

Maine Human Trafficking Needs Assessment

Defining Trafficking

Sex trafficking is perpetrated when a third party benefits from the sale of a person for sex acts through force, fraud, coercion, threats, and/or manipulation, or when the person is a minor. Maine's sex trafficking statute includes aggravated sex trafficking, as well as imposing additional fines for those convicted of trafficking to pay into a victims' assistance fund.

Sexual exploitation is the exchange of sex acts for anything of value where the individual is coerced or manipulated into the agreement through addiction or desperation.

Labor trafficking is perpetrated when a person is forced to perform labor or provide services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. Currently, Maine does not have any laws specific to labor trafficking.

The Voice of Survivors and Trafficking Victims

"Because of my experience I feel less than people with families and 'real jobs.' So you stay with the people who you think 'get' you and understand. People outside of the life don't respect us. People will say 'you choose to live like that,' but a lot of us didn't choose this life."

"Are you going to be in the street or will do you whatever it takes to have a house to live in?"

"Women need comfort and someone who will stand by them no matter what. If you tell a woman she has a choice, you need to accept her choice even if it is 'no, I don't want [help] right now.'"

Executive Summary

The goal of this Needs Assessment was to determine the extent to which human trafficking exists, what types of trafficking occur, and if community advocates and providers know how to recognize and address it. The findings inform law enforcement and service providers, help all community members to better identify trafficking and exploitation, help providers to assist identified victims and improve the screening and support processes for victims and those at risk of being trafficked.

Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation in Maine

- Sex trafficking victims are typically females between the ages of 14 and 30, living in both rural and urban communities with a history of sexual and/or physical abuse, lacking basic needs and an emotional support system.
- For many, the entrance into being sex trafficked starts with the belief that they are in a personal, intimate relationship with the trafficker.
- Survival sex and trafficking are often interchangeable. Victims and survivors stated they would rather do things they did not want to do in exchange for meeting basic needs.
- Addiction is heavily intertwined with trafficking and one of the ways traffickers control their victims.
- Most of the focus on labor trafficking in Maine concentrates on agriculture; more is needed to determine the reality of labor trafficking in other industries.

Estimating Prevalence and Challenges with Estimates

- Challenges in determining prevalence are that victims engaged in illegal and stigmatized behavior do not want to reveal themselves and that not all victims view themselves as a victim. Additionally, the only victims able to be counted are those who access services or who are arrested.
- There is no UCR data available on trafficking in Maine although it is now a federal requirement.
- Prevalence estimates vary by data source; regardless of the source, they are always higher than the current numbers of cases identified (11 cases, *Polaris*, 2014; 48 cases, *MECASA*, 2014).
- Based on all available sources of data, the most conservative estimates from the 2015 Needs Assessment suggest the annual number of cases is likely between 200 and 300, not including labor trafficking.

Supports Available

- Maine's response to human trafficking spans many systems, providers and organizations that focus on policy, training and direct services.
- Services available include emergency response, basic needs, medical, legal, law enforcement, mental health and substance abuse treatment; this varies by geography.
- There is more funding and infrastructure available to support trafficking victims in Cumberland and York than elsewhere in the state.
- Over the past 2-3 years, providers have increased collaboration across sectors to better serve victims' needs.
- Safety, trust and choice are essential to victims. In general, service providers recognize and are sensitive to the stigma around sexual violence.

Service Needs and Gaps

- Victims face many of the same challenges when accessing services as other vulnerable groups (e.g., transportation, health insurance, waitlists, eligibility, legal record).
- Service gaps specific to this population include housing, shelter, and residential treatment; after-hour response capacity; and mentorship and social support.
- Requiring victims to self-identify as a "trafficking victim limits access.
- Legal factors (e.g., prostitution and drug trafficking charges that are intertwined) complicate coordinated service delivery; perception that service providers interfere with an investigation or that involving law enforcement violates victims' trust.

Maine Human Trafficking Needs Assessment Recommendations

Statewide Law Enforcement Perspective

(N = 182)

- Respondents were mostly male (89%) and had been officers over 10 years (76%).
- 76% of officers in Cumberland and York Counties said trafficking was an issue in their jurisdiction, compared to only 37% in all other counties.
- 51% said their organization is adequately trained to handle **sex trafficking**, while only 39% were adequately prepared to handle **labor trafficking**.
- 44% said their department was adequately prepared to handle trafficking cases **involving minors**.
- 76% of officers involved with over 5 human trafficking cases in the past year agreed with the statement: *additional laws are needed to address trafficking in Maine*.
- The most common actions when handling a trafficking case were determining if the victim was a minor (86%) and calling a victim advocate (81%).
- Those with less experience and exposure to trafficking were less familiar with resources in their area (78%); they also wanted clear definitions and help knowing how to identify cases.

The Voice of Law Enforcement

“Some [service providers] go home at 5 o’clock, and this is a 24-hour issue.”

“We don’t want to penalize the women but support them...The service providers, though, need to understand what it means to be a witness in a case.”

- 1. Streamline guidance, materials and language to use.** *Maine Sex Trafficking and Exploitation Network (MaineSTEN)* produced guidelines for reporting and discussing trafficking. Numerous providers described the importance of agreeing on and using common language to shift public perceptions. Coordinated training across disciplines is encouraged. The influence of mainstream and social media on community awareness is particularly important and could be useful.
- 2. Increase community awareness of red flags and how to respond appropriately.** Include education to the hospitality, health and beauty service sectors. Reinforce that this is an issue affecting many populations across the state rather than exclusive to urban areas and limited to foreign nationals.
- 3. Continue to expand focus on prevention through connecting with schools.** Young adults, especially those in high-risk environments, need to learn about personal relationships; self-empowerment; choice and control. Concrete information about warning signs of abuse and violence can be extended to adults, teachers and other caregivers working with children and families.
- 4. Enhance support services available to victims 24/7.** Aside from crisis and emergency response services, the complex needs of trafficking victims extend beyond the traditional workday. Many situations require carefully assembled response teams with safety and personal integrity the priority. Shelter and basic needs are always necessary.
- 5. Consider mentorship as an interim plan of support.** Given the transient nature of victims, and the frequent interaction with law enforcement, organized advocates and mentors can be trained to work alongside designated service providers to assure support at whatever stage of being in or getting out of the life.
- 6. Designate a state lead to coordinate improved data collection.** Service providers around the state would benefit from using a standardized data collection tool. Similarly, law enforcement would benefit from implementing the UCR typology. One entity should be designated to coordinate data improvement efforts, decide what to count, and help providers implement the process. The appointed lead could compile, analyze, and distribute data to all involved agencies.
- 7. Expand state oversight and service support for labor trafficking.** The lack of regulation limits the rights and safety of labor trafficking victims, as well as the state’s response. The next step should be engaging the various stakeholders within the state to explore whether labor trafficking victims could benefit from a response that mirrors the case management and multi-disciplinary approach to serving those being sex trafficked.

Efforts and Accomplishments

- In 2010, Maine initiated a requirement that all officers receive mandatory training in human trafficking. Training will be updated in 2016.
- There are at least 6 coalitions and task forces working throughout Maine to address human trafficking and sexual exploitation.
- In 2013, Preble Street received a \$400,000 grant to work on identifying and helping victims of human trafficking in Maine.
- Through a formalized needs assessment process, *MECASA* hired *HZA* to administer a survey of law enforcement (n=182); complete interviews (n=46) with stakeholders, service providers, community members; and listen to stories, thoughts and recommendations of 18 women who are victims and survivors of abuse and exploitation.