Human trafficking can occur in many different forms and in any location, even in your own backyard. Typically, human trafficking is thought to occur in other countries, or when persons from other countries are brought into the United States, however, approximately 36 percent of potential victims of human trafficking are from the United States.

Our story begins with two cousins in Toledo, Ohio. On May 13, 2005, two girls, ages 14 and 15, were abducted on the street when they decided to walk to get a Frosty. It was raining, and when a man and woman, who the girls thought they knew, offered them a ride, the horror began. For 10 days, these girls were held and forced into prostitution by their captors. Fortunately, this story has a happy ending. Both girls were rescued and returned home. 1

"Article 3, paragraph (a) of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons defines trafficking in persons as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs". 2

Statistically, it is difficult to determine the actual numbers of persons trafficked in the United States. According to the 2014 National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) Annual Report, the NHTRC received 24,062 incoming communications regarding human trafficking. 3

In cases where the location of the potential trafficking is known to be in the United States, they appear to have been distributed throughout the country as illustrated in the map below.

Trafficing is illegal in the United States. While law enforcement agencies at the local, state and federal level all work to locate and eliminate sources of human trafficking, the battle is an uphill struggle. The individuals involved exist in a dark sub-culture for their “work”, while mingling with every day citizens in their “open” lives. While difficult to locate, once information is gathered and a case can be built, there are some substantial laws on the books to assist.

**FEDERAL ANTI-TRAFFICKING LAWS**

- The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 is the first comprehensive federal law to address trafficking in persons. The law provides a three-pronged approach that includes prevention, protection and prosecution. The TVPA was reauthorized through the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2013.
- Under U.S. federal law, “severe forms of trafficking in persons” includes both sex trafficking and labor trafficking.
• **Sex trafficking** is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age (22 USC § 7102 (9-10)).

• **Labor trafficking** is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of subjecting to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery, (22 USC § 7102(9)).

Typically, there are two methods used to dominate and control victims of human trafficking: coercion and deception. Examples of both are provided below.

**COERCION INVOLVES:**

- Causing or threatening to cause bodily harm to any person, physically restraining or confining any person, or threatening to physically restrain or confine any person.
- Exposing or threatening to expose any fact or information that if revealed would tend to subject a person to criminal or immigration proceedings, hatred, contempt or ridicule.
- Destroying, concealing, removing, confiscating or possessing any actual or purported passport or other immigration document, or any other actual or purported government identification document, of any person.
- Providing a controlled substance as defined by G.S. 90-87 to a person.

**DECEPTION INVOLVES:**

- Creating or confirming another’s impression of an existing fact or past event that is false and which the accused knows or believes to be false.
- Maintaining the status or condition of a person arising from a pledge by that person of his or her personal services as security for a debt, if the value of those services as reasonably assessed is not applied toward the liquidation of the debt or the length and nature of those services are not respectively limited and defined, or preventing a person from acquiring information pertinent to the disposition of such debt.
- Promising benefits or the performance of services that the accused does not intend to deliver or perform or knows will not be delivered or performed.

Calls regarding human trafficking are unlikely to be identified as exactly that, and rarely will a person identify themselves as a victim of human trafficking. This can make it difficult for a telecommunicator to determine exactly what is going on. Calls received may take the form of domestic disputes, labor disputes, or some other complaint. It is not uncommon for victims to fear police and authority, as many have been told that they will be the one in trouble if law enforcement encounters them. It is important to remember that victims have likely been threatened, deceived and coerced to believe that there is no help for them. The telecommunicator may hear a “cover” story, repeated by the victim as it has been rehearsed. Other considerations about victims may be that they do not speak English, may not know what country they are in, or even their location, and that they do not realize they are protected under U.S. law.

Indicators of human trafficking may include restricted communication, lacking the freedom to leave their current location, claims that they are only visiting the area, numerous inconsistencies in their story and performance of tasks at odd hours. While none of these are conclusive evidence of human trafficking, telecommunicators should be alert for clues.

Several “red flags” are indicated in the NENA Protocol for Handling Calls Regarding Human Trafficking OID:
- False and unfulfilled promises
- Exploitative working and living conditions
- Lack of freedom to leave working or living conditions
- Individual not in control of their own identification documents
- Fear, anxiety, submissive behavior
- Signs of physical abuse
- Unpaid or paid very little
- Not in control of their own money
- Owes a large debt and is unable to pay it off
- Excessively long working hours
- Not allowed breaks during work
- Few or no personal possessions
- Lack of healthcare
- Being watched or followed
- Not allowed to speak for themselves

Normal call-taking procedures should be followed with regard to location, call back number and type of incident. Care should be taken to ask questions and document any information the caller may relay regarding personal information, transportation, work or living conditions, harm or threats made to the victim, safety concerns, escape attempts, threats to family, guards, assaults and isolation of the victim.

As a telecommunicator, you are the tip of the spear and have an opportunity to identify potential victims sooner rather than later. It is important that telecommunicators remain non-judgmental, build trust with the caller, utilize interpreters as necessary, don’t focus on immigration status, and allow the victim to talk and to know what assistance is available for the victim. Knowing the indicators involved in trafficking, knowing the signs and symptoms of a potential victim as well as some of the elements to watch for with regard to possible suspects, and being alert to hints provided by your callers are all important aspects of the role telecommunicators can play in helping to identify, and save, victims of this horrific crime.

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**References**


1. Human trafficking only occurs outside of the United States.
   a. True
   b. False
2. Red flags for human trafficking calls include:
   a. Exploitative working and living conditions
   b. Victims are allowed to speak for themselves
   c. Signs of physical abuse
   d. All of the above
   e. A and C
3. Normal call-taking procedures should be followed with regard to (select all that apply)
   a. Location
   b. Call back number
   c. Type of incident
   d. Financial status
   e. Race and sex of caller
4. Calls regarding human trafficking are unlikely to be identified as exactly that, and rarely will a person identify themselves as victims of human trafficking.
   a. True
   b. False
5. Knowing the indicators involved in trafficking, knowing the signs and symptoms of a potential victim are not a telecommunications responsibility. These are left to law enforcement only.
   a. True
   b. False
6. Other considerations about victims may be that:
   a. They do not speak English
   b. They may not know what country they are in – or even their location
   c. They do not realize they are protected under U.S. law
   d. A and C only
   e. All of the above
7. Typically, there are two methods used to dominate and control victims of human trafficking. They are: coercion and deception.
   a. True
   b. False
8. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 is:
   a. The first comprehensive federal law to address trafficking in persons.
   b. An outdated statute no longer used in prosecution of these cases.
   c. A federal law that does not apply to local cases.
   d. Applied only to international cases.
9. Labor trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of a commercial sex act.
   a. True
   b. False
10. Human trafficking calls are limited to major metropolitan areas on the east and west coasts of the United States and are a rare occurrence.
    a. True
    b. False

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