

Policy Brief

Child Trafficking Prevention

Why Does This Matter?

UNICEF estimates that approximately 1.2 million children are being trafficked each year. The commercial sexual exploitation and sex and labor trafficking of children has devastating consequences for them. Research suggests that child trafficking may adversely affect a child's physical, psychological, spiritual, and social-emotional development. In addition to exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, and unsafe abortions, trafficked children report adverse emotional effects, including depression, hopelessness, guilt, shame, flashbacks, loss of confidence, lower self-esteem, and anxiety.



Implications and Recommendations

For policy makers and child-serving systems:

- Be accountable for safeguarding children in care and those experiencing homelessness.
- Facilitate community and efforts to protect children by including community-based primary prevention in grants and other funding mechanisms for efforts related to trafficking, and include funding for evaluation.
- In all funding solicitations, require human trafficking impact statements.
- Require anti-trafficking task forces to place greater emphasis on primary prevention.
- Include content relevant to the prevention of child trafficking in any legislation that begins with a statement about the value of children and families.

For private industry:

- Adopt and implement a code of business conduct to address labor trafficking that is inclusive of child labor.
- Take steps to investigate and prevent human trafficking in supply chains and publish the information, including supplier or factory lists, for consumer awareness.
- Require human trafficking impact statements in Requests for Proposals.

For grassroots community organizations:

- Undertake efforts to protect children and evaluate such efforts. Examples include mobilizing family support, organizing youth activities, enlisting the faith and business communities to raise awareness of child trafficking, helping schools provide support to children and youth, and organizing training for community members and institutions.
- Make resources (e.g., written materials, posters, videos) available for families, schools, community organizations, youth groups, and faith-based organizations.

Implications (continued)

For researchers:

- Support efforts to collect data to show how child trafficking operates.
- Conduct research on socioeconomic factors and how those factors affect markets, focusing on demand.

For individuals, peers, and families:

- Reflect on your connection to modern day slavery by answering the question, “How many slaves work for you?” at <http://www.slaveryfootprint.org>.
- Shop fair trade. Fair Trade certification guarantees that no child or forced labor was used in the production of goods.
- Monitor young people’s online activity, friends, and accounts.

For all:

- Use the bully pulpit to establish norms regarding what community members can do to keep children/neighbors safe.
- Continue work of collaboration, coordination, and capacity building within and across organizations and institutions.

What We Know About Child Trafficking

Trafficking is an inherently covert operation, which makes it difficult to obtain specific and reliable data on the number of children affected. In addition to a lack of systematic and reliable data on the scale of trafficking, other areas in which research is limited include but is not limited to: characteristics of victims and their trafficking trajectories, the modus operandi of traffickers and their networks, strategies aimed at prevention, and evaluations on the effectiveness of anti-trafficking policies and programs. Information included in this section is based on an extensive review of the literature and includes best available studies and estimates.

Risk Factors

- There is not a specific profile of a child or youth who is at risk of being trafficked. Factors and conditions associated with trafficking include individual, family, and peer characteristics; neighborhood characteristics and norms; and expectations of and resources within the community at large. These factors and conditions include but are not limited to conflict, violence, and instability within the family; poverty and homelessness; substance abuse; and social isolation.¹
- A study in Florida found that young people exploited in human trafficking experienced more childhood adversity (i.e., childhood sexual abuse, emotional abuse, emotional and physical neglect, and family violence) as compared to a matched sample of similar children.²
- A study of juvenile sex trafficking victims revealed that 83% had experienced neglect/abandonment, 71% had experienced child physical abuse, 67% had witnessed domestic violence, and 88% had been a victim of child sexual abuse. Fifty-nine percent of the victims had experienced all types of maltreatment.³
- Pathways into trafficking include out-of-home care, homelessness, running away, and recruitment at school. Trafficking may also be facilitated by family members.¹
- A report of migration patterns along Mediterranean routes found that (a) boys travelling without families are more vulnerable than girls, (b) children who travel alone are more vulnerable, (c) the longer or costlier their journey, the more likely it is that children will be exploited, and (d) children who left their countries of origin because of conflict/war or natural disasters are more vulnerable.⁴

Why have we seen so little progress in reducing the prevalence of child trafficking and related forms of exploitation? ... the reality is that most of the work continues to focus on prosecuting perpetrators and, to a lesser extent, on assisting survivors. Few significant efforts have been aimed at prevention. – Jonathan Todres, Georgia State University College of Law

What We Know About Child Trafficking (Cont.)

