



Human Trafficking: Prevention and Detection of Abuse

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After reading the newsletter, the home health aide should be able to:

1. Define human trafficking.
2. Identify three types of human trafficking and how victims are targeted.
3. Describe the effects of human trafficking on its victims.
4. Discuss measures to prevent and detect human trafficking.

Human trafficking, also called trafficking in persons, is a modern-day form of slavery. This is a serious and worsening public health issue in the US and worldwide. Every year in the US, hundreds of thousands of people are victimized by this crime. It occurs in every state in the US, as well as every country in the world. Globally, over 40 million people are believed to be victims of human trafficking.

It is important for everyone, including healthcare providers, to have an awareness of human trafficking and to recognize and report suspicious activity. This newsletter will review the definition and types of human trafficking, discuss effects on the victims, and address measures that help to prevent and detect possible human trafficking situations.

Human Trafficking—An Overview

Human trafficking (HT), or modern-day slavery, occurs when a trafficker uses force, coercion, or deception to make victims perform work, sex acts, or other services. This exploitation is a gross violation of human rights on all levels, and is done solely for the financial gain of the people doing the trafficking. 

Victims may be kidnapped into service, or lured with false promises of jobs or education. They may be coerced through threats of harm to

themselves or their family, or told that they must work to pay off a false debt. They may be given addictive drugs so that they are dependent on their abusers. Victims are often chosen because they are vulnerable, due to poverty, desperation, lack of family support, language barriers, illegal alien status, and lack of knowledge about their rights. People at higher risk for becoming victims include runaway and homeless youth, victims of domestic violence, people in a country illegally, and those who are desperate to leave the area due to war or other violence.



Most victims of HT are obtained for a specific reason or task, for use in either legal or illegal businesses. The victims may be of any age, and include men, women, girls, and boys. They are commonly used for jobs in prostitution, forced labor in factories, farms, and construction, and as maids, household servants, or nannies. Victims may also be sold as marriage partners.

Prevention of Human Trafficking

Prevention of HT occurs through measures taken at the community, state, and federal levels. Many communities have developed programs and education aimed at promoting awareness and education regarding human trafficking. This awareness is especially important for

those in law enforcement, health care, financial institutions, schools, the hotel/motel industry, and others who are likely to come into contact with traffickers or their victims. Communities must also take steps to correct the root causes of human trafficking, such as poverty, homelessness, domestic abuse, gang violence, unemployment, and child neglect/abuse.

All states in the US have passed anti-trafficking laws, but these can vary greatly in penalties for traffickers and protection for victims. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act, originally passed in 2000, is the first federal law that provides for prevention of trafficking, protection for victims, and prosecution of traffickers.



Victims of HT—Effects and Detection

Victims of HT suffer devastating physical and psychological effects of abuse. These include physical injury due to violence or unsafe work conditions, malnutrition, substance abuse, pregnancy, sexually-transmitted infections, and other infections, such as tuberculosis. Anxiety, depression, panic attacks, memory loss, and suicidal behavior are common, made worse by the lack of any support system or treatment. The physical and psychological damage can cause severe, life-long effects, particularly in children.

Detection and support of these individuals is critical. However, identification of those who have become victims of HT can be very difficult, as many do not seek help. Some do not see themselves as victims of a crime, instead believing they must pay off a debt by working. They are also conditioned to mistrust law enforcement and other authority figures, due to fear of being jailed or deported. In many cases, victims of human trafficking have been convicted and jailed for crimes they were forced to commit, such as prostitution or theft. Victims may also refuse help if they fear that the traffickers will harm them or their family.

There are a number of clues that may serve as “red flags” that HT may be occurring. While any one, or even several, of these signs does not necessarily indicate HT, the likelihood is increased if multiple signs are present:

Poor working conditions: Works very long hours; is not free to leave; is always accompanied by a controlling person who does all the talking; lives

with the employer; has few personal possessions; has no money; is subjected to physical and/or verbal abuse; does not have possession of own ID card, passport, or other documents

Poor physical and mental health: Appears underweight, malnourished, or weak; has bruises, cuts, or other signs of injuries or untreated illness; appears to be in pain; seems anxious, tense, or depressed

Unusual behavior: Makes no eye contact; says very little; responses seem rehearsed; provides inconsistent stories; is fearful of law enforcement; has no contact with family or friends; has poor hygiene; dresses poorly or inappropriately; shows evidence of substance abuse; is unable to provide own address

Victims of HT may be located at any business, home, or street, in all cities and states. So what should you do if you suspect someone is a victim? A very important thing to remember is what NOT to do. Do not confront the trafficker or discuss your concerns with the potential victim, since this could be very dangerous for you or the victim. Suspected trafficking should be reported to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center. This is a service that provides information, support, guidance, training, and referrals to victims of HT and those concerned about them. The center operates a 24-hour toll-free hotline at 1-888-373-7888, or can be reached by text at BeFree (233733). The caller can leave information about potential trafficking and remain anonymous. The center will then attempt to speak directly with the suspected victim to assess the situation. The center contacts law enforcement only if the victim consents to this, is in immediate danger, or is under age 18. The center is careful to maintain the victim’s confidentiality and choice, since leaving the trafficker may put the victim or his/her family in serious danger. If the suspected victim is in immediate danger or is a child, 911 should be called first. Suspected trafficking can also be reported toll-free to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at 1-866-347-2423. If you suspect HT at a visit to a client’s home, notify your supervisor promptly after you have left.



Human trafficking is one of the worst possible violations of human rights. Healthcare providers must have adequate awareness and knowledge to help identify and prevent this type of abuse.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Directions: Place the letter of the one best answer in the space provided.

- ____ 1. In the US, human trafficking occurs:
 - A. only in border states, such as California and Texas
 - B. only in states with large international airports
 - C. in states without human trafficking laws
 - D. in every state

- ____ 2. Human traffickers are able to get their victims to follow their demands by using:
 - A. force
 - B. coercion
 - C. deception
 - D. all of the above

- ____ 3. Only young women and adult men are used for human trafficking, as there is no demand for girls, boys, or older adults.
 - A. True
 - B. False

- ____ 4. A person is LEAST likely to become a victim of human trafficking if he/she is:
 - A. homeless
 - B. financially stable
 - C. an illegal alien
 - D. without family or friends

- ____ 5. Every state in the US has passed anti-trafficking laws.
 - A. True
 - B. False

- ___6. It can be very difficult to identify victims of human trafficking, because they:
- A. do not trust authority figures
 - B. are afraid of going to jail
 - C. are afraid that they or their family will be harmed
 - D. all of the above
- ___7. Some victims of human trafficking do not realize they are victims of a crime.
- A. True
 - B. False
- ___8. Clues that someone may be a victim of human trafficking include all of the following EXCEPT:
- A. says very little and makes no eye contact
 - B. has poor hygiene and inappropriate clothing
 - C. has regular breaks at work and is able to leave
 - D. is always accompanied by a controlling person
- ___9. Most victims of human trafficking are desperate to escape and will tell anyone about their situation.
- A. True
 - B. False
- ___10. Which of the following actions are appropriate to take if you suspect that someone is a victim of human trafficking?
- A. confront the trafficker
 - B. offer to take the suspected victim to a safe place
 - C. call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center
 - D. all of the above

