

Human trafficking

What is it?

When one provides or benefits financially from an individual engaging in commercial sex acts compelled to do so by force, fraud or coercion; or if the victim is under 18 years of age.

Impact

- Est. 300,000 people within the U.S. are subject to human trafficking each year
- Est. 80% of victims of human trafficking are victims of sex trafficking, with the average age of entry of sex trafficking victims being 12-14 years of age
- Since 2010, the Omaha Child Exploitation Task Force has identified more than 60 primary victims of sex trafficking in the Omaha/Council Bluffs area, estimated to be “just the tip of the iceberg” (with many more secondary victims ranging in age down to 9 weeks old)
 - All of the primary victims have been female
 - Victims have ranged from 13 to 40 years old
 - Recently trend has been victims ranging from 14 to 17 years old

Trafficking exists, even here in the Midwest, in cities both large and small.

- In 2009, in a town of approximately 6,700 people in west-central Iowa, authorities rescued two runaway, minor females in Omaha, Nebraska, who were headed for Washington, D.C. to be prostituted
- In 2014, a sting operation in a town of 550 people in east-central Iowa rescued 15 and 17-year-old victims, who were being prostituted by an 35-year-old adult male from Wisconsin
- In 2013, an adult male from Sioux City, Iowa, was caught in a sting operation in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, ordering twin 11-year-old females for commercial sex acts
- Nearly seven years ago, newly made child pornography from an adult male in a south-central Iowa town of about 26,000 people was found in California, with victims ranging in age from 18 months to 15 years old.

Supply and Demand

- Sex Trafficking is strictly a “market-driven” industry
- Recent worldwide estimates show sex trafficking as a \$100-billion-per-year industry, rapidly closing in on drug trafficking as the #1 illegal industry in the world
- Just in the past few years in Omaha, the IRS estimated that a “pimp” in one particular case made \$500,000 per year
- In a 2010 case in the Omaha/Council Bluffs area, one prostituted victim estimated making \$1,000 per day for the “pimp” over a 3-month period
- The internet and social media have had a substantial impact on sex trafficking, in terms of recruiting victims, advertising sex acts and communication with consumers (secondary traffickers) – including reaching minor victims
- A 2011 study by John Reid found that, among other factors, the existence of an adult prostitution market and the presence of large number of transient males, e.g. military personnel, truckers, conventioners, were conditions which could inflate minors’ risk for entrapment into prostitution. This has been confirmed with recent experiences at the Super Bowl regarding major sporting events; at the oil-fields of North Dakota/Montana regarding “boom-town” industrial operations, and experiences of the Omaha Child Exploitation Task Force confirm this in the Omaha/Council Bluffs area regarding major sporting events and conventions – for both minors and adult victims.

Sex Trafficking in the Omaha-Council Bluffs Metro Area¹

“Kadie.” Kadie was a just-19 year old female resident of Nebraska, with a long history of family and emotional issues. While living in a homeless shelter in Omaha, an acquaintance lured her away from the shelter, taking her to the house of some “friends” in Omaha. The male and female “friends” within hours kidnapped Kadie, taking her to a motel near a casino in Council Bluffs, where Kadie was forced into prostitution. Kadie saw and learned of other females being whipped with belts, burned with cigarettes, strip searched for money from prostitution, sexually abused by their main captor, and otherwise physically and psychologically abused. Heroically, within about three days of being kidnapped, Kadie got out one phone call for help. When law enforcement arrived, they found her in the motel office, sitting on the floor, straddling a waste basket, into which she was vomiting uncontrollably from the trauma of her experience. When her mother arrived shortly thereafter, she did not recognize Kadie because her captors had so changed her within the three days.

- Human trafficking consists of sex trafficking and forced labor. An estimated 80% of human trafficking victims are victims of sex trafficking; 20% forced labor. More people are in slavery now than at any time in the history of the world. Human trafficking affects an estimated 36 million people throughout the world. It is estimated that 300,000 people are at risk to be victims of sex trafficking each year in the United States of America. From January of 2010-July of 2014, the Omaha Child Exploitation Task Force encountered more than 60 primary victims (all female), and many more secondary victims (e.g., minor children, including as young as 9 weeks old (encountered at a prostitution appointment) or other family members of primary victims).

“Samantha.” Samantha was a 15 year old female from a good middle-class family in a suburban area of Omaha. She had emotional issues, was receiving in-home services, and was under electronic monitoring by the juvenile court to prevent her running away. Unbeknown to her, she came into contact with a “pimp” who was a very recent high school graduate. This young male “pimp” put “Samantha” in contact with his main “pimp,” a female. The main “pimp,” by phone, instructed “Samantha” how to defeat the electronic monitoring and run away, which “Samantha” did, taking with her a 13 year old female friend. After running to the pimps’ house, the juveniles learned of serious physical and emotional abuse of young women forced into prostitution in Omaha and Council Bluffs by the group. “Samantha” and her 13 year old friend were threatened with physical abuse and being turned into law enforcement. “Samantha” was forced by the group to separately engage in sex acts for money with two adult males. When the 13 year old was about to be forced into sex acts for money, the juveniles stole a neighboring vehicle and fled, but being afraid of the group and the circumstances, fled Omaha heading south on the interstate. During the flight, they crashed, and tried to walk away from the crash site in near-blizzard conditions, also becoming entangled in a barbed-wire fence, resulting in serious cuts, hypothermia, and one of them having to have frostbite surgically removed.

- The average beginning age of a victim being forced or enticed into sex trafficking is 12-14 years old. The age range of victims encountered by the Omaha Child Exploitation Task Force is 13-40

¹ These are all real victims, from real cases in, from or affecting the Omaha-Council Bluffs Metro Area. The names of victims are not necessarily the victims’ true names.

years of age, with the mean age about 17-22 years of age; but trending younger with more recently encountered victims tending to be between 14-17 years of age. Runaway minor children are among the highest risk victims.

