
In General: Sex Trafficking - Sexual Violence

Sex trafficking is one of the greatest threats to America's growing population. This criminal industry is responsible for the enslavement of millions around the globe, and the number of victims is steadily on the rise. The experiences that these victims have to go through are truly traumatizing and horrific. Due to experiencing severe traumatic events, victims are often at high risk for short term and long term psychological problems. Many of those in the medical community do not know how to properly care for those previously involved in sex trafficking. Sex trafficking rips away the innocence of the youth, breaks apart families, and completely destroys people's autonomy. This monster is often brushed under the rug, but it is important for public to recognize that it is a real problem that is occurring all over our country, day and night.

As soon as one enters the sex trafficking industry, they are immediately exposed to traumatic events. First, the victims are often beaten, gang raped, and abused by their traffickers/pimps. This is the traffickers way of breaking them in and making sure they would be good prostitutes. According to an article written by Tetiana Sukach et al., this results in "powerlessness and helplessness in every aspect of lives". The goal is to completely take away any and all power that the victim has. This also enlists a sense of helplessness in the victim, which helps the trafficker or pimp gain power. These events dramatically decrease the victim's self-esteem, making them feel as if they don't deserve to be treated any other way. They are broken down, and ripped of their autonomy. Victims are also often threatened by their perpetrators, claiming that they will harm their loved ones if they refuse to comply with their demands. Meanwhile, they are kept in very unsanitary living conditions, and are often exposed to sexually transmitted infections and diseases as a result of being forced to participate in unprotected sex, along with unwanted pregnancy. They are also withheld from proper medical care. Traffickers/Pimps often supply the victim with extremely dangerous drugs such as heroin, leaving them in a distorted, lifeless state. This allows the trafficker or pimp to completely control the victim, being that they are in a distorted and helpless state. Victims will also voluntarily abuse drugs and alcohol to try to cope with the pain and emptiness that they feel everyday. Some drink alcohol to have that warm feeling when out on the streets during winter. Substance abuse is the only option the victims have when trying to cope. Many victims often use self harm as a way to try and cope with their surroundings. Some even go as far as committing suicide. In a documentary directed by Mary Mazzio, the mother of a victim, after finding her daughter listed on Backpage.com, stated that "we got her back, but she was addicted to drugs, she had been very abused". Websites like Backpage.com play a huge part in the trafficking of victims. A listing could be posted in minutes, and within a short amount of time, the money starts rolling in. The feeling of emptiness is also inflicted upon their family. The father of one of the victims stated that he "couldn't stop thinking about what was happening to her". Obviously, this is not okay. Yet this is how millions of people are living every single day. According to a nonprofit organization that regularly helps survivors of human trafficking, "4.8 million people trapped in forced sexual exploitation globally". Victims of sex trafficking need their voice heard, and they need people to listen. Human trafficking is everywhere and it can happen to anyone. Anybody could become a victim and have to live through these inhumane and demoralizing experiences.

Repeated trauma caused by their perpetrators, results in many short term and long term consequences. Survivors of sex trafficking often deal with "post-traumatic stress disorder,

depression, anxiety, dissociative disorders, and substance-related disorders". Survivors often have problems integrating back into society. One reason is because society looks at them more so as a criminal, not a victim. Many think that it's the victims fault that they were in the situation they were in, and that they aren't a victim at all, just a prostitute. This is based off the fact that the majority of the population is not very educated on sex trafficking at all. Nobody takes the time to listen to their experiences and try to understand them, everyone just assumes and labels them as criminals or prostitutes. Many victims choose not to run away and get help in fear of being arrested and criminalized. Some survivors also claim to have problems dealing with relationships, often because of the repeated trauma inflicted upon them by men. Many of them have no respect for men and feel as if they can't trust any of them. Ultimately, it is very hard for survivors to smoothly integrate themselves back into society. Due to a long period of isolation from the outside world and repeated abuse, getting back into daily life will be very difficult. It is important that they have a strong support system and a well trained caregiver.

Most health care providers do not know how to properly care for a victim who was previously part of the sex trafficking industry. Usually the victim is scared, confused, and upset. According to an article written by Dana Kaplan, "Many victims have an overwhelming distrust of authority figures based on histories of child maltreatment, abandonment by caregivers, and prior involvement with CPS and/or law enforcement". This is why it is essential for the medical provider to establish trust and build a connection with the victim. Most medical professionals are not properly trained on how to handle a victim of sex trafficking, and it shows. It is important that a physical is performed to look for injuries, along with testing for any infections or diseases. The victim needs to feel safe in their environment, and they need to feel like they can trust the caregiver. Some victims may also need training in different life skills, such as "building healthy relationships with peers, grocery shopping, navigating public transportation, cooking, and building a support network among healthcare providers". Helping these victims integrate themselves back into society is very important, especially if they spent a long period in the industry. Educating them in different social and life skills will be very useful to them and will allow them to smoothly integrate back into society. Substance abuse programs should also be offered, being that most victims become addicted to drugs and/or alcohol. This can help prevent long-term addictions and health risks. The public needs to be more educated on the sex trafficking industry. It is real, and it happens to real people. These victims live through the most traumatic and terrifying events, and get their autonomy ripped away from them. They are not just prostitutes on the corner. They are somebody's mother, daughter, cousin, niece, and they deserve to be heard. They deserve to be understood. Just like in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, these "monsters" or "prostitutes" deserve to have their stories heard. Victor's monster was not what he assumed. Just by the looks of it, he made a false assumption. Same goes for society and victims of sex trafficking. Victims are labeled as criminals before their story could even be heard. Medical professionals need to be properly trained to take care of sex trafficking victims. It should be widely integrated in the health system. Public education and professional training are the first steps to fighting this monster called sex trafficking. We need to understand and care for these victims, not label them.