

Fact Sheet

Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons
Washington, DC
July 28, 2004

How Can I Recognize Trafficking Victims?

Because trafficking in persons is usually an "underground" crime, it can be difficult for law-enforcement personnel, the public, or service providers to readily identify a trafficking victim and/or a trafficking scenario. There have been cases of victims escaping and reporting the situation to the police. However, many are physically unable to leave their work sites without an escort and are not free to contact family, friends, or members of the public.

There are many factors that can tip off the general public, law enforcement personnel, or service organizations that a trafficking scenario may be taking place locally.

Sex Trafficking

Victims of sex trafficking are often found in the streets or working in establishments that offer commercial sex acts, e.g., brothels, strip clubs, pornography production houses. Such establishments may operate under the guise of:

- Massage parlors;
- Escort services;
- Adult bookstores;
- Modeling studios; and
- Bars/strip clubs.

Labor Trafficking

People forced into indentured servitude can be found in:

- Sweatshops (where abusive labor standards are present);
- Commercial agricultural situations (fields, processing plants, canneries);
- Domestic situations (maids, nannies);
- Construction sites (particularly if public access is denied); and
- Restaurant and custodial work.

How Do People Get Trapped Into Sex or Labor Trafficking?

No one signs up to become a slave. Traffickers frequently recruit victims through fraudulent advertisements promising legitimate jobs as hostesses, domestics, or work in the agricultural industry. Trafficking victims of all kinds come from rural, suburban, and urban settings.

There are tell-tale signs when commercial establishments are holding people against their will.

Visible Indicators May Include:

- Heavy security at the commercial establishment including barred windows, locked doors, isolated location, electronic surveillance. Women are never seen leaving the premises unless escorted.
- Victims live at the same premises as the brothel or work site or are driven between quarters and "work" by a guard. For labor trafficking, victims are often prohibited from leaving the work site, which may look like a guarded compound from the outside.
- Victims are kept under surveillance when taken to a doctor, hospital or clinic for treatment; trafficker may act as a translator.
- High foot traffic especially for brothels where there may be trafficked women indicated often by a stream of men arriving and leaving the premises.

Trafficking victims are kept in bondage through a combination of fear, intimidation, abuse, and psychological controls. While each victim will have a different experience, they share common threads that may signify a life of indentured servitude.

Trafficking victims live a life marked by abuse, betrayal of their basic human rights, and control under their trafficker. The following indicators in and of themselves may not be enough to meet the legal standard for trafficking, but they indicate that a victim is controlled by someone else and, accordingly, the situation should be further investigated.

What Is the Profile of a Trafficking Victim?

Most trafficking victims will not readily volunteer information about their status because of fear and abuse they've suffered at the hands of their trafficker. They may also be reluctant to come forward with information from despair, discouragement, and a sense that there are no viable options to escape their situation. Even if pressed, they may not identify themselves as someone held in bondage for fear of retribution to themselves or family members. However, there are indicators that often point to a person held in a slavery condition. They include:

Health Characteristics of a Trafficked Person. Trafficked individuals may be treated as disposable possessions without much attention given to their mental or physical health. Accordingly, some of the health problems that may be evident in a victim include:

- Malnutrition, dehydration or poor personal hygiene;
- Sexually transmitted diseases;
- Signs of rape or sexual abuse;
- Bruising, broken bones, or other signs of untreated medical problems;
- Critical illnesses including diabetes, cancer or heart disease; and
- Post-traumatic stress or psychological disorders.

Signs That a Person Is Being Held as a Slave. In addition to some of the obvious physical and mental indicators of trafficking, there are other signs that an individual is being controlled by someone else. Red flags should go up for police or aid workers who notice any of the following during an intake. The individual:

- Does not hold his/her own identity or travel documents;
- Suffers from verbal or psychological abuse designed to intimidate, degrade and frighten the individual;
- Has a trafficker or pimp who controls all the money, victim will have very little or no pocket money; and
- Is extremely nervous, especially if their "translator" (who may be their trafficker) is present during an intake.

Coupled with any of the above, another indicator that a person may be held against their will is if the individual is a foreigner, unable to speak the language in the country where they reside or work.

While there is no set formula to determine whether or not a person has been trafficked, the following list of questions can serve as a guideline to determine if trafficking elements are present in a given situation.

Trafficking Screening Questions

1. Is the person free to leave the work site?
2. Is the person physically, sexually or psychologically abused?
3. Does the person have a passport or valid I.D. card and is he/she in possession of such documents?
4. What is the pay and conditions of employment?
5. Does the person live at home or at/near the work site?
6. How did the individual arrive to this destination if the suspected victim is a foreign national?
7. Has the person or a family member of this person been threatened?
8. Does the person fear that something bad will happen to him or her, or to a family member, if he/she leaves the job?

Anyone can report suspected trafficking cases. If the victim is under 18, U.S. professionals who work in law enforcement, healthcare, social care, mental health, and education are mandated to report such cases.

Through a grass-roots, community-wide effort and public awareness campaign, more professionals on the front line can readily identify the trafficking victim and have him/her treated accordingly.

How To Report a Suspected Trafficking Case

If you suspect that a person is a trafficking victim, there are a number of ways to report the suspected case and to help the individual receive appropriate care and counseling.

In the United States:

- Call the Health and Human Services-sponsored, toll-free line 888-3737-8888 24 hours/day. 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.
- Contact your state's Attorney General's victim/witness coordinator.
- Contact your local FBI.
- Additional information on reporting suspected cases within the U.S. can be accessed through: <http://www.usdoj.gov/trafficking.htm>.

For countries outside the United States:

- Call the national or local trafficking hotline, if applicable.
- If the suspected victim is foreign, contact their embassy.
- If local law enforcement is reliable, contact local police.

The Road To Recovery

Trafficked victims have been through extensive personal hardships that may include isolation from family members and severed relationships from their home community, while having suffered from physical abuse and medical problems from months– or often years in slavery. Their road to recovery is generally intense and requires considerable aftercare on several levels.

Once identified, a trafficked individual may require any or all of the following services:

- Translation;
- Housing, food and clothing;
- Medical care;
- Legal assistance;
- Language training;
- Vocational or educational training; and
- Counseling.

As modern-day slavery continues, the best way to combat this heinous practice is to gather the best resources from police, service providers, medical professionals, lawmakers, and general public.

(Sources: Donna Hughes, ECPAT USA & IOFA 2003, Vital Voices and the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence)



BACK TO TOP

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.