

# Human Trafficking

**LT. MICHAEL STUDIN – VERMONT STATE POLICE  
BUREAU OF CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION  
HUMAN TRAFFICKING COORDINATOR**

# BACKGROUND

- Vermont State Police since 2003
- Approximately 23 years of service
- Detective Lieutenant – Bureau of Criminal Investigation
- Human Trafficking Coordinator since 2019

# HUMAN TRAFFICKING TRAINING AGENDA

- Introduction / Vermont Human Trafficking Task Force
- Defining Human Trafficking
- Elements of Human Trafficking
- Recruitment Tactics of Traffickers
- Human Trafficking in Vermont
- Recognizing Human Trafficking- Indicators and Red Flags
- Investigation Approach
- Victim-Centered Investigations
- Investigatory Barriers and Needs

# DEFINITION OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The “Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000” defines Human Trafficking as:

- a) Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age
- b) The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery

# HUMAN TRAFFICKING – COMMERCIAL SEX TRAFFICKING

## 13 V.S.A. § 2652(A)(1)-(4)

No person shall knowingly:

- 1) recruit, entice, harbor, transport, provide, or obtain by any means a person under the age of 18 for the purpose of having the person engage in a commercial sex act;
- 2) recruit, entice, harbor, transport, provide, or obtain a person through *force, fraud, or coercion* for the purpose of having the person engage in a commercial sex act;
- 3) compel a person through *force, fraud, or coercion* to engage in a commercial sex act;
- 4) benefit financially or by receiving anything of value from participation in a venture, knowing that force, fraud, or coercion was or will be used to compel any person to engage in a commercial sex act as part of the venture

# HUMAN TRAFFICKING – LABOR TRAFFICKING

## 13V.S.A. § 2652(A)(5-7)

*No person shall knowingly:*

- 5) subject a person to labor servitude;
- 6) recruit, entice, harbor, transport, provide, or obtain a person for the purpose of subjecting the person to labor servitude; or
- 7) benefit financially or by receiving anything of value from participation in a venture, knowing that a person will be subject to labor servitude as part of the venture.

Definition of Labor Servitude:

"Labor servitude" means labor or services performed or provided by a person that are induced or maintained through *force, fraud, or coercion*.

# THREE CATEGORIES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS

- 1) Those **under 18** involved in **commercial sex acts**
- 2) Those **18 or over** involved in **commercial sex acts** through **force, fraud or coercion**
- 3) Those forced to perform **labor and/or services** in conditions of involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery through **force, fraud or coercion**

# Trafficking

versus

# Smuggling



- Crime or violation against a person
- Contains element of coercion (cannot consent to enslavement)
- Subsequent exploitation and/or forced labor
- Trafficked persons seen as victims by the law

- No coercion
- Facilitating illegal entry of person from one country to another
- Smuggled persons seen as criminals by the law

# Trafficking Recruitment

Human trafficking involves numerous types of recruitment tactics:

- “American Dream” Tactic- Victims promised good pay, treatment and opportunity for worker program via Visa program
- Fraud- Trafficker purposely makes false promises about the conditions of employment
- Coercion- Trafficker threatens harms against victim or family or threatens use of legal process against the victim
- Familial Trafficking- Trafficker forces family member to work to force off debt or to support addiction, etc.

# Bradley & O'Dell



Threatened to  
“destroy them”  
if they left

- Litchfield, NH case
- Recruited men from Jamaica to work for tree and landscape company
- Promise: Attractive salaries, good working conditions, time off for recreation
- Reality: Unheated camper, no toilet, no bed, verbal assaults, monitored movements, confiscated passports and plane tickets

# The Elements of Human Trafficking

## ACTION

Recruit  
Harbor  
Entice  
Transport  
Provide  
Obtain  
Maintain  
Advertise  
Solicit  
Patronize

(How did the person get into the situation?)

## MEANS

Force  
  
Fraud  
  
Coercion

(How is the person kept in the situation?)

## PURPOSE

Involuntary  
Servitude  
  
Debt Bondage  
  
Peonage  
  
Sex Trade

(For what purpose was the person brought in/kept in the situation?)

**O  
R**

## VICTIM UNDER 18

Recruit  
Harbor  
Entice  
Transport  
Provide  
Obtain  
Maintain  
Advertise  
Solicit  
Patronize

...For the purpose of commercial sex

# What is Force, Fraud and Coercion?

Force, Fraud, Coercion are the MEANS to which an individual is trafficked

How were the victims kept in the trafficking situation?

