

Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking & Understanding Survivors' Needs

Laurie Cook Heffron, LMSW



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

INSTITUTE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT
CENTER FOR SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH

We'll explore,...

- Types of exploitation and victimization
- Identification of potential trafficking
- Immediate needs of victims/survivors
- Long-term needs of survivors

Human Trafficking = Slavery & Exploitation

- Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA): “the recruitment, harboring, transporting, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, slavery, or forced commercial sex acts.”
- 3 P’s: prevention, protection, and prosecution

I used to be scared because of the threats people would make, like deportation, but my lawyer showed me not to be scared. She told me that I have the same rights as everyone else and I feel like a real citizen, ... In my country they hurt people and no one says or does anything. Before meeting the lawyers I did not know I had rights.

We'll explore,...

- Types of exploitation and victimization
- Identification of potential trafficking
- Immediate needs of victims/survivors
- Long-term needs of survivors

What Does Slavery Look Like Today?

- Domestic servitude
- Sweat shops
- Prostitution rings
- Child pornography
- Agricultural work
- Janitorial
- Construction
- Restaurants
- Salons
- Au pair programs
- And the list goes on,.....



Case Example: Sex Trafficking

- 120 women held captive and coerced to work off smuggling debt in cantinas.
- If a customer wanted a beer, it would cost \$2-3. If he wanted the company of a woman, it would cost \$13, (\$9 went pay off debt.)
- Victimization: sexual assault, forced abortions.
- Long-term effects: STDs; kidney damage; psychological impact.



Case Example: Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

- Minor under control of pimp
- Exploited in escort service to high-end hotels, advertised on internet
- Victimization: Physical assault, sexual assault, threats
- No pay
- Identified very strongly with pimp, not as “victim”

Case Example: Domestic Servitude

- Nigerian woman held for 9 years
- Housecleaning, babysitting
- Documents withheld, isolated, emotionally and sexually assaulted
- Orchestrated her own escape

Case Example: Forced Labor

- Men and women
- Forced labor in a factory, involving welding
- No training and no safety precautions
- Housed together, documents withheld, no pay
- Law enforcement raided prematurely to assist victim with health concerns

We'll explore,...

- Types of exploitation and victimization
- **Identification of potential trafficking**
- Immediate needs of victims/survivors
- Long-term needs of survivors

Barriers for Victims

- Identifying cases is difficult
- Victim's understanding & knowledge about rights and services
- No trust in law enforcement

How to Recognize Human Trafficking

- Being controlled
 - Rarely alone, seems to be under surveillance, isolated, fear of speaking to others
- Inability to leave a job or move
- Signs of trauma
 - Persistent fear, depressions, anxiety, submissiveness, stupor like behavior
- No passport or other identifying documentation

We'll explore,...

- Types of exploitation and victimization
- Identification of potential trafficking
- **Immediate needs of victims/survivors**
- Long-term needs of survivors

Victim Needs

- Housing and Food
- Medical Services
- Case management
- Legal representation
- Transportation
- Mental Health Services
- Language interpretation
- English as a Second Language
- Education/GED/Employment

They empowered me and gave me confidence. I feel like I always had the intention of being independent, to move on my own. But I always knew that if I got a little stuck, that I could count on them to get me out.

We'll explore,...

- Types of exploitation and victimization
- Identification of potential trafficking
- Immediate needs of victims/survivors
- **Long-term needs of survivors**

Long-Term Needs

1. Safety
2. Medical Health
3. Emotional & Psychological Health
4. Financial Stability
5. Social & Familial Equilibrium
6. Legal/Immigration

1. Ongoing Safety Needs

- Concern about traffickers' sentence & release
- Concern about those involved that were not arrested, and traffickers' networks that extend beyond prison walls
- Information & mis-information
- Increased need for safety when children arrive
- Link to independence and self-sufficiency

It is hard. For now they are in prison, but they will be released pretty soon. Before it was just me, but now it is my son as well.

The traffickers know a lot of people, and those people we do not know. There are a lot of people involved [that were not arrested]. For right now, I am OK. But when I get together with other victims, we talk about all these things and what can happen in the future. But we take care of each other and we are always tuned in with everything and listening for anything and right away we let each other know what we hear.

2. Medical Health

- Chronic health problems related to trafficking situation and/or past history of limited preventive medical care
- Obtaining health insurance for self and children
- Navigating the maze of public health benefits requires a great deal of knowledge of the system, determination, and English language proficiency

3. Emotional & Psychological Health

- Funding/policy priority given to immediate, basic needs, rather than emotional needs or effects of sustained trauma
- Victims sometimes not able to devote time and energy to the trauma they experienced until their life has stabilized
- Cultural & resource barriers to seeking/accessing services
- Trusting relationships – continuing importance & challenge

Emotional & Psychological Health

I would like to go to counseling, because part of me has not overcome everything. But I do feel much stronger than before. If you all had met me before I received all the support from the agency, I think you may have felt sorry for me.

4. Financial Stability

- Career advancement - difficult to make ends meet on low wage jobs
- Heightened need for stability with arrival of children
- Identification of steps necessary for stability – ESL, transportation, training, childcare
- Work presents barrier to attending ESL, while not speaking English is a barrier to finding better work/pay/hours

5. Social & Familial Equilibrium

- Reunification with children – an agonizing waiting game
- Immigration difficulties on both sides - host country and US
- Parenting challenges
- Preparing children for school
- Social, healthcare, and childcare needs of children

Social & Familial Equilibrium

I left my son when he was 3, and he says he cannot remember. He says I am his mom because I picked him up from the airport but not because he remembers me as his mother. I know it hurt him when I left him, but I told him he needed to get used to it and that now things are different. I always wanted to be with him. Two months after he arrived, he started crying a lot. I asked him why he was crying, and he said he needed his mother. I told him, 'I am here,' and he said, 'no, the one in El Salvador.' It hurt me to see him this way. I felt like I was hurting him a lot. I asked him several times if he wanted to go back, and he said no. When I left him I thought I would never see him again, and I am sure he feels the same way about his grandma. He calls her and tells her he wishes she were here.

Legal/Immigration

- Adjustment of status
- Reunification with children
- Information & mis-information

Waiting game anxiety

And the work continues,...

- Increased community knowledge to increase victim ID
- Prosecution of traffickers
- Address prevention around demand for both sex industry and inexpensive labor
- Culturally grounded services for victims
- Long-term housing, legal/immigration assistance, and case management
- Attention to and specialized services for CSEC

Resources

- Polaris Project

<http://www.polarisproject.org/>

- Free the Slaves

<http://www.freetheslaves.net/>

- Not for Sale

<http://www.notforsalecampaign.org/>

- Central Texas Coalition against Human Trafficking

www.ctcaht.org

One of my dreams is to one day buy a house, something small, it does not matter, but to have something here because I think that in bringing my son here he will study well. I want to have my own things. I want to be able and save one day and have my own house. It does not matter if it is small. A *right* life is what I think most people want. Unfortunately not everyone has the same chances. But now that I have been given this opportunity, I would like to do things this way.

Contact Information:

Noël B. Busch-Armendariz, PhD, LMSW, MPA

nbusch@mail.utexas.edu

Laurie Cook Heffron

lcookheffron@mail.utexas.edu

<http://www.utexas.edu/ssw/cswr/institutes/idvsa/>

Institute on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault

The School of Social Work

The University of Texas at Austin