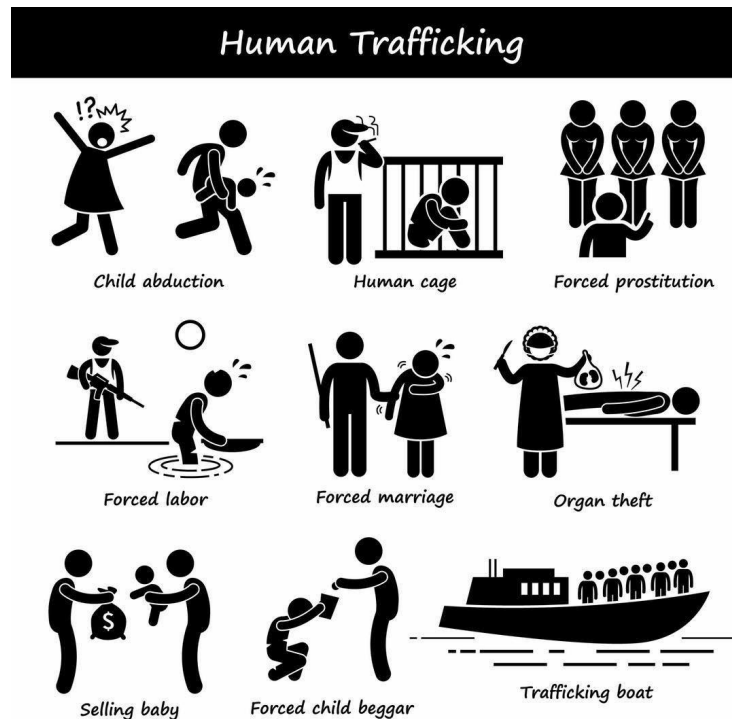


Human Trafficking is quite a buzz word these days. But many of us really understand how it impacts our everyday lives. The simple way to define it is, Human Trafficking is Modern Day Slavery. Slavery brings to mind images of Africans being brought by boat to America, and chained, sold, and forced to work without their freedom. This is a helpful image, but it falls dramatically short of what we mean today when we say modern day slavery. Slavery today involves over 24 million victims globally (some reports are as high as 45million), the lower estimate is still 4x as many enslaved people as during the American slave trade. Slavery is not just forced labor, or sexual exploitation. It involves many different forms:



Human Trafficking is a global issue, it is happening in every single country in the world, not one is immune. Because of the demand to dehumanize and exploit people, we find ourselves in a global crisis where slavery is coming to the doorsteps of our children's schools right here in the U.S.

There is a lot of good information out there about Human Trafficking for anyone to become more educated and aware, because the more aware we are, the better we can prevent and fight! Some good resources are [PolarisProject](#), [A21](#), and [Human Trafficking Hotline](#). That said, I want to provide a few tidbits to help us conceptualize how Human Trafficking could be affecting the very girls we work with on a regular basis.

80% of all victims of trafficking are women and children (UN TIP Report). Women, specifically ages 12-17 are statistically the most at-risk to human trafficking. That alone should send up some red flags for us. If Human Trafficking is happening in *every country* around the world,

including the U.S. and young girls are the most vulnerable - is it likely that one or more of the girls we work with has experienced or is currently in a human trafficking situation? I know we all hope and pray it is not touching our girls. But, I would like to suggest, that it is very likely that many of us reading this blog have girls in our ministry affected by Human Trafficking. Let's spend a minute figuring out the likelihood modern day slavery is interacting with your average teenage girl.

329 million people in US, 4.2% of global population.

24% of that number are under age 18.

80% of that are girls or children.

.008% chance your child has been trafficked.

6% of US children are in foster care - vulnerability

Children remain the poorest age group in America - nearly 1 in 6.

To understand who is vulnerable, what the risk is, and how close to home this comes - we must begin with a quick introduction to the causes of human trafficking.

What are the causes of Human Trafficking?

Let me start by introducing you to the Traffickers - those that exploit and enslave people.

Traffickers are men and women who seek out vulnerable people to exploit. They are friends, boyfriends, family members, internet trollers, and strangers, male or female. Traffickers are looking for one main thing that they can exploit: **Vulnerability**. What types of vulnerabilities are they looking for? Here is a quick list of some vulnerabilities:

Traffickers often target children and youths with a history of:

- sexual abuse
- dating violence
- low self-esteem
- minimal social support
- homelessness
- lack of personal safety
- isolation
- emotional distress
- poverty
- family dysfunction
- substance abuse
- mental illness
- developmental delay

Do any of the girls you minister to fall into one or more of these categories? If they do, they are vulnerable.