## Force

- Physical assault
- Sexual assault & Rape
- Confinement
- Kidnapping
- Deprivation of basic needs – food, water, sleep
- Facilitated drug use

## Fraud

- Withholding of wages
- Fraudulent employment contracts
- False Promises
  - Love, marriage
  - Education
  - Employment
  - Living conditions

## Coercion

- Threats to self, loved ones, pets
- Threats of arrest, deportation
- Blackmail
- Debt bondage
- Withholding of legal documents
- Other psychological manipulation & control

# Trafficking and the Control Over Victims

- Intimidation or Violence- Threats or perceived threats of physical, sexual or verbal abuse against victim and/or their family
- Isolation- Not allowing victims to leave or go anywhere alone; taking away ID or immigration documents; confiscation of phone
- Financial Control- Little to no wages for work; increase in debt for victim; deduction for basic needs
- Diminishing Resistance- Control over basic needs and housing conditions and control over working conditions
- Threatened Use of Law- Threatens victim with arrest or deportation or arrest in their home country

# Why Is it the Fastest Growing Crime & So Profitable?

- Reusable resource unlike drugs & arms
- Limited interdiction compared to drugs & arms
- Hidden in plain sight; profit margins high
- Not always seen as a crime It's just sex; stigma of “prostitute” “criminal” or “choice”; our most vulnerable community members
- Difficult to prove
- Victims may not be the “perfect” victim, they may be addicts, criminals...

# Sexual Exploitation of Minors

- Important: Lower Threshold for MINORS
- The Federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act identifies trafficked minors as:
  - under the age of 18 years old and coerced, defrauded, or forced to work while a third party benefits from their labor
  - under the age of 18 years old and induced to participate in the commercial sex trade (even if there is no force, fraud, or coercion involved)
- The law does not distinguish between immigration status or gender of youth

# Runaways

Teens that runaway are a higher risk for being recruited

Things to consider when the youth returns:

- What are they running from? To?
- How are they living? (Food/water/shelter)
- Did they see anything that scared them while they were on the run?
- Did anything bad happen to any of their friends while they were on the run?

# Survival Sex

- Teens that runaway are a high risk for being recruited and or exploited
- Youth are offered a place to stay, food, alcohol, and/or drugs in exchange for sex.



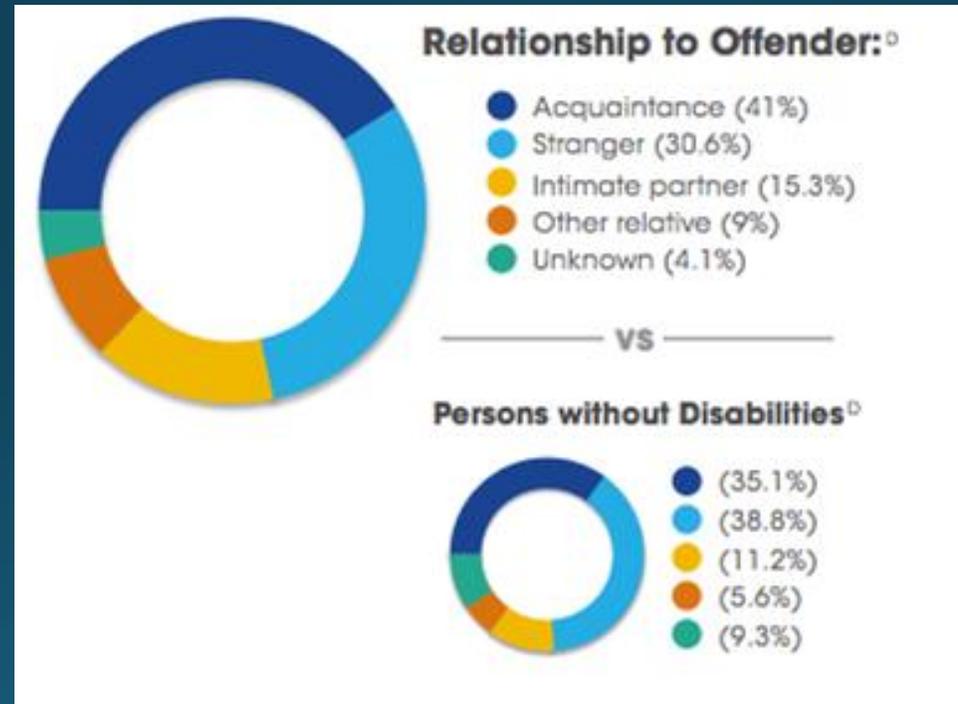
“[P]eople with disabilities  
[are]...especially vulnerable to  
human trafficking.”

-U.S. Department of State,  
Trafficking in Persons Report (2016)

Often reliant on others for assistance



Increased vulnerability to abuse



Source: Office of Victims of Crime

# Reasons Why Persons With Disabilities are Trafficked in Vermont

- Money
- Persons with Disabilities are seen as burdens
- Lack of resources
- Lack of options for both families and persons with disabilities
- Persons with disabilities are sometimes groomed at early age
- People tend to look the other way when it comes to abuse of persons with disabilities
- Isolated from others



# ONE KEY COMPONENT OF PERSON WITH DISABILITY IN A TRAFFICKING SITUATION

|   | Individual without disabilities | Individual with disabilities |
|---|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Force                                   | ✓                               | ✓                            |
| Fraud                                   | ✓                               | ✓                            |
| Coercion                                | ✓                               | ✓                            |
| Withholding of Social Security Benefits |                                 | ✓                            |

