

Human Trafficking: What Utahns Need to Know

RESEARCH SUMMARY

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP Project

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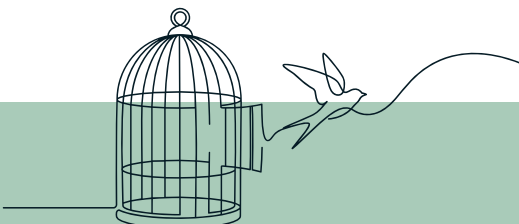
Human trafficking is a global problem that involves the exploitation of people for profit through the means of force, fraud, or coercion. It can happen anywhere, including in Utah. It takes a variety of forms, including forced labor, debt bondage, domestic servitude, and sexual exploitation. While human trafficking occurs across sexes and gender identities, girls and women can face unique risks, especially when they lack safety, support, stable housing, trusted adults, or access to accurate information and services.

TRAFFICKING IN UTAH

Recent indicators show that human trafficking is present across Utah, though reported figures likely capture only a portion of the problem. In 2020, the National Human Trafficking Hotline received 182 tips related to Utah and identified 64 potential trafficking cases; the year before, 157 victims, 39 traffickers, and 28 trafficking businesses were identified. State-level activity also reflects ongoing enforcement and service needs: in 2018, the Utah Attorney General's Office conducted 49 trafficking investigations, prosecuted eight cases, and served 44 victims. Service providers saw similar demand, with the Asian Association of Utah's Trafficking in Persons Program serving 251 victims in 2019 and 2020 combined and reporting a 39% increase in clients between 2018 and 2020.

TRAFFICKERS

Contrary to popular myths, traffickers are not always strangers. Trafficking often involves manipulation by someone the victim knows. They may be acquaintances, romantic partners, friends, family members, fake employers, or agencies that use coercion, intimidation, abuse, debt, or false promises to control victims.



DEFINITION

"Severe forms of trafficking in persons" include:

"(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; or (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."

Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000)

WOMEN & GIRLS

Public perception often associates human trafficking primarily with sexual exploitation, but globally, labor trafficking is far more widespread. Globally, 20% of victims detected are girls and 50% are adult women, and girls and women are disproportionately represented among victims of sex trafficking. Detected cases and court data consistently show that women and girls are more likely to be trafficked for sexual exploitation than for other forms of labor trafficking. Of the U.S. federal criminal court cases that were active in 2020, 98% of victims of sex trafficking were female, and 60% of victims of forced labor were male.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING:

- is a modern form of slavery.
- occurs in every state.
- affects both men and women.
- has lasting impacts on health.

ROOT CAUSES

Human trafficking is rarely caused by one factor alone; rather, it emerges when vulnerability, demand, and weak protections intersect. Poverty, housing instability, unemployment, limited access to education, family separation, displacement, and restrictive migration pathways can leave people with few safe options. Limited options make fraudulent offers of work, housing, or support appear more credible. Discrimination, trauma, substance dependence, involvement in child welfare or juvenile justice systems, and lack of trusted social networks can further increase risk by isolating individuals from people and institutions that might otherwise help.

Trafficking also persists because there is demand for exploitable labor and commercial sex, and because traffickers can profit when communities, employers, consumers, and systems fail to identify and interrupt abuse. Industries that rely on low-wage, informal, or hidden labor can create possibilities for coercion, debt bondage, withheld wages, and threats.



LASTING IMPACTS

The negative impacts of trafficking extend far beyond the period of exploitation. Victims and survivors may experience complex trauma, PTSD, depression, anxiety, shame, stigma, substance use concerns, physical injuries, chronic health conditions, reproductive health complications, and disrupted education or employment. These consequences can make it difficult to feel safe, reconnect with family or community, access healthcare, continue school, secure housing, or maintain stable work.

Human trafficking also harms families, communities, and public systems. It increases demand for emergency shelter, medical and mental healthcare, legal assistance, child welfare support, and criminal justice resources, while traffickers profit from exploitation and survivors may lose years of education, earnings, and social connection. Without trauma-informed, long-term services, survivors can face barriers that increase the risk of revictimization; with coordinated support, however, communities can help restore safety, stability, and opportunity.

PREVENTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Prevention education can reduce vulnerability before trafficking occurs. Community- and school-based education on healthy relationships, consent, violence prevention, grooming, and reporting can help people recognize warning signs and seek help. Addressing affordable housing, income inequality, workers' rights, labor migration policies, legal immigration barriers, and bias against vulnerable populations can also reduce conditions traffickers exploit.

Improved identification connects victims and survivors with support. Screening in social service, education, medical, immigration, juvenile justice, child welfare, and criminal legal settings can help professionals recognize trafficking and respond appropriately. Clear protocols, coordinated partnerships, and victim-centered advocates can help survivors access services such as safety planning, case management, immigration support, crisis care, therapy, housing, and other assistance.

Intervention services help survivors rebuild and avoid revictimization. Immediate and long-term shelter, medical and dental care, legal and immigration assistance, mental health treatment, job and life skills training, and family reconnection can support recovery. Utahns can help by volunteering, educating legislators, supporting marginalized communities, practicing conscious consumption, and advocating for living wages.

HELP STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN UTAH

Preventing human trafficking begins with understanding its causes and supporting effective solutions. You can help prevent trafficking in Utah by increasing awareness of the root causes and learning how to identify human trafficking. See below for calls to action and resources that can help Utahns protect girls and women, strengthen our communities, and prevent human trafficking.

Data Source: [UWLP Snapshot No. 35 \(2022\)](#)

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Learn More:** Explore resources in the UWLP Sexual Assault [Resource Kit](#).
- **Review:** Find goals, perceptions, and community partners on the Sexual Assault Spoke [webpage](#).
- **Get Involved:** Connect to the grassroots movement [A Bolder Way Forward](#).
- **Take Action:** Help move the needle and discover additional [Calls to Action](#) for groups, organizations and communities.



Connect with local organizations that help victims of trafficking and ask how you can help survivors in your community.



Learn how to identify victims of human trafficking and share this knowledge with others.



Reach out to community leaders and policymakers about the importance of reducing the structural conditions that make people vulnerable to trafficking.

Learn more at www.utwomen.org

Authors: Dr. Yvette Young & Dr. Susan R. Madsen