I. Identify

a. What does a trafficked person look like?

There are many different faces of human trafficking, with sex trafficking through prostitution, mail-order brides or commercial sexual exploitation through strip clubs or the pornography industry forming one of the biggest portions of trafficked people worldwide. Other forms of trafficking include labor trafficking, organ trafficking, panhandling, debt-bondage, domestic servitude and recruitment of child soldiers. Essentially, trafficking involves the use of force or coercion to manipulate an individual into doing something. This could involve threats, violence, fraud or the withholding of an individual's legal identification documents.

Though there are factors that influence a person's risk of being trafficked, victims of trafficking come from all countries and demographics. The defining factor that puts people at risk of being trafficked is vulnerability, which comes in many different forms. Socioeconomic instability, social discrimination (based on religion, ethnicity, gender identity, etc.), low self-esteem, mental illness, age, lack of opportunity, refugee status, migrant status and lack of citizenship are often exploited when someone is trafficked, though this list is not exhaustive. Generally, women and children are trafficked for sexual exploitation, while labor and other forms of trafficking include men, women and children.

What can you look for when trying to identify trafficking victims? According to the Polaris Project, people who have been trafficked may let someone else speak for them, may have an unclear story of origin, appear significantly more disheveled than others in their party, seem as though they do not know where they are or how they came to be there, or have other obvious signs of neglect or abuse. To view a full list of trafficking red flags, visit polarisproject.org/recognize-signs. If you notice any of these things, call your local police department or the National Human Trafficking hotline (explained below) to report your suspicions.

b. What does a trafficker look like?

Though films like “Taken” (2008) and the media in general have portrayed kidnapping as the primary method of entry into exploitation, traffickers recruit people into their trade using deception, focusing their efforts on marginalized or otherwise vulnerable individuals. This is often done by promising a job, love, protection or other forms of hope and security to people who are desperate in one way or another. Abduction is occasionally used to recruit, but far less than most people might imagine. The exploitation of people through trafficking usually begins by selling a person in desperate conditions a story of hope. Once the reality of trafficking sets in, the trafficked person usually has little choice but to comply. Traffickers are able to maintain control over trafficked people through the use of violence, coercion and threats.

II. Understand

a. Global

Trafficking is present around the world, influenced in each country by the culture and government under which it operates, with a global estimate that 27 million people are being trafficked at any given time. Most often, this industry feeds off of acceptance, whether passive or active, or governmental inability to effectively combat it. There are generally three ways a country is referred to in terms of trafficking: as a source, meaning the primary function of trafficking is to export people out of the country for exploitation; as a destination, meaning the place to which these same people are being exported; or as a transit country, meaning people from other places are being trafficked through that country into other countries. The United Nations has standards which it requires and guidelines by which it ranks each nation’s anti-trafficking efforts. It also makes recommendations for how each country can improve its policies.

b. United States

According to the U.S. Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, individuals who are especially vulnerable to trafficking in the United States include children in the juvenile court system or welfare program, members of the LGBTQ community, those with disabilities, children and young adults who are homeless or have run away from home, people from rural areas of the country and people who have low levels of English proficiency. Women and children form the majority of those trafficked into the United States each year for the purpose of prostitution and other commercial sex acts, though men do form a small portion of this group. Most of the women and girls used in the U.S. for sex trafficking purposes are between the
ages of 17 and 25 and come from vulnerable backgrounds. It is estimated that roughly 400,000 people were trafficked in the U.S. in 2012.

III. Intervene

a. Law Enforcement and Aftercare

In the TIP report from 2016, the U.S. Department of State describes what they refer to as a 3P system to fight human trafficking: prosecute, prevent and protect. This means that the global anti-trafficking community puts in place laws and sentences that criminalize trafficking in its varying forms and match the seriousness of this crime. Prevention comes in the form of information shared in communities across the world that educates people about the dangers and realities of trafficking. The protection part of this system seeks to empower survivors of trafficking to rebuild their lives after being rescued. The TIP report calls for law enforcement everywhere to partner with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and nonprofits to strengthen prevention practices.

The aftercare for survivors of trafficking varies case by case. Though all forms of trafficking are a violation of human rights, some people (particularly in the labor industry), may not even fully realize that they have been taken advantage of until they are no longer being trafficked. These survivors mainly need education about their rights and help getting back on their feet. Others may suffer much higher levels of physical and mental trauma. Many organizations seek to rehabilitate survivors within two years of being rescued. Aftercare can include psychological counseling, medical care, secure housing, job training, document recovery and life skills training. This aftercare is essential; without it, survivors of trafficking have an enormously high recidivism rate, with many being re-trafficked because they did not receive aftercare.

b. How can you get involved?

i. Report and Volunteer

Call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 800-373-7888 or text 233733, available 24/7, to report any suspicions you have. This is also a resource for those who need help to get in contact with those who can provide it. The iPhone app called “TraffickCam” allows people to upload pictures of their hotel rooms as they travel, helping local law enforcement identify possible places of sex trafficking through photo comparison.

Nonprofits across the country and worldwide work to combat human trafficking. Though an exhaustive list cannot be provided here, International Justice Mission (IJM) and the Polaris Project are two reputable organizations that work across the nation to fight trafficking. Freedom4Innocence is an anti-trafficking group that has compiled a directory of other similar organizations. To view this list and find anti-trafficking organizations near you, visit their website: freedom4innocence.org/anti-trafficking-organizations-directory.

ii. How much do you benefit from trafficking?

Slavery Footprint (linked below) provides an online quiz that estimates how many slaves worked to make your lifestyle possible. This is a great eye-opening tool to start learning more about how everyone is affected by human trafficking. This is not an isolated problem, and since we all benefit from trafficking, we can all work to put an end to it also. Try it out here: slaveryfootprint.org.

iii. Pray

As Christians, the most important weapon at our disposal in the face of degradation and sin is prayer. Praying for those who are vulnerable to trafficking, who are being trafficked, who have been rescued from trafficking, or who traffic others is an essential part of the fight against human trafficking.

References


