

The Mechanism of Sex Trafficking and What You Can Do About it

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## Abstract

Awareness for sex trafficking is on a steady incline. Many organizations and events help to raise awareness for sex trafficking and often collect money to combat the issue.

However, the unfortunate reality is that the public has gained a non-functional awareness of the issue. The public knows about the problem, they know that the number affected is astronomical, and they know that it is ugly, but they know of no tangible way to work toward the solution. Nothing is wrong with donating to an organization that is working to resolve the issue, but people need to be made aware of the simple ways that they can combat sex trafficking in their everyday life. They can do this by understanding how sex trafficking works. They can become familiar with the signs of sex trafficking and how to report suspicious activity. Lastly, the public must be made aware of personal behaviors that contribute to the problem. For example, many Americans consume pornography without knowing that this industry drives the demand for sex slavery.

*Keywords:* sex trafficking, Stockholm Syndrome, signs of trafficking, pornography

### The Mechanism of Sex Trafficking and What You Can Do About It

When discussing sex trafficking, most people will agree that it is an atrocity -- something that should never occur. Many may even be able to quantify the problem by speaking intelligently about current statistics, acknowledging the 4.5 million people who are estimated to be enslaved in sex trafficking worldwide (Polaris, 2017). Some especially well informed people may be able to give qualitative information. They can voice a gruesomely specific, heart wrenching story that makes the listener want to start kicking in doors and taking names right then and there. Unfortunately, a costly knowledge deficit exists related to sex trafficking. While many people know that sex trafficking is a vast and grisly problem, very few people know of any tangible way that they can be a part of the solution. Sex trafficking is a multi-faceted problem, and it is a big problem. That means that the solution needs to be multi-faceted as well, and it needs to be a big solution. With any overwhelming problem, the easiest thing to do is to do nothing. Good intentions are fine, but the public needs to be equipped and empowered with a practical knowledge base. Only then will those good intentions materialize and effect change.

A logical first step to solving any problem is taking the time to truly understand the problem. Understanding how the mechanism of sex trafficking works is the easiest way to identify its vulnerabilities and dismantle it. For instance, knowing who is at risk of victimization leads to countermeasures to protect those vulnerable populations. Knowing where sex trafficking takes place will encourage extra vigilance in those places. Knowing the occupations that are most likely to unwittingly interact with traffickers or victims, allows the professionals in those occupations to educate and prepare themselves for those

situations. Knowing the signs of sex trafficking will enable the public to spot red flags and report them to the authorities. Knowing what drives the demand for sex trafficking will help people stop being a part of the very problem they say that they want to solve.

### **Formal Definition**

Before any further discussion, a formal definition of sex trafficking is warranted: “Sex trafficking occurs when someone uses force, fraud, or coercion to cause a commercial sex act with an adult or causes a minor to commit a commercial sex act” (Shared Hope International, 2017, para. 1). Anyone under the age of 18 is considered to be a minor. A commercial sex act includes “prostitution, pornography, and sexual performance done in exchange for any item of value such as money, drugs, food, shelter, or clothes” (Shared Hope International, 2017, para. 1). Sex trafficking occurs both internationally and domestically, and it is the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world (Walker-Rodriguez & Hill, 2011). Now that a functioning definition is in place, this multi-faceted problem can be broken down into a functional knowledge.

### **Populations at High Risk of Victimization**

Traffickers, also referred to as pimps, play into their victim’s vulnerabilities (Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). They make promises targeted at the individual’s physical and emotional needs to make their victim dependent on them. Because of the nature of the crime, hard and fast statistics that represent the entire effected population are impossible to assess. Research with samples of victims and survivors helps promote an understanding of the general population (Barrows, 2015). Sex traffickers find their victims from various walks of life. Victims can be both male and female, though the vast majority of victims are female. The survivor demographics from

1,611 sex trafficking survivors who used the National Human Trafficking Resource Center and BeFree Textline revealed that only 0.68% of the victims were transgender, 4.41% were male, and 94.49% were female (Polaris, 2017).

