

Human Trafficking by Families

Margaret F. Henderson

CONTENTS

Introduction ... 1	Conclusion ... 13
Timeline of Awareness and Legislation ... 2	Appendix A. Lincoln County, North Carolina: How a Community Can Initiate Efforts to Collectively Learn More about Human Trafficking ... 14
Definition ... 3	Appendix B. Insights from an Anti-Human Trafficking Advocate ... 15
Strategies of Manipulation and Control ... 4	Appendix C. State and National Anti-Human Trafficking Organizations ... 17
Ask the Questions ... 5	
Identify the Cases Accurately ... 8	
Collect Data ... 9	
Key Research Findings ... 12	

Introduction

Legislation to address domestic sex and labor trafficking was implemented with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000. Collective learning about the nature and incidence of trafficking has grown as our various systems of care and intervention have begun to ask about, document, and address these offenses. Parallel to the learning that previously took place in the field of child abuse and interpersonal violence, awareness is increasing among anti-trafficking professionals that the threat presented by friends and family members is as significant, possibly more so, than the threat presented by strangers.

Our systems and practices are not consistent in inquiring about the possibility that familial trafficking took place or in documenting its existence, nor are we informed about unique interventions or services that would best serve the victims.

The purpose of this bulletin is to remind service professionals to inquire about the possibility of familial sex and/or labor trafficking, to accurately label cases that involve that dynamic, and to encourage our collective learning about and implementation of successful proactive and reactive strategies to alleviate the suffering caused by this crime.

[Margaret F. Henderson](#) directs the UNC School of Government Public Intersection Project, facilitates public meetings, assists cross-organizational problem-solving and planning efforts, and provides training about human trafficking for local government audiences.

Timeline of Awareness and Legislation

Why are we talking about familial trafficking today as if it were a new thing? The offenses are not a recent development, but our awareness is, and we are just starting to call it by its name.

Less than 150 years ago, in 1875, the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was created—the first organization to be devoted to child protection. Prior to the late nineteenth century, there were no laws protecting children from maltreatment or granting them rights.¹

As a point of comparison, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals had been created nine years earlier in 1866.² Its founder, Henry Bergh, was consulted when advocates were motivated to create a similar formal structure devoted to child protection.

Before this time, the autonomy of the family took priority over establishing any legal expectations for the care, punishment, and work of children. There were no organized efforts at child protection, but that began to change.³

One significant development happened in 1946, when pediatric radiologist John Caffey published an article in which he described the injuries of six children and hinted at parental abuse. Other medical professionals began to pay attention to the abusive origins of some childhood injuries. In 1962, pediatrician C. Henry Kempe and his colleagues published the article “The Battered-Child Syndrome,” bringing familial abuse of children to national attention.⁴

That publicity generated legislation intended to address child abuse, as well as the professional structures with which to do so, through the creation of Child Protective Services. As awareness of physical abuse grew, the number of cases being reported grew as well. Knowledge also began to deepen in terms of understanding that sexual abuse can exist in addition to or separate from physical abuse.

This evolution of societal awareness and concern followed a specific pattern, from naming the abusive behavior, to declaring it to be a violation of societal expectations via legislation that provided definitions and punishments, to beginning to keep data on the incidence, to developing a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of child abuse.

Initial obstacles to identifying battered-child syndrome included doctors who were reluctant to believe that parents could have attacked their children and who were untrained or unwilling to ask questions. Most of us want to view families as sources of loving support, not exploitation. In mainstream society, some people might be able to believe that parents with certain qualities (poverty, mental health challenges, history of abuse, etc.) could possibly abuse their children but would give the benefit of the doubt to or overlook entirely those parents who exhibited outward signs of success and stability. These inaccurate perceptions continue today.

1. See New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC), <https://nyspcc.org/about-nyspcc/history/> (last visited June 15, 2022).

2. See American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), <https://www.asPCA.org/about-us> (last visited June 15, 2022).

3. See John E.B. Myers, “A Short History of Child Protection in America,” in *The APSAC Handbook on Child Mistreatment*, ed. Myers, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2011), 3, https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/35363_Chapter1.pdf.

4. *Ibid.*, 9.

Though awareness of child abuse is about the same age as the Baby Boomers (people born from 1946 to 1964), there is still resistance to interventions and accountability. Thinking about child abuse can generate more distress than people are willing to endure. Some hold dear the concept of family as a safe refuge. Others might believe that whatever happens within a family unit is no one else's business.

The power of that resistance to acknowledging child abuse, in general, is foundational to the current resistance to naming the sex and labor trafficking of one family member by another.⁵

If awareness of child abuse corresponds to the Baby Boomer generation, awareness of domestic sex and labor trafficking corresponds to Generation Z (people born from approximately 1996 to 2010) since trafficking was distinguished as a criminal act through the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000.

It took a decade after the passage of the TVPA to get glimpses into the frequency of familial trafficking. That awareness corresponds to Generation Alpha (people born from approximately 2010 to 2025). We are not yet consistent in asking about it, documenting it accurately, recognizing the indicators, or understanding the forms it might take.

