

"SEX TRAFFICKING"

(Acts 16:16-18)

(Joe Carter)

The Story: A recent report highlights the cities and states within the United States in which human trafficking is most reported.

The Background: Modern-day slavery, also referred to as “trafficking in persons,” or “human trafficking,” describes the act of recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for compelled labor or commercial sex acts through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. Trafficking in persons is estimated to be one of the top-grossing criminal industries in the world (behind illegal drugs and arms trafficking), with traffickers profiting an estimated \$32 billion every year.

Because the crime is kept out of sight no one knows for sure the extent of trafficking in America. But we can gain a better understanding of the crime by measuring the “signals”—phone calls, emails, and online tip reports—received by the National Human Trafficking Hotline, which maintains one of the most extensive data sets on the issue of human trafficking in the United States. From 2007 to 2018, the Hotline received 195,215 signals representing 45,308 “cases” (i.e., distinct situations of trafficking).

The Geoffrey Nathan Law Offices recently analyzed the data from the Hotline to uncover where human-trafficking reports are most prevalent.

Their report finds that on a per capita basis (cases per 100,000 people), Washington, D.C., (6.1) and Nevada (5.6) have the most reports of human trafficking in the nation. In each of those states, trafficking reports are more than five-times more likely than in states like Wisconsin (1.1) and Utah (1.1). Even larger states like California (1.9), Florida (1.7), and New York (1.1) had fewer reported cases than D.C. and Nevada.

The report also shows the total number of cases from 2007 to 2016 per capita among the 100 largest cities in America. The top five cities in America for human trafficking reports are Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Orlando, Miami, and Las Vegas. Almost all of the top 25 cities for human trafficking prevalence are large metropolises, and many are major tourist destinations and/or have international airports. The exception is New York City, which has the twenty-second-lowest rate of human trafficking in the country. Cities where human trafficking is less common tend to be smaller cities.

What It Means: Why is trafficking more prevalent in some cities and states than in others? A key factor appears to be prostitution. “Underlying much of the prostitution industry and illegal massage parlors is the horrible fact that many of the women supposedly working there are being held against their will,” according to the report.

“While some prostitutes may work entirely on their own accord, a very significant number of them are working against their will,” the report notes. “Even in Nevada,



where prostitution is legal in certain parts of the state with a license, there are widespread reports of women working at brothels against their will or with falsified identification.”

Despite prostitution being frequently described as a “victim-less” crime, the connection between prostitution, both legal and illegal, and sex trafficking is exceedingly well established.

Nearly half of all incidents investigated by U.S. law enforcement agencies between January 1, 2008, and June 30, 2010 (the last date for which data is available), involved allegations of adult prostitution (48 percent) while another 40 percent involved prostitution of a child or child sexual exploitation.

As Donna M. Hughes has noted, “evidence seems to show that legalized sex industries actually result in increased trafficking to meet the demand for women to be used in the legal sex industries.” Melissa Farley adds that “wherever prostitution is legalized, trafficking to sex industry marketplaces in that region increases.”

Christians in America too often assume that trafficking is a problem that only occurs in foreign lands. While sex slavery is certainly more prevalent in other countries, we can't overlook what is happening in our own cities and states. We can help these women and children, though, by knowing the signs to look for. According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, the indicators of human trafficking may include a person:

- Is fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, or nervous/paranoid
- Exhibits unusually fearful or anxious behavior after bringing up law enforcement or immigration officials
- Shows signs of substance use or addiction
- Shows signs of poor hygiene, malnourishment, and/or fatigue
- Shows signs of physical and/or sexual abuse, physical restraint, confinement, or torture
- Has few or no personal possessions
- Is frequently monitored
- Is not in control of their own money, financial records, or bank account
- Is not in control of their own identification documents (ID or passport)
- Is not allowed or able to speak for themselves (a third party may insist on being present and/or translating)
- Claims of just visiting and inability to clarify where they are staying/address
- Lack of knowledge of whereabouts and/or do not know what city he/she is in
- Appear to have lost sense of time
- Shares scripted, confusing, or inconsistent stories

Each individual indicator should be taken in context and not be considered in isolation, notes the Hotline, nor should be taken as “proof” that human trafficking is occurring. But if you believe you may have information about a potential trafficking situation, you should contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline.