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## Support For Communities

### The Top 5 Common Myths of Child Sex Trafficking©

*The following is an excerpt from Dr. Manna Ko's copyrighted dissertation: "Protecting The Most Vulnerable: Learning From rescuers of Sex-Trafficked Children In The United States"*

#### **Reality of the Child Sex Trafficking Industry**

Child sex trafficking is "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a minor for the purpose of a commercial sex act" (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021, para. 1) and is prevalent both domestically and globally.

Traffickers lure their victims away from their homes with promises of a better life (Miles-Johnson & Courtenay, 2021). Once the victims are in the traffickers' control, traffickers "sexually exploit children through street prostitution and in adult night clubs, illegal brothels, sex parties, motel rooms, hotel rooms, and other locations throughout the United States" (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021, para. 3).

#### **Myths about the Child Sex Trafficking Industry**

It is important to illuminate areas of possible confusion within this industry. These areas of confusion could impede public awareness of its nature and prevalence within the United States. It could also impede awareness to proximal situations where children are at risk, thereby blinding us from opportunities to mitigate a dangerous situation (such as alerting law enforcement to suspicious activities or to help authorities with information that could help find missing or trafficked children). Many widely accepted and popularized myths of sex trafficking, particularly child sex trafficking, circulate in the media (Bouché, 2017; Polaris, 2022).

The following are a few of the more common myths relating to sex trafficking or child sex trafficking.

#### ***Myth #1: Child Sex Trafficking Only Happens in Other Countries***

One myth is that sex trafficking only happens in countries other than the United States (Polaris, 2022). The sex trafficking and child sex trafficking industries in the United States continue to grow, fueled by the demands of buyers (Farley et al., 2017). Sex tourism, which is well marketed in the United States, contributed to the growth of the U.S.-based sex trafficking industry. For example, the slogan, *What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas*, epitomizes the sexual activities sought for in *sin city*. The Super Bowl, arguably one of the biggest sporting events in the world, is also one of the largest days for prostitution demand in the United States. Both examples fuel child sex trafficking.

Regarding the Super Bowl example specifically, in 2009, the Florida Commission Against Human Trafficking estimated thousands of minors were brought into the Miami area to meet the increased demand for prostitution during the 2 weeks of activities surrounding the Super Bowl (Hunt, 2015). This finding was further corroborated by Miller et al. (2016), who added the Super Bowl supersedes any other public event in the country for the degree to which it fuels sex trafficking.

#### ***Myth #2: Women are Not Child Sex Traffickers***

The idea that women are not perpetrators of sex trafficking or child sex trafficking is also a myth (Polaris, 2022). While most studies on sex trafficking highlighted the prevalence of male traffickers and buyers, female sex trafficking offenders do exist. Criminologists rarely have studied female sex trafficking offenders (Wijkman & Kleemans, 2019). In their study, Wijkman and Kleemans (2019) analyzed 150 court files of women convicted of human trafficking and reported various offending pathways that demonstrate how women become perpetrators of sex trafficking.

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Increasingly, reports highlight women as traffickers or as individuals operating in partnership with traffickers to lure, recruit, groom, and prostitute their victims. The widely reported case regarding Ghislaine Maxwell is an example of this. Maxwell was found guilty in 2021 of child sex trafficking and other offenses in connection with the financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein (Bekiempis, 2021).

### ***Myth #3: Traffickers Target Victims They Do Not Know***

As evidenced by the literature, contrary to the myth that traffickers target victims they do not know (Polaris, 2022), most trafficking victims are in fact selected and targeted by people known to them (Save the Children, 2021). Existing boyfriends, perhaps best known as romantic partners, often target their girlfriends.

A romantic partner is someone who first grooms the victim to be his love interest and then eventually forces her to have paid sex with others as a demonstration of her love and faithfulness to him (Shared Hope International, 2021b). Traffickers are also often friends and even family members (Save the Children, 2021). Both male and female traffickers pose as romantic partners.

### ***Myth #4: Trafficked Children are Only Girls or Women***

The idea that only girls and women are victims of sex trafficking is also a myth (Polaris, 2022). Research has found that along with girls and women, boys and men are all targeted by traffickers (Save the Children, 2021; UNODC, 2020). Boys and men, however, are targeted for sex trafficking less often than girls and women but more commonly for other forms of trafficking, such as forced labor, child soldiers, and forced criminal activity (UNODC, 2018, 2020). As such, they are less likely to be detected or reported as being sex trafficked (Save the Children, 2021).

### ***Myth #5: Child Sex Trafficking Always Involves Traveling, Transporting, or Moving a Victim Across Borders***

The perpetuation of the myth that child sex trafficking necessarily involves traveling, transporting, or moving a victim across borders is likely due to the common conflation of human trafficking and human smuggling (Polaris, 2022). According to the literature, child sex trafficking does not require the victim to be taken across borders.

Victims are often trafficked in their own homes or at familiar surroundings, such as a party or sporting event, via the Internet, or at nearby hotels or truck stops (Save the Children, 2021). Victims eventually may be trafficked around the country and across borders, but they are first trafficked locally, regionally, and nationally, and then internationally (Saved In America, 2021)."

Source:

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<https://www.proquest.com/openview/087efc0739a5025e051d58da239158d9/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

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### **If you need help:**

- The National Human Trafficking Hotline in your cell phone: call 888-373-7888 (24 hours/day, 7 days/week, 365 days/year). [www.humantraffickinghotline.org](http://www.humantraffickinghotline.org)
- Text INFO or HELP to: BeFree 233733
- Call 911
- The National Runaway Switchboard: 1-800-RUNAWAY. [www.1800RUNAWAY.org](http://www.1800RUNAWAY.org)
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC): 1-800-843-5678. [www.missingkids.org](http://www.missingkids.org)
- Report suspected human trafficking to federal law enforcement by calling 1-866-347-2423.
- CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE 800-344-6000
- The following link provides a card with a brief list of common indicators of human trafficking, the difference between human smuggling and human trafficking, and a DHS reporting option: <https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign/materials/indicator-card>

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Nonprofit organizations that work to stop human trafficking day in and day out need your help! **Please consider donating to HuMannaTea For All™ at: <https://thecause.org/partners/humannatea-for-all/>**

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