Definition

The [Trafficking Victims Protection Act \(TVPA\) of 2000](#) was the first comprehensive federal law to address trafficking in persons. The law provides a three-pronged approach that includes prevention, protection, and prosecution. The TVPA was reauthorized through the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of [2003](#), [2005](#), [2008](#), [2013](#), and [2017](#).⁶

The federal definition of human trafficking, as defined by the TVPA, is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, and/or obtaining of a person for:

- Labor or services, through force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.
- Commercial sex act(s) through force, fraud, or coercion.
- Any commercial sex act if the person is under eighteen years of age, regardless of whether any form of force, fraud, or coercion is involved.⁷

5. Hannah Hopper, Community Outreach and Awareness Specialist with Hope United Survivor Network in Gaston County, North Carolina, observes that “there is always more work to be done in education and awareness; our community is committed to discussing strategies to prevent child abuse and shedding light on human trafficking.” She frames community education as “prevention” and then develops a safe environment for sharing information about human trafficking. Interview of Hopper by the author, August 9, 2022.

6. The website of the National Human Trafficking Hotline provides a timeline and description of the evolution of federal law related to the TVPA at <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/what-human-trafficking/federal-law>.

7. Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (P.L. 106–386), reauthorized by the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2003 (P.L. 108–193), the TVPRA of 2005 (P.L. 109–164), and the 2008 William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act. A copy of the 2000 act is available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-106publ386/pdf/PLAW-106publ386.pdf>.

Under this law, any minor engaged in any kind of commercial sexual activity is considered a victim of sex trafficking, regardless of the circumstances involving third-party participation, emancipation status, or the age of others connected with the exchange of sex for something of benefit.

While some trafficking victims are groomed and controlled by people or organizations outside their families (gangs, labor recruiters, organized crime, etc.), others are trafficked by people with whom they have close personal relationships, such as romantic partners and family members. This bulletin addresses the latter situation, which can also be one that we are less likely to identify.

Familial trafficking as an offense is addressed by other state and federal laws related to trafficking. By law, the categorization of the offense between the trafficker, buyer, and/or victim is not distinguished by the relationship but by the act of exchange (sex or labor for money or some other benefit) itself.

While the phrase “familial trafficking” might immediately generate images or assumptions related to parents who sex traffick their children, it’s important to be aware that other variations of the dynamic exist as well. Family members of any age might be forced, coerced, or fraudulently recruited into labor trafficking, whether through a family business, such as caregiving, restaurant work, or janitorial service, or through work that benefits business owners outside the family, such as a factory, farm, or organized crime. The abuse can affect boys and men as well as girls and women. The family relationship between the trafficker and victim might be something other than parent/child; spouses, grandparents, siblings, aunts, or uncles might also be offenders. If the abuse is multigenerational, the traffickers might view the exchange and abuse as “normal,” and the bodies of their family members will continue to be used as commodities for ongoing financial gain.

Nancy Hagan, Project Analyst at the North Carolina Human Trafficking Commission, is familiar with the forms and dynamics of labor trafficking. “We have yet to identify the characteristics that clearly differentiate work cultures that rely on family members supporting family businesses from those that are exploitative and rise to the level of labor trafficking. We don’t ask enough questions.”⁸

Strategies of Manipulation and Control

Familial traffickers manipulate and control their victims with the same strategies that nonfamilial traffickers employ.

The Polaris Project adapted the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project’s Duluth Model Power and Control Wheel to demonstrate the different types of abuse that can occur in labor and sex trafficking situations.⁹ The working assumption, not yet fully established by research, is that familial traffickers have built-in shortcuts to grooming and controlling their victims: they likely have seemingly trusting, caring relationships with family members through birth or marriage, and they may also have privilege or status conferred by gender, age, or nationality. Vulnerable

8. Email exchange between Nancy Hagan and the author, June 24, 2022.

9. The Polaris Project’s Human Trafficking Power and Control Wheel is available at <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/resources/human-trafficking-power-and-control-wheel> (last visited June 22, 2022).

family members can be manipulated into compliance through the promise of rewards (emotional connection) or punishment (killing pets, physical abuse), or through the implied obligation to protect siblings (threats of homelessness or abuse).

These strategies of oppression and control are employed in a variety of abusive relationships, and the forms of abuse can be intertwined. Here are examples of how traffickers maintain power and control over their victims:

- **Coercion and threats:** The trafficker threatens to hurt family members, friends, or pets. If the victim is not a full citizen, the trafficker threatens to call ICE or otherwise initiate deportation.
- **Intimidation:** The trafficker moves or vocalizes forcefully, inflicts harm on victim's loved ones.
- **Emotional abuse:** The trafficker shames, criticizes, verbally abuses, or manipulates the victim.
- **Isolation:** The trafficker keeps the victim in a house or work location; prohibits any contact with friends or family.
- **Denying, blaming, minimizing:** The trafficker accuses the victim of selfishness, lack of gratitude, or unwillingness to uphold contractual obligations.
- **Sexual abuse:** The trafficker prostitutes and/or abuses the victims; photographs or films the victim for pornography or online viewing.
- **Physical abuse:** The trafficker withholds food or medical care, beats the victim, tattoos the victim to declare ownership, or deprives the victim of fundamental physical needs (food, sleep, access to toilet or medical care, etc.)
- **Using privilege:** The trafficker manipulates the victim into providing for the family, controls personal papers, refuses to renew visas, disguises abuse under cover of outward generosity.
- **Economic abuse:** The trafficker withholds access to financial resources, does not pay as much as promised or nothing at all, creates debt bondage by charging for rent, food, etc.

