



LABOR TRAFFICKING FACT SHEET



The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) defines labor trafficking as: “The recruitment, harboring, transportation, 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 or slavery.” The TVPA also recognizes sex trafficking, which is discussed in a separate fact sheet. A modern-day form of slavery, labor trafficking is a fundamental violation of human rights.

Forms of Labor Trafficking

There are several forms of exploitative practices linked to labor trafficking, including bonded labor, forced labor and child labor.

- **Bonded labor**, or debt bondage, is probably the least known form of labor trafficking today, and yet it is the most widely used method of enslaving people. Victims become bonded laborers when their labor is demanded as a means of repayment for a loan or service in which its terms and conditions have not been defined or in which the value of the victims’ services as reasonably assessed is not applied toward the liquidation of the debt. The value of their work is greater than the original sum of money “borrowed.”
- **Forced labor** is a situation in which victims are forced to work against their own will, under the threat of violence or some other form of punishment, their freedom is restricted and a degree of ownership is exerted. Forms of forced labor can include domestic servitude; agricultural labor; sweatshop factory labor; janitorial, food service and other service industry labor; and begging.

Child labor is a form of work that is likely to be hazardous to the health and/or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development of children and can interfere with their education. The International Labor Organization estimates worldwide that there are 246 million exploited children aged between 5 and 17 involved in debt bondage, forced recruitment for armed conflict, prostitution, pornography, the illegal drug trade, the illegal arms trade and other illicit activities around the world.

Identifying Victims of Labor Trafficking

Victims of labor trafficking are not a homogenous group of people. Victims are young children, teenagers, men and women. Some of them enter the country legally on worker visas for domestic, “entertainment,” computer and agricultural work, while others enter illegally. Some work in legal occupations such as domestic, factory or construction work, while others toil in illegal industries such as the drug and arms trade or panhandling. Although there is no single way to identify victims of labor trafficking, some common patterns include:

- Victims are often kept isolated to prevent them from getting help. Their activities are restricted and are typically watched, escorted or guarded by associates of traffickers. Traffickers may “coach” them to answer questions with a cover story about being a student or tourist.
- Victims may be blackmailed by traffickers using the victims’ status as an undocumented alien or their participation in an “illegal” industry. By threatening to report them to law enforcement or immigration officials, traffickers keep victims compliant.
- People who are trafficked often come from unstable and economically devastated places as traffickers frequently identify vulnerable populations characterized by oppression, high rates of illiteracy, little social mobility and few economic opportunities.

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- Women and children are overwhelmingly trafficked in labor arenas because of their relative lack of power, social marginalization, and their overall status as compared to men.

Health Impacts of Labor Trafficking

In addition to the human rights abuses that define their involuntary servitude, victims of labor trafficking suffer from a variety of physical and mental health problems:

- Various methods of forced labor expose victims of labor trafficking to physical abuse such as scars, headaches, hearing loss, cardiovascular/respiratory problems, and limb amputation. Victims of labor trafficking may also develop chronic back, visual and respiratory problems from working in agriculture, construction or manufacturing under dangerous conditions.
- The psychological effects of torture are helplessness, shame and humiliation, shock, denial and disbelief, disorientation and confusion, and anxiety disorders including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), phobias, panic attacks, and depression.
- Many victims also develop Traumatic Bonding or “Stockholm Syndrome,” which is characterized by cognitive distortions where reciprocal positive feelings develop between captors and their hostages. This bond is a type of human survival instinct and helps the victim cope with the captivity.
- Child victims of labor trafficking are often malnourished to the extent that they may never reach their full height, they may have poorly formed or rotting teeth, and later they may experience reproductive problems.

Assistance for Victims of Labor Trafficking

When victims of trafficking are identified, the U.S. government can help them stabilize their immigration status, and obtain support and assistance in rebuilding their lives in the United States through various programs. By certifying victims of trafficking, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) enables trafficking victims who are non-U.S. citizens to receive federally funded benefits and services to the same extent as a refugee. Victims of trafficking who are U.S. citizens do not need to be certified to receive benefits. As U.S. citizens, they may already be eligible for many benefits.

As a result of the certification or eligibility letters issued by HHS, victims can access benefits and services including food, health care and employment assistance. Certified victims of trafficking can obtain access to services that provide English language instruction and skills training for job placement. Since many victims are reluctant to come forward for fear of being deported, one of HHS’ most important roles is to connect victims with non-profit organizations prepared to assist them and address their specific needs. These organizations can provide counseling, case management and benefit coordination.

If you think you have come in contact with a victim of human trafficking, call the **National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1.888.3737.888**. This hotline will help you determine if you have encountered victims of human trafficking, will identify local resources available in your community to help victims, and will help you coordinate with local social service organizations to help protect and serve victims so they can begin the process of restoring their lives. For more information on human trafficking visit **www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking**.

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