

Human Trafficking: Scope and Nursing Implications

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On August 27th, PNASA sponsored a continuing nursing education (CNE) program on Human Trafficking: Scope and Nursing Implications at the Baptist School of Health Professions. Kayce Ward, MSN, RN, CA-SANE, CP-SANE, SANE-A, an expert in the field, provided an informative and extremely powerful lecture on human trafficking in Texas as well as methods to identify potential victims and resources for reporting suspected human trafficking cases.

What is human trafficking?

Summed up in one word, human trafficking is **slavery**. To date, an estimated 27 million people around the globe are enslaved, a staggering number more than twice the 4-century African slave trade. Human trafficking includes sex trafficking and the less common labor and organ trafficking. Sex trafficking involves forcing victims against their will to engage in sexual acts for commercial purposes such as prostitution, exotic dancing, stripping, and/or pornography. Victims are sometimes made to have sex with 20-40 men in a day. Indeed, sex trafficking is a lucrative global business, bringing in 9.5 billion dollars annually.

Who is at risk for human trafficking?

Anyone! Although anyone is at risk for human trafficking, women and children are at a higher risk of being trafficked. The average victim is 11 years old, with a range from 9 to 19 years old.

While human trafficking exists all over the United States, the rate in Texas is 20% higher compared to other states. This is in part due to the IH-10 corridor that runs from El Paso to Houston, which is considered to be the main human trafficking route in the U.S. With the proximity to the Mexican border, many believe that the majority of victims are those that are trying to enter this country illegally. Although, they do account for some of the cases, this assumption is very inaccurate. The terrifying reality is that a trafficking victim could be anyone's child.

How does human trafficking happen?

Runaway children are at the greatest risk of being trafficked; 1 in 3 runaway teens will have been lured into prostitution within 48 hours. Within 72 hours of leaving home, 90% of teenagers will have been approached by a trafficker. Traffickers lure runaways by pretending to care and understand them.

In the growing era of technology, more and more people are being lured away under false pretenses due to the anonymity that the Internet provides. Many children or teens often believe that they are meeting a peer only to discover that the person on the other side of the computer is in fact a predator. This starts the cycle of trafficking as indicated below.

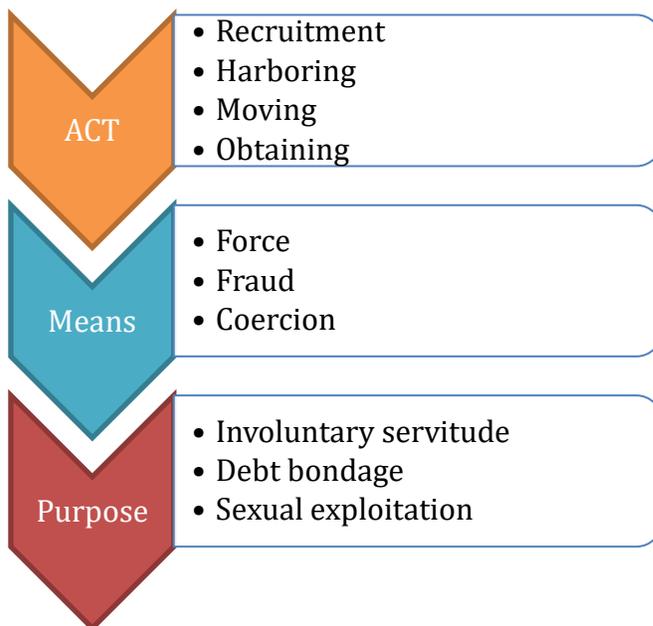
- 1) Target: The predator finds a victim on the street or on the internet

- 2) Deception: The predators lie to the victim about who they are
- 3) Grooming: The predators make the victim believe that they have good intentions and that no one else in the world cares.
- 4) Abduction: The child or teen is abducted.
- 5) Coercion: The victim is made to believe that they have to perform the sexual act for a myriad of reasons (i.e. paying back a debt, etc.)
- 6) Trauma: The actual sexual act.
- 7) Victimizer: Some victims may go on to become abusers themselves.

How do I identify a potential victim?

Nurses and other healthcare professionals should keep their eyes open to identify potential victims. A very helpful tool for identifying potential victims of human trafficking is to “AMP it up!” (Figure 1).

Figure 1. AMP it up!



Relevant questions to ask potential victims in private:

- Has anyone you worked for or lived with trick or force you into doing anything you do not want to do?
- Has anyone put pressures on you to have any unwanted physical or sexual contact with another person?
- Have you ever had sex for money, housing, food, gifts, favors, etc?

Other possible signs might include:

- Having an excessive amounts of money for the child’s age
- Branding and/or tattoos
- Having hotel keys
- Restricted communication (i.e. does not speak and have others speak for them)

- Does not have their own identification (ID)
- Malnourishment
- Reports sex with multiple partners over short course of days
- Repeated vaginal infections
- Fearful demeanor

Professional interventions may include:

- Build rapport with your client
 - Avoid victim blaming (i.e. “Why did get into the car with a stranger?”)
 - Avoid use of the words “victim” or “trafficking.”
- Try to get the patient alone
- Presumptive treatment for sexually transmitted diseases (STD)s
- Contact your multidisciplinary team for assistance (i.e. police or other local law enforcement, ransom light, etc.)

How do I report a suspected case?

A human trafficking victim typically has a 7-year life expectancy. The interaction with a healthcare professional may be that victims’ only chance of identification and rescue from their captor. It is a professional obligation to report any suspected victim of human trafficking. The following these resources can be used to report:

Emergency Services: 911

Human Trafficking Resource Center: 1-888-373-7888

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children’s Hotline:1-800-843-5678

FBI: www.fbi.gov

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