

Health Concerns for Trafficking Victims/Survivors

Trafficking victims may suffer from an array of physical and psychological health issues. Preventive health care is virtually non-existent for these individuals. Health issues are typically not treated in their early stages, but tend to fester until they become critical, or even life-endangering. In many cases, health care is administered at least initially by an unqualified individual hired by the trafficker with little if any regard for the well-being of their “patients” Health issues seen in trafficking victims include:

- Sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, pelvic pain, rectal trauma and urinary difficulties from working in the sex industry.
- Pregnancy, resulting from rape or prostitution.
- Infertility/scarring from chronic untreated sexually transmitted infections or unsafe abortions.
- Infections or mutilations caused by unsanitary and dangerous medical procedures performed by the trafficker’s so-called “doctor.”
- Chronic back, hearing, cardiovascular or respiratory problems from endless days toiling in dangerous agriculture, sweatshop or construction conditions.
- Weak eyes and other eye problems from working in dimly lit sweatshops.
- Malnourishment and serious dental problems. These are especially acute with child trafficking victims who often suffer from retarded growth and poorly formed or rotted teeth.
- Infectious diseases like tuberculosis.
- Undetected or untreated diseases, such as diabetes or cancer.
- Bruises, scars and other signs of physical abuse and torture. Sex-industry victims are often beaten in areas that won’t damage their outward appearance, like the lower back.
- Substance abuse problems or addictions either from being coerced into drug use by their traffickers or by turning to substance abuse to help cope with or mentally escape their desperate situations.
- Psychological trauma from daily mental abuse and torture, including PTSD, depression, stress-related disorders, disorientation, confusion, phobias and panic attacks.
- Feelings of helplessness, shame, humiliation, shock, denial or disbelief.
- Cultural shock from finding themselves in a strange country.