

Human Trafficking from the perspective of the Child

What is Human Trafficking?

Trafficking in human beings is a gross violation of human rights, a modern form of slavery and an extremely profitable business for organised crime. 'Trafficking in persons' is defined¹ as:

'the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.'

This definition has three distinct elements, which must be fulfilled for a situation to be one of trafficking - there must be an act, a means and a purpose. The consent of the victim is irrelevant when any of the means have been used. Many victims of human trafficking are forced to work in prostitution or sex entertainment. However human trafficking also occurs in forms of labour exploitation such as domestic servitude or restaurant work, sweatshop factory work or migrant agricultural work. In the case of a child (anyone under 18 years of age) actions taken for the purpose of exploitation constitute trafficking even where the means have not been used. There is no requirement that a person must have crossed a border for trafficking to take place - it can and does take place within national borders.

Child Trafficking

Children are amongst the most vulnerable in our society. Human traffickers exploit a child's weakness, innocence and vulnerability for personal gain. Taking specific measures to reduce a child's vulnerability to trafficking and create a protective environment are key goals of the National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Trafficking of Human Beings in Ireland 2009-2012 (See Part 4 of the Plan which deals with responses to Child Trafficking - www.justice.ie).

Child trafficking brings with it unthinkable consequences for a child's social, psychological and physical wellbeing. Furthermore a child who has been trafficked may feel socially isolated and fear for what the future may hold. They may fear being ridiculed or ostracized for what they were forced to do when under the control of the traffickers. This is why it is so important not only to recognise signs that a child may have been a victim of human trafficking, but to take appropriate action immediately to protect his/her identity and access all relevant supports.

¹ Article 3(a) of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, 2000 which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (commonly known as the Palermo Protocol).

Identifying victims of Human Trafficking

Victims of human trafficking can be young children, teenagers, men and women. By looking beneath the surface and asking yourself these questions, you can help identify potential child victims of human trafficking:

- Does the child/teenager appear intimidated and behave in a way that does not correspond with behaviour typical of children/teenagers their age?
- Does a child have no time for playing?
- Does a child/teenager have no friends of their own age?
- Does the child/teenager appear fearful of adults/authority for no apparent reason?
- Does the child/teenager have unexplained injuries?

What can you do?

Gaining the trust of a victim of human trafficking is an important step in providing assistance. **Remember** that this may be the first and only contact a victim of human trafficking has with someone apart from the trafficker or it may be their one and only opportunity to explain their situation or ask for help. A teacher must be vigilant to recognise the signs. In the unlikely event that a child/teenager approaches a teacher, the teacher should pay attention to them, listen and then act appropriately. Guidance/support can be obtained from the Child Care Division of the Health Service Executive or from child focused organisations like Barnardos. For more information on human trafficking including child trafficking access www.blueblindfold.gov.ie.