

Chapter 18

Understanding, Recognizing, and Responding to Human Trafficking in the Schools

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ABSTRACT

Human trafficking is an international and domestic public concern. As understanding of this social justice issue expands, awareness is growing that this horrific act impacts adults and children worldwide, including students in public schools. There is currently little guidance for school counselors or research specific to recognizing, preventing, and responding to human trafficking in schools. Through increasing the awareness of how to recognize and respond to human trafficking, school counselors, staff, and community members can work together to prevent trafficking in the schools and be better equipped to serve students who have been victimized by this crime. School counselors can play a role in prevention and education of this social justice issue.

INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is an important and current **social justice** issue. It continues to gain attention as an understanding of its prevalence grows. Nationally, public policy and media attention demonstrate efforts to expand the recognition of and response to **human trafficking** (Francino-Olsen, 2019). In 2016, 13 states required all K-12 schools to teach **human trafficking** prevention (Atkinson et al., 2016). 1 in 4 victims of trafficking are children. In 2018, Kentucky passed House Bill 524, requiring public schools to display contact information for the National Human trafficking Reporting Hotline (Kentucky Department of Education, 2020). In late 2019, Florida became the first state to require incorporating **human trafficking** prevention in all K-12 curricula (Leins, 2019). In order to advocate for and aid students

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impacted by **human trafficking**, school counselors must be equipped to recognize and respond to this complex issue.

This chapter addresses the issue of **human trafficking** in the schools, and identifies critical counseling practices and considerations for school counselors. The information in this chapter will expand counselors' understanding of this important **social justice** issue by presenting an overview of **human trafficking**. The chapter describes the scope of **human trafficking** and details the definitional differences between the types of **human trafficking**. Further, the authors provide guidance for recognizing and responding to students who are impacted by **human trafficking**. Additionally, the authors identify counseling considerations when working with students who have been trafficked. The chapter concludes with additional resources for school counselors and other school personnel, including suggestions for further training and ideas for curricula on **human trafficking** recognition and prevention.

BACKGROUND

Human trafficking is a global public health concern and an important **social justice** issue (Cannon et al., 2018; Greenbaum & Crawford-Jakubiak, 2015). An ever-growing and heinous transnational crime (Shelley, 2010; Zimmerman & Kiss, 2017), **human trafficking** is extremely profitable (Cho et al., 2013; International Justice Mission, 2019). An estimated 24,900,000 individuals around the world have been victimized by this crime (U.S. Department of State, 2019). Cases reported through the National Human Trafficking Hotline increased by 13% in 2017 (Polaris, 2017) and by another 25% in 2018 (Polaris, 2018). Additionally, in 2017 Polaris reviewed data from the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline and identified 25 types of trafficking (Polaris, 2020). The increases in cases reported potentially indicate a greater understanding and awareness of what constitutes **human trafficking**, as modes for confidential reporting (e.g., phone calls, texts, Web chats, Web forms, and emails) expand. These horrific acts and crimes have profound physical, psychological, and social effects that are just beginning to be studied and understood (Bocinski, 2017).

Human trafficking includes sex, labor, and **organ trafficking**. Most often, the term **human trafficking** is used when referring to **sex trafficking**, but blurred definitions of trafficking (not specifying which type of trafficking is being discussed) impact the ability to effectively study and combat this criminal act (Efrat, 2016; Lerum & Brents, 2016; Weitzer, 2014). In this chapter, the term **human trafficking** encompasses any form of trafficking that may impact a student. The authors used specific terms when referring to particular types of trafficking.

The United Nations' *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children* (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2000) defined **human trafficking** as follows:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the 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 forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (para. 13)

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