

Stop Trafficking!

Awareness Advocacy Action

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FOCUS: This month's newsletter highlights the trafficking of boys and men for sex.

The perception of human trafficking victims for sex often revolves around girls or women. Indeed, the first [Trafficking in Persons Report \(TIP Report\)](#), which was published in 2001, recognized that the United States government's initial awareness of human trafficking in 1994 focused only on "trafficking of women and girls for sexual purposes." Since then, however, the focus of the TIP Report has included both sex and labor trafficking of all people.

While it is primarily boys and men who are trafficked for labor, globally, we are [becoming more aware](#) of male victims of sex trafficking. This awareness could be due to an increase in the targeting of males or to their improved ability to identify as victims. This newsletter aims to shed light on the trafficking of boys and men for sex and to emphasize the need for awareness and action.

Men and boys who are victims of labor trafficking often are also trafficked for sex as a means to maintain control over the victims. The [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's 2022 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#), released in January 2023, underscores the urgency for awareness of the situation. According to this report, boys are the fastest-growing segment of identified human trafficking victims for sex. The percentage of boys identified as victims of human trafficking more than quintupled between 2004 and 2020—a much larger increase than for men, women, or girls.

The increasing widespread use of social media has led to a significant surge in sextortion cases involving boys, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2024, the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) issued a warning to parents about this alarming trend, which has unfortunately resulted in a rise in suicide among teenage boys in the United States. This emphasizes the critical need to bring awareness to and address this issue and protect boys from such exploitation.

What Makes Men and Boys Vulnerable

Males and females have many similar vulnerabilities to human trafficking for sex. Male youth who have histories of sexual abuse are more likely to become victims. Homelessness, undocumented or irregular immigration status, substance abuse, lack of family support, or experience in the foster care system are all risks for anyone, regardless of sex. LGBTQ+ boys and young men are seen as particularly vulnerable to trafficking.

Males who escape trafficking are less likely than females to self-identify as victims of human trafficking, either due to stereotypical gender roles in which males are supposed to be strong, or if they believe they will face a significant risk of stigma associated with LGBTQI+ status or same-sex conduct. In some countries, such as Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, male victims face a strong taboo of men having sex with another man, even in cases of force and rape. Moreover, [educational tools](#)



Awareness

and language around human trafficking primarily focus on males as the traffickers or perpetrators. Both men and women can traffic boys, and excluding female pronouns when discussing a potential perpetrator can lead to missed identification of males trafficked by females.

Finally, men and boys who escape trafficking often do not receive the necessary help that they need for recovery due to a lack of recognition by law enforcement that males can be victims. The [United States Department of Justice \(DOJ\) cautions in its Human Trafficking Task Force eGuide](#), warning that “there is often a presumption that human trafficking victims are female”. This false assumption impedes the proper screening and protection of male victims of human trafficking. The knowledge gap on support needs is particularly relevant, given the importance of psychological and emotional assistance in promoting recovery and avoiding the victim becoming revictimized.

The impact of the silence surrounding male sexual abuse and sex trafficking is twofold: It prevents survivors from coming forward and leads to a lack of understanding of these experiences which influences services provided to survivors.

One officer referred to a 15-year-old male found in a motel trafficking sting as a “sex addict” and to another who was “just doing it for the money.” When filing human trafficking reports, law enforcement would often ask, “Why couldn’t he get away? He’s a boy.”

Click [here](#) to learn more.

Methods of Recruitment

Boys and men are groomed and recruited into labor or sex trafficking in similar ways to women and girls. Most commonly, they are offered jobs or groomed and recruited for sex on the internet through platforms like Grindr, Kik, and Instagram.

Unfortunately, there has been a significant rise in the number of young boys who have become victims of sextortion online. In a typical sextortion scam, the boy is groomed by a “friend” and asked to share sexually explicit content. After receiving the sexually explicit content from the child, the perpetrator threatens to release the compromising material unless the victim produces additional explicit material. In these cases, the offenders are motivated by the sexual gratification they receive from the content. In many cases, the sextortion is financially motivated, and the perpetrator threatens to release the material unless the child provides payment.

The perpetrators who engage in financially motivated sextortion are often located outside the United States, primarily in West African countries such as Nigeria and the Ivory Coast, or Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines. These crimes have led to suicide among an alarming number of boys.

Boys are also recruited through pre-existing relationships, including within the family or by friends, or by those in positions that should protect children, such as coaches, teachers, and religious leaders. In many cases, the buyer and the trafficker were the same, making it hard for adult victims to prove that it was not a consensual relationship.



Boys and Sextortion

The [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children \(NCMEC\)](#) has seen a dramatic increase in sextortion cases being reported to their CyberTipline, especially financial sextortion, where the offender demands money from the child. Teenage boys have been the most common targets in the past few years.

The child is encouraged to send a nude photo or photos of themselves to someone they meet online and have formed a trusting relationship, even if it is in a short period of minutes. As soon as the image is received, the tone of the conversation changes, and, in financial sextortion, the blackmail begins. The perpetrator threatens to send their photos to their contacts and friends, their parents' place of work, their school, or church, unless they pay a sum of money. The perpetrator may often accuse the child of being a criminal for exposing themselves.

The perpetrator often sends a barrage of messages, in one case more than 200 in hours, serving to prevent the victim from thinking clearly or to reach out for help. Most teens who die by suicide after being sextorted do so within 24 hours of being targeted. For some victims, it is within an hour. This short period between becoming a victim of sextortion and death is usually too short for a parent or caregiver to notice a change in the child's behavior.



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Braden Markus, a 15-year-old boy living in Ohio, was a victim of sextortion. At 11:01 a.m. on a Sunday, a predator posing as a teenage girl contacted Braden and persuaded him to send nude images of himself. Less than 30 minutes later, Braden committed suicide.

Braden, like most victims of sextortion, was communicating with cybercriminals.

Financial sextortion is the fastest-growing cybercrime targeting children in North America and most commonly exploits young men, particularly boys ages 13 to 17.

In April 2025, Braden's Law went into effect in Ohio, making sextortion a felony.

What Actions Can Victims of Sextortion Take?

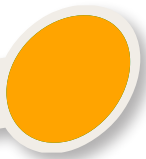
If you know of someone who has experienced sextortion, there are steps you can take.

Remember, the blackmailer is the criminal, not you. Even if you made a choice you regret, what they are doing is a crime. Get help before deciding whether to pay or comply with the blackmailer. Cooperating or paying rarely stops the blackmail. Report the account via the platform's safety feature and block the suspect, but do not delete your profile or messages, because that can be helpful in stopping the blackmailer.

Visit [Take It Down](#) so NCMEC can help you get your explicit images removed from the internet. Congress recently passed legislation, The Take It Down Bill, that instructs platforms to take down pictures of victims of sextortion.

Visit [MissingKids.org/IsYourExplicitContentOutThere](#) to learn how to notify companies yourself, or visit [CyberTipline](#) to report to us for help.

Finally, ask for help. The problems can be very complex and require the help of professionals. You can reach out to NCMEC for support at gethelp@ncmec.org or call at 1-800-THE-LOST.

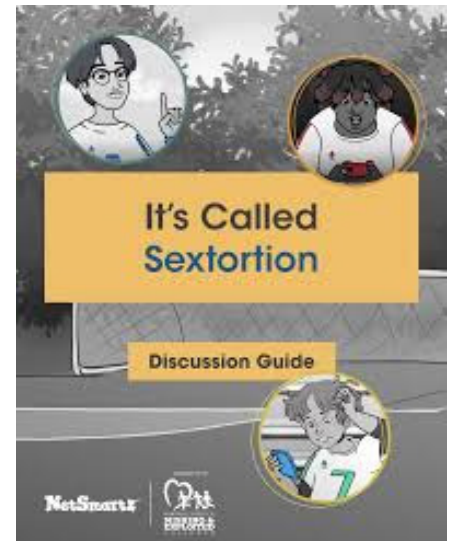


Advocacy

Sextortion and Your Rights

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children provides a study guide: *I am a Survivor of Sextortion*, which may be accessed by clicking [here](#). The guide illustrates some of the intense emotions minors experiencing sextortion go through that prevent them from reaching out for help.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children also provides a study guide, *It's called Sextortion*, which may be accessed by clicking [here](#). This guide demonstrates how sextortion may occur, identifies some red flags, and emphasizes the importance of peers and friends being upstanders for others



The rise of generative artificial intelligence tools has enabled scammers to create highly realistic deepfake images and videos. In some cases, children and teens are blackmailed even without sending pictures of themselves.

