



Human Trafficking: Poverty

Awareness

Human trafficking, also known as trafficking in persons (TIP), is a modern-day form of slavery. It is a crime under state, federal and international law. It is currently the second largest criminal activity globally and generates more than \$150 billion a year in revenue. An estimated 40 million people are held in slavery worldwide, despite the fact that slavery is outlawed in every single country.

There are two major types of human trafficking:

Sex trafficking, in which the victim is forced to commit a commercial sex act;

Labor trafficking, which is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery.

In recent years, there is an increased awareness of people being trafficked to obtain body organs for transplantation.

The correlations between human trafficking and other social justice issues, such as poverty, are complex. Many people who are poor live in communities where there are limited resources and few opportunities for employment. Criminals take advantage of these vulnerable people, offering them a way to escape the harsh realities of their lives. Traffickers may offer fraudulent job opportunities to people who are desperate enough to try anything for a better life for themselves or for their families.

Why is this happening?

Poverty is one of several factors that make individuals vulnerable to trafficking. While trafficking victims come from a range of backgrounds, including from economically privileged families, trafficking is

linked inextricably with people lacking resources, notably job opportunities. Living in poverty is a harsh, almost inescapable reality and desperate people are vulnerable to fraudulent employment schemes or to prostitution. Traffickers target people who have few economic opportunities and who struggle to meet basic needs.

Globally, with 10% of the world living on less than \$2.00 a day, more than 700 million children, women and men are at risk for human trafficking (World Poverty Statistics: Global Poverty Report 2020). Poor parents, promised that their child will be educated and treated well, may send their child, sometimes in exchange for money, with a person the parents trust. At times, a child may be sold in payment for a parent's debt (bonded placement), particularly in societies where it is socially acceptable for children to work. In the United States, vulnerable people may be recruited from homeless shelters.

Most trafficking victims are women and girls. In economically troubled countries where women hold low social status, families may sell a girl child to have money to feed the rest of the family. Other women and girls are lured into trafficking out of a desire for a better life for themselves, and in some cultures, to pay a dowry.



In the United States, pimps will recruit young, vulnerable women in shopping malls, at high school events or in clubs. The trafficker will befriend a woman and then create emotional and, sometimes, drug or alcohol dependence.

Trafficking for sex or labor is a profitable industry. The trafficker is often part of an organized crime ring. Information from the International Labor Association (ILO), estimates that, globally, traffickers make \$99 billion annually from sex trafficking and \$51 billion from forced economic exploitation, including domestic work, agriculture and other economic activities.

Ending sex trafficking requires addressing the demand for sex and cheap labor, which makes possible these enormous profits for the trafficker. It entails ending the poverty that makes human beings vulnerable to trafficking. Becoming educated on the root causes of poverty, including the effects of U.S. trade agreements on workers in less developed countries and the human cost behind cheap consumer goods, will help towards understanding what can be done to decrease global poverty and the trafficking of human beings.

Reflection

What resources from our faith tradition reinforce and strengthen us in our work to end human trafficking?

If any of your neighbors are reduced to such poverty that they sell themselves to you, you must not treat them as bonded workers. Their status is to be that of hired hands or resident laborers with you, and they will be subject to you only until the jubilee year. They may then leave your service with their children and return to their own ancestral property. You were all bonded workers

in Egypt, and I freed you from your bondage. They must not be sold as bonded workers are sold. You are not to work them ruthlessly; you are to revere Yahweh.

-Leviticus 25:39-43

Additional Scripture passages:

Genesis 37:23-28 / Lamentations 5:1, 11, 13, 15 / Acts 16:16-19,23 / Isaiah 61:1 / Psalm 10

Other faith-based resources:

“How I wish that all of us would hear God’s cry: ‘Where is your brother?’ (Gen.4:9). Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother or sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploited and undocumented labor? Let us not look the other way.”

-Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, 2013

“Addressing human trafficking remains an elusive goal if the courage to address the dark reality of consumerism feeding the exploitation of vulnerable human beings is lacking. In this regard, it is necessary to recognize that it is extreme poverty which often drives those desirous of a better future into the hands of those preying upon the vulnerability of the poor and the defenseless. These individuals, prompted by a genuine desire to provide for themselves and their needy families, too easily become unsuspecting victims of those who make false promises of a better future in another country or community. Our efforts to address human trafficking are inherently linked, therefore, to our determination to address poverty eradication and lack of equal economic opportunity.”

-Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, May 13, 2014

“The extreme poverty experienced in areas lacking harmony, open spaces or potential for integration, can lead to incidents of brutality and to exploitation by criminal organizations. In the unstable neighbourhoods of mega-cities, the daily experience of overcrowding and social anonymity can create a sense of uprootedness which spawns antisocial behaviour and violence.”

-Pope Francis, Laudato Si, 2015

“The seventh commandment forbids acts of enterprises that for any reason – selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian – lead to the enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold, and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit.”

-Catechism of the Catholic Church

Actions & Resources

Polaris Project – www.polarisproject.org

Works to eradicate all forms of human trafficking and serves victims. Polaris Project operates a 24/7 national hotline: 1-888-3737-888 or text “BeFree” (233733).

End Child Prostitution and Trafficking – www.ecpatusa.org

Promotes the “Code of Conduct” and urges hospitality industry organizations to endorse it and to train employees to recognize and safely report possible incidences of human trafficking.

Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center – www.ipjc.org

Provides classroom webinars, prayer resources and faith-based presentations on human trafficking.

Mercy Investment Services – www.mercyinvestmentservices.org

MIS actively works with corporations to improve their policies and identify human trafficking victims within their industries. The resources provided help you take an active role in ending this global tragedy.

Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution (S.O.A.P.) – www.soaproject.org

SOAP is an outreach that distributes thousands of bars of soap with the National Human Trafficking Hotline number and key identifying questions.

Shared Hope International – www.sharedhope.org

Their mission is to eradicate sex trafficking.

Slavery Footprint – Made in a Free World – www.slaveryfootprint.org

How many slaves work for you? Do your favorite brands use trafficked labor in their supply chains? Take the survey to find out where their materials are coming from and the extent of your slavery footprint.

Truckers Against Trafficking – www.truckersagainstrafficking.org

Educates, equips, empowers and mobilizes members of the trucking and travel plaza industry to combat domestic sex trafficking.

In order to protect the identity of trafficking victims, models have been used in identifiable photos.