

HUMAN SEX TRAFFICKING

Considered a form of “modern slavery,” sex trafficking is the use of “violence, threats, lies, debt bondage, and other forms of coercion to compel adults and children to engage in commercial sex acts against their will. Under U.S. federal law, any minor under the age of 18 years induced into commercial sex is a victim...regardless of whether or not the trafficker used force, fraud, or coercion.”¹ According to the International Labor Organization, 4.8 million people around the world were victims of forced sexual exploitation in 2016.² “In 2019, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children estimated that 1 in 6 endangered runaways reported to them were likely sex trafficking victims.”³ And over 45,000 cases of sex trafficking have been reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline since 2007.⁴

THE INTERSECTION OF TRAFFICKING AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A closer look at the experiences and needs of those being abused or trafficked reveals striking similarities. Sex trafficking often occurs within the context of an intimate partner or familial relationship, and victims often live with their trafficker. Both partners and parents have forced loved ones into having sex in exchange for things like money, housing, favors or gifts. In some situations, victims perceive what others would call a pimp to be an intimate partner.

Victims of trafficking suffer a cycle of abuse which mirrors that of domestic violence. Like domestic violence, trafficking often involves a combination of psychological manipulation, physical and emotional abuse, and threats of violence to maintain control over victims. In both cases, victims are commonly isolated, monitored, and restricted

in their daily activities, with little or no control over their finances.

Similar to those experiencing domestic violence, people being trafficked often need safe emergency housing, but face a lack of shelter beds across the country.⁴ In both situations, experiences of blame can prevent people from seeking help, with trafficking victims additionally suffering from criminalization.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ARE ON THE SAME SPECTRUM OF VIOLENCE

At Women Against Abuse, we recognize that human trafficking often exists as a specialized form of domestic violence when an intimate partner or family member utilizes assaultive and coercive behaviors to gain power and control to exploit someone for a commercial sex act. By viewing both issues as part of the same spectrum of violence, our aim is twofold: to use tools from the anti-domestic violence movement to empower trafficking victims, and to build coalitions with community partners to prevent and intervene in situations of assault, coercion, and control.

¹ <http://polarisproject.org/sex-trafficking>

² https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575479.pdf

³ <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/type-trafficking/sex-trafficking>

⁴ <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/type-trafficking/sex-trafficking>