



5 MYTHS ABOUT SEX TRAFFICKING

Today, the problem has largely moved from the streets to the Internet. Customers can shop for a child for sex from the privacy of their own homes or hotel rooms. And there is far less risk for the traffickers and the customers.

Myth #5: The “Women’s Issue” Myth Most of the victims are girls and women -- not exclusively, but primarily. They are humiliated, dehumanized, and treated as a commodity for sale or trade. But this problem is much more complicated than that. While it is true that most of the victims are girls and women, it is also true that ***virtually all of the customers are men***. We are never going to have real impact on this problem until we attack the demand.

The challenge is that offenders do not match society’s stereotype of a criminal. They are doctors, lawyers, business executives, teachers, coaches. They don’t look evil. Yet, if we are ever going to have impact on this problem, we have to create real deterrence. We need to make customers think twice before they engage in sex with a child, commercial or otherwise.

However, no matter how many traffickers and pimps we prosecute, there is a seemingly inexhaustible supply ready to take their places. Why? Because there is massive consumer demand for sex with kids in this country, and it has never been more blatant or more normalized than it is today in this era of the Internet. We are paying a price as a society because of it.

What can be done?

1. We need to attack the demand, to awaken the prospective customers to the impact and import of their acts, and create real deterrence. To do that, we need to *hold the customers accountable*. Yet, courts and prosecutors are often reluctant to do that.
2. You can make the public understand. You can help us emphasize prevention and change social norms. In this society, we sexualize girls at younger and younger ages. We must end the practice, a practice that is a cause of devaluing, degrading and dehumanizing women and girls.
3. Finally, you can mobilize this community. This is not just a police problem, and it is not just a woman’s problem. It is ***everyone’s*** problem.

Myth #1: The “Somewhere Else” Myth When most Americans hear the term “human trafficking,” they think it only happens somewhere else, on the other side of the world (e.g. in Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe or Central America), not Main Street USA, and certainly not in their town or neighborhood. They are wrong.

Myth #2: The “Somebody Else” Myth For those who acknowledge it is a problem in America, they assume that it only involves foreign nationals brought into this country, or only happens in huge urban centers like New York or Los Angeles. Overwhelmingly, the victims of sex trafficking in American cities are *American* children. These are not somebody else’s children, *they are our children*. In the U.S. these are primarily children who initially leave home as runaways or throwaways, or are targeted in the child welfare system.

Myth #3: The “Victimless Crime” Myth These children are *real* victims. This is 21st Century slavery. They are targeted with offers of shelter, sustenance, kindness, and even love, but at some point they find that they cannot walk away. The traffickers and pimps who use and discard them are the criminals, as are the customers. These children need to be rescued, not arrested.

We have also learned that these victims experience real physical and mental harm. It is clear that these victims experience serious trauma, PTSD and much more, and later in life, they are at higher risk of depression, anxiety, heart disease, diabetes, cancer and other maladies. And we know that sexual violence at a young age changes the human brain.

Myth #4: The “Bad Part of Town” Myth Many people believe that this is a problem that only occurs in high-crime areas where good people don’t go. At one point there might have been a grain of truth in that, but things have changed.

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* TRUST acknowledges and appreciates our Partner and National Advisor, Ernie Allen, President of the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children. These remarks were made by Mr. Allen at a luncheon of concerned men from our community at the Arizona Biltmore on July 11, 2013. They are shared here with his permission.