

What is Human Trafficking?

Not many years ago, most had not heard the term *human trafficking*. We were well aware of the term *drug trafficking*, however, and this gave us a hint that the “human” version was an activity that had to do with illegally transporting people.

Our “ignorance” was due in part to the relative newness of the term *human trafficking*. In the past, societies used terms such as slavery, forced marriage or prostitution, but in recent years *human trafficking* has come to include these and other forms of exploitation.

Aiding our awareness, reports of human trafficking surfaced in the media, and the term gained even more attention when prominent leaders and celebrities spotlighted the issue.

But what is human trafficking? Here’s a working definition (more technically called *trafficking in persons*) provided by Wikipedia:

Human trafficking is the trade of humans for the purpose of forced labor, sexual slavery, or commercial sexual exploitation for the trafficker or others. This may encompass providing a spouse in the context of forced marriage, or the extraction of organs or tissues.... Human trafficking can occur within a country or trans-nationally. Human trafficking is a crime against the person because of the violation of the victim's rights of movement through coercion and because of their commercial exploitation. Human trafficking is the trade in people, especially women and children, and does not necessarily involve the movement of the person from one place to another.

The act of violating another for one’s own pleasure or benefit comes out of the fallen state of the human heart, and has occurred throughout history whenever individuals or groups with power or money have chosen to exploit those who are vulnerable because of their poverty, or because they are victims of natural disasters, war, or other crises.

It’s important to note that complex social forces, such as the desperation caused by poverty, sometimes mask human trafficking, leading the less informed to conclude that any voluntary component on the part of the subject (i.e., “selling themselves”) means they have not been trafficked. While some appear to willingly become slaves (indentured servitude) or prostitutes, almost without exception they initially made such choices due to desperation, even if some (prostitutes primarily) later feel compelled to defend their choice in an effort to cling to a last vestige of dignity.

Another reality is growing or persistent economic disparities—the awareness of which is magnified by the media (TV, movies), the internet, and social media—that fuel feelings of desperation among younger generations. For example, naïve teens growing up in rural villages in Southeast Asia, many of whom never had access to TV growing up, can now enter a fantasy world of glamor, romance, and porn via cheap smart phones from China that almost everyone can afford.

This distorted view of the world primes them to be the next victims of human traffickers, who prey on this ignorance and the desire of young people to escape dreary home village life in the

desperate hope of living the exciting fantasies paraded before them. This climate then leads some to submit to slavery (willing prostitution, participation in the creation of pornography, selling organs, etc.) for what they believe will be a worthwhile short-term sacrifice—a necessary step to a shimmering life of happiness and material extravagance.

Ethnicity and gender also come into play, as being a member of a lower class/caste or a female can culturally predispose some to exploitation. It's been part of many cultures for generations, so young people fatalistically accept slavery as a role they were meant to play. They have no choice, they believe, and their community often supports that belief.

What does human trafficking look like?

The most tragic forms of human trafficking are those that victimize young children. These cases are often more hidden from public view because victims rarely go farther than a neighbor's house. Increasingly (especially when travel restrictions are present), traffickers set up live webcams inside slum houses. With the cooperation of parents, who receive a share of the profits, traffickers then force children to perform sex acts on demand for depraved viewers around the world.

In other cases, parents (or another relative, such as an aunt or uncle) rent children to neighborhood men, or to pornographers who arrive from the big city to film child porn they can quickly burn to DVDs and sell on city streets, sometimes the next day. The desperation driving most of these cases of exploitation comes from parents seeking funds to support addictions to drugs or alcohol.

There are still more ways human trafficking takes place: boys snatched to work on large offshore fishing boats that transfer their catch to smaller vessels so they never need to return to port; children forced to make bricks or work in sweatshops that prize small hands; and the multitudes of women deceived by uncles, boyfriends, and other trusted middlemen, into entering situations where they end up being exploited by human traffickers (often lured simply by the promise of a good job, or a glamorous future in modeling or acting). The variations are endless, limited only by the twisted greed of those who perpetrate such evil.

Is human trafficking unstoppable?

The unrestrained greed of millions of individuals worldwide with access to unprecedented amounts of disposable income (including a wide array of technology behind which they can hide) means that the problem of human trafficking is likely to always be with us. Human efforts alone, sadly, have proven incapable of providing deep, lasting solutions to this problem. A natural, anger-based response is to eliminate all perpetrators. But others will simply follow.

The solution to Human Trafficking

Extreme Love Ministries believes that we can find hope and true solutions when we include the spiritual dimension. The gospel of Jesus Christ can transform any individual who repents. Perpetrators can find forgiveness and healing of wounded hearts (which are often the root



behind their exploitive choices); those who've sold themselves can experience freedom from the fantasies that drove them to submission; victims can find restoration and healing.

All can find the real love our hearts universally crave. And true reconciliation between perpetrator and victim—a process otherwise unthinkable—becomes possible.