### **Children as a Vulnerable Population**

The most vulnerable population in the United States is minors. In fact, most women engaged in prostitution entered the industry as minors (Kotrla, 2010). A common age range for children to enter the sex trafficking industry is 14-16 years old. At this young age, the child cannot fully comprehend what is happening (Shared Hope International, 2017), and because of the stage of their development, they may think of themselves as the “criminals” instead of the victims (Kotrla, 2010, p. 182). Among those most at risk are the homeless, those who have run away or been kicked out of their homes, those in the foster care system, those who have been neglected and those who have been physically or sexually abused (Polaris, 2017). Children who have a documented history of sexual abuse, physical abuse, or neglect are more than twice as likely to be exploited in prostitution. This propensity often occurs because of a corrupted image of self and an emotional distancing from sex. Engaging in sexual behavior and mentally labeling it as commonplace allows the victim of sexual abuse to water down their previous trauma (Wilson & Widom, 2011). Each of the listed risk factors make sense, because the traffickers are looking for victims who do not have a good social support system (Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). When these victims go missing, it may be a long time before anyone notices, if anyone notices at all.

**People in Poverty as a Vulnerable Population**

Poverty is a major risk factor for domestic sex trafficking, but it is and even more prevalent risk factor for international victims (Logan, Walker, & Hunt, 2009). These people are desperate, and because they are desperate, they are more willing to take dangerous opportunities. This vulnerability provides an opportunity for traffickers to lure victims, by offering them socioeconomic opportunity as bait (Polaris, 2017). Poverty also plays a role when victims are sold into sex trafficking by their impoverished parents or family. The desperate family is likely to believe the trafficker's false promise that when taken to the United States, their child will be well taken care of and may even have further opportunities. In reality, none of this is true. After the traffickers have brought the victim to the United States it is very easy for them to cut any ties that the victim has with their family (Logan, Walker, & Hunt, 2009).

Giving attention to the methods that traffickers use to lure and capture their victims offers another level of insight into the mechanism of the crime. Traffickers lure their victims the same way anyone has ever lured anyone into anything. They offer them something they want, or better yet, something they need. The truth about lying is that sometimes people are willing victims. If a person wants a lie to be true, then that person is more likely to believe the lie. Even if the liar makes mistakes in concealing the lie, the victim may give them the benefit of the doubt in order to maintain the plausibility of the lie that they want to believe (Ekman, 2009).

**Method One: Romantic, or "Lover Boy" Approach**

One of the most common tactics that traffickers use in luring victims is entering in the role of boyfriend. By showering the victim with attention, gifts, and affection, they

build trust and attachment. This method can be employed on adult victims, but is especially common with the sex trafficking of minors. After attachment, trust, and affection have been established, the pimp becomes increasingly controlling, wanting to know the victim's whereabouts at all times (Barrows, 2015). This may seem suspicious, but the trafficker is able to hide his intentions under the claim that he is worried about his "girlfriend." This is often a lie that the victim wants to believe. If her boyfriend is worried about her, then he must love her. It is not so. The trafficker then takes it one step further as he gradually isolates the girl from her family, friends, and support system. He may even geographically isolate the victim by convincing her to go to another city or state with him. Once the trafficker has made the victim dependent on him, then he forces her into prostitution by convincing her that she needs to contribute (Barrows, 2015). At that point, even if the victim realizes what is happening, it is too late. She has already been cut off from anyone who could help her. In this scenario, the lover boy may be the trafficker, or he may simply be a recruiter for the trafficker. The trafficker may control the lover boy via threats or money, driving him to "recruit" girls for exploitation (Hope For Justice, n.d.).

***Apps and online grooming.*** A subset of the "lover boy" approach is used by predators who groom victims online, on social media and in chat rooms. Unfortunately, technology has made it much easier for traffickers to find vulnerable young people and start a relationship with them, all without getting up from their laptop. Adolescents are especially vulnerable to online grooming because of the developmental stage that they are in. Predators online may pretend to be another teenager, or they may not even have to. Online predators take advantage of the adolescents' desire for attention, growing sexual

curiosity and their desire to experiment with sex (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2008). Smartphone apps such as Snapchat automatically delete all photos and chats. This encourages the users to be more risky in what they choose to say or show on the app, because they know it will be deleted (Barrows, 2015).

### **Method Two: Opportunity, Adventure, Protection, Drugs, or Home as Lures**

Another common lure for traffickers to use is socioeconomic opportunity. This may include promises of a new job, an internship, or an educational opportunity. The traffickers simply match their lure to the victims needs. For the victim in poverty, they offer a job. For the homeless, they offer a home. For the runaway, they offer adventure. For the youth who was kicked out, they offer protection. Traffickers are also known to target individuals who are addicted to drugs. Then the traffickers supply them that drug with a promise to continue supplying it in exchange for sexual acts (Polaris, 2017).

