related disorders are often found to be co-morbid in victims of human trafficking (International Organization for Migration, 2006; Zimmerman, 2003). While a few victims of trafficking reported prior substance addictions, the majority of victims who reported alcohol and drug use said they began using after they were in their trafficking situations (Raymond et al., 2002; Zimmerman, 2003). Some victims reported using alcohol and drugs to help them deal with their situations; however, others reported being forced or coerced to use drugs or alcohol by traffickers (Raymond et al., 2002; Zimmerman, 2003).

Complex trauma, defined as a type of trauma that occurs repeatedly and cumulatively, usually over a period of time and within specific relationships and contexts (Courtois, 2008, p. 86) is receiving increasing attention in the mental health field. While this disorder is not currently incorporated into the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), mental healthcare providers, particularly those working in the field of child trauma, are advocating for its inclusion in the DSM-V (Moran, 2007). Complex trauma has been

linked to trauma endured during periods of extended captivity and has been directly associated with human trafficking (Courtois, 2008). Victims suffering from complex trauma often experience depression, anxiety, self-hatred, dissociation, substance abuse, despair, and somatic ailments. Individuals exposed to this type of trauma are also at heightened risk for self-destructive and risk-taking behaviors as well as re-victimization, and tend to experience difficulty with interpersonal and intimate relationships (Courtois, 2008). Future incorporation of this diagnosis into the DSM-V may have significant implications for the diagnosis and treatment of victims of human trafficking.

While victims of human trafficking can suffer from a range of mental health problems, the most prominent and those for which there is significant research documenting their presentation tend to be anxiety disorders, mood disorders, dissociative disorders, and substance-related disorders. While the future diagnosis of complex trauma in this population is possible, the uncertainty of its inclusion in the DSM-V prohibits extensive examination of evidence-based research regarding the treatment of this disorder.

3.2 Mental Health Treatment

Trauma-informed services are a crucial part of a victims recovery (Clawson, Salomon, & Grace, 2008). In trauma-informed care, treatment is guided by practitioners understanding of trauma and trauma-related issues that can present themselves in victims. **Trauma-informed care plays an important role in service delivery by providing a framework for accommodating the vulnerability of trauma victims.** It is not, however, designed to treat specific symptoms or syndromes (Office of Mental Health and Addiction Services, 2008). The treatment of specific mental health symptoms and syndromes requires evidence-based therapeutic and sometimes pharmacological approaches.[4]

Evidence-based mental health treatment is guided by the idea that scientific evidence should be assessed when determining and implementing treatment

options for patients (Drake et al., 2001; Howard, McMillen, & Pollio, 2003). It stresses the importance of grounding practice decisions in empirical evidence that supports specific treatment options for particular types of clients. Additionally,



services should be implemented with adherence to evidence-based methodology; otherwise, treatment can be ineffective and, in some cases, can even cause harm (Drake et al., 2001). Effective implementation requires training in therapeutic techniques. In the field, mental health practitioners engage in evidence-based practice by successfully integrating scientific findings with professional judgment and clients personal preferences (Howard, McMillen & Pollio, 2003). Non-licensed counselors

may not only lack the unique skill set required for proper treatment implementation, but they may also lack testimonial privilege in court. Therefore, victims may be re-victimized if these counselors are called upon to testify during court proceedings since these counselors may have to disclose information that the victims believed to be confidential [5] (Office for Victims of Crime, 1998).

Evidence-based practices target improved outcomes in terms of symptoms, functional status, and quality of life. Therefore, progress is not only assessed in

terms of relapse and re-hospitalization, but also positive outcomes such as independence, employment, and satisfying relationships are evaluated (Drake et al., 2001). Over the years, evidence-based practices have been shown to improve healthcare outcomes as well as conserve resources by removing unnecessary and ineffective healthcare treatment (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2003).

Hierarchical Standards for Evidence-Based Studies

1. Randomized Clinical trials
2. Quasi-experimental studies with comparison of groups not assigned through randomization
3. Open clinical trial that lack independent comparison groups
4. Clinical observation as expert opinion (generally, these should not be considered research evidence).

Although the evidence base specific to trafficking survivors remains relatively limited, it has expanded considerably in recent years, with new systematic reviews, pilot trials, and practice standards offering a clearer foundation for treatment. A 2023 realist systematic review found that psychosocial interventions tailored to survivors—delivered within survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and rights-based programs—can reduce PTSD, depression, and anxiety, especially when care is phased (stabilization, trauma processing, and reintegration) and paired with strong case management and safety planning (Mak et al., 2023). Consistent with broader PTSD guidance, first-line trauma-focused therapies such as Cognitive Processing Therapy, Prolonged Exposure, and EMDR are recommended when clinically appropriate, with careful attention to readiness, safety, and coercion-related triggers (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs & U.S. Department of Defense, 2023). Importantly, there is now randomized-trial evidence for a trafficking-specific application of **Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET)**. A 2024 evidence summary identified one RCT demonstrating NET's effectiveness for survivors of trafficking with PTSD, alongside promising findings for wrap-around models that combine

mental-health treatment with housing, legal aid, employment support, and intensive case management (Innovations for Poverty Action, 2024). Early pilot work also suggests potential benefits from trauma-informed mind-body interventions (e.g., breathwork and gentle movement) as adjuncts to trauma-focused care, though larger trials are needed (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2025).

Emerging clinical guidance stresses that many survivors present with complex trauma, polyvictimization, and moral-injury–related distress, which can blunt response to single-modality treatment if social determinants (housing instability, immigration status, safety, and economic exploitation) are not addressed in parallel (Williamson et al., 2024). Recent practice standards for anti-trafficking service providers therefore emphasize organizational trauma-informed care, survivor leadership, culturally responsive services, and cross-sector coordination with healthcare, legal, and social-service partners (Cutbush et al., 2023). In short, the best available approach remains **survivor-centered, phased, trauma-focused psychotherapy embedded within comprehensive, multi-disciplinary supports**, drawing selectively from adjacent literatures (refugees/asylum seekers, torture survivors, domestic/sexual violence) while trafficking-specific trials continue to grow (Mak et al., 2023; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs & U.S. Department of Defense, 2023; Innovations for Poverty Action, 2024).

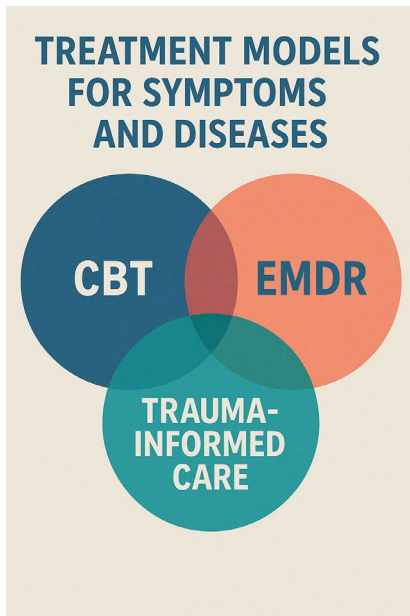
3.3 Treatment Models for Symptoms and Diseases

Processing the psychological consequences of human trafficking requires long-term, comprehensive therapy. Mental health therapy is typically based on one or more theories of psychological treatment, the most prominent being behavioral, cognitive, and psychodynamic. Behavioral therapy focuses on increasing desired behaviors and decreasing problem behaviors through environmental manipulation.

Cognitive therapy works to change behaviors and feelings by altering how patients comprehend and understand significant life experiences.

Psychodynamic therapy explains behavior and personality as being motivated by inner forces, including past experiences, inherited instincts, and biological drives,

and targets patients unconscious (APA, 2008).



Evidence-Based Therapeutic Treatment Options for PTSD

Cognitive Therapy

Aims to challenge dysfunctional thoughts based on irrational or illogical assumptions.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

Combines cognitive therapy with behavioral interventions such as exposure therapy, thought stopping, or breathing techniques.

Exposure Therapy

Aims to reduce anxiety and fear through confrontation of thoughts (imaginal exposure) or actual situations (in vivo exposure) related to the trauma.

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing

Combines general clinical practice with brief imaginal exposure and cognitive restructuring (rapid eye movement is included during the imaginal exposure and cognitive restructuring phases)

Stress inoculation Training

Combines psycho-education with anxiety management techniques such as relaxation training, breathing retraining, and thought stopping (Rauch & Cahill, 2003).

Over the years, research has found that complete psychiatric evaluations are preferable when working with victims of human trafficking. Comprehensive psychological evaluations offer mental healthcare providers a complete understanding of patients psychological needs, including those related to prior traumatic experiences and presentation of co-morbidity. Psychological evaluations can also assess patients functioning and availability of basic resources (e.g., food, shelter, clothing, income), both of which can have a significant impact on mental health as well as the benefits derived from treatment (Ursano et al., 2004). Once patients have received a full psychological evaluation, scientific literature should be examined to determine the most effective evidence-based treatment options

available for care.

Empirical evidence on the treatment of PTSD increasingly supports the use of cognitive-behavioral therapy that incorporates cognitive restructuring and exposure therapy (Rauch & Cahill, 2003; Ursano et al., 2004). Cognitive-behavioral therapy combines cognitive therapy, including cognitive restructuring, with behavioral interventions such as exposure therapy, thought stopping, and breathing techniques. When exposure therapy is introduced, patients confront their fear through progressively intense exposure to the anxiety-provoking stimuli until habituation is reached. Exposure therapy can involve imaginal exposure, with confrontation occurring through thought only, or in vivo exposure, during which patients are exposed to the actual stimuli (Rauch & Cahill, 2003). For example, medical professionals serving victims of sex trafficking cite provocative images of victims posted online during their victimization as a major factor in computer aversion (Williamson, Dutch & Clawson, 2008). Exposure therapy for computer aversion might begin by having patients imagine and work through what it would be like to simply type on a computer. The imaginal exposure would then slowly increase in intensity until patients were asked to imagine and work through what it would be like to find images of themselves online. Exposure treatment relies on patients active engagement in challenging their automatic fearful assumptions and responses through an objective assessment of what results from exposure to feared stimuli (Otto, Smits, & Reese, 2004).

In addition to cognitive-behavioral therapy that includes cognitive restructuring and exposure therapy, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing and stress inoculation training have both been found to be effective treatments for PTSD (Bradley, Greene, Russ, Dutra, & Westen, 2005; Rauch & Cahill, 2003; Ursano et al., 2004). Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing focuses on processing memories, and combines general clinical practice with brief imaginal exposure and cognitive restructuring. During the imaginal exposure and cognitive restructuring phases, mental healthcare providers induce bilateral stimulation

through rapid eye movement, [bilateral sound](#), or bilateral tactile stimulation to decrease the vividness and/or negative emotions associated with the traumatic memories. Stress inoculation training, on the other hand, combines psycho-education with anxiety management techniques such as relaxation training, breathing retraining, and thought stopping (Rauch & Cahill, 2003). Cognitive-behavioral therapy, exposure therapy, and stress inoculation training have been found to be particularly successful in preventing the development of chronic PTSD as well as speeding recovery from PTSD when used with female victims of sexual violence (Rauch & Cahill, 2003; Ursano et al., 2004).

According to the American Psychiatric Association, randomized control trials do not support the effectiveness of psychological debriefing, or applying very brief intervention shortly after traumatic events, with patients presenting symptoms of PTSD (Rauch & Cahill, 2003; Ursano et al., 2004). Psychological debriefing has actually been found to increase symptoms of PTSD in some settings (Ursano et al., 2004). While the use of psychological debriefing is not supported, early supportive intervention, psycho-education, and case management have been found to facilitate victims continued utilization of mental health services (Ursano et al., 2004).

Cognitive-behavioral therapy is also at the forefront of evidence-based treatment for other anxiety and mood disorders (McIntosh et al., 2004; Otto, Smits, & Reese, 2004; Weersing, Lyengar, Kolko, Birmaher, & Brent, 2006). While many practitioners continue to employ psychodynamic therapy, family systems intervention, or a combination of techniques from multiple theoretical practicum, the effectiveness of these treatment options lack evidence-based support at this time (Weersing, Lyengar, Kolko, Birmaher, & Brent, 2006). However, lack of evidence regarding other types of interventions does not necessarily mean they are ineffective, but rather that recommendations regarding the use of these treatment methods cannot be made based on current available research.

For individuals presenting with anxiety disorders, cognitive-behavioral therapy that combines psycho-education with exposure therapy and cognitive restructuring is especially beneficial in helping patients reevaluate automatic thoughts related to

fears so they can eliminate dysfunctional thoughts and create new frameworks for interpretation (Otto, Smits, & Reese, 2004). Cognitive-behavioral therapy, when offered by trained mental healthcare providers, has demonstrated long-term effectiveness (814 years) in patients suffering from anxiety disorders (McIntosh et al., 2004).

The most common diagnostic mood disorder among victims of human trafficking is major depressive disorder. Effective, evidence-based treatments for major depressive disorder include cognitive-behavioral therapy and interpersonal psychotherapy (Karasu, Gelenberg, Merriam, & Wang, 2000; McIntosh et al., 2004; Weersing, Lyergar, Kolko, Birmaher, & Brent, 2006). Unlike, cognitive-behavioral therapy, which targets dysfunctional thoughts while integrating behavioral interventions, interpersonal psychotherapy focuses on interpersonal relationships and the correlation between mood and interpersonal connections. **The goal of interpersonal psychotherapy is to help patients improve their mood by seeking improvements in their interpersonal relationships** (National Institute for Clinical Excellence, 2004).

Patients with substance-related disorders should be assessed to differentiate between use, misuse, abuse, and dependence. Psychotherapy, sometimes coupled with pharmacological treatment, can be an essential part of treatment of substance-related disorders. Evidence-based treatment includes cognitive-behavioral therapy, motivational enhancement therapy, behavioral therapy, 12-step facilitation, and psychodynamic/interpersonal therapy. Additionally, self-help manuals, behavioral self-control, brief interventions, case management, and group, marital, and family therapies can also benefit individuals suffering from substance use disorders (Kleber et al., 2006). Motivational enhancement therapy is a client-centered approach that induces motivation to create a personal decision and plan for change (Miller, 2003). Twelve-step facilitation programs for a variety of substances are based on the theoretical framework that willpower alone is not enough to attain sobriety and that long-term recovery involves spiritual renewal and acceptance of a higher power (Nowinski, 2003). When victims of human trafficking present with

substance-related disorders, no matter what therapeutic method is used, treatment should focus on both the trauma and the consequential issues of victims drug abuse; if treatment only focuses on the consequential issues of victims drug abuse without addressing the underlying trauma that caused the drug abuse victims will be less likely to succeed in treatment and more likely to relapse (Alexander, Kellogg & Thompson, 2005).

While significant research has been and continues to be conducted regarding the treatment of various anxiety and mood disorders, there is a more limited understanding regarding the treatment of dissociative disorders. According to the Mayo Clinic, treatment for dissociative disorders typically involves psychotherapy that incorporates various techniques, including techniques such as hypnosis, to trigger dissociative symptoms and help patients process their trauma. Treatment can include cognitive therapy as well as art therapy, where expression through art can help individuals who may have difficulty expressing themselves through words (Mayo Clinic, 2007).

In the absence of research pertaining to the mental health treatment of victims of human trafficking, mental health professionals working with this population must educate themselves on the evidence-based research related to the treatment of common diagnoses and similarly marginalized populations to ensure proper provision of the best mental health care possible. Mental health care providers should also educate themselves about effective pharmacological treatments for patients presenting with anxiety, mood, dissociative, and substance-related disorders. Some evidence suggests that selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors can effectively complement the psychotherapeutic treatment of PTSD as well as other anxiety and mood disorders (Seedat et al., 2005; Ursano et al., 2004; Weersing, Lyergar, Kolko, Birmaher, & Brent, 2006). Mental health care providers must remain up-to-date about new medications and research regarding pharmacological treatment to ensure proper coordination with psychiatrists and other medical providers, and to incorporate new scientific findings about medications.

