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Human Trafficking and Potential Terrorist Ties  
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## Abstract

Human trafficking is a major issue in the United States. It is important not only as citizens of the United States, but as Christians that we recognize this issue and strive to make a difference. God calls us to take care of one another, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> As Christians, fighting to prevent human trafficking, it is our duty to seek the victim’s well-being and strive to be a disciple to them throughout their journey outside of human trafficking. What most don’t realize is that human trafficking can sometimes be a front for a terrorist organization. By working to prevent human trafficking, we are also working to prevent terrorist organizations from growing and executing their plans. Unfortunately, “An individual becomes vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation when they are exposed to risk factors like instability, violence and abuse, poor education, substance misuse, poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and isolation. These factors can weaken defensive measures and make them **more** susceptible to trafficking and exploitation.”<sup>2</sup> By fighting to counteract terrorist fronts and human trafficking, we are breaking the unhealthy and vulnerable cycle a lot of these victims have spent most of their lives running from.

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<sup>1</sup> Bible Gateway, “New International Version (NIV) - Version Information - BibleGateway.com

<sup>2</sup> A21, “Human Trafficking | A21,” www.a21.org, n.d., <https://www.a21.org/content/human-trafficking/gqe0rc>.

## Introduction

Throughout this research, we are going to take a deeper look into how terrorist organizations tie into human trafficking, and how they use it to benefit them. It is important for us to understand the sole purpose behind terrorism and human trafficking in itself, how to prevent these organizations and networks from growing, the treatments we can implement to help victims, and as Christians, how we can implement the word of God into our efforts of counteracting these crimes. There are so many factors that go into each of these topics, in and of themselves, which makes it difficult to work against it when the two organizations are working together in their benefit.

While this is true, it is important, as Christians, that we still fight to save the lives of these victims and allow for them to serve their God-given purpose here on Earth. Each of us have been given a calling and it is unfair to allow these victims to be convinced there is no one out there fighting on behalf of their calling. These victims are forced into isolation and silence. Proverbs says, “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”<sup>3</sup> It is important that we fulfill what God has called of us and stand up for those who don’t have a voice.

## Terrorism

Terrorism is defined as, “The systematic use of terror especially as a means of coercion.”<sup>4</sup> Terrorism is a constant worry across the United States and shouldn’t be taken lightly. This act has a long-lasting effect on victims, families, and government/law enforcement personnel. What most don’t realize is that there are two different types of terrorism. You have international terrorism, and domestic terrorism. International terrorism is, “Violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups who are inspired by, or associated with, designated foreign terrorist organizations or nations (state-sponsored).”<sup>5</sup> Essentially, this is a form of terrorism involving foreign groups or individuals. For example, September 11, 2001. The group behind these attacks was al-Qaeda, which is an Islamic extremist group. On the other hand, domestic terrorism is, “Violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as those of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature.”<sup>6</sup> Basically, this form of terrorism would be executed by individuals native to the United States, and do not have ties outside of the United States. An example of this would be the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013. The two individuals who executed this terrorist act were not foreign based.

Both international terrorism and domestic terrorism have similar motives. These can include, racial, ethnic, ideological, or even religious motives. “According to DHS, there were 231 domestic terrorism incidents between 2010 and 2021. Of these, about thirty-five percent (the largest category) were classified as racially- or ethnically-motivated. These attacks were also the

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<sup>3</sup> Bible Gateway, “New International Version (NIV) - Version Information - BibleGateway.com,” Biblegateway.com (BibleGateway, 2015), <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-International-Version-NIV-Bible/>.

<sup>4</sup> “Definition of TERRORISM,” www.merriam-webster.com, August 6, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/terrorism#:~:text=1>.

<sup>5</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Terrorism,” Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2023, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

most lethal.”<sup>7</sup> The motives of each attack are going to vary depending on the elements and purpose of the attack. This only makes it more difficult for taskforces to have a plan for prevention and national preparedness, as there are so many ways and locations for a terrorist attack to take place.

“There are five crucial components of terrorism, an involvement of an act of violence, an audience, the creation of a mood of fear, innocent victims, and political gains or motives.”<sup>8</sup> Having these five components in an act of violence helps the government determine what is terrorism. For example, in the September 11, 2001, attacks on the twin towers, met all of these components. The planes crashing into the towers was the act of violence. Considering the location of the towers, and the size of the towers, there was a large audience. As for the creation of a mood of fear, that was created after the first tower was hit. The panic happened immediately surrounding the towers and across the news. This panic set in for families of individuals who worked in the surrounding area or even inside the towers, and even families of those who were traveling on a plane that day. There were a ton of innocent victims who were impacted that day. These victims would include those inside the towers, on the planes, as well as the many families who had lost their loved ones. The political goal/motive was to cause a widespread panic across the United States and to make the United States appear as though their defense is weak.

