

Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking: The Interrelationship

Dorchen A. Leidholdt
Sanctuary for Families' Center for
Battered Women's Legal Services

Sanctuary for Families



Sanctuary attorney Carmen Rey and Congresswoman Nydia Velasquez celebrate the reunification of a survivor with her children.

Sanctuary for Families is a leading provider of legal, clinical, and residential services to victims of domestic violence and their children.

Sanctuary for Families



Over the last two decades Sanctuary has assisted a growing number of victims of human trafficking.

Anti-trafficking poster from Eastern Europe. It reads, "They are not toys."

Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking

Trafficking victims, many of whom are also victims of domestic violence, frequently appear in New York courtrooms. Rarely are they identified as either victims of domestic violence or of human trafficking.

Three Women

KIKA, CHANTAL, AND KENYA

Kika's Story

After fleeing into a domestic violence shelter with her two daughters, Kika petitioned for an order of protection against her husband Arnie. Arnie was waiting for her in the courtroom and informed the judge that she was a prostitute. Finding out that Kika had 4 convictions for prostitution, the judge gave Arnie temporary custody of the two girls and denied Kika's petition for an order of protection.

Three Cases: Kika

The Court did not know that:

Kika had been trafficked by an organized crime group from Venezuela to New York.

Arnie had been a regular customer at the brothel in which Kika was trafficked.

Arnie perpetrated severe domestic violence against Kika, frequently in the presence of their daughters.

Three Cases: Chantal

When John began to beat Chantal, the mother of his 2-year-old son, with a wooden chair, she grabbed a knife and stabbed him. She was charged with attempted murder, but the charges were dropped when John failed to cooperate with the prosecution. A child welfare investigation revealed that Chantal was in prostitution, had more than 20 convictions, and left John, Jr. with a babysitter at night. John, Jr. was placed in foster care, and Chantal was charged with neglect.

Three Cases: Chantal

The Court did not know that:

John had battered Chantal for many years.

John coerced Chantal into prostitution through psychological manipulation and threats.

John beat Chantal with a chair because she refused to continue to prostitute.

Three Cases: Kenya

Kenya was prostituting in high end hotels and on the streets. She had more than twenty convictions. When she was arrested again and brought before the court at arraignment, the Judge was outraged. She pointed out that despite her recidivism and apparent lack of remorse, Kenya had not yet been sentenced to time in jail.

Three Cases: Kenya

The Court did not know that:

Kenya had run away from a violent home in which her father abused first her mother and then her.

In her teens, Kenya had been seduced by a pimp who offered her refuge and then pimped her.

That pimp sold her to an even more brutal pimp who beat her if she did not make her nightly quota.

Three Cases: Kenya

The Court did not know:

That the lawyer representing Kenya had been hired by her pimp and carried out his instructions.

An Interview with Kenya



Traffickers are often intimate partner abusers

- Sex trafficking is often an extreme form of intimate partner violence.
- Traffickers often initially hold themselves out to their victims as devoted boyfriends and lovers.
- Once their victims commit themselves emotionally and physically, trafficker/pimps coerce them into prostitution through pleas and threats.

Kika's Story: Romance or Ruse?

Kika was a teenage mother living in Caracas, Venezuela when she met Daniel at work. He asked her out on dates and romanced her. He always seemed to place her needs above his own. Most important, he offered to be a father to her little girl. When he suddenly moved to the United States and asked her to join him, Kika said yes.

Kika's Story: Romance or Ruse?

Kika was greeted at JFK Airport by Daniel and his cousin Sandra. They monitored her every move, confiscated her savings, and took her passport as security for her growing debt. Daniel played the good cop while Sandra played the bad one.

Kika's Story: Romance or Ruse?

Kika did not know that Daniel's family ran a trafficking ring that lured young women from Venezuela and tricked them into prostitution.

She did not know that she was not Daniel's first victim and would not be his last.

Kika's Story

Eventually Kika succumbed to Daniel's pleas and Sandra's threats.

Sandra took her to the brothel she managed.

The first night Kika provided sexual services to 19 men.

Kika was trafficked over the next 3 years in a series of brothels in Queens.

Marriage to Arnie was her way out.

Chantal's Story: Romance or Ruse?

A young woman born and raised in the projects in Brooklyn, Chantal fell in love with John after he told her how much he wanted a family.

Once she became pregnant, he turned abusive and Chantal fled into a DV shelter.

Two years later she ran into John on the street.

Chantal's Story: Romance or Ruse?

John begged Chantal's forgiveness and told her he had changed.

He moved into her apartment and showered her and John, Jr. with expensive gifts.

He told her he was ready to be a father to their son.

Chantal was overjoyed.

Chantal's Story

John eventually revealed that he was working as a pimp.

He pressured Chantal to enter "the life."

He promised her that it would be just for a short time until they had enough money for their dream house.

Eventually John broke down Chantal's resistance.

The Traffickers of Tenancingo



This garish home of a local pimp was built with the profits of sex trafficking.

