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Child Sex Trafficking: Not Just a Third World Problem

Melissa A. Menasco
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Fact from Fiction

Fact

* Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery.

An estimated 100,000-300,000* U.S. children are currently involved in sex trafficking

- 80% of identified victims are female
- Over 50% are children
- Average age of initial victimization: 13 years

Who is at risk for child sex trafficking?

- Runaway and homeless youth
- Children within the foster care system
- Children with histories of abuse
- Children with histories of substance abuse
- Children with disabilities
- Youth in the juvenile justice system
- LGBTQ youth
- Refugees, immigrants, and non-English-speaking persons

Fiction

- Human trafficking victims are only foreign nationals.

Fact: Human trafficking victims may be U.S. citizens, foreign nationals, or undocumented persons.

- Trafficking victims must be kidnapped and/or physically restrained.

Fact: Human trafficking victims may be threatened or manipulated into compliance,

- Smuggling is required for human trafficking.

Fact: Smuggling is not required, but a person who is smuggled may also be a victim of human trafficking.

* According to New York state 2011, but other sources place child sex trafficking in the U.S. at much higher numbers.

Identifying Victims

- Victims rarely self-identify; they may present with other forms of abuse, neglect or maltreatment
- Victims have likely experienced extensive physical and mental trauma and may be fearful
- Obtaining information usually requires time and multiple interviews
- Observation of the dynamic between the victim and the "guardian/trafficker"
- Possible signs include:
 - Excess amounts of cash
 - Hotel keys
 - Chronic runaway/homelessness
 - Lying about age/false ID
 - Inconsistencies in story
 - Prostitution or commercial sex acts
 - Mention of a pimp/boyfriend
 - Inappropriately dressed for the weather or time of year



When a man, desperate for work, finds himself in a factory or on a fishing boat or in a field, working, toiling, for little or no pay, and beaten if he tries to escape—that is slavery. When a woman is locked in a sweatshop, or trapped in a home as a domestic servant, alone and abused and incapable of leaving—that's slavery. When a little boy is kidnapped, turned into a child soldier, forced to kill or be killed—that's slavery. When a little girl is sold by her impoverished family—girls my daughters' age—runs away from home, or is lured by the false promises of a better life, and then imprisoned in a brothel and tortured is she resists—that's slavery.

*B. Barack Obama, September 2012
Speaking on human trafficking*

Protect & Support

National Strategies

Legislation should address prosecution of traffickers, dismantling of criminal networks, identification of exploiters and facilitators.

Key legislation passed by Congress in support of anti-trafficking efforts:

Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000

Prosecutorial Remedies and other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today Act of 2003

William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008

The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014

Local and State Strategies

- Promote competence and resilience through education and life skills
- Development and implementation of effective strategies to rehabilitate and reintegrate child victims
- Development of child protection system
- Enhance economic opportunities
- Promote gender equality
- Promote adequate training of law enforcement personnel and other front line staff
- Promote children's participation

Rafferty, Y. (2013). Child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation: A review of promising prevention policies and programs. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 83, 559-575.