3.4 Treating Child Victims

Child victims of human trafficking require specialized, developmentally attuned care from mental health providers. Survivors of child sexual exploitation frequently present with a range of complex psychological and behavioral concerns. Common difficulties include substance use disorders, dissociative symptoms, impulse-control problems, conduct-related difficulties, and traits associated with antisocial



behaviors. In addition, many children display significant mood and anxiety disorders—particularly posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), generalized anxiety disorder, and depression.

Obsessive–compulsive symptoms are sometimes observed, though they may be less readily apparent as youth often engage in self-medication, concealment, or other adaptive survival strategies that mask clinical presentation

(Greenbaum & Bodrick, 2017; Ottisova et al., 2023).

Research also suggests that the timing of trafficking experiences relative to developmental milestones can intensify psychological harm. **Exposure during critical periods of cognitive, social, and emotional growth may interfere with attachment formation, identity development, and executive functioning, leading to more severe long-term outcomes** (Chisolm-Straker & Stoklosa, 2021; Office for Victims of Crime, 2021). In addition, trafficked children often experience multiple forms of polyvictimization—including sexual abuse, physical violence, and chronic neglect—which compound trauma responses and increase the likelihood of complex PTSD (Ottisova et al., 2023).

Given these challenges, treatment must be trauma-informed, child-centered, and integrated across healthcare, child welfare, and educational systems. Providers are encouraged to combine evidence-based trauma therapies with case management, substance use support, and family or caregiver involvement where safe and appropriate (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2023).

Understanding posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in children has advanced substantially since its initial recognition, but important gaps remain. Unlike adults, children often present with developmentally specific symptoms—such as regressive behaviors, new-onset separation anxiety, and somatic complaints—that can complicate diagnosis (Scheeringa & Zeanah, 2018). While acute responses to trauma may involve the well-known “fight or flight” reactions, prolonged and repeated trauma without relief can lead to immobilization, dissociation, and emotional numbing as survival strategies (Perry, 2021).

Gender-related differences in response to trauma also appear in the research. Girls are at greater risk for internalizing symptoms, re-victimization, and posttraumatic depression, while boys are more likely to develop externalizing patterns, including aggression and conduct problems (Office for Victims of Crime, 2021; Williamson et al., 2024). These patterns highlight the need for treatment approaches that are both developmentally sensitive and responsive to gendered experiences of trauma.

When it comes to evidence-based treatment, controlled trials consistently support trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT) as the gold standard for children and adolescents who have experienced sexual abuse, exploitation, or trafficking (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2017; World Health Organization, 2023). TF-CBT has demonstrated strong outcomes in reducing PTSD, depression, anxiety, and behavioral difficulties in younger children, with growing evidence of effectiveness in adolescents as well. Other promising approaches include Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) and Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET), though the evidence base for children remains smaller than for adults (Ottisova et al., 2023).

Importantly, research indicates that while many children benefit from focused, time-limited therapy, a significant percentage may develop **delayed-onset symptoms** or experience long-term difficulties, particularly when trauma occurs during sensitive developmental periods (Williamson et al., 2024). This underscores the need for flexible treatment planning: interventions should not be so brief that children who present later are overlooked, nor should they be unnecessarily prolonged once recovery has been achieved. Instead, providers are encouraged to use **phased, trauma-informed care**, routine symptom monitoring, and ongoing collaboration with caregivers to ensure children receive the right intensity of support at the right time (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2023).

Clinical Vignette: “Maria”

Maria, a 14-year-old girl, was referred to a community mental health clinic by child protective services after being removed from a situation of commercial sexual exploitation. For more than a year, Maria had been trafficked by an older man who initially posed as a boyfriend. He promised her affection and stability but quickly became controlling, using violence, threats against her family, and manipulation of her phone and social media accounts to maintain power over her.

At intake, Maria presented with multiple concerns. She reported chronic nightmares, flashbacks triggered by certain music and locations, and frequent episodes of dissociation where she “zoned out” and lost track of time. She described feeling on guard most of the day, with exaggerated startle responses and difficulty sleeping. Teachers reported sudden drops in school performance, refusal to participate in group activities, and angry outbursts toward peers.

Maria also used marijuana and alcohol regularly, describing them as the only ways to “calm down and forget.” When asked about her mood, she admitted to feeling “numb most of the time” but also endorsed periods of deep sadness and hopelessness. She minimized her own suffering, often shifting the focus to concern about her younger siblings, and expressed guilt that she had “caused trouble” for her

family.

During the first few sessions, the therapist noticed that Maria struggled with trust, avoided eye contact, and often sat with her arms crossed protectively. Small gestures—offering choices about where to sit, allowing breaks, and clearly explaining what would happen in each session—gradually helped her feel safer. Psychoeducation with her foster caregivers emphasized the importance of predictable routines, patient communication, and avoiding sudden confrontations that might re-traumatize her.

Clinically, Maria met criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder, with secondary depression and substance use. A phased treatment plan was developed: stabilization through safety planning and grounding techniques; gradual introduction of trauma-focused CBT to process her experiences; and integration of supportive services, including case management, school coordination, and substance use counseling. Over time, Maria began to disclose more details of her exploitation and to explore healthier coping skills, showing early progress toward recovery.

Clinical Vignette: “Jamal”

Jamal, a 16-year-old boy, was referred to a youth residential program after a police operation uncovered a labor trafficking ring at a construction site. Jamal had been recruited from a low-income neighborhood with promises of steady pay and training. Instead, he was forced to work long hours under threat of violence, with little food or rest, and no compensation. When he tried to leave, traffickers beat him and threatened his younger siblings.

At intake, Jamal appeared guarded and irritable. He rarely spoke during the assessment, often responding with shrugs or one-word answers. Staff noted that he avoided eye contact, clenched his fists when asked about his experiences, and seemed constantly alert to noises in the hallway. Jamal denied feeling afraid but admitted to frequent headaches, stomach pain, and insomnia.

Teachers at his residential program reported frequent classroom disruptions, fights

with peers, and defiance toward authority. Jamal often described himself as “angry all the time” and dismissed offers of counseling as “pointless.” Yet privately, he admitted to flashbacks of being trapped at the work site and nightmares of traffickers returning to harm his family. He also acknowledged drinking heavily on weekends prior to placement to “knock myself out.”

Clinically, Jamal met criteria for PTSD with prominent hyperarousal and re-experiencing symptoms, along with co-occurring conduct problems and hazardous alcohol use. Providers recognized that his aggression often masked underlying fear, shame, and helplessness. Treatment began with rapport-building through consistent routines, physical activities he enjoyed (basketball, weight training), and sessions focused on stress management rather than immediate trauma disclosure.

Over time, Jamal agreed to participate in trauma-focused CBT with adaptations for older adolescents. His therapist emphasized coping strategies for anger regulation, grounding techniques for flashbacks, and gradual exploration of his traumatic experiences. Parallel case management supported his family with housing stability and safety planning, reducing Jamal’s ongoing worry about his siblings. As trust grew, Jamal began to express relief that someone believed his story, and he showed early improvements in emotional regulation and sleep.

This vignette illustrates how boys who are trafficked may present with **anger, defiance, and somatic complaints** rather than overt fear or sadness. It also highlights the importance of **trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate approaches** that avoid pathologizing aggression while addressing underlying trauma.

3.5 International Victims

Individuals ethnicity is often directly related to their world view and thus their experiences. Ethnicity can affect how individuals seek assistance, define their problems, attribute psychological difficulties, experience their unique trauma, and perceive future recovery options. Ethnicity can also directly influence patients



outlooks on their pain, expectations of mental health treatment, and beliefs regarding the best course of treatment. Many cultures do not differentiate psychological, emotional, and spiritual reactions from more physical reactions; rather, they focus on the impact of trauma on the body as a whole. Additionally, cultural factors influencing individual's beliefs about threats and response to danger can play an important role in how individuals respond to violent crimes (Office for Victims of Crime, 1998).

Healthcare providers should remember that every culture has a distinct framework or perspective about mental health and, as a result, distinct beliefs about the benefits of seeking mental health services. Counseling, in general, is a predominantly western practice and in some cultures folk healing, healing rituals, and secret societies are the commonly accepted forms of healthcare provision (Williamson, Dutch & Clawson, 2008). **Mental healthcare providers should familiarize themselves with the beliefs, values and practices of the various cultures of their patients so they are able to provide culturally competent care.**

Conclusion

Among the most devastating mental health consequences for victims of any crime can be the destruction of basic life assumptions; that one is safe from harm, one is a good and decent person, and the world is meaningful and just (Office for Victims of Crime, 1998). For victims of human trafficking, mental health problems can be compounded by the misconceptions about and limited understanding of the issue of human trafficking. Additionally, lack of social support and stigmatization by friends, family, and social institutions can exacerbate victims' mental health conditions (Office for Victims of Crime, 1998). Long-term population-specific studies are needed to provide evidence for the best treatment options to help victims of trafficking psychologically process the trauma they have experienced. However, until these studies are conducted and their results made available, mental health practitioners can base treatment options for this population on existing research findings and interventions found to be successful with other similarly victimized populations.

Chapter 4. Treating the Hidden Wounds

4.1 Study Overview

This section draws on recent studies, policy briefs, and practice reports examining how U.S. programs respond to the needs of human trafficking survivors. Since the original exploratory studies in the mid-2000s, the field has advanced in identifying barriers, developing trauma-informed services, and highlighting promising practices. While early research emphasized foreign-born women and girls, newer efforts increasingly include **domestic youth** and labor trafficking survivors, reflecting a broader understanding of trafficking in all its forms (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024; Polaris, 2025). Current priorities focus on the integration of behavioral health care, survivor leadership in program design, and evidence-based,

trauma-informed approaches across health, legal, and social service systems (Cutbush et al., 2023).



This brief addresses the trauma experienced by trafficking survivors, its profound impact on health and well-being, and challenges to meeting trauma-related needs. While trauma affects all survivor populations, this section places particular emphasis on sex trafficking of women and girls, given its prevalence and the severity of its health consequences.

4.2 Trauma and Its Impact

Recent trauma research has deepened understanding of the complex range of post-traumatic symptoms survivors may experience. Studies emphasize that the severity of symptoms is strongly linked to cumulative victimization, particularly when trauma begins in childhood and disrupts attachment relationships (Scheeringa & Zeanah, 2018; Ottisova et al., 2023). Survivors with co-occurring behavioral health conditions such as substance use disorders, depression, or eating disorders often exhibit more severe impairment, as do those with limited social supports, socioeconomic instability, or stigmatizing cultural contexts (Zimmerman & Kiss, 2022).

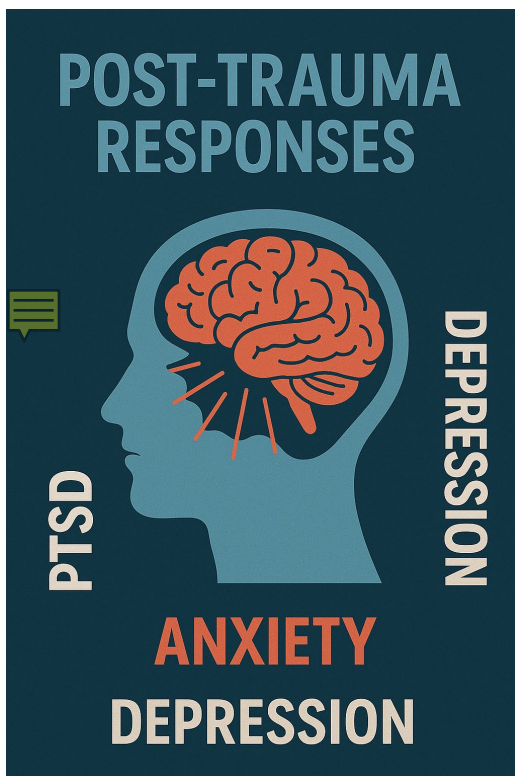


Trauma can be understood along a continuum of complexity. At one end are single-incident traumas occurring in otherwise stable circumstances (e.g., a car accident). At the other are

repeated, interpersonal traumas that carry high degrees of stigma, betrayal, and loss of safety. **Victims of human trafficking—particularly those exploited sexually—fall on this more complex end of the continuum, where trauma is layered, prolonged, and often combined with coercion, violence, and captivity** (Hopper & Gonzalez, 2018).

4.3 Post-Trauma Responses in Victims of Human Trafficking

Research consistently documents that trafficking survivors endure multiple layers of trauma, including terrorizing violence, captivity, threats of reprisal, and sometimes prior histories of abuse or displacement (Oram et al., 2021). Survivors frequently



present with **PTSD, depression, anxiety, panic disorder, substance use disorders, and eating disorders**, often with overlapping symptoms. Trafficking by someone once trusted compounds the damage by creating deep mistrust of helpers, complicating service engagement (Williamson et al., 2024).

PTSD remains one of the most prevalent conditions among survivors. Symptoms include intrusive memories (flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts), avoidance of reminders, negative alterations in mood and cognition, and hyperarousal such as exaggerated startle and concentration

problems. Without treatment, PTSD in both adults and youth tends to be chronic and impairing (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs & U.S. Department of Defense, 2023).

Trauma responses contribute to functional difficulties such as emotional

dysregulation, anger outbursts, dissociation, suicidal behaviors, and self-harm (Ottisova et al., 2023). Risk-taking behaviors, including unsafe sex or substance misuse, are frequently reported coping mechanisms. Service providers note that alcohol and drugs are often used to manage overwhelming emotional states or physical exhaustion from exploitation.

In addition to psychological consequences, trafficking survivors experience significant physical health problems. Injuries, sexually transmitted infections, and untreated chronic conditions are common. Survivors also report **stress-related somatic complaints** such as headaches, gastrointestinal pain, and fatigue (Zimmerman & Kiss, 2022). These issues directly affect survivors' ability to secure housing, employment, and reintegration supports, underscoring the need for coordinated, multi-sectoral interventions.

4.4 Challenges meeting victims

Many of the health and social needs of trafficking victims stem directly from their experience with trauma and the brutal reality of unrelenting threats or actual physical and sexual violence. Meeting these needs, in particular providing mental health treatment and trauma-informed services, is not without challenges. Service providers report the following barriers and challenges to getting victims help in dealing with their trauma.

Limited availability and access to appropriate mental health services. Issues of affordability and access to services, as well as responsiveness of those services to the complex needs of survivors, are common issues identified by service providers. Providers uniformly point to access to mental health services as a significant challenge for both international and domestic victims. For most victims, shame is seen as one of the greatest barriers preventing them from seeking mental health services. Providers note that the stigma associated with mental illness is an especially prominent challenge in engaging foreign-born and male victims in treatment.

For other victims, while providers report a willingness to seek help for physical health complaints, the underlying cause of the physical problems or symptoms - the trauma - often goes ignored and untreated.

For U.S. minor victims, barriers to accessing mental health services are linked primarily to the issues of confidentiality and concerns that someone will find out what has happened to them, lack of identification documents, lack of insurance, and system-related jurisdictional issues. For example, as one provider notes, it is often assumed that child welfare systems will provide mental health services for minors.



Requirements to report minors to child protective services, however, do not necessarily result in access to treatment. If the abuse is not inflicted by a parent or legal guardian, the case is often seen as outside the jurisdiction of the system. In such cases the minors fall through the cracks and do not receive services they need. But there are still challenges even if a youth has health insurance or is served under the child welfare system. Most providers note that referral sources for mental health treatment or counseling are limited for youth, as well as for adults. In one

community, the wait for a psychiatric referral for youth was up to seven months.

Once access to mental health or counseling services is obtained, many providers are unable to maintain the long-term treatment that many victims require. Providers report that insurance and/or funding restrictions often limit the number of sessions that a victim can receive. Furthermore, traditional therapeutic services are often ill-designed to respond to the needs of transient victim populations, in particular U.S. minor victims, who sometimes find it difficult to meet expectations for weekly appointments. Responsive mental health treatment requires considerable flexibility which may not be supported by existing systems of care. Therefore, while getting services in response to the immediate crisis is not viewed as a problem in most cases, helping a victim with long-term trauma recovery is a significant concern.

