

A deeper look into Labor and Sex Trafficking in the United States

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Introduction

This fact sheet was developed to provide information and resources to parents, prevention professionals, providers, and community members on Human Trafficking in the United States. We would like to take this opportunity to present you with a deeper look into the issues related to Labor and Sex Trafficking.

At the end of the document, you will find action and prevention tips, as well as trusted additional resources.

We hope this resource is useful for you and for you and we hope you can share the information with your family, friends, and colleagues.



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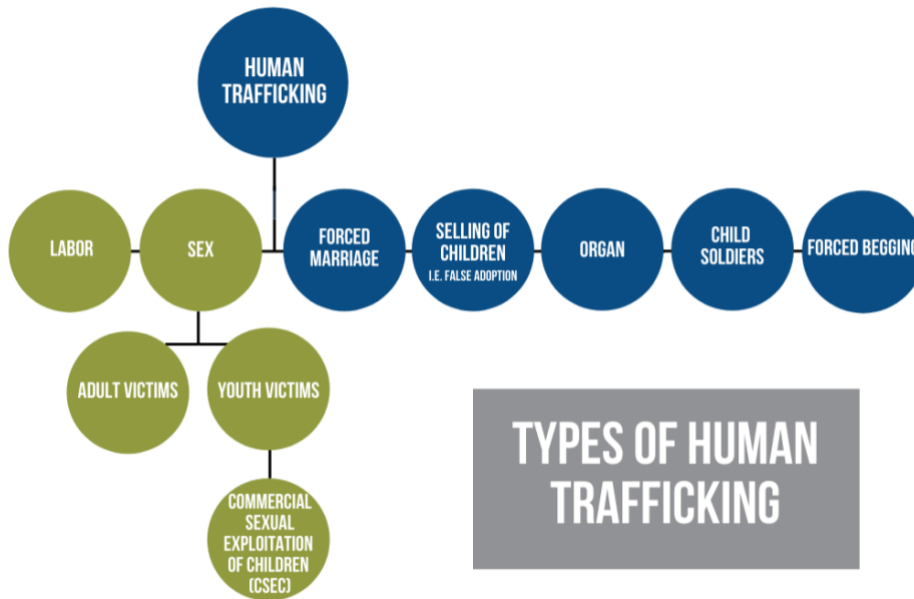
National Statistics

In reality, no one knows *exactly* how many people human trafficking affects. Worldwide estimates can range from 20 – 40 million people being trafficked^{1,2}. Human Trafficking is a multi-billion-dollar criminal industry that is complex and notoriously underreported.¹

According to a Polaris analysis from calls received during 2020 at the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline, 16,658 victims of trafficking were identified nationwide. This included: 10,836 victims of sex trafficking, 3,583 victims of labor trafficking, 631 victims of both sex and labor trafficking, and 1,634 victims of other forms of trafficking/not specified. The top 5 sites where human trafficking incidents were identified in the country were: escort services (1,116), pornography (939), illicit massage, health, & beauty (465), residential-based commercial sex (295), and personal sexual servitude (210).³

What is Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking is the forced exploitation of a person using deception, violence, or coercion.



*Chart created and adapted from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) HTMSS Thematic Brief on COVID-19 Report



The chart is not exhaustive of all types or subsets of human trafficking but helps illustrate the complexity of the issue. This factsheet will focus on labor and sex trafficking (categories in green).

U.S. Law defines human trafficking as the use of force, fraud, or coercion to compel a person into commercial sex acts or labor against his or her will¹. There is an exception to this law when it comes to minors and commercial sex. Youth, under 18 years old, who are involved in commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC) are considered victims regardless of force, fraud, or coercion; an important distinction.⁴

CSEC includes a sexual activity involving a child in exchange for something of value⁵. CSEC is a subset of human trafficking. CSEC is a form of violence and abuse against children.

Traffickers and victims are from all racial, ethnic, social, and gender demographics². Some use their privilege, wealth, and power as a means of control. Sex trafficking occurs anywhere there are people². It can affect girls/women, boys/men, and non-binary youth/adults.²

Sex Trafficking Recruitment

Sex traffickers can recruit anywhere! This can include within family/friend circles, schools, foster homes, malls, bus stops, concerts, clubs, and online⁴.

Sex trafficking tactics to recruitment, for people all ages, are not limited to but can include false promises, false job offers, posing as a friend or romantic partner, threats or blackmail, confiscation of passport or documents, sextortion, rape and/or physical force.⁴

Victims are commonly physically and emotionally abused to the point that they may feel shame, emotional attachment, fear, and may not know of or have the opportunity to access help and resources.

Sex Trafficking and Vulnerabilities – Who is at risk?