# Who Commits Acts of Trafficking?

- Neighbors, friends, relatives, community leaders, peers
- Family members and partners
- Organized crime
- ANYONE who profits
- Looks for vulnerable individuals
- Preys on potential victims with low self-esteem and minimal social supports
- Willing to invest a great deal of time and effort into their victims to break down natural resistance and suspicion

# The Process of Trafficking Control

## Recruitment

Individual recruited through lures of love, affection, money, safety, and family  
Can occur in person or online/social networking  
Can occur directly with the pimp, bottom girl or other victims

## Grooming

Investment of time, gifts, building trust, and sense of belonging  
Increased isolation, control, and breaking down and rebuilding identity  
Increased manipulation and testing of sexual boundaries

## “Turning Out”

Point when relationship fully shifts, and individual is exploited through commercial sex.  
Can be gradual, where trafficker promises exploitation will happen only for a short time, or youth can be posted online or put on the street and given a quota.

# Recruitment Pathways

- Family
- Peer recruitment
- Violence
- Internet
- Pimp
- Lack of options—running away, poverty, basic needs,
- Kidnapping

# Traffickers Promise...

- Promises of economic opportunities
- Promises of material comforts
- Offering of love & affection
- Offering of basic needs: food/shelter... for self or family
- Offering acceptance, protection
- Hope for a better future, success

# Traffickers, Drugs, and Coercion

- Perpetrators could start as a dealer and then suggest a different way to pay when buyer runs out of funds
- Perpetrators waiting outside of recovery/rehabilitation centers with drugs
- Perpetrators posting bail so a victim might avoid detoxing in jail

# Addiction & Human Trafficking

- Addiction has a complex relationship with human trafficking
- Many cases have a drug component
- Challenging to find services for detox/recovery
- Many survivors have been to inpatient rehab multiple times, some are no longer allowed back
- Lack of supportive housing is a barrier to recovery
- The drug component adds complication to an already complex treatment plan
  - Timing
  - Readiness
  - Treatment availability

# Human Trafficking: Understanding Drugs and Intoxicants

- Exacerbate a trafficked person's vulnerability and dependence
- Used as a carrot and a stick: create dependency and ensure obedience via
  - Fear of withdrawal
  - Used as wages
  - Used as anesthesia
  - Reduce victim knowledge and credibility

# Why do Victims Stay in the “Life”

- Frequent if not constant accompaniment
- Language and social barriers
- Lack of alternative options
- Victims may not be looking to be rescued
- Use of and/or threat of violence
- Fear of retaliation, death, arrest, harm to themselves or to loved ones
- Addiction
- Shame and self-blame
- Traumatic bonding to the trafficker
- Normalization of the exploitation
- Traffickers train victims to tell lies and false stories
- Victims trained to distrust authority
- Traffickers maintain physical and psychological hold over the victim
- Victims labeled as criminals instead of victims

# Things to remember....

- Trauma bonds are created between the victim and the traffickers
- Devastating consequences including long-term physical and psychological trauma, disease, drug addiction, unintended pregnancy, and death
- Money becomes important to support basic living needs
- There is a desire to escape, but often times “love” and financial reasons make it difficult to leave
- It may be hard to have a conversation with someone who is experiencing trafficking

# Investigative Approach and Victim Centered Investigations

One of the most important factors to consider is what the victim may need at the time.....that may be the time to begin building trust between the victim and law enforcement. How you respond can set the framework and build rapport with the victim moving forward.

There are FOUR guidelines to follow when speaking with a victim using what experts call the four pillars of procedural justice:

- 1) Treat the victim with respect, empathy, and kindness.
- 2) Listen to what the victim has to say AND what they are not saying. – Non-Verbal Cues
- 3) Victims are their own experts in their safety and well-being
- 4) Explain your actions to the victim; let them know what to expect.

# Human Trafficking Investigations- What Barriers do Investigators Face?

- No case is the same
- Requires a significant amount of flexibility and patience
- May require months or years to investigate
- Relapse/recovery trajectory unpredictable
- Rapport building can be challenging
- Victim's trauma history may impact their ability to recall events and timelines

# Likely Intersections with Human Trafficking

EVERYWHERE

# Human Trafficking Statistics

- Limited Reporting - 2025
  - 42 Reports – DCF/VSP/HSI
  - Victims – 86% Female
    - 11 – 24 YOA
  - Offenders – 92% Male
- HSI Lead LE Investigatory Agency

# Human Trafficking Needs

- Increase availability of victim services
  - Housing - In /out of state options
  - Drug rehabilitation - In / out of state options
  - MOUs with Hotels and Taxis
  - Coordination of basic need services – HT Specific
- Greater LE reporting and tracking of HT Cases
  - Task Force to Governor's Commission

# Human Trafficking Needs

- Additional HT Case Manager
- Specialized HT Training for State Attorneys and Judges
- Specialized HT Victim Service Providers
- HT Focused MDTs

Lieutenant Michael Studin  
Vermont State Police  
Michael.Studin@vermont.gov