Difficulty establishing trusting relationships with victims. For both law enforcement and service providers, getting victims to trust them and accept help is a huge obstacle. They acknowledged that while building trust takes time, time is something that often worked against both law enforcement and providers. Many of the services available for victims are described as time limited. For example, both domestic violence shelters and runaway and homeless youth programs, where most counseling services are offered on-site to victims, generally provide for short stays that do not allow adequate time to establish trusting relationships needed in order for a victim to open up and begin to address their trauma. The mistrust of victims often is due to their histories of betrayal from families, service systems, and in some cases, law enforcement and governments. But in addition, a victim's mistrust is often compounded by fears that connections with law enforcement and/or service providers can compromise their physical safety (e.g., the trafficker will find them, they will be deported, or they will be sent back to an abusive home).

Mandated treatment efforts may be counterproductive when working with victims. In some communities, the only way to access mental health screening and

treatment services is to be committed to a locked treatment facility. Having already experienced the loss of control to traffickers, this can make being in locked treatment facilities or detention centers seem particularly threatening, essentially re-traumatizing victims and frustrating their recovery.

Secrecy is a trademark of the women and girls involved in sex trafficking; victims may not define their experience as abusive or attempt to escape. A complex web of coping strategies and harsh realities make it hard for some victims to seek and receive help. The shame and stigma of sex trafficking may lead them to conceal their involvement in prostitution, even in therapeutic relationships where success is dependent on frank disclosure and “working through” the trauma (Herman, 2003). In addition, if a victim does not define her experience as abusive, no matter how dangerous, she will not likely seek help or engage in recovery (Ugarte et al., 2003).

Foreign-born trafficking victims face additional barriers related to language, culture, and isolation. Lack of English skills for foreign-born victims limit their ability to access information about rights, services and options. Isolation due to these language barriers as well as cultural differences can be hard for any new immigrant but are particularly devastating for trafficking victims by reinforcing their captivity. (It should be noted that the isolation of domestic victims moved repeatedly throughout the country has some of the same effects.) Forming outside supports is critical in fighting the isolation and ultimately getting victims the help they need. Shifts in traditional Western professional treatment paradigms to more nontraditional interventions and support groups (which “recognize oppression when working with people of low economic status and low power”) have been noted as key to working with immigrant and refugee victims (Hotaling et al., 2003 p. 257).

4.5 Trauma Informed and Specific Services

Given this range of challenges, what do we know about the way systems and services can best respond to the complex and multiple needs of trafficking victims?

One especially useful framework characterizes two broad categories of service delivery: “trauma informed” services, appropriate for all systems of care in which victims may present; and “trauma specific” services, designed to treat the actual symptoms of physical or sexual abuse in specialty treatment programs (Harris & Fallot, 2001).



This framework is especially appropriate to working with trafficked women and girls since they are likely to present in a variety of systems of care for other than their trauma-related needs. Trauma informed services can promote a sensitive and relevant response regardless of where a victim seeks help, and can also improve the identification of victims. At the same time, trafficking victims are likely to need more specific and long-term

trauma treatment. The distinction between trauma informed and trauma specific services can help providers better pinpoint where their services are located on the continuum and what it might take (including training, supervision, additional program components and networking) to create a more continuous and comprehensive system for victims of human trafficking.

Trauma informed services encompass two distinctly different things. According to Harris & Fallot (2001), to be trauma informed means, **first, to “know the history of past and current abuse” in the life of your clients.** This information allows for a more integrated and appropriate approach to meeting their needs. But second, to be trauma informed **means “to understand the role that violence and victimization play in the lives of most consumers of... services and to use that understanding to design service systems that accommodate the vulnerabilities of trauma survivors and allow services to be delivered in a way that will facilitate consumer participation in treatment.”** (Harris & Fallot, 2001,

pp. 4-5)

Trauma informed services are generally developed to treat primary problems other than trauma, by building capacity within those systems of care where survivors of trauma may present (i.e., homeless shelters, substance abuse treatment programs, the criminal/juvenile justice systems, mental health programs, medical programs, etc.). Regardless of the agency or system's primary mission, trauma informed services are committed to providing services in a manner that is welcoming and appropriate to the special needs of trauma survivors. Both the identification of victims, and successful treatment of their trauma, can be improved by having trauma informed services provided in multiple systems.

Trauma specific services, on the other hand, are likely to be found with specialty mental health programs or providers, although they clearly could be developed in other medical settings, homeless shelters, or other systems of care. They are generally accessed by referral to those doing the clinical work. A variety of trauma specific techniques are in the repertoire of these services. Among them may be grounding techniques to help manage dissociative symptoms; desensitization therapies to help make painful images more tolerable; and certain behavioral therapies which teach skills for coping with posttrauma effects (Harris & Fallot, 2001). These therapies can be delivered individually or in groups, and are often augmented by other complimentary approaches, including culturally relevant material.



4.6 Core Components of Specific Trauma Informed Services

While the needs of individual trafficking victims with histories of trauma may vary considerably, the systems of care in which they are likely to present (child welfare; criminal justice; immigration; public health and behavioral health) can be better prepared to recognize their needs and help accordingly. Core components of a system of care responsive to the trauma-related needs of trafficking victims should include a set of core principles and practices based upon providers understanding that:

- ***Trauma is a defining life event*** with a complex course which can profoundly shape a victim's sense of self and others;
- ***The victim's complaints, behaviors and symptoms are coping mechanisms*** (their original sources of strength may no longer be effective), and requiring use of a relational, rather than individualized or confrontational, approach to their solution;
- ***The primary goals of services are empowerment and recovery*** (growth, mastery, and efficacy) which are prevention-driven and limited by survivor self-assessment and recovery needs; and
- ***The service relationship is collaborative***, with victim and provider having equally valuable knowledge, the victim can be an active planner and participant in services, his/her safety ensured, a priority placed on choice and self control, and trust developed over time (Harris & Fallot, 2001).

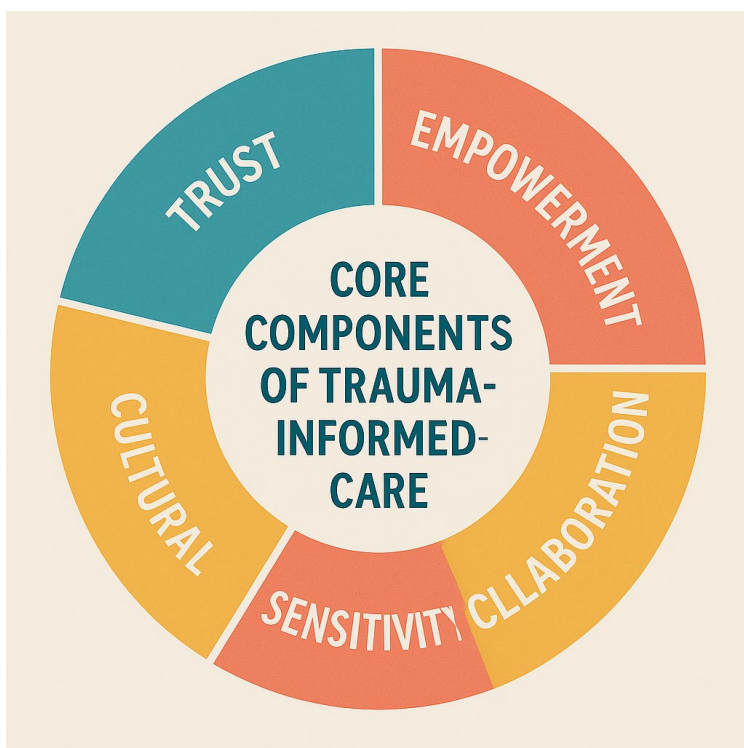
Specific core components that are based on these beliefs and practices are listed below.

Review of agency policies and procedures to identify and remove any that

are potentially unsafe and harmful to trafficking

victims with histories of trauma. Internal reviews,

using a trauma lens, can be especially helpful in identifying policies and procedures (e.g., strip searches, locked holding pens) which can be damaging to trafficking victims experiencing trauma disorders. Conversely, assessing the degree to



which policies and procedures support a welcoming and agency-wide trauma informed perspective, within an overall planning process, can help clarify an agency's needs (for staff and training) and the role it expects to play within a comprehensive network of community services.

Education and training of staff, including those working directly with trafficking victims as well as other providers in relevant systems of care.

Education of staff might include training on the complex interactions of trauma, substance use, emotional disorders and physical illness; multicultural education on specialized approaches to working with foreign-born victims; as well as basic safety issues in working with victims and approaches to treatment. Training should also include helping caregivers understand the experience of being trafficked, who is most vulnerable to trafficking, the techniques traffickers use to recruit victims, the impact on victims, and what a path to recovery can look like.

Screening for trauma in multiple settings. Identification is the first and necessary step in assuring victims get the help they need. In some cases, providers may be reluctant to ask sensitive questions early on in the relationship building process;

however, not raising those questions at all can be more detrimental. For victims of sex trafficking, culturally sensitive screening that incorporates multiple references to sexual abuse has been considered beneficial in reframing the abuse and shifting responsibility to the perpetrators (Ugarte et al., 2003). Staff who conduct these screening will need adequate skills, supervision, and supports.

Ensuring safety and meeting basic service needs. Establishing physical and psychological safety is considered a pre-requisite in working with trafficking victims with trauma histories. This may mean collaboratively assessing the current level of client safety and developing together plans to remain safe. It can also mean designing each component of service to prioritize safety. For example, an outreach and engagement activity under this rubric would prioritize safety and control by explicitly seeking permission to speak with a victim, asking about the amount of privacy he/she might want for an initial conversation, and following his/her lead on disclosure. Safety can also mean collaborating with a clinician who is respectful and nonjudgmental, and allows the victim to explore his/her history in a safe and containing way. In addition and complementary to safety, providers emphasize several basic services that are critical components to comprehensively meeting the needs of individuals who have experienced trauma, including safe housing, life skills, health care, legal services, and vocational supports (Finkelstein et al., 2004). Developing multidisciplinary collaborative networks of programs across systems of care can help facilitate comprehensively addressing multiple needs.

Building long-term, sustaining relationships and providing opportunities for regaining valued social roles. A critical part of trauma recovery and building new lives for trafficking victims involves the development of trusting, long-term relationships. This often needs to occur well before a victim is willing to engage in trauma specific treatment. These relationships are developed in some programs with “care coordinators” who assist with identifying and helping to meet a victim’s basic needs. Care coordinators are sometimes the link (through gentle and respectful suggestion) between basic services and mental health

treatment, where needed. Other programs, working especially with immigrant women, emphasize relationship building through more natural and culturally familiar supports, including home visits, sharing a meal, etc. Helping victims connect with valued social roles, such as providing opportunities for peer leadership and community action are also noted by trafficking survivors and providers as opportunities to regain or reshape a victim's sense of self and capabilities.

Access to trauma specific treatment services. In addition to the trauma informed strategies outlined above, providers working with trauma survivors must have access to a range of trauma specific interventions, including individual clinicians willing, available and culturally competent to work with victims of human trafficking, as well as groups designed to meet their often multiple treatment needs. Cognitive Behavioral Therapies have been most studied and therefore have the largest evidence-base supporting their effectiveness in reducing PTSD symptoms (Feeny et al., 2004; Foa and Rothbaum, 1998). In addition, evolving traumatheory specific to complex trauma emphasizes that treatment should address developmental and relationship difficulties in addition to PTSD symptoms (Pearlman & Courtois, 2005).

Several treatment approaches have been developed for complex trauma specific to adolescents, using group therapy to address skills development, affect regulation, interpersonal connections and competence and resiliency building. These interventions all emphasize the relationship between symptoms and the traumatic experience, the development of concrete coping skills in managing symptoms, and the use of peer support groups to increase normalization, build healthy interpersonal relationship skills, and establish social supports (Cook et al., 2005). One program for sexually exploited teens emphasizes the importance that youth make the connection between their physical symptoms and mental health. Weaving mental health into other strategies, like art or music therapy, appear especially promising.

Providers also need to understand and assess the role that culture plays in resiliency and the importance of community resources as potentially mediating the trauma experience, especially for foreign-born victims. Individually-focused Western

conceptualizations of trauma may miss the potential strengths inherent in culture and community to enhance engagement in healthy relationships and promote recovery (Tsoi Hoshmand, 2007; ArgentiPullen, 2000; Burstow, 2003; Summerfield, 2004).

Making peer models and supports available. Given the challenges for trafficking victims in developing trusting relationships with professionals, there was wide acceptance among providers that successful programs need to incorporate peer-to-peer counseling and supports among their core components. Particularly for victims of human trafficking, where shame promotes secrecy, individuals can be most comfortable with peers who understand, and have lived, their own struggles. Both service providers and victims highlight the critical importance of non-judgmental, empathic peer support that allows trauma victims to successfully make the transition to a new life. Furthermore, peer led services can reduce or remove the cultural and language barriers that can get in the way of successful recovery. Structured peer support additionally offers the opportunity for survivors to “develop a new identity as a valued and responsible member of a community.” (Herman, 2003 p.11).

More and more programs for victims of human trafficking are starting to engage survivors in programming. This includes peer counsels assisting in program decision-making and peers providing group-mentoring/support to current clients. Peers are often individuals who graduated from the program. Interviews with survivors suggest that, when they are ready, involving them in the care of others can be beneficial to both the survivor and the victims they work with. Other programs have formed “communities” of survivors to serve as peer groups to assist other victims in rebuilding their sense of personal efficacy. Part of the success of these groups involves allowing the victims to set the agenda for meetings and focus on what is most important to them; which have included computer training, language classes, ethnic celebrations, and writing plays about their experiences.

Developing alternatives to traditional therapies. Alternatives to traditional therapies, especially those that build self-esteem, empowerment, and re-connection

with self, are considered important adjunct services for this population. Art therapy, journaling, poetry and song writing, yoga, body work, drama, and outdoor physical activities are some examples of this strategy. Given the difficulty some victims have with self-soothing (an impact of trauma), it is not surprising that several programs use music as part of their therapy. Some programs report offering organized religious or spiritual activities to help victims connect to something that will last beyond the program timeframe. For several of the youth programs, engaging victims in decision making, providing leadership opportunities, and helping youth develop valued social roles is part of therapy. For adults, programs offered acupuncture, meditation, and a variety of other alternatives to traditional therapy within their agencies.

Summary

Victims of human trafficking are especially vulnerable to the debilitating physical and psychological symptoms of trauma resulting from their repeated, intrusive, and long-term abuse. Providers working with this population, in particular with sexually exploited women and girls, emphasize that trauma recovery is critical to a victim's ability to repair and regain her life. However, there are many challenges to meeting the trauma-related needs of trafficking victims, especially since a comprehensive approach, which includes building basic supports and safety as well as treatment, often crosses multiple systems of care. Building trauma-informed and trauma-specific services offers the promise of identifying and responding to victims where they present (i.e., in other than the mental health system) with services that cover the spectrum of their needs. Building long-term, trusting relationships is at the heart of this work, which requires time and flexible models of engagement and treatment, including peer-to-peer work. In addition to group and individual trauma-specific counseling, a range of alternative therapies offer promise in helping victims build self-esteem, empowerment and re-connection with themselves and society. For foreign-born victims, promising models that recognize the limitations of individualized Western treatment and the healing potential of culture and community resources show promise.

Chapter 5: Faith-Based Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking

In 2014, Pope Francis joined with 11 other religious leaders representing the Muslim, Jewish, Orthodox, Anglican, Buddhist, and Hindu faiths to commit to work together and within their respective communities to inspire spiritual and practical action to help eradicate human trafficking worldwide. In a historic step, these religious leaders of the world's major religions gathered and proclaimed in unison that their sacred texts do not support human trafficking.

As perhaps this momentous occasion demonstrated, faith-based communities, organizations, and congregations are powerful and necessary forces in the fight against human trafficking. Unlike governments, faith-based organizations are not limited by jurisdiction, election cycles, or political will. Nor are faith communities hemmed in by borders. By contrast, faith-based organizations serve in many different cities, provinces, and countries. They reach across international borders, spanning continents with a powerful network of followers with tremendous reach – from remote villages to capital cities and the seats of power. This unique nongovernmental reach allows faith-based organizations a flexibility that governments cannot exercise.



