

Human Trafficking and the Healthcare Professional

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Abstract: Despite the legislation passed in the 19th century outlawing human slavery, it is more widespread today than at the conclusion of the civil war. Modern human slavery, termed human trafficking, comes in several forms. The most common type of human trafficking is sex trafficking, the sale of women and children into prostitution. Labor trafficking is the sale of men, women, and children into hard labor for which they receive little or no compensation. Other forms of trafficking include child soldiering, war brides, and organ removal. Healthcare professionals play a critical role in both finding victims of human trafficking while they are still in captivity, as well as caring for their mental and physical needs upon release. Those working in the healthcare profession need to be educated regarding how a trafficking victim may present, as well as their unique healthcare needs.

Key Words: human trafficking, slavery, sex trafficking

Despite the advancement of human rights with the legal abolition of slavery in England,¹ the United States² and elsewhere, each ensuing decade brings additional evidence that the practice of slavery is alive and well around the globe. Rather than being a global trade sanctioned by nations, however, today's slavery is largely practiced by individuals, families, and criminal networks ranging from small and informal to highly organized on a global scale. The terms "human trafficking" and "trafficking in persons" (TIP) have been created to describe the enslavement, buying, and selling of human lives. In the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000,³ Congress defined "severe forms of TIP" as:

1. Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the

person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or

2. The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

On every continent, the demand for purchased sex is so great that large sums of money can be made by traffickers and pimps willing to exploit victims in prostitution. Therefore, the enslavement of women and children for the purpose of sexual services is the single most common manifestation of trafficking.³⁻⁵ However, people are also trafficked to serve in hotels and restaurants, in agricultural and industrial settings,⁶ and as domestic servants.⁷

Statistics

Because of the hidden and illegal nature of the activities, it has been very difficult to estimate how many people are trafficked into, and within, the United States. The Central Intelligence Agency published a rough figure of 50,000 per year in the late 1990s.⁸ More recently, the US Department of State has published estimates that 14,500 to 17,500 persons per year are being trafficked into the United States.⁹ In its most recent annual report, the TIP division of the US State Department states that 800,000 people are trafficked annually across international borders, with 80% of these victims being women and girls, and up to 50% minors.¹⁰

Key Points

- Modern slavery still exists in society under the name of human trafficking.
- Healthcare professionals are in the unique position to find and free these victims.
- Healthcare professionals also have a role in restoring the mental and physical health of those who survive human trafficking.
- To properly fulfill these roles, healthcare professionals must be educated regarding the phenomenon of human trafficking.

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These numbers, however, do not include the most common form of severe trafficking found in the United States; underage prostitution. The vast majority of these individuals are American youth who come out of abusive homes and are forced to survive on the streets through selling sex under the control of a trafficker or pimp. Even though some would suggest that these young people are “voluntarily” involved in prostitution, Congress has determined that an individual under the age of 18 cannot properly consent to this activity, which is why prostitution under age 18 is included as a form of severe trafficking in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000. In a recent representative sample of over 13,000 US adolescents, 3.5% admitted that they had exchanged sex for money or drugs.¹¹ According to US 2000 census data, that translates into over 400,000 American adolescents that have either sold sex or exchanged it for drugs. This number is similar to a study from the University of Pennsylvania that estimated that as many as 325,000 American youth are at risk of commercial sexual exploitation.¹² This means that every state within the United States has several thousand youth who are either actively being prostituted, or are at risk of becoming prostituted in the next year.

How Healthcare Professionals Can Help

Healthcare professionals play two very critical roles in the lives of these victims. First of all, they are among the few professionals likely to encounter these victims while they are being held by their trafficker. A study examining the experience of European trafficking victims found that 28% encountered a healthcare professional while still in captivity.¹³ Unfortunately, none of these encounters resulted in the victim being freed, because the healthcare professionals failed to recognize the true condition of the victim because of lack of training. A recent study examining the experience of emergency room personnel regarding trafficking victims found that although 29% thought it was a problem in their emergency department population, only 13% felt confident or very confident that they could identify a TIP victim, and less than 3% had ever had any training on recognizing TIP victims.¹⁴

In its Rescue and Restore Campaign, Health and Human Services has put together a list of clues that a patient may in fact be a victim of human trafficking.¹⁵ Indicators that a particular patient may be a victim of human trafficking include:

- The patient is accompanied by another person who seems controlling;
- The accompanying person insists on giving health information;
- The patient has visible signs of physical abuse;
- The patient acts unusually fearful or submissive;
- The patient does not speak English;

- The patient has recently been brought to this country from Eastern Europe, Asia, Latin America, Canada, Africa, or India; and/or
- The patient lacks a passport, immigration, or identification documentation.