## **Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking is a major issue within the United States, more than we recognize. Unfortunately, a lot of those who are in the human trafficking network are children. “1 in 4 victims of human trafficking are children. Approximately 130 people are trafficked worldwide every hour.”<sup>9</sup> Most are less than eighteen years old, and some are as young as four years old. Regardless of age, human trafficking is a horrible network. Not only is the human trafficking network used for sexual pleasure, but they also use it for drug smuggling. “Drug cartels often use trafficked women and children to smuggle drugs across the border, doubling up on the money they can make from them.”<sup>10</sup> This can increase the traffickers profit extremely fast. “A pimp can make up to \$150,000-\$200,000 per child a year.”<sup>11</sup> Figuratively speaking, assuming the numbers would be exactly double, if a trafficker is able to make \$150,000 per year, for one child, by smuggling drugs in with them, they are potentially looking at an end profit of \$300,000. That is a large profit each year, per person trafficked.

Trafficking victims who are used for sexual exploitation are sometimes trafficked by complete strangers, someone who made a false promise, or even their own families. “Sometimes sold by a family member or an acquaintance, sometimes lured by false promises of education and a ‘better’ life – the reality is that these trafficked and exploited children are held in salve-like conditions without enough food, shelter or clothing, and are often severely abused and cut off

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<sup>7</sup> U. S. Government Accountability Office, “The Rising Threat of Domestic Terrorism in the U.S. And Federal Efforts to Combat It | U.S. GAO,” [www.gao.gov](https://www.gao.gov), March 2, 2023, <https://www.gao.gov/blog/rising-threat-domestic-terrorism-u.s.-and-federal-efforts-combat-it#:~:text=According%20to%20DHS%2C%20there%20were>.

<sup>8</sup> Harry Jackson, “Understanding Terrorism the Certificate-of-Training in United Nations Peace Support Operations,” n.d., <https://cdn.peaceopstraining.org/theses/jackson.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> “Facts & Figures,” Youth Underground, 2023, <https://youth-underground.com/facts-figures/>.

<sup>10</sup> Jarod Forget, “Violent Drug Organizations Use Human Trafficking to Expand Profits,” [www.dea.gov](https://www.dea.gov), January 28, 2021, <https://www.dea.gov/stories/2021/2021-01/2021-01-28/violent-drug-organizations-use-human-trafficking-expand-profits>.

<sup>11</sup> “Facts & Figures,” Youth Underground, 2023.

from all contact with their families.”<sup>12</sup> This forces the victims to adapt to their new lifestyle and adjust to not having a voice in their own lives. They are to obey those who are trafficking them and using them for personal and monetary benefit.

Some trafficking victims are used to smuggle drugs, increasing the profit of the traffickers. “Popularly known as ‘drug mules’, the victims are made to swallow balloons containing illicit drugs and are then transported across borders. Once they have reached their destination, these balloons are retrieved from the victim’s body.”<sup>13</sup> This is an extremely dangerous task for the victims, as the number of drugs that are in their system would kill them extremely fast. In order to package the drugs to be swallowed, they are placed into a multi-layered condom for the victims to ingest. “On many occasions, the drug mules are first given a soup laced with drugs to numb their throats. The soup is very oily and makes the balloons slide down their throat. The victim’s mouth can also be sprayed with anesthesia, enabling them to swallow up to 120 balloons.”<sup>14</sup> This is an extreme amount of drugs that have entered the victim’s system and has increased a chance of death with each balloon swallowed. These victims are not only experiencing torture in the moment, but after swallowing these balloons as well. “A drug mule may be forced to swallow up to one kg of illicit drugs and this painful procedure can lead to serious injuries to the throat. Once they have reached their destination, they are fed laxatives, and the balloons pass through their bodies.”<sup>15</sup> The torture of drug mulling is immense. These victim’s begin feeling excruciating pain the moment they enter the human trafficking network.

