



# Human Trafficking Myth v. Reality

**Myth:** Trafficking always involves moving a victim across borders or some form of travel.

**Fact:** The legal definition of trafficking **does not require transportation**, although transportation may be involved in the crime.

**Myth:** Victims of trafficking will immediately ask for help and will see themselves as victims of crime.

**Fact:** Victims of trafficking often do not immediately seek help or see themselves as victims due to lack of trust, self-blame, or manipulation by the traffickers.

**Myth:** Human trafficking only occurs in illegal underground industries.

**Fact:** Trafficking can occur in legal and legitimate business settings as well as underground markets. Many industries present in Wisconsin (tourism, hospitality, transportation, agriculture) are industries exploited by traffickers in order to commit their crimes.

**Myth:** Trafficked persons are usually foreign nationals or immigrants from other countries.

**Fact:** Victims of human trafficking can be any nationality and hold any immigration status. U.S. citizens and foreign nationals are equally protected under the federal trafficking statutes and Wisconsin state law.

**Myth:** Human trafficking always involves physical restraint, physical force, or physical bondage.

**Fact:** Trafficking does not always involve physical restraint, bodily harm, or physical force. Psychological means of control, such as threats, exploiting a drug dependency, or abuse of the legal process, are often used to control victims and are sufficient elements of the crime against adults. No force, fraud or coercion need be present at all in order for a minor to be considered a victim of human trafficking, although such acts might be part of the trafficking.

**Myth:** Human trafficking mainly affects girls and women trafficked for sex.

**Fact:** Human trafficking includes both commercial sex acts and forced labor or services. Victims include men and boys in addition to women and girls.

**Myth:** Human trafficking is the same as human smuggling.

**Fact:** There are fundamental differences between human trafficking and smuggling:

Smuggling...	Human Trafficking...
Involves a border crossing	Does not require movement or transport of any kind
Is a voluntary arrangement Fees are paid by the person who wants to cross the border to the smuggler	Involves exploitation of a victim through forced labor and/or exploitation within the commercial sex industry.
Is a crime of illegal entry into a country	Is a crime against a person

**Myth:** Trafficking involves victims who come from situations of poverty and is a city problem that doesn't involve rural communities.

**Fact:** Poverty is often a factor of vulnerability but poverty is not a universal indicator of a human trafficking victim. Trafficked victims come from a range of income levels and backgrounds including families with increased socioeconomic status. Likewise, human trafficking affects rural and urban communities alike.

**Myth:** If the trafficked person consented to be in their initial situation or was informed about what type of labor they would be doing or that commercial sex would be involved, then it cannot be trafficking or against their will.

**Fact:** Initial consent to commercial sex or a labor setting prior to acts of force, fraud, or coercion is not relevant to the crime, nor is payment. Any minor involved in a commercial sex act is a victim of trafficking whether or not force, fraud or coercion exists.

**Myth:** If the victim receives something of value in exchange for sex, it is not human trafficking.

**Fact:** Any minor involved in a commercial sex act for anything of value (even food or a place to stay) is automatically a victim of human trafficking. Human trafficking of an adult involves force, fraud or coercion.

*Source: Adapted from Myths & Misconceptions, National Human Trafficking Hotline  
[www.humantraffickinghotline.org](http://www.humantraffickinghotline.org).*

For more information about human trafficking,  
visit the Wisconsin Department of Justice website:  
[www.BeFreeWisconsin.com](http://www.BeFreeWisconsin.com)