If a healthcare professional encounters a patient that he or she believes may be a victim of human trafficking, it is imperative that the person be separated from the potential trafficker and sensitively questioned regarding his or her situation. An otherwise uninvolved person who speaks the native language of the patient is very helpful, especially if he or she is able to establish rapport with the patient. Sample questions to ask these patients include:

- Can you leave your work or job situation if you want?
- When you are not working, can you come and go as you please?
- Have you been threatened with harm if you try to quit?
- Has anyone threatened your family?
- What are your working or living conditions like?
- Where do you sleep and eat?
- Do you have to ask permission to eat, sleep, or go to the bathroom?
- Is there a lock on your door or windows so you cannot get out?

If the answers to these questions indicate that the patient may be a victim of human trafficking, or at least raise that possibility, Health and Human Services has established a hotline number (1.888.3737.888) to provide further assistance. Trained personnel will help determine whether the person is truly a victim of trafficking and help get them connected to local resources that will be able to help them.

Second, as healthcare professionals encounter these victims, they will need to take steps to assure provision of their healthcare. Trafficked persons suffer a wide variety of health problems beyond what would be expected given their age, gender, and country of residence. There are three major factors that cause this. First of all, trafficking typically involves removing a person from his or her previous home and life circumstances, usually by force, threats, deception, or some combination of the three.¹⁶ In the process, the person often experiences deprivation of food and sleep, extreme stress, and the hazards of travel, as well as violence from the perpetrators. Secondly, the nature of the work to which people are trafficked is generally hazardous in itself. Prostitution by its nature exposes one to violence, unwanted pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections. Those trafficked into farm or factory work often labor under unsafe and unpredictable conditions. Finally, because of the illegal nature of the activities, trafficked persons are not usually provided access to needed healthcare in a timely fashion. Thus, their problems are compounded and become worse because of lack of proper treatment.

Unfortunately, very little good data exist on the specific health problems affecting these victims. One study of sex trafficking victims in Europe examined the symptoms these women experienced in the interval following their release from captivity.¹⁷ When this data is combined with international health data on child prostitution,¹⁸ six categories of health consequences are found for victims of human trafficking. These six categories are:

- Infectious diseases such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS);
- Noninfectious diseases;
- Reproductive health problems;
- Substance abuse;
- Mental health problems; and
- Physical trauma

A recent report evaluating the incidence of HIV/AIDS in girls trafficked from Nepal into prostitution in India found that on their return to Nepal, 38% were HIV+, and if they were trafficked when they were less than 15, the HIV+ rate jumped to just over 60%.¹⁹ Similar HIV+ rates have been reported in sex trafficking victims returning to Nigeria.²⁰ Risk factors for trafficked women and girls becoming HIV+ include time within the brothel and young age when first trafficked.²¹ Along with HIV/AIDS, these victims are at obvious risk for other sexually transmitted infections, and nonsexually transmitted infections such as tuberculosis. Reproductive health problems can include infertility from chronic salpingitis and complications such as cervical incompetence from unsafe abortion.

Mental health problems reported with human trafficking include a high risk of posttraumatic stress disorder, with one researcher finding that 68% of trafficked women suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder.²² Other mental health problems that might be encountered in human trafficking victims include suicidal ideation, depression, anxiety, and chronic fear.

Physical trauma can result from the work the victim is forced to undertake, or may be a direct result of the physical violence used by the trafficker to control the victim. The complications from this violence are compounded by the chronic lack of medical care often experienced by these victims.

