



Human Trafficking 101 – What is Human Trafficking?

By Christine Commerce

Preview:

Human trafficking is a complex issue that can happen to anyone, anywhere. It is a crime against every person's God-given basic human rights and dignity.

Article:

***Editor's Note:** This article is the first in a series about human trafficking. While this article described the reality of human trafficking, the next article will identify how it can happen in our environments. The third article will describe online exploitative environments.*

Human Trafficking may conjure up many images in our minds—a windowless, white van kidnapping a girl off the streets, a child in India making rugs, an immigrant who has been brought here illegally and forced into labor or sex trafficking... You might even recall the movie, "Taken," with Liam Neeson.

While these can be examples of human trafficking, this crime is a complex issue that can happen to anyone, anywhere. In this article, we will discuss two common types, sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Most victims are not kidnapped off the streets and physically chained or held against their will in the United States. While it is true that traffickers will target those who are most vulnerable, other factors increase a person's vulnerability. This can include people living in poverty, immigrants, people who have been previously abused, children or youth who are missing (who have been labeled in some instances as "runaways") or children living in the foster care system, as well as others living in the margins of society.

Traffickers do not discriminate. Both traffickers and victims have come from middle and upper-class families and include people of all races, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds. Human trafficking is a crime against every person's God-given basic human rights and dignity. It is best described as modern-day slavery.

The legal definition of human trafficking is defined as the recruitment, harboring, moving, or obtaining of a person **by force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of** involuntary servitude, debt bondage, slavery or commercial sex acts. In order to be considered human trafficking, only one of these elements needs to be present for adults 18 and older.

- **Force** can include physical restraint, physical harm, sexual assault, beatings and confinement. Traffickers often use force to control victims, especially during early stages of victimization to break down the person's resistance.
- **Fraud** can include false promises and deception regarding employment, wages, working conditions, love, marriage, or a better life. At any point, the trafficker may make unexpected changes to the relationship, work conditions, previously agreed-upon compensation or debt agreements.



- **Coercion** can include threats of serious harm or physical restraint against any person. Traffickers coerce victims through psychological manipulation (which is often part of a grooming process), document confiscation, shaming, and through the threat of involving law enforcement.

It is important to note that in the U.S., **law enforcement does not need to prove force, fraud or coercion when minors under the age of 18 are involved in sex trafficking.** Minors are always considered to be victims of human trafficking if anything of value is being traded for their sexual acts. On the contrary, to prove the labor trafficking of minors in the U.S., law enforcement does need to prove the presence of force, fraud or coercion.

Human trafficking is the fastest growing criminal industry in the world—second only to the illegal drug trade, and surpassing the illegal gun trade. According to the U.S. Department of State, there are 27.9 million people in labor and sex trafficking, while that number is as high as 50 million, with 22 million in forced marriages (International Labour Organization and Global Slavery Index). While specific statistics on the actual numbers may vary due to the extreme under-reporting of human trafficking, the key takeaway is that human trafficking is all too common and occurs too frequently all around us.

For more information on this topic and how to get involved, visit the AllianceToEndHumanTrafficking.org.