

IDENTIFYING TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Trafficking in Persons (TIP) is a crime affecting every province in South Africa. Detecting a trafficking situation can be challenging because traffickers may hide victims in seemingly ordinary activities or situations in everyday life. TIP has often been coined as a paradoxical crime that is 'hidden in plain sight', as victims are often visibly 'working' in places that the community engages with on a regular basis. This includes shops, construction sites, and hotels. Other victims may be in homes doing domestic work or travelling on the same transportation systems as everyone else.

VICTIM IDENTIFICATION

Victim identification is the process whereby an individual or potential victim is recognised or accepted to be a victim of trafficking by the authorities, a non-profit organisation (NPO), another entity or another frontline professional such as a nurse or police officer. Victim identification may also take place through self-identification, where an individual recognises or accepts they were a victim of trafficking. The process of identifying a victim of trafficking is often the hinge decision that impacts their ability to access support such as housing, counselling, or support to meet other needs. In this way, identification is often the first step in the journey to recovery.

HOW ARE VICTIMS IDENTIFIED?

Although self-identification may take place when a victim escapes from a trafficker and seeks help from the authorities or an NPO, a more nuanced form of identification occurs when an individual does not self-identify, but the authorities or other entities suspect a potentially exploitative situation. This second scenario commonly occurs when frontline professionals encounter a potential victim of trafficking while conducting their daily professional responsibilities.

Proactive efforts are often required to assist frontline professionals in identifying victims of trafficking. These proactive efforts can include specialised training for professionals in positions where they are more likely to encounter potential victims, and also for those responsible for creating and enforcing trafficking laws and policies, such as government officials or compliance officers.

Educating the general public can also result in victim identification. This education can take place through effective awareness campaigns and targeted training/awareness sessions.

EXAMPLES

- *Law enforcement encounters a victim of trafficking either during the course of a criminal investigation or as a result of its proactive victim identification operations/outreaches.*
- *A nurse or a physician encounters a victim when the victim seeks medical help for injuries sustained as a result of the trafficking.*

Specialised outreach activities also serve as a vehicle to identify potential victims. Many NPOs or government agencies proactively conduct outreach activities at targeted locations with a high likelihood of encountering exploited individuals. These locations include detention centres, hotels, brothels, sexual health clinics and even on the streets, in amongst other locations. Outreach activities vary in execution, but will always focus on providing information and assistance from trained individuals to those being actively exploited or are at risk of exploitation.

It is important to note that potential victims may not realise that they are being trafficked. Further, some may not want to be recognised as a victim for several reasons, including psychological factors, such as shame, fear or mental exhaustion, which may even prevent an individual from recognising the situation they are in. In some cases, individuals may recognise that they are a victim of abuse or exploitation, but they may not perceive that the harm they are experiencing is actually trafficking. Manipulated victims may blame themselves for their victimisation or, alternatively, they may still be trauma-bonded to their trafficker.¹ These complex issues underlying the exploitative situation may even manifest in a way that means a victim can appear to be complicit in the exploitation. At other times, self-blaming victims may not realise that the trafficker had planned every step resulting in their exploitation.

In addition to the numerous reasons why an individual may not self-identify, certain vulnerability factors may make an identified victim feel as if they are unable to leave an exploitative environment. For example, a victim may be aware of the unfair treatment but may be hesitant to leave because of an inability to return home, likely homelessness, or the lack of alternative employment options. Foreign national victims face additional hurdles such as immigration status, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with a foreign country. Therefore, a victim may perceive that it may be better, or in some ways safer, to stay in a hostile or exploitative situation rather than to leave and face the unknown.

To report suspected trafficking and access victim services, call the **National Human Trafficking Hotline (0800 222 777)** or the **South African Police Service (10111)**.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, please see [Victim-Centred Approach](#), [Developing a Counter-Trafficking Strategy](#) and the [CYSM? Awareness Overview Guide](#).

1. Trauma bonding occurs when a victim develops strong emotional attachments with their abuser. A repeated cycle of abuse and positive reinforcement contributes to the bond and the sense of loyalty and dependency the victim may feel towards their abuser.

Vulnerability Factors

In order to recognise the indicators of trafficking, it is important to understand the factors which might make someone more vulnerable to being trafficked in the first place. Whilst any person can be trafficked, it is often those who are vulnerable who are more likely to be victims. Understanding this intersection between vulnerability and trafficking allows for a better understanding of survivors and implicitly supports preventative and safeguarding efforts.