Conclusion

In summary, healthcare professionals have a responsibility to be educated about the ever-growing phenomenon of human trafficking for two reasons. First, they are among the few in a unique position to see these victims while they are still in captivity and thus have a chance to free them. Second,

as a result of their horrific ordeal, these victims suffer from many unique health consequences that require accurate diagnosis and treatment from properly trained professionals. Only then can they begin to rebuild the parts of their lives that have been so brutally taken from them.

Acknowledgments

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Please see James Hanvey's editorial on page 464 of this issue.

"You are today where the thoughts of yesterday have brought you and you will be tomorrow where the thoughts of today take you."

—Blaise Pascal

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1. HUMAN TRAFFICKING INCREASING WORLDWIDE :CRIMES ARE RARELY PROSECUTED, LEGAL CONFERENCE IS TOLD
JOHN IWASAKI P-I REPORTER. Seattle Post - Intelligencer. Seattle, Wash.:Aug 5, 2008. p. B.1
What's needed is a "cultural shift," she said, so that society will see that "prostituted teens are still children and are victims of trafficking." block style="factbox"> HOW TO HELP To report a human trafficking case, contact the Washington Anti-Trafficking Response Network's hot line at 206-245-0782 or go online to warn-trafficking.org.

2. HUMAN TRAFFICKING: RECOGNIZE THE VICTIMS
Anonymous. Seattle Post - Intelligencer. Seattle, Wash.:Jul 23, 2008. p. B.6
The story tells us that "Part of the problem is that the laws require proof that sex traffickers used `force, fraud or coercion,' except when the victim is a minor."

3. JUSTICE APPEARS INVISIBLE FOR SOME VICTIMS :AFTER FIVE YEARS ON BOOKS, HUMAN TRAFFICKING LAW FAILS TO SNAG A CONVICTION
RUTH TEICHROEB P-I investigative reporter. Seattle Post - Intelligencer. Seattle, Wash.:Jul 22, 2008. p. A.1
The only human trafficking charge known to have been filed so far under the law is pending in Spokane County Superior Court, where two defendants were charged in December with second-degree human trafficking in an alleged forced labor case. "Law enforcement are not necessarily empathetic with the victims," said John Goldman, a former Spokane County sheriff, who trains officers to recognize human trafficking.

4. Study sounds alarm on human trafficking :Spokane area | Teen prostitution, mail-order brides, forced labor cited
Anonymous. Seattle Times. Seattle, Wash.:May 13, 2008. p. B.2
Prostitution accounts for the largest form of human trafficking in the region with an estimated 500 adult women and an unknown number of men and underage boys and girls providing sex for money through escort businesses, massage parlors, drug houses and on the streets, the study found.

5. Promoting human-trafficking awareness :Crime and Safety | Transit centers
Lauren Vane. Seattle Times. Seattle, Wash.:Jan 13, 2008. p. S.4

6. LOCAL COALITION FORMED TO FIGHT HUMAN TRAFFICKING ; SEATTLE A POTENTIAL HOT SPOT FOR DEALING IN FORCED LABOR, SEX SLAVES :[FINAL Edition] P-I STAFF. Seattle Post - Intelligencer. Seattle, Wash.:Oct 23, 2004. p. B2

Few victims have so far been identified despite new laws that allow trafficking victims to apply for special immigration visas and despite assurances from President Bush and Attorney General John Ashcroft that this is a national priority.

Federal financing for four other programs was also announced yesterday: \$50,000 to the Refugee Women's Alliance to help Russian and Somali domestic violence survivors; \$75,000 to Seattle Children's Home to work with street youths who are victims of abuse; and nearly \$50,000 to the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, to help disabled victims of domestic violence.

7. Officials say U.S. slavery still a reality ; Victims' hotline | Attention drawn to human trafficking :[Fourth Edition]

Florangela Davila. Seattle Times. Seattle, Wash.:Oct 23, 2004. p. B2

Federal officials yesterday rolled out a public-education campaign about the victims of human trafficking, a group estimated to be entering the U.S. at a rate of between 4,500 and 17,500 annually.

