

Faces of Human Trafficking: The Victim-Centered Case

This video features survivors, service providers, prosecutors, and local law enforcement who have worked on human trafficking cases that have ended with a successful prosecution. They stress the importance of proactive cases and collecting various kinds of evidence rather than relying solely on victim testimony. It is intended for prosecutors, law enforcement, service providers, courts, and the general community.

Key Points

- Cases should be victim centered, not victim focused or victim built. Like with sexual assault or domestic violence cases, a strong human trafficking case should not rest entirely on the victim's statement. Instead, the case presentation should also include evidence that corroborates the victim's account of the crime.
- Evidence may look different in various trafficking settings—evidence of trafficking in a restaurant will be different than evidence in a field labor or street prostitution setting.
- The impact of trauma on a victim can be substantial. It may affect victims' ability to tell their story, make decisions, remember appointments, and serve as a strong witness in their case. Like other crimes, you can work with trauma in your case, if you understand it.
- Think outside the box. For example, a partnership with Zoning Enforcement can help you enter and gain information on massage parlors or nail salons, and a partnership with Alcohol and Beverage Licensing can allow you to enter and request information from a bar or cantina.
- When state and federal prosecutors work together, they can best determine how to bring the case forward.
- Don't just approach cases from a "vice" perspective—you won't find labor trafficking. An intelligence-based approach helps you gather the information you need. These cases are time-consuming but worth it.
- Forensic interviews are critical when working with youth and can also be useful with victims of all ages who have suffered significant trauma or when there is a language or cultural barrier.

“These types of cases need to be victim-centered but not victim-built.”

— Anita Alvarez
Cook County (Illinois) State's Attorney

- Federal law enforcement agencies such as the U.S. Department of Justice Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit and Child Exploitation and Obscenities Section, the Executive Office of U.S. Attorneys, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the U.S. Department of Human Services Blue Campaign are resources, if you need assistance with your case.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to have a “victim-centered” case?
2. What are indicators or signs of trauma, and how can this affect the victim’s ability to tell their story or participate in the case?
3. What types of evidence may help to corroborate a victim’s statement? What about in sex trafficking cases? In labor trafficking cases?
4. What can investigators and prosecutors do to help build rapport with a victim?
5. What local, state, or tribal criminal codes might apply to labor trafficking, and who is in the position to investigate these offenses?
6. For law enforcement, what other crimes can you potentially charge in addition to or instead of human trafficking? What are the possible benefits of those other charges?
7. What can be done in your community to proactively identify and investigate sex or labor trafficking?
8. What federal resources can provide assistance with human trafficking cases?
9. What federal, state, local, or tribal partners could you cultivate to expand your access to needed investigation resources (e.g.,

undercover vehicles, technology, information sharing, additional personnel)?

10. What can you do with the knowledge that you have gained today?

Supplemental Training Materials

- Provide the federal definition, from the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000, of “a victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons” and “sex trafficking” (found at 22 U.S.C. 7102).
- Provide a brief history of modern human trafficking legislation in the United States, including the TVPA of 2000 and its reauthorizations, the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014, the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act of 2015, and relevant legislation in your state.
- Compare the federal criminal trafficking charges with the relevant state, tribal, and local codes, and point out the differences for sex and labor trafficking.
- Provide definitions for victim-centered and trauma-informed approaches to criminal investigations and prosecutions (see the Human Trafficking Task Force e-Guide for definitions).
- Describe trafficking cases that have been successfully prosecuted in your area (both sex and labor trafficking of U.S. citizen and foreign national victims), including all the partners involved in the investigation and prosecution of the cases.

For more information, including additional resources for your trainings, please visit www.ovc.gov/trafficking or www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide.