



Human Trafficking: Sex Trafficking of LGBTQ+ Individuals

Awareness

Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery and is a crime under federal and international law. Under the United States Federal Law (Trafficking Victims Protection Act, 2000), human trafficking includes both sex trafficking and labor trafficking, defined as:

1. *Sex trafficking*, the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting 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;
2. *Labor trafficking*, which is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

LGBTQ+ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning. The “plus” represents other sexual identities including pansexual and Two-Spirit.

These terms are used to describe a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity.

Gender Identity is an individual’s inner sense of being male, female, or other gender. Gender identity is not necessarily the same as the sex assigned or presumed at birth. Everyone has a gender identity.

Why are LGBTQ+ individuals being trafficked?

While human trafficking affects people of any age and background, traffickers commonly target individuals who have unstable living conditions, are runaways or involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice system, have a history of sexual abuse, are addicted to drugs or alcohol, or have a family member or caregiver who has a substance abuse issue, are experiencing financial difficulties, are undocumented immigrants, have been victims of violence in the past, or who are marginalized by society.

LGBTQ+ youth and young adults are at a heightened risk of human trafficking victimization due to culture-based prejudices, homophobia, sex and gender discrimination, economic vulnerability, and social stigma. Polaris has found that, along with people of color, LGBTQ+ people are the demographic most vulnerable to being trafficked.

This risk faced by this already vulnerable population increases substantially if LGBTQ+ youth or young adults are kicked out of their homes or forced to run away on their own initiative. Homeless LGBTQ+ youth are significantly more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and trafficking than other homeless youths, according to the National Coalition for the Homeless. Up to 40% of homeless youth identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. As a result, nearly half of the youth who are homeless are at an increased risk of being recruited into human trafficking.

Traffickers prey on the vulnerabilities of LGBTQ+ youth and young adults by providing the needs they have lost from their support networks. Traffickers present themselves as a solution to their problems, by providing such things as a place to stay, food, and a source of love, care, and concern. Unfortunately, traffickers may appear to provide the support structure that LGBTQ+ youth and young adults so desperately need and have lost due to their sexual orientation.

Services for LGBTQ+ victims and survivors

The human trafficking of LGBTQ+ individuals and how to best assist this population is a developing field of knowledge. Even as the capacity to serve victims of human trafficking continues to increase in the United States, LGBTQ+ youth and young adults are, unfortunately, frequently overlooked or left out of the conversation. Specific training in acceptance, understanding, and awareness of issues unique to the LGBTQ+ community is becoming increasingly important among organizations fighting human trafficking.

According to Polaris (2015), there are 10 ways to break down the barriers to best serving LGBTQ+ victims. It is important for social service agencies to build partnerships in their communities, train staff to create a welcoming environment, improve the ability to identify human trafficking, revise the intake process to reduce fear or hesitancy in disclosing sexual orientation, review confidentiality practices, adapt facilities to be inclusive, adjust the safety planning process to be multidimensional and self-directed, and allow flexibility in treatment or case planning.

A model agency that serves LGBTQ+ survivors of human trafficking is You Are More Than, Inc. (YAMT) in Marlton, New Jersey. All services are free to LGBTQ+ adult victims and, although they are not a crisis agency, they are able to provide support through appropriate programming and their peer mentorship program.

New Ways Ministry educates and advocates for justice and equality for LGBTQ+ Catholics and reconciliation within the larger church and civil communities. Through research, publication, and education about sexual orientation and gender identity, New Ways Ministry fosters dialogue among groups and individuals, identifies and combats personal and structural homophobia and transphobia, works for changes in attitudes, and promotes the acceptance of LGBTQ+ people as full and equal members of church and society.

Actions

- LEARN about human trafficking of LGBTQ+ individuals and their needs and consider how to meet those needs.
- LEARN about human trafficking of LGBTQ+ individuals -- globally, nationally, locally.
- PRAY for LGBTQ+ victims of trafficking and for an end to this slavery.
- ADVOCATE for state and federal legislation that protects LGBTQ+ victims.

- BECOME involved with an organization assisting LGBTQ+ victims of sex trafficking
- REPORT suspicious activity: National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888.

Reflection

Romans 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Psalms 139:13-14 You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I praise you, because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works! My very self you know.

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.

The Church seeks to enable every person to live out the universal call to holiness. Persons with a homosexual inclination ought to receive every aid and encouragement to embrace this call personally and fully. This will unavoidably involve much struggle and self-mastery, for following Jesus always means following the way of the Cross. The Sacraments of the Eucharist and of Penance are essential sources of consolation and aid on this path.

- USCCB, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination* (2006), p. 13

Human Trafficking is a scourge, a crime against the whole of humanity. It is time to join forces and work together to free its victims and to eradicate this crime that affects all of us, from individual families to the worldwide community.

- Pope Francis

Hear the cry of our many brothers and sisters who are criminally trafficked and exploited. They are not merchandise. They are human beings, and they must be treated as such.

- Pope Francis

It they accept the Lord and have goodwill, who am I to judge them?

- Pope Francis

Resources

Informational Websites

U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking (USCSAHT) – <https://sistersagainsttrafficking.org>

Polaris. Vulnerabilities & Signs of Recruitment – <https://polarisproject.org/recognizing-human-trafficking-vulnerabilities-recruitment/>

National Coalition for the Homeless/LGBT Issues – <http://nationalhomeless.org/issues/lgbt/>

You Are More Than, Inc. (YAMT) – <https://www.yamt.org/>

Polaris (2015). Breaking Barriers: Improving Services for LGBTQ+ Human Trafficking Victims. <https://polarisproject.org/resources/breaking-barriers-improving-services-for-lgbtq-human-trafficking-victims/>

New Ways Ministry – <https://newwaysministry.org>