

CLOSE TO HOME: CONFRONTING THE PROBLEM OF SEX TRAFFICKING IN OUR COMMUNITY

Claire M. Renzetti, Ph.D.

Judi Conway Patton Endowed Chair for Studies of
Violence Against Women

Professor and Chair of Sociology

University of Kentucky

claire.renzetti@uky.edu

Natasha, 20 years old, undocumented immigrant

- Natasha paid 2 men to smuggle her into the country. They promised her a job as a nanny, but after she arrived, there was no such job.
- The men suggested that she engage in sex for money with customers they provided. She saw no other options, so she complied.

Is this sex trafficking?



Christina, 15 years old, born in the US, lives at home with her parents in a midwestern city

- Videotaped having sex with her boyfriend and one of his friends
- Threatened to show her parents the video if she did not agree to have sex with other boys for money
- Continued to live at home with her parents and attend school

Is this sex trafficking?



Tanya, an adult U.S. citizen, married

- Abused by her husband of 5 years, who is also a U.S. citizen
- He brings men home to have sex with her; he charges the men and keeps the money.
- She complies because she is afraid of him.

Is this sex trafficking?



Linda, U.S. citizen, runaway, sex worker

- Born in Florida, ran away from home when she was 16 and made her living as a street prostitute; now 19
- Approached by a pimp who threatened her if she didn't work for him rather than on her own.
- She finally complied and now he keeps her under constant surveillance.

Is this sex trafficking?



What is *sex trafficking*?

Federal law defines sex trafficking as enticing, harboring, transporting, providing or obtaining:

- An adult for commercial sex by means of *force, fraud or coercion* or
- A minor (under the age of 18) for commercial sex, *regardless of the means.*

Key elements of sex trafficking

- For adults: *compelled* to engage in sex work through *force, fraud or coercion*
- Force or coercion may be physical force, but can also include other means—e.g., alcohol or drugs, threats
- For minors: force, fraud or coercion is *not required*
- No movement or transport is necessary: Someone can be trafficked from their home town or even from their own home
- Trafficking is not the same as human smuggling, although someone who is smuggled may become a trafficking victim
- Sex trafficking involves various forms of commercial sexual exploitation, not only forced prostitution

U.S. sex trafficking statistics



- ◆ Official statistics: Cases known to the police
 - 8 out of 10 (82%) human trafficking cases involve sex trafficking
 - Nearly all sex trafficking cases (99%) involve female victims
 - 1/3 of sex trafficking victims are minors (under the age of 18)
 - 83% of victims were US citizens; 86% of traffickers were US citizens

Texas

A sex
trafficking hub

Houston & El
Paso: DOJ's
list of “most
intense
human
trafficking
jurisdictions”



Risk of sex trafficking victimization

- Risk is *not* equally distributed across all social groups
- One group at especially high risk: runaways & “throwaways”



- History of physical, psychological and/or sexual abuse
- Trafficker initially offers care, becomes “all-powerful” in the victim’s life
- Grooming & traumatic bonding



Male sex trafficking victims



- Official statistics: ~1% of sex trafficking victims
- Service providers' estimates: 10-20% of sex trafficking victims
- More highly stigmatized, most overlooked/ignored
- Most are gay or transgendered
- Many (most) are runaways/throwaways
- Challenge: How to engage gay community leaders in addressing this problem?

What can community members do to address sex trafficking?

- ◆ Increase awareness

- ◆ Learn more:

- *Girls Like Us: A Memoir*, Rachel Lloyd
- *Human Trafficking in the Midwest: A Case Study of St. Louis and the Bi-State Area*, Erin Heil & Andrea Nichols
- “Service providers and their perceptions of the service needs of sex trafficking victims in the United States,” Claire Renzetti (in *Global Human Trafficking*, ed. Molly Dragiewicz)
- <http://www.sharedhope.org>
- <http://www.polarisproject.org>

What can community members do to address sex trafficking?

◆ Pay attention

Learn the warning signs:

- Men coming and going from a particular house or apartment
- Unusual anxiety, nervousness, fear, depression
- Bruises or signs of physical abuse, lack of health care, seems drugged or “out of it”
- Appears to be under the control of another person



What can community members do to address sex trafficking?

Make the call:

National Human Trafficking Resource Center

Hotline: 888-373-7888

Texting helpline: text INFO or HELP to BeFree (233733)

Make a tip report online:

<http://www.TraffickingResourceCenter.org>

In 2014: 24,062 contacts were made with NHTRC, over 33% from community members (e.g., students, teachers, health care providers, neighbors, truckers, business owners)

What can community members do to address sex trafficking?

Local Resources

Officer Kristie Brian, Longview Police Department –
local hotline: 903-237-2777

Refuge of Light, Tyler – Safe home for female domestic minor victims of sex trafficking

<http://www.refugeoflight.org>

For the Silent, Tyler: I Have Voice Program – to educate and empower adolescent girls most vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation

<http://www.forthesilent.org>

What can community members do to address sex trafficking?

Volunteer:

- Services for the homeless
- Services for abuse victims
- Tutoring & mentoring programs for children and adolescents

YOU can make a difference!