### **Method Three: Abduction, Kidnapping, or Physical Force**

Despite the fact that Hollywood often depicts traffickers as abducting or kidnapping their victims, and forcing them into commercial sex acts, this scenario is less common than the methods discussed above (Polaris, 2017). Out of 292 survivors who reported the recruitment method to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center and BeFree Textline, only 21 listed abduction, kidnapping, or physical force. That is only 7.19%. Comparatively, 92 of the 292 survivors reported being recruited via a romantic situation or marriage proposal. That is 31.51% (Polaris, 2017).

### **How do Traffickers Prevent Victims from Escaping?**

Despite what most people would think, a victim of trafficking seldom seeks help. The victims may be afraid of law enforcement, they may struggle with a language barrier,

or they may be too afraid of their traffickers to risk coming forward (Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). Even if the victim is determined to seek help, the traffickers have methods of preventing them from being successful. One way that traffickers contain their victims is by taking their money, creating a dependence for even the most basic things. In addition, traffickers may set quotas that a victim must meet every night. An average quota may range anywhere from \$500 to around \$1000 or even \$1500 in a single night (Barrows, 2015). Unmet quotas mean the victim will be punished with physical abuse. (Polaris, 2017). With international victims especially, traffickers will steal documentation such as passports, visas, and birth certificates. Without this documentation, the victim cannot freely travel (Freed, 2007). Traffickers may also threaten to report the international victim to the authorities if they try and escape. The international victim may be afraid of law enforcement for fear of deportation or punishment for illegal immigration status (Polaris, 2017). In this way, traffickers not only dissuade international victims from escaping, but they also create a distrust between the victim and law enforcement, which would be the normal place to go for help. Traffickers may also threaten their victims, or the families of their victims (Freed, 2007). Traffickers can also force their victims to become addicted to drugs to create a harder bond between victim and trafficker that will prevent the victim from running away. Traffickers also keep their victims isolated, so they cannot develop any support system that may help them escape. In addition, traffickers often move victims between cities and states. This constant travel helps keep the victims disoriented and prevents them from identifying resources in the community that could help them escape (Freed, 2007). When the victim

and trafficker are in public, the trafficker will speak for the victim to prevent disclosure of the situation to anyone they might come in contact with.

### **Stockholm Syndrome**

In hostage and kidnapping situations, a psychological response can occur where the abductees bond with, sympathize with, or express loyalty to their abductors. The psychological response is called Stockholm Syndrome (Adorjan, Christensen, Kelly, & Pawluch, 2012). The victims may identify with the trafficker's perspective, and may even become grateful just for the privilege of survival. A victim who is experiencing Stockholm Syndrome may misconstrue the roles for rescuers and captors. When questioned, they may even deny any violence or harm, which makes it more difficult for law enforcement to accurately determine what is happening in the situation (Freed, 2007). The bond can become so strong that the victim has trouble separating from the captor when given the opportunity (Polaris, 2017). Because of this psychological phenomenon, traffickers may not even need to use physical abuse or threats to prevent their victims from running away. Victims affected by Stockholm Syndrome are controlled by their own psyche in the trafficker's favor.

### **Where Does Trafficking Take Place?**

Sex trafficking is tied to a variety of types of places with different material and social/behavioral qualities. Hadjiyanni, Povlitzki, & Preble (2014) used the term "placeness" to mean "the state of being tied to a place with material and social/behavioral qualities" (p. 2). Investigating and understanding the placeness of sex trafficking will lead to increased vigilance in those places (Hadjiyanni, Povlitzki, & Preble, 2014). Certain venues, because of their inherent qualities, are ideal for traffickers to operate in without

detection. Thus, these venues have a higher influx and efflux of sex traffickers and their victims. Sex trafficking is often hidden in plain sight. Such places include hotels, motels, gas stations, airports, homes, hospitals, massage parlors, parks, bars, malls, and truck stops (Hadjiyanni, Povlitzki, & Preble, 2014). Each of these places has characteristics that appeal to trafficker's needs.

