

Stop Trafficking!

Awareness Advocacy Action

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FOCUS: As we commemorate Women's History Month, we focus on the prevalence of women and girls as sex trafficking victims.

Women & Girls and Sex Trafficking

Human trafficking for sex is a massive global industry that generates billions of dollars annually. It is also considered a low-risk and high-reward business for the perpetrators and is made possible by structural gender inequality worldwide.

According to the [United Nations' International Labour Organization](#), human traffickers victimize an estimated 27.6 million people worldwide. Among the victims of sex trafficking, 78% are women and girls, and 22% are men and boys. Women and girls are also affected by forced labor, forced marriage, forced surrogacy, and child marriage.

Discrimination and structural inequalities globally have **created conditions** that increase the vulnerability of women and girls. Cultural and societal inequality deprives many women across the globe of fundamental rights and employment opportunities necessary for them to earn a living. Risks are greater for women and girls who also face racism or other forms of marginalization.

Worldwide, discriminatory conditions include:

- Pervasive gender stereotypes and gender norms create perceptions of a lower social status of women and girls, and the oversexualization of women and girls. In some cultures, women and girls are seen as a financial burden by their families.
- Due to cultural norms, women and girls are not valued as highly as men, and this discrimination begins at birth.
- More women and girls live in poverty than men and boys, both globally and in the U.S., with higher poverty rates for adult women and single mothers. However, children's poverty rates are similar, impacting more girls in some areas and linked to female caregivers.
- Normalization of gender-based violence; the World Health Organization has estimated that one in three women worldwide is subjected to either intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. Social media surrounds consumers with depictions of women whose primary role is sexual appeal, conditioning women to believe this is where their worth lies.
- Lack of autonomy over financial resources and lack of representation of women in decision-making processes
- Unequal access to education. Again, in some societies, due to patriarchal and psychological norms, girls and women do not attend school.
- Discriminatory labor or migration laws and gender-blind policies: Labor and migration laws that lack a human rights and gender-sensitive approach may restrict women's ability to move freely and change employment, increasing the likelihood that they will seek jobs in unregulated or informal sectors.

Societies worldwide and nationally need to make a collective approach to improve gender equality for women and girls who are vulnerable to human trafficking.



Awareness

Normalization of Exploitation

According to [an article](#) on Violence Against Women in the Indian Journal of Psychiatry, masculine identity is often associated with feelings of power and dominance, contributing to toxic masculinity and the trafficking of women. This correlation leads to many men believing they are entitled to anything, including women's bodies.

Unhealthy masculinity not only affects women negatively but is also very psychologically harmful to men. It puts strain on mental and physical health that can lead to depression, self-harm, and stress, highlighting the importance of understanding and the need to change. Unfortunately, societal views often see men as weak when seeking psychological help, which prevents many from getting the support they need and exacerbates their mental health struggles.

***In the United States**, women generally experience higher poverty rates. In 2024, women's rate of poverty was around 11.6%, while men's was 9.6%.*

Nearly one in three single-mother families lived in poverty in 2024.

Poverty rates are much higher for Black women, Latinas, and Native women compared to white women.

Women account for approximately two-thirds of all illiterate adults globally.

<https://educationnorthwest.org/insights/literacy-lens-improving-literacy-rates-women-and-girls>

*According to the **Global Gender Gap Report** published by the World Economic Forum, it will take 134 years to achieve full gender parity economically, at the current rate of progress.*





Criminal Justice System Bias

Many girls and women who are victims of human trafficking for sex are often arrested, detained and punished for prostitution or other crimes they are forced to commit by their trafficker. Also, Black women and girls who are victims of sex trafficking often receive worse treatment than their white counterparts when seeking services from law enforcement or healthcare providers.

Women survivors also face significant barriers to long-term comprehensive support, including housing, healthcare access, and employment. This is often related to criminal records due to offenses committed as a victim of trafficking. Women survivors also frequently face a lack of community and family acceptance upon returning home, perpetuating a cycle of vulnerability and, at times, re-trafficking.

“The harms of trafficking are known to be more severe for women and girls than for men and boys, given the exposure of the former to specific forms of exploitation such as sexual exploitation and violence, domestic servitude, and forced marriage.”

The Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, Secretary General Report

Child Marriage

An estimated 22 million people are living in forced marriages worldwide, of which most, 14.9 million, are women and girls.

According to [UNICEF](#), child marriage refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child. Despite a steady decline in this destructive practice over the past decade, child marriage remains widespread. Today, one in five young women aged 20 to 24 years was married as a child, compared with nearly one in four 10 years ago, while [UNICEF](#) data show that an estimated 640 million girls and women alive today were married in childhood.

In many places, the gains have not been equitable, leaving the most vulnerable girls behind. At the current rate, it will take another 300 years until child marriage is eliminated.

[Nearly half of child brides](#) live in South Asia (45 percent), followed by sub-Saharan Africa (20 percent), East Asia and the Pacific (15 percent), and Latin America and the Caribbean (9 percent). At the same time, India alone accounts for one-third of the world’s child brides.

