



Disabilities & Human Trafficking: The Facts

Cristal N. Hernandez, M.A.

What is the Relationship Between Disability and Human Trafficking?

Disability and trafficking intersect in two main ways, in that persons with disabilities may become victims of trafficking and survivors may develop a disability because of being trafficked. In other words, trafficking not only disables people, but people living with preexisting disabilities are particularly at risk for human trafficking.[1] Although the increased likelihood of abuse experienced by people with disabilities is generally well documented in the literature, and a small body of research indicates heightened sex trafficking victimization of minor girls with a disability, little research to date specifically examines sex and/or labor trafficking of people with a disability.[2,3,4] The vast majority of cases examined in a recent study involved sex trafficking situations and an intellectual disability. This indicates that among those with a disability, those with an intellectual disability may be particularly at risk of human trafficking, especially sex trafficking.[2]

Have You Heard?

- The main forms of trafficking and exploitation affecting people with disabilities include commercial sexual exploitation, forced labor, drug couriering and commission of other crimes, and exploitation for disability benefits.[1]
- Some risk factors that traffickers try to exploit may include gaps in education, societal isolation, and inadequate access to services and support.[5]
- Women with any type of disability report experiencing sexual violence approximately double the proportion of that experienced by non-disabled women in their lifetime.[1]

What Are the Consequences?

Trafficking survivors with disabilities often experience discrimination, isolation, and prejudice within society and may have limited access to or knowledge of services.[5] Unfortunately, caregivers, family, friends, and law enforcement might be less likely to believe reports of abuse/victimization from people with disabilities and many service providers in the anti-trafficking field are not equipped and/or comfortable to make referrals for disability services.[1]

How to Support Survivors

To increase and improve support for trafficking survivors with disabilities, it is imperative to bring appropriate human trafficking-related education and awareness to organizations of and for persons with different disabilities and their stakeholders. Some individuals with disabilities (e.g., women, children, and members of ethnic or other minorities) have additional vulnerability factors that may place them at higher risk of experiencing trafficking victimization.[1] Thus, there is a need for both widespread and specialized anti-trafficking training for those in legal, healthcare, and social services that is inclusive of all people with a disability.[2]

Resources

Texas

- **Texas Human Trafficking Resource Center --**
<https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/safety/texas-human-trafficking-resource-center>

National

- **Futures Without Violence Action Steps Handout --**
<https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/Supporting-Survivors-of-Trafficking-With-Intellectual-Disabilities-Handout-1.pdf>
- **Futures Without Violence Resource List --**
<https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/Human-Trafficking-and-Disabilities-Resources-List-merged.pdf>
- **National Human Trafficking & Disabilities Working Group (NHTDWG) --** <https://iofa.org/nhtdwg-resources/>
- **The National Resource Center for Reaching Victims --**
<https://www.reachingvictims.org/resource/human-trafficking-of-youth-with-disabilities/>

References

- [1]Patterson, H., & Moga, H. (2024). Recognizing the Intersectionality of Individuals with Disabilities and Human Trafficking Victimization. Conference on Crimes Against Women Presentation. May 2024.
- [2]Nichols, A., & Heil, E. (2022). Human trafficking of people with a disability: An analysis of state and federal cases. *Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence*, 7(1), 1.
- [3]Reid, J. A. (2016). Sex trafficking of girls with intellectual disabilities: An exploratory mixed methods study. *Sexual Abuse*, 30(2), 107-131.
- [4]Franchino-Olsen, H., Silverstein, H. A., Kahn, N. F., & Martin, S. L. (2020). Minor sex trafficking of girls with disabilities. *International journal of human rights in healthcare*, 13(2), 97-108.
- [5]National Disability Rights Network. (2021). *Human Trafficking: What It Is and How it Impacts the Disability Community*. NDRN. <https://www.ndrn.org/resource/human-trafficking-and-the-disability-community/#:~:text=People%20with%20disabilities%20are%20more,able%20to%20isolate%20and%20control>

Texas State University System Board of Regents

Alan L. Tinsley
Chairman
Madisonville

Stephen Lee
Vice Chairman
Bastrop

Charlie Amato
Regent
San Antonio

Duke Austin
Regent
Houston

Sheila Faske
Regent
Rose City

Don Flores
Regent
El Paso

Russell Gordy
Regent
Houston

Tom Long
Regent
Frisco

William F. Scott
Regent
Nederland

Olivia Discon
Student Regent
Huntsville

Resources

- Aging and Disability Resource Center 855-937-2372
- Cyber Civil Rights Initiative 844-878-2274
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving 877-623-3435
- National Child Abuse Hotline 800-422-4453
- National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-7233
- National Human Trafficking Hotline 888-373-7888
- National Sexual Assault Hotline 800-656-4673
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 988
- Texas Abuse Hotline 800-252-5400
- Texas Council on Family Violence <https://tcfv.org/survivor-resources/>
- Texas Association Against Sexual Assault <https://taasa.org/get-help/>
- Victim Connect Resource Center 855-484-2846