These forms of power and control can be employed in non-trafficking situations. It is the exchange of sex and/or labor for something of value (money, drugs, rent payment, etc.) that elevates any abuse or neglect charge to that of trafficking.

Ask the Questions

The indicators of trafficking look similar to indicators of other types of crimes or high-risk situations, and victims are not likely to immediately self-identify as having been trafficked. Helping professionals will have to invest time in building trust and initially asking indirect questions that enable the alleged victim to describe their living and working circumstances without putting the label of "trafficking" on the situation or the offender.

Investigator/Trainer Rick Hoffman, currently with the Johnston County District Attorney's Office, begins interviews by asking about basic needs to gain understanding of the victim's living circumstances: "Are you hungry? When was the last time you had something to eat? Where did you sleep last night?" He then transitions to questions concerning safety and relationships to assess if a potential victim is making choices that have been coerced out of their dependency on another person who is manipulating those circumstances.

Hoffman describes how he ascertains that some form of benefit exchange took place without asking directly about it:

“I ask peripheral questions. For example, if a person tells me they are voluntarily engaged in commercial sex, I’ll ask what sex acts they don’t do. A trafficked person may answer it depends on how much money they pay instead of directly telling you what they won’t do. Another example is that if a person says they are free to leave, I will ask them to describe how and where they would go. They won’t or can’t give details because their circumstances are such that they depend entirely on the trafficker to have a place to stay and a way to get there. My goal is to get them to see that their choices are dependent on circumstances that someone else controls. In the course of uncovering that dependency, I attempt to corroborate their account in ways that do not require the victim to testify (phone records, social media records, witnesses, receipts, payment methods, video, medical records, etc.). I focus on what an offender is doing, how they do it, and with what. This becomes the evidence.

“Another approach I like to use when there is a lot of trauma and history is to simply ask the questions. You learn to ask open-ended questions, but when there is so much to tell and share, victims don’t know where to start or how to discern what is important. Or conversely, they are so traumatized they can’t give you even the most basic description of a suspect (race, gender, etc.). I’ll ask something simple: ‘What was the worst thing you remember? Tell me about that.’ They can start there and build out. It ends up helping them get their bearings, and they do much better because you can then transition to sensory questions that the memories of traumatized people can process (smell, touch, feel, etc.). Victims can describe what the ground felt like or what they smelled, as examples.”¹⁰

For more ideas on asking indirect questions to assess the likelihood of trafficking, see Sidebar 1, “Quick Youth Indicators for Trafficking (QYIT).” The screening tool is brief and does not require the administrator to hold extensive knowledge about trafficking.

Hoffman, who believes that familial trafficking is grossly under-identified, notes that when law enforcement and Child Protective Services work together on a child sexual abuse investigation, the focus is likely to be on the production, possession, and dissemination of child sexual abuse materials (CSAM) or on the family member as an abuser. “The path to trafficking is really only one step away,” he says. “A parent records a child in a sex act, then sells the video to another. This is both production and dissemination of child pornography, but it is also sex trafficking.”¹¹ His experience with coexisting risk factors mirrors current research findings, which show that opioid addictions and poverty can drive the motivation to traffick. However, it is important to remember that drug and gambling addictions can also exist in families that project the appearance of wealth and success.

There are more reasons why careful evaluation is needed whenever addictions are present in a household. Traffickers use substances for victim exploitation and recruitment. Traffickers can initiate addiction by providing drugs to victims without their knowledge or by forcing them

10. Email exchange between Rick Hoffman and the author, June 22, 2022.

11. Email exchange between Hoffman and the author, June 24, 2022.

Sidebar 1. Quick Youth Indicators for Trafficking (QYIT)

A person who has been trafficked as defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 will likely not use the vocabulary of that legislation to describe their experiences, nor will they label themselves as a victim or survivor of sex or labor trafficking. Direct service providers have learned to assess the risk of trafficking in a client's situation by asking indirect questions about their circumstances.

The Quick Youth Indicators for Trafficking tool is comprised of the following five questions that were developed by researchers working with homeless young adults in New Jersey. The questions are used as an initial, relatively quick and user-friendly assessment tool and can be easily adapted for other service populations. The vocabulary used is nonjudgmental, free of sensational words, and easy to understand.

1. It is not uncommon for people to stay in work situations that are risky or even dangerous, simply because they have no other options. Have you ever worked, or done other things, in a place that made you feel scared or unsafe?
2. In thinking back over your past experiences, have you ever been tricked or forced into doing any kind of work that you did not want to do?
3. Sometimes people are prevented from leaving an unfair or unsafe work situation by their employers. Have you ever been afraid to leave or quit a work situation due to fears of violence or threats of harm to yourself or your family?
4. Some employers think that in exchange for the work their employees do, they can pay them in other ways even though they've never gotten their permission. Has someone you worked for ever controlled the money you earned, or kept money you earned in exchange for transportation, food, or rent without your consent?
5. Sometimes young people who are homeless or who are having difficulties with their families have very few options to survive or fulfill their basic needs, such as food and shelter. Have you ever received anything in exchange for sex (e.g.: a place to stay, gifts, or food)?^a

In the interest of identifying familial trafficking, interviewers should be aware that the parties controlling the person or placing them at risk might be related to the youth.

a. Makini Chisolm-Straker, Jeremy Sze, Julia Einbond, James White, & Hanni Stoklosa, "Screening for Human Trafficking among Homeless Young Adults," *Children and Youth Services Review* 98 (Mar. 2019), 72–79, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2018.12.014> (last visited May 27, 2022).

