

Human Trafficking

As Christian healthcare professionals, we affirm that all humans have inestimable worth, having been created in God's image, and should not be trafficked by others. Accordingly, we grieve for victims of human trafficking and are compelled to oppose this evil.

Human trafficking is the contemporary practice of slavery. Human trafficking involves acts of recruiting, transporting, transferring, harboring or receiving a person through the use of threat, abduction, fraud, deception, force or other coercive means for the purpose of exploitation.¹ Its victims include, at a minimum, persons in forced labor, forced marriage (including child brides), child soldiers, persons trafficked for the removal of eggs or organs, and adults and children kept in bondage for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. Healthcare professionals should be aware that human trafficking is a widespread yet often hidden problem and alert to the possibility that it may reach into their local communities. Its victims may be forced into migrant agricultural, domestic, restaurant, factory, or commercial sex work.

Victims of trafficking may come into contact with healthcare professionals when seeking treatment for bodily injuries such as fractures resulting from violence, torture or sexual assault; traumatic brain injury; sexually transmitted diseases including HIV, gonorrhea, syphilis, urinary tract infections or pubic lice; infectious diseases including hepatitis and tuberculosis; miscarriages or the sequelae of forced abortions; malnutrition; and sequelae of delayed diagnosis or lack of adequate medical care. Victims of trafficking have increased rates of post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide. Social harms from trafficking include the public burdens of dealing with its health consequences as well as the dissemination of infectious diseases into the general population. These problems represent only a partial list of the enormous medical and social consequences of human trafficking.

Healthcare professionals who do not directly treat victims of human trafficking nonetheless provide care and counsel to patients who may be end-users of human trafficking industries. Individuals who pay for commercial sex acts or purchase or view pornography become complicit with human degradation and commodification, which are at the root of human trafficking. The viewing of sexually explicit material is not victimless; rather, it promotes the economic demand that sustains an international sex industry that contributes to marital instability and divorce, enslaves its users and keeps its victims in bondage (see CMDA Statement on Human Sexuality).

The counsel of Scripture is unequivocally opposed to the dehumanization, commodification, and devaluation of human beings (see CMDA Statement on Human Life, Its Moral Worth). Accordingly, Christians historically have opposed human slavery and ministered to the oppressed and neglected.

As the body of Christ, and in the spirit of Isaiah 61:1 and Matthew 25: 35-40, Christian healthcare professionals should display the love of Christ in caring for victims of human trafficking. Victims may have difficulty establishing a relationship of trust; many have been betrayed by family members, and their predominant relationship may be with someone exploiting them. The Christian healthcare professional has an opportunity to demonstrate care and compassion through tangible acts that reflect the love that God has for them. The healthcare professional should treat the patient who may be a victim of trafficking in an empathetic, supportive and nonjudgmental manner with sensitivity to the victim's fear, fragile emotional state, and physical needs. In responding to victims of human trafficking, the healthcare professional should not express prejudice against the disadvantaged and marginalized, such as migrants, those forced into prostitution, the sexually abused, the disabled, the inarticulate, the poor, or the economically or socially deprived.

The primary obligation of the healthcare professional is to the welfare of the patient. The healthcare professional who has reason to suspect human trafficking is morally obligated to try to protect the patient from abuse or violence, and to respect the wishes of the adult victim in receiving care and in reporting trafficking. The healthcare professional may also be legally obligated to report to the appropriate authorities. Since exposing the trafficker might result in retaliation, interventions should be carried out in such a way as to minimize the risk of harm to the patient or the patient's family. Healthcare professionals should recognize that children are exceptionally vulnerable to exploitation and warrant special protection and advocacy. Healthcare professionals are legally mandated to report instances of trafficking of minors.²

The campaign to oppose human trafficking and assist its victims represents an opportunity for secular organizations and faith-based ministries to work together toward the common good. Public agencies that allocate funding to programs that provide medical services to human trafficking victims should not compel faith-based ministries to compromise their moral integrity as a condition of receiving funding by, for example, requiring that such ministries provide abortion services (see CMDA Statements on Rights of Conscience and Moral Complicity with Evil). As Christian healthcare professionals, our concern for preborn human beings is morally inseparable from our concern for victims of human trafficking.

Conclusions

- CMDA condemns human trafficking in all its forms and everywhere it is practiced.
- CMDA urges its members to be alert in identifying and caring for victims of human trafficking. Healthcare professionals should ensure that they are well-informed about the medical and spiritual needs of trafficked persons and about caregivers' legal obligations and available resources regarding reporting and referral.
- CMDA opposes policies and practices that defund or otherwise discriminate against faith-based agencies that care for victims of human trafficking yet on religious grounds do not provide or refer for abortion services.
- CMDA encourages its members to use their knowledge and expertise proactively to help prevent the crime of human trafficking from occurring in their communities and countries.

