



# Human Trafficking

By Ashley Bleoaja

Today, 30 million people live as slaves. More than 24 million people are subject to sexual exploitation across the globe. A large percentage of the abused are children. According to UNICEF every two minutes a child is being prepared for sexual exploitation. 1.2 million children alone are being trafficked every year. This number excluded the millions already being held captive by trafficking. UNICEF also reports that approximately 30 million children have lost their childhood through sexual exploitation over the past 30 years. (Chawla, 2016) America holds the title of “second highest destination in the world for trafficked women” (Wiehl, 2010). Between 14,500 and 17,500 victims are trafficked into the USA each year. In most cases the average age of the prostitute or exploited victim is between 12 and 13 years old. Though many may believe that slavery is dead, especially in first world countries, the grip of slavery is strong and continuously growing. Nearly 20,000 victims are sold and trafficked each year. This number includes the victims who are as young as 5 and 6 years of age. It is also estimated that 30,000 people die each year due to neglect, abuse, disease or torture while being trafficked.

Young and naïve children are often abducted because of the luring tactics pimps use to manipulate their victims into trusting them. According to the Huffington Post, traffickers target their victims on the internet, on the telephone, through friends who have already been victimized, at the mall and even in after-school programs where their families believe they are safe. Most young victims are cases of neglect by their families and often considered a throwaway of society. An article written by Dr. Withers for Psychology Today stated that domestic trafficking victims are most often young girls—even as young as 10 or 11 years old—who are desperate to find someone who will love and take care of them. Traffickers are masters at manipulating and exploiting at-risk girls. These traffickers, who can be regarded as pimps, groom their victims, gaining their trust and loyalty by preying upon their vulnerabilities and showering them with praise or even gifts. Many times, the girls who become victims believe that their trafficker loves them, will stay with them, and even protect them from the law. The victims are eager to believe their traffickers’ assurances that they are a “couple.” Soon, the victims are coerced into having sex with strangers for money that their “boyfriends” keep for themselves.

It is said that one of the best tactics to combat human trafficking is through prevention and awareness. Teaching young girls to protect themselves against predators may minimize future trafficking victims. Furthermore, communities and schools should implement programs and safeguards to ensure that children are kept safe. Dr. Withers stated in her article that the most important way to prevent traffickers from finding new victims is ensuring that our girls value themselves. It is critical to promote young girls’ self-esteem and to make

sure they know about the recruitment strategies of traffickers. We also have to ensure that there are resources and services available to at-risk youth who have already left home. We must let these girls know that there are people that care about them and organizations that can offer them help.

Sources:

How U.S. Citizens Become Human Trafficking Victims, Mellissa Withers, Psychology Today

The Disturbing Reality of Human Trafficking and Children, Allison Chawla, Huffington Post

When Sex Trafficking Goes Unnoticed in America, Priscilla Alvarez, The Atlantic