

A Social Worker's Call to Action to Stand Against Human Trafficking
Elizabeth Ringler-Jayanthan
Barry University

As an intern with the Life of Freedom Center, an organization devoted to anti-trafficking efforts, I was afforded the opportunity to provide direct services to survivors of sex trafficking. Through my experience with the Life of Freedom Center I was very humbled by the resiliency the women I worked with displayed and deeply moved by the progress I was able to see them make. One of my clients is now entering training in nursing and another is pursuing her GED. Despite enduring multiple traumas, and unbelievably difficult circumstances, they are fighting to build better lives for themselves.

The Polaris Project estimates that 20.9 million men, women and children are trafficked worldwide each year (Polaris Project, 2016). According to the International Labour Organization, 11.4 million of those trafficked are labor trafficking victims, and 4.5 million are forced into sexual exploitation (ILO, 2016). 98% of those trafficked for sexual exploitation are women and girls (Equality Now, n.d.). Estimates suggest that hundreds of thousands of individuals are trafficked within the United States each year (Polaris Project, 2016). Among those trafficked within the United States, it has been suggested that 100,000 of them are children trafficked into sexual exploitation (Goldberg, 2014). All types of human trafficking exist in the United States, including labor trafficking of agricultural workers, restaurant workers, hotel staff, and domestic workers; bonded labor/debt bondage; sex trafficking, which includes both children and adults; sexual exploitation which can include adult massage parlors, escort services, exotic dancing, pornography and prostitution (Clawson, Dutch, Soloman, & Goldblatt Grace, 2009). Human trafficking is inextricably linked to global criminal networks, as people are sold like other illegally obtained commodities (Marcano & Gibbon, 2012).

Florida is considered to be a hub for human trafficking, and is believed to be one of the top three destinations for trafficking within the United States. Florida is a primary destination for trafficking due to its proximity to tourist and vacation areas, its economy which is based largely on agriculture and tourism, and its geographic location. Miami's airport is considered to be one of the key entry points in the United States for trafficking victims (National Organization for Women, 2009).

With the scale of the problem being so vast, complex, and multi-faceted, it can feel like any effort at combatting this issue cannot possibly make an impact. Yet, social workers are at the intersection of mental health, the medical field, the justice system, the school system, as well as various social service agencies, and may likely be the first to identify a trafficking victim-- placing us in a unique position to make a real difference for this population. What can you do to help?

- Educate yourself on the issue of human trafficking and let others know what you've learned. Attend a workshop or training on this issue.
- Learn how to assess whether an individual may be trafficked. As a social worker, you may be the first person to identify a potential trafficking victim.
- If you think someone may be trafficked report a tip to the Polaris Project hotline: at 1-888-373-7888.
- Host a film screening on the human trafficking to raise awareness, such as *A Path Appears*.
- Make a donation to an agency working with survivors. Tangible needs for survivors of human trafficking may include: clothing, toiletries, money for rental assistance/getting a first apartment, bus passes.
- Survivors of human trafficking also have long-term needs in order for them to become self-sufficient. This may include GED classes or ESL classes, medical services, counseling services, job placement services and immigration services. Consider whether your agency may be willing to help provide some of these services for survivors.
- Become a mentor for a survivor. Several agencies in Miami offer mentorship opportunities.

(Clawson & Dutch, 2008)

While it is an audacious goal, we must aspire to end human trafficking in our time. As

abolitionist William Wilberforce is quoted as saying, "You may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know."

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