Faith-based organizations are well-positioned by their familiarity with local threats, their stake in keeping their communities safe, **and their ability to develop context, build trust, establish relationships, and provide protection before a trafficker ever acts.** They can issue calls to action that cut across borders, cultures, ethnicities, and economic classes.

Faith-based efforts to combat human trafficking take many forms and operate in different ways, adapting to a particular context or sector, or to the culture of the communities and countries in which they serve. Some of the entities involved have raised awareness, made concrete commitments, established networks, or developed tools and guidance to help eradicate human trafficking, as well as assisted with the reintegration of survivors in their community. The following are but a few examples of faith-based anti-trafficking efforts.

The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) based in the United States uses a multi-faith approach from a different angle. A coalition of more than

300 global institutional investors with more than \$500 billion in managed assets, it uses the power of shareholder advocacy to engage companies to identify, mitigate, and address social and environmental risks associated with corporate operations, including human trafficking. ICCR members call on companies they hold to adopt policies banning human trafficking as a key part of their core business policies, and to train their personnel and suppliers to safeguard against these risks throughout their supply chains. ICCR's Statement of *Principles & Recommended Practices for Confronting Human Trafficking & Modern Slavery* provides guidance to companies to protect their supply chains from sex and labor trafficking.

In **Senegal**, religious leaders and local authorities in several municipalities are engaged in efforts to reduce and eradicate forced child begging. Forced child begging is one of the main forms of trafficking found in Senegal, where children, commonly known as talibés have been forced to beg in the streets as part of their studies in Quranic schools, called daaras. While the majority are Senegalese, many of these children also come from neighboring countries in West Africa such as **The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, and Mali**. Over the past few years, the government has increased its engagement with religious leaders from all of Senegal's five dominant religious brotherhoods and the national federation of Quranic teachers to raise concerns regarding forced begging and secure their commitments to end this practice in its current form. With support from the international community, some targeted projects have sought to raise awareness and sensitize local authorities and religious leaders on the issue of forced child begging. One such project conducted over the past few years by UNODC is also facilitating the creation of local associations of Quranic teachers and is working with prominent leaders to raise awareness during radio programs, clearly stating that forced child begging is child trafficking and is against Islamic principles. As a result, several Quranic schools have committed to no longer send their children to beg, and the National Federation of Quranic Teachers is working with the Ministry of Family and Child Protection to push for the adoption of the Daara Modernization Law by the National Assembly. While much more needs to be done given the size of the problem, these faith-based efforts are nonetheless very promising. UNODC also

published a paper in 2010, titled Combating Trafficking in Persons in Accordance with the Principles of Islamic Law.

Talitha Kum (or the International Network of Consecrated Life Against Trafficking in Persons), is a project based in Rome, Italy, and founded in 2009 by the International Union of Superiors General, in collaboration with the Union of Superiors General. It functions as a network of networks to connect women religious in more than 92 countries to facilitate collaboration and the exchange of experiences and to help strengthen efforts to combat human trafficking. Network members work with local communities to raise awareness and recognize the indicators of human trafficking, advocate for the effective implementation of existing laws, and work closely with victims to provide them with guidance and support, including access to shelters, safe houses, counseling and legal assistance, and vocational training. In the Mediterranean region, a priority area of Talitha Kum, women of Christian and Muslim faith are working together against human trafficking.

T'ruah is a nonprofit organization bringing together more than 2,000 rabbis and cantors, together with all members of the Jewish community, to act on the Jewish imperative to respect and protect the human rights of all people. A leader in the Jewish community's fight against modern slavery, T'ruah has partnered since 2011 with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) to expand the Fair Food Program, bringing human rights and higher wages to farmworkers in Florida and up the East Coast and eliminating the root causes of human trafficking in the tomato industry. More than 100 of T'ruah's "#tomatorabbis" have led broader faith efforts to support CIW, bringing their communities to join farmworker campaigns, sharing sermons and other faith resources, and putting tomatoes on their Seder plates each Passover in honor of the farmworkers who picked them. In 2018, T'ruah was the first Jewish organization to join the Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking.

Finally, there are a number of resources, such as UNICEF's Interfaith Toolkit to End Trafficking, to help educate faith leaders and faith-based organizations on the issue of human trafficking and to empower them with the resources they need to take action in a way that prevents further harm to victims.

Organizations called by their faith to help address human trafficking can play an important role both locally and around the world. Given their unique reach, they are well positioned to inspire spiritual and practical action to help respond to and prevent human trafficking.

Chapter 6: Human Trafficking of Athletes

Many people around the world dream of becoming professional athletes, drawn by the fame, multi-million-dollar contracts, lucrative brand sponsorships, and opportunities to travel around the world. The growing number of young players aspiring to become professional athletes and the potential to sign the next greatest deal inevitably draws human traffickers looking to profit from the exploitation of players' dreams. The often-insufficient oversight by sport governing bodies and lack of government enforcement further allows unscrupulous agents to operate.

Most often, sports agents approach poor or rural families with an offer to arrange for a child to train at a street-side academy, sports club, or school, with the promise of signing the child with a professional team. Many of these families will do whatever it takes to meet the agent's price. In cases where the agent does arrange for the children's admittance and travel to a club or school, typically for a fee of thousands of dollars, the children often find themselves in situations that increase their vulnerability to predatory behaviors. **Some unscrupulous agents immediately abandon the children while in transit or after arrival at the destination.** Other agents, who are actually traffickers, have a longer-term scheme, where they vie to establish themselves within young athletes' circle of trust and instill a sense of dependency as early as possible. If players fail to advance to the next level in the sport, the agent abandons them without means to return home. If abandoned abroad, players often remain in the country undocumented not knowing how to contact family and

friends or too afraid to do so because of a strong sense of shame and self-blame. This lack of resources, guidance, and social support increases their vulnerability to traffickers.

For players offered a position on a team, the traffickers posing as agents have already established a relationship with the athlete and are well-positioned to control the course of the athlete's career. In numerous cases, the traffickers have compelled or tricked athletes into signing exploitative contracts with major kickback schemes that bind the athletes to the agent. These agents often maintain control of athletes' travel and identity documents to prevent them from leaving, or they exploit a debt amassed from previous fees or interest on loans to keep the athlete in a state of debt-



based coercion. For the athletes who have dedicated their lives to sign a contract, the fear of losing the opportunity by questioning the terms of that contract or their so-called agent can be insurmountable. Once the contract is signed, the trafficker finally has the control needed to extort as much as possible from the athlete. Even after becoming more established, athletes may feel it is too risky to challenge the terms of a contract or seek other representation out of fear their situation would cause shame, ruin their reputation, or jeopardize their future.

While traffickers tend to target children and youth, they also approach young adults. In these instances, traffickers follow the same plan of signing an exploitative contract if the player is selected or abandonment upon failure. In either scenario,

the player is at heightened risk of human trafficking. When legal migration avenues to countries with premier leagues are difficult or do not exist, the draw of a trafficker's promise of success is even more compelling.

A number of human trafficking cases in sports have been reported by news outlets and in documentaries. Within Europe's soccer industry alone, it is estimated there are 15,000 human trafficking victims each year. The migration patterns vary by sport, but the exploitative scheme of recruiting, building trust and dependency, and taking control upon a job offer is universal. The confluence of athletes' desire to play, their families' hopes of escaping poverty, agents' desire to profit, leagues' interest in marketing competitive players and games, and teams' eagerness to find young talent all create an environment that, if left unregulated, could be ripe for traffickers to exploit.

Yet neither governments nor international sports federations or national sports leagues have successfully addressed the growing incidence of human trafficking of athletes. As professional sports leagues have become increasingly globalized, multilateral and regional bodies have started incorporating protection of athletes in sports integrity and anticorruption initiatives; however, government and industry efforts to regulate an expanding web of migration and recruitment routes have proven insufficient. Though some national sports associations and individual government officials have taken interest in addressing the exploitation of athletes, the global nature of the sports industry and decentralized structure of many associations and leagues calls for a more systematic and standardized approach. Greater pressure on teams and their scouts is needed to conduct more due diligence on the agents they work with to ensure their talent acquisition is free of exploitation. While sports federations have precautions and safeguards in place against unwarranted interference from external parties, governments should acknowledge when their national sport leagues or associations in their country are not adequately protecting athletes and investigate cases where agents violate anti-trafficking and labor statutes.

Governments could consider: increasing coordination between their youth or child services programs and their sports programs; training consular officers on common indicators or schemes traffickers use within student or sports visas programs; and pursuing partnerships or dialogues with sports agencies and leagues to begin to address this form of human trafficking, such as through nationwide public awareness initiatives.

Enforcement of these regulations proved challenging. Some associations refused to work only with licensed agents (estimates claimed licensed agents comprised only 25 to 30 percent of active agents); some agents and clubs failed to report transactions at all; and discrepancies proliferated between countries' national regulations on recruitment. To address these shortcomings, FIFA released a new set of regulations in 2015 that decentralized monitoring of agents, who previously had needed to pass an exam and register with a national governing body. The new regulations also empowered member associations to establish their own criteria and registration system for any intermediary representing players or clubs in employment contract and transfer agreement negotiations. Deregulation of the recruitment industry and a decline in transparency and accountability resulted in an increase in the number of intermediaries. The 2015 regulations also removed limits on the duration of representation contracts, which opened the door to young players unwittingly binding themselves to long-term representation with a certain agent and losing their ability to leave a job. To mitigate some of these consequences, FIFA established a task force to recommend regulatory changes for intermediaries, including a potential return to a central licensing system through FIFA and creation of a clearing house to process payments associated with player transfers, such as agent commissions. Such a move could improve oversight of an industry that has resisted regulation despite being linked to crimes, including human trafficking.

Chapter 7: Trafficking for Forced Labor; The Economy of Coercion

Trafficking for the purpose of forced labor cannot be analyzed as a single form of trafficking, as it includes a variety of different methods of exploitation, victim profiles and economic sectors. This form of trafficking is characterized by its infiltration in the legal economy and its possible interaction with daily life. Victims can be trafficked in sectors that are part of a population's ordinary consumption, such as food production, construction and textile manufacturing. Traffickers involved in this form of exploitation may not necessarily work underground in illicit markets, but instead may be associated with officially registered companies or operate in a broader informal economic system where working conditions resort to exploitative practices to increase profits.

Trafficking for the purpose of forced labor accounts for about 38 per cent of the total trafficking cases detected globally in 2018. Some regions of the world, namely Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, detect more cases of trafficking for forced labor than other types of trafficking.

Globally, the majority of detected victims trafficked for forced labor are adult men. Meanwhile, adult women account for about one fourth, while children account for more than one third of detected victims (15 per cent are girls and 21 per cent are boys). However, it is important to note that there are regional differences that affect these figures.

Sub-Saharan African countries mainly detect girls and boys trafficked for this purpose. Children, especially girls, also represent the main profile identified as trafficked for forced labor in Central America and the Caribbean. Adult women represent the main profile of detected victims trafficked for forced labor in North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. European countries mainly report adult men among detected victims of trafficking for forced labor.

The sex and age profiles of detected victims of trafficking for forced labor is connected to the types of employment where victims are exploited. Each sector

presents different trafficking patterns, in terms of victim profile or type of organization of traffickers. It is difficult to provide an exhaustive list of all forms of labour activities where victims have been detected.

About 70 of the 489 court cases collected by UNODC for this Report concern trafficking for forced labour, involving about 900 victims exploited in 11 different types of work, including domestic work, car washing, textile production and street trading, among others. These cases represent only a limited set of examples, as the literature points to many other types of forced labour.

However, these examples reveal important dynamics of how different economic sectors present distinct exploitative patterns in terms of victim profile differing by type of industry.

On average, one case of trafficking for forced labour typically involves about 14 victims. Meanwhile, the average number of victims is six for sexual exploitation and around four for other forms of exploitation. The average number of victims, however, changes according to the economic sector.

Cases of domestic servitude are characterized by a lower number of victims, most of them adult women, and in some cases, children, both girls and boys. While only two cases reported to UNODC concerned trafficking in the fishing industry, they involved a large number of victims, mostly adult men. Groups of adult men are also commonly exploited in construction work. Meanwhile, other forms of exploitation typically target children, and only a few at a time, such as is generally the case for trafficking for street trading.

Another emerging pattern is that, in comparison to other forms of exploitation, this form of trafficking seems to be more frequently detected as a cross-border phenomenon rather than a domestic one. Most of the court cases of trafficking for forced labour analysed for this Report referred to episodes of cross-border trafficking – a much greater figure than for trafficking for sexual exploitation and for other forms of exploitation.

Although the number of cases considered is limited, the analysis of the cases suggests that, as a pattern, trafficking for the purpose of forced labour is closely connected with labour migration, particularly in high income countries.

7.1 Different profiles trafficked in different economic sectors



The following sections describe patterns of trafficking in selected economic sectors. Labor activities were selected on the basis of the reported relevance of these types of trafficking globally. Thus, the patterns of trafficking of victims in the following sectors were selected: domestic work, agriculture, construction and the fishing industry. Trafficking patterns recorded in these industries differ significantly from each other and may help to represent the wide variety of characteristics registered

in trafficking for forced labor. Regarding other forms not included, while not lower in importance or severity, limited literature was found and/or the phenomenon was only reported in certain regions, making the potential for analysis more limited.

7.1.2 Domestic Work

The preamble to the 2011 International Labor Organization Domestic Workers Convention (no. 189) describes domestic work²⁰⁹ as “undervalued” and “invisible.” The Convention also notes how this type of work is normally conducted by members of disadvantaged communities particularly “discriminated” against in terms of working conditions. These sections explain how domestic work presents particular risks to workers becoming victims of human trafficking.

Domestic work is a significant industry globally. In 2013, it was estimated that about 67 million domestic workers were employed worldwide, and of these, 11.5 million of them (about 8 per cent) were migrant workers.²¹⁰ Yet, this may very well be an underrepresentation of the size of this economic sector. Domestic work takes place inside private homes²¹¹ and, in some cases, is carried out by undocumented migrants.²¹² As with other migrants with undocumented status, domestic workers remain, to a large extent, under the radar of labour inspection. These factors expose such workers, especially if they are migrants, to human trafficking.

Trafficking for the purpose of domestic servitude has been documented in all regions: from Europe to the Middle East, from the Americas to Africa and Asia.

Trafficking for domestic servitude primarily affects women. The vast majority of domestic workers around the world are female (80 per cent), which also explains why most detected victims of trafficking for domestic servitude are adult women. Further, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), **88 per cent** of the victims trafficked for domestic servitude included in the Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC) database are females.

Individual countries’ data on the detected victims of trafficking in persons confirms

that both in high- and low-income countries, most detected victims of trafficking for domestic servitude are females, largely adult women, though there are with larger proportions of girls in some countries and regions.

In terms of the nature of the trafficking itself, one pattern in particular appears to characterize trafficking for the purpose of domestic servitude: extremely high levels of violence, abuse and exploitation at the hands of persons not typically considered as “professional” criminals but rather as members of the household where the victim is employed and exploited.

While all forms of trafficking are frequently physically and/or psychologically violent (see section The means used by traffickers: tools of control), the analysis of the court cases examined for this Report, as well as the literature, suggest that victims of domestic servitude are exposed to severe levels of sexual, physical and psychological abuse that is rarely seen in other – albeit still tragic – forms of trafficking.

The Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons reports that victims of domestic servitude may experience food deprivation, beatings with electrical wires or scalding with hot water.²²⁰ Court cases report victims were constantly abused by those who employ them. For example, one case recorded that members of the household were *“hitting on victim’s mouth with a stone pestle, hitting victim with a hot iron on her face, hitting victim’s mouth with a milk bottle...pushing victim’s body and forehead to a door frame ... The victim’s nipples were also pinched and hit, and hot water was also poured on her chest....”* This type of violence is frequently combined with harassment, psychological abuse, sexual assaults and rape by the males of the households.

