

Stop Trafficking!

Awareness Advocacy Action

Anti-Human Trafficking Newsletter • March 2023 • Vol. 21 • No. 3

FOCUS: This month's newsletter focuses on the nexus between homelessness and human trafficking.

Unhoused youth are especially vulnerable to human trafficking. 68% of youth who had either been trafficked or engaged in survival sex had done so while homeless. (Covenant House)

Human Trafficking and Homelessness

In a typical year, 100 million homeless children live on the streets worldwide, while 4.2 million young people experience homelessness in America. Housing instability makes individuals, families, and entire communities vulnerable to exploitation, including an increased risk of human trafficking. Over sixty percent of victims of human trafficking report having experienced homelessness or housing instability at the time they were recruited, according to a study by Polaris. Covenant House, an organization that provides housing and support for



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homeless youth, reports that 68 percent of youth who were victims of trafficking or engaged in survival sex had done so while experiencing homelessness.

Homeless and runaway youth experience the risk factors of trafficking at a higher rate. These include mental health issues, addiction, poverty, unemployment, and a history of abuse. This makes them more susceptible to human trafficking and other forms of exploitation.

LGBTQ+ youth are twice as likely to experience human trafficking as their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts. In

addition, many of these individuals are rejected by their families and face higher rates of discrimination, violence, and economic instability.

Finally, trafficking can lead to homelessness due to an increased risk of criminal records or gaps in documented employment or housing history, which are barriers to accessing housing. Survivors of human trafficking must have access to safe and stable housing. Unfortunately, survivors are often left homeless after they leave emergency housing and shelters. These provide temporary relief but are usually short-term and have limited space and funding.

Common Reasons for Homelessness

Chronic homelessness is the term to describe those who have been without a home for over a year.

Mental health is a recurring factor among people living on the streets, which is why many people experience chronic homelessness. Those living with mental health issues and not receiving the medical, psychological, and social support they need find coping with life overwhelming. Lack of medical help is a common reason many veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder or other physical or mental challenges end up on the streets.

One of the common reasons people experience homelessness is substance abuse. Often, substance abuse starts before becoming homeless, while other times, it is a habit acquired while on the streets, often as a coping mechanism.

Another leading factor, especially since COVID, is the lack of affordable housing. Without a permanent address, setting up a bank account or securing a job is difficult. Domestic abuse is one of the most common causes of situational homelessness. Victims often need to exit quickly and find a place their abuser cannot locate them. Unfortunately, many of these victims of domestic abuse end up homeless and on the streets.

Those who live in poverty are also at risk. For example, if those living in poverty face an illness or accident or become unemployed, they are often forced out of their home. Click [here](#) to learn more.

Awareness

Traffickers often use the fear of homelessness to coerce victims to stay under their control.

In a recent Polaris survivor survey, 64% of human trafficking survivors reported being homeless or experiencing unstable housing when recruited into their trafficking situation.

Traffickers can exploit potential victims' fear of sleeping on the street by offering them safe shelter to recruit them into trafficking. Traffickers utilize several recruitment tactics for those experiencing homelessness or vulnerable to homelessness. Some of the most common methods used by perpetrators of both sex and labor trafficking include:

Approaching vulnerable persons and presenting themselves as a "helper," providing shelter to manipulate and coerce the individual into believing they can be trusted.

Traffickers may recruit by providing support with money, drugs, travel, and more. Support is provided under the premise that traffickers desire to assist with the survivors' needs. However, in time, traffickers use the assistance they provide as a debt that they force survivors to pay back through sex or labor.

Finally, the trafficker may already have a relationship with the person, such as a family member, friends, classmate, or trusted mentor, such as a coach or youth leader. If the person does not have a support system, they pose as a trusted support and companion.

Common locations traffickers meet homeless youth are in and around places such as homeless shelters, shopping malls, and bus stations. Traffickers hang around social service agencies and near shelters, often building rapport with potential victims.

High-risk populations include runaway youth, BIPOC, the LGBTQIA community, undocumented individuals, and those with physical or intellectual disabilities. Moreover, systemic racism, implicit biases among service providers and law enforcement, and social and economic marginalization contribute to vulnerability and limit access to care.

Click [here](#) to learn more.



All persons who are homeless are at risk for becoming victims of either sex or labor trafficking or both.

However, certain individuals experiencing homelessness are even more vulnerable than most. These include:

Those who lack basic needs, such as not having a safe place to sleep at night.

