

ASSESSING PATIENTS FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING

(Adapted from The National Human Trafficking Resource Screening Tool)

How do I conduct an assessment or exam with a potential victim of human trafficking?

Victims of trafficking do not often disclose their trafficking situation in clinical settings. Therefore, it is critical for medical practitioners to be thoughtful about engaging patients, employing trauma-informed practices, and creating a space that is conducive for discussing human trafficking. Before beginning any conversation with a patient, assess the potential safety risks that may result from asking sensitive questions of the patient. Recognize that the goal of your interaction is not disclosure or rescue, but rather to create a safe, non-judgmental place that will help you identify trafficking indicators and assist the patient.

Recommendations for Assessments:

- Allow the patient to decide if they would feel more comfortable speaking with a male or female practitioner.
- If the patient requires interpretation, always utilize professional interpreters who are unrelated to the patient or situation.
- If the patient is accompanied by others, find a time and place to speak with the patient privately.
- Take time to build rapport with potential victims, or if you do not have the time yourself, find someone else on staff who can develop rapport with the patient.
- Ensure that the patient understands confidentiality policies and practices, including mandatory reporting laws.
- Use multidisciplinary resources, such as social workers, where available.
- Refer to existing institutional protocols for victims of abuse/sexual abuse.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING INDICATORS

GENERAL INDICATORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

- Shares a scripted or inconsistent history
- Is unwilling or hesitant to answer questions about the injury or illness
- Is accompanied by an individual who does not let the patient speak for themselves, refuses to let the patient have privacy, or who interprets for them. May also insist on translating for patient
- Evidence of controlling or dominating relationships (excessive concerns about pleasing a family member, romantic partner, or employer)
- Demonstrates fearful or nervous behavior or avoids eye contact
- Is resistant to assistance or demonstrates hostile behavior
- Is unable to provide his/her address
- Is not aware of his/her location, the current date, or time
- Is not in possession of his/her identification documents
- Is not in control of his/her own money
- Is not being paid or wages are withheld
- Physical age is inconsistent with reported age

LABOR TRAFFICKING INDICATORS

- Has been abused at work or threatened with harm by an employer or supervisor
- Is not allowed to have adequate breaks, food, or water while at work
- Is not provided with adequate personal protective equipment for hazardous work
- Was recruited for different work than he/she is currently doing
- Is required to live in housing provided by employer
- Is living at workplace
- Has a debt to employer or recruiter that he/she cannot pay off or is being forced to work to pay off

SEX TRAFFICKING INDICATORS

- Patient is under the age of 18 and is involved in the commercial sex industry
- Has tattoos or other forms of branding, such as tattoos that say, "Daddy," "Property of...", "For sale," "\$" or crowns, etc.
- Reports an unusually high number of sexual partners
- Does not have appropriate clothing for the weather or venue, or sexualized clothing
- Uses language common in the commercial sex industry
- Youth or young adult with an older "boyfriend"

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HEALTH INDICATORS AND CONSEQUENCES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING *

Physical Health Indicators

- Signs of physical abuse or unexplained injuries
 - Bruising
 - Burns
 - Cuts or wounds
 - Blunt force trauma
 - Fractures
 - Broken teeth
 - Traumatic alopecia
 - Signs of torture
- Neurological conditions
 - Traumatic brain injury
 - Headaches or migraines
 - Unexplained memory loss
 - Vertigo of unknown etiology
 - Insomnia
 - Difficulty concentrating
- Cardiovascular/respiratory conditions that appear to be caused or worsened by stress, such as:
 - Arrhythmia
 - High blood pressure
 - Acute respiratory distress
- Gastrointestinal conditions that appear to be caused or worsened by stress such as:
 - Constipation
 - Irritable bowel syndrome
- Dietary health issues
 - Severe weight loss
 - Malnutrition/dehydration
 - Loss of appetite
- Reproductive issues
 - STIs (multiple/recurrent)
 - Genitourinary issues
 - Repeated unwanted pregnancies
 - Forced/pressured/multiple abortions
 - Genital trauma
 - Sexual dysfunction
 - Retained or impacted foreign body
- Substance use disorders
- Other health issues
 - Effects of prolonged exposure to extreme temperatures
 - Effects of prolonged exposure to industrial or agricultural chemicals
 - Somatic complaints

Mental Health Indicators

- Depression
- Suicidal ideation
- Self-harming behaviors
- Anxiety
- Post-traumatic stress disorder/response
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Flat affect
- Feelings of shame or guilt
- Hyper-Vigilance
- Distrust or paranoia
- Hostility
- Attachment disorders
 - Lack of or difficulty in engaging in social interactions
 - Signs of withdrawal, fear, sadness, or irritability
- Depersonalization or derealization
 - Feeling like an outside observer of themselves, as if watching themselves in a movie
 - Emotional or physical numbness of senses
 - Feeling alienated from or unfamiliar with their surroundings
 - Distortions in perceptions
- Dissociation disorders
 - Memory loss
 - A sense of being detached from themselves and experiences
 - A lack of sense of self-identity, or switching between alternate identities
 - A perception that the people and things around them seem distorted or unreal

Social or Developmental Indicators

- Increased engagement in high risk behaviors such as running away or early sexual initiation if a minor
- Trauma bonding with trafficker or other victims (e.g. Stockholm syndrome)
- Difficulty establishing or maintaining healthy relationships
- Delayed physical or cognitive development
- Impaired social skills

*This list of physical and mental health indicators of human trafficking is not exhaustive. Trafficking survivors may experience one or more of these indicators, none of these indicators, or health indicators not on this list. This list is intended to help you assess if a patient's condition may be a result of trafficking-related trauma and should be considered in context.