According to the IOM CTDC database, about 15 per cent of the victims of trafficking for the purpose of domestic servitude are exposed to sexual abuse,²²⁴ constituting a much higher likelihood of such abuse than those exploited in agriculture (3 per cent), construction (1 per cent) or manufacturing (6 per cent). According to fieldwork conducted in the European Union, more than 25 per cent of domestic workers, not necessarily victims of trafficking, reported being sexually

harassed. Overall, domestic workers reported sexual harassment more often than female workers in other sectors.

One factor that may contribute to the incidence of violence and sexual abuse in domestic work is the unique situation of cohabitation with the employer. Such a situation exacerbates the level of dependency and may result in an increased level of intimacy among the people living under the same roof. Cohabitation also can result in the isolation of domestic workers, often to the extreme of complete segregation.

As a result, the combination of these elements makes trafficking for domestic servitude a crime in some instances more similar to domestic and gender-based violence rather than to a typical form of organized criminal activity.

7.1.3 Trafficking in Agriculture

Agriculture employs 28 per cent of the total labor force globally and about 60 per cent in low income countries. It is an economic sector characterized by a high level of informal employment, and those employed in this sector are typically paid less compared to other workers. These factors make working in agriculture less attractive to a prospective worker than other sectors. **In general, those employed in this sector often have few opportunities to choose other forms of employment, thus resulting in an increased vulnerability to trafficking.**

The pervasiveness of trafficking in persons in this sector has been documented in all parts of the world and in varying types of agricultural operations, including large plantations in Africa and in South-East Asia, farms in North America, different types of croplands in Latin America and for the seasonal harvest of fruits, berries and vegetables in Europe. Moreover, the victim profile is also quite diverse. Victims of trafficking in persons in this economic sector are males and females, both adults and children.

Furthermore, the modus operandi of the traffickers accordingly also is varied. Victims are trafficked and exploited in groups or individually. Similarly, there is not a specific pattern in the trafficker profile. There are cases where a single victim is trafficked by

relatives, for example, to harvest lettuce and other vegetables. In other cases, trafficking victims are exploited in groups, on large farms or in large-scale agricultural production facilities. The Netherlands reported, for example, a case where a registered company and its managers were convicted for recruiting and exploiting migrants for mushroom picking. Similarly, Israel reported a case where a company and three additional defendants were indicted for trafficking of foreign nationals to be exploited in agriculture. Trafficking in the agriculture sector has also been documented involving more socially structured criminal organizations.

Additionally, there is a range of means used by traffickers to exploit victims, spanning the spectrum from blunt explicit violence and isolation to less violent, but equally coercive, threats of being reported to the authorities for being irregular migrants.

7.1.4 Trafficking in the construction industry

Compared to other economic sectors, the number of people employed in the construction industry is limited but expanding. This expansion is particularly marked in lower-middle income countries, where the share of employment in the construction industry has tripled in less than 30 years. Over the same period, this share has doubled in low-income countries and increased by 30 per cent in upper-middle income countries. This shows a rather sudden increased demand for construction workers, frequently filled by low-skilled and migrant workers. This form of employment is characterized by a lower level of mechanization compared to manufacturing and is generally more dangerous than others. More people die while working in the construction sector than in any other economic activity.

Furthermore, the employment in this sector is often of a short term and of a project-based nature. Due to these characteristics, low-skilled national and migrant workers with few employment alternatives are structural facets of this industry. Working in the construction sector traditionally is a male dominated activity and therefore, data and literature.

Court cases of trafficking in the construction sector collected for this Report describe a form of trafficking characterized by victims primarily exploited in groups by organized actors.

Canadian authorities, for instance, reported a case of a criminal group engaged in trafficking victims from Central Europe to work on construction sites in Canada. Victims were recruited by means of deception and, once at destination, they were deprived of documents and subjected to exploitation. Traffickers were organized in a group characterized by family ties and operated in the origin and destination countries. The traffickers convicted were typically subcontracted to supply victims to construction sites in need of workers.

Subcontracting is an important characteristic of employment in construction work. Yet, the practice can be flagged as a potential risk factor for human trafficking. When due diligence screenings of contractors are not implemented, subcontracting to “firms” whose main business is to supply cheap, non-unionized, flexible labour can open the gates to systematic exploitative practices.

As the construction industry continues to expand globally, the prevalence of this form of trafficking may continue to grow.

7.1.5 Fishing industry and Trafficking

The global consumption of fish has been steadily increasing over the last 70 years, the result of both the growing world population and corresponding fish consumption per capita. Similarly, over the last few years, the world has recorded an increase in the market price of fish. Therefore, the overall business in this industry has increased. In addition, the fishing industry has diversified as it has expanded. Over the last 15 years, the industry has been introduced to new sources of supply with advances in aquaculture production, or the farming of aquatic organisms. Old-fashioned capture production is more labor intensive than modern aquaculture. Yet, capture production continues to be prevalent, and people employed in the most

labor-intensive sector of the industry are concentrated in Asia and Africa. The African continent records a high share of non-motorized vessels (about 77 per cent, as opposed to 35 per cent in Asia), suggesting African production is even more labor-intensive than in other parts of the world.

Some features put this industry at risk for human trafficking: workers are typically underpaid, working under hazardous conditions, with rampant informal employment present.

A structural factor exacerbating the exposure of workers to trafficking is overfishing. The increasing consumption of fish, although compensated by aquaculture, has led to the depletion of fish stocks in traditional fishing areas. Faced with the scarcity of fish along the coastlines, over the last decade, fishing vessels have started working further out in waters away from shore, in order to locate more abundant fish stocks.²⁶¹ Distant captures require crews to stay prolonged periods at open sea, increasing costs for a catch while reducing the possibilities of labor or police inspections. Overall, these factors have favored the use of trafficking victims in this sector. Trafficking in persons for forced labor in the fishing industry has been widely documented all over the world. As discussed previously, given the specific geography of this industry, most reports and studies of trafficking in the fishing industry are recorded in Asia²⁶⁴ and Africa, and to lesser extent in other regions.

According to a study by IOM and Indonesian authorities, 10 per cent of all inspections recorded in vessels operating in Indonesian waters reported violations of trafficking in persons and forced labor in 2016. A 2018 ILO study conducted in South-East Asia reported that 24 per cent of fishermen interviewed had experienced their pay being withheld and 34 per cent reported having had their documents taken by employers.²⁶⁷ Other studies estimate that 33 per cent of seafood workers in Asia's principal processing region have been trafficked.

There is no clear information on the sex of victims of trafficking exploited in this economic sector. The vast majority (86 per cent) of people employed in fish capture are males, which explains why most studies on trafficking in this industry refer to male victims. In some rural communities, however, girls are exploited in other parts

of the industry, such as mending nets, but not in the capture phase. Most identified victims, as with many other forms of trafficking for forced labour, are migrant workers.

Victims are typically exploited in large groups by organized actors, including officially licensed companies. Court cases and literature refer to crews exploited for years with no pay by companies operating in international waters.²⁷³ Some investigations highlight how the levels of organization of certain groups can be very sophisticated, including utilizing a country's systemic corruption along with the use of supply ships to exchange the catch for food, water and fuel in order to keep the crew permanently at sea and fraudulent documentation to mask the true identity of trafficked migrants.²⁷⁴ According to these cases, thousands of fishery workers have been documented to have been recruited in a variety of different countries in South-East Asia and operating in distant waters up to the African coasts.

In addition, there are also cases of victims exploited in smaller fishing vessels by unregulated operators active along the coastlines.²⁷⁶ Patterns of children trafficked in small numbers in the context of local fishing communities are also reported. In these cases, children are exploited in rudimentary wooden rowing boats, most of which have no motors.

Whether victims are exploited by large companies or by local fish suppliers, it appears that, like in other industries, recruiting agencies and intermediaries between the labour supply and demand sides play a role. Large investigative cases resulting in the detection of thousands of victims identify the role of recruitment companies supplying crews from different parts of the world to the fishing companies that then exploit them. Similarly, children in rural communities in Africa are also recruited by intermediaries who provide money to the child's parent to supply these children to fishermen. As the fishing industry continues to grow and diversify, victims may be exploited in different ways and in different areas in the global fishing supply chain. Yet, it is likely that traffickers will continue to rely on the very nature of fishing and its remoteness in the world's oceans to exploit victims, in particular migrants.

7.2 Risk Factors

Investigating patterns and vulnerabilities in trafficking for forced labor is extremely complex given its multi-dimensional nature that cuts across criminal activities, social norms, labor relations and the macroeconomic dynamics of different economic sectors.

Some elements that may contribute to the incidence of trafficking in persons for forced labor emerge from the analysis presented above. These elements include workers' individual vulnerabilities, such as being an undocumented migrant or lacking alternatives for income generation, as well as structural dynamics connected with the working environment itself, such as being low paid, labor intensive, short-term and/or dangerous. Further, some factors relate to the labor market, such as the presence of recruitment agencies or a limited labor supply. However, one element in particular seems to be a common pattern recorded in different forms of trafficking for forced labor: the drastically asymmetric relationship between employer and employee, resulting in a lack of realistic alternatives for workers other than to accept risky job offers and remain in exploitative labor situations.

7.2.1 Lack of alternatives to exploitative wages, excessive working hours and few or no rights

Overall, trafficking for forced labor is more frequently detected in those countries characterized by low salaries, longer working hours and high informal employment. Workers in informal employment are often not unionized and are invisible to existing systems of labor protections. In general, those in informal employment typically work more and are paid less than workers doing the same job in formal employment. For these workers, the informal nature of their job may include the absence of social security coverage, annual paid leave or paid sick leave, employment contracts as well as a lack of awareness or choice to not comply with the requests of the employer. Not everyone in informal employment is a victim of trafficking, of course, but informality is a context that is more prone to exploitation. Furthermore, the World

Bank has assessed that the Pandemic recession will greatly and negatively impact those surviving in informal employment, raising additional concerns over the exacerbated effect of COVID-19 on trafficking in persons. One element of importance is that, while victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are normally promised a job unrelated to sexual activities, victims of trafficking for forced labor are more frequently deceived about the working conditions, but not about the nature of the job, which is a likely indicator of low salaries or dangerous activities. Yet, their intrinsic vulnerability makes them accept these risky choices.

7.2.2 Out of sight; confined in remote areas with few or no inspections

Traffickers can avoid labor regulations by segregating their victims in remote areas or in private apartments. The “invisibility” of some sectors, such as domestic work, fish capture in open sea, agriculture or mining in remote areas where workers have no contact with the rest of the community, facilitates exploitative practices. In the absence of labor inspections, law enforcement and social control, trafficking goes unpunished more easily and traffickers may operate relatively freely with impunity.

The most evident case of hidden labor is domestic work. According to the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants regarding domestic workers, “Many migrant women work as domestic workers. However, labor inspections are not carried out in private households. That leaves domestic workers unprotected and therefore vulnerable to abuse and exploitation”. This is confirmed by field studies indicating inspections as being virtually non-existent in the domestic work sector. What makes combatting trafficking particularly challenging in domestic work is that victims are segregated from the rest of the community, forced to live in the same location where their exploitation takes place. In the same way, similar situations have been reported for people trafficked to work in restaurants and garment “sweatshops.”

Working in remote areas increases the risk of exploitative conditions. Ukraine, for example, reported a case of trafficking where victims were trafficked from South Asia to be exploited in stone processing. Further compounding their situation was the fact that they were living and working in the production plant in a remote

province. Such isolation and thus increased risk of being exploited, sometimes for years, is also commonly the case in the fishing industry, as discussed previously.

Similarly, people trafficked in agriculture can often be found in remote rural areas. In a case reported in the European Union, for example, a group of migrant workers from Eastern Europe were exploited on a remote farm, far from any populated areas with no access to transportation and relying entirely on their exploiters for basic supplies. This pattern emerges in several European countries, where migrants trafficked in the agriculture sector are found to live in rudimentary accommodation close to the fields and isolated from local communities. Moreover, spatial segregation in slums and abandoned farmhouses facilitates the concealment of the victims' living and working conditions and reduces the risks of intervention by authorities. The same methods are reported for trafficking of workers in the mining sector. As mining often takes place in remote areas where law enforcement and social control is weak, the resulting conditions create immense opportunities for traffickers to exploit children and adults in the extraction of minerals and metals.

The involvement and control of national authorities in an area can also play a significant role in traffickers' ability to act with impunity. Avoiding the risks of being overseen by national authorities can be achieved in any location if law enforcement and labor inspectors' controls are limited, corrupted or focus on migration status rather than labor standards. Authorities' lack of controls over employers facilitates the perpetration of exploitative practices against employees.

Qualitative research conducted in the European Union showed that 132 out of 237 workers participating in the study had not witnessed nor heard of inspections at the workplace. Almost none of those employed as domestic workers witnessed inspections, nor the majority of those working in construction or catering. Those who had witnessed labor inspections perceived them to not have been properly conducted. There are indications that labor inspections are generally reducing in number. Despite the increases in working populations or national GDPs, reduction in the number of labor inspections is a trend recorded in 31 countries from a total of 62 where information was available.

7.2.3 Migration and precarious legal status

People can also be exploited in plain sight, **especially when they are marginalized, discriminated against and/ or are afraid of being reported because they have an irregular migration status.** Particularly in wealthy countries, trafficking for forced labor is more commonly identified among migrants than national citizens. Traffickers abuse different vulnerabilities of migrants, starting with the fact migrants may not always have a regular status to work or legal permission to stay in the country of exploitation.

According to official data on 71 cases of trafficking for forced labor prosecuted in Argentina between 2009 and 2013, about 70 per cent of the 516 victims were foreigners, and 56 per cent of them were in a precarious legal situation, such as experiences of illegal entry into the country (26 per cent). From the investigations in these cases, it emerges that traffickers use this irregular status to exploit victims. Similarly, research conducted in the European Union among irregular migrants shows that residence status is perceived as the most important factor contributing to labor exploitation.

Traffickers typically threaten to report victims to migration authorities if they do not comply with exploitative working conditions. In a court case provided by Israel, the persons convicted for trafficking restricted the movement of a domestic worker, warning her she could be arrested if she left the house as she did not have her travel documents in order. Many countries report similar cases. The fear of being returned to their country of origin may discourage migrants with irregular residence status from seeking support or justice, even in extremely exploitative situations. As with many forms of trafficking, labour traffickers may be involved in facilitating the irregular migration of the victims. This typically happens on the basis of a debt these victims have to pay back to cover the costs for being smuggled into the country.³¹¹ Charging migration fees is not only practiced by migrant smugglers, but also widely used in regular migration processes and by officially registered companies. Many migrant workers fall victim to debt bondage when they take on an initial debt for the migration journey as part of the terms of a regular registered employment contract.

In some instances, the fees charged for regular migration are more expensive than those for irregular migration.

Linking labour contracts and migration status makes migrant workers bound to their employer. In some countries of the Middle East, for example, migrant workers are not allowed to leave the country without the employer's permission. The employer can legally withhold the passport of the employee until the migration debt is paid.

Similarly, studies conducted in Europe highlight the risk of immigration policies that tie a residence permit to a specific employment contract. These policies can result in leaving the worker with no choice other than to accept exploitative working conditions in order to renew legal residence or legalise status. For example, Norway reported a case involving three Indian migrants trafficked to work as cooks in a restaurant. The victims had residence permits allowing them only to work in that specific restaurant. This created a complete dependency of the victims on the employer, who abused this power by coercing the victims into exploitative conditions. In an interesting distinction, the court ruled that a fourth person, an Afghan man with irregular status, also exploited with the three Indians, did not constitute trafficking for forced labour in lieu of the fact as he was not bound to remain with the same employer. Yet, migration status is not the only risk factor that may expose a worker to labour exploitation. Migrants are also targeted because they are generally unfamiliar with their labour rights, are unaware of available support mechanisms³¹⁸ and/or are unable to understand the language of the countries where they are exploited.³¹⁹ Further compounding the issue, studies have shown that law enforcement or labour inspectors may not always be so keen in protecting migrants' rights due to widespread discrimination by the community or state authorities of the countries where they have settled.

7.2.4 Lack of due diligence; intermediation, sub-contracting and involvement of legal companies

As reported above, migrant workers often rely on some form of intermediation in order to access the labour market abroad. This normally implies a cost that the migrant is bound to pay back, such as a reduction in the agreed upon salary.