### **Hotels and Motels**

Hotels and motels appeal to the trafficker for a few reasons. First, they almost always have accessible side doors by which the hotel's rooms can be accessed without passing through the main lobby. This allows one of the traffickers to check in, and then they can bring the victims through with minimal chances of their distress being noticed. Also, hotels and motels are useful to traffickers because it allows them to have a mobile presence in the community that attracts less attention than a permanent location and is very hard for law enforcement to tack down (Hadjiyanni, Povlitzki, & Preble, 2014). A hotel or motel setting also means that the trafficker does not need to be concerned about maintenance of a building. Hotels and motels are also optimal from the buyer's perspective. Buyers can easily park at a hotel or motel and enter a room without it being obvious to anyone else that they are there to buy sex. Their action appears to be perfectly normal. This keeps their crime more confidential, which increases their probability of committing it (Polaris, 2017). Out of 693 survivors who reported the primary venue of commercial sex to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center and BeFree Textline, a total of 243 listed hotels and motels. Among the venues where sex trafficking occurs, hotels and motels are some of the most common (Polaris, 2017). Fortunately,

some hotels and motels have attempted to counter some of this by increased security measures and training their employees to spot the signs of sex trafficking.

### **Gas Stations, Truck Stops, Bus Terminals, and Airports**

Gas stations are also places prone to high levels of trafficking. The primary reason is because part of the trafficker's strategy is to move their victims from city to city or even state to state. The more they move around, the harder it is for the law to find them (Polaris, 2017). Another reason is because gas stations often have one-person bathrooms that lock, and are around the corner out of sight from the register. This allows the trafficker to go into the bathroom with a victim potentially unnoticed (Hadjiyanni, Povlitzki, & Preble, 2014). This presents an obvious opportunity for gas station employees to be vigilant and report suspected sex trafficking.

The same premise goes for truck stops. There is a large population of men who have been driving by themselves and are often lonely. Numerous trucks are parked at the truck stop at night, and commercial sex could be committed in the cab of any one of them. This geographically isolated environment suits the preference of the traffickers, especially when there is the additional concealment of darkness. Traffickers may advertise to truck drivers using broadcasting on Citizen Band radio, which the truckers can respond to. Victims may also be forced to advertise by knocking on truck cab doors (Polaris Project, 2012). Truckers may communicate their interest in commercial sex by flashing their headlights at women walking up and down parking lot. These methods and characteristics make truck stops strategic locations for traffickers. It is important to note that not all truckers are part of the problem. A community of truckers called Truckers

Against Trafficking use their unique position to combat the very issues discussed above (Polaris Project, 2012).

Bus terminals are not so much a place where sex trafficking occurs as they are a place where traffickers find their targets. Traffickers may go to bus stops and look for individuals who look like runaways with little to no money or skill set (Hadjiyanni, Povlitzki, & Preble, 2014). Traffickers may target victims at shopping malls, clubs, or after school activities in the same manner (Department of Homeland Security, 2016).

Airports are another hub which traffickers utilize to keep their victims moving. Vigilance on the part of airport personnel is key to identifying and responding to this. For example, Shelia Fredrick, an Alaska Airline flight attendant, noticed a distraught girl with greasy blonde hair on a flight from Seattle to San Francisco. The girl appeared to be 14 or 15 years old, but she was travelling with a well-dressed man who was significantly older. The flight attendant's suspicions were aroused by the stark contrast between the two travelers, so she tried to talk with them, but the man turned defensive. The flight attendant left a note in the plane's bathroom, which the girl found and responded to by saying, "I need help." The flight attendant informed the pilot, and police were waiting when the plane landed (Rosenblatt, 2017). By her attentiveness and willingness to act on her suspicions, Shelia Fredrick rescued a victim of sex trafficking. There are unique training opportunities for airline and security personnel at major airports that enable them to identify and protect children from exploitation. Airline Ambassadors International is an organization that offers such training opportunities. They submit tips to law enforcement, like Shelia Fredrick did. One such tip saved 86 children in Boston when the authorities took down a pornography ring (Airline Ambassadors International, 2015).