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48 approvals and 2 abstentions
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¹ See United Nations definition of human trafficking at <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/what-is-human-trafficking.html>.

² In some situations it may be ethically preferable to seek permission from a minor who is mature enough to consent prior to intervening, since exposing the trafficker could potentially place the victim in harm's way. However, since there is also a legal obligation to report trafficking of minors to law enforcement agencies, such consent should be obtained without deception, and every effort should be made that intervention does not further endanger the victim. In the case of an emancipated minor (a minor who is legally deemed an adult), legal obligations vary by jurisdiction.

Appendix

Relevant Biblical Principles

- All human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) and are loved by God (John 3:16-17).
- God has compassion on the vulnerable, the oppressed, and the defenseless and requires that they be treated justly (e.g., Deuteronomy 10:18; Psalms 9:9, 10:17-18, 72:12-14, 103:6).
- God intends to break the yoke of slavery. God delivered His people from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 1-18) and continues through Christ to free His people from slavery to sin (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:16-20; Galatians 5:1,13).
- Scripture instructs us as Christians to love our neighbors as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39b; Mark 12:31a; Luke 10:27b), defend the weak and fatherless, uphold the cause of the poor and oppressed (Psalm 82:3; Isaiah 1:17), rescue the weak and needy, and deliver them from the hand of the wicked (Psalm 82:4).
- Scripture instructs us as disciples of Christ to show mercy and compassion (Zechariah 7:9; Isaiah 1:17) to others with the same love that He showed to the Church (Romans 5:8; Ephesians 5:25; John 13:15), for in serving others we are also serving Christ (Matthew 25:35-36,40).
- Scriptures calling for submission to authority do not condone slavery.
 - Some proponents of slavery have defended the practice by misinterpreting Colossians 3:22, which calls slaves to obedience. The intent of this verse is not to condone slavery, but rather to encourage all who are under human authority to a moral standard of integrity transcending earthly servitude (Colossians 3:23).
 - Scriptural instructions to obey the authorities (e.g., Romans 13:1-5; 1 Timothy 6:1-2) do not condone tyranny, injustice, abuse, or oppression (see CMDA Statement on Abuse of Human Life) but describe legitimate authority as established by God.
 - Slaves are instructed to gain their freedom if they have the opportunity (1 Corinthians 7:21b).

Notable Historical Precedents

- Christians led the movement that abolished the African slave trade. The passion and perseverance of abolitionists such as William Wilberforce secured the passage of the Slave Trade Act of 1807 in London which abolished the slave trade in the British Empire.
- President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution outlaw slavery and human trafficking.
- Numerous current U.S. and international laws rightly authenticate and proclaim human trafficking to be a serious crime. Among them are the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1950, the U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (and its subsequent reauthorizations), and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings of 2008, and legislation enacted by numerous nations around the world. Additionally, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 declares in Article 4 that "[n]o one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."

Further Resources

1. Trafficking in Persons: A Primer for the Healthcare Professional. Published at http://www.cmda.org/WCM/CMDA/Navigation/Human_Trafficking/TIP_Module_Descriptions.aspx
2. CMDA Human Trafficking continuing medical education module at http://www.cmda.org/WCM/CMDA/Navigation/Human_Trafficking/Continuing_Education.aspx

3. Barrows J and Finger R. Human trafficking and the healthcare professional. *South Med J* 2008; 101(5): 521-524.
4. O'Callaghan MG. Human trafficking and the dental professional. *J Am Dent Assoc* 2012; 143(5): 498-504.
5. Baldwin SB, Eisenman DP, Sayles JN, Ryan G, Chuang KS. Identification of human trafficking victims in health care settings. *Health Hum Rights* 2011; 13(1): E36-49.
6. Recognize the signs of human trafficking, and be prepared to act. *ED Manag* 2011; 23(8): 93-95.
7. U.S. Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons Fact Sheets 2012. Published at <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/fs/2012/index.htm>
8. United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking at www.ungift.org
9. *Human Trafficking Statistics*, Polaris Project. Published at <http://www.cicatelli.org/titex/downloadable/Human%20Trafficking%20Statistics.pdf>
10. *Special Report: Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents, 2008-2010*, U.S. Department of Justice. Published at <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cshti0810.pdf>
11. UNODC report on human trafficking exposes modern form of slavery. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Published at <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/global-report-on-trafficking-in-persons.html>
12. *Caring for Trafficked Persons: Guidance for Health Providers*. Geneva, Switzerland: International Organization for Migration. Published in 2009 at http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/CT_Handbook.pdf
13. *Trafficking in Persons Report 2012*. U.S. Department of State. Published at <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2012/index.htm>
14. Samaritan's Purse international relief at http://www.samaritanspurse.org/index.php/Who_We_Are/About_Us
15. Rescue and Restore (US Department of Health & Human Services) <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/programs/anti-trafficking>
16. Polaris Project for a World without Slavery --- <http://www.polarisproject.org>