Recruitment fees applied by intermediaries may cover the acquisition of an employer/employee, travel and immigration documents, transportation, housing and other possible services. Recruitment agencies have been reported to charge a worker up to the equivalent of four months' salary along certain migration routes, but in some cases, these costs may amount to up to 11 months' salary for the worker. Recruitment agencies sometimes induce people to believe that it will be easy for them to repay the debt based on the salaries promised in destination countries, but this is often not the case.

As a matter of fact, this debt is a burden for the migrant worker who is forced to give up most of the salary that was promised, turning this recruitment mechanism into a debt bondage scheme resulting in trafficking in persons. Furthermore, in South-East Asia, a study reports about 65 per cent of those migrant workers who had to pay a recruitment fee saw their identification document withheld by their employer.

While some recruitment companies are officially registered, others are not. Dealing with an officially registered recruitment/intermediation agency, however, does not necessarily mean there are no risks of trafficking involved. Indonesian authorities, for example, reported the case of a registered worker placement company whose owner and affiliates were convicted for trafficking in persons. In this case, the recruitment company recruited a large number of people to be "dispatched" or "sold" to other licensed recruitment/placement companies located in different East Asian countries. Workers were recruited, "stocked" in compounds, segregated and forced to pay their recruitment debts to these companies before being released and sent to work abroad.

The role of agents in the recruitment and exploitation of the victims is documented in all economic sectors and in all regions. For example, employment agencies operating between Asia and the Middle East are reportedly involved in the recruitment of domestic workers to be placed with middle- and high-income households. These companies typically charge employers for their services, and then in turn, employers charge the workers to pay back this cost. Documents are withheld and the migrant is not allowed to leave the employer until this recruitment

fee is paid back. In some cases, the employment agencies have active roles in the trafficking by threatening the domestic worker and discouraging them to report to national authorities.

Cases of trafficking where licensed recruitment or placement companies were involved or complicit with the exploitation of victims were reported also in agriculture.³³⁰ Many agricultural and other economic activities require an expanded labour force during certain periods of the production cycle, and thus the use of intermediaries facilitates a flexible labour supply.

Recruitment or placement agencies, whether legal or illegal, often have the power to intercept salaries paid by the company where workers are placed. In these cases, the exploitation scheme is operated by the intermediary and not by the employer at the workplace.

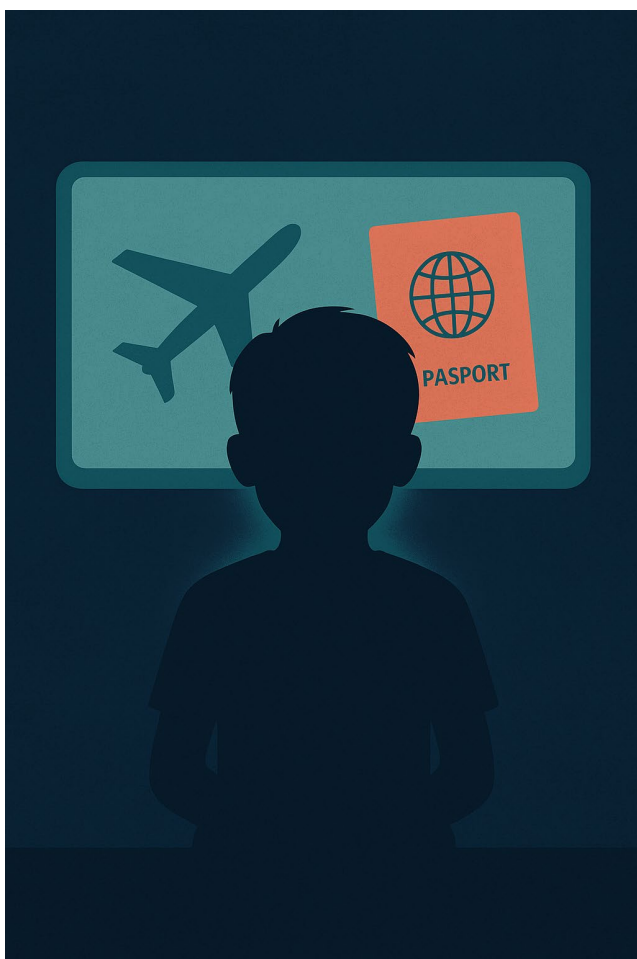
Belgian authorities, for example, reported a trafficking case where Eastern European trafficking victims were recruited by service providers in the cleaning sector. These workers were 'sublet' to clean toilets in petrol stations through a legal service contract. Petrol stations paid the agency providing the cleaning service. The workers, meanwhile, were segregated and threatened, with their payments retained. Authorities estimated the trafficking group made profits of up to 1.3 million euros during three years of activity. Similar cases were reported in different regions and economic sectors.

Outsourcing the labour force is a flexible form of labour arrangement that allows employers to adapt to the volatility of the markets.³³⁵ When labour is outsourced, however, there is no direct contractual link between the contractor and the workers, and the contractor has no responsibility for the working conditions of their employment. This often results in opacity and fragmentation of responsibilities, where it is unclear who is accountable for the labour conditions of the worker. These contexts become susceptible to trafficking practices under the guise of a legitimate business.

The same principle applies when the supply chain is externalised and delocalised.

Manufacturing corporations that import final or semi-final products from other companies located in other countries where labour costs are lower and where there is less enforcement may involuntarily become accomplices to trafficking for forced labour. While legal and well-reputed corporations may apply proper labour standards, those supplying services downstream may not.³³⁸ This mechanism is how trafficking in persons may infiltrate the globalized legal economy.

Chapter 8: Extraterritorial Commercial Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: Evolving Information and Improving Responses



Extraterritorial child sexual exploitation and abuse occurs when perpetrators engage in sex acts with children, or produce child sexual abuse material, outside their country of citizenship. Extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse concerns child sex trafficking, specifically when a perpetrator travels to another country and engages in a commercial sex act with a child.

Historically, these types of crimes were referred to as “child sex tourism.” **Today, the anti- trafficking community is moving away from using that term in favor of the**

terms “extraterritorial child sexual exploitation and abuse” and

“extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse.” These emphasize the significant harm inflicted on children without referencing the perpetrator’s reason for being in the foreign country.

Indeed, while some perpetrators may be in the foreign country for tourism, others may be volunteers or expatriates who have permanently moved abroad. Some perpetrators may access children through relationships to families overseas, and others use the appearance of being in a position of trust to gain unsupervised access to children. Still other perpetrators are “situational abusers” who do not travel specifically to commit child sexual exploitation and abuse, but take advantage of an opportunity if it arises.

International travel has increased to historic levels as it has become more accessible and inexpensive. Some countries are attractive destinations for perpetrators who take advantage of weak rule of law, poverty, or the opportunity to engage in “voluntourism.” A relatively new form of extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse involves the use of livestreaming, chat, and payment platforms. Perpetrators send an electronic payment to a person in another country who then livestreams the sexual abuse of a child in that country back to the “customer.”

Per the reauthorization of the TVPA in 2008, the TIP Report has assessed governments’ efforts to prevent the participation in extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse by their nationals. In the 2019 TIP Report, at least 53 country narratives cited concerns or reported cases of foreign perpetrators committing this type of child sexual exploitation and abuse in their country or of their nationals engaging in the crime abroad. For example, some countries report that foreign perpetrators commit extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse in their country by offering to pay for children’s school fees or financially support orphanages to gain access to children.

The Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to end the Exploitation of Children Today (PROTECT) Act, enacted in 2003, broadened the United States’ ability to address extraterritorial child sexual exploitation and abuse by making it a crime for

U.S. nationals to travel abroad and engage in illicit sexual conduct with children, including child sex trafficking. Currently, the U.S. Angel Watch Center seeks to identify individuals previously convicted of child sexual exploitation or abuse offenses, including child sex trafficking, who intend to travel abroad. The Angel Watch Center uses publicly available sex offender registry information and passenger travel data to strategically alert foreign law enforcement of a convicted child sex offender's intent to travel to their country. With that notification, foreign law enforcement officials can choose whether to allow entry into their country. In FY 2019, the U.S. government provided 3,564 notifications to 127 countries.

While actions, policies, and laws have increasingly addressed this crime, all governments must do more to implement frameworks and take action to bring an end to extraterritorial child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Chapter 9: Children: The Easy Target

Source: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_15jan_web.pdf

Globally, one in every three victims detected is a child. Patterns about the age profile of the victims, however, appear to change drastically across different regions.

Countries in West Africa, South Asia and Central America and the Caribbean typically present a much higher share of children among total victims detected.

More broadly, differences in the age composition of detected victims appear to be related to the income level of the country of detection. **The detection of children accounts for a significantly higher proportion in low-income countries when compared to high income countries.** As such, wealthier countries tend to detect more adults than children among the trafficking victims.

These differences could be the result of varying criminal justice focuses in different parts of the world. At the same time, however, they may reflect different trafficking patterns according to countries' socio-economic conditions.

This chapter provides an overview of the dynamics related to the trafficking of children. The first section discusses the main forms of child trafficking, namely trafficking for forced labour and trafficking for sexual exploitation. The second section focuses on risk factors connected with child trafficking.

9.1 Different forms of child trafficking in different parts of the world

The characteristics of child trafficking and its underlying drivers seem to differ according to geographical and social contexts. Trafficked children detected in low income countries are more likely to be exploited in forced labour; this is particularly the case for Sub-Saharan African countries. Conversely, children detected in high income countries are more frequently trafficked for sexual exploitation. Thus, it can be concluded that the nature of child trafficking in low-income countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, seems to be part of the broader phenomenon of child labour. In high-income countries, it is more related to child sexual exploitation.

9.1.2 Children trafficked for forced labour The phenomenon of child labour is conceptually different than child trafficking for forced labour or children in exploitative situations.¹⁴⁰ These two phenomena, however, appear to be interrelated and have similar determinants. Countries where children account for a larger share of the trafficking victims detected are also countries where child labour is more prevalent. This trend is particularly relevant for West Africa.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the African continent records the largest prevalence of children (between 5 and 17 years of age) in labour.¹⁴² The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimates confirm this geographical pattern. Some countries in West Africa are estimated to have more than 40 per cent of the total population aged between 5 and 17 engaged in child labour.

The interlinkages between child trafficking and child labour are illustrated in field

research conducted in West Africa, where child labour has been found to possibly deteriorate into children working in exploitative situations. One study in Burkina Faso documented how a significant share of children working in goldmining sites are not paid (14 per cent) or only provided with food and lodging (16 per cent), suggesting that exploitative practices and trafficking are part of these working sites where child labour is employed.¹⁴³ About half of those who were paid barely managed to cover food and lodging, while only one third of them managed to support their families.¹⁴⁴ In one case reported by Cote d'Ivoire, for example, authorities identified more than 30 children working on one cocoa plantation site. After assessing each individual case, authorities determined that about one third of these children were victims of trafficking.

Broad cultural acceptance of the participation of children in the labour market can serve as a fertile ground for traffickers seeking children to exploit in labour activities. It is easier to exploit children in areas where communities are accustomed to sending children to work than in communities where child labour is generally not an acceptable practice. In such settings, child trafficking victims may be hidden in plain sight.

In some socio-economic contexts, trafficking of children may occur on a community scale, often involving family members. Families in dire need may encourage their children to work and children may feel the pressure to economically contribute to the family, leaving them vulnerable to exploitative practices.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, cases have been documented of children trafficked to work on different types of plantations, in mines and quarries, on farms (i.e. les enfants bouvier), as well as being forced to sell different products in markets and on the streets or to engage in domestic work (i.e. vidomegon). In South Asia, it has been documented that children as young as years of age are trafficked for forced labour in domestic work, brick kilns, small hotels, the garment industry or agriculture. Child trafficking cases have also been reported on South American plantation.

There are no precise statistics on the age range of children trafficked for forced labour in general. Studies on children working in agriculture in South Asia indicate that one quarter of these children start to work between the ages of six and nine. In West Africa, children trafficked for domestic labour are mainly females, with younger



girls often doing childcare and older girls responsible for cooking. Even in hazardous work settings, such as mines and quarries, some children may begin to learn the skills at the age of six or seven, while doing support functions for the adults they accompany to the mining site. Younger children are normally involved in lighter activities, such as sorting or washing of the material extracted. Older children are tasked with digging and going down into the holes. Deciding whether a boy is strong enough to become a digger depends on the child's physical strength and so, the age can vary. Girls also work around these sites,

usually carrying materials above ground.

9.1.3 Trafficking for sexual exploitation of children

Child victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation (mainly girls) are identified in every part of the world, but largely concentrated in Central America and the Caribbean and East Asia.

As with trafficking for forced labour, countries with lower GDP per capita typically detect more children than adults among detected victims of sexual exploitation compared to countries that record a higher GDP per capita. This is confirmed even among countries parts of the same subregion. The age profile of the victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation changes according to the national income.

Among children, girls aged between 14 and 17 years old appear to be particularly targeted. This age pattern seems to be part of broader patterns of sexual and gender-based violence that results in teenage girls also being particularly targeted as victims of other crimes, from bullying to sexual violence and murder. Girls' risk of death as a result of violence increases from early to late adolescence and the first incident of sexual violence occurs most often between the ages of 15 and 19.

9.2 Risks factors for and drivers of child trafficking

The profile of victims of child trafficking is often characterized by many intersecting vulnerabilities. The risks related to their young age are compounded by the socio-economic dimensions discussed earlier (see Chapter 2 – The impact of socio-economic factors on victims' experiences and the risks of the COVID-19 Recession), as well as other factors particularly relevant to children, such as behavioural and developmental needs, lack of parental care and/or dysfunctional families. Some studies in Central America, for example, suggest that domestic violence and other forms of violence against women and children, as well as discrimination against ethnic minorities, potentially increase the risk of girls becoming victims of trafficking.

A child victim's vulnerabilities are often connected to the child's family background. In extremely poor communities, socioeconomic context and cultural norms appear to play an important role in the trafficking of children. However, even in high income countries, children are vulnerable to traffickers too. This is particularly true among children experiencing dysfunctional parenting or with no parental care, as well as

those living in poorer communities.

9.2.1 Families' coping mechanisms may place children at risk of trafficking

Child trafficking in West Africa is often connected with the practice of parents sending children for employment outside of the household¹⁶⁸. Similar findings emerge from studies in Latin America¹⁶⁹ and South Asia.¹⁷⁰ These practices are not trafficking per se, and in general they may not be harmful to children, but they can represent a significant risk factor for children to be trafficked into forced labour.

The practice of sending children to work is generally reported as a coping mechanism for families to survive in conditions of extreme poverty. According to a seminal study on the drivers of child labour, “parents withdraw their children from the labour force as soon as they can afford to do so” and “a family will send the children to the labour market only if the family’s income from non-child labour sources drops very low.” This practice could easily deteriorate into child trafficking. A study on children trafficked for forced labour in brick kilns in South Asia, for example, refers to farm debts compelling families to send their children for work as one of the risk factors for child trafficking.

When looking at high-income countries, the share of detected children trafficked for forced labour is limited. While these countries do not record significant levels of child labour, the few cases of reported child trafficking for forced labour are characterized by a context of extreme economic need for these children and their families.

Early marriage is a practice that is rooted in some cultures and may sometimes be regarded as a family survival strategy. This practice constitutes trafficking when the girl is married off in return for some economic or other material benefit. In some communities these practices are the results of bride-price arrangements between families.

Child trafficking for forced marriage is heavily dependent on the household’s income as it can be perceived as a way to generate income and assets, while reducing the

costs associated with raising a daughter. In South Sudan, for example, it has been documented how this practice is more common in periods of drought and economic hardship. Similarly, in South Asia it has been documented how this practice is more pronounced after natural disasters like floods.

Another practice that has been found to affect the risk of child trafficking is the sending of boys, and in some limited cases, girls, to residential religious schools. In North and West Africa¹⁸¹, some child trafficking for the purpose of forced begging have been linked to this practice. Cases of religious teachers (called marabouts or mallams) forcing students (referred to as talibe or almajiris) to beg have been reported by international organizations. There are several reasons behind this widespread and complex phenomenon. Many studies indicate the need of poor households to provide some form of education, pressure on some of the boys to send additional money to their families, and the demand among families for some education for their children.

Although significantly more rarely reported than for children in forced labour or forced marriages, child trafficking for sexual exploitation may also be related to some form of tradition or cultural norms. Some families, under the ancient customs in South Asia, such as the Devadasi, the Joginis and others, maintain the tradition of forcing girls into sexual exploitation. These girls are not only trafficked within their communities but also in the large urban areas of the country. Yet, the extremely poor socioeconomic context of the communities remains one of the main drivers behind the persistence of this form of sexual exploitation.

9.2.2 Children on their own

Court cases collected by UNODC include examples of traffickers targeting children who had no parental care. The absence of a family is particularly prevalent in the cases of children trafficked for sexual exploitation, but also reported in cases of trafficking for begging¹⁸⁸ and forced criminal activity.

Some court cases in European countries reveal that traffickers specifically targeted “girls who had lived in orphanages”. Similarly, a study on trafficking in persons in Sri

Lanka indicated that traffickers target children deprived of parental care for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The absence of a family also has an economic connotation as these children have find a way to survive on their own. In a court case reported by the Dominican Republic, for instance, authorities reported a girl without parents, living in extreme poverty with no fixed home, as an easy target for a trafficker who sexually exploited her. Homeless children are present in many urban areas of the world struggling on the streets, sometimes in a trafficking-like situation. Traffickers may target street children for sexual exploitation or forced criminal activity in exchange for food, clothing, shelter, or other basic survival needs.

A study conducted on children in a situation of homelessness in Juba, South Sudan reported that about 3,000 children living in the streets either on their own or with caregivers were unable to financially meet their basic needs. Among these, researchers identified large numbers of children who were victims of sexual exploitation, forced labour and/or trafficking.

Field studies conducted in West Africa revealed the situation of some boys and girls, mostly teenagers, trafficked into sexual exploitation to cover basic needs for food and for a place to sleep. Between 13 and 28 percent of these children experienced the death of their parents, and between 30 and 80 per cent were not living with their parents.

Children deprived of parental care in migratory situations face the same risks. Unaccompanied and separated children migrating, often along irregular migration routes, are exposed to traffickers, both along the route and upon arrival in transit and destination countries.

9.2.3 Dysfunctional families and behavioural disorders

While the absence of a family is a risk factor for child trafficking, children being raised with dysfunctional parenting may also present a vulnerability easily exploited by traffickers. The literature and court files show cases of parents or siblings being directly involved in the trafficking of children.¹⁹⁸ Cases of child trafficking at the hands of the parents are reported in different parts of the world and for different forms of exploitation, though, mostly, these cases involve sexual exploitation. In

these cases, parents procure children directly to buyers for sexual intercourse in return for a payment. Field studies conducted in West Africa, for example, show that up to 35 per cent of children in sexual exploitation have a parent organizing their exploitation. Other than sexual exploitation, cases where parents are found to be involved in the trafficking of their children range in form of exploitation, including exploitative begging, forced marriage and child sexual abuse imagery (pornography).

When children are not trafficked by their parents, they may still be easily targeted by traffickers as a result of a dysfunctional family. Literature reports children with family problems at home were recruited for the purpose of sexual exploitation and for forced criminal activity. In these cases, traffickers appear to create some attachment with or sense of belonging for the victim.

The need to be part of a group seems to be one significant factor in attracting children to be recruited or deceived by the trafficker. For example, in the so-called “county lines” cases in the United Kingdom, traffickers target children of separated parents or those looked after by social services, including those with behavioural or developmental disorders. Trafficked children, as well as victims emotionally attached to their traffickers, can also be incited to use drugs or alcohol, thereby increasing the control the traffickers have over them.

Chapter 10: Reengineering Health Care for Survivors of Human Trafficking

Internationally, experts recognize both the short- and long-term health consequences as well as the public health burden of human trafficking. Indeed, the Palermo Protocol encourages states to provide medical and psychological assistance to survivors of human trafficking.

Medical and behavioral health professionals already caring for populations at high risk for human trafficking are incorporating training on human trafficking to enhance prevention and quality of care. Health care providers are also learning to use



trauma-informed, survivor-informed, and culturally and linguistically appropriate services to build trust, strengthen screening, provide improved quality medical care, and reduce the risk of retraumatization. In addition, hospital networks have integrated responses to human trafficking into other health care violence prevention efforts. Public and private health care institutions, universities, and community organizations have been developing innovative partnerships and practices to provide specialized and comprehensive health care to survivors.

Here are some suggested promising practices that can be followed:

- » Provide trauma-informed care by understanding, respecting, and appropriately responding to how human trafficking and other types of trauma affect a survivor's life, behavior, and sense of themselves.
- » Clinics should aim to provide a safe environment for survivors in which all staff are

trained on survivor engagement, acknowledge their rights and responsibilities, and disclose confidentiality and reporting policies.

» The presence of a trafficker can affect the patient's ability to speak openly with medical professionals, so providers should have procedures in place to separate a patient from a potential trafficker.

» If needed for language purposes, the provider should use a professional interpreter trained to interpret information appropriately, and without judgment, to ensure information is accurate and non-stigmatizing when applicable.

» Clinics should be aware of ways medical care can re-traumatize a survivor, such as through invasive procedures, removal of clothing, embarrassing or distressing personal questions, the gender of the health care provider, and the power dynamics of the doctor/patient relationship.

- Empower patients by discussing informed consent, making it clear that clinical services are voluntary, and clarifying that patients have the right to accept or decline care recommendations. Treatment for survivors should support agency, healing, and recovery, and not simply impose a treatment.

- Understand that survivors of trafficking may require additional wraparound services. Health care providers should be prepared to refer survivors to a network of resources to support non-medical needs, such as food, shelter, money management, and legal aid.

- Survivors come from all national, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. To treat survivors, providers should provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services by accounting not just for interpretation/translation challenges, but also varying communication styles, expectations of health care, power dynamics, and levels of trust. As human trafficking can take place domestically or transnationally, providers should account for the survivor's unique geographic background.

- Provide a comprehensive health assessment whenever possible and

with the survivor's consent. Ensure the survivor receives comprehensive information in advance of an exam or treatment plan.

» There should be clarity as to what will be done with the patient's health record and who will have access to it.

» As this may be the only time a survivor sees a medical professional, provision of a baseline-level of health assessment can be critical.

» Extra time should be allocated to examine the medical issues identified by the patient.

Finally, national ministries of health can help build the capacity of health care services to respond to human trafficking. For example, they can provide funding to support the provision of medical services to victims of human trafficking. They can also promote standard operating procedures for health officials, develop formal guidance on victim identification and assistance, and offer online or other forms of training for health, behavioral health, public health, and social work professionals.

In the United States, an increasing number of medical centers and NGOs are recognizing the value of providing specialized care to survivors of trafficking and training for those who work with them:

- In Florida, the Traffickin Health care Resources and Interdisciplinary Victim Services and Education (THRIVE) Clinic at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine provides the resources of a world-class research hospital to trafficking survivors across the Southeast. The clinic recognizes that human trafficking can be both a physical and psychological trauma, and it seeks to reduce the risk of retraumatization by minimizing waiting times (especially in waiting rooms with strangers), having a single site of care across all specialists, and taking a single health history.

- Dignity Health Systems, in California, strives to ensure all medical and professional staff receive training to approach survivor care consistently in a

survivor-informed manner. An evidence-based universal education model helps empower survivors through opportunities to share their experiences while building trust with providers. Dignity Health developed the PEARR Tool in consultation with survivors and community organizations to train medical professionals to provide privacy, educate, ask, respect, and respond to survivor's needs.

Chapter 11: Traffickers Use of the Internet: The Hunting Fields

Source: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_15jan_web.pdf

As the world continues to transform digitally, internet technologies are increasingly being used for the facilitation of trafficking in persons. With the rise of new technologies, some traffickers have adapted their modus operandi for cyberspace by integrating technology and taking advantage of digital platforms to advertise, recruit and exploit victims.

Everyday digital platforms are used by traffickers to advertise deceptive job offers and to market exploitative services to potential paying customers. Victims are recruited through social media, with traffickers taking advantage of publicly available personal information and the anonymity of online spaces to contact victims. Patterns of exploitation have been transformed by digital platforms, as webcams and livestreams have created new forms of exploitation and reduced the need for transportation and transfer of victims.

With the help of the internet, traffickers have learnt to adapt their strategies to effectively target specific victims, by actively 'hunting' those who they deem as vulnerable to falling victim to trafficking, or passively 'fishing' for potential victims by posting advertisements and waiting for potential victims to respond.

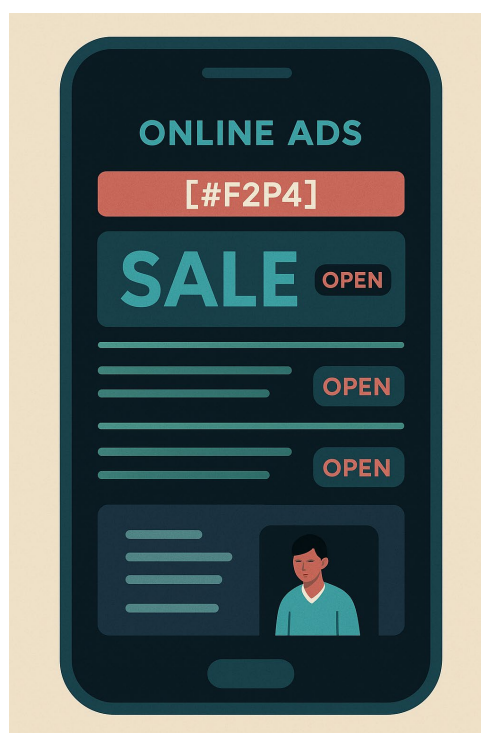
To analyze these new emerging patterns, UNODC has gathered the narratives of 79 court cases of trafficking containing an element of internet technology. Some of these cases were directly collected by UNODC to produce the Global Report. Others were collected from the UNODC Case Law Database, Sherlock, to expand

the information at the base of this analysis.

The following chapter presents an analysis of the collected court cases, illustrating how internet technologies are applied by traffickers to perpetrate their crimes in the digital age.

11.1 Digital platforms and markets: The use of technology to advertise, recruit and exploit

Among the cases collected by UNODC for this thematic chapter, the first which reports the use of internet dates to 2004. This case described how traffickers used a free-standing webpage to promote sexual services and to connect with interested consumers in a tourist destination. Nowadays, internet-based trafficking has become increasingly varied; spanning from simple setups of advertising victims online, to traffickers' use of communications platforms to broadcast exploitation abroad, to interacting with potential victims or transferring money between trafficking group members. There have been cases of traffickers who have coerced victims into establishing rapport with customers in chat rooms monitored by the traffickers, and there is ample evidence of the



growth of child sexual abuse material online of which some is related to trafficking in persons. Traffickers have coerced their victims into forced crime, forced labour or have used internet technologies to advertise the selling of organs, such as kidneys harvested from impoverished individuals.

11.1.1 Advertisement

Through the internet, traffickers easily gain access to an increased pool of customers, particularly sex buyers. One court case is particularly illustrative: a

single trafficker, working alone, managed to sexually exploit and connect one victim with over 100 sex buyers over a period of 60 days using online advertisement.

Traffickers increasingly use internet technologies to advertise the services resulting from their victims' exploitation. Examples of advertisements used to exploit victims include

those on classified listing sites, such as Backpage³⁴⁷ and similar, or on social media platforms and applications (apps). From the 79 court cases selected for this chapter, 44 cases included some form of online advertisement with 278 victims affected (from a total of 491 victims in this dataset). The remaining 35 cases and 213 victims did not use any form of online advertisement. In some cases, traffickers hide exploitative services behind legitimate activities to avoid detection by law enforcement while targeting their client base.

Carefully crafted language with coded keywords and pictures are used to attract potential clients.³⁴⁸ In some cases, advertisements are addressed to a close circle of clients, such as the case of child sexual exploitation advertised via social media platforms. In other cases, exploitation services are advertised in more organized ways via free-standing webpages which, on one occasion, publicized the exploitation of 89 victims through an escort service featuring approximately 2,800 advertisements.

Through this type of activity, traffickers can be more direct. For example, one case described the use of a social media site as resembling the experience of 'window shopping', whereby customers could inspect which victims they intended to 'buy'.

The platforms used for advertisements tend to be broadly accessible. The analysis of court cases report that regular online marketplace sites, on which anyone can post or browse advertisements to sell or buy any service (from job vacancies to the sale of equipment, cars and clothes), are being used to advertise services obtained from victims of human trafficking.

11.1.2 Recruitment

The internet is also used by traffickers to connect with the targeted victims.

Recruitment practices are widely reported upon, when it comes to both sexual

exploitation and forced labour. Several methods have been identified, from direct contact to more devious and deceptive ploys. 31 out of the 79 court cases considered for this chapter report an element of online recruitment, affecting almost half of the total victims included in the database.

Technology-based recruitment hinges on the anonymity of communications via the internet. It may prove difficult to identify the author of online advertisements or the genuine identity of people writing from social media accounts. An example of internet manipulation is described in one court case, where the trafficker used multiple online profiles to recruit the victims. The trafficker stayed in contact with each victim through two fake identities: one was used to write abusive text messages, while the other was used to express understanding and compassion. This technique was instrumental in building trust with the victims.

The disclosure of personal information on social media platforms may easily be misused by traffickers. One group of traffickers, for instance, used Facebook to browse through user profiles and, on basis of the information that people shared, selected potential victims who could be more susceptible to being courted and tricked into exploitation.

Other examples illustrate that job advertisements are also used as recruitment fronts. Examples of advertisements used to attract victims often include wording that describes the possibility of living a luxurious life or promising jobs in industries such as modelling or entertainment.

11.1.3 Internet based exploitation

Internet technologies also play a role in the exploitation of victims. The internet can be used to broadcast or livestream acts of exploitation, reaching a large base of consumers in different locations throughout different regions of the world. In one case, a group of traffickers organized and managed a “cybersex den” to exploit victims through coerced performances in front of webcams. The four male traffickers coerced 21 female victims into ‘cybersex’, harbouring them in an apartment where some rooms were used for dance performances. The performances

were live-streamed, reaching paying costumers all over the world.³⁵⁶ Other court cases describe forms of trafficking that involve child sexual abuse 'on demand'. One court case reported by Norwegian authorities, for example, reported one male trafficker who was found guilty of forcing children, both girls and boys, into sexual performances, which were livestreamed over Skype. Similar cases have been detected in other countries, but not necessarily prosecuted as trafficking, rather as sexual assault or rape. The internet can also be used to traffic victims to exploit them into the commission of crime. One court case describes how a group of traffickers successfully recruited people with the purpose of coercing them to commit identity theft and data fraud. The victims were kept in an abandoned building and forced to live under inhumane conditions. They were given fake identities to procure and lease products from companies by abusing credit card information on websites, fraudulently using digital signatures to file tax returns.

These cases reveal how technology has become integrated in exploitation and has introduced new ways for traffickers to expand their businesses. While these types of cases are not often detected, they make up a significant share of the total number of victims included in the database. In total, 12 out of 79 cases, corresponding to 112 victims, involved the use of digital technology in the exploitation of the victim. Out of the 112 victims, 11 were boys, 32 were girls, 40 were men and 23 were women. Six remained undefined in terms of sex and age.

11.2 Evolution of the internet platform used

An analysis of the court cases suggests that different types of internet platforms are used by traffickers. For the purposes of this chapter, three broad typologies of platforms have been identified:

- **Social media, including Facebook, Myspace, Skype, WhatsApp and V Kontakte;**
- **Classified webpages for advertisement, referring to generic websites where individuals post advertisements or browse for items or services to buy or sell;**
- **Free-standing webpages, referring to websites created by traffickers that do not form part of larger domains.**

Trafficking methods and the profiles of victims and perpetrators seem to differ according to the platform used. As reported in the section on the structure of traffickers' operations, organized crime groups are able to traffic more victims per case compared to criminals operating alone or in pairs (see section Traffickers; how they operate).

