

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN TENNESSEE

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It is a major problem.

Human trafficking is a type of crime where human beings are treated as possessions and forced to perform involuntary acts for someone else's profit. It affects an estimated 27 million people in the world.¹ Forced labor and sexual exploitation are the most common forms.² Forced labor is when a person is forced to work unwillingly for little to no pay, usually at the threat of being harmed. Likewise, sexual exploitation occurs when a child or adult is forced to perform any sex act, such as prostitution or pornography, in exchange for money, drugs, food, shelter or other basic needs.² The business of sexually exploiting minors and nonconsenting adults for profit is known as sex trafficking.²

It isn't just international.

Atlanta is the "sex trafficking capital" of the United States and brings a lot of activity to the state of Tennessee. In fact, 14,000 to 18,000 individuals are trafficked across US borders annually,³ and in Tennessee, 94 children are trafficked online each month for sex.⁴ At least 85 percent of Tennessee counties report that human trafficking occurs in their county, with the highest rates occurring in Coffee, Shelby, Davidson and Knox counties.⁴

It often involves minors.

Domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) is the most common form of sex trafficking in the United States.² An estimated 100,000 US minors are involved each year in the sex trade.⁵ On average, children are sexually exploited around the age of 13,⁶ yet traffickers have been known to target victims as young as 9.⁷

It involves multiple individuals.

There are multiple people involved in human trafficking. Beyond the victims of trafficking, there are multiple offenders, including the traffickers ("pimps") and the purchasers ("johns") of sex crimes.² Pimps sexually exploit an individual for their own personal gain, through means of force, fear, coercion or trickery. A john is the buyer who exchanges money or goods (i.e., drugs) for sex acts.

Sex trafficking and prostitution are the same thing.

Sex trafficking is the same as prostitution; most victims enter unwillingly into the industry as minor children.² Because the typical victim is trafficked for an average of 7 years,³ many "age into" prostitution after being trafficked as a minor.

The industry is so profitable because victims are resellable.

Human trafficking is second to drug trafficking as the most profitable criminal industry worldwide.⁶ The human trafficking industry brings in between \$32 to \$50 billion each year with each slave costing an average of \$90 each time she or he is sold.⁵ The industry is so profitable because a single victim can be sold for sex again and again. Unlike drugs, weapons or other goods that are sold once for a fixed cost, the human body can be sold not just once, but hundreds and thousands of times.

The internet intensifies the problem.

Some of the most common physical locations from which victims are trafficked include truck stops; streets; hotels or low-cost motels; escort services; and commercial-front brothels, or “businesses” advertising as spas, salons or massage parlors. Today, the preferred channel to traffic children is through use of online ads hosted through Craigslist or backpage.com;⁸ smartphone applications, such as Kik, Yik Yak or SnapChat; or social media platforms like Instagram.⁹ The internet has added to the problem because of its accessibility and sense of privacy.

There are warning signs.

Victims typically are young (around 13 years), female, low-income, homeless, or may be a runaway. Many come from unstable family backgrounds that lack adult supervision or include high rates of abuse or neglect. The most vulnerable are those involved in the child welfare system (i.e., foster care).

Typical signs that a victim is being trafficked include:⁴

- Younger than what she or he says they are.
- Socially isolated.
- Fearful of authority figures or generally fearful, like they are under someone’s control.
- Inappropriately dressed.
- Has bruises, injuries or branding (with a tattoo).
- Malnourished and/or lacking in hygiene.
- Carries no personal belongings, identification or money.
- Carries a prepaid cellphone and what appears to be hotel keys or key cards.
- Moves from place to place frequently.
- Has inconsistent or incoherent stories.
- Usually accompanied by another person.
- Under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.

There are solutions.

In short, human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery!¹ It is a serious crime that could lead to life imprisonment. It is tricky to connect the offenders of human trafficking to their victims because today’s technologies help to keep those involved anonymous. One way to tackle human trafficking is to educate others about the warning signs and realities of human trafficking and prostitution. Another way is to get involved by reporting if you suspect or witness human trafficking in your community.

**TAKE A
STAND**

- **Report** if you suspect or witness a crime:
Tennessee Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline
1-855-558-6484 or 1-888-373-7888
- Learn more:
www.traffickingresourcecenter.org/what-human-trafficking/recognizing-signs
- Find nonprofits in Tennessee fighting to end trafficking:
ithastostop.com/theopportunity.shtml

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