Why do Traffickers look for these vulnerabilities in children and teens? Because these factors cause a young person to look for a “Savior” or a way out. Traffickers are skilled in appearing like a Savior to a vulnerable teen. Using whichever vulnerability they find to convince the young teen that they are better off with their Trafficker (more likely seen as a boyfriend, mentor, savior). For example, if one young girl has lack of self-esteem a Trafficker may approach by offering huge compliments, elevating the teen to a fantasy level of perfection, giving gifts and offering unwavering affection. This type of manipulation continues for a few days, or weeks, while they “hook” their victim. Then the switch is flipped. Traffickers typically keep their victims hooked, through force, coercion, and fraud. These three methods keep teens from speaking out against their trafficker.

**“A man from Millington, Tennessee, was accused of trafficking girls as young as 15. He reportedly used a boy under the age of 18 to help recruit girls from local high schools. The boy was paid \$20 for every \$100 the girls brought in.”
—www.localmemphis.com**

When noticing these risk factors (that we may see more often than we like) we cannot make the immediate assumption it means they are being targeted for Human Trafficking. But, it does give us some red flags to watch out for.

According to a report called Human Trafficking in America’s Schools in 2015, “Traffickers may systematically target vulnerable children by frequenting locations where children congregate—malls, schools, bus and train stations, and group homes, among other locations. With the advent of social media, traffickers recruit through Facebook and other Internet sites. They also use peers or classmates, who befriend the target and slowly groom the child for the trafficker by bringing the child along to parties and other activities.”

Here are just a few more general statistics to consider to determine if your girls may fall into the at-risk category:

--According to RAINN, statistics for children and teens 1 out of 9 girls under the age of 18 have been sexually abused.

--According to Forbes and USA Today a child’s first exposure to porn can be as early as 6 years old, the average age hovering around 13.

--1 in 5 U.S. children fall into the category of poor or near-poor, that is more than 40% according to [The American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\)](#)

-- National Kids Count and The Annie E. Casey Foundation approximate 35% of children under 18 live in a single-parent home (2016). 25% of children in the US live in households with a mother alone.

These are just a few statistics that reveal, our girls, at least a few of them likely fall into one of these vulnerable categories. That means, they are susceptible to Traffickers traps who target their schools, their social media accounts, and places they frequent.

So, what does this mean for us as leaders, and mentors?

We can be observers and ask intentional questions to our teen girls to find out if they are being trafficked. Things to look for are:

- an inability to attend school on a regular basis and/or unexplained absences
- frequently running away from home
- references made to frequent travel to other cities
- bruises or other signs of physical trauma, withdrawn behavior, depression, anxiety, or fear
- lack of control over a personal schedule and/or identification or travel documents
- hunger, malnourishment, or inappropriate dress (based on weather conditions or surroundings)
- signs of drug addiction
- coached or rehearsed responses to questions
- uncharacteristic promiscuity and/or references to sexual situations or terminology beyond age-specific norms
- a “boyfriend” or “girlfriend” who is noticeably older and/or controlling

It also does not have to be complicated or covert. You can ask simple questions like - “Are you safe?” or “Do you feel safe?”

We can also begin to educate our teens about their own vulnerabilities. Educate them on Traffickers Traps and what to look for. One of the most important things we can do is to involve our teens in the fight against human trafficking. Jesus came to set us free, freedom is something everyone understands and we can use the gospel to involve our teens in practical and current social justice issues. This moves our teen girls from a victim to an abolitionist. This gives them ownership of understanding the risks, and working to save others from such horrors. This gives them a platform, a purpose, and a way out of their own vulnerability. The good news is our girls don't have to stay at-risk. The very thing which threatens them, Human Trafficking, can be the very thing that reduces their vulnerability by giving them something outside of themselves that they can fight for!

-Chrissy Duke
U.S. Director of Beauty For Ashes Africa

My Sources and other Suggested Resources:

- [TIP Report](#)

- ExodusCry.org
- PolarisProject.org
- Beautyforashesafrica.org
- A21.org
- [Human Trafficking in America's Schools](#)

Suggested Movies:

- Nefarious: Merchant of Souls
- Not For Sale
- The Dark Side of Chocolate

Suggested Books:

- Half The Sky
- The Slave Across the Street: A True Story of how an American Teen Survived the World of Human Trafficking
- Tattoos From The Heart

By: Chrissy Duke