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# Identifying and Representing Human Trafficking Survivors

Effective Legal Advocacy Through a Trauma Informed  
Approach



# Statistics

Estimated 27.6 million victims of HT worldwide

57% men/boys and 43% women/girls

78% of sex trafficking victims are female

No reliable estimate for US numbers but HT has been reported in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, on tribal lands and within U.S. Territories.

Source: United Nations International Labor Organization



# Michigan Numbers

As of 2023, only five states received more signals (i.e. tips) regarding suspected HT than Michigan.

Since 2007, National Human Trafficking hotline has received more than 10,000 Michigan based tips with nearly 3000 confirmed cases of HT and over 6000 victims.

# The Crime of Human Trafficking

**Sex** trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by **force, fraud, or coercion**, *or* in which the person induced to perform the act has not attained the age of 18 year of age; or

The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for **labor or services**, through the use of **force, fraud, or coercion** for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

Source: Trafficking Victims Protection Act 22 U.S.C. 7102 (11)





# Michigan Anti-Trafficking Laws

Criminal penalties – 10 years to life imprisonment, consecutive sentencing (MCL 750.462 et seq)

Expert testimony as to human trafficking victim's behavior is admissible (MCL 750.462g)

Deferred adjudication/dismissal for victims (e.g. accosting and soliciting) (MCL 750.451c)

Restitution for survivors (MCL 752.981)

Expungement of specified convictions without waiting period (MCL 780.621(3)); MCL 780.621d(6))





# Force

Beating

Sexual Assault

Burning

Confinement

Torture

Forced Drug Use



# Fraud

False promises

Lying about a “better life”

Deceitful, enticing, and affectionate behavior

Preying on desperation



# Coercion

Creating dependency through drug addiction

Establishing quotas

Threatened abuse of legal process

Climate of fear, intimidation, and abuse

Taking personal items



# Who are the Victims?

The higher the vulnerability, the greater the chance of victimization.





# Vulnerability Factors

Poverty

Broken Homes

Removal from Home/Foster Care

Drug Use of Parent/Caregiver

Trafficker Known to Victim

# Who are the Traffickers?

Anyone who profits from the commercial exploitation of another:

“Gorilla Pimps”

“Daddy Pimps”

“Romeo Pimps” (minors online)

“Under the Table” Employers (foreign born employees)



# Social Networking Applications



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# The Consequence



# Legal Needs of Survivors

## Family Law

Custody  
Child Support  
PPOs

## Immigration

T and U Visas

## Criminal Justice Advocacy

Expungement and Record Relief  
Defense for the incarcerated  
Legal name changes

## Civil

Legal name changes  
Civil action (hotels, casinos, bars/clubs)  
Debt Relief

## Benefits

Victim Compensation  
Restitution



# Identifying Victims of Sex Trafficking

## Red Flags:

Person seems overly fearful, submissive, tense, or paranoid.

Person is deferring to another person before giving information.

Person has physical injuries or branding such as name tattoos on face or chest, tattoos about money and sex, or pimp phrases.

Clothing is inappropriately sexual or inappropriate for weather.

Identification documents are held by another.

Person works long or excessive hours

Multiple phones or social media accounts.

Signs of unusual wealth without explanation—new jewelry, shoes, phones without any known form of income.



# Identifying Victims of Labor Trafficking

## Red Flags:

Worker is not free to leave premises.

Worker lives at the business.

Worker is transported to the location by the owner or manager and all workers arrive and leave at the same time.

Worker has excessively long and/or unusual hours or is always available on demand.

Worker owes a large debt that is continually increasing and cannot be paid off.

Workplace has high security features such as opaque windows, bars, locks outside doors.

Worker seems to be deferring to another person before giving information, avoids eye contact, or isn't allowed to speak.

Goods or services are priced below general market rates.

Someone else controls the worker's identification documents and finances.

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# Trauma Informed Lawyering

Puts the realities of the client's trauma experiences at the forefront

Understanding long term effects of trauma (memory loss, loss of executive functioning, inconsistent statements)

Focus on avoiding re-traumatization

Understand/identify trauma bonding behaviors

Coordination with providers (counselors, residential treatment programs)

Source: Hannah Savaso "The Importance of Trauma Informed Lawyering" Human Trafficking Institute, April 15, 2021

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# Additional Resources

National Resources:

Polaris Project (<https://polarisproject.org/>)

Call to Freedom (<https://www.calltofreedom.org/about/>)

U.S. Department of Justice  
(<https://www.justice.gov/humantrafficking/resources>)

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# Additional Resources

Michigan Resources:

Department of Attorney General

(<https://www.michigan.gov/ag/initiatives/human-trafficking>)

Sanctum House (<https://sanctumhouse.org/>)

Grace Centers of Hope (<https://gracecentersofhope.org/about-us/>)



# What is The Joseph Project?

A nonprofit organization committed to addressing the legal consequences of human trafficking

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# Our Mission

To connect human trafficking survivors with skilled pro bono legal counsel



# Our Services

**Assess** – Determine legal needs/obtain thorough background information/obtain support documentation

**Initiate** – Connect to attorney/stay involved to provide assistance

**Empower** – Address legal issues/cover court related expenses

**Educate** – Promote victim identification

# Contact

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