### **Terrorist and Human Trafficking Relations**

When we hear terrorism and trafficking, we think of two separate offenses. While they in fact are two separate offenses, sometimes, they are found working together as one team. Each of these offenses are major issues in the United States, are responsible for a lot of terror and panic, and come alongside a major economic gain. “Trafficking in persons for ransom is part of a terrorist organization’s strategic objectives to fuel insecurity, and it also represents a highly profitable funding source. As a result, it is a common modus operandi for terrorist organizations.”<sup>16</sup> Human trafficking is extremely profitable. “A pimp can make up to \$150,000-\$200,000 per child a year.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, terrorist organizations using human trafficking is essentially fronted as a marketing strategy or fundraising strategy for them.

Terrorist’s use human trafficking as an advantage for them for many of reasons. Unfortunately, their easiest and their most common target is children. “Terrorist and violent extremist groups are prominently exploiting children to boost their visibility, notable examples being the propaganda of Boko Haram and ISIL. The analysis of a six-month data set of ISIL

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<sup>12</sup> “Child Trafficking: What You Need to Know,” Save the Children, n.d., <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/child-trafficking-awareness#:~:text=Sometimes%20sold%20by%20a%20family>.

<sup>13</sup> “Drug Mules: Swallowed by the Illicit Drug Trade,” www.unodc.org, accessed February 21, 2024, <https://www.unodc.org/southasia/frontpage/2012/october/drug-mules-swallowed-by-the-illicit-drug-trade.html#:~:text=Popularly%20known%20as%20>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> “Drug Mules: Swallowed by the Illicit Drug Trade,” www.unodc.org, accessed February 21, 2024.

<sup>16</sup> “Why Terrorist Organizations Use Human Trafficking,” ACAMS Today, January 25, 2023, <https://www.acamstoday.org/why-terrorist-organizations-use-human-trafficking/#:~:text=Trafficking%20in%20persons%20for%20ransom%20is%20part%20of%20a%20terrorist>.

<sup>17</sup> “Facts & Figures,” Youth Underground, 2023.

propaganda revealed a total of 254 events that included images of children; thirty-eight percent of the images were of children engaged in acts of violence or being exposed and normalized to violence. The images are used to shock the public and, at the same time, to show the power and ruthlessness of the group.”<sup>18</sup> Essentially, terrorists use this to receive the attention they are wanting from the rest of the world. Most terrorists’ groups are trying to get a rise out of the country and need something that will cause a panic or cause anger and frustration among the citizens. Some use acts of terror, such as bombings, shootings, etc., but as we see here, some use something vulnerable and gentle, such as the innocence of children.

“In this regard, the individuals who are held captive by terrorist organizations are mainly enslaved and forced into labor so fighters can devote their attention to their respective activities. The enslavement of individuals results in the free provision of services, which is not quantifiable in monetary terms but cuts operational costs and increases organizational efficiency.”<sup>19</sup> From this, we see that terrorist organizations also traffic for labor. This could be doing the dirty work in terrorist’s plans or even helping them in preparation for their plans. Either way, this is considered free labor to them. It allows for the terrorist group to focus solely on the damage they want to cause and ensuring their point gets across to their target. It decreases the amount of stress they have on their plate as far as the execution of their plan.

### **Recruitment**

Data shows that every “1 in 3 children who run away from home are approached by a trafficker within forty-eight hours of their running away.”<sup>20</sup> This data goes to show prevalent the human trafficking network is and there are so many people out attempting to recruit their newest member of the human trafficking network. This is not the only way these traffickers recruit, unfortunately, there are many other forms of recruitment that most would never realize. Other recruitment strategies used by traffickers could include seeking those who have past or present substance abuse problems, or even simply through employment opportunity postings.

Substance abuse is a common recruitment strategy used. “The relationship between substance use disorders and human trafficking is often cyclical. Traffickers may focus and recruit individuals with a history of or existing substance use disorder. This allows traffickers to induce or exploit substance use, using it as a reward or punishment to maintain control.”<sup>21</sup> Those with drug abuse history or even a current struggle become extremely vulnerable to this tactic. It is put in their head that they will work for whatever the trafficker’s ask, and in return, they receive drugs. This is detrimental to the victims, as the drug could do a number of things to their state of mind, which could make things go even worse for them in a given situation. Once the victim becomes used to the drug, they see no way out of it, they crave it and feel they need it to survive.

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<sup>18</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System,” 2017, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Child-Victims/Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups the Role of the Justice System.E.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Child-Victims/Handbook_on_Children_Recruited_and_Exploited_by_Terrorist_and_Violent_Extremist_Groups_the_Role_of_the_Justice_System.E.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> “Why Terrorist Organizations Use Human Trafficking,” ACAMS Today, January 25, 2023.

