



# STOP Human Trafficking

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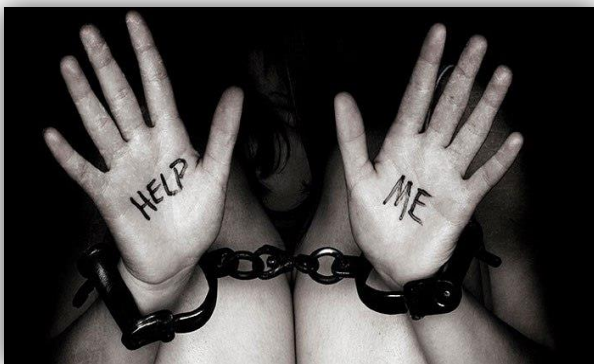
January 17, 2019

It is time to stop modern day slavery! No man, woman or child should be forced, coerced or compelled to engage in sexual activity for the financial benefit of another person. In combatting this heinous crime, we are challenged with the many overwhelming misconceptions surrounding this crime defined as human trafficking. In my opinion, one of the most concerning and dangerous misconceptions is that it doesn't happen here. Contrary to the belief of many, human trafficking is happening on a daily basis right here in the United States. The Department of Defense has characterized Human Trafficking as the second most profitable and fastest growing criminal enterprise with a child being sold and commercially raped every thirty seconds.<sup>1</sup> Last year human sex traffickers made an estimated \$99 billion dollars tax free.<sup>2</sup> United States citizens are the biggest consumers of child pornography.<sup>3</sup> It is time to open our eyes and be a part of the solution.

Our society has become desensitized to the behaviors associated with human trafficking and are unaware of its prevalence in our own backyards. From my professional experience, pornography and strip clubs are at the forefront of desensitizing our society. Popular rap music artists such as Cardi B with her song "Money" and Fifty Cent with his song "P.I.M.P." are sending messages to our youth that sex in exchange for money is socially acceptable. It is scary that music artists our children aspire to be are providing them with a recipe of how to be a human trafficker.

Our children are vulnerable, and the traffickers exploit their vulnerabilities. Children who fall victim to traffickers have their innocence taken away in a matter of seconds. We hear child victims say, "I had no idea it was going to be about sex."<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, because of the repeated abuse they have endured and the addictions they have been subjected to our victims of human trafficking are not ideal witnesses. It usually takes exhaustive efforts and multiple interviews before our victims are forthcoming and disclose information that is valuable for a criminal prosecution. On average our victims will return to "the life" seven times.<sup>1</sup> Much like our victims of domestic violence they return to their abusers because of a strong emotional connection and economic dependence. We need to remember that it is not our job to pressure or persuade our victims into disclosing.

The physical and emotional abuse that our victims of human trafficking experience is unimaginable. Often times they are brutally raped multiple times in a day to make their trafficker money. Studies show that on a low our victims are sold three to five times per day and on a high twenty times per day. Can you imagine being forcibly raped between three and twenty times in one day? Grown women, who have a strong support system, that are raped once in their lifetime succumb to the emotional trauma. Rape is a life altering experience that no person should ever have to experience, especially children. Sexual assaults of all degrees routinely go unreported to law enforcement because of self-blame, embarrassment, humiliation, and the concern of not being believed. Yet, we expect our children of domestic minor sex trafficking to report being commercially raped multiple times a night. Society has given our victims of human trafficking a stigma that intimidates them into remaining silent. Our victims get labeled as “promiscuous” and are blamed for becoming victims. The average age of our domestic minor sex trafficking victims is between 12 and 14 years old.<sup>4</sup> Many adult victims of human trafficking that we recover were entered into this sex industry before the age of eighteen.<sup>7</sup> Victims will suffer for the rest of their lives.



It is our duty to build a rapport and help them feel safe. Remember they don't know you and usually have difficulty trusting people. Victims of human trafficking live in fear. Traffickers lead their victims to believe that law enforcement officers will arrest them or worse deport them if they are an illegal immigrant. It is the victim's choice what they share with you and when. We may not like it, but that is their right. We all have our own ways of coping and healing. We present them with the facts and their options, and we let them decide. They don't know us and we are asking them to share the most personal and intimate details of their life with us. We want them to relive the most traumatizing moments of their lives, this takes strength and courage. One of the greatest things you can give a victim is a sense of control and with control comes power. Allow them to open up on their terms. Listening to a victim tell their story is an incredible opportunity that will bring chills to your body.

