

INDICATORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS



SEX TRAFFICKING

If you are a Healthcare Professional, here are key indicators that you may recognize in a potential victim of sex trafficking. For example, the patient:

- ▶ Has had frequent visits to a healthcare facility for traumatic injuries or is “accident prone.”

EXAMPLE *A female adult visits the ER at least 2-3 times a month and always stays less than 24 hours.*

- ▶ Has had multiple rapid pregnancies with miscarriages or (unplanned) abortions.
- ▶ Is less likely to show signs of physical abuse in areas like the face, arms, or legs, but may display evidence of physical violence on their lower back or on their head, underneath the hair.
- ▶ Has had frequent visits for OB/GYN medical screenings, such as for STDs, pregnancy, etc., especially leading into and/or coming out of the weekend.
- ▶ Has exhibited chronic mental health diagnoses, such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, and somatic complaints.
- ▶ Has a history or disclosure of:
 - ▶ Admittance for overdose and/or suicide attempts.
 - ▶ Assault by an alleged stranger.
 - ▶ Chronic pain, such as headaches, fibromyalgia, and/or pelvic pain.
 - ▶ Multiple stressors, such as financial strain, alcohol/substance misuse, or recent or frequent separations from a romantic partner.
- ▶ Displays injuries inconsistent with the patient’s explanation during the medical assessment or there are “incidental findings” of old, unexplained injuries.

EXAMPLE *The patient says they slipped and fell which is why they have an ulnar fracture (broken wrist) but they have additional bruises which are not consistent with a mild fall.*

- ▶ Has delayed seeking care for injuries or ailments or if they are an adult, refused to report assaults to the authorities.
- ▶ Has tattoos of a name on the body (i.e., a “boyfriend’s” street name) or other pimp/prostitution-related symbols (crown, dollar signs).
- ▶ Has poor eye contact or seems embarrassed. The patient may act guarded or evasive with their answers and may not be forthcoming about their personal life (what they do for a living, etc.).

SEX TRAFFICKED MINORS

A potential minor victim of sex trafficking may:

- ▶ Be accompanied by someone who is not related/cannot provide documentation for the minor.
- ▶ Frequent the ER or mental health unit for elopement; when elopement occurs, meets with older individuals (18+) that are not relatives or friends from school.
- ▶ Report multiple instances of “exchanging” sex for a place to stay, food, and other basic needs.

Suspected child sex trafficking can be reported to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) at 1-800-THE-LOST or cybertipline.org.

SEX AND LABOR TRAFFICKING

If you are a Healthcare Professional, here are key indicators that you may recognize in a potential victim of labor or sex trafficking. For example, the patient:

- ▶ Is showing indicators of unsafe working conditions:
 - ▶ Odor (chemicals)
 - ▶ Respiratory infections
 - ▶ Skin burns
 - ▶ Indications of chemical burns, exposure to the elements
 - ▶ Inability to keep themselves hygienic
- ▶ Is showing indicators of physical neglect or abuse (scars, bruises, burns, etc.).
- ▶ Displays injuries inconsistent with the patient's explanation during the medical assessment, or there are "incidental findings" of old, unexplained injuries.
EXAMPLE *The patient says that they were cleaning the house which is why they have chemical burns, but the burns are more consistent with pesticides.*
- ▶ Seems malnourished or disheveled.
- ▶ Has poor eye contact or seems embarrassed. The patient may act guarded or evasive with their answers.

If the patient is accompanied by another individual:

- ▶ The accompanying individual
 - is domineering.
 - is in control of the patient's identification documents.
 - refuses to/does not want to leave the patient alone.
 - speaks on behalf of the patient or tries to control the patient's communication.
 - consistently mentions the patient being discharged to them, and the patient has not mentioned discharge plans.
- ▶ The patient seems fearful or uncomfortable with the accompanying individual.
- ▶ The patient expresses fear that information given or discovered during the appointment would be given to the accompanying individual.
- ▶ The patient is in frequent communication, by phone, when not in the presence of the accompanying individual (indicator of sex trafficking).
- ▶ If the patient is limited in English proficiency, the accompanying individual insists on interpreting for the patient and/or provides all of the medical information in English to the medical staff without input from the patient.

INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC RESPONSE

Everyone should have the opportunity to speak alone with a Healthcare Professional (HCP). Even when the patient expresses comfort or preference in speaking in front of an accompanying individual, it is critical to provide some level of separation, even if temporarily, to allow for the patient to speak with the HCP alone. Do not rely on the patient to request privacy as this puts them in a potentially unsafe situation. The accompanying individual most likely is the trafficker or otherwise complicit in the trafficking, and the victim will not disclose abuse or exploitation in their presence, and requesting privacy may result in "consequences."

NOTE The potential victim may have children who are in the "care" of the trafficker or trafficker's accomplice, or who are in an otherwise unsafe situation. When creating a care plan for a potential victim, factor in contacting the proper authorities to support a safer exit to a safer place for the victim and their children.

NOTE If potential hallucinations, delusions, or psychosis are suspected, the individual should first be referred to the hospital's psychiatric team prior to being referred to a service provider for human trafficking survivors. When active psychosis, hallucinations, delusions, or similar mental health indicators are present, it can be difficult to screen effectively for trafficking indicators.

While no single indicator confirms the existence of sex or labor trafficking, several indicators combined can increase the likelihood of exploitation. Even in the absence of these indicators, you can still make a report to the National Human Trafficking Hotline if you suspect exploitation.

888-373-7888
U.S. HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE