



# Human sex trafficking in hotels is a major concern for hoteliers

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Because of the transient nature of guests who utilize lodging accommodations and the privacy afforded to these temporary guests, hotels have become prime venues for the exploitation of “at risk” individuals through sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Check any newswire or perform an Internet search and stories of human trafficking and sexual exploitation invariably connect to or through hotels in some form. Here are just a few examples:

From 2006 to 2011, members of an organized gang in San Diego ran a child sex trafficking ring of at least 16 girls out of various area hotels. At one hotel, staff members neglected to take any action to protect the long parade of children who were being ushered in to be raped. Furthermore, two members of

the hotel staff permitted the gang members to use the hotel computer to post online ads advertising sex with the minors. Staff members also knowingly rented rooms for use in prostitution, charged higher room rates for rooms to be used for child sex trafficking and pocketed the difference, and warned the pimps if police were nearby.

Last month in Oakland, California, government officials sought to shut down two local limited-service hotels that have allegedly been hubs of prostitution and drug activity for several years. Officials said there have been numerous incidents of rape, kidnapping and violence - many involving victims as young as 14 who were forced to work as prostitutes.

In Orlando, a Florida man was arrested on charges of sex-trafficking last month at a full-service branded hotel. He was accused of selling sex with a 16-year-old girl and coercing a second young girl into prostitution who was “extremely scared” of disobeying him after he had physically abused her.

In December 2008, the ringleader of a sex-trafficking ring that spanned at least three states, was sentenced in federal court in Bridgeport, Connecticut, on federal civil rights charges for organizing and leading a sex-trafficking operation that exploited as many as 20 females, including minors. He admitted that he recruited minors to engage in prostitution; that he was the organizer of a sex-trafficking venture; and that he used force, fraud, and coercion to compel the victims to commit commercial sex acts from which he obtained the proceeds. According to the indictment, the defendant lured victims to his operation with promises of modeling contracts and a glamorous lifestyle and then forced them into a grueling schedule of dancing and performing at strip clubs and then forced the victims to walk the streets until 4 or 5 a.m. propositioning customers. The indictment also alleged that he beat many of the victims to force them to work for him and that he also used physical abuse as punishment for disobeying the stringent rules he imposed to isolate and control them.



## What is sex trafficking?

Sex trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act is under the age of 18 years. Enactment of the *Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000* (TVPA) made sex trafficking a serious violation of United States law. Sexual traffickers use psychological as well as physical coercion and bondage to force their slaves to remain compliant.

Not only is human sex trafficking slavery but it is big business. It is the fastest-growing business of organized crime and the third-largest criminal enterprise in the world. The majority of sex trafficking is international, with victims taken from such places as South and Southeast Asia, the former Soviet Union, Central and South America, and other less developed areas and moved to more developed ones, including Asia, the Middle East, Western Europe, and North America. And it is this movement of victims from underdeveloped countries to more developed ones where hotels become initially exposed to sex trafficking.

Although anti-trafficking organizations can't be sure how many people are forced into commercial sex work, the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking estimates that human trafficking is a \$32 billion business worldwide, with \$15.5 billion coming from industrialized countries.

Victims of trafficking are forced into various forms of commercial sexual exploitation including prostitution, pornography, stripping, live-sex shows, mail-order brides, military prostitution and sex tourism. Victims trafficked into prostitution and pornography are usually involved in the most exploitive forms of commercial sex operations. Sex trafficking operations can be found not only in highly-visible systems such as street prostitution, but also in more underground venues such as closed brothels that operate out of residential homes. Sex trafficking also takes place in a variety of public and private locations such as massage parlors, spas, strip clubs and other fronts for prostitution, including some hotels and motels. Unfortunately, it is these handful of lodging establishments who either permit and support sexual trafficking or tacitly "look the other way" that has created a negative image of hotels as an inviting environment for human sex trafficking to occur.

## Domestic trafficking

Unfortunately, sex trafficking also occurs domestically. The United States not only faces an influx of international victims but also has its own homegrown problem of interstate sex trafficking of minors. Although comprehensive research to document the number of children engaged in prostitution in the United States is lacking, an estimated 293,000 American youths currently are at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The majority of these victims are runaways or "thrown-away" youths who live on the streets and become victims of prostitution. These children generally come from homes where they have been abused or from families who have abandoned them. Often, they become involved in prostitution to support themselves financially or to get the things they feel they need or want (e.g., drugs). Other young people are recruited into prostitution through forced abduction, pressure from parents, or through deceptive agreements between parents and traffickers. Once these children become involved in prostitution, they often are forced to travel far from their homes and, as a result, are isolated from their friends and family. Few children in this situation can develop new relationships with peers or adults other than the person victimizing them. The lifestyle of such youths revolves around violence, forced drug use, and constant threats. The average age at which girls first become victims of prostitution is 12 to 14. It is not only girls; boys and transgender youth enter into prostitution between the ages of 11 and 13 on average.

