

Case Studies: Gift Cards

The Polaris FIU reviewed labor and sex trafficking cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline which included information regarding gift cards. This document includes selected cases that contain significant financial detail and illustrate how gift cards are involved in various situations.

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Polaris received \$3.5 million through competitive funding through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant # 90ZV0138-01-00. The project will be financed with 77.7% of federal funds and 22.3% (\$1.002 million) by non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACF/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

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Case 1:

A caller reported that an adult female was potentially in a sex trafficking situation. The caller said that an adult female was coming to the United States from the Philippines to marry him. During the flight to the United States, the caller believes she was kidnapped after the caller received messages saying that an unknown individual was going to sell the female and already paid \$3,000 for her. This unknown person contacted the caller from the female's Facebook account asking for ransom. The unknown person sent the caller a photo of the female's passport as proof and instructed him to purchase gift cards and take photos with them. The unknown person told the caller that the female could be sold on the dark web for \$25,000 because she was Filipina and a virgin. The unknown person told the caller he was involved in human trafficking and made undisclosed comments about pedophilia. This situation is consistent with internet scams, but the caller insisted that that was not the case.

Case 2:

A caller wanted to report her situation of labor trafficking. The caller stated that she accepted a job to clean houses. Her employer told her that she would receive a paycheck for \$1,000 but instead gave her a \$400 Visa gift card. The employer monitors her location by tracking her phone, is physically and mentally abusive, and threatened her with physical harm if she ever refuses to work. She is currently stranded at a hotel that is being paid for by her employer. The employer stated that the caller must pay the cost of the hotel room before she can leave, and that the caller can work for the employer to pay off this debt.

Case 3:

A caller reported a possible trafficking situation that also matches a known internet scam. The caller stated that a female individual contacted him saying she was kidnapped from a nightclub and taken to a hotel. The individual stated that she was kidnapped because she owes the kidnapers \$800, and now they are forcing her to engage in sexual acts with males for \$800 per night. The caller has sent the individual gift cards, which the individual stated were confiscated from her.

Continued Case Studies: Gift Cards

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Case 4:

A caller contacted the hotline regarding a potential grooming situation involving a minor. The minor posted sexually explicit pictures on Reddit. An unknown individual has sent the minor gift cards and PayPal credit. Additionally, the minor sends photos to multiple other adult males in exchange for money sent through PayPal. The minor meets with unknown males at night to engage in sex. The caller stated that once an adult male sent the minor money to take an Uber to get to a hotel to meet.

Case 5:

A caller contacted the hotline about her relative's sex trafficking situation. The relative, an adult female, was forced to participate in commercial sex by her intimate partner. The adult female was confined in her partner's apartment and branded with his name. In one instance when the adult female tried to leave, the intimate partner became angry and threatened her with a gun. This partner also used the adult female's credit to buy furniture and multiple Walmart gift cards. Her partner advertised her on a commercial sex website, where an undercover law enforcement officer responded to the ad. The adult female was subsequently arrested when she met the undercover officer at a hotel for commercial sex.

Case 6:

A caller contacted the hotline to report a situation regarding traveling sales crews. An adult male stated that he read an ad on Facebook, Instagram, and Craigslist that advertised getting to travel and see the world for free. The business promised to pay for a room, food, transportation, and daily pay. However, this was not the case. The adult male had to earn \$600 cash or sell seven magazine subscriptions a day. If he or his coworkers did not meet the quota, they owed money to the business. The employer would frequently starve workers, take phones away, assault workers, and drop individuals off in random locations and force them to walk back to the hotel. The adult male was eventually able to purchase an Uber gift card at Walmart, which he and several of his coworkers used to escape their employer.