

Extended Abstract

Do you know the signs of a human trafficking victim?

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Clinical Human and sex trafficking has been a problem most individuals believe is only associated with events occurring outside of the United States. Unfortunately, this is a common misconception and this problem is prevalent and uprising in the United States. The exact number of cases in the United States is unknown but there are reported cases in every state. The youth of America are at an exponential risk of being exploited and becoming victims of human sex trafficking. Although youth and vulnerable populations are typical targets for sex trafficking, anyone is at risk of being a target. A victim of sex trafficking is defined by US federal law as an individual under the age of 18 who performs commercial sex through force, fraud or coercion, or is induced into commercial sex. Sex traffickers utilize different methods of manipulation to entrap and coerce their victims to perform sex acts they are unwilling to perform. This leads to some form of child or adult prostitution. Labor traffickers may embellish potential employment, education, or travel opportunities to recruit individuals to work in subservient roles resulting in hostile work conditions and inability to regain their freedom for various reasons. These acts translate into a form of modern day slavery. These victims are at risk for physical and psychological trauma that may be longstanding. With the increasing rise of these victims in our communities, most healthcare providers have not received the proper training to identify potential victims and resources to report and assist these individuals. As the U.S. anti-trafficking movement has grown in our understanding of this diverse and complex crime, we are learning more about how specific people, such as medical professionals, teachers, truck drivers, and restaurant personnel, in addition to friends and family members, can help identify and report possible trafficking. Everyone can help by learning the types of trafficking and paying attention to the people around us. Anyone can experience trafficking in any community, just as anyone can be the victim of any kind of crime. While it can happen to anyone, evidence suggests that people of color and LGBTQ+ people are more likely to experience trafficking than other demographic groups. Generational trauma, historic oppression, discrimination, and other societal factors and inequities create community-wide vulnerabilities. Traffickers recognize and take advantage of people who are vulnerable. There is no evidence that traffickers are more likely to be of a particular race, nationality, gender, or sexual orientation. They may be family members, romantic partners, acquaintances, or strangers. Stories become weapons in the hands of human traffickers — tales of romantic love everlasting or about good jobs and fair wages just over the horizon. Sometimes, the stories themselves raise red flags. Other times, traffickers or potential traffickers may raise red flags during recruitment.