These are foreigners brought into the United States and forced into domestic servitude, prostitution or factory work.

That includes a publicity campaign highlighting a 24-hour toll-free hotline to assist victims. The hotline is equipped to handle calls in 150 languages and can immediately refer callers to nearby aid groups.

8. How to spot trafficking in human beings

Jennifer Nislow. Law Enforcement News. New York:Fall 2004. Vol. 30, Iss. 625, p. 6

With Seattle recognized by federal, state and local authorities as one of the nation's hot spots for human trafficking, the city's police department is training its officers to identify victims from among the many people they come in contact with during the workday.

9. Call to action on human trafficking ; Task-force report | Location, ports make region susceptible to "hideous crime" :[Fourth Edition]

Florangela Davila. Seattle Times. Seattle, Wash.:Jul 14, 2004. p. B2

As of April, authorities had 153 open trafficking investigations.

Under a 2000 federal law that makes trafficking a crime, federal officials had prosecuted 110 people between fiscal years 2001 and 2003. Authorities have also issued more than 400 immigration visas to adult trafficking victims since October 2000.

Based on extensive interviews with local social-service providers, the report notes **trafficking has occurred in 18 Washington state counties, with victims ranging from "mail-order" brides to sex workers to domestic workers and children.** The local victims have been brought from Russia, the Philippines, China and Mexico.

Washington was the first state to make trafficking a state crime, in 2003. No one has been convicted under the state trafficking law, but there is at least one case pending, according to the report.

10. **SEATTLE LABELED 'HOT SPOT' FOR HUMAN CARGO ; TASK FORCE WILL BE SET UP TO RAISE AWARENESS OF ENSLAVED WORKERS** :[FINAL Edition]

MICHELLE NICOLosi P-I reporter. Seattle Post - Intelligencer. Seattle, Wash.:Jul 10, 2004. p. A1

Federal and local officials believe that many of them are victims of human trafficking - working in sweatshops, massage parlors, restaurants and farms here and elsewhere. But because many local law- enforcement agencies have no idea how to identify trafficking victims, very few of them have been found. So the federal government plans to launch an Anti-Trafficking Task Force here in the fall to improve enforcement efforts.

Trafficking arrests, investigations and convictions are rare in part because many of the officers, social workers and health care workers who are likely to encounter victims haven't been trained to recognize signs of trafficking. The coalition will conduct an education and media blitz to teach them how to recognize trafficking - and what to do about it.

The report recommends that the state fund efforts to provide services to trafficking victims, to monitor trafficking in the state, and to give trafficking training to local officers, health care workers and others.

11. Ex-congressman stunned by extent of worldwide trafficking in humans ; John Miller heads federal-government office to combat problem :[Fourth Edition] Alex Fryer. Seattle Times. Seattle, Wash.:Feb 4, 2004. p. B1

In January 2003, [John Miller] took the helm of the State Department's 20-person Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, which follows trends, implements policy and coordinates anti-trafficking programs.

Unlike efforts to stop drug and gun smuggling, the international movement to end human trafficking is composed of many faith-based groups, such as Arlington, Va.-based International Justice Mission (IJM).

The ranking meant [Bush] could impose sanctions on those countries, which included NATO allies Greece and Turkey as well as the Dominican Republic and Belize.

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Comment in: South Med J. 2008 May;101(5):464.

Human trafficking and the healthcare professional.

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PMID: 18414161

2: Social Work. 2008 Apr;53(2):143-52.

Sexual trafficking in the United States: a domestic problem with transnational dimensions.

Hodge DR.

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The trafficking of young women and children for prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation is one of the most significant human rights abuses in contemporary society. In keeping with the social work profession's commitment to social justice, this article examines the issue of sexual trafficking in the United States. The transnational scope of the problem is discussed along with the means that traffickers use to recruit, transport, and initiate victims from around the world into the sex industry in the United States. Some legislative responses to the problem are discussed, and a number of suggestions are offered to help social workers advocate on behalf of some of the most vulnerable and oppressed people in the global community.

PMID: 18595448

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Human trafficking. A health care perspective.

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PMID: 15484995

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Dougherty ME.

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