

## Sex Trafficking in the Tourism Industry

Carolin L\*, Lindsay A and Victor W

The Business of Hospitality, Florida International University, Biscayne Bay Campus, HM 333, 3000 Northeast 151 Street, North Miami, USA

### Abstract

This article examines exploitation in tourism. If the industry is to move towards enhanced sustainability, then the issue of fair working conditions needs to be addressed. The study summarizes current literature on trafficking in tourism and discusses the current state of sex trafficking in the tourism industry. The paper finally summarizes major initiatives in the industry and concludes by providing warning signs and indicators of trafficking that can be useful for tourism employees.

**Keywords:** Tourism; Hospitality; Sustainability; Human rights; Trafficking

### Introduction

Tourism is one of the world's leading businesses and plays a major role in global commerce. The volume of tourism "equals or even surpasses that of oil exports, food products or automobiles" [1]. The last 70 years in the travel industry have experienced an increase in growth. According to the World Tourism Organization the number of travelers has increased from 25 million in 1950 to 806 million in 2005 [2]. The number of travelers is expected to grow and expand into new destinations throughout the globe each year. In 2013, there were 1.87 billion international tourists, which was an increase of 52 million tourists from the previous year [3]. As the industry grows, more complications emerge. With an enhanced awareness of sustainability in the industry and a global reach, labor issues become an increasingly challenging issue. The sociocultural pillar of sustainability focuses on human rights, equality of opportunity and fair pay among others. Decreasing human exploitation is a major aim in achieving social sustainability. To this end, this paper will try to shed more light on human trafficking in general, and sex trafficking as it pertains to the hospitality industry in particular.

### Sex trafficking

One of the ways the hospitality industry is involved in exploitation is through its conscious or unconscious participation in sex trafficking of men, women, and children. This is a global issue which has not been fully (it at all) addressed by stakeholders. There is a lack of awareness of how victims are moved through hospitality and tourism businesses to work as prostitutes. The purpose of this paper then is to help raise awareness by examining the current literature available on sex trafficking in the industry, to summarize major responses of the industry, as well list main indicators.

### Background of Trafficking

Around the world millions of men, women, and children are being exploited for sex trafficking [4]. The International Labour Organization estimated 21 million individuals are trafficked worldwide and forced into labor [5]. Additionally more women and children are believed to be victims of human trafficking compared to men. The ILO estimates 11.4 million victims of trafficking are women and girls [6]. Human trafficking includes trafficking for labor and sexual activities. The purpose of selling individuals for sex has been an issue in the trafficking industry for decades. Sex trafficking is defined as "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person of the purpose of a commercial sex act [7].

### Sex trafficking

According to the International Labor Union, an estimated 4.5 million individuals are forced into sexual labor, with 98 percent of the victims being identified as female. In the United States an estimated 17,500 individuals are trafficked throughout the country annually, with 79 percent of victims being trafficked for sexual activities (U.S. Department of State, 2006).

Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of the United States, sex trafficking is classified as a severe form of trafficking [7]. Female victims of sexual trafficking have been lured into sexual activities through either a pimp or a trafficker they may know, like a boyfriend. Male victims of trafficking are often lured into sexual trafficking due to rejection from family and their local community of their preferences in sexuality [8].

A Trafficker/Pimp can make \$150,000-\$200,000 per child each year and the average pimp has four to six girls [9]. The average victim may be forced to have sex up to 20-48 times a day [10]. Fewer than 100 beds are available in the United States for underage victims (Health and Human Services).

### Child exploitation

Traffickers and pimps often prey on victims between the ages of 12 to 14 years old [9]. The Department of State estimated that over one million children are trafficked for sex throughout the world (U.S. Department of State, 2006). Minors between the ages of 14 to 17 in the United States are the largest percentage of juvenile victims who are sold for sexual activities. Victims under the age of 14 represent 11 percent of minors sold for sexual activities in the United States [11]. Child human trafficking victims often live in horrendous conditions and are subject to abuse from their traffickers; additionally they are prone to substantial violence from those involved in trafficking [12]. Children are some of the hardest hit victims of sex trafficking. In some developing countries, child victims are sacrificed to sex trafficking for short-term financial

\*Corresponding author: Carolin L, Assistant Professor, The Business of Hospitality, Florida International University, Biscayne Bay Campus, HM 333, 3000 Northeast 151 Street, North Miami, USA, Tel: 3059194500; E-mail: [clusby@fiu.edu](mailto:clusby@fiu.edu)

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gains [13]. The National Runaway Hotline estimates that one in three teens on the street will be lured toward prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home.

