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*“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”*

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING: A SERVICE PROVIDER’S GUIDE TO  
RECOGNIZING AND ASSISTING VICTIMS OF MODERN DAY  
SLAVERY**

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## Abstract

*There are 27 million slaves in the world today, nearly three times that of the Atlantic slave trade.*

*This paper will discuss modern day slavery by examining the means and reasons behind it, and will discuss ways service providers can recognize and assist victims of human trafficking.*

“Imagine a world where slavery is normal, where slavery is considered good business, offering solid returns. In this world “excess” people- the very poor, for example- can be put to productive uses that benefit everyone” (Bales, 2007, p. 1). It is difficult to imagine that such a world exists, but in reality this is the very world we live in. By the time it will have taken you to read this paragraph, one child will have been sexually exploited for commercial profit. By the time you finish reading this article one person will have been smuggled across U.S. borders for commercial exploitation, and by the end of today nearly 93 million dollars in global profits will have been made through the labor of enslaved individuals (Belser, 2007; FAAST, 2007).

Kevin Bales, cofounder of Free the Slaves, estimates that there are 27 million slaves in the world at any given time (Bales, 2004). This is nearly three times the number of slaves traded during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade (Emory University, 2009). In 2008 human trafficking surpassed the illegal weapons trade to become the second largest criminal industry in the world (U.S. Department of State, 2009). As seen from these statistics, human trafficking is a growing and prevalent problem.

Not only does it take place in other countries, it is a problem within the United States. The U.S. Department of State (2009) estimates that there are 600,000 to 800,000 men, women, and children trafficked across international borders annually. Higher estimates report that the annual incidences of trafficking in persons (TIP) are as high as four million (U.S. Agency for International Development, 2003). Conservative estimates state that about 18,000 individuals are trafficked into the U.S. annually (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2009). The International Labor Office (Belser, 2007)

reports global profits of sexual exploitation alone are \$33.9 billion, with half of that accumulated in industrial countries.

This issue presents unique challenges for service providers as they learn to recognize, assess, and assist trafficking victims. Many trafficking victims in the U.S. are erroneously thought to be “illegal” immigrants and are sentenced to time in prison or are returned to their countries of origin; often the trafficker is set free or is given a light sentence. Mistreatment of the victim can be avoided if service providers are educated in how to recognize them. They must be aware of the services available to victims and the legal process with which to assist them. Law enforcement, social workers, and grassroots organizations must have open communication to build strong networks in order to provide swift rescue and rehabilitation for trafficking survivors.

### **Is it really slavery?**

Because modern day slavery does not always involve physical chains, one may wonder if these situations can actually be considered slavery. However, psychological coercion has proven to be just as effective as physical bonds, if not more so, at holding people in bondage (International Justice Mission, 2009; U.S. Department of State, 2009). Key to determining if a situation is indeed human trafficking is the involvement of force, fraud, or coercion.

Force is the physical means used to bring someone into or keep someone in slavery, and involves the use of rape, beatings and confinement to control victims. Forceful violence is used especially during the early stages of victimization, known as the ‘seasoning process’, which is used to break victim’s resistance to make them easier to control (FAAST, 2007).

Fraud involves the deceit and misleading of an individual into slavery. Many victims are promised legitimate jobs in another city or country. For example, women and children will reply to advertisements promising jobs as waitresses, maids and dancers in other countries but are forced into prostitution when they arrive at their destinations. Fraud also involves the control of the victim's identification documents (passports, etc.) by the trafficker (International Justice Mission, 2009).

Coercion is the threat of force used to keep an individual in bondage. It involves any threat of harm, physical restraint, abuse, or legal action against the victim. This alone can be strong enough to keep someone in bondage (FAAST, 2007; International Justice Mission, 2009; U.S. Department of State, 2009)

### **The process of victimization**

The process of victimization includes recruitment, transportation, transferring, harboring, and receipt of persons. Once victims are recruited or abducted, they are often transported to another location. Harboring involves sheltering the victim at a specific location, usually in concealment. It occurs any time a victim is held at a location by a trafficker or recruiter. Once a victim has been recruited, he or she is transported to the trafficker, who may transfer the victim to another location.

Although a victim will often be transported and transferred, it is important to recognize that transportation or transferring need not be included to qualify a situation as human trafficking. Some cases have been reported of an individual harboring a relative in concealment and forcing that relative into domestic servitude or commercial sexual exploitation.

## **Forms of modern day slavery**

Modern day slavery takes many forms such as labor trafficking, sex trafficking, ritual slavery, child soldiering, and organ harvesting. Perhaps the most well known form is that of sex trafficking, but the other forms are just as dangerous and lucrative to the trafficker.

