



## Human Trafficking & Major Sporting Events

### Awareness

Human trafficking, also known as trafficking in persons (TIP), is a modern-day form of slavery. It is a crime under state, federal and international law. It is currently the second-largest type of criminal activity, exceeded only by the illegal drug trade.

There are two major types of human trafficking:

*Sex trafficking*, in which the victim is forced to commit a commercial sex act;

*Labor trafficking*, which is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery.<sup>1</sup>

### What is happening?

The links between human trafficking and major sporting events are complex. Human trafficking is largely a hidden crime, making accurate numbers of trafficking incidents difficult to determine. However, many studies have shown that there is an increase in the demand for commercial sex services surrounding large sporting events such as the Super Bowl, World Series, NBA and NHL playoffs, professional

golf tournaments, and horse races, as well as college sports and NCAA playoff events.<sup>2</sup> International sporting events, including the summer and winter Olympics and FIFA World Cup Soccer, increase not only the demand for commercial sex but for labor exploitation as well, especially with the construction of sports venues. With this construction, egregious labor abuses such as wage theft, unsafe working and living conditions, and a lack of access to state-guaranteed social services that affect migrant and foreign workers in particular often occur.<sup>3</sup>

### Why is this happening?

An increase in tourists seeking entertainment, including commercial sex, increases the potential risk for exploitation and human trafficking. Sports is a huge global business, but it pales in comparison to human trafficking. The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that forced labor and human trafficking is a \$150 billion industry worldwide.<sup>2</sup> Traffickers are opportunistic hunters, and they see major sporting events and the hundreds of thousands of people who flock to sports venues as an opportunity for huge profits with very little risk of penalty or punishment.

“Buyers think, ‘I’m in Kentucky, who’s going to know what I’m doing here?’” states Summer Dickerson, who fell into trafficking at the age of 17. Her boyfriend sent her to a hotel “to pick something up” when she was confronted by a buyer who informed her she had been “bought and sold,” then raped her. While being trafficked, Ms. Dickerson said she was brought from Chicago to Louisville to work during the Kentucky Derby on several occasions. “I sat on Millionaire’s Row at the derby and no one realized I was a victim. My trafficker sold me to a man who beat me when we left the racetrack.” Ms. Dickerson, founder of the Women of the Well Ministry, a nonprofit organization for trafficking survivors, said she was “sold anywhere up to 30 times a night for a thousand dollars (US) each time.” Eventually, she turned to drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms. “We’re the girls people find dead in dumpsters or floating in rivers or down an alley like garbage; but we’re not garbage, we’re somebody’s daughter and often a mother.”<sup>4</sup>

Traffickers “advertise” the availability of commercial sex using online escort ads and social media sites. In monitoring these sites, law enforcement officials have observed that as the date of a major sporting event nears, ads for escorts and commercial sex services increase daily.

However, sporting events are not the root cause of human trafficking. The root causes that allow trafficking to flourish include:

- a culture that readily treats people as a commodity, objects that can be bought and sold
- desperation arising from poverty, lack of access to education and health care
- the ready market for cheap labor and cheap goods.<sup>4</sup>



It is important to note that human trafficking in sports does not only happen at major sporting events, but it can happen in our own schools, communities or backyards.

## What needs to be done?

Human trafficking is a crime that preys on society's most vulnerable people. Viewing it from a business perspective requires that we consider the relationship of supply and demand to the driving force of profit. No matter how many criminals are prosecuted, there will be other opportunists to step into their shoes. No matter how many victims are rescued, there will still be a steady supply at the ready. So long as the supply, demand, and profit remain unchanged, human trafficking will continue.

People of all ages, races, religions and nationalities, of all political outlooks, and even sports persuasions – people across every conceivable divide must come together to address the root causes of trafficking. The profit must be squeezed out of both the supply and demand of this equation and replaced by justice and hope.

## Reflection

### What resources from our faith tradition reinforce and strengthen us in our work to end human trafficking?

If any of your neighbors are reduced to such poverty that they sell themselves to you, you must not treat them as bonded workers. Their status is to be that of hired hands or resident laborers with you, and they will be subject to you only until the jubilee year. They may then leave your service with their children and return to their own ancestral property. You were all bonded workers in Egypt, and I freed you from your bondage. They must not be sold as bonded workers are sold. You are not to work them ruthlessly; you are to revere Yahweh.

-Leviticus 25:39-43

Additional scripture passages: *Genesis 37:23-28; Lamentations 5:1, 11, 13, 15; Acts 16:16-19, 23*

Catholic Social Teaching references: "The seventh commandment forbids acts of enterprises that for any reason – selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian – lead to the enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold, and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit."

-Catechism of the Catholic Church

"I appeal, particularly to governments, so that the causes of this scourge (of human trafficking) are confronted decisively and the victims are protected."

-Pope Francis, Feb. 2019

## Actions & Resources

**Polaris Project**--[www.polarisproject.org](http://www.polarisproject.org). This organization works on eradicating all forms of human trafficking and serves victims. Polaris Project operates a 24/7 national hotline: 1-888-3737-888 or text "BeFree" (233733).

**Celebration Without Exploitation**--[www.iccr.org/resources/2012/CelebrationWithoutExploitationToolkit.pdf](http://www.iccr.org/resources/2012/CelebrationWithoutExploitationToolkit.pdf). A Toolkit for Planning Trafficking-Free Sporting (and Other) Events is available from the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) Human Trafficking Group.

**Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution (S.O.A.P.)**--[www.free-international.org/soap.html](http://www.free-international.org/soap.html). SOAP is an outreach that distributes thousands of bars of soap with the National Human Trafficking Hotline number and key identifying questions FREE to local motels.

**Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center**--[www.ipjc.org](http://www.ipjc.org). Webinars, prayer resources, presentations

**U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking**--<https://sistersagainstrafficking.org/> is a collaborative, faith-based network that offers educational programs and materials, supports access to survivor services, and engages in legislative advocacy to eradicate human trafficking.

### Source Notes:

1. Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-386 (2000), available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10492.pdf>
2. [https://www.espn.com/espn/story/\\_/id/27263771/the-state-human-trafficking-sport-2019](https://www.espn.com/espn/story/_/id/27263771/the-state-human-trafficking-sport-2019)
3. <https://u.osu.edu/osuhtblog/2018/03/05/human-trafficking-and-forced-labor-in-the-context-of-the-olympics-and-major-sporting-events/>
4. <https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/true-stories/human-trafficking-survivor-were-the-girls-you-find-dead-in-rivers-and-dumpsters/news-story/4a85bd18c62a3fff29093d8643a88a89>
5. [https://www.espn.com/espn/story/\\_/id/25876477/the-rise-exposure-human-trafficking-sports-world](https://www.espn.com/espn/story/_/id/25876477/the-rise-exposure-human-trafficking-sports-world)
6. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Toolkit-files/08-58296\\_tool\\_9-2.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Toolkit-files/08-58296_tool_9-2.pdf)

*In order to protect the identity of trafficking victims, models have been used in identifiable photos.*