WHAT IS SEX TRAFFICKING?

Sex trafficking is defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000) as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation or obtaining of a person for a commercial sex act where such an act is induced by force, fraud or coercion or in which the person has not attained 18 years of age.”

The commercial aspect of sex trafficking is what differentiates the crime from sexual assault, molestation or rape (Shared Hope International, 2012). In sex trafficking, like drug trafficking, the market is driven by the laws of supply and demand. Adult and youth victims serve as the supply, while buyers of commercial sex serve as the demand. Sex traffickers fill the distribution void through facilitating the transactions between sex buyers and victims they coerce or force to sell sex.

It is impossible to understand the full scope of sex trafficking cases occurring in the United States, as it is often hidden from plain view. To give an idea of what is being reported, the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline identified 10,836 victims of sex trafficking in the year 2020 (Polaris Project, 2020).

FORCE: includes physical restraint, physical harm, sexual assault, and beatings.
FRAUD: includes false promises regarding employment, wages, working conditions, love, marriage, or a better life.
COERCION: includes threats of serious harm or physical restraint against any person, psychological manipulation, document confiscation, and shame and fear-inducing threats to share information or pictures with others or report to authorities.

(U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2022)
Sex traffickers in custody will continue to exploit others while in a custody setting. This is seen in a few ways. Sex traffickers will often recruit victims from the outside by looking for vulnerable inmates they can groom and exploit. Sex traffickers learn about the inmates by starting a relationship, typically through letters and jail calls, to identify their specific needs. Sex traffickers will then meet those needs, such as adding money to their inmate account or sending them things. This creates a degree of dependence and debt until the inmate is released and then the exploitation begins.

Sex traffickers who are not incarcerated will also use victims 'on the inside' who are incarcerated to recruit new victims to offer a new life or to join their 'family'. Additionally, traffickers use bail as a means to control their victims. In states such as Arizona, where anyone can bail an individual out of jail, victims have reported not knowing who bailed them out until they entered the car outside. In other states, traffickers are known to use fraudulent bail bondsmen to bail victims out. These victims then have to "work off" their debt (Sisters Against Trafficking, 2021).

Lastly, from the inside of jails and prisons, incarcerated sex traffickers will groom, recruit, and maintain individuals in the community who are currently working for them and placing money in their inmate accounts.

Both victims of sex trafficking and sex traffickers may be incarcerated for crimes that appear unrelated to sex trafficking. Inmates who may be involved in sex trafficking, either as a victim or sex trafficker, could be incarcerated for charges such as loitering, trespassing, prostitution, pandering, drug trafficking, domestic violence, assault, kidnapping, robbery, fraud or shoplifting (Roe-Sepowitz, 2019).

Differences in the situation of inmates housed in male correctional units or facilities. To protect transgender inmates from sex trafficking victimization, direct questions need to be asked as part of The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) screening and assessment, intake classification interview, or medical intake process (see page 8).

Special Populations
The unique challenges faced by transgender individuals, such as unemployment and limited healthcare access, can make them more vulnerable to exploitation. Traffickers are aware of this, are able to identify the specific needs of this population, and will provide false promises to meet those needs (Polaris Project, 2017). Transgender individuals are also more vulnerable inside jails and prisons. Research has shown that transgender inmates are at higher risk of victimization while incarcerated (Au, 2016), and transgender women may be at a disproportionate risk of sex trafficking when housed in male correctional housing units or facilities. To protect transgender inmates from sex trafficking victimization, direct questions need to be asked as part of The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) screening and assessment, intake classification interview, or medical intake process (see page 8).

Overlap With Interpersonal Violence
There is tremendous overlap between the experiences of victims of sex trafficking and victims of interpersonal violence. Overlapping issues include the use of coercive control, violence, manipulation and threatening behavior, threatening harm to children or no contact to make the victim stay in the situation, economic abuse, and forced sexual contact. Trafficking victims require the same kind of advocacy as victims of interpersonal violence with special attention to safety and screening for sexual exploitation. It is helpful to apply knowledge about the experiences of victims of interpersonal violence to better understand victims of sex trafficking and their reluctance to leave a harmful situation. Many sex trafficking crimes mirror intimate partner violence and include physical abuse, psychological abuse, coercive control, and rape. Sex trafficking victims may not disclose their experiences due to trauma bonding and attachment to their trafficker, perceived feelings of love and devotion toward the abuser, or a lack of recognition that they are a victim of sex trafficking.
RED FLAGS FOR VICTIMS OF SEX TRAFFICKING FOR JAIL AND PRISON SPECIALTY AREAS

Each of the following specialty areas have specific red flags of sex trafficking to consider when screening or working with inmates.