Those who have experienced early trauma, such as homelessness and exploitation as a young child.

LGBTQ+ youth are particularly vulnerable and experience trafficking at higher rates than other youth experiencing homelessness.

Youth who have been in foster care also experience trafficking at higher rates than other youth experiencing homelessness.

Youth experiencing homelessness who have also been victims of sex trafficking are more likely to have mental health and substance use issues, to have experienced physical and emotional abuse by parents or guardians, and to have a history of sexual abuse.

Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Program

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services administers the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) program. This program helps to prevent trafficking, identify survivors, and provide services to runaway and homeless youth. In addition, through local street outreach, shelters, transitional housing, and maternity group homes, RHYA helps youth experiencing homelessness access education, employment, personal savings, and family reconnection services. Research has also shown that serving homeless young people prevents chronic homelessness as an adult. For example, data from the City of Seattle found that nearly fifty percent of their homeless population first experienced homelessness as a minor or young adult.

Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) programs have been chronically underfunded since their inception, despite these programs costing less than other systems that many youths experiencing homelessness encounter. Please support at least a \$300 million increase by Congress for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) program.

RHYA programs are effective. According to FYSB data, 90% of transitional living program participants exit to a safe place, and 75% are employed or looking for work when they leave the program. Unfortunately, in the United States, subpopulations of youth and young adults face a higher risk

for homelessness. RHYA data on homelessness shows:

Black youth face an 83% increased risk vs. their white peers.

Hispanic youth face a 33% increased risk.

LGBTQ+ youth were more than twice as likely to have experienced homelessness.

Young parents—especially unmarried ones—had a three times higher risk than non-parenting peers.

Youth with experiences of foster care, juvenile detention, jail, or prison are at higher risk.

Youth who do not complete high school are 3.5 times more likely to experience homelessness than peers with a high school diploma.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

The Intersection of Homelessness and Human Trafficking Globally

The intersection of homelessness and human trafficking appeared in the country narratives of most countries in the 2022 Trafficking in Persons report. Many victims of homelessness throughout the world soon became victims of sex and or labor trafficking. Examples of narratives are below.

In Barbados, sex traffickers exploit children experiencing homelessness or use the streets as a source of livelihood in exchange for food, shelter, protection, and money. These children are sometimes forced to become addicted to drugs and use addiction to keep them in sex trafficking and involuntary unlawful acts.

Bangladeshi children are at risk for forced labor in tanneries. Traffickers coerce children experiencing homelessness into criminality or force them to beg, and begging ringleaders sometimes maim children to increase earnings. Traffickers force children, especially in border areas, to produce and transport drugs, particularly methamphetamine.

Traffickers transport Burkinabe children—including children experiencing homelessness—to Côte d'Ivoire, Mali,

Senegal, and Niger for forced labor in artisanal mining, forced begging, cocoa production, and sex trafficking.

Indonesians, including children, whose homes or livelihoods were destroyed by natural disasters in 2020 are vulnerable to trafficking. In addition, four million children deemed by the government to be “neglected,” and approximately 16,000 children estimated to be experiencing homelessness and living in urban environments are also vulnerable to trafficking.

Government reports from Latvia indicate a rise in traffickers from other countries, especially from Russia, exploiting individuals experiencing mental health conditions, addiction, and homelessness.

Swedish authorities report that traffickers force boys and young men from Morocco experiencing homelessness to deal drugs, carry out thefts, and perpetrate other criminal activities in Sweden.

In Pakistan, due to the consistent lack of law enforcement efforts against those who exploited children experiencing homelessness, including in forced labor and sex trafficking, traffickers operated openly and with impunity.



Advocacy

The Rwandan government-operated transit centers that advocacy groups and NGOs reported detained vulnerable persons and potential trafficking victims — including those in commercial sex, adults and children experiencing homelessness, members of the LGBTQ+ community, foreign nationals, and children in street vending and forced begging — and did not adequately screen for trafficking indicators among them. The government held many of these potential victims of trafficking in these centers, which functioned as de facto detention facilities, for up to six months. The authorities often released these detainees back on the streets abruptly and without notice, thereby exposing them to possible revictimization. The Rwandan government was also cited because officials did not effectively use identification and screening mechanisms to screen for trafficking indicators among underserved communities, such as those engaged in commercial sex,

adults and children experiencing homelessness, and children in street vending and forced begging who were also denied access to protection measures.