Vulnerability factors include but are not limited to:

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| ▶ Age | ▶ Unemployment | ▶ Physical or intellectual disability |
| ▶ Homelessness | ▶ Immigration status | ▶ Unstable political and/or social conditions |
| ▶ Substance misuse | ▶ Poverty | |
| ▶ Lack of education | ▶ Poor Mental health | |

Lack of employment options, lack of opportunity for a better quality of life or dysfunctional and abusive home environments may lead people to seek alternative employment away from home. In this way, many people are exploited in attempts to improve personal financial situations, where economic turmoil can increase vulnerability to trafficking through desperation and acceptance of unregulated or informal work. Conflict or unstable political conditions also increase vulnerability, as seen in migrant and refugee populations.

While these external factors provide some context, it is important to note that there are wider cultural, political, and socio-economic barriers that may also play a role in exploitation. Namely, it may be the lack of socio-economic protections to combat vulnerabilities that lead to trafficking. For example, many individuals do not have access to further education, lack social support networks, and do not have access to social protection measures that may safeguard against potential exploitation.

Complex trauma and poor mental health can be observed in both minor and adult victims. An individual may have been subjected to multiple forms of trauma before entering a trafficking situation. Such responses can often be hypo or hyperarousal reactions resulting from complex trauma.

INDICATORS OF TRAFFICKING

This section details some of the general indicators of TIP that might be observed by a frontline professional. It also details the working and living conditions that victims of TIP may experience.

While no single indicator confirms the existence of a particular type of trafficking, there are various factors that can help highlight the possibility of an exploitative situation or an individual who is actively being targeted and recruited. The demeanour of the potential victims tends to have common themes, regardless of exploitation type.

It is important to note that the indicators stated here are not exhaustive and represent only a selection of possible indicators. Moreover, indicators on these lists will not all be present in each trafficking case. However, they serve as a representative sampling of the type of human behaviour that signifies the likelihood of exploitation.

Indicators of Trafficking

- ▶ The potential victim(s) have minimal-to-no details about the working or living situation.
EXAMPLE *When asked about their job, the individual does not appear to have a clear concept of what the job is, provides vague details, or seems unwilling to share information about the job.*
- ▶ The potential victim(s) are accompanied by someone they do not seem to know or who is not a close friend or family member.
EXAMPLE *They are escorted to the hospital by someone who knows little about their medical history but claims to be a parent or friend.*
- ▶ The potential victim(s) are being controlled and/or are not in control of their identification documents.
EXAMPLE *They arrive at the border and there is a dominant passenger who is holding the passports and speaking on behalf of the other person(s). This dominant passenger may hand out identification documents to the potential victims when necessary before collecting these again and keeping them in their possession.*
- ▶ The potential victim(s) have few personal belongings despite the fact they are permanently moving to a new location.
EXAMPLE *They move to a new city for work, but they have only a small bag with few or even no personal belongings.*
- ▶ Potential victim(s) of trafficking for forced labour show signs of physical neglect or abuse (scars, bruises, burns, etc.) and/or seem malnourished or dishevelled. Victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation are less likely to show signs of physical abuse in areas like the face, arms or legs. Instead, they are often injured on areas of their body that do not affect their outward appearance.
EXAMPLE *On examination at a medical facility, a healthcare professional might notice bruises or scars on the person's lower back or in their hairline.*
- ▶ The potential victim(s) seem unfamiliar with their surroundings or lost.
EXAMPLE *They are seen waiting at a bus station for a prolonged period of time with limited personal belongings.*
- ▶ The potential victim(s) seem distrustful, fearful, or hostile.
EXAMPLE *They visit the hospital with visible injuries and refuse to give personal information, seem fearful or distrustful, and are anxious to leave as soon as possible.*
EXAMPLE *They create a false story for medical professionals that does not align with their injuries or reason for needing to be seen. Medical professionals can ask follow-up questions if the suspected perpetrator is not present.*
- ▶ The potential victim(s) are being controlled, abused, or surveilled by their employer.
EXAMPLE *They are a construction worker and do not look at you when you walk by, appear to be hesitant to answer questions, and when you start to talk to them, the employer is always present or seems to interrupt the conversation.*
- ▶ The potential victim(s) are quick to answer their phone and have frequent phone calls or text messages, from the trafficker that seem to cause anxiety. Failure to respond quickly will result in repeated calls from the trafficker.
EXAMPLE *They are anxiously checking their phone while waiting at arrivals in the airport, or the bus station, and appear fearful or uncomfortable when communicating on the phone.*

Indicators of Trafficking

WORKING AND LIVING CONDITIONS INDICATORS

While it is unlikely you will ever see someone's working or living situation, something they tell you might raise concerns.

- ▶ The potential victim(s) live and work in the same place.

EXAMPLE *They sleep on the floor of the factory where they work, or they live out of a hotel and have sex with 'clients' in the same hotel.*

- ▶ The potential victim(s) live in overcrowded and/or dirty accommodation.