<sup>20</sup> “Facts & Figures,” Youth Underground, 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Katherine Chon, “Supporting Individuals at the Intersection of Human Trafficking and Substance Use,” www.acf.hhs.gov, October 31, 2022, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/otip/blog/2022/10/supporting-individuals-intersection-human-trafficking-and-substance-use#:~:text=The%20relationship%20between%20substance%20use.>

This is why some may not feel they have a choice on whether they have a shot at getting out of the human trafficking network.

Employment opportunities are another way traffickers recruit their victims. “Traffickers create fake websites or post advertisements on legitimate employment portals and social networking websites.”<sup>22</sup> This is an easy way to lure people into the network without them recognizing it soon enough. These traffickers are good at hiding who they really are behind these sites. A job posting that has all the right benefits and pay is easily and quickly appealing to most, making their tactic move fast. Once you trust the site and begin applying, they get to know so much more about you than you would let on to the average stranger. When you fill out your information, they may receive your address, along with other personal information. This gives them easy access to your home, potentially recruiting more than just you. This may lead them into forcing your family or loved ones into the network as well. Or, simply by you showing up to interview with the ‘employing agency’. This is much easier to do than we would like to realize.

### **Prevention**

There are many ways to prevent human trafficking, which in the end could help to prevent the funding of a terrorist organization. There are many taskforces trained and prepared to act on these situations, both terrorist attacks and human trafficking. There are also a number of non-profits that work to inform the public about these issues. Another prevention strategy is each of us, as the public. Each of these prevention strategies work towards one ultimate goal, giving the victims of these crimes a better chance at being rescued.

There are a number of taskforces formed to counteract human trafficking. One of these taskforces is through the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI). “FBI Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking Task Forces operate within nearly every FBI field office. The ultimate goal of these task forces is to recover victims and investigate traffickers at the state and federal level.”<sup>23</sup> This is a great task force, since it does cover both the state and federal level. If these traffickers are using their victims as a front for a terrorist operation, considering terrorism can be both international and domestic, the FBI would have a better chance of getting their hands on the operation.

Another major task force is the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Program. This task force “is a national network of 61 coordinated task forces representing over 400 federal, state, and local law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies.”<sup>24</sup> This gives victims more hope, in knowing there are so many agencies at the federal, state, and local level with a goal in mind to rescue them. This also allows more room for community members to be at ease, knowing there are law enforcement agencies who are monitoring internet crimes in hopes of prevention. “The program helps state and local law enforcement agencies develop an effective response to technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and internet crimes against children. This help encompasses forensic and investigative components, training and technical assistance, victim services and community education.”<sup>25</sup> With everyone being educated in this area in some form,

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<sup>22</sup> UNODC, “The Role of Technology in Human Trafficking,” United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime, October 14, 2021, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/Webstories2021/the-role-of-technology-in-human-trafficking.html>.

<sup>23</sup> “Special Initiatives,” Justice.gov, November 18, 2015, <https://www.justice.gov/humantrafficking/special-initiatives>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> “Special Initiatives,” Justice.gov, November 18, 2015.

helps to decrease the chance of children being trafficked or even helps to rescue some from the network, which is everyone's ultimate goal.

There are a large number of non-profits that work to rescue victims of human trafficking. A21 is a major non-profit that works hard for the community surrounding victims of human trafficking. "Reach is the difference between vulnerability and safety. Educating and equipping everyone to understand, identify, and reduce the risk of human trafficking through programs like educational curriculum, prevention programs, and awareness programs."<sup>26</sup> This organization seeks to educate individuals in many aspects. This is great, as there are so many task forces that work hard to catch the traffickers, but it is extremely necessary to have organizations that are working with the community to make them aware.

Another big organization is Love146. "Love146 journeys alongside children impacted by trafficking today and prevents the trafficking of children tomorrow."<sup>27</sup> This organization offers many programs for both the victims of human trafficking, and the community. These include, U.S. prevention, U.S. survivor care, Philippines survivor care, and community engagement. Their U.S. survivor care expresses, "Many services exist, but few survivors have a trauma-informed advocate equipped to navigate these systems."<sup>28</sup> This is important to recognize, and it goes to show the time this organization takes to care for victims. "True freedom for a youth looks many ways; it is for this reason that Love146's services are based on individualized Care Plans, developed in collaboration with youth and their support networks."<sup>29</sup> Each victim is going to have experienced a different level of trauma while in the human trafficking network. Having a personalized care plan is beneficial for the victims, not just due to the different trauma they faced, but the survivor's long-term goals post rescue. It is important that this organization helps victims to recognize that their purpose in life goes beyond being a rescue from the human trafficking network, and that they were created in Christ's image to live out the calling He has placed on their lives.

