

# Sex Trafficking IN AMERICA **FAQ**

## **What is Domestic Sex Trafficking?**

Sex trafficking is a sub-category of human trafficking and is “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act.” It involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to make an adult engage in commercial sex acts. Any commercial sexual activity with a minor, even without force, fraud, or coercion, is considered a severe form of trafficking. (Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000).

## **What is a Commercial Sex Act?**

A commercial sex act includes prostitution, pornography, or sexual performance done in exchange for any item of value, such as money, drugs, shelter, food, clothing, protection.

## **Who is Sex Trafficked?**

Victims of sex trafficking have been identified in cities, suburbs, and rural areas in all 50 states. Sex traffickers frequently prey on individuals who are young, poor, vulnerable, living in an unsafe or unstable situation, and/or in search of a better life. Sex trafficking victims are often deceived by false promises of love, a good job, or a stable life. There are 199,000 incidents of child sex trafficking within the U.S. each year (Dept of HHS, 2020).

## **Who is most vulnerable to trafficking?**

Although sex trafficking victims include both children and adults, children are among the most vulnerable populations in the United States, making them ideal targets for traffickers.

- The average age of induction into the sex trade in the US is 12-14 years old. ([www.dosomething.org](http://www.dosomething.org))
- There are more than 42 million victims of childhood sexual abuse in America (RAIIN, 2018)
- 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 13 boys experience sexual abuse before the age of 18. Source: CDC, 2009
- 94% of sex trafficking victims were victims of childhood sexual abuse (Institute for Shelter Care, 2018)
- 60% of child trafficking victims nationwide have a history in the child welfare system (National Foster Youth Institute, 2019)

## **Who are the sex traffickers?**

Traffickers can be family members, partners, acquaintances, and strangers. They can act alone or as part of an organized criminal enterprise. People often incorrectly assume that all traffickers are males; however, the United States has prosecuted cases against women traffickers. Polaris Project (2019) reports that the #1 recruitment is from an intimate relationship and #2 is at the hand of a family member. A recent report on familial trafficking estimates 25-50% of child trafficking cases nationally are by a family member (Allert, 2021).

## **How do sex traffickers recruit victims?**

It is widely perceived that child sex trafficking is primarily initiated through kidnapping and transporting to different states or countries. This is not common. In most cases, minors become victimized through processes of targeting, grooming, and recruitment within their own community and sometimes within their own family. Top recruitment tactics for sex trafficking: Intimate partner and familial. (Dept of HHS, 2019).

## **How many sex trafficking victims are there?**

It is difficult to put a number on how many individuals are being commercially sexually exploited as a majority of incidents go unreported. Estimated numbers of sex trafficking victims vary from 100,000 to 400,000 nationally, yet one Texas study reports 313,000 victims of human trafficking at any given moment, and approximately 79,000 minor victims of sex trafficking in that state alone. (University of Texas School of Social Work, 2017).

## **What are the most prevalent forms of sex trafficking?**

Top four forms of sex trafficking: escort services, illicit massage, health and beauty, and pornography (Polaris, 2019)

## **How many shelters are there for victims of domestic sex trafficking?**

Safe housing remains the #1 need of survivors. Today, there are only 218 shelters in the U.S. dedicated to serving victims of domestic sex trafficking. This equates to approximately 2,800 beds.



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|---|------------|
| <b>Open and active shelters in our database</b> | <b>249</b> |
| <b>Faith-based programs in our database</b>     | <b>160</b> |
| <b>Faith-friendly programs in our database</b>  | <b>26</b>  |
| <b>Secular shelters in our database</b>         | <b>3</b>   |
| <b>Religious shelters in our database</b>       | <b>37</b>  |
| <b>Emergency programs in our database</b>       | <b>83</b>  |
| <b>Stabilization programs in our database</b>   | <b>29</b>  |
| <b>Restorative programs in our database</b>     | <b>193</b> |
| <b>Independent programs in our database</b>     | <b>98</b>  |
| <b>Average # of Beds</b>                        | <b>11</b>  |
| <b>Programs serving Minors (29%)</b>            | <b>71</b>  |
| <b>Programs serving Women w/children (29%)</b>  | <b>72</b>  |
| <b>Programs serving Men (17%)</b>               | <b>43</b>  |
| <b>Programs serving Men w/children (4%)</b>     | <b>9</b>   |

Source: Institute for Survivor Care Shelter Landscape Map as of October 1, 2025. © 2025 Institute for Survivor Care.