

## Trafficking in Women Fact Sheet

Trafficking in persons affects nearly every country in the world, including the United States. It is defined as the illegal recruitment, transport or sale of human beings for the purpose of exploiting their labor. Each year, millions of women and children are exploited for sexual purposes, such as prostitution or pornography, or for labor without compensation in homes, farms, factories or other businesses.

Estimates vary widely on the number of people affected by trafficking and reliable data of how many U.S. and non-U.S. citizens does not appear to be available.<sup>i</sup> According to the U.S. intelligence estimates, approximately 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year. About 80 percent of them are female and up to half are minors.<sup>ii</sup> Obtaining reliable estimates is very difficult given the secretive and hidden conditions of child sexual exploitation. The lack of data collection has inhibited resource allocation.<sup>iii</sup>

Trafficking is a complex issue with indescribable consequences for victims. Victims are often vulnerable and lured by false promises of employment and a better life. Victims may also be abducted, forced or sold by their parents. In addition, traffickers use coercive methods such as deception, fraud, intimidation and debt bondage, forcing someone into a situation as a way of paying off a real or perceived debt, to recruit and control their victims.

Victims are often isolated, subjected to abuse and vulnerable to traffickers' demands. Victims rarely seek help from local law enforcement for a variety of reasons including: not knowing where to turn for help, reluctance to communicate with law enforcement officers, fear being prosecuted as criminals for forced labor into which they were trafficked and fear retribution from their captor. Trafficking victims also face psychological and physical trauma daily, including disease, forced substance abuse, violence, and food deprivation. Finally, those who are sexually exploited may also become infected with HIV or other sexually transmitted infections.

In 2000 Congress passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA). The bill was the first comprehensive federal law to protect victims of trafficking or to prosecute their traffickers. The goals of the TVPA are to protect victims and help them rebuild their lives with Federal and State support, and to provide increased federal penalties for traffickers. It also encourages efforts to prevent trafficking overseas by creating annual

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<sup>i</sup> ECPAT-USA. 2007. *Alternative Report to the Initial Report of the United States of America to the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child Concerning the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography*. New York, NY: ECPAT-USA, Inc.

<sup>ii</sup> U.S. State Department, (June 2008) *Trafficking in Persons Report*

<sup>iii</sup> Friedman SA. 2005. *Who is there to help us? How the system fails sexually exploited girls in the United States*. New York, NY: ECPAT-USA, Inc.

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country reports on trafficking and by tying financial non-humanitarian assistance to foreign countries to those countries' efforts to address human trafficking. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act was reauthorized in 2003 (PL 108-193), and again in 2005 (PL 109-164).

TVPA legally defines persons under the age of 18 who engage in “a commercial sex act as victims.” However, most state laws on trafficking are inconsistently applied and treat the act of prostitution as a crime regardless of the age of those involved.<sup>iv</sup>

## **YWCA POSITION**

The YWCA supports public policies that protect victims, hold perpetrators accountable, and work to eliminate the demand for commercial sex acts. Specifically, we support the continuance and full funding for the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA).

The YWCA also supports:

- legislation that ensures economic stability and physical security for victims of trafficking;
- better data collection and monitoring methods,
- increased coordination between federal and state agencies to promote better services and protection; and
- training for law enforcement and health care practitioners in identifying and effectively responding to victims.

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<sup>iv</sup> Friedman SA. 2005. Who is there to help us? How the system fails sexually exploited girls in the United States. New York, NY: ECPAT-USA, Inc.