INMATE INTAKE
- Prostitution and drug charges
- Lack of identification
- Property with large quantity of condoms, hotel key cards/receipts, multiple cell phones
- Arrived at correctional facility wearing few clothes/lingerie
- Suspicious tattoos or other branding marks (e.g. crown, money signs, "property of...")
- History of abuse
- Homelessness
- Substance addiction
- Visitor List – Visitation records of inmates with prostitution charges may show the same sex traffickers consistently visiting them and others and/or putting money in their inmate accounts

INMATE HOUSING
- Uses language related to sex trafficking (see page 5)
- Notable new crowd or new friend (can be solo or a network)
- Caught with contraband (drugs)
- No money in inmate account
- Sudden influx of commissary money - Inmates with no known family or contacts suddenly receiving excessive amounts of money in inmate account
- Mail, video calls, texts, etc. from sex traffickers or regular sex buyers will include offers to take care of them upon release
- Calls – Several victims may be calling the same number and numbers may linked to online escort ads

INMATE HEALTH SERVICES
Behavioral Indicators
- PTSD
- Poor coping
- Emotional liability
- Aggression
- Suicidal ideation or suicide attempts

Physical Indicators
- Injury – Hidden or unusual injuries (e.g. bruises, cuts, scars, burns)
- Physical pain – Signs of physical and sexual abuse, anal or genital trauma
- STIs and STDs
- Substance use addiction
- Suspicious tattoos or other branding marks

JAIL OR PRISON COURT/CUSTODY
- Sex traffickers will attempt to communicate with victims at court appearances in the waiting areas or in the actual courtroom.

INMATE RE-ENTRY AND RELEASE
- Upcoming release date
- Few skills or education
- Unlikely to have stable place to go to
- Picked up by individual who has posted bail for/picked up multiple other inmates

MINDSET OF ADULT AND YOUTH VICTIMS OF SEX TRAFFICKING (ASU STIR, 2022)
- Victims often do not see themselves as victims
- Victims may feel shame, self-blame, and feelings of unworthiness of a better life
- Victims may be coached to lie to mental health providers and often give fabricated histories with scripted stories
- Victims are often fearful and distrust the criminal justice system and government services
- Victims may have formed a trauma bond with their exploiter and may have deep loyalties and positive feelings for their abuser
- Victims often fear for their own safety and the safety of their loved ones due to threats of violence
- Drugs may play a role in sex trafficking situations, with the sex trafficker exploiting the drug habit of a victim, and other times as a way to cope with the violence and trauma of the sex trafficking situation.

CASE STUDY #1
Brooke (not her real name) is a trafficking survivor who spent 11 years under the control of eight different traffickers, which resulted in more than 20 arrests for prostitution, grand theft auto and drug possession. While in prison, she began recruiting new women for her trafficker. She continued recruiting after finishing her sentence with the hopes that it would please her trafficker and lessen the physical and emotional abuse she would suffer when she was forced to return to him upon her release. She was not the only one with this idea. Many women from her “stable” kept in contact with their trafficker and discussed potential new recruits, primarily to please their abuser and receive better treatment from him, even if for only a small period of time (Binzer, 2018).

SEX TRAFFICKING VICTIM-OFFENDERS
Oftentimes, adult and youth victims of sex trafficking are not only coerced into commercial sex acts, but they are also coerced to commit other crimes by the sex trafficker. Forced criminality in sex trafficking situations has often been used as an additional form of control over victims to create fear and as a method of forcing victims to show their loyalty to the trafficker (Roe-Sepowitz, 2019).

It is important to recognize that many trafficking victims lack choice when it comes to committing these acts and the impact of trauma is a major factor. Proactive steps must be taken to identify victims of sex trafficking and distinguish between the role of a trafficker and the role of a victim-offender (Shared Hope, 2020).
SEX TRAFFICKERS AND RECRUITING

Sex traffickers target vulnerable individuals who have needs that the trafficker can fulfill. These may be basic needs, material needs or desires, emotional support, love, etc. By meeting these needs, traffickers gain the trust of victims and then manipulate or “groom” them into engaging in commercial sex. They also maintain victims they have identified as “money makers.” Sex traffickers use a variety of tactics to control victims and keep them from leaving, such as physical and emotional abuse and threats, isolation from others, and financial abuse (Polaris Project, 2022).