to use drugs. They provide drugs to ensure the victim is in a euphoric mood prior to sex work, to reward productivity of sex work, and to maintain control by initiating withdrawal and then providing drugs to alleviate symptoms. Sex work then becomes the strategy by which victims pay for their own addiction or that of the trafficker.¹²

Pam Strickland, Founder and CEO of NC Stop Human Trafficking, states that among the people her organization reaches, there are many who simply do not want to believe that parents will sell their children for money or drugs. Strickland, whose advocacy extends to professional audiences, says, "What I've been preaching most recently to law enforcement and social workers is this: When you discover that a child has been sexually abused or assaulted by a family member

12. Erica Koegler, Claire A. Wood, Lilly Bahlinger, & Sharon D. Johnson, "Traffickers' Use of Substances to Recruit and Control Victims of Domestic Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in the American Midwest," *Anti-Trafficking Review*, no. 18 (April 2022), 103–120, <https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201222187> (last visited June 9, 2022).

(or anyone else), don't stop asking questions. Keep going. Were photos or videos taken of the abuse? Were those images shared with others, either online or in person? Did that abuser allow anyone else access to the child?" These professionals understandably do not want to further traumatize the child by asking more questions, but Strickland believes more cases of trafficking by family members and others will likely be uncovered if they do pursue the inquiry.¹³

Identify the Cases Accurately

Why do we care whether the focus in any case of abuse or neglect highlights the offense of familial trafficking? The first concern is that we are failing to identify these cases at all. In fact, not all screening tools provide options to identify the trafficker or buyer as family members other than husbands or boyfriends.

Additional concerns immediately follow in that if we are not identifying the cases, we are also not holding the perpetrators accountable, adequately protecting the victims from subsequent abuse, or accurately addressing the trauma the victims have experienced.

When concluding a presentation in a workshop about human trafficking, I asked if any of the local government staff in the audience were now reconsidering any situations they had previously encountered. Two Child Protective Services workers spoke up about investigating a mother for neglect of her preadolescent children. They had found a video on the mother's phone in which the two children were engaged in sexual contact with each other. Given their gaps in understanding at the time, the workers had not considered that the video might have been made to sell, and trafficking charges might also have been appropriate.

If this scenario (of a financially stressed and under-resourced single parent living in a rural area) did prove to involve trafficking, it would be consistent with the research findings about situational high-risk characteristics that will be discussed later in this bulletin.

Also, because we are not identifying the cases, we are not learning about the dynamics and impact of familial abuse, not developing treatment modalities that specifically take this form of trauma into account, and not designing services to accommodate their unique circumstances.

The gaps in our knowledge about familial trafficking show up in practical terms as a void. This topic does not receive the same volume of attention as do other dynamics related to trafficking. In the comprehensive 2017 publication *Human Trafficking Is a Public Health Issue: A Paradigm Expansion in the United States*, familial trafficking is mentioned on only two of the 441 pages: once in a case description and once in a discussion of the limited applicability of a commonly used descriptive model of the stages of human trafficking health effects, which assumes that victims are transported to places where they will be marketed and sold.¹⁴ Since victims of familial trafficking can be exploited within their own homes and communities, intervention/prevention/response strategies that target the travel/transit phase of trafficking will miss those victims entirely.

13. Email exchange between Pam Strickland and the author, June 29, 2022.

14. Makini Chisolm-Straker & Hanni Stoklosa, eds., *Human Trafficking Is a Public Health Issue: A Paradigm Expansion in the United States* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017), 190, 215, <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-47824-1>. The stages of trafficking health effects included in the model are (1) pre-departure/recruitment, (2) travel, (3) destination/exploitation, (4) reception/detention, and (5) integration/reintegration.

Collect Data

No one anywhere can provide comprehensive information about any form of sex and labor trafficking. Instead, we piece together what we know by looking at data sets that might be limited by geography, population, or function. Examples of these focused data sets include those collected by law enforcement agencies for the jurisdictions they serve,¹⁵ an agency serving homeless youth in ten cities across the United States,¹⁶ and the Federal Human Trafficking Report that tracks criminal prosecutions.¹⁷

Familial trafficking might be reported as a subset of some data sources and not identified at all in others.

Step one of collecting accurate data is simply to provide a box to check when the trafficker is a family member. Even if the right box to check exists, though, the connection might be overlooked because both the victims and the service provider might be reluctant or lack awareness to identify the exploitation as human trafficking, particularly “when there [is] a non-monetary exchange as part of the transaction, such as a mother allowing a person to have sex with her daughter for drugs.”¹⁸

As an example of the reluctance of a victim to identify her experience of parental exploitation as sex trafficking, see Sidebar 2 about actress Demi Moore’s experience, which she describes in her 2019 memoir.

Hannah Hopper is the Community Outreach and Awareness Specialist at the Hope United Survivor Network in Gaston County, North Carolina. She agrees that victims/survivors of human trafficking are unlikely to identify as such. For that reason, she focuses on the risk factors that her clients experience without using the term “trafficking” and tries to identify strategies for increasing their safety. Using an evidence-based risk assessment tool enables a neutral evaluation that reveals the nuances of the person’s situation.¹⁹ “They are more likely to be willing to work on reducing harm without that label of ‘human trafficking,’ even though that is what they have experienced.”²⁰

Shawna Pagano, Director of Education and Community Engagement at Pat’s Place Child Advocacy Center in Charlotte, North Carolina, reports that “children who are abused and trafficked often do not realize what is happening to them is abuse. After all, if you have been

15. Paul Woolverton, “Cumberland Leads N.C. in Human Trafficking Charges,” *The Fayetteville Observer*, January 19, 2019, <https://www.fayobserver.com/story/news/crime/2019/01/19/cumberland-county-leads-nc-in-human-trafficking-charges/5989305007/>.