Once forced to marry, women and girls face a heightened risk of sexual exploitation and violence, forced labor both inside and outside the home, and domestic servitude. Alarming, some countries allow rapists to avoid prosecution if they marry their victims.

In the United States, [child marriage](#) is currently legal in 34 states; four of these states, California, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Oklahoma, do not require any minimum age for marriage, with a parental or judicial waiver. The United States is the only United Nations member state that has not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which affirms that the minimum age for marriage should be 18.

Data from [Unchained at Last](#) shows that between 2000 and 2021, 315,000 minors were legally married in the United States, with almost 90 percent of these marriages involving a minor girl and an adult man. In some states, the girl cannot divorce her husband. Also, many domestic abuse shelters do not accept minors.

Advocacy

United States Legislation that safeguards human rights for women and girls includes:

- Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA), which mandates equal pay for equal work, regardless of sex, targeting the gender wage gap.
- Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964): Prohibits employment discrimination based on sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation, and transgender status).
- Title IX of the Education Amendments (1972): Bans sex-based discrimination in federally funded education programs.
- Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) (1993): Allows eligible employees, both men and women, job-protected, unpaid leave for family or medical reasons.

Several international conventions that safeguard human rights for women and girls include:

- Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, 1962: A treaty agreed upon in the United Nations on the standards of marriage. The treaty was drafted by the Commission on the Status of Women,
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): A UN treaty defining states' obligations to ensure women's rights, covering civil, political, economic, social, and cultural areas.
- Beijing Platform for Action (1995): A comprehensive blueprint for advancing women's rights, focusing on critical areas like violence, poverty, and education.

The United Nations has recognized gender equality as a necessary accelerator for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), including [SDG Target 8.7](#), which calls for the eradication of forced labor, modern slavery, and human trafficking. The SDGs have a 2030 deadline. Goals related to children, including ending child labor, were set for 2025 and have not been met.



Gender Differences in Perception of Victims

Some [studies](#) indicate that there is a difference in how men and women view human trafficking victims and survivors, which may be ingrained in socialization patterns. Women are less likely to blame trafficking victims than men, despite no difference in their knowledge or direct experience of human trafficking. Women are more likely to blame systemic problems such as poverty and exploitation, while men are more apt to blame the victims.

[Women who have been trafficked](#) for sex face higher levels of [fear](#) and trauma, are more isolated, and have greater mental health needs than male victims of the crime. Trafficked women and girls also encounter higher rates of physical and sexual violence, memory loss, sexually transmitted diseases, and traumatic brain injuries.

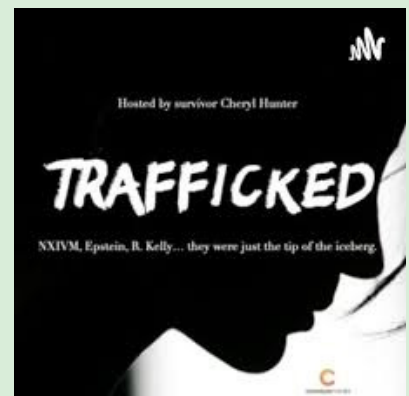
Depression, anxiety, and PTSD rates are also higher among female sex and labor trafficking survivors, emphasizing the need to understand their mental health challenges. A [study](#) investigating physical and mental health, and experiences of violence among male and female trafficking survivors in England found 78% of women and 40% of men reported high levels of depression, anxiety, or PTSD symptoms.

Action



STOP THE TRAFFIK
PEOPLE SHOULDN'T BE BOUGHT & SOLD

At [STOP THE TRAFFIK](#), we harness the power of data, technology, and stories to drive change. By uplifting survivor stories and their lived experience, combined with our intelligence work, our aim is to alter the landscape of trafficking, making it a high-risk and low-profit endeavor.



Please click [here](#) to listen to *Trafficked*, a podcast that chronicles the stories of sex trafficking survivors and advocates.



Action

Equality Now delivers against one of four strategic aims, each addressing a key driver of global gender inequality: achieving legal equality, ending sexual violence, ending sexual exploitation, and ending harmful practices. Their website has material on child marriage in the United States and the loopholes that allow marriage under the age of 18 in most states in the United States.



A just world for all women and girls

Please click [here](#) to access this excellent YouTube video on child marriage in the United States and globally by the Council on Foreign Relations.

Nicole was 17 when she was pulled into the world of underage prostitution and human trafficking. Now 27, Nicole is one of countless young women victimized by child sex traffickers. But with the assistance of the FBI and their partners, she and other victims are turning their lives around—and helping to put hundreds of pimps behind bars. Please click [here](#) to view this five-minute YouTube video.



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GLOBAL RENEWAL

The mission of **Global Renewal** is to educate children and combat human trafficking. It states that one of the main risk factors that causes girls to be vulnerable to human trafficking is the lack of educational and vocational skills, especially among poorly educated ethnic minorities. They make a point that female weakness is ingrained in many traditional beliefs in many third-world nations to this day, and educational reform can work to slowly change these harmful ideologies and reduce vulnerability to trafficking circles by spreading awareness. Education will also increase self-respect and the respect others have for them in society, thus improving their safety.



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