Tools Sex Traffickers Use to Recruit Vulnerable Individuals
- Look at mugshots or arrest photo sites to choose potential victims
- Seek out inmates who experience homelessness and who don’t have family or support
- Deposit money in inmate accounts consistently for victims - This creates debt that victims have to “work off” once released
- Recruit using other victims who are incarcerated - Traffickers pay a “finder’s fee” to victims recruiting inside

From Custody, Sex Traffickers:
- Recruit new victims through pen pal systems or ask a third party to look up individuals on social media and connect with them
- Post online escort ads using tablets or ask third party to do this for them
- Control victims through friends and family on the outside, or through individuals who are indebted to them or have exploitative relationships with
  - Use 3 way calls to contact victims
  - Use prison accounts to launder money - Victims in the community sell commercial sex, put money in the trafficker’s inmate account, then the money is released to other individuals so they can collect it on the outside
- Traffickers often create relationships with their victims through letters. Traffickers use this tactic to learn everything they can about victims, such as their needs and desires, and then make promises to fulfill those needs and desires and to provide a better future.
RED FLAGS FOR SEX TRAFFICKERS IN JAILS AND PRISONS

INMATE INTAKE
- Tattoos or other branding marks (e.g. phrases and images depicting that money is the priority and women come last)
- Involved with the criminal justice system at a young age
- Criminal history – Multiple arrests for prostitution related criminal activity, has record of assault or intimate partner violence
- Unstable housing (e.g. lives in a hotel or couch surfs with different women)
- Has money but no apparent legal source of income

INMATE HOUSING
- Uses language related to sex trafficking
- Sex traffickers often glorify the “life” - They will talk about the street, the money, and the lifestyle. They will also talk and brag about how many victims they are recruiting.

JAIL OR PRISON INFORMATION
- Mail - Sex traffickers will send/receive letters to/from multiple victims. Letters will use language related to trafficking, such as the victim stating how much money they made for their trafficker that day
- Photos - Photos of victims from dating sites (Tinder, Plenty of Fish, etc.) wearing lingerie and/or frequently in hotel rooms. Traffickers will request photos also to use as currency in custody
- Phone numbers dialed from inmate phones may be linked to online escort ads
- Communications (calls, video visits, mail, texts) involve conversations/language related to trafficking - Victims may communicate while setting up dates at hotels with tricks or working on the track
- Relationship Analysis- Information from all communications and visiting lists can be compared to money deposited in inmate accounts

INMATE HEALTH SERVICES
Behavioral Indicators:
- Narcissism
- Showing manipulative behaviors
Physical Indicators:
- Substance use addiction
- Suspicious tattoos related to trafficking
- STIs and STDs

COURT
- Multiple victims (stable) show up to the trafficker’s court hearings
- Crowd shows up specifically for that inmate

COMMON TERMINOLOGY
(Shared Hope International, 2022)
- Bottom - A female appointed by the trafficker to supervise the others and report rule violations. Operating as his ‘right hand’, the bottom girl may help instruct victims, collect money, book hotel rooms, post ads, or inflict punishment on other victims. Bottom girls have often been trafficked as minors and are in complex relationships with their traffickers.
- Caught a case - When a trafficker or victim has been arrested and charged with a crime.
- Choose Up - The process by which a different trafficker takes “ownership” of a victim. If the original trafficker wants the victim back, they must pay a fee to the new trafficker. When this occurs, they will force the victim to work harder to replace the money lost in transaction.
- Daddy/Sugar Daddy/Boss/Manager - The term a male trafficker will often require his victims to call him.
- Escort/Dance Service - An organization, operating chiefly via cell phone and the internet, which sends a victim to a buyer’s location (an “outcall”) or arranges for the buyer to come to a house or apartment (an “in-call”); this may be the workplace of a single woman or a small brothel. Some escort services are networked with others and can assemble large numbers of women for parties and conventions.
- Game/Life - The subculture of prostitution, complete with rules, a hierarchy of authority, and language. Referring to the act of pimping as ‘the game’ gives the illusion that it can be a fun and easy way to make money, when the reality is much harsher.
- Knock - When a trafficker attempts to recruit a new victim.
- Out of Pocket - When a victim is not doing what their trafficker has instructed. This often ends in punishment from the trafficker.
- Quota - A set amount of money that a trafficking victim must make each night before they can come ‘home’. Quotas are often set between $300 and $2,000.
- Squaring Up - Attempting to escape or exit prostitution.
- Stable - A group of victims who are under the control of a single trafficker.
- Track/Blade - An area of town known for prostitution activity. This can be the area around a group of strip clubs and pornography stores, or a particular stretch of street.
- Trick/Date - A buyer of commercial sex.
- Turn Out - To successfully bring an individual into the life of prostitution.
- Wifeys - What women and girls under the control of the same trafficker call each other.
CASE STUDY #2
Ray was being held on domestic violence charges when a corrections officer named Camille noticed behavior that caused suspicion that Ray was sex trafficking women while in the jail. She overheard Ray talking to other men in the unit about “a bottom being out of pocket” and that he had “knocked two girls” recently. She also noticed that Ray was receiving visits from multiple women who were depositing large amounts of money into his inmate account. This suspicion led Officer Camille to report to her supervisor and an investigation was opened.

