

HER CAMPAIGN

WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

**The exploitation of vulnerability
through force, fraud, or coercion
for profit.**



Human trafficking is a serious crime and a violation of human rights.

It happens when someone is controlled through **force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of exploitation**. This can include commercial sex, forced labor, or other forms of abuse for profit. It does not require crossing borders and can happen in any community.

1

The Three Legal Elements of Human Trafficking

Around the world, human trafficking is understood through three key parts: **the act, the means, and the purpose**. The act includes recruiting, moving, or housing a person. The means involves force, threats, deception, or taking advantage of someone's vulnerability. The purpose is exploitation. When someone is recruited or controlled through force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of exploitation, human trafficking has occurred.

When a minor is involved in commercial sex, it is automatically considered sex trafficking under U.S. law. A child cannot legally consent to commercial sexual exploitation. In these cases, proof of force, fraud, or coercion is not required.

2

Trafficking vs. Other Crimes

Trafficking is often confused with smuggling or kidnapping. Smuggling usually involves agreeing to be transported across a border. Trafficking centers on exploitation and control, not movement. While kidnapping can happen, many traffickers rely on **manipulation, grooming, and psychological control** rather than physical restraint.

3

Control and Coercion

The key feature of trafficking is **control**. Traffickers may use violence, but they often use threats, debt, isolation, emotional abuse, or financial dependence. They may take identification documents, withhold wages, or threaten loved ones. Many victims stay because they fear the consequences of leaving.

4

Who is Vulnerable

Trafficking thrives on vulnerability. Poverty, unstable housing, prior abuse, immigration challenges, untreated mental health needs, and lack of safe support systems can all increase risk. Traffickers intentionally target people facing hardship, isolation, or emotional need.

Intake assessments from women served by HER Campaign reflect risk factors consistent with national trafficking research:

- 75% experienced early childhood abuse or neglect
- 62.5% had co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders
- 43.75% reported early substance use
- 43.75% had severe trauma histories
- 25.5% were identified as having spectrum disorders

These statistics highlight a critical reality: exploitation often builds on pre-existing trauma and unmet needs that traffickers deliberately target. But together, through early intervention, trauma-informed care, and strong community support, we can combat this issue.

If someone is in immediate danger, call emergency services. In the United States, the National Human Trafficking Hotline is available 24/7 at 1-888-373-7888 or by text at 233733. For survivors looking for safe housing, call Rescue America's 24/7 rescue hotline at 833.599.FREE

To support survivors of human trafficking with life saving services, join our giving community today.



HER CAMPAIGN