**Massage Parlors**

Massage parlors can be used by traffickers as a front for sex trafficking. It is difficult for the authorities to distinguish a massage parlor that is a legitimate business from one that is being used as a cover for sex trafficking (Kotrla, 2010). This is especially difficult because traffickers may only keep victims at a massage parlor for a short time before they move on. One day, active sex crimes may be committed there, and the next day the massage parlor may be functioning as a normal business. If the nail technicians and masseuses are above the age of 18, there also needs to be an element of force, fraud, or coercion present to substantiate sex trafficking (Shared Hope International, 2017). It is often difficult to determine if these people are acting of their own volition or if they are being forced. Even when the authorities successfully close the doors of one of these establishments, others seem to pop up to take its place (Hadjiyanni, Povlitzki, & Preble, 2014).

**Hospitals and Clinics**

Even though traffickers try to limit their victim's exposure to other people, victims may come in contact with healthcare professionals at hospitals and clinics (Polaris, 2017). Victims of sex trafficking are at high risk for health disparities for several reasons. The most obvious reason is because of their sexual and physical abuse. Injuries, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, or makeshift abortions gone wrong can all bring a victim into the hospital (Curits, Terry, Dank, Dombrowski, & Khan, 2008). Traffickers use violence to create fear and control. This can result in beating, broken bones, stabbing, facial trauma and head trauma. Sexual violence and rape increases the victim's chances of getting HPV or cervical cancer due to young age at first intercourse

and having many sexual partners (Freed, 2007). The poor living conditions and tight quarters in which sex trafficking victims often live are another reason why this population requires healthcare attention. People in constant close contact are at high risk for infectious disease such as tuberculosis and meningitis. If a person has HIV/AIDS, then she is even more likely to contract infectious disease because her immune system is already suppressed. The poor living conditions could also be conducive to pneumonia, asthma, bronchitis, and a host of other disease processes depending on the specifics of the living conditions (Lewis, Dirksen, Heitkemper, & Bucher, 2014).

The traffickers may allow the victim to seek medical attention because sickness or death would cut profit. A study conducted in 2008 on the commercial exploitation of children in New York City revealed that it is not uncommon for trafficking victims to come in contact with healthcare professionals. Of the sample of victims in this study, over 75% of the youth had visited a doctor in the last six months. A total of 42.6% received a full checkup, with a gynecological checkup for females. In addition, many of the victims were tested for sexually transmitted infections (Curits, Terry, Dank, Dombrowski, & Khan, 2008). A separate study on sexually exploited youth in Oakland California reported that 77% of the victims stated that they see a physician regularly. 49% had been hospitalized, and 33% were on prescribed medications (Barrows, 2015).

Unfortunately, opportunities for rescue are often missed because healthcare personnel are not aware of the signs of sex trafficking, or they simply don't take the time to investigate further. Healthcare personnel routinely ask patients questions about demographic information, contact information, healthy history, and family history. Inconsistencies in the story given and the patient's injuries should be recognized as a sign

that something is wrong. The patient should be separated from any family, friends, or significant others because the trafficker may pose in one of these roles. Once separated from the potential trafficker, the patient may be more truthful about the situation.

Appropriate care can be provided and the authorities can be contacted (Barrows, 2015).

In an effort to remedy the disparity of healthcare teaching this topic, The Christian Medical and Dental Association had developed accredited continuing education modules to train healthcare professionals on how to identify and care for victims of trafficking (Christian Medical & Dental Associations, 2017).

### **Sports Events**

Another type of venue well known for attracting large amounts of trafficking activity is a sporting event. The most extreme example of this is, of course, the Super Bowl. The Super Bowl is the largest human trafficking event in the United States. In 2015, a two-week long sting surrounding the Super Bowl led to the arrest of 570 men who were trying to buy sex and 23 traffickers (Fight The New Drug, 2017). However, it is not just the Super Bowl where this is a problem. Any large sporting event attracts a large crowd of potential buyers. If the demand is there, the traffickers will bring a supply of sex slaves.

### **Signs of Sex Trafficking**

The above paragraphs have discussed populations who have high chances of interacting with sex trafficking victims. Healthcare professionals, hotel and motel staff, and persons employed in hubs of travel should all make themselves aware of the signs of trafficking. First responders such as firefighters, police, and emergency medical technicians may surprise traffickers in their least-prepared state, and the trafficking

operation may not be well hidden in a time of emergency. Thus, first responders should be trained in recognizing red flags of trafficking. The preparation of these disciplines is important, but what about the average American who is not employed in any of those fields?