Investigators began monitoring Ray’s jail activity, including incoming and outgoing mail, calls, and tablet history. Because Ray didn’t think he was on anyone’s radar for sex trafficking, he would make calls to various women and discuss their quotas for the day. Investigators searched the phone numbers Ray was calling and there were multiple matches to phone numbers listed on online escort ads. It was also discovered that Ray was recruiting victims from jail by using a third party to post ads on social media. One ad stated “Seeking attractive, educated girls with upbeat and engaging personalities. You must be as comfortable at a 5-star restaurant as you are in the bedroom of your 5-star hotel. You must be sensual and seductive.” After enough evidence was collected, the investigation led to interviews with the victims and resulted in an indictment for sex trafficking.

IMPLEMENT VICTIM-CENTERED APPROACH
Research demonstrates the vital role that support from within the criminal justice system can have for someone struggling to exit the commercial sex industry.

Be Empathetic
• Do not victim blame or be judgmental. Connect victims with lived experience advocacy that can be maintained in the community after release.

Provide Victim-Centered Support
• Have a plan on how to respond (internal referrals for services, refer to law enforcement, refer to social services).

Recognize Language That Is Used
• Mirror appropriate language used by victims when discussing their story (e.g., use “boyfriend” instead of “pimp”).

Do Not Contribute To Stigma
• Set the example by avoiding stigmatizing language
• Do not ask questions to satisfy personal curiosity
• Recognize that trafficking indicators (e.g., multiple STI’s) may be misinterpreted as risky or problematic behavior

Become Comfortable With An Uncomfortable Topic
• Ask direct questions
• Do not blame or shame, but acknowledge the harm that victims have suffered and their resiliency and survival
• Acknowledge the secrecy associated with this type of victimization
The presence of force, fraud, and coercion in commercial sex exchanges are not needed to prove sex trafficking when the situation involves a minor. The intent to prostitute a minor, even if the act never occurred, is prosecutable. Different from adult sex trafficking cases, the presence of a third party exploiter isn’t necessary if the sex trafficking situation involves a minor. There is no such thing as a child prostitute nor a sex buyer of a child in the United States. Anyone who purchases or exchanges sex for something of value with a minor can be prosecuted for sex trafficking.

Youth who are at higher risk of sex trafficking are those who are involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, experience homelessness, frequently run away from home, have been in special education classes, and identify as LGBTQ+. Identifying sex trafficked youth can be challenging as youth may not recognize their sex trafficking victimization or self-identify as victims. Youth may believe their activities while being sex trafficked were crimes and that they will get into more trouble if they discuss it. Juvenile corrections staff may see the youth’s behavior as being defiant or delinquent and not make the connection that the youth is being sex trafficked. Youth are often brought into custody for seemingly unrelated charges such as drug possession or distribution, theft, trespassing, or gang related crimes. Using a screening tool may help identify youth who are victims of sex trafficking or who are at high risk of being sex trafficked. Youth may not feel ready to disclose their victimization and may not immediately display high risk characteristics. It is important to consider training all providers, juvenile detention staff/officers and juvenile probation officers, so that they are equipped to respond if and when the youth decides to disclose that information.

**Specialty Courts for Sex Trafficked Youth**

Currently, there are over 20 specialty courts for sex trafficked youth nationwide. These courts prioritize diversion and connecting youth to the appropriate services using a trauma informed lens and multidisciplinary teams. The structure and procedures of the courts differ by place and they are located in a wide variety of jurisdictions, but examples of some of the services offered are:

- Case planning and management
- Mentor programs/Survivor advocates
- Trauma focused therapy
- Mental health and substance abuse counseling
- Education and employment assistance
- Enrichment activities (yoga, art, field trips, community outreach, etc.)