The Traffickers of Tenancingo

Tenancingo is a small town in the state of Tlaxcala, Mexico. Its economy revolves around the sex industry. Boys in Tenancingo are schooled to be pimps. They are taught that the most effective techniques involve romance and promises of marriage and a home.

The Traffickers of Tenancingo

Tenancingo pimps fan out into Mexico in search of vulnerable women who will fall prey to their wiles. They often take them to the United State where the largest profits can be made.



An interview with Graciella



Intimate partner traffickers

Once they have recruited their victims, intimate partner traffickers often maintain their control over them through a mixture of rewards and punishments. Gifts and protestations of love are followed by verbal abuse and beatings.

Seasoning into prostitution

Traffickers often convince their victims that they are outside the law and can never seek protection from the police. They reinforce their victims' sense of social exclusion by remaking their identities, often giving them new names, and sometimes branding them with tattoos to signify their ownership.

Seasoning into prostitution

Not infrequently the trauma victims sustain leads them to see their tormentors as protectors. "Traumatic bonding" is the name mental health professionals use to designate this condition.

Traumatic Bonding

In a high profile criminal trial in NYC, victims testified in support of their traffickers, a father-son pimp team.

Battered, branded, and deceived, they denied the violence captured on wiretap and defended their exploiters.



"My heart still stays the same.
I'm not going to leave him. That's my husband."

Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking

Domestic violence can also be the entrance into or exit from human trafficking. People at risk can fall under the control of traffickers while attempting to escape human trafficking. Traffickers know how to recognize and exploit their vulnerability.

Olga's story

Olga, a young mother in the Ukraine, was frequently beaten by her husband. There were no domestic violence shelters in the village where she lived. The police blamed victims and sent them back to their abusers. Then a wealthy woman from her village told her about a wonderful opportunity in the United States.

Olga's story

The woman gave Olga forged travel documents and tickets to the U.S. She promised Olga a well paying job there. When Olga arrived in New York City, she was told that she had to work around the clock in a grocery store. She had to give her paycheck to the woman's friends. When she tried to escape she was beaten. The woman's friends threatened to kill her daughters if she didn't do what they said.

Domestic violence as a “push factor” into trafficking

Experts on trafficking refer to “push factors”—social, political, and/or economic conditions that can propel vulnerable people into sex or labor trafficking. Domestic violence can be such a push factor. Olga realized that she had escaped a battering husband only to become another kind of abuse victim.

Trafficking as a “push factor” into domestic violence

Conversely, people trying to escape trafficking are often vulnerable to perpetrators of domestic violence. Kika thought that if she married Arnie, she would gain her freedom. Instead, under his control she became a different kind of slave. Arnie frequently threatened to expose her history of prostitution if she left him.

Olga's story continued

When one of Olga's traffickers tried to rape her, she attempted suicide and ended up in the psychiatric ward of a large City hospital. An astute social worker identified her as a trafficking victim. Olga cooperated with the FBI, and her traffickers were arrested and convicted of human trafficking. Several other victims of their ring were identified and rescued.

Human trafficking and domestic violence

Whether sex or labor, whether carried out by an intimate partner pimp or an organized crime ring like the one that trafficked Olga, human traffickers use the same tactics of power and control that batterers use.

The Power and Control Wheel, Adapted for Human Trafficking



Both batterers and traffickers perpetrate psychological torture

- Isolation of the victim
- Induced debility, producing exhaustion, weakness, or fatigue
- Monopolization of perception
- Threats of harm to the victim or family and friends and other forms of threat

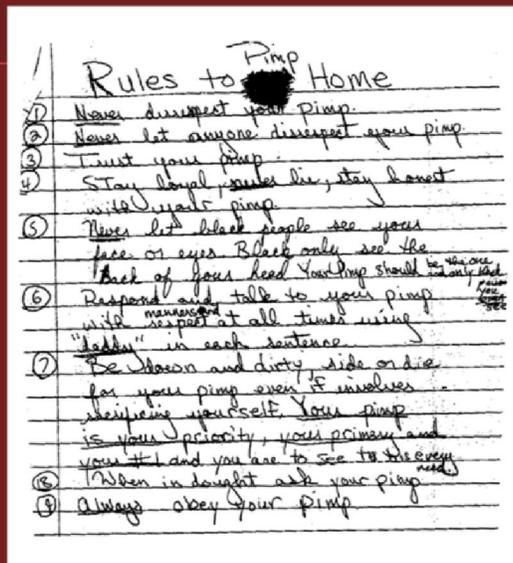
Definition from Amnesty International.