### Global issues

Victims of sex trafficking can be trafficked both domestically and internationally. Open borders between nations have contributed to the movement of human trafficking, since travel documentation is not required, as in the case between Nepal and India [14]. There are three stages of sex trafficking: origin, transit, and destination [8]. Typically, a victim's homeland is plagued with many problems like poverty, inequality, war, and poor economic factors. The transit stage can have many routes and can often cross borders or state lines. Sometimes the transit stage will cross borders that are afflicted with instability, corruption, and governmental disorganization. The destination stage can be anywhere in the world, but typically victims may be trafficked to wealthier countries. Of course even countries with human rights and trafficking laws experience trafficking. The United States had 3,598 cases of human trafficking reported to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center [10]. Additionally, Mexico is considered both a country of origin for many victims and a transiting country into the United States, with an estimated 5,000 children and women being brought into the United States each year [15,16].

Sex trafficking victims are classified differently from sex workers. Sex workers are defined as consenting adults over the age of 18 years, while sex trafficking laborers are viewed as non-consenting and often under the age of 18 years [17]. Sex trafficking for profit includes activities like pornography, prostitution, and sex shows [8]. The Polaris Project noted the top three venues for sex trafficking in the United States were hotels and motels, commercial front brothels, and internet advertisements [10]. Websites used to sell goods have been common means for selling services online [18]. According to law enforcement reports and child advocacy organizations, websites that are legitimate for selling goods are also selling sexual activities with minors [19].

### Sex Trafficking and the Hospitality/Tourism Industry

Sex trafficking is an issue the hospitality and tourism industry faces around the globe. In New York City, 45% of commercially exploited victims were exploited in hotels. Almost every part of the world, except Antarctica, experiences sex tourism. Prostitution is legal in 49 countries around the world, 12 countries have limited laws allowing some aspects of prostitution, and 39 countries have laws making prostitution illegal [20]. The Netherlands is one of the most famous countries with legalized prostitution due to the Red Light District located in Amsterdam. Thailand is a notable sex tourism destination for tourists from Australia, Europe, Japan, and the United States [21]. Sex tourism exists throughout the globe with both legally run organizations and other businesses whose employees are sex trafficking victims. Sex tourism was originally defined as "tourism for commercial sex purposes" [22], but has evolved to include individuals who have been trafficked for sexual activities.

As many tourism destinations become more commercialized, traffickers have taken advantage of victims and tourists looking for sexual activities. World Vision Australia estimates 250,000 tourists visit Asia each year for sexual activities with a minor, with 13 percent of the sex tourists originating from Australia [22]. Furthermore, an estimated 25 percent of sex tourists originate from the United States [23]. Men are considered to be the primary sex tourist around the globe with most sex tourism customers coming from middle to upper class backgrounds [24]. Not all tourists who partake in sex tourism travel just for this

specific activity. Oftentimes tourists travel for multiple activities and reasons, and the opportunity to partake in sexual activities can also occur [21]. This makes it difficult for researchers to define the exact tourist who may choose to partake in sex tourism. Some tourists may go to brothels or strip clubs, while others may hire prostitutes by the hour, the evening, or for a specific number of days.

### Minors and sex tourism

Child sex tourism is considered one of the major ethical issues in the tourism and hospitality industry [25]. Typically, an individual who travels for sexual tourism with a minor is from a wealthier country and will travel to a developing country [12]. Tourists who have sexual relationships with a minor are violating the minor's basic human rights according to the United Nations [26]. Around 25% of sex tourists abusing children outside of the United States are North American. These tourists violate the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, and of the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography [25]. Minors and children have the right to be protected from sexual trafficking and exploitation from adults and traffickers.