EXAMPLE *They share a small two-bedroom house on a farm with 15 other people.*

- ▶ The potential victim(s) are not free to come and go as they please.

EXAMPLE *If the victim leaves to go to a shop, the trafficker calls every few minutes to determine their whereabouts.*

EXAMPLE *Traffickers may live with victims who have been trafficked for forced labour or sexual exploitation, or live nearby, to monitor the victims' movements closely.*

- ▶ The potential victim(s) are underpaid or receive no pay.

EXAMPLE *They are not paid regularly or at all because of the 'debt' they owe their employers for basic amenities such as food or rent.*

EXAMPLE *Victims are not in possession of their own finances and believe their 'lover' or 'boyfriend' will provide for their needs.*

- ▶ The potential victim(s) work excessively long hours, perhaps without any breaks.

EXAMPLE *They work 15-hour days on a fruit farm, are not given any breaks until they have finished their daily quota, and are threatened if they try to leave.*

EXAMPLE *Victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation appear overly tired, as they have a high quota of 'clients' they must meet per day.*

- ▶ The potential victim(s) have a debt that they are working to pay off.

EXAMPLE *They have not been paid despite having worked in a massage parlour for two months because their employer told them they have to work to pay off the cost of their travel to South Africa.*

- ▶ The potential victim(s) are subjected to violence or threats of violence.

EXAMPLE *Their friends and family are threatened if they don't obey the trafficker.*

- ▶ The potential victim(s) are doing work that is different from what they initially agreed to.

EXAMPLE *Victims may think they are coming to South Africa for a good job but instead are forced to work and live on a fruit farm for no pay. Victims may be hesitant to speak with law enforcement about this or will not seek help because of threats against their loved ones back home and misinformation about deportation.*

Specific Indicators by Type of Exploitation

TRAFFICKING FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

- ▶ The potential victim(s) use language that mimics familial relationships, such as referring to the trafficker as 'husband' or 'boyfriend' or other victims as 'family'. This language is to enforce loyalty and prevent victims from leaving or speaking out.
- ▶ Victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation often present similarly to victims of domestic violence.
- ▶ Many victims may be allowed to travel alone, but they must call or text frequently to check-in, and may have rules about who they can and cannot speak with while out.
- ▶ Multiple rideshares may be booked in one evening to multiple residential locations or hotels. Uber, inDrive and Bolt are commonly used for transportation.
- ▶ The potential victim(s) are in possession of items or clothing that are commonly used for sexual purposes (e.g., condoms, lingerie, sex toys, etc.).
- ▶ If the potential victim(s) do not speak the local language, they may know a few words relating to the sex industry.
- ▶ The potential victim(s) have no money or personal finances and depend on someone else to pay for them.
- ▶ The potential victim(s) may have no identification, or possess fraudulent documents, or someone else may be in possession of their identification documents.

EXAMPLES

- *They are travelling to meet their partner whom they met on social media. They are not in possession of their own finances and believe their new 'lover' will provide for their needs.*
- *They seek emergency medical assistance and have severe bruising that is not easily detectable, such as on their lower back or on their head underneath the hair, so injuries are not observed by 'clients'.*
- *They are travelling to 'make money' for the week or weekend in a different city.*

FORCED LABOUR & DOMESTIC SERVITUDE

- ▶ The potential victim(s) live in unsuitable housing, such as outhouses, sheds, or agricultural/industrial buildings.
- ▶ The potential victim(s) have no access to their finances. They may have bank accounts opened in their name which they do not have access to or control over.
- ▶ The potential victim(s) have no employment contract or the contract may be unsuitable or illegal.
- ▶ The potential victim(s) depend on the employer for employment, transportation, housing, and meals.
- ▶ The potential victim(s) lack suitable training or professional qualifications.
- ▶ The potential victim(s) are forced to pay for work equipment, including tools or workwear.
- ▶ The potential victim(s) are forced to eat leftovers or insubstantial meals.
- ▶ The potential victim(s) are rarely/never allowed to leave premises without the employer or supervision.

EXAMPLES

- *They state that they live and work in the same location.*
- *They are only permitted to leave the house where they both live and work when accompanied by the employer or employer's trusted associate.*
- *They are forced to work on a farm with pesticides, improper equipment, or improper clothing, limiting their protection against exposure to the climate, chemicals, or tools being used.*

ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

- ▶ The child is socially and emotionally isolated from their friends/family.
- ▶ The child becomes withdrawn and/or exhibits secretive behaviour.
- ▶ The child spends excessive amounts of time texting or chatting with someone online.
- ▶ The child's behaviour and school performance declines.
- ▶ The child is not in school or frequently skips school.
- ▶ The child has gifts that cannot be explained or accounted for.

