

Summary of Human Trafficking 101: Dispelling the Myths



Human trafficking is a global issue, and **anyone can become a victim**, including men, women, and children. Worldwide forms of human trafficking include child soldiers, child brides, and organ trafficking. Following are **10 myths** associated with human trafficking.

Myth #1: Human trafficking only happens overseas.

Truth: Every country is affected by human trafficking, including the United States. The U.S. passed federal legislation to **outlaw two common forms of human trafficking**: sex trafficking and labor trafficking. According to federal law, human trafficking means **forcing or coercing a person to perform commercial sex or labor/services**. Commercial sex is any sex act in which money or something of value is exchanged. Under federal law, anyone under age 18 involved in commercial sex is automatically a victim of human trafficking—no force or coercion is required.

Myth #2: Only foreign nationals/immigrants are trafficked in the United States.

Truth: In 2016, over 7,500 human trafficking tips were reported **and at least 2,075 of these tips involved U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents**.

Myth #3: Human trafficking and human smuggling are the same crime.

Truth: Human trafficking is **NOT** the same crime as human smuggling. Human trafficking is a violation of someone's human rights. Human smuggling is a violation of a country's immigration laws. A person can consent to being smuggled into the country; however, if that person is forced or coerced into commercial sex or labor/services, then s/he may be a victim of human trafficking.

Myth #4: Sex trafficking could never occur in a legal setting like a strip club.

Truth: Sex trafficking has been reported in legal business settings (e.g., strip clubs, pornography operations, escort services). **Regardless of the location or legality**, any person induced to perform commercial sex or labor through force, fraud, or coercion is a victim of human trafficking.

Myth #5: Everyone engaging in prostitution is doing so by choice.

Truth: Adults often "choose" to perform commercial sex work due to lack of options as opposed to making a free choice. We must refrain from passing judgment and we must offer compassion and resources to persons in need of help.

Myth #6: Victims of human trafficking will reach out for help.

Truth: Victims of sex trafficking, especially youth, do not always self-identify as victims. Due to prior abuse, victims may not realize they are being manipulated or exploited. Sex traffickers often target abused/vulnerable youth. Victims of sex or labor trafficking may blame themselves, may fear authorities, or may fear retaliation by traffickers. Foreign national victims may not speak English and may not know their rights in the U.S.

Myth #7: Only women and girls are victims of sex trafficking.

Truth: Men and boys are also victims of sex trafficking. Traffickers often target young men and boys living on the streets, many of whom identify as LGBTQ.

Myth #8: Child sex trafficking could never occur in my community.

Truth: Child sex trafficking has occurred in every region served by Dignity Health.

Myth #9: All sex traffickers are stereotypical pimps.

Truth: Pimping has become so normalized and even glamorized in the media that many young men and boys, especially gang members, want to become pimps. Gangs consider it easier to sell a person for sex than to sell drugs or guns. **Drugs and guns can be sold only once. A person, however, can be sold for sex over and over.** Anyone can be a trafficker, including family members, friends, and neighbors. This crime is not exclusive to known pimps and gang members. There have been many cases in which mothers, fathers, step-parents, and even grandparents have been accused and convicted of selling or trading their children or grandchildren for sex.

Myth #10: Human trafficking refers only to sex trafficking.

Truth: Human trafficking is an umbrella term that includes both sex and labor trafficking. Unfortunately, labor trafficking often does not get as much exposure in the media as does sex trafficking. Labor trafficking has been identified in industries like agriculture, hospitality, domestic work (e.g., live-in maid), and traveling sales crews. Red flags include the following:

- Victims may be charged a fee that is impossible to pay off (i.e., debt bondage).
- Victims may be forced to work 12+ hours per day, 7 days per week.
- Victims may not be allowed to leave the work premises and may be forced to sleep on the floor or on a cot in the back of the business.
- Victims of domestic servitude may be forced to sleep in the home. Victims working in traveling sales crews may be forced to sleep in a van.

As defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), **there are three victim populations** of criminal human trafficking:

1. Anyone under age 18 induced to perform commercial sex **under any circumstance**
2. Any adult induced to perform commercial sex through **force, fraud, or coercion**
3. Anyone, of **any age**, induced to perform labor/services through force, fraud, or coercion.

Red Flags in the health care setting include (but are not limited to) patients with controlling companions (e.g., a companion who insists on holding a patient's passport or work visa, a companion who insists on interpreting for a patient, a companion who refuses to leave the patient's side); patients not speaking for themselves; patients with signs of medical/physical neglect; and patients who are submissive, fearful, hypervigilant, and/or uncooperative.

What to do if you see red flags: Inform an appropriate supervisor or an appropriate nurse (e.g., nurse shift manager/nurse supervisor), physician/medical provider, or social worker.

The **National Human Trafficking Hotline** is available 24/7 to report suspicious activity, to inquire about local resources, and to seek support if you or someone you know is a victim of human trafficking: **1.888.373.7888**. For additional information, see the Dignity Health module, Human Trafficking 101: Dispelling the Myths, available in MyJourney and/or PDF format.

To learn more about Dignity Health's Human Trafficking Response Program,
please visit www.dignityhealth.org/human-trafficking-response.

