

## Force, Fraud and Coercion

### How do traffickers control victims?

The use of force, fraud, or coercion to exploit victims for labor or sex is at the heart of all human trafficking cases and distinguishes it from related offenses.

Force, fraud, and coercion can take many forms, ranging from severe mental and physical abuse and torture; to verbal intimidation, threats of force, or threats of legal action; to seizing victims' immigration documents or withholding their wages to prevent their escape.

In cases where traffickers charge workers recruitment fees, workers can find themselves perpetually indebted. Recruitment fees are usually compounded, and workers are then barely able to pay off any of their debt with the paltry wages that they earn.

Employers often keep workers under tight control through force and verbal intimidation, especially when they are enslaved abroad in factories, on fishing vessels, or in other areas of global supply chains. Victims have little chance of rescue or seeing their traffickers prosecuted when law enforcement and government officials are corrupt or lack the resources to protect victims and fight crime. In many countries, local laws don't allow workers to

### Tools of Power and Control



unionize or to assert their rights against suppliers and large companies that knowingly or unknowingly perpetuate slavery.

The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has identified eight key ways traffickers exert control over victims:

- **Violence and threats of violence:** Use or threats of physical violence to intimidate victims
- **Deception:** Tricking victims into believing that they'll be paid once they start working for the trafficker, that their families abroad will be paid and/or taken care of, or that authorities are not to be trusted
- **Imprisonment:** Physical restraint, imprisonment, and/or close supervision
- **Collusion:** Forcing victims to participate in illegal activity, such as visa fraud, theft, prostitution, or recruiting additional victims, which causes victims to feel complicit in their traffickers' crimes
- **Debt Bondage:** Charging victims fees for transportation, recruitment and/or living expenses, and compounding or charging interest on those debts so that victims must continue working for the trafficker
- **Relationship:** Using emotional manipulation to cause a victim to believe the trafficker or associate of the trafficker is romantically interested in him or her, or causing the victim to regard the trafficker as a parental figure
- **Isolation:** Restricting the victim's interaction with the outside world, through language barriers, forbidding victims from talking to their friends and family, and/or having victims work in a remote location
- **Religion, culture and belief:** Using spiritual or cultural practices, rituals, superstitions, or deep personal values to compel the victim's obedience

## Unique Control Mechanisms in Sex Trafficking

Sex traffickers frequently use sexual abuse and rape to terrorize victims. As their sense of dependency and social isolation increases, victims can become bonded to their traffickers and to pimps who lure them into forced prostitution through the promise of a romantic relationship. Relational ensnarement typically involves elaborate and carefully planned schemes, where traffickers earn victims' trust over time and create a dynamic in which victims seek to earn the love and affection of the traffickers. Runaways and children in foster care are also highly vulnerable to traffickers looking to take advantage of young people, particularly for sexual exploitation. Studies estimate that over 50 percent of sex trafficking victims nationwide come from foster care.

Since threats of deportation and seizing immigration documents are not effective against U.S. nationals, traffickers who target vulnerable American youth often use physical and verbal abuse, threats of force, threats of harm to third parties, confiscating wages, and physical restraint and isolation to keep victims under their control. ■