The simplest action that the average person can do to fight sex trafficking is be vigilant and report suspicious activity. Everyone who has spent any amount of time in the United States has heard the phrase “If you see something, say something.” After 9/11 this became an obligation of every American. Of course, this phrase refers to suspicious packages, potential bombs or threats of terrorism, but the fundamental concept is universal. If everyone in a country is intentional about being watchful, then the country is a much less likely to be blindsided. This could also be applied to sex trafficking as well. The major difference is that a bomb represents an immediate threat to the life of anyone who is close enough to see it. Conversely, sex trafficking is not an immediate threat to the bystander. People tend not to do anything about a problem until it affects them directly, and by then it is too late. The bystander who neither sees nor reports signs of trafficking is preserving the very environment which allows traffickers to pull off their crime in broad daylight. The signs of sex trafficking can be broken down into three categories: indicators of control, strange red flags, and physical indicators (Barrows, 2015).

### **Category One: Indicators of Control**

The victim of sex trafficking is often accompanied by an individual who is domineering and intimidating to the victim. The victim may be fearful, timid and submissive. An older boyfriend or an adult male who is not the victim’s guardian could be controlling individuals (Barrows, 2015). When asked about his profession, the

accompanying individual speaks only vaguely on the topic. The accompanying individual may come across as jealous and violent. The accompanying individual may promise things that sound too good to be true (Shared Hope International, 2014). The victim may not be free to go, live, or work where they want to. The victim may not be in control of their money or documents. There may be high security measures where the victim lives or works (Department of Homeland Security).

### **Category Two: Strange Red Flags**

Sex trafficking victims may give contradictory stories and there may be inconsistencies between their words and their physical or situational presentation. For instance, the victim may appear to be much younger than the age she claims to be (Barrows, 2015). A victim's conversations may seem coached, or scripted. The victim may not know what city she is in or she may be unable to state her current address. To cover this up, she may claim she is just visiting (National Human Trafficking Hotline, n.d.). Victims may have large amounts of cash on their person, or may have expensive clothing and accessories. Victims may be overly tired in class, absent from school without any explanation, or stop going to school altogether (Shared Hope International, 2014). A victim may be detached from friends and family (Department of Homeland Security). A victim may also demonstrate increased levels of anxiety when the police come up in conversation. The victim may have sexual behaviors or demonstrate a sexual knowledge uncharacteristic for their age (National Human Trafficking Hotline, n.d.).

### **Category Three: Physical Indicators**

Victims of sex trafficking may be branded with tattoos that depict a barcode, a dollar sign, a name, or say "property of..." (Shared Hope International, 2014). The victim

may have burns, cuts, and bruises in various stages of healing, or other signs of physical abuse (Department of Homeland Security). The person may look like they have not had access to food, water, sleep, or healthcare. The person may have signs of physical restraint, strangling, torture, or exposure to harmful chemicals (National Human Trafficking Hotline, n.d.).

### **How to Report Sex Trafficking**

A public armed with the knowledge of how to identify a potential sex trafficking victim must next learn how to report the suspected trafficking. It is important to understand that the signs of trafficking listed above is not an exhaustive list. No one red flag is proof of sex trafficking, but if there is suspicion of trafficking, the bystander should call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1-888-373-7888. This center is a non-governmental agency. The call is confidential, and the line is open 24/7 and is available in over 200 languages. The bystander can also text “HELP” or “INFO” to BeFree 233733 (National Human Trafficking Hotline, n.d.). Another number that can be called is 1-866-347-2423, which is the number for the Homeland Security Investigations Tip Line. This tip line is open 24 hours a day every day and is available in over 300 languages and dialects. A tip may be submitted online at [www.ice.gov/tips](http://www.ice.gov/tips). No attempt should be made by the bystander to rescue a suspected victim or directly confront a suspected trafficker. Such action could put the safety of both the bystander and the victim in jeopardy. If the victim appears to be in direct danger, they bystander should contact law enforcement immediately by dialing 911 (Department of Homeland Security, 2016).

### **Utilizing Technology to Aid Law Enforcement**

Almost everyone has a smart phone, and apps can be great tools even for fighting sex trafficking. Several apps have been developed to help educate individuals on sex trafficking, and help identify victims. “Redlight Traffic” and “The STOP APP” are two similar apps aimed at reporting suspected trafficking. “Lifeboat ACT Game” is an educational interactive app that includes gameplay which provides a fun way for individuals to learn how to identify victims of trafficking (Women at Risk International, n.d.).