### **Labor trafficking**

Labor trafficking is any situation in which the victim is forced, deceived, or coerced into performing a job against their will, in which the profit they earn goes directly to their trafficker. An individual or family sometimes finds themselves in a slavery situation when a personal or family emergency requires immediate financial remediation. The victim may receive a loan from an individual donor who requires repayment in the form of work for very little or no pay. The debt accumulates faster than the victim is paid, forcing their family into servitude (International Justice Mission, 2007).

### **Ritual slavery**

Ritual slavery involves the forced marriage of a girl or woman to a deity or deities of a temple shrine. By being married to a particular deity, women are forced into labor and sexual servitude and have no hope of escape (Black, 2007).

### **Child soldiers**

Child soldiering involves the recruitment, abduction, and forced participation in combat of children. Some children join voluntarily because they see no other alternative to military work, or to avenge the killing of their relatives. Both girls and boys are trained in combat, and girls are also used for sexual exploitation (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2007).

### **Sex trafficking**

Sex trafficking is defined as “The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act” (FAAST, 2007, p. 35). In other words, sex trafficking is any sex act forced upon an individual for the commercial gain of another person. Types of sex trafficking include prostitution, pornography, mail-order brides, military prostitution, sex tourism, stripping, and live sex shows. While there are some individuals involved in prostitution, pornography, stripping, or live sex shows who participate voluntarily, these activities often involve trafficking. Individuals who work in the sex industry, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, work in the industry which profits solely by exploiting women and children (Farley, 2003).

It is important to note that any minor sexually exploited for commercial gain is always considered a victim of human trafficking. Statistics show that one in three runaway youths will be approached within 38 hours of being on the streets for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation (U.S. Department of State, 2009).

## **Assisting and Recognizing Victims of Human Trafficking**

### **Tools for Recognizing Trafficking Victims**

In order to effectively work with victims of trafficking, service providers must have an understanding of the issue and of the process victims walk through. A key to verifying if the individual is a victim of trafficking is to determine whether or not they have control of their identification documents. Ask whether or not the individual is doing the job they thought they would be doing once they reached the U.S. Clarify if they receive direct payment for their services, or if all or most of their earnings go directly to someone else. Determine whether or not they are free to leave the premises where they live or work. Discover if they are allowed to be in contact with friends and family from their home communities. These are all indicators that the individual is a victim of trafficking. It is important to carefully screen interpreters as they may be involved in the community and may know the trafficker (The Salvation Army, 2000-2009).

### **Assisting Victims of Trafficking**

Because of the nature of the crime, victims of human trafficking require unique assistance and treatment. The U.S. government has developed a trafficking visa (T-VISA) specifically for victims of trafficking which allows victims to stay in the U.S. without being prosecuted or deported (Bruno, et.al. 2005). Rather than treating the victim as a criminal by incarceration, the human trafficking victim must be treated as a victim of a crime. It is important to be aware that many times a survivor of trafficking may not want to return to their country of origin because of cultural issues. For example, once someone has been sold into sexual slavery, their village may consider them an outcast. Additionally, the survivor of human trafficking may be vulnerable to re-trafficking. It is important to obtain safe housing as soon as possible so they will be safe from their traffickers and can begin their recovery.

Law agencies, health providers, and community service agencies must have open communication about this issue. Many victims have been egregiously treated because of a lack of awareness and understanding.

### **A God of Justice**

Our God is a God of justice (Psalm 11: 5, 7, 33:5; Isaiah 30: 18; Jeremiah 9:24; Micah 6:8; Psalm 10). In Luke 4:18 Jesus declares, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free" (TNIV, 2005). God sent his son to earth to reveal his truth and to bring us to him. One way Jesus did this was by relieving the physical suffering of his people. God calls his children to "act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8, TNIV, 2005). As we grow closer to the heart of God, our hearts should grow in loving justice because God loves justice (Haugen, 1999).

A tangible form of seeking justice is to work to set captives of modern day slavery, or human trafficking, free. Christians have a calling to seek justice (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 1:17), and an undeniably atrocious form of injustice presents itself through human trafficking. Our response cannot be to ignore the issue because there are too many other issues to focus on, or because we believe it happens outside of our realm of influence. We must act responsibly by becoming educated about it and by dealing with it directly. Our response to human trafficking should not be a spirit of fear or timidity, but one of "power, love, and self discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7, TNIV, 2005).

Social workers and other service providers have unique opportunities to be on the front lines of work with trafficking victims. Service providers are often first responders in dealing

with crime, and by learning how to recognize and assist these individuals, they can positively impact the recovery of the survivor. With 27 million slaves in the world, and 20 percent of those individuals in the U.S., social workers are bound to encounter victims of human trafficking. By being prepared with an understanding of the issue and the best process through which to help victims, social workers can be part of the work of God's justice.

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