

The Effects of Modern Slavery: Sex Trafficking

When you hear the word “slavery,” what do you think of? Many would say they think of the Civil Rights movement in the U.S. They might even even say that slavery is outdated. However, the reality of slavery is quite the opposite of outdated. Human trafficking has been relevant to this day. More specifically, sex trafficking is one of the leading forms of modern slavery. In fact, UNICEF (2013) claimed it to be a 32 billion dollar industry (as cited in Sukach, Castañeda, & Pickens, 2018, p. 1422). Unfortunately, many girls across the globe are taken and forced into sex trafficking. Sex trafficking can, and does, happen anywhere. The International Labour Organization (2012) said that “approximately 4.5 million individuals are victims of sex trafficking” (as cited in Sukach et al., 2018, p. 1422). 4.5 million is an incredibly large number of trafficked victims, and the fact that it is rising is even more alarming. While most people have heard about sex trafficking, they do not understand the full extent of its effects; this issue must be addressed; its consequences are too devastating. Sex trafficking causes victims to feel hopeless and helpless, it increases drugs and alcohol sales, and it leads to the making of pornography.

As widespread as sex trafficking is, there are several core ways in which traffickers obtain their victims. One method is to falsely advertise a job opening. Upon accepting these jobs, the women are kidnapped and directly forced into sexual slavery. More often than not, these women are from foreign countries, and they do not speak the same language as their captors. Because of this, victims are unable to understand what is happening to them. Additionally, pimps, another term for traffickers, obtain women’s legal documents, making it nearly impossible for victims to find help. One trafficking survivor, Shandra Woworuntu, shared her story of being kidnapped through false advertisement. In order to support her three-year-old daughter in Indonesia, Woworuntu accepted a job at a hotel located in Chicago. Upon arriving at the airport, she was taken by a man named Johnny, who confiscated her legal documents. In a matter of hours, Woworuntu found herself at a brothel with a gun at her back; her life as a sex trafficking victim had begun (“Shandra Woworuntu,” 2016, para. 1-15). Another way girls become victims is through “trust.” Crawford and Kaufman (2008) said that in these situations, a pimp “gains trust and thus controls the woman by becoming her boyfriend and, in certain situations, by offering marriage” (as cited

in Meshkovska, Siegel, Stutterheim, & Bos, 2015, p. 389). By using girls' vulnerability, pimps are able to force them into sex trafficking. Whether women are lured in through false advertisement or a "trusting" relationship, violence and threats are usually used to ensure the trafficker's control.

Other major effects that the sex industry has on its victims are mental exhaustion and pain. Sex trafficking causes girls who are victims to feel hopeless and helpless, and because traffickers often use violence to establish control, victims feel defeated. Sukach et al. (2018) said, "In addition to the sexual abuse, emotional abuse was another tactic used to initially control victims. Traffickers would threaten to harm victims' loved ones, such as their families" (p. 1428). Many times, traffickers use their words to deflate the hopes of their victims. Faulkner, Mahapatra, Cook Heffron, Nsonwu, and Busch-Armendariz (2013) said, "Victims' freedom is taken by the use of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, which results in powerlessness and helplessness in every aspect of their lives" (as cited in Sukach et al., 2018, p. 1423). Victims become powerless and dependent on their abusers. Emotional abuse not only causes victims to feel powerless, but also to have feelings of low self-worth.

Prominent in the world of sex trafficked victims is the sickening belief that girls have no value except to be sold for their bodies. Sukach et al. (2018) said, "Over time, victims internalize the message that their only value is selling their bodies to meet the sexual and financial needs of those profiting from the industry" (p. 1424). Many victims also believe that they deserve the pain they have. Sukach et al. (2018) explains that "feelings of hopelessness seemed to further promote isolation and a lack of self-worth as victims did not believe they deserve better treatment" (p. 1429). Trafficked women endure severe mental and physical abuse, forcing them to rely on dangerous coping strategies, such as the consumption of drugs and alcohol.

Although they are not healthy or safe, alcohol and drugs are used extensively in sex trafficking, resulting in an increase in the sales of these harmful substances. In some cases, traffickers drug girls in order to kidnap them. After being captured, girls can be drugged when their pimps want to prevent them from escaping. Also, limited resources make it more desirable for traffickers to simply give girls alcohol instead of healthy meals and medical care. Addictions can form, however, and girls soon rely on drugs

and alcohol to ease their physical and emotional pain. Sukach et al. (2018) said, “Alcohol and drug use are common coping mechanisms that victims implement in an attempt to deal with stressful and traumatic daily life events and to numb the pain of their experiences” (p. 1424). Moreover, as one source (Zimmerman, Hossain, & Watts, 2011) stated, some girls “use alcohol as a way to feel warm while on the streets in winter or take drugs that promote alertness to sustain longer hours” (as cited in Sukach et al., 2018, p. 1424). By doing this, they can make a better profit, either for themselves or for their pimps. As the sex industry grows, more and more pimps buy drugs to suppress their girls, and more girls become addicted to alcohol and drugs because of their pain. This unfortunate trend results in increased sales of these dangerous substances.

Finally, sex trafficking directly leads to the making of pornography. While this may sound far-fetched, sex trafficking has the right components for making pornography. Sex traffickers can provide pornography directors access to women with “experience,” and pornography is an easy way for pimps to bring in extra cash. Luzwick (2017) said, “The very production of pornography often relies on trafficked victims” (p. 358). Pornography is just another form of sex trafficking because “like victims of other forms of sex trafficking, porn ‘actors’ are controlled by pimps for the sexual use of buyers, leading to the same type of victimization experienced by those trafficked into prostitution” (Luzwick, p. 360). Catherine MacKinnon (2017) stated that “just as throwing money at victims of sexual abuse does not make it a job, taking pictures of it does not make it freely chosen or desired” (as cited in Luzwick, 2017, p. 360). For many women in the pornography industry, whether they chose it in the first place or not, they do not wish to continue after a certain period of time. Also, traffickers in the pornography industry are often violent to the oppressed porn “actors” or “actresses.” This is quite similar to how pimps use violence to control their victims. Therefore, pornography is a result of, and is influenced by, sex trafficking.

Some might argue that there is a difference between prostitution and sex trafficking. By definition, a prostitute is a person who engages in sexual activity in exchange for money. While sex trafficking does involve sex and money, it goes much deeper. In every situation, victims are abused, raped, and emotionally drained. They do not choose to be trafficked; everything is forced upon them. This

is where people often draw the line between trafficking and prostitution because generally, prostitution is thought of as voluntary. Many times, however, when women start out as prostitutes, they are not aware that they could potentially become victims of sex trafficking. Too often do they realize, after the fact, that they are stuck in an abusive cycle of being used for their bodies. One source discovered that 92% of women in prostitution wanted to leave but could not. This source also found that “58% of American prostitutes reported violent assault at the hands of clients” (“Prostitution Statistics,” para. 4). In addition to this, traffickers of prostitutes eventually take the earned money for themselves. Similarly, pimps in sex trafficking situations take the money earned for themselves. Prostitution and sex trafficking soon become a debated grey area, but overall, prostitution inevitably turns into trafficking.

The effects of sex trafficking are devastating: enslaved women feel hopeless, drugs and alcohol sales increase, and pornography becomes widespread with easy access. While sex slavery has been going on for many years and has taken many forms, its popularity has grown to the point of great destruction. If people do not know about the effects of sex trafficking, this problem will not go away. Girls will continue to be taken and feel unempowered. Their voices must be heard.

Word Count: 1483

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