One of the most practical apps that has been developed is called “TraffickCam.” The app is aimed at travelers who stay in hotels. After they check in, the traveler snaps a picture of their hotel room before they unpack. This picture is then uploaded to a national database full of thousands of other hotel room pictures. The app includes state of the art image analysis that allows law enforcement to match a hotel room to the picture in an online advertisement for underage prostitution. Much of the market for sex trafficking is online on websites like backpage.com. These websites function similarly to craigslist, except they are used to sell commercial sex acts. Using the TraffickCam app, law enforcement can take a picture off of backpage.com, plug it into the app, and identify where that victim is being held captive. The app analyzes carpet patterns, furniture, decorations, room accessories, and window views (Fight The New Drug, 2016). This can save law enforcement countless hours of searching. Tests have shown that the app is able to identify the right hotel room in the top 20 matches with 85% accuracy. The app is available for both I-Phone and Android phones. To get the app to a running start, the creators of the app have harvested pictures of hotel rooms from hotel websites and travel

websites such as expedia.com. However, these pictures may not be the rooms that victims are being trafficked in, or they may not accurately represent the hotel. There is currently a total of about 1.5 million photos in the database from over 145,000 different hotels. More photos are needed to make this tool even more effective for law enforcement (Fight The New Drug, 2016). This app provides a very tangible for the travelling American to combat sex trafficking.

### **Writing a Letter to a Survivor**

Another practical thing an individual can do is write a letter to a survivor of sex trafficking. Initially, this may sound like it does not help solve the problem, because this victim has already been rescued. However, even after the victim has been removed from the trafficker's control, there is still a great deal of physical and emotional healing that must take place. Many victims and survivors of sex trafficking experience post-traumatic stress disorder (Barrows, 2015) and fear of revictimization (Gouty, 2015). Because of their experience, victims may feel unlovable, worthless, and used. Writing a letter simply saying that you care about them can help undo a little bit of that emotional trauma they endured. One reliable organization to write your letter through is the A21 Campaign. This organization suggests addressing your letter or card to "Dear Beautiful" or "Lovely." This is recommended because it is encouraging, but it is also generic enough to include any survivor who might receive the letter. This is also necessary because the writer will not know the name of the survivor they are writing to. Due to the sensitivity of the issue of sex trafficking is, privacy is important. The A21 Campaign also suggest not to talk too much about yourself and not to claim to understand the survivors' situations. Rather, use the letter as an opportunity to place value and worth on the girls (A21 Campaign, 2017).

### **Pornography Driving the Demand for Sex Trafficking**

Rarely do people think of themselves as the offenders in the case of sex trafficking. It seems so black and white. A person who avoids buying sex must one of the good guys. Right? Not quite, many people do not realize that they create a demand for sex trafficking with their addiction to pornography. Our culture is inundated with pornography, and has normalized it to the point where it has become strange for someone not to look at it. One very practical way to stop sex trafficking is to stop looking at pornography. The oversexualized spheres of media and advertisement start Americans off young, numbing them to the implications of pornography. "It's not hurting anyone" is the untrue thought process that the American culture endorses. Yet, it is well documented that pornography drives the demand for sex trafficking for a couple reasons (Foubert, Brosi, & Bannon, 2011).

### **Pornography Produces More Buyers of Commercial Sex**

First, watching pornography is a huge part of the process that turns men into buyers of sex. Studies have revealed that viewing pornography actually rewires the brain (Wilson G. , 2015). Part of this rewiring of the brain is due to what are called mirror neurons. Mirror neurons were originally discovered in the brains of monkeys. The neurons fire when the monkey performs a particular action, but the same neurons also fire when the monkey watches that action being done by another monkey. Further studies found that humans have these same kinds of mirror neurons, which are both a visual and a motor neuron. Essentially, when a person sees an action done, it discharges the same neurons in their brain as if they had done that action themselves (Mauras, et al., 2008). Thus, it is thought that mirror neurons play a role in imitative learning. Studies have

shown that men watching pornography have the desire to reproduce what they are seeing. They experience sexual motor imagery and imagine themselves performing the sexual actions that they are watching in the pornographic video. This contributes to why men experience erections when watching pornography. They may not be engaged in any physical or motor sexual activity, but when they watch someone else's sexual experience, their mirror neurons fire as if they are the one in the video (Mauras, et al., 2008).

