Common Terminology Used When Discussing Human Trafficking

When advocates talk about human trafficking, there are a lot of terms that get tossed around. The following is a list of some of the most common terms that can get confusing for someone entering into the field. This list is by no means comprehensive, and these definitions are not meant to be technical definitions but should merely serve as a reference as you begin to learn more about human trafficking.

One of the common obstacles people meet when they first begin to work to fight human trafficking is the politics. Throughout these training materials, we advocate for a broad definition of human trafficking and a broad view of who is involved and affected by human trafficking. It may be tempting or easy to get mired down in the debates about whether or not we are fighting against “domestic minor sex trafficking,” “child sex trafficking,” “domestic servitude trafficking,” “labor trafficking,” etc.

While it may be important for individual organizations to carve out their niche in the fight for justice for the purpose of grants or their donors, as the Church, we do not have to make such distinctions. God calls us to care for the widow, the victim, the vulnerable, the oppressed, the powerless, the poor, the imprisoned, and so many more. This means that regardless of whether a victim is trafficked domestically or from another state or country, whether the victim is a child or an adult, whether the victim has been sold for sex of for domestic servitude, it shouldn’t matter. Though it is important to give that victim care appropriate to his or her exploitation, as the Church, we are called to love and to serve all of them.

Abolition (abolitionist) refers to the movement to end all forms of commercial sexual exploitation. People who identify themselves as abolitionists believe that not only should trafficking end, but the prostitution of persons must end as well because it is also a form of sexual exploitation. Most abolitionists favor criminalizing the sex buyers, pimps and traffickers as the perpetrators and providing services to women and girls in prostitution or trafficking, recognizing that they have been victimized by the industry.

Beer Gardens are bars in Cambodia that are simply fronts for prostitution. Like Karaoke Bars or KTVs in Cambodia, customers go to beer gardens and can request that a girl come sit with them while they eat dinner or drink. Afterwards, they can negotiate with managers or with the girls to take them home or back to a hotel for the evening.

Bonded Labor/Debt Bondage occurs when a loan is granted that has vague or undefined terms and conditions and the loan recipient must work in order to pay it off. However, the terms of the loans are so unfavorable to the recipients that they will realistically never be able to pay it off and will be forced to keep working indefinitely.

Brothels are locations where prostituted and trafficked women and girls may be purchased and sold for sex. Brothels may take different forms – in Nevada, where prostitution is legal, there are buildings where women are kept and customers can come to purchase them for sex. More covert brothels
include massage parlors, beer gardens and KTVs in Cambodia, and palm readers where, depending on
the location, customers can negotiate for sexual services.

**Buyers** are the people who pay for any kind of sexual services, whether actual sexual conduct or
pornographic images and videos. They are typically men, but may be women as well, and are not
limited by age, ethnicity, or other demographic.

**Child Sex Trafficking** refers specifically to the trafficking of victims under the age of consent, which
varies by jurisdiction but is typically 18 years old.

**Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)** is the purchase and sale of children for sex. This
term arose as an alternative to child prostitution which advocates found to be ludicrous – since no
child under the age of 18 can consent to sex, they cannot be prostituted, only exploited.

**Date** is a common term used to refer to an agreed meeting place and time between a prostituted or
trafficked person and a client.

**Demand** refers broadly to all of the consumers and purchasers of commercial sex which fuel sex
trafficking. This includes purchasers of sex acts as well as consumers of pornography.

**Domestic** refers to victims who are being abused and exploited in their own countries. People talk
about domestic victims to differentiate them from foreign victims who have somehow come from
another country to the country where they are being exploited.

**Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking** is the trafficking of children who are still within their own countries.
This is different from international sex trafficking, which refers to victims who have been moved or
who have come from another country. In the United States, most domestic minor sex trafficking
victims are girls who have come out of the foster care system, group homes, have run away from
home, who have unstable or absent parents, etc.

**Facilitator** is another name for pimps and traffickers who enable sex buyers to purchase prostituted
or trafficked women and girls. This term may be used specifically for individual pimps and traffickers or
it may be used more broadly for anybody or thing that facilitates the purchase of sex. For example,
websites like Backpage.com on which girls may be bought or sold for sex, hotels that allow girls to be
abused on premises, taxi drivers who help buyers to arrange dates, etc. All of these may be active or
passive participants in the exploitation.

**Forced labor** is a situation in which victims are forced to work against their own will, under the threat
of violence or some other form of punishment, their freedom is restricted and a degree of ownership is
exerted. Forms of forced labor can include domestic servitude; agricultural labor; sweatshop factory
labor; janitorial, food service and other service industry labor; and begging.¹

**Foreign** refers to victims who have come from another country to the country where they are being
exploited. People talk about foreign victims to differentiate them from domestic victims, those that
are being abused and exploited in their own countries.