16. Laura T. Murphy, “Labor and Sex Trafficking among Homeless Youth: A Ten-City Study” (Modern Slavery Research Project, Loyola University, with Covenant House International, 2016). The Executive Summary is available at <https://www.covenanthouse.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Loyola%20Multi-City%20Executive%20Summary%20FINAL.pdf>.

17. The 2021 Federal Human Trafficking Report is produced by the Human Trafficking Institute and is available at <https://traffickinginstitute.org/federal-human-trafficking-report>.

18. Linda A. Smith, Samantha Healy Vardaman, & Melissa A. Snow, *The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking* (Shared Hope International, May 2009), 7, https://sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/SHI_National_Report_on_DMST_2009.pdf (last visited June 21, 2022).

19. Hopper’s organization uses the WestCoast Children’s Clinic’s Commercial Sexual Exploitation Identification tool (CSE-IT, pronounced “see it”), an assessment tool for children in foster care who are ten or older. For more information on the tool, go to <https://www.westcoastcc.org/cse-it/> (last visited Aug. 9, 2022).

20. Interview of Hopper by the author, August 9, 2022.

Sidebar 2. Demi Moore

In her 2019 memoir, *Inside Out*, actress Demi Moore describes her childhood as being unstable due to her parents' behaviors. They moved the household frequently, fighting with each other, as well as with friends and family, along the way. Any financial or emotional security was short-term due to their addictions and dysfunctions.

When she was fifteen, Ms. Moore lived with her mother in Los Angeles. They were dining in a popular restaurant when a man who appeared to be financially successful came over to introduce himself. He offered them a ride home in his car, and Ms. Moore sat beside him in the front seat while her mother sat in the back. He then began grooming Ms. Moore: taking her to lunch, picking her up at school, and generally acting like a friend of the family.

One day, she came home from school to find the man alone in the apartment, and he raped her.

"I have blotted out the exact sequence of events—the details that led from me opening the front door, to wondering if my mother had given him a key, to feeling trapped in my own home with a man three times my age and twice my size, to him raping me.

"For decades, I didn't even think of it as rape . . . I couldn't see that—as someone with no guidance or grounding, no sense of worth, someone who'd spent her whole life contorting herself to meet other people's expectations—I was an easy mark for a predator."^a

Her mother decided they needed to move again, and Ms. Moore was glad to leave the apartment where she had been assaulted. A week later, the man showed up to help them move, much to her distress. When her mother was busy unpacking boxes in the new apartment, he turned to Ms. Moore and said, "How does it feel to be whored by your mother for five hundred dollars?"^b

Ms. Moore states she never knew the exact nature of the transaction or how he came to have a key to the apartment. Perhaps there was no clear discussion of what he would get for the transaction, or perhaps her mother understood exactly what he expected in return and agreed to it.^c

Here are some key factors to consider in this account:

- Ms. Moore was vulnerable to abuse due to her unstable home life, lack of oversight or support, and the gambling and substance abuse addictions of her parents.
- Prior to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000, there were no laws related to domestic human trafficking. Legally, this abuse would not have been labeled as such, even if it had been reported to authorities at the time.
- Ms. Moore today does not use the term "trafficking" in the book or her interviews about the book. That is common. Victims of sex or labor trafficking rarely identify themselves as such, even today.

The TVPA defines "commercial sex act" as "any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person."^d When the victim is a minor, it is not necessary to demonstrate that the trafficker employed force, fraud, or coercion to enable the transaction because children cannot consent to commercial sex.

According to Ms. Moore's quote from the sex buyer, the man's access to her for the purpose of sexual contact was purchased by giving \$500 to her mother. That is human trafficking.

a. Demi Moore, *Inside Out: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 2019), 57–59.

b. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

c. *Ibid.*

d. 22 U.S. Code § 7102 (2020), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2020-title22/pdf/USCODE-2020-title22-chap78-sec7102.pdf> (last visited May 26, 2022).

abused your entire life, abuse is normal for you.” Although she has only encountered a small number of cases identified as familial trafficking, in each of the cases, “the child’s parent acting as the trafficker was engaged in sex trafficking of the child. The average age of the child was much younger (ten years old) than in other cases of human trafficking.”

Pagano also describes how the family might operate in isolation. “The children who were being exploited by a parent generally stayed in an insulated environment (they may be homeschooled, live in a rural area, etc.). The kids are not interacting with people who may recognize signs of human trafficking, which makes it even more challenging to intervene.”²¹

One of the larger data sets available in the United States comes from the National Human Trafficking Hotline and its allied organization, Polaris, which uses hotline data to inform our understanding of the nature of sex and labor trafficking in the United States. The Polaris report, “Human Trafficking Trends in 2020,” shares descriptive data about calls made to the hotline.²² Their numbers do not represent the total criminal cases or total incidents of human trafficking in the United States since they rely exclusively on calls made to the hotline.