The public should work hard to educate themselves in what to look out for when it comes to human trafficking. As adults seeking employment on different job sites, it is important to be aware of the site you are sharing your information on. For example, when seeing a job posting, it may be beneficial to research the employer on a separate search engine and retrieve their number. From there, reach out and speak with them regarding the job listing and confirm both the posting and the site. This will help to eliminate job postings that may appear legitimate but are actually fake. Another solution would be to do further research into the trustworthiness of the site that job has been posted to. This too may help to eliminate the chance of sharing personal information with people who have bad intentions.

As for children, it is important that both at home and in school, these children are being taught what to be aware of. It is important to educate children on the dangers of being somewhere without their parent or guardian. Running away from home is a major risk, even simply stepping away from them in the grocery store is a danger. "152 million children were victims of child labor in 2016, which amounts to nearly one in every ten children worldwide. There are 5.4 victims of human trafficking for every 1,000 people in the world."<sup>30</sup> This number is extremely high, however, can be reduced. It is extremely important and necessary to stay with

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<sup>26</sup> A21, "Human Trafficking | A21," www.a21.org, n.d., <https://www.a21.org/content/human-trafficking/gqe0rc>.

<sup>27</sup> "Love146'S Impact To-Date," Love146, n.d., <https://love146.org/impact/>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> "Love146'S Impact To-Date," Love146, n.d.

<sup>30</sup> "Facts & Figures," Youth Underground, 2023.



your child, keeping an eye on them, and preaching to them to trust the saying ‘stranger danger’. It should not be taken lightly.

### **Biblical Perspective**

God made us to be in the image and likeness of Him. This means we are supposed to reflect Him and His attributes throughout our actions and the way we treat others. We are to care and love the way God loves us. In the aspect of human trafficking, most who are victims in human trafficking feel as though they don’t have a voice. “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”<sup>31</sup> We need to be the voice, the advocates for those who remain in the human trafficking network, and for those who have been rescued. There are so many children and adults who are stuck in the viscous cycle that human trafficking enforces yet feels as if there is no hope in a better life. We need to be the ones who fight to encourage them to keep fighting, to not lose hope in the goodness of Christ.

Psalm 82:4 says, “Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicker.”<sup>32</sup> Those involved in a taskforce that fights human trafficking, are pursuing this verse daily, and we can too. As the public, we can be sure to inform those who may not be aware of the risks or what to be mindful of in certain situations. We can make it our goal, as Christians, and as the public to fight to protect and inform others.

“I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and he strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.”<sup>33</sup> This verse goes well for those involved in law enforcement, investigating these crimes, saving these victims, preventing the spread, catching the perpetrators, and pursuing charges. It also goes for the attorney’s pursuing prosecution and seeing that the appropriate charges for the crime are applied, as well as the time for the crime is served. These are pursuing God’s will. ‘Shepherd the flock with justice,’

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, both human trafficking and terrorism are major issues within the United States. It is important not only as citizens but as Christian’s to work hard to counteract these organizations and help others to pursue the calling God has placed on their lives. These individuals who have been consumed by the human trafficking network and by these terrorist organizations, were made for so much more than a body for their personal, monetary, or labor needs. They are also so much more than becoming a statistic and it is important that we work hard to ensure their ability to prove that to those who forced them into these networks.

As those who have been fortunate enough to not have to experience the life inside of these networks, it is important that we work to help those who have experienced it, revert to a more normal lifestyle. It is crucial that we recognize the trauma they have endured and handle it with extreme care. It is something they feel they have to be afraid of and live with for the rest of

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<sup>31</sup> Bible Gateway, “New International Version (NIV) - Version Information - BibleGateway.com

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Bible Gateway, “New International Version (NIV) - Version Information - BibleGateway.com

their lives. “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”<sup>34</sup> Be there as a support system for victims, care for them, and be a brother or sister in Christ.

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<sup>34</sup> Bible Gateway, “New International Version (NIV) - Version Information - BibleGateway.com

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