

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING, EXPLOITATION, AND ABUSE OF OLDER ADULTS

Human trafficking of older adults can be simply defined as profiting from the exploitation of others through the use of force, fraud, and coercion. Human trafficking takes on a variety of forms and often intersects with domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of abuse in multiple ways. It is important to recognize that human trafficking and other types of victimization don't occur in silos - rather, there is a marked overlap in the pattern of behaviors that both abusers and traffickers use to exert power and control over a victim<sup>1</sup>, as well as in the impact survivors may experience.

Intimate partner violence in later life (IPVILL) is the physical, financial, sexual, and/or emotional abuse of an individual aged 60 and older by a current or former intimate partner, spouse, or family member. Older adults experience various types of domestic abuse; however, the impact can be compounded by implicit and explicit biases that society may have about older adults, actual or perceived mental health issues, and/or people with disabilities. These biases leave older adults more vulnerable for compound abuse and trafficking by exploitation.

Across age groups, survivors of sexual exploitation, harassment, abuse, and assault experience a range of emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual reactions. Some impacts may include increased feelings of shame, anxiety and depression, sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, social withdrawal, substance use and abuse, sexually-transmitted infections, suicidality, or exacerbation of existing medical conditions or diagnoses. Older adults, in particular, are at increased risk of genital trauma and physical injury from sexual abuse or assault (Bows, 2018 a & b; NSVRC, 2010; NSVRC, 2013). The terms abuse, exploitation, and trafficking are often used interchangeably when referring to victimization against older adults, but they may mean different things depending upon the situation and have different legal definitions. Understanding the intersection between domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking is extremely important for raising awareness of the realities of what survivors and victims face-- especially when it is compounded by the unique needs and experiences of those who are aged 60 and older.

### Human trafficking, exploitation, and abuse of older adults can present as:

- Benefits trafficking- withholding food stamps, social security benefits, Medicaid, veteran's benefits in exchange for sex, drugs, money, or as a tool of coercion.
- Profiting from the sale of explicit pictures of an older adult without their consent.
- Forcing the older adult to provide childcare without payment or not providing appropriate living conditions or food.
- Threatening an older adult's independence if they don't comply with demands for sexual activity.
- Financially exploiting the older adult by abusing their Power of Attorney or Guardianship rights and misusing the older adult's money and assets.
- Sexually exploiting an older adult in exchange for drugs, money, or something else of value.



## WHY OLDER ADULTS?

Due to ageism and bias, older people are often perceived as having less agency and bodily autonomy. They are placed at greater risk for exploitation and abuse because they are more likely to rely on closed systems for support and are at a higher potential risk for injury<sup>6</sup>. Older adults are less likely to report instances of abuse due to the biases of others or their own internal biases, reporting barriers<sup>7</sup>, or coercion from an abusive family member and/or partner<sup>8</sup>.

### ACT 105 & ASSISTANCE FOR VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Act 105 is Pennsylvania's comprehensive human trafficking law, which went into effect on July 2, 2014. Along with the Federal TVPA Act of 2000, Act 105 provides legal definitions of trafficking that are prosecutable by law. For more information on the state and Federal laws regarding human trafficking, and programs that assist human trafficking victims, please visit:

The PA General Assembly:

<https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/li/uconsCheck.cfm?yr=2014&sessInd=0&act=105>

Pennsylvania Alliance Against the Trafficking of Humans (PAATH):

<http://www.educateandadvocate-paath.com/what-is-pennsylvania-act-105/>

The Villanova Law Institute to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation:

<https://cseinstitute.org>

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act:

<https://www.state.gov/international-and-domestic-law/>

The Polaris Project:

<https://polarisproject.org/current-federal-laws>

**If you suspect that you or someone you know is a victim of trafficking,  
please contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline:**

**1-888-373-7888**

#### Sources:

1. [https://nnedv.org/latest\\_update/intersections-domestic-violence-human-trafficking/](https://nnedv.org/latest_update/intersections-domestic-violence-human-trafficking/)
2. Bows, H. (2018a). Practitioner views on the impacts, challenges, and barriers in supporting older survivors of sexual violence. *Violence Against Women*, 24(9). Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6009174/>
3. Bows, H. (2018b). Sexual violence against older people: A review of the empirical literature. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 19(5), 567-583. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1524838016683455>
4. National Sexual Violence Resource Center. (2010). Sexual violence in later life. Retrieved from [https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/2012-03/publications\\_SVlaterlife\\_bulletin.pdf](https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/2012-03/publications_SVlaterlife_bulletin.pdf)
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