EXAMPLES

- *They become emotionally and socially withdrawn from family and peers, but spend excessive amounts of unmonitored time online.*
- *They experience barriers that impact their social engagement, but then develop a sudden close friendship with someone who forces them to keep secrets.*
- *They develop a 'romantic relationship' with someone who is significantly older who showers them with affection and extravagant gifts.*

OTHER FORMS OF CHILD EXPLOITATION

- ▶ The child is frequently absent from school for days at a time and has unexplained travel receipts.
- ▶ The child has numerous phones or possessions that do not belong to them or were given to them, such as brand new tekkies or iPhones.
- ▶ The child is found in another town or part of the country without any direct connection to the location.
- ▶ The child is unwilling to explain where they have been going during the day.
- ▶ The child becomes emotionally isolated from their parents or guardians even if they continue to live in their own home.
- ▶ The child shows signs of extreme distress or anxiety when engaging with someone unfamiliar.
- ▶ The child is unsupervised, seems anxious, or is acting under the instructions of someone else.

EXAMPLES

- *A child is found in the back of a car being driven by a much older adult. Their relationship is unknown/unclear, and the child is in possession of illicit drugs.*
- *A child is identified by the authorities travelling on a bus alone—hours away from their home.*
- *A child has multiple phones constantly ringing or buzzing and appears anxious to respond.*

Note: Child exploitation can take on a variety of different formats. The types of child exploitation highlighted in this resource are not comprehensive and merely reflect a few examples of child exploitation in South Africa.

Indicators of a Potential Trafficker

Oftentimes, victims are escorted or accompanied by their trafficker or a controller to ensure compliance and evade detection. Here are some potential signs to look out for:

- ▶ The trafficker might insist on speaking on behalf of the victim or act as an interpreter.
- ▶ The trafficker may be resistant to officers speaking to them or the victim.
- ▶ The trafficker and victim are travelling together, but there is little-to-no verbal communication.
- ▶ The victim and trafficker may not interact in a manner consistent with the stated relationship.
- ▶ The body language of the victim suggests fear, tension, or agitation around the trafficker.
- ▶ The trafficker may be holding onto all of the victim's identification documentation or paperwork.
- ▶ The trafficker may be a frequent traveller meeting different people or travelling out alone but returning with different people.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, please see [Victim-Centred Approach](#), [Responding, Reporting and Recovery](#) and [Developing a Counter-Trafficking Strategy](#).

Barriers to Identification

- ▶ Victims may have been exploited by a friend or family member and feel there is no safe place for them to turn to if they were to leave.
- ▶ A victim may have experienced threats of violence against themselves, their family, or loved ones and fear the repercussions of leaving.
- ▶ A victim may fear that the authorities will not believe their story or be able to help them. They may have had prior negative experiences with law enforcement in their home country or traffickers may have told them that they will not be believed.
- ▶ A victim may be dependent on their exploiter either emotionally, financially, or for the provision of alcohol/drugs due to a substance addiction.
- ▶ A victim may lack the capacity to financially support themselves if they leave.
- ▶ A victim may have developed positive feelings for their exploiter or believe that their partner, who is also their trafficker, has their best interests at heart.
- ▶ A victim may have children as a result of their exploitation and fear losing parental custody if they leave.
- ▶ A victim may be unaware or disbelieving of the protection the authorities can provide.
- ▶ A victim may fear legal repercussions due to their undocumented status.
- ▶ A victim may fear their trafficker will not be arrested or prosecuted for their crimes, which would increase the likelihood of being re-trafficked and further victimised.
- ▶ An emotional attachment to the exploiter might delay identification and recovery, especially in the typical 'Lover Boy' scenarios where traffickers form romantic relationships with their victims with the intention to exploit them sexually. As this falsified relationship perpetuates an emotional attachment to their exploiter, a victim may continue to have strong emotional feelings towards the perpetrator, despite suffering abuse or ill-treatment. This illustrates the trauma bonding element that is common in sexual exploitation cases, where traffickers use coercive control tactics to subjugate victims that make them unwilling or feel unable to leave the situation or may cause the victim to return to the situation.
- ▶ A victim may not speak the local language and is therefore unable to communicate their situation to seek help.
- ▶ A victim may be in a situation of debt-bondage and believe they are unable to leave as they have what is thought to be a legitimate debt to repay.
- ▶ A victim may believe that because they signed an employment contract or agreement they are unable to leave.
- ▶ A victim may fear being charged with crimes they committed while they were being trafficked.
- ▶ A victim may have normalised the environment they are in and be fearful of leaving and going into the 'unknown'.
- ▶ A victim may feel they have no safe option upon leaving due to fear of how they will be received or perceived by family because of strong cultural or religious beliefs.
- ▶ A victim may be unaware of their legal rights and the availability of support.