The government of Turkmenistan did nothing when police officers began detaining dozens of individuals experiencing homelessness and others suspected of being homeless and forcing them to work on farms, in domestic service — including in the residences of their relatives and friends — and in other capacities. Moreover, authorities threatened family members who attempted to locate relatives detained under this campaign.

Likewise, in Uganda, police reportedly conduct sweeps to remove individuals experiencing homelessness and subsequently place them in agricultural work or domestic servitude at the residences of law enforcement-connected families.

Attitudes and Behaviors that Put Teenage Girls at Greater Risk of Sex Trafficking in Canada

In April 2018, Covenant House Toronto partnered with IPSOS Public Affairs (Institut Public de Sondage d'Opinion Secteur) to survey and interview teenage girls across Canada to better understand the attitudes and behaviors that put teens at risk for sex trafficking.

The research included one-on-one interviews with sex trafficking survivors, their parents, and advocates and online mini-groups with teenage girls, ages 12 to 16, and their parents. They also polled 501 girls between 12 and 16 in rural communities and urban centers nationwide. This study found the following:

Early teenage years are a critical age range to educate girls before their risk for human trafficking increases. Girls familiar with sex trafficking were more likely to take steps to ensure their safety. They were confident they would know if they were being “catfished,” deceived by someone using a fictitious identity online.

Education about sex trafficking and open dialogue between girls and their parents is essential for reducing the risk that a girl will be trafficked for sex. Girls who report that their parents are aware of their online social media activity or feel that they can talk to their parents about anything expressed greater awareness of the risks of certain behaviors. They also thought they would not engage in risky behaviors. Parents play a critical role in keeping their daughters safe from human traffickers.

For more information on this study, the Covenant House Toronto and IPSOS Public Affairs study, please click [here](#).

Runaway Youth from Foster Care

A recent research brief examined the link between foster care runaway episodes and human trafficking.

Many children and teens in foster care run away from their placement in foster care at least once, and many do multiple times. Most youth that run away are female and non-white and between the ages of 14-16 years old. Many identify as LGBTQ. A large number have been placed with multiple foster parents. Children and youth who run from foster care are at risk for both sex and labor trafficking.

Children and teens in foster care are more likely than their peers to be vulnerable to human trafficking due to a history of child abuse and maltreatment, being exposed to domestic violence, and being involved in the criminal justice system.

Perpetrators will coerce youth that run away by offering housing, money, drugs, and alcohol. Moreover, having a prior history of being a sex trafficking victim may also be a risk factor for running away from foster care placement. Some runaway youth end up being trafficked for labor, including forced drug dealing as well as factory, domestic, and agricultural work.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

Survivors Need Access to Housing

Survivors of human trafficking need safe and stable housing as they exit their trafficking situation and continue their journey toward healing. Data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline shows shelter is the most requested service for all crisis cases.

Anti-trafficking service providers often rely on emergency housing, such as homeless or domestic violence shelters, to meet survivors' immediate needs. However, these options are short-term, and some survivors end up vulnerable and on the streets again once their time is up at these shelters.

Safe housing allows survivors to concentrate on their psychological needs, including trauma that they may have experienced. When a survivor's basic needs, such as safe and affordable housing, are unmet, they must concentrate on basic survival. This creates an environment that makes them more vulnerable to new exploitative situations.

Since there is a general lack of trafficking-specific shelters, domestic violence shelters are often used. Although there has been significant improvement with domestic violence shelters opening their doors to some sex trafficking survivors, many are still not recognizing the crucial role they can play for victims of labor trafficking.

Providers in the housing and homelessness field are likely already serving survivors of trafficking without knowing it. Not all survivors will disclose their trafficking experience, and some may not be aware that their exploitation is considered trafficking. Housing programs can ensure that their services are trauma-informed and person-centered.

If you want to learn more, please visit Freedom Network USA's Housing Project and the Resource Library, which contain materials including fact sheets, videos, and templates for providers to access practical tools and respond to the individual needs of survivors in a person-centered, trauma-informed manner.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

Action

Housing for Survivors

This report by Polaris lays out the minor policy alterations that a domestic violence shelter can consider when adapting to the needs of trafficking survivors they serve. Additionally, since rentals are common for traffickers, landlords could be in a key position to identify and respond to human trafficking given the right training.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

Labor and Sex Trafficking Among Homeless Youth

This study provides a detailed account of labor and sexual exploitation experienced by homeless youth in Covenant House's care in ten cities.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

Intersections on Homelessness and Human Trafficking: A Case Study on End Slavery Tennessee

This study may be accessed by clicking [here](#). The purpose of this case study is to provide an example of quality services for individuals with the experience of both homelessness and human trafficking. It is also intended to share signs providers can use to identify a history of trafficking and additional health considerations.

Protect U.S. youth from human trafficking



Protect Runaway and Homeless Youth

Congress has the power to help prevent child labor and sex trafficking by passing a law like the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act to provide services and support at that crucial moment to intervene before a child is trafficked and to help them escape exploitative situations. Please click [here](#) to sign a petition to Congress to pass this important legislation to protect youth and prevent trafficking.

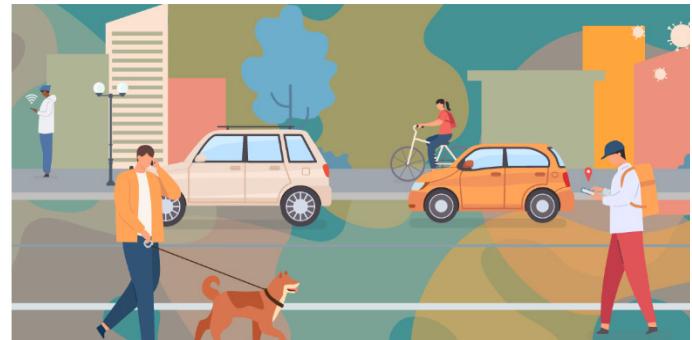
Action

Organizations working to prevent human trafficking among homeless youth.

- The Department of Children and Families: Human Anti-Trafficking Response Team (HART).
- CT DCF runs programs for the identification and response of victims, awareness and education throughout the state, and restoration and recovery of survivors.
- National Human Trafficking Resource Center: NHTRC is a national, anti-trafficking hotline and resource center serving victims and survivors of human trafficking and the anti-trafficking community in the United States.
- The Polaris Project: Polaris works to end human trafficking and help survivors restore their freedom, prevent more victims, and leverage data and technology to pursue traffickers wherever they operate.
- Love 146: an international NGO that provides professional education, prevention education, and survivor care to victims of human trafficking.

Homelessness and Human Trafficking: COVID-19 Creates a More Vulnerable Population

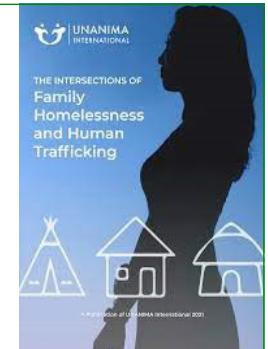
🕒 December 02, 2021 🔍 Melinda Sampson



Please click [here](#) to view a short YouTube video on homelessness and human trafficking in North Carolina.

The Intersections of Family Homelessness and Human Trafficking

was published by UNANIMA INTERNATIONAL a non-governmental organization advocating on behalf of women, children, and girls, particularly those living in poverty, the homeless, migrants and refugees, and the environment. Click [here](#) to learn more.



What Can Be Done

Although there are no specific root causes or solutions to homelessness, there are steps that can be taken to reduce the risks in the community.

Affordable housing is a significant barrier to housing that affects individuals in every community. Community members can advocate for renter protection laws and their enforcement. These laws can help those at risk of eviction, assist with rent control, and promote equity in housing practices and initiatives. There should also be a greater focus on communities of color and under-resourced communities to work to prevent homelessness overall.

One crucial policy strategy that is coming into play to combat human trafficking is a state safe harbor law. Safe harbor laws provide legal protections and access to specialized services that treat minors exploited for commercial sex as victims rather than criminals.

Unfortunately, many survivors experience credit and identity fraud, previous evictions, broken leases, and financial instability while being exploited, which can affect their likelihood of being approved for housing applications. Therefore, advocating for short- and long-term transitional programs that allow survivors to seek full recovery from their trauma and work to connect survivors with permanent housing opportunities is essential for a survivor's re-integration into society.

Finally, since traffickers mainly rent rather than buy, landlords could be a key to identifying and responding to human trafficking. Residential brothels have been documented in housing rentals across all rungs of the economic ladder. Traffickers in labor trafficking have been known to rent housing properties and force workers to live in overcrowded spaces, affecting workers' health and safety. Click [here](#) to learn more.



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