

## Human Trafficking: Objectification of Women

### Awareness

Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery with over twenty-seven million people enslaved worldwide. The scope of the problem is hard to define because human trafficking is largely a hidden crime, making accurate numbers of trafficking incidents difficult to determine. It is a crime under state, federal and international law and is currently the second fastest growing criminal activity, exceeded only by the illegal drug trade.

There are two major types of human trafficking:

#### *Sex trafficking*

- in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion
- in which the person induced to perform such an act is under 18 years of age

#### *Labor trafficking*

- which is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services using force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery

Sex trafficking is especially reprehensible because it specifically targets vulnerable women and girls. Some victims are abducted; others are runaways or are lured out of poverty or sold by their destitute families. Many are desperate for acceptance and enticed by the false promise of romance, good jobs or a better life. Predators or traffickers see them as easy prey and exploit them, especially the young women. The victims are often kept on the streets until they meet their quota of money for the night, which they must turn over to the trafficker. If they rebel, they are beaten, raped, drugged and starved into submission.

The predators and traffickers recognize that women under their control are a



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more lucrative source of income than selling drugs because the same girl can be sold repeatedly for years until she is no longer useful or dies.

The links between human trafficking and other social justice issues, such as poverty, immigration, and violence against women and children are complex.

Factors contributing to the tragedy of human trafficking are:

- Growing demand for both labor and commercial sex services
- Widespread use of social media in all its forms
- Lack of access to appropriate social services such as safe housing, employment, addiction rehabilitation and mental health services
- Cultural factors such as racism, caste systems, bigotry, etc.
- Pornography
- Lack of respect for the dignity of persons
- Sexually explicit content of videos and lyrics to music

The focus of this module is the objectification of women as a significant contributing factor to human sex trafficking and the creation of a climate in which violence and exploitation of women and girls is both tolerated and tacitly encouraged.

In her paper, *Objectification of Women*, Phyllis B. Frank says, "A definition of objectification might be portrayals of women in ways and contexts which suggest that women are objects to be looked at, ogled, even touched, or used, anonymous things or commodities perhaps to be purchased, perhaps taken -- and once tired of, even discarded, often to be replaced by a newer, younger edition; certainly not treated as full human beings with equal rights and needs.

"Once a class of human beings are seen as objects or commodities, or in ways that effectively reduce them to objects, it becomes much easier to use them as one would an object, with as little, or no, regard."

Objectification of women is obviously common in mainstream media, many social media platforms, advertising, calendars, movies and magazines – it is

seen everywhere. Half-naked female bodies are displayed (on walls); in public, like objects; exposed female bodies are used as markers of male territory or turf. This raises immediate signals of discomfort and of menace for women. In short, the direct negative effects on women exposed to it daily are negative self-images, shame and diminished feelings of dignity, autonomy, privacy, and safety.

The objectification of women can lead women and girls to believe they are old and unattractive even in their 20's, that they are not taken seriously and cannot match in real life their photographed, objectified image even if they are young and beautiful. The objectification of women may contribute to a "climate" in which violence and exploitation of women are both tolerated and tacitly encouraged. Once a class of human beings is seen as objects or commodities, or in ways that effectively reduce them to objects, it becomes much easier to use them as one would an object, with little or no regard. It can become the norm.

[Source: Objectification of Women by Phyllis B. Frank]

Throughout history, sexual objectification of women has been a constant in society. Women were, and in many cultures still are, perceived as inferior to men; and therefore are to be dominated, subdued and controlled. They are treated simply as an instrument of sexual pleasure, a "sex object" or commodity to be bought and sold, used and abused without regard for their personhood or dignity.

The objectification of women results in many crimes committed against women:

- Gender-based abortions primarily target female children around the world, especially in cultures such as China, India, Pakistan and Indonesia which devalue women in general.
- Women are forced to bear a disproportionate weight of the world's poverty. They perform over 66% of the world's work, earn 10% of the income and own 1% of the land. This poverty largely results in female unemployment, lack of education and denial of health care, a particular problem for pregnant women in developing countries.
- Women and girls are most often the victims of pornography and prostitution.



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## Why is this happening?

In the developing world, some of the factors leading to the lowered status of women are:

- Cultural norms in some societies which have long viewed women as being of lower value.
- Refusal of poor families to educate girls who, when married, become the property of the husband's family.
- Desperately poor families viewing their girl children as less productive and therefore as objects to be sold.

In the developed world, some of the issues of great concern involving women are:

- The breakdown of the nuclear family and the lack of moral guidance for the children.
- Violent behavior in the home, in social media and on television often directed at the woman.
- The availability of pornography on the internet and in many forms of advertising.
- The demand for sex on the one hand and the money to be made from it on the other.

