

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

Understanding Human Trafficking Assessment and Intervention in the Veteran Community

Presentation for: Military Social Work & Behavioral Health Conference

Presented by: Katie Papke, LMSW, CAADC, CCHTVSP and Amy
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Trauma Care Statement

This presentation contains information about violence and trauma. Please practice self-care, and if needed, step away.

If you experience symptoms of traumatic stress, please seek support from your health care provider, your employee assistance program, or one of the hotlines below:

- **Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:**

Dial 988, press 1 (new number); for Veterans

- **National Domestic Violence Hotline:** 800-799-SAFE (7233)
- **National Human Trafficking Hotline:** 888-373-7888
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline:** 800-656-HOPE (4673)



Frequently Asked Questions

What is human trafficking?

Does this only happen on active duty?

Does human trafficking affect Veterans?

What do we do if we suspect human trafficking?

Should we call the police?



Common Myths

- Human trafficking doesn't happen to Veterans
- Human trafficking only involves sex and includes moving, traveling, or transporting a person across state or national borders
- People being trafficked are physically unable to leave their situations/locked in/held against their will
- Traffickers target victims they don't know
- Pimps fit the stereotypical description often seen in movies
- Sex trafficking is not prostitution



Human Trafficking Definition

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000
defines human trafficking as:

1. Sex Trafficking: “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age”

(and)

2. Forced Labor: “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery”

*Sex trafficking if under the age of 18: force, fraud, or coercion does not have to be proved. Labor trafficking: force, fraud or coercion has to be proved regardless of age

(Source: [Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act](#))



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Human Trafficking Tiger Team

- The term “Tiger Team” originates from the military and was made famous by National Aeronautics and Space Administration which deployed a tiger team during the Apollo 13 mission in 1970
- **Purpose:** Organize a human trafficking initiative in the VA by educating and promoting an understanding of identifying, intervening, and supporting Veterans, their families, and caregivers impacted by human trafficking
- **Goal:** Establish key recommendations for VA Senior Leaders to address and support the needs of Veteran survivors of human trafficking by implementing guidelines of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000



Gender, Race, and Cultural Factors

- Human trafficking is seen across all genders, sexual orientations, races, cultures, ages, abilities, education, occupations, classes, and nationalities
- There is no “right,” or “wrong,” type of victim
- There is a high prevalence of women and children impacted
- Human trafficking is part of an interconnected system of oppression, and inequality through gender and sexual orientation-based violence, poverty, and racism



The Action Means Purpose (A-M-P) Model

Actions

(Source: [Polaris Project, 2021](#))



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Assessment

Interviewing



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Trauma-Informed Care

An **organizational structure** and **treatment framework** that involves understanding, recognizing and responding to the effects of all types of trauma including:

- Realizing the prevalence of trauma
- Recognizing how trauma affects all individuals involved with the program, organization, or system, including its own workforce
- Respond by putting this knowledge into practice

Environment



Trauma-Informed Care - Environment

- Provide a safe, warm, inviting environment
- Complete an environment scan to ensure not re-traumatizing
- Become culturally sensitive and aware of language
- Respect privacy and see the individual alone
- Adhere to confidentiality policies

Environment



Trauma-Informed Care - Policy

- Obtain administrative leadership support
- Review and integrate human trafficking policy into existing policies
- Provide human trafficking training and education to all staff
- Include survivors in an inclusive person-centered approach

Environment



Trauma-Informed Care - Procedures

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Empower individuals by recognizing their power and self-determination. Interventions should be recovery focused:

- Interview and assess, not investigate the situation or incident
- Offer to assist in notifying authorities **IF** the individual wants to report or mandatory reporting is needed
- Allow the individual to disclose only what they feel comfortable

Environment



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The Way Forward

- Strategic planning with national VA program offices
- Produce a toolkit for implementing human trafficking protocols
- Started a two-year pilot program June 1, 2023- May 31, 2025
 - The goal of the pilot program is to strategically implement efforts to address human trafficking as it impacts Veterans, their families and caregivers
- Develop and disseminate trauma-informed training suitable for all VHA staff and targeted groups to provide general awareness, risk identification and increase understanding of how human trafficking can impact the Veteran community
- Establish a network of community partners, government and non-government resources for Veterans, their families, and caregivers including shelter, safety, legal services and other resources



Take Aways

- Human trafficking is a public health concern impacting Veterans, their families, and caregivers
- There are gaps in service needs within the VA to address the impact of human trafficking among Veterans, their families, and caregivers
- The VA is still in the initial stages of developing programming and resources to address this issue within the Veteran community
- The VA has a critical role in the collective effort to eliminate human trafficking

Take Action

- Know the signs and identify red flags during direct care or case consultation
- Stay informed and debunk myths about human trafficking
- Learn the local community resources that serve human trafficking victims and survivors
- Join a human trafficking task force
- Become familiar with your state human trafficking laws

**HUMAN
TRAFFICKING**

Take Action Now

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