Recommendations

By focusing on the sex trafficking of males, men, and boys can begin to be recognized by a society that is willing to listen and help them, along with assisting female survivors. A priority is to increase awareness that boys and men can be victims of sex trafficking in webinars, trainings, and any awareness event. The prevailing view of sex trafficking victims being female led to services and aftercare tailored to the needs of women and girls. The [Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#) has emphasized that “gender-specific anti-trafficking programs, female-centric services, and awareness campaigns that use non-inclusive language and imagery can contribute to harmful stigma affecting a male’s willingness to disclose the trauma they experienced.”

Law enforcement, healthcare providers, and others who may be in contact with victims need to be trained on how to identify male (and female) victims and survivors. Also, we need more resources and services for both male and female victims, including housing, counseling, legal aid, as well as long-term behavioral health care, including mental health and substance use treatment. According to the [UNODC’s 2022 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#) 2023 report, most services for victims worldwide focus on female victims.

All services provided should be trauma-informed, gender-inclusive, and culturally-responsive. By implementing validated gender-inclusive screening tools, organizations can better identify men and boys who have experienced or are at risk of human trafficking, assess their needs, and connect them to appropriate services.



EPCAT Global Boys Initiative

The [EPCAT Global Boys Initiative](#) is a global project to coordinate research, advocacy and action to end the sexual exploitation of children and supports the protection of children and empowerment of 135 members in 111 countries.



The Texas Trucking Association is partnering with lawmakers and sex trafficking awareness advocates to launch a new campaign called “Boys and Young Men are Sex Trafficked Too.” The goal is to have semi-trucks driving up and down the state with signs on them, raising awareness about the risks boys face.



Growing Number of Male Survivors Talk About Being a Sex Trade Victim

Male victims of sex trafficking are telling their stories. By speaking out they hope to destroy the myth that boys are not victims of the sex trade. Please click [here](#) to listen to this 4-minute podcast.

And Boys Too

Please click [here](#) to access an EPCAT-USA discussion paper about the lack of recognition of the commercial sexual exploitation of boys in the United States.

Please click [here](#) to view this YouTube video on *Ask an Expert: Male Victims and Human Trafficking* sponsored by the National Center for Victims of Crime. Ensuring equity and inclusion of services for all individuals who experience human trafficking means addressing the needs of men and boys. On April 28, 2022, a panel of experts convened to discuss men and boys’ experiences with human trafficking. The Ask an Expert series is sponsored by the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center. This webinar session was offered in partnership with the Office on Trafficking in Persons’ National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center (NHTTAC).



An Analysis of Missing Male Victims of Child Sex Trafficking

There are many unknowns in child sex trafficking (CST), notably the exact number of child victims who exist in the United States. Male victims of child sex trafficking have been, and remain, a bigger unknown. This report from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children may be accessed by clicking [here](#).

Action

Safe House Project

Safe House Project is proud to support organizations who offer restorative care to men and boys while upholding industry best-practices. Their mission to educate communities includes educating them on how to spot, report, and prevent the trafficking of men and boys. Their drive for survivor empowerment is all-encompassing, with the understanding that male survivor leaders are valid and have something unique to bring to the table, just as each female survivor does.



How to Improve Services for Males Experiencing Trafficking

A guide on *How to Improve Services for Males Experiencing Trafficking* published by the Office on Trafficking in Persons may be accessed by clicking [here](#).



The International Organization for Adolescents (IOFA) is one of the first and most experienced non-governmental organizations addressing the trafficking of children and youth in the United States and around the world.



Please click [here](#) to view this 5 minute video on the Sex Trade's Unseen Victims.

The Boy Victims of the Sex Trade

There is growing evidence that in New England and across the United States there are likely thousands of male victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking, far more than previously understood. Please click [here](#) to read more and listen to the 7-minute podcast.

The Urban Light Foundation

Founded in 2015, Urban Light Foundation (UL) works to protect men and boys in Thailand from trafficking and exploitation by meeting their basic needs and empowering them through education, training, and counseling to give them the freedom to choose a life beyond exploitation.

UL's programs and activities center on approaches led by youth and by those who have been trafficked or exploited. The foundation provides healthcare services, occupational skills training, workshops for protection and prevention, life skills training, housing, education, outreach, and legal support.

UL focuses its interventions on men and boys due to the lack of gender-sensitive care and services in anti-trafficking work for this population.





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