### How to possibly identify a human trafficking victim

According to the U.S. Department of State, the following are all possible indicators that someone might be a victim:

- Living with employer scripted and rehearsed
- Poor living conditions • Employer is holding identity documents
- Multiple people in cramped space • Signs of physical abuse
- Inability to speak to individual alone • Submissive or fearful
- Answers appear to be • Unpaid or paid very little
- Under 18 and in prostitution

If you are able to communicate with the suspected victim without jeopardizing their safety, the U.S. Department of State recommends you ask these questions:

- Can you leave your job if you want to?
- Can you come and go as you please?
- Have you been hurt or threatened if you tried to leave?
- Has your family been threatened?
- Do you live with your employer?
- Where do you sleep and eat?
- Are you in debt to your employer?
- Do you have your passport/identification? Who has it?

If you believe an individual in your hotel is a victim you must alert the proper officials. Contact your local police station or country's human trafficking hotline.

For the United States, contact the National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline at telephone number 1-888-373-7888.

Source: The CNN Freedom Project

## **International victims and what they face**

Victims of sex trafficking can be women or men, girls or boys, but the majority are women and girls. There are a number of common patterns for luring victims into situations of sex trafficking, including:

- A promise of a good job in another country
- A false marriage proposal turned into a bondage situation
- Being sold into the sex trade by parents, husbands, boyfriends
- Being kidnapped by traffickers

Sex traffickers frequently subject their victims to debt-bondage, an illegal practice in which the traffickers tell their victims that they owe money (often relating to the victims' living expenses and transport into the country) and that they must pledge their personal services to repay the debt. Traffickers often take their victims' money and identity documents, including birth certificates, passports, and drivers' licenses to prevent them from being able to flee, secure long-distance transportation, or provide for themselves. If a victim has no ability to support themselves or escape, they become dependent on the trafficker to survive.

Sex traffickers use a variety of methods to "condition" their victims including starvation, confinement, beatings, physical abuse, rape, gang rape, threats of violence to the victims and the victims' families, forced drug use, and the threat of shaming their victims by revealing their activities to their family and their families' friends.

Victims face numerous health risks. Physical risks include drug and alcohol addiction; physical injuries; traumatic brain injury resulting in memory loss, dizziness, headaches, numbness; sexually transmitted diseases; sterility, miscarriages, menstrual problems; other diseases; and forced or coerced abortions. Psychological harms include mind/body separation/disassociated ego states, shame, grief, fear, distrust, hatred of men, self-hatred, suicide, and suicidal thoughts. Victims are at risk for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – acute anxiety, depression, insomnia, physical hyper alertness, self-loathing that is long-lasting and resistant to change (complex-PTSD). Victims may also suffer from traumatic bonding – a form of coercive control in which the perpetrator instills in the victim fear as well as gratitude for being allowed to live.

## **How hotels can respond**

Hotels can take a number of steps to prevent and respond to sex trafficking. If you think you have come in contact with a victim of human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1-888-373-7888. This hotline will help you determine if you have encountered victims of human trafficking, will identify local resources available in your community to help victims, and will help you coordinate with local social service organizations to help protect and serve victims so they can begin the process of restoring their lives. For more information on human trafficking visit: [www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking).

The *Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism*, also known as 'The Code' is a set of voluntary guidelines developed by ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Sex Trafficking, Tourism and Pornography), in cooperation with the travel and tourism industry. Hotels can adopt The Code as part of a strategy to help prevent what is arguably the worst form of sex trafficking – child sex trafficking. The Code has been signed by over 1000 travel and tourism companies including major hotel groups Accor, Carlson, Hilton, Wyndham and Millennium. These groups vary in the extent to which they implement it across their operations. Hotels can extend their implementation of The Code to other forms of sex trafficking.

Training of hotel staff is key. Hotel managers may never spot the signs of sex trafficking, but housekeeping and room service employees often know when something isn't right. They are the employees that are in the guestrooms where much of the evidence of slavery or sex trafficking will be present. Train employees not just what to look for and to report indicators of exploitation to management in a timely manner, but educate all employees about the social and human costs of this horrendous exploitation. And remind them that the hotel's reputation and perhaps its financial stability (and hence their individual job security), can be adversely impacted by the ongoing existence of such illegal activity.

Hotels can really be part of the solution to ending this systemic pattern of exploitation against at risk individuals. Remember, these are crimes being committed and these are people being mistreated. No respectable hotel should want to be associated with it. ✧