



Human Trafficking Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the difference between human trafficking and prostitution?

A: The difference is whether the person in question is self-promoting. Human trafficking occurs when there is a pimp or trafficker using force, fraud, or coercion to control their victim. Without these main factors, the crime is considered prostitution.

Q: Does human sex trafficking really happen in the United States or Alabama?

A: Human trafficking can happen anywhere. It is estimated that between 18,000 and 20,000 victims are trafficked into the United States every year. The United States, along with Mexico and the Philippines, was ranked one of the world's worst places for human trafficking in 2018. In addition, Birmingham has been identified as one of six major hubs in the South for human trafficking. Interstate 20 is known as the "Sex Trafficking Super-Highway." It is believed there are more trafficking victims that travel this stretch of interstate than any other stretch of interstate in the entire nation.

Q: How profitable is the human trafficking industry?

A: Human trafficking is an estimated \$150 billion industry, making it the world's second largest criminal enterprise, second only to drug trafficking. Commercial sex is estimated to be a \$110 million industry in the Birmingham metropolitan area. That does not include child sex trafficking or illegal massage parlors.

Q: Are females the only victims of human sex trafficking?

A: There is no single victim profile. Victims of human sex trafficking can be male, female, young and old. They can also be from a variety of different socioeconomic backgrounds. However, victims of human sex trafficking specifically tend to be females. The International Labour Organization estimates that 99 percent of human sex trafficking victims were female in 2016.

Q: Why would a victim choose to stay with their trafficker or choose not to seek help?

A: There are many reasons why a victim might choose to remain in their situation, even if they are not physically being held against their will. For many, the bondage of a woman or girl to their trafficker is unseen. Traffickers might threaten their victims' life, children, or family. In other cases, the woman or girl being trafficked has come to rely on their trafficker financially for food, shelter, clothes, drugs, or transportation. Lastly, many victims of sex trafficking have endured enormous amounts of emotional manipulation and mental abuse. Victims believe they are truly trapped with no escape or that no one cares for them, other than their trafficker.

Continued on next page.



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Q: Do victims ever relapse after they have been rescued?

A: Yes. Survivors may return for many reasons. Some lack the resources needed to be self-sufficient (i.e. job, money, shelter, transportation, etc.). Some victims have serious physical and mental health issues and have no support system. Once rescued, victims need to enter an immediate treatment facility to reduce the chances of relapse.

Q: Could my children be victims of trafficking and I not be aware?

A: Yes. Unfortunately, there are many cases in which children are victims of sex trafficking without the parent(s) ever becoming aware. To reduce the risk of your child becoming a target to traffickers, be sure to monitor their online activity, know exactly who your kids are with and where they are. Be open and understanding when talking with your kids about sex, relationships, and boundaries.

Q: Where are WellHouse residents from, and how do they get to the WellHouse?

A: The WellHouse rescues victims from all over the U.S. and abroad, with a concentration in the Southeast. In 2019, 45 percent of our residents were from Alabama. We receive trafficked victims by one of three ways: rescue through our 24-hour crisis call line, partnership with the FBI, Homeland Security, and local law enforcement, and referrals from street outreach partners, hospitals, shelters, and more.

Q: Do traffickers ever look for women and girls at The WellHouse Campus?

A: There has only been one instance of a trafficker pursuing a WellHouse resident. To prevent this from happening again, we only disclose our location with trusted staff and volunteers to ensure the safety of our residents. Traffickers, unfortunately, view those that “work” for them as commodities, or objects. When they lose a woman or girl to law enforcement, rehabilitation services, etc., it is easier and cheaper for the trafficker to simply replace the woman with another.

Q: What should I do if I suspect trafficking is occurring to me, someone I know, or in my area?

A: If you think that you, or someone you know, is a victim of trafficking, or if you see anything suspicious in your area, contact The WellHouse Crisis Line. We will be able to give you advice on what to do and potential next steps. Additionally, you can contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at (888) 373-7888. If someone is in need of urgent assistance, contact your local police or dial 9-1-1.

The above information was gathered from various sources including The WellHouse, Business Insider, U.S. Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, International Labour Organization, and Nationwide Children's Hospital.