Child sex tourism is a worldwide phenomenon with Asia being at the forefront of the problem. Glover [27] estimated that there are over 800,000 children in Thailand being trafficked for sex, 400,000 children in India, 60,000 children in the Philippines, and 20,000 children in Sri Lanka. Though it is noted, child sex trafficking cannot be entirely blamed on sex trafficking due to circumstances of poverty and cultural practice of prostitution in some communities. Furthermore, the Internet has contributed to the problem of child sex trafficking [12]. The United States is considered to be a "sending country" that has allowed individuals to travel abroad for child sex tourism [28]. To combat child sex tourism of US travelers, Congress created the Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today Act. Specifically section 2423c created in 2003, focuses on prosecuting individuals who travel outside the United States and have some sort of sexual activity with a minor under the age of 18. The act establishes both prosecution and fines for American citizens who commit acts of sexual exploitation with minors outside the United States [12]. Additionally, United States sex offenders are required to register with their local jurisdiction before traveling outside the country [29].

Even with laws in place to prosecute those who commit crimes against children abroad, governments face difficulties in enforcing laws because evidence and victims are not always located in the country prosecuting the perpetrator [12]. This makes it difficult for countries like the United States to prosecute all individuals who exploit minors. Today sex trafficking of minors has experienced an increase in adults who travel abroad for sexual activities with children. Since U.S. ICE is stretched thin because of funding, the governmental organization has been focusing attention towards offenders who are classified as "preferential abusers" since these offenders have committed multiple crimes against minors [12]. The organization is unable to prosecute all individuals who commit crimes against minors due to funding and difficulties with evidence not being located in the United States.

Minors are particularly vulnerable to traffickers and individuals who are seeking to take advantage of potential victims because oftentimes minors can become indebted to someone who may have helped them [30]. A study by Akullo [31] examined minors traveling alone through Heathrow Airport. Out of 1,738 minors who traveled on their own, 551 individuals were considered to be at risk for trafficking. The study tried to follow up with the 551 minors, but 25 of the minors

were nowhere to be found. Akullo speculated that these minors most likely faced some form of exploitation by another individual, but there is no hard evidence to support that claim. Minors traveling alone are a concern for activists, researchers, and governmental organizations because of the increased chance of exploitation. Derluyn et al. [30] expressed a need for an increased awareness from airport staff, port authorities, customs agents, and law enforcement of the potential risks, minors face when traveling alone and the signs of minors trafficked for labor and sexual trafficking.

### Major sporting events

Major sporting events are a concern for sex trafficking. Events in the tourism industry, like sporting events, are a significant motive for travel and have created an increase in competitiveness between tourism destinations to attract tourists [32]. Sports tourism events at the regional, national, or international level can create both positive and negative impacts on communities around the globe. The financial contributions that sports tourism provides to communities have grown in recent years [33]. It is estimated that \$4.5 trillion dollars are added to the global economy through sports tourism [34], although often money also leaks out. Events like the World Cup, Olympic Games, Super Bowl, and Formula One are considered a once in a lifetime experience for many attendees and are referred to as “hallmark” events [35]. Major sporting events can attract a large number of attendees from various backgrounds and countries [36]. Nevertheless, sporting events can create negative impacts on host communities through leakage, security issues, traffic, public disorder, and crimes against others [36].

Because major sporting events have worldwide exposure and attract thousands of attendees, activists and governmental organizations are concerned that there is a link between human trafficking and major sporting events [37,38]. Data for sex trafficking in conjunction with major sport events is contradicting, due to the fact that sex trafficking is a global phenomenon that changes in movement and operation patterns. This makes it difficult for organizations to collect accurate data. Furthermore, data oftentimes is either unreliable or incomplete, and at the global and regional levels, detailed data are simply not available [39]. One example of unreliable information was the Olympic Games in Athens and the 2006 World Cup in Germany. Before both sporting events, media reports suggested 40,000 women and children might be trafficked in Greece and Germany [40]. These types of claims have led host cities to be scrutinized by non-governmental organizations, governments, and by the media to determine if there is a risk of trafficking before events.