During the course of my career as a law enforcement officer the most satisfying and rewarding investigations I've conducted involve children. Internet crimes against children and human trafficking go hand in hand, as eighty percent of domestic minor sex trafficking victims have been advertised on websites such as [backpage.com](http://backpage.com).<sup>1</sup> Most recently, I had the privilege of working an elaborate undercover human trafficking investigation with Detective Samantha McCord of the Connecticut State Police Computer Crimes Unit. Our suspect was seeking very young, pre-pubescent female children for “slave training” in his private sado-masochism sex dungeon. He wanted to have “limitless sex” with the child he believed to be a 12-year-old DCF foster kid.

Our investigation revealed this suspect was a husband, father, business owner and vice president of a local volunteer ambulance. This leads me to put emphasis on the saying that human traffickers and buyers come from all different walks of life. The traffickers and buyers can be the people we least expect. The people that we think are protecting our children can also be the ones abusing them. Offenders take advantage of the system and exploit the weaknesses of law enforcement. The most commonly exploited weaknesses of law enforcement are our lack of communication and education regarding human trafficking. Human trafficking doesn't always look how we think it should look.

Law enforcement officers are our front line for detecting the signs of human trafficking. However, without training and education on human trafficking our law enforcement officers don't recognize it. Our law enforcement officers who have not received training on human trafficking will often realize something isn't right, but don't know what they are looking at. I speak from experience, before receiving my first class on human trafficking I had no idea the prevalence of it or the signs associated with it. As I sat in class and listened to the instructor, my brain immediately started recalling encounters I had as a patrol officer where I knew something wasn't right, but I couldn't put my finger on what was going on. Had I known then what I know now, I would have been able to ask some additional questions that might have confirmed or dismissed the possibility it was human trafficking. This is what fuels my passion for spreading awareness and educating my fellow officers and community members.

Education is imperative to combatting this quickly growing criminal enterprise. In 2017 Connecticut implemented a new law that mandates law enforcement officers receive training in domestic minor sex trafficking. I am proud to say that my department took a very proactive approach and was one of the first departments in the state of Connecticut to be in compliance prior to the July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018 deadline. We are working diligently to help all departments near and far meet compliance with this training mandate as well.

**In the last 10 years, prostitutes were 7 times more likely to be convicted than their buyers.<sup>5</sup>**

As a certified lead instructor of human trafficking, one of the biggest hurdles is getting our law enforcement officers to recognize a prostitute as a victim, particularly our narcotic investigators who strive to develop confidential informants. Victims have disclosed to us that officers have told them, "If I can't arrest you for prostitution, I will find something else to arrest you for." This is not the answer. Our victims need resources and opportunities to get out of "the life", not to be incarcerated for a criminal enterprise they have been forced into for the means of surviving. Incarcerating our victims of human trafficking further traumatizes them. I urge my fellow officers to reconsider and ask themselves, "What if this was my child?" We should be focusing our efforts on arresting the traffickers and buyers. Fourteen percent of men admit to purchasing sex at least once in their lifetime, but many times face no consequences.<sup>6</sup> In a study conducted by the



Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation most men cited the lack of consequence as a factor in their decision to purchase sex.<sup>7</sup>

Combatting human trafficking takes a collaborative effort between governmental and non-governmental entities. Federal, state, and municipal law enforcement agencies, the judicial court systems, and departmental children and family services need to build partnerships with one another to rescue victims and successfully prosecute offenders. Multidisciplinary teams have largely contributed to coordinating efforts between different agencies to accomplish successful prosecutions while causing the least re-victimization to our children.

We **ALL** have a responsibility in keeping our children safe and heightening our communities awareness of human trafficking. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reports that 1 in 7 runaways were likely a victim of domestic minor sex trafficking with 1 in 3 being approached by a trafficker within the first 48 hours of running away.<sup>8/9</sup> January is national slavery and human trafficking prevention month. In an effort to increase awareness of this prevalent problem, I committed to wearing a human trafficking awareness ribbon for the month of January. When people don't know what the ribbon represents, they ask, and it opens the door for conversation. When I talk about the

prevalence and explain to community members what is happening and how it is happening, I watch their jaws drop in disbelief.

In closing, I would like to take a moment to recognize a few people that made it possible for me to contribute to your request. My Chief of Police Scott M. Sansom, my Deputy Chief Rob Davis, my current Lieutenant Don Olson, retired Lieutenant Javier Rosario, my former Sergeant from the Avon Police Department Jeffery Gilbert, and lastly but certainly not least Tammy Sneed Director of Gender Responsive Adolescent Services for the Connecticut Department of Children and Family Services. It is an honor to work alongside of Tammy and I attribute a vast amount of my knowledge and passion for combatting Human Trafficking to the education she has provided to me. I look forward to continuing my efforts of combatting this heinous crime.



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