---

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Administration for Children & Families "Fact Sheet: Labor
ICE (Immigration Customs Enforcement) is the largest investigative agency in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. They work to help international, or foreign, human trafficking victims in need of help in the United States.

Involuntary Domestic Servitude typically involves domestic workers, whose workplace is informal, connected to their off-duty living quarters, and not often shared with other workers. Such an environment, which often socially isolates domestic workers, is conducive to nonconsensual exploitation since authorities cannot inspect private property as easily as they can inspect formal workplaces.²

“Johns” is a slang term used to refer to male sex buyers.

Karaoke Bar (or KTV) in Cambodia are commonly places where prostitution and trafficking occur. KTV translates literally to Karaoke TV or television. Though karaoke may also occur on premises, customers generally know that they can go to such locations in Cambodia and negotiate with the managers to take the girls working at the KTV back home or to a hotel for the evening.

The Life is a slang term for currently being in prostitution or being trafficked. One might say, for example, “She just left the life,” which means that she recently stopped being trafficked or exploited.

Lover Boys are pimps or traffickers who pose as boyfriends first to potential victims of trafficking. They lure vulnerable women and girls by treating them kindly and taking care of them, but eventually they transition the relationship to one of exploitation, in which they sell or force the girl to sell herself through emotional, physical, and/or psychological manipulation.

Madam is a slang term for female pimps or for women who manage other women who are being prostituted or trafficked. She may also be in prostitution herself or may have formerly been prostituted.

Massage parlors are places where people can go to get a massage but often serve as fronts for prostitution and trafficking. Often, where illicit activity is ongoing, massage parlors may operate what appears to be legitimate business in the front or during the day, but additional sexual services will also be available with additional negotiation. This takes place both in the U.S. and in other countries.

NGO (Non-governmental Organization) is an organization created by citizens or companies that operates independently from the government.

Palermo Protocol is the short name for the United Nations protocol that defined and criminalized human trafficking, or trafficking in persons. The full name for the protocol is the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which was passed in 2000.

Pimps/ Traffickers are the agents who “manage” prostituted women and girls and profit from their earnings. Typically, the relationship between pimps and their girls is psychologically and emotionally abusive. Pimps employ many tactics to lure girls in, including posing as a lover or boyfriend.

Punters is a term commonly used in the U.K. and other British English speaking countries to refer to male sex buyers.

**Sex Trafficking** exists wherever a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age.3

**Stable** is a slang term for a group of prostituted or trafficked women who are all controlled by the same pimp or trafficker.

**Supply** refers to the victims in the commercial sex industry. This includes victims who may be considered “prostituted” under the law as well as those who are considered to be “trafficked.” Supply includes all of these individuals because unless the entire supply of victims is eliminated, both prostituted and trafficked victims will still exist. Where there is prostitution there is also trafficking since pimps and traffickers know they can bring their victims there to be exploited.

**The Swedish Model** (or Nordic Model) refers to the Swedish Legislation passed in 1999 that is commonly called the human rights approach to legislating prostitution. In brief, the Swedish Model decriminalized prostituted persons but criminalized the buyers, pimps and traffickers, based on the understanding that the women and girls being trafficked and prostituted are victims and the pimps and buyers are the victimizers. In addition to this, the legislation provided funding for services for women to leave working in prostitution as well as launched a major public awareness campaign so that potential buyers would be deterred from trying to buy sex. In the years that followed, researchers who have tracked this legislation have found that prostitution and trafficking in Sweden has decreased.

**The Track (also known as the Circuit or the Blade)** is a slang term for the areas where prostituted and trafficked women and girls are told to work. This could be on a small scale—an area within a city or county, or it could be on a larger scale, like a series of cities or states that the girls move between. It may also be used more generally to say that somebody is currently being trafficked or prostituted. For example, one might say “she’s back on the track (or the circuit).”

**Tricks** is a term commonly used by prostituted women to refer to male sex buyers.

**T-Visas (U-Visas)** are both types of visas granted to trafficking victims who are from other countries and who have been trafficked to the United States. Even if they may have entered the country illegally, foreign-born victims of trafficking may apply for T-Visas and remain in the United States to work or attend school if they meet certain other qualifications including cooperating in the prosecution.

**TVPA** (Trafficking Victims Protection Act) or the TVPRA (Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act) are the names of the laws in the United States that define and criminalize human trafficking. The TVPA was originally passed in 2000, and then it was reauthorized in 2003, 2005, and 2008.

---