

# UNDERSTANDING TRAFFICKING

## **TRAFFICKING OFTEN STARTS WITH TRUST AND MANIPULATION**

Victims may know their traffickers and even feel affection or dependency towards them. Traffickers prey on vulnerable individuals, offering material support like housing or promises of wealth, or emotional support, creating a false sense of belonging. Contrary to popular belief, violent kidnapping is rare in these situations.

## **TRAFFICKERS CAN BE ANYONE REGARDLESS OF GENDER, RACE, OR SOCIAL STATUS**

They could be intimate partners, family members, friends, or even employers. This diversity makes it challenging to identify them, as they operate within familiar circles.

## **ANYONE CAN FALL VICTM TO TRAFFICKING**

But certain groups are more vulnerable due to their needs. Those living in poverty, unstable housing, or dealing with trauma or addiction are at higher risk. Sadly, marginalized communities such as people of color, immigrants, and LGBTQ+ individuals face increased exploitation due to historical discrimination and inequality.

## **LEAVING ISN'T EASY OR SAFE**

Why victims don't "just leave" is a question asked by many, but the reality is complex. In the grip of trafficking, victims often don't perceive themselves as such. They've been cleverly manipulated or "groomed" into believing they're making their own choices. Emotional ties can be as binding as physical restraints, with victims relying on their traffickers for basic needs like money or shelter. Threats against them or their loved ones, as well as the fear of violence, further entrench them in their situations.

## **VICTIMS FIND FREEDOM THROUGH VARIOUS MEANS**

There's no one-size-fits-all answer. Yet, amidst the darkness, resilience shines through. Some survivors reach a critical realization that they deserve better and fight for their freedom, While others may receive aid from service providers or anti-trafficking organizations. It's important to dispel the notion of "rescuing" adult victims, as survivors ultimately reclaim their agency.

## **WE CAN REDUCE AND PREVENT TRAFFICKING**

Dealing with human trafficking involves confronting its underlying causes deeply rooted in societal inequalities and economic gaps. Although holding traffickers responsible and aiding survivors are essential steps, they alone are not enough. To truly combat trafficking, we must join forces to strengthen support networks for at-risk individuals and dismantle the societal conditions, like homelessness, domestic violence, poverty, and discrimination, that make them vulnerable to exploitation.

***By understanding these dynamics and working together as a community, we can strive towards a brighter future where all individuals are free from trafficking and exploitation.***