

KNOW THE FACTS: Domestic Sex Trafficking

Americans generally tend to think that human trafficking is a crime that occurs in other countries, to foreigners who should have known better, or to those who brought it upon themselves. These assumptions are misconceptions; trafficking happens here in the United States to U.S. citizens and in every state in the nation.

- In the United States, the federal definition of human trafficking in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act includes both U.S. citizens and foreign nationals - both are equally protected under Federal trafficking statutes and have been since 2000.¹
- Americans usually do not realize that a child or adult who is a U.S. citizen can be a victim of human trafficking. It is just as likely that a trafficking victim could come from your own neighborhood and be a local teenage girl who is prostituted by an older man at a local truck stop. Sadly, Americans tend to refer to U.S. trafficking victims as anything but victims. They are referred to as criminals, prostitutes, child prostitutes, runaways, addicts, or juvenile delinquents. Traffickers are often referred to only as pimps.²
- Research indicates that most victims of sex trafficking within the United States are women and children, particularly girls under the age of 18.³
- While human trafficking is about exploitation and does not require the movement or transportation of the person, trafficking victims within the United States can often be identified in situations where the victims are moved from one location to another irrespective of distance. The movement of a victim is a common control technique used to isolate him or her; the distance may range from a couple of miles from the victim's home to several states.⁴
- Just as with international sex trafficking, domestic sex trafficking often occurs through the use of force, fraud, or coercion against the victim. Although some of these tactics may be similar to those used against international victims, victims in the United States have reported other tactics that may look very different. For example:
 - **Force:** Most victims have reported being raped by a trafficker or pimp or gang-raped by a trafficker and his associates. Victims are often told that they are now "damaged" and can do nothing but enter prostitution. Victims have also reported being forced to take drugs or consume alcohol by the trafficker.⁶
 - **Fraud:** Victims, especially girls who are fleeing abusive homes, have reported how traffickers ("pimps") will use other women or girls to lure them into prostitution by claiming that the trafficker is their boyfriend and he will protect her like he protects them. Some traffickers also seduce victims and claim to be their boyfriends; after a short time of "dating," he will then tell the victim that he wants her to prostitute herself (or provide sexual favors to his "friends") to prove she loves him.⁷

¹ Polaris Project (2009). *Common myths and misconceptions about human trafficking in the U.S.* Retrieved July 22, 2009, from <http://nhtrc.polarisproject.org/materials/Common-Myths-and-Misconceptions-about-Human-Trafficking-in-the-US.pdf>

² Based on each state's 2007 law enforcement and prosecution statistics and the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program. U.S. Department of State Human Smuggling and Trafficking Center (December 2008). *Domestic human trafficking: An internal issue* [Electronic version], 2. Retrieved July 22, 2009, from <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/113612.pdf> (hereinafter "HSTC Report").

³ *HSTC Report*, 4.

⁴ *HSTC Report*, 4.

⁵ The TVPA does not require that force, fraud or coercion be shown if the victim is less than 18 years old. *HTSC Report*, 3.

⁶ Brantley, N. (June 2009). Presentation on victims of commercial sexual exploitation on behalf of Motivating, Inspiring, Supporting & Serving Sexually Exploited Youth (MISSEY) (hereinafter *MISSEY Presentation*). MISSEY is a project based out of Alameda County, California, created to respond to the epidemic of commercial sexual exploitation of children, especially in the form of child/teen prostitution. MISSEY works specifically with minor victims of domestic sex trafficking by providing counseling, shelter, and many other rehabilitation services. These facts come specifically from interviews with MISSEY's clients.

⁷ *MISSEY Presentation*.



KNOW THE FACTS: Domestic Sex Trafficking

- **Coercion:** Victims report how traffickers use personal information they learned during the “dating” or grooming period to craft very personal threats. For instance, a pimp may threaten to harm a specific family member to whom the victim is very close, or a pimp may write a letter regarding the victim’s sexual activity to the victim’s parents, grandparents, etc., and threaten to mail it if the victim does not cooperate.⁸
- A number of studies in the United States indicate that many women and girls in prostitution are also victims of sex trafficking. For example:
 - 79% of women in prostitution in one study gave an indication that they were in prostitution due to some degree of force.⁹
 - In another study, 50% of the women and girls interviewed reported being kidnapped by pimps; 76% of those were beaten by pimps; and 79% were beaten by customers.¹⁰
 - A study of 222 women in the sex trade in Chicago found that 44-50% of these women give the money they make in prostitution to someone else, and 79% believe they would be harmed if they stopped.¹¹
- Domestic sex trafficking victims not only fear harm from their traffickers, but many report violence by those people who purchase sex acts (“johns”). For example:
 - In one study in San Francisco, 70% of the 200 women and girls surveyed reported being sexually assaulted an average of 31 times by “johns,” and 65% of them reported being physically abused or beaten at least four times.¹²
 - In the study “Sister Speak Out” by the Center for Impact Research in Chicago, the victims reported that “johns” were the most frequent perpetrators of violence.¹³

⁸ MISSEY Presentation.

⁹ Hughes, D.M. (Spring 2003). Demand: The driving force of sex trafficking. *Coalition Commentary*. Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault.

¹⁰ Giobbe, E. Statement of WHISPER action group members, 6 (1-2). *WHISPER*.

¹¹ Raphael, J. & Shapiro, D.L. (2002). *Sister speak out: The lives and needs of prostituted women in Chicago*. Center for Impact Research.

¹² Silbert, M.H. & Pines, A.M. (1981). Sexual child abuse as an antecedent to prostitution. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 5:407-411.

¹³ Raphael, J. & Shapiro, D.L. (2002).