
Human Trafficking and the Opioid Crisis

OVERVIEW

Addiction is one of the most powerful tools human traffickers have to coerce, manipulate, and exploit victims. By creating or perpetuating a dependency on opioids and acting as a means for continued access, traffickers can prolong exploitation situations.

Beginning in January 2015, Polaris has been working to further understand the relationship between drugs and human trafficking using data collected through the National Human Trafficking Hotline and BeFree Textline.

Understanding the role drugs play in facilitating modern slavery can help inform policymakers seeking to formulate responses to the ongoing opioid abuse crisis in America that take into account the experiences of human trafficking survivors.

STATISTICS

- From January 1, 2015 through June 30, 2017, Polaris recorded **2,238 potential victims of human trafficking** who had drug use induced or exploited as a means of control in their trafficking situation.
 - That figure represents **nearly 15 percent** of all the potential victims for whom there were enough details available about their trafficking situation to make a determination. The information was only recorded when drug use was proactively disclosed by a caller.
- In the same time frame, Polaris recorded **926 potential victims of human trafficking** who had a substance abuse issue prior to the potential trafficking, many of whom had this vulnerability exploited by their traffickers.
 - Twenty-six of those were recruited into their trafficking situation directly from drug rehabilitation centers.
- Of the 2,238 potential victims for whom drugs played a role in their exploitation:
 - 543 were minors at the time their situations were reported to Polaris; an additional 135 were minors at the start of their trafficking situation.
 - The vast majority – 1,972 individuals or 88 percent – were victims of sex trafficking – as compared to labor trafficking or situations where both sex and labor trafficking were present.
 - 1,822 of the sex trafficking victims were female.