## What is being done?

Globally, men and boys represent about 29 percent of trafficking victims, and women and girls represent 71 percent. "The harms of trafficking are known to be more severe for women and girls... given their exposure...to specific forms of exploitation such as sexual exploitation and violence, domestic servitude and forced marriage... Females represent 96 percent of victims trafficked for sexual exploitation." (1)

Nevertheless, gender figures significantly among the root causes of human trafficking. Gender inequality, gender-based violence, discriminatory labor and/or migration laws, gender-blind policies, conflict or post-conflict settings, and humanitarian crises all contribute to human trafficking. All disproportionately affect women and girls. (2)

One of the United Nations' Sustainable Goals is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It emphasizes that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world...Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large. Implementing new legal frameworks regarding female equality in the workplace and the eradication of harmful practices targeting women and girls are crucial to ending the gender-based discrimination prevalent in many countries around the world and limiting their vulnerability to human trafficking. (3)

NOTES:

1) <https://icat.network/sites/default/files/publications/documents/ICAT-IB-04-V.1.pdf>, issue 04.09/2017

2) <https://icat.network/sites/default/files/publications/documents/ICAT-IB-04-V.1.pdf>, issue 04.09/2017

3) <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality>

## Reflection

### What are our values and sources of our hope in the battle against the exploitation of human persons?

#### Scripture

- 1 Cor. 6:19 Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit
- Matthew 5:27-28 Lust...adultery in the heart
- Matthew 25:35-40 Whatever you did to one of the least of these, you did to me.
- Romans 5:20 Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more.

#### Catholic Social Teaching

- *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church. Rights of the Human Person*: “Man and woman have been created, which is to say willed by God... in perfect equality as human persons. ‘Being man’ or ‘being woman’ is a reality which is good and willed by God. ..and possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God, their Creator. Man and woman are both made with one and the same dignity in the image of God (and) reflect the Creator’s wisdom and goodness.”
- *Rerum Novarum* (1891) # 5, 9, 48, 55, 62; Peter Henriot S.J. et al., *Catholic Social Teaching Our Best Kept Secret*, ©1985, Center of Concern, Washington, D.C., pp. 34, 35. “Flowing from our God-given dignity, each person has basic rights and responsibilities. People have a fundamental right to life and those things that make life truly human: food, clothing, housing, healthcare, education, security, social services, and employment.”
- *Rerum Novarum* #31, 32. “Duties of Employers: Not to treat workers as slaves: to uphold the dignity of workers, not to impose more work than a person can endure, pay a just wage, not to tamper with worker’s savings.”
- Pope Francis – *Message for the World Day of Peace, January 2015*. “The work of raising awareness must begin at home, with ourselves because only in this way will we be able to then make our communities aware, motivating them to commit themselves so that no human being may ever again be a victim of trafficking.”

## Action & Information

The scope of human trafficking is exceptionally large. It is immensely valuable for people to connect with a group to have any significant impact on this crime. Those listed below are excellent resources.

Many faith-based organizations are working towards eliminating this scourge of society. They include but are not limited to:

- *U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking* (USCSAHT) (<https://sistersagainstrafficking.org>)

- *Coalition of Catholic Organizations Against Human Trafficking* (CCOAH) (<http://www.usccb.org/about/anti-trafficking-program/coalition-of-catholic-organizations-against-human-trafficking.cfm>)
- *Catholic Health Association* (<https://www.chausa.org/human-trafficking>)
- *Catholic Relief Services* ([www.crs.org/slavery-human-trafficking](http://www.crs.org/slavery-human-trafficking))
- *United Methodist Women* (<https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/human-trafficking>)
- *National Council of Jewish Women* (<https://www.ncjw.org/work/stop-sex-trafficking>)
- *The Salvation Army* ([www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/combating-human-trafficking](http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/combating-human-trafficking))
- *Australian Catholic Religious against Trafficking in Humans* (ACRATH) (<https://acrath.org.au/news-2>)
- *Mercy Efforts for Child Protection against Trafficking with the Hospitality Sector* (MECPATHS) (<https://mecpaths.com>)

Other grassroots organizations have also been effective in addressing human trafficking. They include but are not limited to:

- *Polaris Project* ([www.polarisproject.org](http://www.polarisproject.org)) is serving victims and survivors through the National Human Trafficking Hotline, building a dataset that illuminates how human trafficking really works, in real time and turning knowledge into targeted systems-level strategies to disrupt and prevent human trafficking.
- *Clean Hotels* ([www.cleanhotels.com](http://www.cleanhotels.com)) Clean Hotels lists the hotels and motels in most cities and towns in the U.S. that have taken the pledge to remove in-room porn as a TV offering. Interviews by concerned citizens with local hotel/motel managers about this have led them to remove the porn.

Governmental resources and information include:

- *Blue Campaign* (<https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign>) is a national public awareness campaign, designed to educate the public, law enforcement and other industry partners to recognize the indicators of human trafficking, to increase detection of human trafficking, to identify victims and how to appropriately respond to possible cases.
- *The Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report* (<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report>) is the U.S. Government’s principal diplomatic tool to engage foreign governments on human trafficking. It is also the world’s most comprehensive resource of governmental anti-trafficking efforts and reflects the U.S. Government’s commitment to global leadership on this key human rights and law enforcement issue. For earlier versions of the report, please visit: (<https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/index.htm>)
- For *state information* go to (<http://www.state.gov/i/tip>)

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