Both batterers and traffickers perpetrate psychological torture

- Degradation, including humiliation, name-calling and insults, and denial of privacy or personal hygiene
- Forced drug or alcohol use
- Occasional random and variable reinforcers or indulgences that keep alive the hope that the torture will cease

Definition from Amnesty International

Pimps employ extreme tactics of power and control, imposing "Pimp Rules" on victims



The physical consequences of human trafficking are identical to those of domestic violence

- Direct physical injury, e.g., bruises, broken bones, lacerations, traumatic brain injury
- Indirect physical injury, e.g., chronic headaches, pervasive body aches, feelings of dizziness
- Insomnia and disrupted sleep patterns
- Damage to reproductive and uro-genital systems; STDs, HIV, AIDS
- Drug and alcohol dependency

As with domestic violence, the psychological consequences are often even more debilitating

- High levels of anxiety
- Minimization/denial
- Numbness/flattened affect
- Memory loss
- Depression
- Dissociation
- Post-traumatic stress disorder

Psychological consequences facilitate the traffickers' control



- Traumatic bonding with traffickers
- Mistrust and suspicion of authorities and service providers
- Shame, self-blame
- Self-medication (drug, alcohol abuse)

Psychological consequences facilitate the traffickers' control

- Terrified and traumatized, human trafficking victims, like domestic violence victims, often do not cooperate with law enforcement.
- Law enforcement officials are more likely to identify trafficking by telltale signs than by victim disclosure.

Flagging trafficking: traffickers hide in plain sight



"Massage parlors"
"Escort agencies"
"Internet brides"
"Modeling agencies"
"Erotic services"
"Adult services"
"Gentleman's Clubs"

Identifying trafficking on the internet

[vancouver, BC craigslist > erotic services](#)

young and tender! - w4m - 18 (Van)

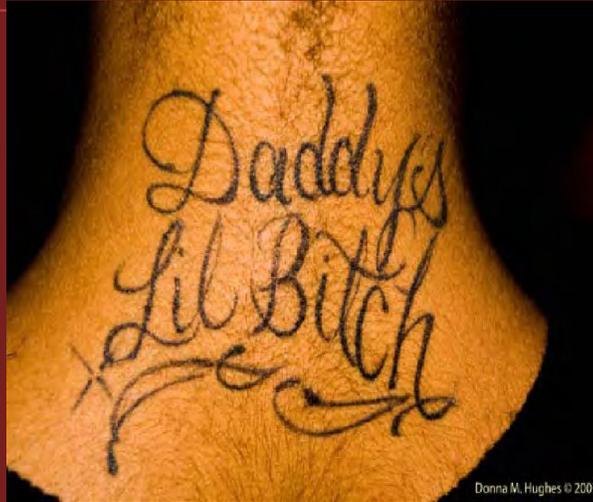
Reply to: [\[redacted\]](#)
Date: 2008-05-08, 11:31AM PDT

looking for something young and fresh this morning? Here I am baby!

5'4", 120 lbs, 34B-25-34



Identifying trafficking: tattoos



Psychological consequences facilitate the traffickers' control

As with domestic violence, prosecutors often do not have cooperating victim witnesses in trafficking prosecutions and must build "evidence-based cases."

Psychological consequences facilitate traffickers' control

Branded with her pimp's name, "King Koby," and threatened by him ("Don't make me break your fucking neck in the morning"), this young woman testified in his defense and insisted that he never coerced her into prostitution.



Minor sex trafficking within the United States



- In the U.S., the average age of entry into prostitution is 13.
- The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children estimates that over 100,000 American children and youth are victims of sex trafficking.



Prostituted girls are frequently victims of intimate partner violence, under the control of severely abusive boyfriend/pimps.

Internet brides may be trafficking victims

- The internet bride trade may be “disguised trafficking.”
- At least 9,500 to 14,500 internet brides are brought into the U.S. each year.
- Many are enslaved and abused by their new American husbands.



From victim to survivor: The path to recovery and empowerment

Trafficking victims need the same kind of holistic services that domestic violence victims need. Increasingly domestic violence service providers are recognizing this and opening their doors to them.

From victim to survivor: The path to recovery and empowerment

With legal representation in order of protection, custody, matrimonial, and immigration cases, and with trauma informed counseling, Kika was able to regain custody of her daughters, bring her left-behind daughter to the U.S., and rebuild her life. She has become an activist against sex trafficking.

From victim to survivor: Kika today



From victim to survivor: The path to recovery and empowerment

Prostituted at age 13 by her school janitor, Melanie was rescued at 15 and provided intensive psychological services at Gateways, a therapeutic community for trafficked girls run by the Jewish Childcare Association.

From victim to survivor: Melanie today



- Safe space
- Safe community
- Trauma-informed counseling
- Legal services
- Economic empowerment
- Survivor leadership training

"If a girl can change her own life, she can change the lives of girls everywhere."

The old approach



- Believing that women and children choose prostitution
- Arresting and prosecuting prostituted people
- Ignoring the johns
- Ignoring the pimps and other traffickers

The new approach

- Understanding the domestic violence-trafficking connection
- Providing holistic services to victims
- Stopping the justice system's revictimization of trafficking victims
- Arresting and prosecuting the perpetrators (both buyers and sellers)

The old vocabulary

"Prostitute" and "hooker," stigmatize and reinforce stereotypes. "Sex worker" renders the harm invisible.

The new vocabulary



Trafficking survivor Kikka Cerpa is congratulated by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon after testifying about her exploitation in prostitution.

More information about human trafficking

New York State

www.tvpja.com

www.stophumantraffickingny.org

<http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/womeninthecourts/LMHT.pdf>

U.S. Government

www.state.gov/g/tip/

International

www.catwinternational.org

www.equalitynow.org