Polaris reports that while recruitment by family members and intimate partners is always highly reported for all forms of trafficking for victims of all ages, it was particularly pronounced in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced a worldwide shutdown.

“In 2020, among all forms of trafficking whose recruitment relationships were known (4,142), the proportion of victims recruited by a family member or caregiver increased significantly—from 21% of all victims in 2019 to 31% in 2020—a 47% increase....²³

“In 2020, [in] situations of sex trafficking or sex and labor trafficking combined, of the 2,448 victims whose recruitment was known, 42% were brought into trafficking by a member of their own families....²⁴

“In labor trafficking situations, by contrast, of the 1,572 victims whose recruitment was known ... 15% were recruited into trafficking by a member of their own family.”²⁵

Rachel Parker, Anti-Human Trafficking Services Program Manager of World Relief Triad, works with both domestic and immigrant victims of sex and/or labor trafficking. She reflects that “labor trafficking is the most hidden of human trafficking, and when familial ties enter as a way to recruit, obtain, and maintain a person in a labor situation, it gets even trickier, yet it does happen. An example of such a case occurred in North Carolina when a U.S. citizen recruited her foreign-born mother-in-law to join their family to help with the care of grandchildren and the upkeep of the woman’s home. Once the mother-in-law joined the young family, the dynamic shifted from her being a family member helping out to one of domestic servitude that involved abuse, intimidation, and fear.”²⁶

21. Email exchange between Shawna Pagano and the author, July 26, 2022.

22. The Polaris report, “Human Trafficking Trends in 2020: An Analysis of Data from the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline,” is available at <https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Human-Trafficking-Trends-in-2020-by-Polaris.pdf> (last visited May 12, 2022).

23. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

26. Email exchange between Rachel Parker and the author, July 25, 2022.

Key Research Findings

Research is beginning to make up for the lack of attention paid to familial trafficking. The following are key points of learning that warrant discussion in our communities.

A report published by Shared Hope International in 2009 referenced a staff member from a shelter for at-risk youth in Las Vegas who estimated that “potentially as many as 30% of domestically trafficked minors who receive services ... are exploited by family members.” In all ten of the service agencies studied in the report, workers recounted cases in which parents or guardians were the traffickers and also said there was a “reluctance and/or lack of awareness to view such exploitation as sex trafficking,” especially when the benefit exchanged for sex was something other than money.²⁷

One critical finding that rural communities should consider is that “younger girls in non-urban areas are more likely to be trafficked by their parents than those in urban areas, and at younger ages.”²⁸ The same article summarizes research that found “that the younger the [victim], the more likely [the child was] introduced to the sex trade by a relative.”²⁹

Research attempting to compare the trafficking experiences of both male and female minors found that familial sex trafficking was a common initiation into commercial sexual exploitation.³⁰

A study of Kentucky’s child welfare system provided important insight into questions related to the characteristics of the victims, circumstances, responses, and outcomes in 698 alleged cases of child trafficking reported between 2013 and 2017.³¹

What victim characteristics are associated with family-controlled trafficking cases? Those victims were more likely to have a higher number of perpetrators, live in rural communities, and be younger.³²

What are the system responses associated with family-controlled trafficking cases? The reports are more likely to come from anonymous community members than from professionals.³³

What were the case outcomes? Perpetration by a family member predicted that the case would not be substantiated.³⁴

One novel finding in the Kentucky study was that these cases were less likely to involve drugs than cases involving nonrelative perpetrators.³⁵ In contrast, a study of thirty-one young children living in a predominantly rural state who were referred for behavioral health assessment found

27. Smith, Vardaman, & Snow, *National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking*, 7.

28. Jody Raphael, “Parents as Pimps: Survivor Accounts of Trafficking of Children in the United States,” *Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence* 4, no. 4 (2020), 13, <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol4/iss4/7>.

29. Ibid.

30. Jennifer Cole, “Service Providers’ Perspectives on Sex Trafficking of Male Minors: Comparing Background and Trafficking Situations of Male and Female Victims,” *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 35, no. 6 (Aug. 2018).

31. Emily E. Edwards, Jennifer S. Middleton, & Jennifer Cole, “Family-Controlled Trafficking in the United States: Victim Characteristics, System Response, and Case Outcomes,” *Journal of Human Trafficking*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2022.2039866>.

32. Ibid., p. 11.

33. Ibid., p. 12.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

family members trafficking children in exchange for illicit drugs in more than 81 percent of the cases. Nine of the thirty-one children were also given drugs to ensure their compliance.³⁶

Conclusion

Figuring out where and how to start can be intimidating, but it's important to know that both individuals and communities can make progress in addressing human trafficking. Lincoln County tells its origin story of building awareness in Appendix A, page 14. A professional in anti-trafficking efforts in North Carolina provides advice about building on local assets in Appendix B, page 15. Child advocacy centers and rape crisis centers exist in most North Carolina communities and are well-positioned to build on existing relationships, provide community education, and serve as advocates for victims of trafficking.

In conclusion, here are tangible steps any helping professional can use to become more informed about and effective in dealing with familial trafficking.