Athens experienced an increase of 95 percent in trafficking cases from 2003 to 2004. In 2003, 93 cases of sex trafficking were reported and in 2004 the number rose to 181, however this is no indication of changes of actual cases. After the Olympic Games were finished, the number of sex trafficking cases declined by 24 percent [41]. Awareness of the problems of sex trafficking may have possibly played a role in the low number of victims trafficked during the games. During the World Cup only 33 trafficking cases were reported to law enforcement, with only five cases believed to have a direct link to the World Cup [40]. However, reported cases do not give clear indication of actual cases, so caution towards these conclusions is necessary. The 2006 World Cup did experience an increase in sex workers who traveled to Germany it was noted, but the sex workers were not all believed to be sex trafficking victims [41]. The human trafficking claims of both the Olympic Games in Athens and the 2006 World Cup are regarded as sensationalized by researchers [38,42]. In the instance of the 2006 World Cup, Henning [40] noted there might not have been an increase in human trafficking

since the World Cup attracted many families to the event. Again, this claim cannot be substantiated. Additionally, the sensationalized claims may have helped to create more measures focusing on sex trafficking from the German government, including more law enforcement and monitoring of Germany's borders.

Contradictory reports for sex tourism during major sporting events make it difficult to determine whether there is a correlation. Multiple super bowl games have seen an increase in trafficking in cities hosting the game. Super Bowl XLIV in Miami was believed to be a hotbed for trafficking. In 2010, 10,000 individuals were trafficked through Miami for sex tourism according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children [43]. The following year, Super Bowl XLV in Dallas experienced an increase in escort ads in back pages, a free classified ad service. An estimated 136 percent increase in escort ads was noted before the Super Bowl in Dallas [44]. The most recent super bowl in Arizona also saw trafficking arrests possibly related to the game. A total of 570 individuals were arrested in the surrounding areas of Phoenix for soliciting prostitutes and an additional 23 individuals were arrested for perpetrating sex trafficking [45].

Inconsistent evidence from one sporting event to another makes it difficult to fully determine whether there is a correlation between major sporting events and sex trafficking. When some sporting events show a higher number of trafficking, like the Super Bowl, but others events have a low number, like the World Cup, this creates uncertainty in the claims there is a link between trafficking and sports tourism due to inconsistent data.

### Awareness and Response to Sex Trafficking in the Tourism Industry

Tourism and hospitality stakeholders are often unaware of signs and hence might unknowingly contribute to sex trafficking and the transportation of human trafficking victims. The industry needs to better examine how businesses contribute to sex trafficking and sex tourism. The tourism and hospitality industry ultimately has a social responsibility and moral obligation to help stop and prevent sex trafficking. A lack of awareness of human trafficking is an issue that seems to exist across the globe. According to Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, the special representative for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, awareness of human trafficking has increased, but at the same time trafficking has increased as well [46]. One reason awareness has increased is due to new action plans that have been implemented to combat trafficking, along with more legislation and more assistance programs for victims. Giammarinaro also noted that even with increasing awareness, human trafficking still exists because the response to address trafficking is not commensurate with the magnitude of the phenomenon [46].

Tourism and hospitality employees may not be fully aware of how often victims are trafficked through businesses in the industry tourism. Trains, ferries, and airlines have unknowingly transported victims of trafficking, while hotels have provided a venue for traffickers to sell their victims to tourists and other individuals seeking sex services [47]. The United Nations has stressed the need for the tourism and hospitality industry to help with putting a stop to human trafficking [48]. The number one way to help stop sex trafficking, according to the United States Department of State, is to learn the warning signs and red flags of human trafficking and for individuals to ask questions when he or she suspects they have come into contact with a victim of trafficking. To help employees be able to understand the signs, and to know when to ask questions, the Department of State recommends training for businesses, law enforcement, and first responders [49].

The hospitality and tourism industry is working to stop trafficking by becoming more aware and implementing programs. One major step the industry has taken is the development of the code. In 1996 at the World Conference against the Sexual Exploitation of Children, a code of conduct was created for tourism and hospitality businesses to protect children from sexual trafficking. The code was created as an industry initiative to provide support and tools to the tourism industry to increase awareness of sexual exploitation of minors. By 1998 three major tour operators in Sweden implemented the code into their business [47]. In 2013 the code had 1,287 signatories with 140,096 trained staff in 52 countries [50]. Accor Hotels, Hilton Worldwide, Sabre Holdings, and TUI Group are just some of the current members who have signed the code. Sabre Holdings has further worked to help make employees aware of human trafficking. The “Passport to Freedom” program was created to train 10,000 employees on how to identify human trafficking and report it to authorities [51].