**Soft Branding**

Minor victims of sex trafficking may have tattoos as a form of branding from their sex traffickers, but “soft branding” is also becoming a common tactic used by sex traffickers. This is when a sex trafficker gives their victim jewelry to wear that is related to the life. Types of jewelry designs may include: the sex trafficker’s moniker or initials, anything related to money, a crown or symbol signifying royalty, and terms such as “loyalty” and “faith.”

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**VALIDATED SCREENING TOOL QUESTIONS (ASU STIR, 2022)**

**INDICATORS (DO NOT ASK THE JUVENILES THESE QUESTIONS)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-disclosure of being sex trafficked OR a report from a family member, treatment provider, school or another juvenile that the youth has been sex trafficked, complete a mandatory report to Child Welfare or Law Enforcement and make a referral to Child Protective Services if detained.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If this significant indicator is selected, please ask follow up questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses any terminology referencing sex trafficking (bottom, daddy, john (buyer or trick), quota, squaring up, stable, the game, the life, track (stroll or blade))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If more than one of these indicators is selected, please ask follow up questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Items: hotel keys, large amounts of cash/gift cards, condoms, lubrication, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Located with an adult that is not related to the youth or in a relationship with a much older person (information can be found in police reports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothed inappropriately: scantily dressed, overdressed for the season, or has large amount of belongings in their possession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile is unable to freely contact friends and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indications in police report juvenile may be trafficked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If ONE OR FEWER indicators are marked, the Juvenile Probation Officer (JPO)/Juvenile Detention Officer (JDO) enters into contact log. Sex Trafficking Pre-Screening Tool complete and indicate “One or No Risk Indicators noted” in the comment section. No further screening is needed unless new information is learned, the juvenile’s circumstances change, or the juvenile returns from being missing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Follow Up Questions To Be Asked Of The Juvenile**

**NOTE:** Please remember this is not an interrogation, once enough information is obtained, stop the questions and make a report to Child Welfare and/or Law Enforcement

1. About how many times in the past 12 months have you run away or being kicked out of the home and youth did not voluntarily return within 24 hours, and includes incidents not reported to law enforcement)?
2. Have you ever agreed to meet someone you met online or through the internet or a phone app?
3. Has anyone ever taken a photo (or video) of you that you were uncomfortable with? a. If you are comfortable with talking about this, can you tell me who took the photo?
4. Has anyone asked you to do anything sexual for money or something of value like a purse, a place to stay, food, or drugs?

**INTERVIEWER OBSERVATION - DO NOT ASK JUVENILE THIS QUESTION:**

Do you believe this juvenile is being sex trafficked? If yes, can you please explain why?

If enough information is obtained to make a report to Law Enforcement or Child Welfare do so immediately, please note action taken in the box below.

**Law Enforcement Report Made DR#**

**Child Welfare Report Made**

**The Results: Documentation and Required Actions**

If juvenile has self-disclosed or there are reports by a family member, treatment provider, school, or another juvenile that the youth is being sex trafficked, the JPO/JDO enters “Confirmed Sex Trafficking Victim” into the information system contact log.

The significant indicator is marked or more than one other indicator is marked, the JPO/JDO enters “Sex Trafficking Pre-Screening Tool completed. At Risk” into information system contact log.
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If you suspect Human Trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-3737-888

INITIAL CONTACT QUESTIONS:
• Can you tell me about that tattoo?
• Who do you stay with? Do you have to do things to stay somewhere that you would rather not do?
• Where you are staying, can you come and go as you please?
• What are your plans when you are released?

SCREENING QUESTIONS:
• Has anyone ever paid you to have sex or paid someone else (i.e. a boss or pimp) for you to have sex with them?
• When you were under the age of 18, did you ever trade sex for something of value (e.g. money, drugs, a place to stay, food, protection, or things like purses or clothes)?
• Have you ever been forced or tricked into exchanging sex for something of value?
• Has anyone ever taken photos of you that they used to control or manipulate you?
• Have you ever felt that someone was grooming you to prostitute you?

WAYS TO ENSURE SAFE RELEASE:
• Provide appropriate clothing
• Set a daytime release
• Connect with Uber/Lyft/Taxi services to ensure a safe ride
• Provide a free bus pass
• Arrange for a social service agency to pick victim up if possible
• Connect to community health and/or provide a referral sheet of social services

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References:


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