This becomes a more concerning phenomenon when one notes the increasing trend toward violent pornography, which includes rape pornography and torture pornography. Research done on the pornographic videos that are currently most popular revealed that 88% of the clips involved physical violence to women (Foubert, Brosi, & Bannon, 2011). All pornography perpetuates objectification and commodification of women, but violent pornography is even more dehumanizing (Makin & Morczek, 2015). A study conducted on the fraternity population of a Midwestern public university in 2011 assessed the effect of men's pornography usage on their behavior and attitude about sexual assault. The results of the study showed that "men who view pornography are significantly less likely to intervene as a bystander, report an increased behavioral intent to rape, and are more likely to believe rape myths" (Foubert, Brosi, & Bannon, 2011, p. 212). All of this to say, that the pornography industry is creating more buyers of commercial sex. As long as that demand continues to be there, sex trafficking will continue to grow as a criminal enterprise and traffickers will victimize more women to make the supply meet the demand. A conscious decision has to be made by the public not to view pornography. Anyone viewing pornography is metaphorically casting a vote with his actions in favor of sex trafficking.

**Sex Trafficking Victims Are Forced to Make Pornography**

Many people do not know that trafficking victims are often exploited in the production of pornography. They would rather assume that the women in pornography are willingly there, but this is often not the case (Fight The New Drug, 2014).

Pornography production is a commercial sex act, which means that the use of force, fraud, or coercion to make someone produce pornography is considered sex trafficking. If the subject is less than 18 years old, then it is automatically considered to be sex trafficking even without force, fraud, or coercion. Pornographers want to make it look like the performers are enjoying what they are doing. They use emotional and physical abuse, drugs, and threats to force the victims into doing what they want. After careful editing, they have a product that is capable of convincing the viewer that the performers want to be there, and therefore it is acceptable to watch (Fight The New Drug, 2014). Not only are sex victims forced to make pornography, but pornography is also used as a training tool to teach sex trafficking victims how to be sex slaves. It is not uncommon for someone who is purchasing commercial sex to provide a pornographic picture of what he wants (Fight The New Drug, 2014). These people have become so desensitized that they bring in these pictures as if they are showing a barber a picture of the haircut they would like. This is the culture that feeds a \$100 billion/year pornography industry, which this is directly linked to the growth of the sex trafficking industry (She's Somebody's Daughter, 2015).

Even just reading about how revolting and dehumanizing the pornography industry is should cause sickening in the heart of any right-minded individual. A public that is equipped with this knowledge of the pornography industry now has clear moral

motive to restrain from viewing pornography. Because of the uncomfortable nature of this topic, the true nature of the pornography is not well understood by most. An informed person has the ability and obligation to inform others that pornography is not victimless. Obviously, pornography has an addictive quality to it for those who have made a habit of viewing it. There are tools available such as internet filters, accountability programs, and parental controls for a variety of situations where the user would like to limit unintentional contact with pornography. Such tools could prove especially useful and warranted for children, whose minds are still very impressionable.

In conclusion, sex trafficking is a problem that will only be remedied by a public with a functional knowledge that they are willing to utilize in a combined effort. This effort includes measures to dismantle the mechanism in a couple ways. First, the public must gain a functional knowledge of high risk populations for sex trafficking, luring methods used by traffickers, and places where trafficking is most likely to occur. This knowledge will aid in an understanding of the signs of sex trafficking. If signs of sex trafficking are observed, the situation should be reported via the provided hotline. Aside from spotting the signs of sex trafficking, other positive interventions include the use of technology in combating trafficking as well as writing a letter to a survivor of sex trafficking. The public must also know that if they are consuming pornography, then they are contributing to the problem of sex trafficking in multiple different ways. Pornography increases the demand for sex trafficking by turning more men into buyers. The use of trafficking victims to make pornography and the use of pornography to train victims are also evident of the cycle of ever-increasing demand for sex trafficking. The public must come to the realization that by participating in the consumption of pornography, they are

essentially promoting the idea that sex trafficking is acceptable. Each individual has to choose whether to be a part of the problem or the solution. Armed with this knowledge, the public has the power to save one life at a time, but there is no middle ground. Anyone who is not a part of the solution is a part of the problem.

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