



# IDENTIFYING VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING FACT SHEET



Everyone can play a role in identifying victims of human trafficking. Health care and social service providers; law enforcement officials; and ethnic, community, and faith-based organizations may encounter victims through their work. An informed community member could also be a victim's link to freedom. It is important to be vigilant and to "look beneath the surface" in situations that don't seem quite right. One chance encounter could be a victim's best hope for rescue.

## **Who Is a Human Trafficking Victim?**

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery in which victims are subjected to force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of commercial sex, debt bondage, or involuntary labor. Victims of human trafficking can be young children, teenagers, men and women. They can be U.S. citizens, Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) or foreign nationals, and they can be found in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Minors (under the age of 18) who are induced to perform commercial sex acts are victims of trafficking, regardless of whether their traffickers used force, fraud, or coercion.

A victim could be a man who does not speak English who is suspiciously injured "on the job" and shows signs of old bruising. A victim could be an abused woman who doesn't know what city she is in when brought to the emergency room, and who is accompanied by a controlling companion who insists on speaking for her. A victim could be a fearful individual who quietly slips in and out of a local church on Sunday morning, or a child who lives in the neighborhood, yet doesn't go to school or play outside.

## **General Clues to Help Identify Victims of Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking may occur in the following situations:

- Prostitution and escort services;
- Pornography, stripping, or exotic dancing;
- Massage parlors;
- Sexual services publicized on the Internet or in newspapers;
- Agricultural or ranch work;
- Factory work or sweatshops;
- Businesses like hotels, nail salons or home-cleaning services;
- Domestic labor (cleaning, childcare, eldercare, etc. within a home);
- Restaurants, bars, or cantinas; or
- Begging, street peddling, or door-to-door sales.

Victims of human trafficking may exhibit any of the following:

- Evidence of being controlled either physically or psychologically;
- Inability to leave home or place of work;
- Inability to speak for oneself or share one's own information;
- Information is provided by someone accompanying the individual;
- Loss of control of one's own identification documents (ID or passport);
- Have few or no personal possessions;
- Owe a large debt that the individual is unable to pay off; or
- Loss of sense of time or space, not knowing where they are or what city or state they are in.

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## The Mindset of a Trafficking Victim

A human trafficking victim may develop a mindset of fear, distrust, denial, and conflicting loyalties. Foreign victims of trafficking are often fearful of being deported or jailed and, therefore, they may distrust authority figures, particularly law enforcement and government officials. Similarly, traffickers may convince sex trafficking victims who are U.S. citizens or LPRs that, if they report their traffickers to the police, the police will jail the victim for prostitution while the traffickers, pimps, or johns will go free. Many victims of both sex and labor trafficking fear that if they escape their servitude and initiate investigations against their trafficker, the trafficker and his/her associates will harm the victims, the victims' family members, or others.

## Psychological and Behavioral Clues

Being able to recognize the psychological and emotional consequences of human trafficking can also be helpful in identifying victims. Victims often:

- Develop general feelings of helplessness, shame, guilt, self-blame, and humiliation;
- Suffer from shock and denial, or display symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, phobias, panic attacks, anxiety, and depression;
- Suffer from sleep or eating disorders;
- Become addicted to drugs and/or alcohol as a way to cope with or “escape” their situation, or as a method of control used by their traffickers;
- Become emotionally numb, detached, and disassociated from the physical and psychological trauma and display “flat affect”; or
- Experience “trauma bonding” with the trafficker, positively identifying with the trafficker and believing that, despite repeated abuse, the trafficker is a loving boyfriend, spouse, or parent.

## Physical Effects of Human Trafficking

While not all victims of trafficking have physical indicators that aid identification, many victims suffer serious health issues, some of which may include the following:

- Signs of physical abuse, such as bruises, broken bones, burns, and scarring;
- Chronic back, visual, or hearing problems from work in agriculture, construction, or manufacturing;
- Skin or respiratory problems caused by exposure to agricultural or other chemicals;
- Infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis and hepatitis, which are spread in overcrowded, unsanitary environments with limited ventilation;
- Untreated chronic illnesses, such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease; or
- Reproductive health problems, including sexually transmitted diseases, urinary tract infections, pelvic pain and injuries from sexual assault, or forced abortions.

*If you think you have come into contact with a victim of human trafficking, call the **National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1.888.3737.888**. The NHTRC can help you identify and coordinate with local organizations that protect and serve trafficking victims. For more information on human trafficking visit: [www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking).*

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