Traffickers are experts in recognizing a person's vulnerabilities and can use sophisticated techniques to recruit and exploit. Human trafficking can happen to anyone, but some people are more vulnerable than others. Significant risk factors can include: recent migration or relocation, substance or alcohol addictions, mental health concerns, unstable living situation, LGBTQ+ people, history of sexual abuse, people of color, undocumented immigrants, facing poverty or economic need, and youth with runaway tendencies or involvement in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems.^{1, 2}

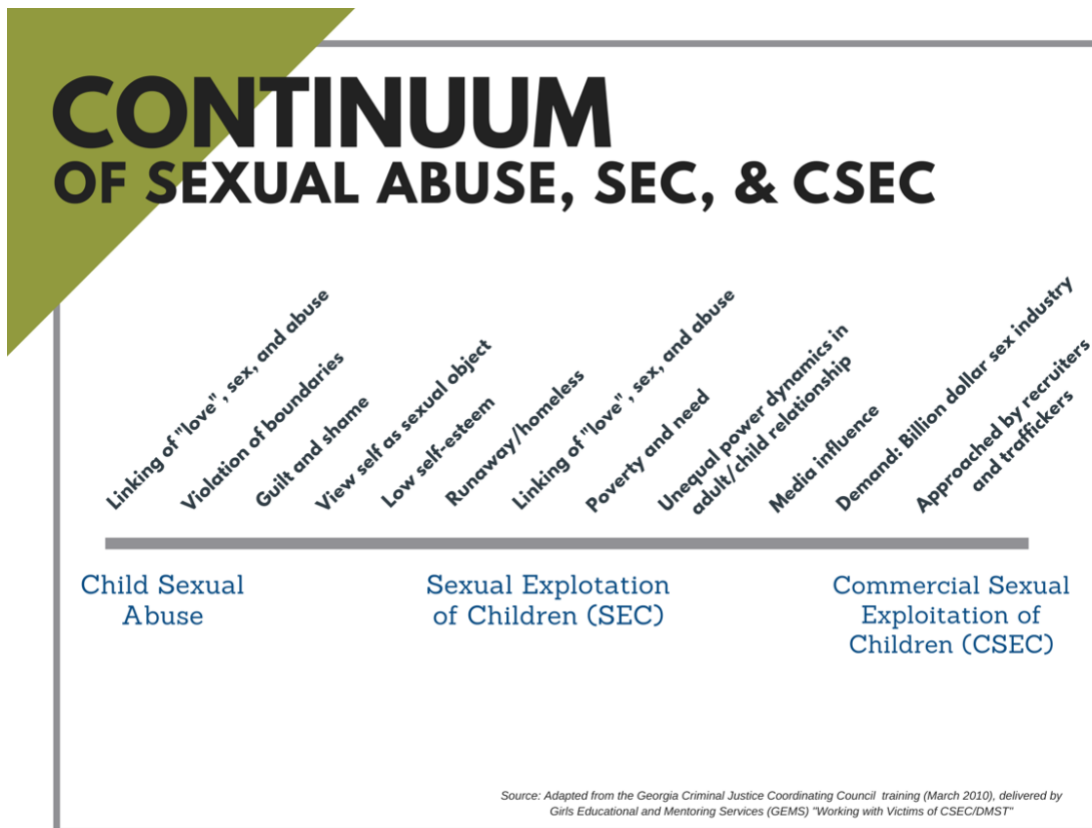


The following characteristics can put youth at a heightened risk: those who have access to the internet, feel unaccepted or misunderstood, feel insecure or desire attention, and/or have unhealthy family patterns⁴.

Sex Trafficking and Child Sexual Abuse

CSEC is one form of child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse is any sexual act between an adult and a minor or between two minors when one exerts power over the other.

CSEC occurs along a continuum spanning increasing levels of commercialization⁵. Child pornography is a form of child sexual exploitation.



Studies consistently report that 70% – 90% of children who are commercially exploited were **sexually abused** prior to being sexually commercially exploited⁵. This leads us to consider child sexual abuse as a root cause of CSEC. This highlights a need for more investment on child sexual abuse prevention initiatives to tackle the issue of sex trafficking.



Sex Trafficking, Race/Ethnicity, and Immigration Status

Children from culturally (i.e. Black, Hispanic/Latinx, multiracial) and linguistically diverse communities are **more than twice** as likely to experience sex trafficking as children who identify as white. ²

Racism and oppression are deeply embedded and perpetuated in sex trafficking by race – especially in CSEC. Sex trafficking data often finds a disproportionate number of children of color being trafficked. ²

Polaris found that recent migration/relocation was found to be the **top fifth** risk factor/vulnerability for sex trafficking; and **the top** risk factor/ vulnerability for labor trafficking. ³

Sex Trafficking and Substance Use

Addiction is one of the most powerful tools for human traffickers⁶. Drugs, alcohol, marijuana, and opioids can be used as the “payment” for labor or sex trafficking – to the victim and/or trafficker.

