

Dynamics and Terminology of Sex Trafficking

Ramsey County Attorney's Office

Sex trafficking is the recruitment or selling of individuals for sex, which often involves control, coercion, or force. Victims of sex trafficking can be any age, race, nationality, gender, or sexuality. Sex trafficking (also called commercial sexual exploitation) is **not** limited to cases with crossed borders, international victims, or physical abuse and restraint.

Cases of sex trafficking are difficult to identify. It is critical to understand **the real dynamics** of trafficking and **how you may hear it** presented to you. You may hear from victims, traffickers, commercial sex abusers, or bystanders in incidents that do not immediately sound like sexual exploitation. By learning to recognize terminology used in trafficking, you can accurately identify what's happening and appropriately intervene.

Who is doing the trafficking?

The real dynamics: Traffickers are called “pimps” in popular culture and use coercion, force, and control to sell women and girls for sex.

How you will hear it:

Pimp: Slang for trafficker. **Gorilla pimps** use violence and intimidation to control victims. A **Casanova pimp** (or **Romeo pimp**) woos women romantically and then convinces them to prostitute as a condition for his love.

Daddy, boyfriend, husband: Terms a victim will most realistically use to refer to her trafficker. Victims rarely recognize that they are being exploited. They are coerced into believing that their trafficker loves them and will use what seem like terms of endearment. “Daddy,” specifically, acknowledges the trafficker’s control over her life.

Bottom bitch, bitch: When a trafficker has multiple victims, he will enlist one woman, his “girlfriend” or “home girl” to help supervise the others. May involve setting up calls and inflicting punishment.

Who is being trafficked?

The real dynamics: Women and girls under the control of traffickers are victims, not offenders. There is normally something in their lives that has made them vulnerable to traffickers (e.g. unstable home, personal insecurities, disability, drug use).

How you will hear it:

Prostitute, whore, ho, street walker, call girl, escort: These are all terms that the public would likely use to describe trafficked women. Remember in your own work that whether they seem derogatory or even “classy,” they are misleading and inaccurate. Never use them. Trafficked women are victims and survivors of commercial sexual exploitation, not prostitutes.

Throwaway: A runaway who has nowhere to go. Without shelter, she becomes vulnerable to the financial assistance that a trafficker may offer.

Stable, family: A group of women and girls under the control of the same trafficker.

Wife-in-law: Relationship between two women who are controlled by the same trafficker.

Who supports the trafficking industry?

The real dynamics: There would be no trafficking if there were not demand for sex. Commercial sex abusers offer money, shelter, food, and drugs to women in exchange for sex. They perpetuate the brutal behavior of traffickers and the victimization of women and girls.

How you will hear it:

John, buyer, purchaser, patron: An individual who offers consideration for sex. Like the “prostitute”-related terms, you may hear these from the public, but you should never use any of them. They minimize the real and far-reaching harms of trafficking. “Commercial sex abuser” is the best label.

Monger, pooner: A frequent and seasoned purchaser of sex.

How does trafficking take place?

The real dynamics: Traffickers exert extensive control over victims’ lives. They recognize vulnerability and have honed their abilities to recruit and retain victims. A trafficker controls all the arrangements for women and girls to make money for him.

How you will hear it:

Grooming: The process a trafficker uses to manipulate a woman into prostituting for him. It does not have to be violent and may include romantic gestures and promises.

Call, date, job, trick, lick, working: An event involving consideration (money, food, shelter, drugs) for sex. These are usually arranged by the trafficker on the internet, by phone, or in person.

Incall: When a commercial sex abuser comes to the residence or hotel room of a victim. The hotel room is usually paid for and supervised by the trafficker.

Outcall: When the victim goes to the residence or hotel room of a commercial sex abuser for sex.

Hitting licks, hitting a lick: Going on a call.

Backpage.com: A classified ad website frequently used by traffickers to post advertisements for sex. Backpage has replaced Craigslist as the dominant online venue for trafficking. A Backpage ad costs only around \$7 and can be used to generate dozens of responses almost immediately.

Special: An arranged deal for sex, usually seen online. Example: “\$80 special,” “2 girl special.”

Seasoning: The process a trafficker uses to break down a girl and force her into prostitution, often through physical, verbal, and sexual violence.

Turned out: An underage individual who has been trafficked recently and for the first time.

Choosing up: A trafficker claiming a new victim among other traffickers as his own.

The life, the game: The subculture of trafficking and prostitution.

Quota: Amount of money a trafficked girl is supposed to make in a night. If she does not there are consequences from the trafficker.

Going out of pocket: Violating a trafficker’s rules. May involve communicating with another trafficker, staying longer than usual on a call, or keeping more money than allowed.

Sources

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