



CHILD VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING



Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery. Victims are young children, teenagers, men and women. Victims of human trafficking are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion to compel them to engage in commercial sex or involuntary labor. What’s more, any child who has engaged in commercial sex is a victim of human trafficking.

Approximately 600,000 to 800,000 victims are trafficked across international borders annually, and between 14,500 and 17,500 of those victims are trafficked into the United States each year, according to the U.S. government. **More than half of these victims worldwide are children,** according to the U.S. Department of State.

Child victims of trafficking are often exploited for commercial sex, including prostitution, pornography and sex tourism. They are also exploited for labor, including domestic servitude, migrant farming, landscaping and hotel or restaurant work – to name just a few potential trafficking situations.

- Children are considered persons under the age of 18
- Frequent sources of child trafficking include the Pacific Islands, the former Soviet Union, Latin America, Southeast Asia and Africa as well as developing countries.
- Children can be trafficked by close family members

The reasons for coming to the U.S. vary, but often children succumb to exploitation under the guise of opportunity— children may believe they are coming to the United States to be united with family, to work in a legitimate job or to attend school. Additionally, children may be subject to psychological intimidation or threats of physical harm to self or family members.

A Lasting Effect: Physical and Mental Consequences of Trafficking

For child victims of exploitation, the destructive effects can create a number of long-term health problems:

Physical Symptoms	Mental Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleeping and eating disorders • Sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, pelvic pain, rectal trauma and urinary difficulties from working in the sex industry • Chronic back, hearing, cardiovascular or respiratory problems from endless days toiling in dangerous agriculture, sweatshop or construction conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear and anxiety • Depression, mood changes • Guilt and shame • Cultural shock from finding themselves in a strange country • Posttraumatic Stress Disorder • Traumatic Bonding with the Trafficker

Child victims of human trafficking face significant problems. Often physically and sexually abused, they have distinctive medical and psychological needs that must be addressed before advancing in the formative years of adulthood.

How to Recognize a Child Victim of Human Trafficking



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Traffickers frequently confiscate their victims' immigration and identification documents. Traffickers frequently instill in their victims a fear government officials— particularly law enforcement and immigration officers. These are two of the challenges in identifying victims of trafficking. But whether you are a law enforcement officer, health care professional or a social service provider, there are physical and mental clues that can alert you to a victim:

- Child victims of labor trafficking are often hungry or malnourished to the extent that they may never reach their full height, may have poorly formed or rotting teeth, and later may experience reproductive problems.
- The psychological effects of torture are helplessness, shame and humiliation, shock, denial and disbelief, disorientation and confusion, and anxiety disorders including post traumatic stress disorder, phobias, panic attacks and depression.
- Environmental factors can also aid in identifying child victims of trafficking, including whether the child is living at the workplace or with the employer, living with multiple people in a cramped space, and attending school sporadically, not at all or has a significant gap of schooling in the U.S.
- Victims may experience Traumatic Bonding (Stockholm Syndrome) – a form of coercive control in which the perpetrator instills in the victim fear as well as gratitude for being allowed to live or for any other perceived favors, however small.
- Traffickers of children are sometimes family members or sometimes conditon their victims to refer to them by familial titles (e.g., uncle, aunt, cousin).

Help for Child Victims of Human Trafficking

Prior to the enactment of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in October 2000, no comprehensive Federal law existed to protect victims of trafficking or to prosecute their traffickers. The TVPA is intended to prevent human trafficking overseas, to increase prosecution of human traffickers, and to protect victims and provide Federally funded or administered benefits and services so that qualified victims can safely rebuild their lives in the United States.

Children as well as adult victims may be eligible for the T visa, which allows victims of trafficking to remain in the United States and become eligible for work authorization. After three years, victims may apply to adjust their status to lawful permanent resident. Through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), unaccompanied trafficked children are also eligible for the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) program, which provides a comprehensive range of services for children and places them in culturally appropriate foster homes, group homes, or independent living arrangements, appropriate to their developmental needs.

URM serves as a legal authority designated to act in place of the child's unavailable parents. Through the program, children may receive intensive case management, education, health care, mental health counseling, independent living skills training, and many other services. URM also assists in family reunification and repatriation services, when appropriate for the victim. Children are eligible to remain in foster care until they turn 18 or such higher age, depending on the foster care rules of the state.

If you think you have come in contact with a victim of human trafficking, call the Trafficking Information and Referral Hotline at 1.888.3737.888. This hotline will help you determine if you have encountered victims of human trafficking, will identify local resources available in your community to help victims, and will help you coordinate with local social service organizations to help protect and serve victims so they can begin the process of restoring their lives. For more information on human trafficking, visit www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking.

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