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March 27, 2023

Religion III

### A Modern Loss of Dignity

According to the first Catholic principle of social teaching, the life and dignity of the human person, we are called to value every life and treat everyone with respect. The women involved in the world of sex trafficking are not afforded this courtesy. The vulnerable women in the sex trafficking industry have had their dignity stripped away from them and are left alone, soulless in a way, as their experiences have shown that their human rights have clearly been violated. Women who have become subject to the world of sex trafficking are prone to suffer from trauma and illnesses as a result of the inhumane experiences they have encountered; therefore, there must be more institutional support for these women throughout their recovery. This research project contends that safety precautions must be enforced nationwide to protect women and bring the sex trafficking industry to justice.

Many women all over the world have been introduced to the world of sex trafficking. The victims of sexual exploitation are mostly women and girls. Surprisingly, in 30% of the countries which provided information on the gender of traffickers, women make up the largest proportion of traffickers (UN). This is interesting because it could be assumed that women would try to protect each other instead of bringing each other into such a malicious world. Although, women in low socioeconomic parts of the world search for a way to find “fast money” and decide to become the predator instead of the prey (Withers). Not to mention, these women are also in close physical proximity to high trafficking areas because of where they reside. According to the

United Nations, “Worldwide, almost 20% of all trafficking victims are children” (UN). However, in some parts of Africa and the Mekong region, children are the majority (up to 100% in parts of West Africa) (UN). Additionally, sex trafficking is most prevalent in areas of economic depression, the lack of a sustainable income, and poverty (UN). It was also found that 20% of international women and 28% of US women had intimate relationships with the men who sold them (Janice G. Raymond Ph.D.; Donna M. Hughes Ph.D.). Additionally, about 46% of women are trafficked solely for prostitution (Deshpande and Nour).

Women can be introduced into the world of sex trafficking in a plethora of ways. Some of the bait women are fed is being offered a job or a false marriage proposal (APA). Some victims are sold by their own parents. This clearly ignites a lack of trust between women and their families. It was found that organized businesses and crime networks were crucial in recruiting international and US women (Janice G. Raymond Ph.D.; Donna M. Hughes Ph.D.). With these methods of recruitment, women are being taken advantage of and are not aware of the troubles coming their way. It is said, “Variables that contribute to a person’s vulnerability to being trafficked include membership in a marginalized group; prior victimization and trauma; disabilities; immigrant or refugee status; and family disruption” (APA). In other words, once an individual is at a personal and societal disadvantage, they immediately become vulnerable to trafficking. Circumstances such as living in areas with extreme poverty can result in desperation and mothers will sell their children against their will in order to provide for their family and loved ones.

Moreover, many specific factors existing within poverty drive families to sell their children and women. Some of these factors include not being able to provide enough food for their families due to a lack of resources because of the geographic area. A number of families

could also be facing an issue with debt. To exemplify, Saphak, a 13-year-old girl, was sold for sex by her mother. She was taken to a hospital to verify her virginity and then raped constantly by men her mother arranged (Field and Tham). Saphak was raised in Svay Park, a poor fishing village in the outskirts of Cambodia. Within Svay Park, it is notorious to pay for child sex. Saphak's mother, Ann, stated that her family had a copious amount of about six thousand dollars in debt (Field and Tham). Ann was threatened and took an offer from a woman who offered to buy her daughter's virginity. After selling Saphak's virginity she made eight hundred dollars, although she states that she regrets her decision and that if she knew what she knows now, she would have never sold her daughter (Field and Tham).

However, some women detest being trafficked and fight back for their dignity. The story of Piper Lewis demonstrates this strength. Lewis is a runaway victim who killed her captivator whom she was prostituted by a for-profit (Tumin). She pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter in June 2021 for the murder of Zachary Brooks, a 37-year-old man who kept her captive (Tumin). Lewis stated that she acknowledges she took a life, although she felt she wasn't safe (Tumin). She explains that she was constantly drugged and intoxicated to be raped by other men (Tumin). For some time Lewis endured the harassment as Zachary Brown's apartment was the only available place that she had to live (Tumin). After being raped countless times by Brown and others, she grabbed a knife and decided to commit murder in self-defense (Tumin). From a moral standpoint, murder is wrong, although it should not be counted as wrong if it is in a case of protecting one's dignity. Piper Lewis is being held on probation for 5 years and has to perform 200 hours of community service for 3 years (Tumin). Not to mention, she has to pay a \$150,000 restitution to the Brown family. However, even with these charges, she graduated high school and joined the Youth Justice Counsel at her detention center (Tumin).

Fortunate women who make it out of the world of trafficking after being manipulated deal with many physical issues and an immense amount of trauma. Serious mental health issues result from trafficking, including anxiety, depression, suicidal behavior, drug and alcohol addiction, post-traumatic stress disorder, and social anxiety (APA). Out of many, these are some of the examples of the challenges that women once made out of the sex trafficking world. Moreover, Women suffer from a plethora of physical issues as well, for example, “Physical symptoms among trafficking victims include neurological issues, gastrointestinal disturbances, respiratory distress, chronic pain, sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV), urogenital problems, dental problems, fractures, and traumatic brain injuries”. (APA)