1. Gain education and understanding about sex and labor trafficking. Many excellent resources are available online for free, and there are professional groups in North Carolina and across the nation. Please do not rely on the inaccurate information commonly shared through social media. Appendix C, page 17, provides the websites of key state and national organizations upon which professionals in the field rely.
2. Building broad community awareness about the indicators of and resources for trafficking is important for all cases of sex and labor trafficking but particularly critical for familial trafficking because those cases are more likely to be reported by anonymous community members rather than by professionals who work with vulnerable populations (teachers, health-care and social workers, law enforcement officers, etc.)
3. If your organization assesses risk factors and keeps data about the characteristics of the people you serve, review your screening tools to ensure you ask about the indicators of human trafficking. Include a category of offense that accurately labels the situation as suspected or reported familial trafficking.
4. If your organization serves or investigates people who are or who live with substance abusers, ensure your forms and protocols inquire about how those addictions are financially supported.
5. If your organization serves victims/survivors of human trafficking, consider creating or joining a local multidisciplinary team to share information about local incidents and to better coordinate efforts to address the problem.³⁷

36. Ginny Sprang & Jennifer Cole, "Familial Sex Trafficking of Minors: Trafficking Conditions, Clinical Presentation, and System Involvement," *Journal of Family Violence* 33, no. 3 (April 2018), 189, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-018-9950-y>.

37. One guide to creating a multidisciplinary team, developed through a national collaboration, is the "Multidisciplinary Collaborative Model for Anti-Human Trafficking Task Forces Development & Operations Roadmap," available on the website of the North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault at <https://nccasa.org/slug/multidisciplinary-collaborative-model-for-anti-human-trafficking-task-forces-development-operations-roadmap/>. Another resource that provides guidance for starting and maintaining multidisciplinary teams is available on the School of Government at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, website at <https://www.sog.unc.edu/publications/bulletins/multi-disciplinary-teams>. This bulletin was written for teams that address adult protection, but the advice and exercises contained within apply to any type of multidisciplinary team.

Appendix A. Lincoln County, North Carolina: How a Community Can Initiate Efforts to Collectively Learn More about Human Trafficking

Until recently, trafficking seemed like an abstract idea in Lincoln County, North Carolina. Sherry Reinhardt, Executive Director of the Lincoln County Coalition Against Child Abuse & Child Advocacy Center (CAC), works with a multidisciplinary team (MDT) that focuses on identifying and responding to child abuse. Their team had encountered situations that made them consider whether they had the potential to charge human trafficking offenses in addition to abuse and neglect. They realized they needed to learn more about sex and labor trafficking and used resources at hand to take the first step.

Misinformation abounds in many communities, Reinhardt said, and “most people equate trafficking with either prostitution or kidnapped kids taken to other countries.” Fortunately, her MDT was aware enough to know that this is a simplistic and inaccurate perspective. When a situation arose that involved an uncle abusing and photographing his niece, they wondered if he had traded or sold the images. They were also concerned about the large immigrant population that works on area farms and their vulnerability to trafficking.

The accreditation standards of child advocacy centers require them to support the training of their multidisciplinary teams, and Lincoln County was able to use CAC state funding to do so. Using that foundation of motivation and financial support, they decided to host a one-day conference on human trafficking in May 2022. The speakers were able to provide foundational learning about trafficking as well as nuanced guidance in interviewing victims and building cases against offenders. About ninety-seven people attended, including CAC volunteers, local government staff, elected officials, law enforcement officers, and concerned citizens. Reinhardt advises that organizers “seek the information that will best meet the interests of their communities, whether that means starting with basic definitions or focusing on advanced skills.”

Since that time, they have built on existing relationships to expand their shared learning. For example, the conference attendees and organizers who also participate in the local Rotary club were able to influence the agenda of the next district Rotary meeting, which will now focus on human trafficking.

Reinhardt said that when she encountered a building inspector who had attended the training, he explained how he’d changed. “I look now,” he told her. “We saw the signs before but didn’t understand what we were seeing.” He was referring to plastic bins of clothing and personal belongings stored under massage tables in a nail salon/massage parlor, an indicator that the workers are not able to leave the premises.

The Lincoln County experience shows how communities can start wherever they are in their awareness, appropriately using resources that might not seem to have a specific focus on human trafficking and allowing their unique situation to dictate the next steps.¹

1. The information and quotations in this sidebar are from the author’s interview and email exchange with Sherry Reinhardt and Debbie Perry, board president, June 30, 2022.

Appendix B. Insights from an Anti-Human Trafficking Advocate

by Courtney Dunkerton, Human Trafficking Program Coordinator for the North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault

The realization that much of the commercial sexual exploitation of children is being perpetrated by family members and caregivers adds to the already bleak landscape of child sex trafficking. Now is not the time to throw up our hands in despair. It is the time to lean into this information and proceed with evidence and trauma-informed policies and funding to reimagine the systems and environmental factors that are complicit in this type of child abuse.

It is also disturbing to face the truth that a commercial market for child sexual abuse materials (CSAM) exists in which even the youngest of babies are abused. Even more soul-withering is to accept the fact that it is their families who create, trade, or sell most of it.

In 2016, a shocking case of child trafficking received publicity. A mother in Eden, North Carolina, “sold” her thirteen- and fifteen-year-old daughters with mental disabilities to local men who raped them in the barber shop belonging to one of the perpetrators. The men paid \$5 to \$20 for each act of sexual abuse. The mother was sentenced to a minimum of twenty years in jail. She said of her actions: “Drugs did this to me and I’m sorry. I’ve made some terrible decisions I’m not proud of ... I am truly wholeheartedly sorry for what I’ve done to our family. I broke up a lot of families, and it hurts knowing that I did so.”¹

Many of us were not aware then that this horrible case was, in fact, not an outlier but a situation experienced by many children across the nation. Yet for many advocates and practitioners, family trafficking is not at all a new phenomenon.