"Katherine." Katherine was an approximately 20 year old female, described as being "slow," who was involved with an approximately 19 year old male "pimp." The pimp was part of a group of three "pimps," headed by a female, who operated in Omaha and Council Bluffs. The lead "pimp" convinced the young "pimp" to marry Katherine, in order to better control her, and eventually to have a child with her, to assure that she would never leave. At the same time the young male "pimp" was married to Katherine, and while she was pregnant and after, the young male "pimp" was also intimate with another young female victim-prostitute, whom the "pimp" convinced he loved her. When Katherine was 7 months pregnant, Katherine refused to work as a prostitute, whereupon the lead female pimp took a large knife and went after Katherine, to cut the baby out of her womb, being stopped only by Katherine blocking her with a pillow, and the young male "pimp" intervening. Katherine endured physical and emotional abuse, including: having a tooth knocked out by her husband-pimp because of her "attitude"; and being placed outside in sub-zero weather, naked, and when that was insufficient torture, the lead pimp then poured water over her, still naked in sub-zero temperatures.

- Victims have a variety of vulnerabilities which make them susceptible to grooming/enticement or force/coercion by the "pimp." In addition to "minor runaways," mentioned above, other groups at high risk for victimization in sex trafficking include persons with mental-emotional-developmental disability issues; persons suffering from any of a variety of addictions; persons in poverty, especially subject to homelessness; and persons isolated by language, culture, or nationality.

"Jennifer." Jennifer was an approximately 20 year old female from Pennsylvania, who had a long history of psychiatric issues, having been hospitalized off and on since she was about 13 years of age, and who had at times been homeless and had developed issues regarding the illegitimate use of drugs. She met a 25 year old male who professed to love her (although he had a wife and child in another state). Immediately upon her being released from a hospitalization, to her mother, the young man, using promises of love and helping her regain her infant child, enticed Jennifer to leave her maternal home and go with him. He then explained to her that she would have to be a prostitute for him, so they could have a future together. She was immediately taken from Pennsylvania, to Maryland, then South Carolina, and ultimately to Little Rock, Arkansas, being forced to engage in prostitution. She learned that the "pimp" was one of a group of "pimps" operating from the eastern seaboard of the United States, to the Rocky Mountains. The "pimp" became very physically abusive of Jennifer, including severely beating her in Arkansas and again in Georgia. She was forced to service truck stops and also to engage in a type of sex act which she did not want to do because it was painful to her. Other victims described Jennifer as being treated "like a dog" and as being his "slave." Jennifer became one of about five to six prostitutes operated by this "pimp," as part of the larger group, which had more prostitutes. She was forced to engage in prostitution in at least 14 states, being rescued by the Omaha Child Exploitation Task Force in Omaha, Nebraska. When Jennifer was rescued, found with her was an approximately 20 year old single mother of a toddler, which young woman had been kidnapped by the "pimp" just a week before in Texarkana, and forced to engage in prostitution in Arkansas and Des

Moines, Iowa, before being rescued in Omaha. When observed by law enforcement officers, the young woman was laying on the backseat of a car, in a fetal position, crying uncontrollably out of fear of the “pimp.”

- A high percentage of victims of sex trafficking (68% or higher) suffer from various serious mental health conditions as a result of their enslavement, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety. Somewhat dependent upon the length and severity of their enslavement, victims tend to require specialized care, including trauma-induced, wrap-around therapy. They can suffer from dissociation, denial, bonding with their captors, and are more susceptible to re-victimization. Victims tend to develop co-dependency and very low self-esteem, and are often easily lured back into association with their pimp, even after rescue by law enforcement or other entities.

“Amanda.” Amanda was a just 19 year old female, still a minor under Nebraska law. She lived with her single-parent mother and attended high school in Omaha. She met a young adult male, who professed to love her, using the ruse to entice her into prostitution. The “pimp” enticed Amanda into withdrawing from high school, and being taken to Florida, where he caused her to engage in prostitution. On a “date,” she was taken to a beach and severely attacked by a “john,” cutting her through her thighs and crotch, then going after her eyes, and then spraying pepper spray in the affected areas. Amanda was physically injured, in much pain, and traumatized. When first responders found her in the street near the attack site, the police and EMTs advised her there was nothing they could do because she was a prostitute. The “pimp” refused her medical treatment, instead pouring milk on the affected areas, compounding the issues. She managed to get a call to her mother in Omaha, who remembered a few contacts from the Omaha Child Exploitation Task Force (which the mother and victim at the time had rejected), contacted the victim services specialist with the FBI in Omaha, and within a few hours, the Task Force effected the rescue of the young woman in Florida.

- Some minors and young adults are very susceptible to being fraudulently enticed into being victims of sex trafficking. While variable according to the individual, neuro-psychology estimates that the part of the human brain dealing with judgment does not develop to adult functioning until approximately 24-25 years of age, with some estimates going into the late 20s. The vulnerability of minor child victims of sex trafficking is often compounded by difficult family situations; lack of available or appropriately administered juvenile resources; runaway status, including poverty and homelessness; being taken to a geographic location with which they are not familiar; distrust of law enforcement; addiction; and mental-emotional-developmental disability issues. Minors are especially susceptible to recruitment through Internet and social media, often without restrictions or monitoring of the use of electronic media by adults. In Omaha, children as young as 14 years of age have actually been fraudulently checked out of school by a pimp or left school without authority, to be taken to a day-time prostitution appointment by the pimp.