Recruitment can occur through substance use. Substance use concern was found to be **the top** risk factor/vulnerability for sex trafficking; the **top fifth** for labor trafficking³. Control can occur through substance addiction. Trafficker-induced drug dependencies help keep victims in trafficking situations. Substances can be used as a reward or punishment. Victims may also use substances as a coping mechanism in response to the abuse and trauma induced.⁷

Sex Trafficking and Mental Health

Studies have shown that people with a known major mental illness(es) are more likely to be victimized than those without a mental illness⁸. Mental health concerns were found to be the **top fourth** risk factor/vulnerability for sex trafficking³.

Upon exiting sexual trafficking, survivors (this is a term victims of human trafficking sometimes use to self-identify themselves honoring their strength, resilience, and bravery) may struggle with depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and self-harm and/or attempted suicide⁹.

Human Trafficking and COVID-19

Human Trafficking is adaptable! During lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a noticeable decrease of recruitment in common sites (strip clubs, foster homes, and schools) ³. The internet was reported as the top recruitment spot for labor



and sex trafficking (22% increase). Facebook and Instagram saw a significant increase (120%) as sites for recruitment compared to previous years.³

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic there has also been an increase of viral digital misinformation helping carry out myths of sex trafficking occurring through traps to target people for kidnapping². In fact, few cases of human trafficking involve kidnapping!²

Traffickers tend to target people who they already know. Recruitment via a close relationship (family member, caregiver, and/or intimate partner) was highly reported in 2020 for all forms of trafficking – particularly in sex trafficking (22-47% increase).³

Misinformation of human trafficking is harmful. It is important to check that information comes from a reputable source before sharing virtually and in person.



Prevention and Action Tips

Learn: Become educated and empowered by taking a child sexual abuse and human trafficking prevention training.

Take Action: Share this fact sheet with a friend. Encourage your school district to implement a human trafficking prevention curriculum in their school. Connect with your elected officials to advocate for more laws and help combat human trafficking.

Invest: Volunteer, support, and donate to anti-trafficking efforts and organizations in your community.

Talking to Youth: Let's empower youth as well! Talking to them about body safety, sex, sexual abuse, healthy vs unhealthy relationships, social media and online safety, trusted adults, their vulnerabilities, labor laws and expectations, and how to seek help can better equip youth and prevent (or help them early identify) from being trafficked.



Additional Resources

You can visit the following websites for additional support and information.

SAMHSA's National Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP

24/7/365 Treatment Referral Information Service in English and Español

Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline

Toll Free: 1-800-985-5990 (español e inglés)

Text in Spanish: Envíe "Háblanos" al 66746

Text in English: "TalkWithUs" al 66746 (TTY): 1-800-846-8517 English

English: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>

Spanish: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline/espanol>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Toll Free: 1-888-628-9454 English: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) (TTY): 1-800-799-4TTY

(4889) Spanish: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/en-espanol/>

English: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator: <https://findtreatment.gov>

Human Trafficking National Resources

Seek and request culturally appropriate and trauma-informed services for victims and survivors.

- Make a report to law enforcement or call the Human Trafficking Hotline if you suspect or someone you know is being exploited. Call: 1-888-373-7888 (or text: "BeFree" to 233733). The Hotline is available 24/7 and provides support in more than 200 languages.
- U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/>
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) <https://www.missingkids.org/>
- Polaris <https://polarisproject.org/>
- Love 146 <https://love146.org/>



- Darkness to Light <https://www.d2l.org/>
- In Georgia: Statewide CSEC Response Team <https://www.cacga.org/csec-response-team/>
- In Georgia: Georgia Center for Child Advocacy <https://georgiacenterforchildadvocacy.org/>

Learn more about the author:

Sandy Chavarria is the Hispanic Outreach Prevention Coordinator of The Georgia Center for Child Advocacy and she is the leader of The Latino Coalition for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse (Coalición Latina Mas P.A.S).

The Georgia Center for Child Advocacy is a private, non-profit, whose mission is to champion the needs of sexually and severely physically abused children through prevention, intervention, therapy, and collaboration. Services include training on human trafficking and providing specialized intervention and therapeutic services to youth victims of sex trafficking. The Latino Coalition for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse (Coalición Latina Mas P.A.S) unites community partners and providers to focus on child sexual abuse, human trafficking, and ACEs education, prevention, intervention, therapeutic/counseling, and other culturally-relevant community resources in the Metro-Atlanta Hispanic community. Sandy Chavarria initiated and leads this coalition.



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11. credit organization: Girls Educational & Mentoring Services (GEMS)
<https://www.gems-girls.org/> (for graphic: continuum of sexual abuse)



Acknowledgment

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[PTTCnetwork.org/hispaniclatino](https://pttcnetwork.org/hispaniclatino)

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At the time of this publication, Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D, served as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

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