This is also confirmed for cases of trafficking in persons where the use of the internet is reported.



Whether they are operating in groups or not, traffickers that make use of free-standing webpages are typically able to traffic more victims per case. The number of victims per case recorded for trafficking using social media, however, is still significant. As technology-based trafficking has become more commonplace, social media has been increasingly used by traffickers, making this method of trafficking an emerging threat,

especially for youth. Online classified sites or free-standing webpages are more frequently used to post fake job listings with the purpose of recruiting victims, or to publicize the services offered by exploited victims. These platforms were among the most used digital outlets in the mid- 2000s. Over the years, they have been replaced in popularity with social media platforms, which have also become the main space for job advertisements.

This trend is also reflected in trafficking patterns. Since 2009, the share of victims trafficked using a form of social media has grown from zero to 51 per cent among the 79 cases. However, it is important to note that this figure is based on a limited dataset of court cases and does not necessarily represent all trafficking cases.

The dynamism of social media platforms makes them useful for criminal business activity that requires quick responses and the ability to connect with people without delay. The rapid pace of communication on social media is instrumental to the recruitment victims,³⁶¹ but also enables traffickers to easily link up with clients interested in purchasing an exploitative service. Since a significant amount of social activity has migrated to the digital sphere, traffickers use these platforms to easily blend in and move around, searching for victims.

The use of different platforms appears to relate with the age profile of the victims. Younger victims are reported in cases of trafficking through social media as compared to trafficking perpetrated across other platforms.

The average age of those using internet-based tools is decreasing; more children have started using the internet from an early age. Children and teenagers are often 'courted' by traffickers on social media platforms and they appear to be susceptible to deceptive ploys in the search for acceptance, attention or friendship. These behaviours are easily abused by traffickers, who take advantage of younger victims not necessarily aware of the dangers of exploitation when approached by strangers online.

Adult victims are more exposed to trafficking through free-standing websites such as escort sites, where advertising of victims is not hidden. These public sites do not typically involve child victims, possibly due to the heightened risk of drawing the attention of law enforcement or because traffickers who exploit children prefer more clandestine ways of operating.

Yet, although the use of public sites for child exploitation is limited, the availability of such materials is not limited. In addition to the platforms here considered, the so-called "dark- web" has gained the interest of criminals to facilitate their illegal trades. Among the information collected for the purpose of this Report, there are no cases of trafficking in persons where traffickers operated over the dark-web. There are, however, reports of criminal organizations making use of this platform to distribute child sexual abuse material.

According to Europol, the distribution of child sexual abuse material continues to grow and is available on various internet platforms, including the non-indexed part of the internet that is not accessible through mainstream search engines.³⁶⁵ Although distribution of this abusive material does not, in itself, constitute trafficking in persons, the production of images of child sexual abuse is very often the result of trafficking children for sexual exploitation.

11.3 New geographies of trafficking in persons

Internet technology has broadened the geographical scope of traffickers' operations. The internet helps traffickers to operate across borders and in multiple locations at the same time, while physically exploiting the victims in a single location.

11.3.1 Cyber flows

By making use of internet technologies, traffickers are able to overcome geographical distances using the 'cyberspace' to connect themselves, victims, and



the final consumers of exploitative services. This form of trafficking may or may not require the transportation of the victim although some cases have shown the victims may be transferred between countries.

The cyber flows are often characterized by victims held and coerced into video performances, allowing the perpetrators to connect with

potential clients living abroad. This type of trafficking has been identified in several countries and typically relies on the availability of video equipment and digital recording devices to broadcast victims' exploitation.

The examined court cases did not describe many cases of cyber flows, yet those reported appeared to be significant in terms of numbers of victims and customers. Internet technologies allow for exploitation in front of larger audiences than is generally possible with traditional trafficking.

UNICEF reported how children may be at increased risk to exploitation in front of webcams— connecting with abusers based elsewhere, and in many cases, with their parents unaware.³⁶⁷ While this does not constitute trafficking in persons as such, it describes how abusive material is easily disseminated through digital tools, connecting victims and perpetrators in cyberspace.

11.3.2 International flows

Traffickers may use internet technologies to facilitate the movement of people between countries. Of the 79 examined court cases involving an aspect of internet usage, 34 involved victims who were transported across borders between two or more countries, amounting to 57 per cent of the total victims identified in the dataset. Internet-based technologies may prove particularly useful for assisting flows across borders, as they provide efficient and convenient ways also to facilitate international money transfers.

Cross-border trafficking facilitated by technology typically requires the involvement of several connected perpetrators. For example, as demonstrated by one case, trafficking can be facilitated by one organizer, with one recruiter in the country of origin and another person acting as the enforcer in the country of destination where the victims are exploited.

11.3.4 Domestic flows

Trafficking operations facilitated by the internet may also be confined within national borders. Court cases include examples of traffickers that have coerced relatives into exploitation and advertised their services online. Other examples demonstrate people in vulnerable situations who have been abused by their friends, and similarly coerced into exploitation, which is then advertised on internet sites. Victims may be

recruited online with the exploitation taking place offline. One court case refers to a trafficker who gradually built an emotional relationship with the targeted victim, to the point of having complete control over the victim. Eventually, the victim was coerced into exploitation, which unfolded offline. Another example involved a trafficker that coerced a female victim into sexual exploitation, advertised her online and transported her to different cities in response to online demand.³⁷⁰ In these cases, the use of internet technologies during the recruitment of victims is a key element, mostly due to the ease of moving the victim out of his or her community.

11.4 Cyber Traffickers

The way internet technologies are used to commit trafficking in persons changes according to the profile, group size and level of 'cyber expertise' of the traffickers themselves. Most trafficking cases facilitated by the internet are conducted on a small scale. As for trafficking that occurs offline, lone traffickers can assert control over their victims in several ways. An analysis of the court cases reveals traffickers working alone through the internet generally recruit and exploit their victims in their countries of residence. Out of the 35 cases in the dataset involving a single trafficker using the internet, just six involved the international transfer of victims.

A significant number of court cases (24) involving use of internet technology were perpetrated by groups of traffickers working in groups of three or more. While comprising just around one third of the 79 identified cases involving technology, the cases involving groups of traffickers included over half of the identified victims. From the court cases, it is clear that larger trafficking groups are able to traffic larger numbers of victims. These results are broadly in line with the average number of victims trafficked by organized crime groups compared to non-organized crime traffickers reported for all forms of trafficking (see section Traffickers; how they operate).

11.4.1 Cyber experts

Traffickers may possess different levels of computer literacy. Some use rather

unsophisticated internet-based technologies. For example, many of the reviewed



court cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation were perpetrated with a smartphone equipped with a camera.

Other cases refer to more complex applications, such as the case of a trafficking group sexually exploiting large numbers of children and producing several hundred thousand images for online distribution through illicit sites. Other examples indicate how social media can be used to facilitate money transfers between traffickers, or how traffickers use the internet to monitor their clients on the 'digital streets' of chat

rooms.

Sophisticated technologies allow traffickers to scale up their activities. It has been documented that organized criminal networks have attempted to recruit hackers or cyber experts to support their operations. One court case describes how a trafficking network had one 'dedicated' person responsible for online advertisement.

Another case involved the use of the application Money Gram to transfer money, along with other applications to recruit or communicate with victims. This shows how a reliance on internet technologies may remove the need for physical interactions between traffickers and victims. The use of multiple applications also indicates that traffickers are aware of the risk of monitoring and surveillance when using technology. Traffickers may initially contact potential victims on open groups in social media and move communication to encrypted or anonymized services, such as WhatsApp messaging on cellular phones.

Traffickers seem to master the intricacies of linking means of coercive control with digital technologies. They can convince victims to share revealing pictures of themselves under the guise of assessing their suitability for some modelling job and then in turn, use the same pictures to maintain control over the victims by threatening their distribution. Some traffickers use social media to monitor the profiles of their victims and to track their whereabouts. In one case, a victim was lured to go home with a perpetrator whom she met online. She was later drugged and raped. The trafficker recorded the rape and threatened its distribution as leverage to coerce the victim into sexual exploitation.

11.5 Modus operandi: The strategies used

Traffickers appear to adopt different approaches in the way they use internet technologies. The reviewed court cases highlight two distinct types of strategies: one in which traffickers proactively look for a specific type of victims ('hunting'), and the other in which traffickers attract potential victims ('fishing').

11.5.1 Hunting strategies

Traffickers may proactively target specific victims or clients in a strategy that can be

referred to as 'hunting'. Hunting strategies are used both for getting access to victims



and establishing connections with potential buyers of exploitative services.

In this approach, the targets of the traffickers are not random, but are chosen based on specific characteristics, such as economic, emotional or other vulnerabilities, which consequently make them more susceptible to exploitation or abuse.

Hunting strategies were identified in 21 cases collected by UNODC for the purpose of this chapter. Out of these, 18 cases referred to victims' recruitment, while four cases traffickers targeted potential clients interested in the services of exploited victims, with one case including the hunting of both victims and clients. A key characteristic of the hunting strategy is that the trafficker proactively pursues the victim or the potential customer online. Social media provides traffickers with a large pool of potential targets and the ability to collect personal information on individuals whom they might otherwise never meet. In the cases where a hunting strategy was used by perpetrators, almost all involved the use of social media. This may be due to the accessibility of personal information shared on these platforms, which enables perpetrators to identify vulnerable individuals relatively easily, assess their situation and approach them to build relationship.

11.5.2 Fishing strategies

Conversely, the fishing strategies involve traffickers posting advertisements online and waiting for potential clients or victims to respond. According to the cases collected by UNODC, this strategy was more commonly used than hunting. Fishing strategies were identified in 45 cases, representing the majority of the cases in the dataset used in this Chapter.

Traffickers use fishing strategies to recruit victims by advertisements accessible to

everyone, typically offering well paid jobs, prompting potential victims to make initial contact with traffickers.

In several of these cases, perpetrators used deception to attract victims by advertising jobs in a foreign country.

In one case, traffickers used fake profiles on the social media platform V Kontakte to advertise modeling jobs in a foreign country. Traffickers eventually sexually exploited the women who were deceived by the advertisements. In this single case, approximately 100 women were recruited through fishing strategies.

Fishing strategies are also used to attract potential clients. In these cases, traffickers typically post advertisements for escort services or prostitution, and invite interested customers to contact them. In one example, traffickers set up two websites advertising 'escort services', which were actually sexually exploitative services. Clients would call or send messages over the internet to make appointments for prostitution services. In this case, more than 30 women were advertised online and forced to engage in sexual activities with customers. This case highlights the main advantage of fishing strategies for human traffickers: through the internet, perpetrators can reach many potential victims or clients with minimal risk, while simultaneously increasing the scale of their operations through minimal effort.

Fishing strategies are commonly used by traffickers to advertise victims to potential clients. They typically use online classified advertisements, social media platforms or specialized websites dedicated to sexual services. In a smaller number of cases, perpetrators advertise victims on websites which they set up themselves,³⁸⁶ though this trend seems to be diminishing in favour of more mainstream platforms.

Chapter 12: The Intersection of Human Trafficking and Addiction

The following is a product of the Human Trafficking Expert Consultant Network funded by the TIP Office. The purpose of the Network is to engage experts,

particularly those with lived experience, to provide expertise and input on Department of State anti- trafficking policies, strategies, and products related to human trafficking, both in the United States and abroad. The author has a range of expertise related to human trafficking, marginalized communities, substance use disorder, and trauma, including as a clinician.

Substance use disorder and addiction are terms used here to describe the stage of the condition where a person's brain and body are chemically dependent on a substance. While the term "substance use disorder" may carry less stigma, the term "addiction" is used, not pejoratively, in legal and criminal justice cases and by medical experts to describe this complex condition.

The complex relationship between addiction and both labor and sex trafficking is recognized by the United States criminal justice system.

Successfully prosecuted cases have proven that the role of substance use disorder in human trafficking is powerful and pervasive; addiction can increase a person's vulnerability to being trafficked, can be initiated and manipulated by the trafficker as a means of coercion and control, and can be used by the victim/survivor as a means of coping with the physical and psychological traumas of being trafficked both during captivity and after exiting the trafficking situation.

People with substance use issues are especially vulnerable to trauma and victimization by human traffickers. Some traffickers recruit directly from detox and addiction treatment facilities. Similar to traumatic stress effects on the brain,



substance use disorder involves biochemical changes to the brain and adds an additional layer of risk, especially for survivors with post-traumatic stress disorder. Although addiction is scientifically understood as a medical condition and not a moral weakness, the societal stigma surrounding both the condition and the sufferer is pervasive, and the negative stereotype persists of the chemically dependent person as morally deficient and lacking in willpower. Societal stigma can prevent health care providers, law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and other professionals from identifying victims of human trafficking when they see only the manifestations of substance use disorder and consequently dismiss red flags. In addition, societal stigma and self-stigma may deter an individual from seeking help.

Within the past several years, the United States has prosecuted multiple sex trafficking cases in which the perpetrator used addiction as a tool of coercion. In these cases, perpetrators entrapped victims with existing substance use issues, or initiated dependency in victims with no prior addiction history. They then used the threat of withdrawal—which causes extreme pain and suffering and can be fatal without medical supervision—to control the victims and coerce them to engage in commercial sex, compounding the victims' trauma. Individuals with substance use issues seeking recovery have been exploited in addiction treatment situations for sex trafficking and forced labor. In one recent case, the owner of a chain of sober living facilities was convicted of sex trafficking individuals in such facilities. In another case still pending before a U.S. civil court, traffickers allegedly targeted people with substance use issues who were court-mandated to recovery facilities in lieu of prison sentences and forced them to work in chicken processing, sheet metal fabrication, and other dangerous work.

Recommendations

Identification and referral. Whenever trafficking survivors with substance use issues are identified, referral to safe, ethical treatment programs and facilities is essential. Trauma-informed care prevents re-exploitation and retraumatization and promotes recovery. The danger of retraumatization as a trigger during early recovery can precipitate a survivor's re-exploitation. Post-traumatic stress disorder

and substance use disorder are related; each disorder can mask the symptoms of the other, and both need to be treated to attain long-term recovery outcomes. Health care professionals can coordinate efforts to identify victims and survivors who are vulnerable to substance use, or present with substance use issues. Emergency room admissions for overdose also present opportunities to screen for human trafficking. Specific training of medical and mental health staff aimed at reducing stigma and establishing standards of non-judgmental and trauma-informed care are also highly recommended.

Safe housing. Safe housing is essential for survivors; a lack of safe housing options increases vulnerability to further trauma. As mentioned earlier, some traffickers recruit directly from addiction treatment facilities, targeting people coming out of detox and inpatient programs, knowing they can exploit the vulnerabilities of these individuals. This is similar to how traffickers target children aging out of foster care. Lack of safe shelter is a significant vulnerability for human trafficking, and in such situations, perpetrators take advantage.

Trauma-informed prosecutions and special task forces are key. In the United States, specialized, multi-disciplinary task forces have been key to the successful investigation and prosecution of human trafficking cases involving addiction. To explain the power of drug-based coercion, survivors have testified during criminal trials to the extreme pain of withdrawal and other types of suffering related to addiction. Trauma-informed victim advocates worked closely with prosecutors and law enforcement to support those survivors as they participated in the criminal justice process. Prosecutors also called drug counselors and other expert witnesses to inform the jury of how addiction affects the brain and body and of the dangers of withdrawal.

Listen to survivors. The prosecutorial successes in the abovementioned cases were achieved because the prosecutors, law enforcement, and judges listened to survivors, respected their needs, and valued their lived experience in describing the torment of drug-based coercion. The courage and resilience of victims and survivors cannot be overstated. NGOs, hospitals, government entities, and other

stakeholders can build partnerships with survivors who have lived experience of substance use disorder and recovery, with survivor experts in diverse fields, and with survivor-led organizations, and can support survivors who are raising awareness about this issue.

Significant progress is already under way in addressing these issues.

Certainly, more work remains in the areas of global research, education, and the willingness to create policies that reduce stigma and protect vulnerable populations.

The end of the course!