

Human Trafficking and Its Impact on Upstate New York

In October 2000, Congress enacted a law, Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). Prior to this law, no comprehensive Federal law existed to protect victims of trafficking or to prosecute their traffickers. This law requires the US State Department to monitor and provide an annual overview of worldwide anti-trafficking measures.

It also provided that the US could issue up to 5,000 visas annually to permit trafficking victims to remain in the United States. During the decade after this law was passed, it became clear that human trafficking victims were not only from other countries but there were victims of human trafficking, citizens, born in the United States, who also needed protection.

The TVPA act was later amended to allow protection for all victims, including those who were US citizens. As more data was gathered on human trafficking, individual states recognized a need to enact state laws. These state laws created a system of coordinated law enforcement to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes; provided protection for victims; educated physicians, health care workers, community workers, teachers, judges, mental health professionals, and others how to identify and assist victims.

Definition of Human Trafficking

Trafficking in persons is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons by means of threats or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power. The essence is force, fraud, and/or coercion of vulnerable people. There is disproportionate representation of poor women, children, and members of disadvantaged minority groups.

Trafficking in US

Increasingly, the US population began to understand that human trafficking is a world wide phenomenon which also exists in every state of the US. As the decade progressed, there was more and more media coverage, more research and numerous public presentations by community organizations and religious groups. Many US citizens initially believed that human trafficking was something that mainly occurred in large cities such as Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, or Las Vegas. In reality, human trafficking also happens in small cities, rural areas, and wealthy suburban areas. Human trafficking also includes children and adults who are forced into unpaid labor in sweatshops, commercial agriculture, domestic servitude, construction, restaurant work, housekeeping, and other service industries.

Trafficking of Minors in Upstate New York

Often unrecognized and sometimes under-reported is the human trafficking that is connected with runaway adolescents who are often lured into becoming prostitutes by sex traffickers. These sex traffickers often lure victims by the use of the Internet, social sites, telephone chat rooms or find the future victims in malls, clubs or on the streets. Classified advertising on web sites is used to advertise for sex with minors.

In September 2012, a 15 year-old Syracuse girl, missing from her home since June, was found working as a prostitute in Watertown. The girl's mother saw her daughter in photographs and advertisements for escort services on a web site. The mother also recognized the listing's phone number as belonging to her daughter. The mother told state police about the site. Police, investigating prostitution in Watertown, found the girl at a Watertown motel. The 29 year-old man for whom she was working was arrested. He was found to be listed on the New York State Sex Offender Registry.

In November 2012, nine adults in Utica, NY were arrested for sex trafficking of a minor child. The state police reported that the criminal organization used a website to advertise and sell the child online to various individuals. The 16 year-old girl was a runaway who prostituted herself in exchange for room and board. Once the nine were arrested the victim was offered services through Oneida County Child Advocacy Center.

Community Awareness and Response

These examples of human trafficking in upstate New York need to be shared with parents, teachers, counselors, and others who work with school-age minors. Parents may not be aware of the multiple ways their children may be lured, forced, or coerced into prostitution. According to the Department of Justice, 100,000 to 300,000 American children under the age of 18 are involved annually in prostitution and are often targeted by sexual predators. The average age a girl enters into prostitution is age 13, for a boy it is age 12.

Community education on human trafficking is needed not only for parents, educators, mental health workers but to other community staff, such as workers in motels and hotels where predators often demand and coerce young victims to work. Bus drivers, flight attendants, and others in the general public are often in close proximity to trafficking victims. One astute airline attendant became suspicious when an 18 year-old passenger said she was flying from rural Illinois to Florida to meet a new friend she had made on Facebook. The veteran attendant became suspicious, pulled the flight indicator and found the ticket had been purchased by a known trafficker. The attendant contacted the Human Trafficking tip line. With the information the attendant provided, federal agents were able to rescue the victim.

The National Human Trafficking Hotline **1-888-3737-888** may be called **anytime** if you suspect that someone may be a victim of human trafficking.

The goals of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act are to prevent human trafficking, protect victims, help them rebuild their lives, and prosecute traffickers.

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