As mentioned above, many issues result from the sex trafficking of women, which is why it must be prevented at all costs. One illustration of trying to prevent trafficking could be the addition of safety checkpoints throughout the labor migration cycle in order to protect potential victims. To exemplify, a potential safety checkpoint would need to be conducted by border patrols as many sex traffickers hide women when transporting them from country to country. Additionally, more collaborative efforts need to be formed to help these women by raising public awareness and by providing consistent law enforcement. Volunteering and supporting anti-trafficking efforts in the community is beneficial as well (State). Also, organizing a fundraiser and donating the proceeds to an anti-trafficking organization or a safety house can provide better living conditions for victims during recovery (State). With these efforts, an impactful change can be made to the lives of women in the sex trafficking industry. Not to mention, dispatching more officers throughout busy areas would increase the chance of having traffickers exposed, although this can only be made possible with more money in regard to the officers being paid. Utilizing money from fundraisers and foundations supporting sex trafficking

victims can be helpful, however, the government should put a larger emphasis on sex trafficking and allocate more money towards the cause so fewer women have to suffer. Organizations, such as Polaris, are a national nonprofit working to combat human trafficking in the US and report that it is only a group effort that can put an end to trafficking once and for all (Ahearn).

In a related way, the labor migration cycle involves movement back and forth between homes and places of work. With the constant movement of looking for a job, women can be easily trafficked. To illustrate this point, a woman could be sitting next to a man and is forced to pretend that they are married. To others, it may seem like a normal couple passing by, although in reality that woman is being held against her will. This emphasizes on my previous point of implementing safety checkpoints at borders, such as asking a plethora of questions to make the trafficker feel uncomfortable and possibly have him/ her exposed.

Additionally, many individuals pass victims in everyday life. Trafficking victims are taken into hospitals to certify their virginity and taken into cosmetic centers in order to please the men who will buy them. It is imperative to stay aware in cosmetic salons and analyze a girl's behavior alongside who she's with because she may be in danger. Malls are also a very popular place where a trafficking exchange may take place. If a woman seems uncomfortable it is imperative to investigate further as you could potentially stop a life from being ruined. Although it is imperative to emphasize trafficking in the beauty industry. Ahearn states that "55% of labor trafficking includes women, with many forced into the beauty industry" (Ahearn). Trafficking in the beauty industry is both labor and sex trafficking, although sex trafficking is more common. As mentioned before, perpetrators might bring victims into waxing salons or beauty salons to receive hair, makeup, and waxing services (Ahearn). Sometimes, women can be forced into illicit massage or sex work through seemingly legitimate businesses (Ahearn). With this existing in

normal everyday life, it is imperative to put an emphasis on the legitimacy of businesses and thoroughly investigate each business once in a while, especially ones within the beauty industry. It has also been posited that “Many survivors report experiencing coercion under false pretenses to a location and put under indentured servitude to work for very little or no pay” (Ahearn). Victims may think that everything is fine while in school, with no knowledge of when they will finally receive a paycheck or might realize the truth long after they have been trafficked.

Moreover, the mall is one of the easiest places to traffic as a group of young teenagers could be allowed to go without adult supervision for quite some time. It has also been proven that “11,000 victims/year in the USA, 13,000 in the UK, and some 1,000’s in countries like Australia fall easy prey to traffickers who groom, flatter and trick both children and fully grown adults into the fastest growing crime in the world: sex trafficking” (Kelly). It has also been shown that the mall is also the first place a bullied teenager goes when they run away. Additionally, there was an exposed sex trafficking outing in a mall in India. It was reported, “During multiple visits to the massage parlor to investigate, they spent time building relationships with the workers, and they noticed many of the telltale signs that the women were in fact trafficked and not working willingly as prostitutes” (Van). This shows that with thorough investigation and awareness, trafficking can be brought to exposure and a victim can be saved.

Certain schools also have a trafficking issue as they are a huge site for potential young girls. Desperate teachers can be corrupt and desperate for money and make deals with traffickers to sell young girls (NCSSLE). Some schools also do not have the best safety systems and students can be abducted while leaving school or sometimes even during school. It has been proven that in the US many young girls have been trafficked and no community, school, socioeconomic group, or student demographic is immune (NCSSLE). However schools are

supposed to be safe places for children, and it is emphasized, “It is fitting that schools take on this challenge; of all social institutions, schools are perhaps the best positioned to identify and report suspected trafficking and connect affected students to critical services” (NCSSLE).

Although making schools safer is a team effort, faculty alone cannot make this happen. Parents, faculty, and students all need to play a part in the safety of schools and should implement procedures to protect young women and all demographic of students against predators.

Certain methods such as involving the senate are imperative as they can further empower educators and school communities (Graham). To exemplify, “Bipartisan legislation introduced last year in the Senate, the [Human Trafficking and Exploitation Prevention Act](#) (S. 2136), would provide elementary and secondary schools across the country with grants to train educators, students, and parents to better recognize, prevent, and respond to the signs of human trafficking and the exploitation of children” (Graham). Educators nationwide should be encouraged to support this important bill to protect young women and all children. Additionally, the NEA created a [toolkit of resources and organizations](#) that educators should utilize and implement within their own schools and communities to stop the spread of trafficking any further.

Conclusively, women are prone to having trauma and many forms of illnesses once out of the sex trafficking world and there must be institutions and practices implemented to help support them. Additionally, women and young girls are being trafficked in highly social areas and common places such as beauty salons and schools. Women need to be protected from their vulnerability, and it is obvious that we have not reached a benchmark where women are not falling into the traps of traffickers, and more safety precautions and trafficking checkpoints need to be placed throughout the country. It is our job as a society to help these women and every step should be taken towards the upward mobility of less human trafficking occurring.

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