

The United States, along with Mexico and the Philippines, was ranked one of the world's worst places for human trafficking. In the US, there is no official number of human trafficking victims, but estimates place it in the hundreds of thousands.

Human Trafficking Defined

Human trafficking is the business of stealing freedom for profit. In some cases, traffickers trick, defraud or physically force victims into providing commercial sex. In others, victims are lied to, assaulted, threatened or manipulated into working under inhumane, illegal or otherwise unacceptable conditions. It is a multi-billion-dollar criminal industry that denies freedom to 24.9 million people around the world. Human trafficking does not have to require movement. A person can be a victim of human trafficking in your hometown. At the heart of human trafficking is the traffickers' goal of exploitation and enslavement.

Who Are the Traffickers?

Traffickers may be family members, romantic partners, acquaintances, or strangers. There is no evidence that traffickers are more likely to be of a particular race, nationality, gender, or sexual orientation.

Who is Most Vulnerable?

Human trafficking can happen to anyone, but some people are more vulnerable than others. Significant risk factors include recent migration or relocation, substance use, mental health concerns, involvement with the child welfare system and being a runaway or homeless youth. Often, traffickers identify and leverage their victims' vulnerabilities in order to create dependency. This may occur in person or online through social media.

How Do Traffickers Lure People In?

Data shows that the vast majority of trafficking victims identified in the United States are people who have historically faced discrimination and its political, social and economic consequences: People of color, indigenous communities, immigrants and people who identify as LGBTQ+ are disproportionately victimized. People living in poverty, or foster care, or are struggling with addiction, trauma, abuse or unstable housing, are all at comparatively higher risk for trafficking.

What ties all these disparate groups of people and experiences together is that there is something they need, sometimes desperately. Survivors have taught us that traffickers expertly seek out people whose specific need they can fill – or pretend to fill. Sometimes

they dangle material support – a good job, a safe place to stay, drugs. Often what they offer is less tangible but just as vital – the illusion of love, belonging, safety or acceptance.

How You Can Spot Trafficking

The following is a list of signs from the National Human Trafficking Hotline that may indicate someone is being trafficked. It could be happening in your very own community and recognizing the signs could save someone's life.

If you suspect human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline
888-373-7888.

Abnormal Behaviors:

- Is fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, or nervous/paranoid
- Exhibits unusually fearful or anxious behavior after bringing up law enforcement
- Avoids eye contact
- Has no access to health care
- Appears malnourished
- Shows signs of physical and/or sexual abuse, physical restraint, confinement or torture
- Has few or no personal possessions
- Is not in control of his/her own money and has no financial records or bank accounts
- Is not in control of his/her own ID or passport
- Is not allowed or able to speak for themselves (a third party may insist on being present and/or translating)
- Claims he or she is just visiting but is unable to clarify where he or she is staying
- Lack of knowledge of whereabouts and/or does not know what city he/she is in
- Loss of sense of time
- Has numerous inconsistencies in her/his story

Work or Living Conditions:

- Is restricted from coming and going as he or she wishes
- Is under 18 and is providing sex acts for money or trade
- Is unpaid, paid very little or paid only through tips
- Works excessively long or unusual hours
- Is not allowed breaks or suffers under unusual restrictions at work
- Was recruited through false promises concerning the nature and conditions of his/her work
- High security measures exist in the work and/or living locations (boarded up windows, bars on windows, barbed wire, security cameras, etc.)

Helpful Numbers

In Case of Emergency Always call 911

Call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 to: get help, report a tip, or learn more.

Call federal law enforcement directly to report suspected human trafficking activity and get help: U.S. Department of Homeland Security 1-866-347-2423 24/7 or submit a tip online www.ice.gov/tips

Related Articles to Learn More

<https://www.cedars-sinai.org/blog/signs-of-human-trafficking.html>

<https://www.domesticshelters.org/articles/human-trafficking/hospitals-on-the-lookout-for-human-trafficking>

<https://www.domesticshelters.org/articles/domestic-violence-op-ed-column/what-being-a-flight-attendant-taught-me-about-human-trafficking>

<https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2019/02/24/how-to-spot-the-signs-of-sex-trafficking/>