Michelle Guelbart, the United States director of ECPAT, noted an increased number of trafficking arrests have taken place at hotels or at a hotel setting [52]. According to Travel Weekly, some airlines, hotels, and travel agencies are working with various government agencies to stop trafficking [47]. One example of a project is the Exchange Initiative, which was created by Nix Conference and Meeting Management to provide a resource for meeting planners and convention centers to understand human trafficking. The Exchange Initiative has been working with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to create a database of motel and hotel room photos. The purpose of the database is to help organizations like the Federal Bureau of Investigation to compare photos of trafficking victims being abused in hotel rooms to the database of hotels [52].

The transportation industry has also been working to create more awareness for employees on how to report signs of potential human trafficking cases. The Blue Lightning program is one example of airlines working together with the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, and the Department of Transportation. The program is a voluntary educational and training program to train airline staff and flight crews about potential indicators of human trafficking they may encounter while working. In addition, the program educates airline employees on how to safely report to human trafficking cases to authorities. Allegiant, Delta, and JetBlue are just some of the airline members in the Blue Lightning Program [53-61]. Furthermore, Amtrak has partnered with the Department of Transportation and the Department of Homeland Security to train 75,000 employees at both the Department of Transportation and Amtrak to stop trafficking of individuals through the railway system in the United States [51].

### General Signs and Indicators ECPAT (The Code)

People who have been trafficked may (Homeland Security Investigations):

- Believe that they must work against their will.
- Be unable to leave their work environment.
- Show signs that their movements are being controlled.
- Feel that they cannot leave.
- Show fear or anxiety.
- Be subjected to violence or threats of violence against themselves or against their family members and loved ones.
- Suffer injuries that appear to be the result of an assault.

- Suffer injuries or impairments typical of certain jobs or control measures.
- Be distrustful of the authorities.
- Be threatened with being handed over to the authorities.
- Be afraid of revealing their immigration status.
- Appear to be coached what to say to law enforcement or immigration officials.
- Not be in possession of their passports or other travel or identity documents, as those documents are being held by someone else.
- Have false identity or travel documents.
- Be found in or connected to a type of location likely to be used for exploiting people.
- Be unfamiliar with the local language.
- Not know their home or work address.
- Allow others to speak for them when addressed directly.
- Act as if they were instructed by someone else.
- Be disciplined through punishment.
- Be unable to negotiate working conditions.
- Receive little or no payment.
- Have no access to their earnings.
- Recruited for one purpose and forced to engage in some other job.

In response to these indicators by ECPAT, the organization has provided tools for training of tourism employees. Some of the indicators tourism employees can be aware of include among others:

A trafficker may:

- Pay in cash one day at a time
- Escort various men into the room and lingers until they leave, watching the door
- Remove self from operations
- Be seen with a group of women
- Not leave victim alone, calls often
- Control all or most money and identification.

Trafficker/victim interaction could include:

- Victim refers to trafficker as “Daddy”
- Trafficker uses derogatory slang
- Openly threatens or physically assaults victim
- Inconsistency in story
- Ordering adjacent rooms
- Late or unusual hours

Some specific behaviors room and lobby staff can look out for are:

- Insists on little or no housekeeping
- Little or no luggage/clothing
- Room frequented by men
- Use of backpage.com
- Requests large number of towels and linens
- Pay in cash
- Requests room with access to exits
- Use inappropriate nicknames

## Conclusion

The tourism and hospitality industry plays an unintentional role in sexual trafficking through accommodations and transportation. The tourism and hospitality industry can play a large role minimizing victimization in sex trafficking because of the size of the industry and its global nature. In the academic field, more research is needed to better understand the scope of sex trafficking and the role the hospitality industry plays in it. Future research could also shed more light on the inconclusive evidence we have for the relation of sports tourism and events to sex trafficking, as well as reported cases versus actual cases. Better estimates are needed for specific groups of the population.

As the future of sex tourism evolves to include different areas of sexual activities, stakeholders will need to address new issues that arise. While the effort of tourism and hospitality businesses to create programs helping with awareness and training is applaudable, more needs to be done. Some of the solutions must and should include: setting policies and procedures, training employees, providing information to travelers, and expressing zero tolerance of sexual exploitation in contract throughout the value chain.

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