Scope

- The International Labour Organization estimates that 26% of the 20.9 million people believed to be victims of human trafficking are children.⁵
- 79% of identified victims are women and children.⁵
- Child trafficking has been detected in all regions of the world. In some countries, it is the major form of trafficking.⁶
- The U.S. Department of Labor has identified 139 goods from 75 countries made by forced and child labor.⁷
- In 2016, an estimated 1 out of 6 endangered runaways reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children were likely child sex trafficking victims.⁸
- Of those, 86% were in the care of social services or foster care when they ran.⁸
- In low-income countries, children often comprise large proportions of the identified victims.⁸
- About 70% of all sex trafficking victims are under the age of 24, and 30% are under the age of 18.⁹

Effects

- Research has suggested that emotional and physical abuse, coupled with constant fear, can hurt a child's physical, psychological, spiritual, and social-emotional development.¹⁰
- Children may develop disturbances in their perceptions of time, memory, and concentration.¹¹
- They may have a sense of 'no future' and hopelessness, personality disorganization or dissociation, and they may have unexpressed anger against those who hurt them, or people who failed to help, and these feelings may be turned into self-hatred and suicidal thoughts.¹¹
- Older children may, in an effort to regain control, abuse alcohol or drugs or self-harm.
- Victims of sexual exploitation may face unsafe sexual practices, heightened risks of unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, complications from frequent high-risk pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases.¹²
- A study conducted in Southeast Asia found that half the child survivors (56.3%) had symptoms associated with depression and 32% showed symptom levels of an anxiety disorder.¹³

The Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice (formerly the American Orthopsychiatric Association) is a compassionate community of individuals and organizations dedicated to informing policy, practice and research concerning behavioral health, social justice, and well-being.

This policy brief was developed by the Global Alliance's Task Force on Human Trafficking. For more information about the work of the Task Force, visit: <http://www.bhjustice.org>

¹ Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, Committee on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States. (2013). *Confronting commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking of minors*. Washington, DC: Author.

² Reid, J. A., Baglivio, M. T., Piquero, A. R., Greenwald, M. A., & Epps, N. (2017). Human trafficking of minors and childhood adversity in Florida. *American Journal of Public Health, 107*, 306-311.

³ Reid, J. A., Huard, J., & Haskell, R. A. (2015). Family-facilitated juvenile sex trafficking. *Journal of Crime and Justice, 38*, 361-376.

⁴ Galos, E., Bartolini, L., Cook, H., & Grant, N. (2017). *Migrant vulnerability to human trafficking and exploitation: Evidence from the central and eastern Mediterranean migration routes*. Geneva, Switzerland: International Organization for Migration.

⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2016). *Global report on trafficking in persons*. Retrieved from <http://www.unodc.org>

⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2009). *Global report on trafficking in persons*. Retrieved from <http://www.unodc.org>

⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs. (2016). *List of goods produced by child labor or forced labor*. Retrieved from <http://www.dol.gov>

⁸ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. (2017). *Child sex trafficking in America: A guide for child welfare professionals*. Retrieved from <http://www.missingkids.org>

⁹ Farrell, A., McDevitt, J., Fahy, S. (2008). Understanding and improving law enforcement responses to human trafficking, final report (*Human Trafficking Data Collection and Reporting Center Research and Technical Reports*, Paper 1). Chicago, IL: Northeastern University.

¹⁰ End Child Prostitution and Trafficking International. (2005). *The psychosocial rehabilitation of children who have been commercially sexually exploited: A training guide*. Retrieved from <http://www.ecpat.net>

¹¹ Mitchels, B. (2004). *Developing effective communication with children victims of violence and trafficking. Practical handbook for social workers, police, and other professionals*. Pristina, Kosovo: United Nations Children's Fund and Government of Kosovo, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.

¹² End Child Prostitution and Trafficking International. (2006). *Protecting children from sexual exploitation and sexual violence in disaster and emergency situations*. Bangkok, Thailand: Author.

¹³ Kiss, L., Yum, K., Pocock, N., & Zimmerman, C. (2015). Exploitation, violence, and suicide risk among child and adolescent survivors of human trafficking in the greater Mekong subregion. *JAMA Pediatrics, 169*(9): e152278. Doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.2278