



HUMAN TRAFFICKING

by

Human Trafficking Immersion Team 2020

Elizabeth Holt, Rachel Kingery, Kelsey Larus, Nathan Moubray, Matthew Oatts,
Lauren Powell, Liz Reilly-Brown, Ivy Sager, Mel Stubbins, Hollie Woodruff

Introduction

Human trafficking, often confused with issues of immigration and migration, is a crime involving the exploitation of an individual for the purposes of compelled labor or a commercial sex act through the use of force, fraud, or coercion.¹ While the thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery and involuntary servitude in the United States in 1865, our LMR Immersion Group research revealed to us that the market for forced labor and commercial sex never actually disappeared, and having evolved with time and technologies, today trafficking is an underground crime that continues to impact women, men and children in Richmond. Human trafficking is believed to be the fastest growing crime in the world and the second largest criminal enterprise globally. But it is not a problem impacting people predominantly abroad; 80% of confirmed cases represent American citizens.²

Findings

Richmond has a long history with human trafficking, as a major market for the sale of enslaved people in 18th and 19th centuries, and we decided to dive into the discomfort of learning about the present-day human trafficking market and its ramifications for people living in the Richmond Region. We began with interviews with Linda Tissiere of the Richmond YWCA, Cathy Easter of Safe Harbor Shelter and Colonel Jeffrey Katz, Chesterfield County Chief of Police, which opened our eyes to the reality of human trafficking in our Region and the experiences of victims. We learned that Richmond ranks in the top 20 for most prolific cases for trafficking nationally. In the United States, 40% of trafficking cases are children. The average age of a trafficked child is 15 years, and one study showed that one in six trafficking victims were reported being recruited for sex labor before the age of 12.³ Through subsequent interviews and further research we tried to understand the layers of this complex issue: from healthcare and victim services needs, to supply and demand of the criminal markets, and the impact of the internet and social media in enabling predatory behavior online.

1. "Human Trafficking & Migrant Smuggling: Understanding the Difference" Fact Sheet Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, June 27, 2017.
2. "Virginia Responds to Human Trafficking," Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association Review, September 2019.
3. "Survivor Insights the Role of Technology in Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking" Dr. Vanessa Bouché, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Texas Christian University, January 2018.

Recommendations and/or Calls to Action

Human trafficking is vast and complicated problem, but several possible recommendations stood out to us. To begin with, encouraging citizens to learn about this problem in our Region and discuss it with young people is important. More must be done to help young people from all communities and socio-economic statuses to be aware of the threat and learn about safe internet practices. Finally, we were surprised to learn that there is not yet a formal coding process in place to clearly identify victims of trafficking for both healthcare and law enforcement record keeping. Developing a clear system for communicating this information could help better identify victims and connect victims with services they need.

Interviews

- Tanya Gonzalez, *Executive Director, Sacred Heart Center*
- Linda Tissiere, *Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Richmond*
- Cathy Easter, *Executive Director, Safe Harbor Shelter*
- Colonel Jeffrey Katz, *Chesterfield County Chief of Police*
- Angella Alvernaz, *State Trafficking Response Coordinator, VA Department of Criminal Justice*
- Lynne White, *Executive Director of the Wesley Shelter, Wilson, NC*

Additional Sources

- [“Human Trafficking & Migrant Smuggling: Understanding the Difference”](#) Fact Sheet Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, June 27, 2017
- *“Welcome to Shelbyville,”* Becoming American: A Documentary Film and Discussion Series on Our Immigration Experience program, 11/13/19
- [“The Trauma Economy: The Demand For Sex Trafficking And The Fight To End It,”](#) Tori Utley, Forbes, Jan 27, 2016
- [“Who Buys Sex? Understanding and Disrupting Illicit Market Demand,”](#) Demand Abolition, Nov 2018
- [“Virginia Responds to Human Trafficking,”](#) Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association Review, September 2019
- [“Human Trafficking Awareness Campaigns Are Feeding A Dangerous Myth”](#) Michael Hobbes, Huffington Post, February 17, 2020
- [Impact Virginia 2019 Symposium](#), VCU Health, recordings available

- Human Trafficking Awareness Training, Hanover County Child Abuse Response Team (CART) and Hanover County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), 2019.
- [“Survivor Insights The Role of Technology in Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking.”](#)
Dr. Vanessa Bouché, Texas Christian University, January 2018