

Juvenile Justice Vision 20/20 Training Event
Human Trafficking: Modern Day Slavery and Juvenile Prostitution in Michigan
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There are an estimated 27 million current victims of human trafficking worldwide. Despite this estimate, the exact number of victims is unknown due to the inability to obtain the “full picture” of human trafficking statistically. This lack of information is based on statistics gathered from known charges, and in recent years, it is the unknown factors that prove problematic. Trafficking used to be done on the street, but now it is much more likely to be conducted on the internet and in hotel rooms. Even though the exact number of victims is unknown, what is certain is the undeniable profit that is gained by those exploiting people through sex trafficking. This profit is easily obtained because a person being trafficked can be bought and sold repeatedly.

Under United States Federal Law, “severe forms of trafficking persons” included both sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Labor trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of the subjugation to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery. On the other hand, sex trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age. Another notable comparison is the difference between smuggling and trafficking. Smuggling involves crossing an international border whereas a border does not need to be crossed in order to be trafficked. In fact, a child does not even need to leave his or her home to be trafficked. Trafficking is exploitation-based and smuggling is transportation-based.

Innocence Lost is a national initiative implemented in 2003 by the Department of Justice and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. This initiative took a victim-centered approach by developing task forces to address juveniles being trafficked. There are currently over seventy task forces nationwide. During the 2015 Cross Country initiative, 149 juveniles were recovered and 153 pimps were arrested. Some Michigan-based initiatives include SEMCAC (South East Michigan Crimes Against Children) and WEBCHEX (West Michigan Based Child Exploitation Task Force).

It is important to know that anyone can anyone can become a victim of sex trafficking. Men, women, and children of any age, race, and background have been trafficked in the United States. However, there are groups who are particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of human trafficking. These include runaways/throwaways, adults and children brought in from other countries, and those who belong to a family with traffickers in it. Victims of human trafficking are often victimized in massage parlors, hair braiding salons, restaurants, hotels, truck stops, and

sporting events. The life expectancy of human trafficking victims is only seven years after the trafficking begins. This can be credited to the beatings inflicted, drugs taken, and to suicides.

The use of technology cannot be overstated when looking at how sex trafficking has increased in recent years. Not only are victims recruited online, but the use of ads, online auctions, and even webcams contributes to their easy exploitation. Technology is also used by pimps to control and communicate with their victims. In addition, easy online access to pornography increases the demand for harder core porn and child pornography.

Many people may wonder why victims of human trafficking do not leave once they realize the horrible conditions of their situation. This is often due to the amount of power and control used by pimps in order to keep exploiting their victims. Victims experience intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, minimizing, sexual abuse, economic abuse, and coercion which make it challenging for them to leave the industry. This is why it is important to recognize how to help someone who is being trafficked or wants to stay away from a pimp. Different placements can be made, a person can be connected with a variety of services, PPOs can be filed, and safety education can be given. The most important thing to remember is that action must always be taken when coming across a person who is showing signs of being trafficked.