In an interview for *The Shreveport Times*, Alex Person, a child forensic interviewer for the Gingerbread House, the local Child Advocacy Center, summed up the origin stories of child victims, saying that “children usually are trafficked in one of two ways. They fall in line with a trafficker, who gains their loyalty by offering them protection or a false sense of being loved, or they enter the lifestyle through ‘homegrown trafficking’—sold by their parents, relatives, or caregivers.”²

Studies are showing that Child Protective Services investigations are more likely to find cases of neglect than sexual abuse with these kids. Systems involvement include health care, social services, and schools. Modifications in screening and intervention must take into consideration patterns unique to family trafficking, which include findings of neglect rather than sexual abuse, excessive school absences, emergency room visits, and significant mental health needs. Also important to note is the finding that these kids are less involved in the juvenile justice system and are not the runaways we find in other expressions of child trafficking, most likely because familial trafficking involves younger children who are greatly dependent on their abusive family for daily survival.

1. “‘Drugs Did This to Me and I’m Sorry’: Eden Mom, 2 Defendants Sentenced in Child Prostitution Case,” Fox8 WGHP, May 31, 2016, <https://myfox8.com/news/drugs-did-this-to-me-and-im-sorry-eden-mom-2-defendants-sentenced-in-child-prostitution-case/> (last visited July 25, 2022).

2. Lex Talamo, “Shreveport a Hub for Child Sex Trafficking,” *The Shreveport Times*, May 25, 2016, <https://www.shreveporttimes.com/story/news/watchdog/trafficking/2016/05/25/shreveport-hub-child-sex-trafficking/82599304/> (last visited July 25, 2022).

Appendix B. Insights from an Anti-Human Trafficking Advocate (*continued*)

Recommendation: Include familial trafficking examples in outreach and awareness materials.

The experiences of victims/survivors should be reflected in human trafficking outreach and awareness materials in which family members are depicted as traffickers. For example, when we discuss online safety, there is often an assumption that families are safe, and “others” are unsafe. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. We must broaden our narratives to include all types of trafficking whereby victims can recognize their stories in them.

Recommendation: Use the relational foundation that local advocates offer.

The same rural communities in which family trafficking has greater prevalence and severity of abuse may also be the communities that experience a high distrust of government and “outsiders,” valuing isolation from the outside world. This has implications for outreach where we can only move at the speed of trust. Training those who already have the social capital and influence with those in rural communities can be an effective strategy. Building on and investing in the expertise and community relationships of child advocacy centers and rape crisis centers makes sense.

Recommendation: Connect the dots to substance abuse.

We must explore the interrelation of opioid use in a community and the drug-facilitated sex trafficking of minors by family members. Not all screening tools and practices include questions that assess this risk.

Recommendation: Use accurate language.

Children are *commercially sexually abused*—not *sexually involved* or *in relationships with adults*. They are not *child prostitutes*; instead, they are *commercially sexually exploited*. Adults do not create *child porn*; they create *child sexual abuse materials* (CSAM). Terms that soften or misdirect responsibility for the abuse do not accurately describe the offenses.

A Challenge: Address the links between structural racism and child trafficking.

Moving from the community level to the systemic perspective, we should build our awareness of how racism affects the incidence of minor sex trafficking. The article “Addressing Racism in the Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking of Black Girls: The Role of Public Health Critical Race Praxis” identifies structural racism as a social determinant that puts certain groups at increased risk of being trafficked.³ Racial bias shows up when iconic female victims are primarily portrayed as being white. Myths are reinforced when black girls are seen as more mature than they really are, “fast,” and thus complicit in their sexual exploitation. As long as misinformation and myths are repeated, victims of color will be considered less deserving of help and more likely to be criminalized because of their exploitation. Employing a public health approach will enable primary prevention within systems that tend to oppress youth of color.

3. Mekeila C. Cook, PhuongThao D. Le, & Jennifer García, “Addressing Racism in the Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking of Black Girls: The Role of Public Health Critical Race Praxis,” *Public Health Reports* 137, no. 1S (July/Aug. 2022), 10S–16S, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00333549211058735> (last visited July 25, 2022).

Appendix C. State and National Anti-Human Trafficking Organizations

There are now many organizations addressing human trafficking. Some focus on types of trafficking, dynamics within trafficking, or populations affected by trafficking. Unfortunately, some organizations perpetuate myths and misinformation. To gain reliable information about the dynamics and incidence of sex and labor trafficking, explore the following websites:

The North Carolina Human Trafficking Commission—<https://www.nccourts.gov/commissions/human-trafficking-commission>

The North Carolina Coalition Against Human Trafficking—<https://www.nccaht.org/>

The North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault—<https://nccasa.org/our-work/human-trafficking/>

NC Stop Human Trafficking—www.ncstophumantrafficking.org

The National Human Trafficking Hotline—<https://humantraffickinghotline.org/>

The Polaris Project—<https://polarisproject.org/human-trafficking/>

Additional bulletins written specifically for local government audiences are available through the School of Government at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, website at <https://cplg.sog.unc.edu/learn-now/human-trafficking>.