



D60 Human Trafficking: Implications for Forensic Nursing Practice

Nancy B. Cabelus, MSN, International Forensic Consultant, 701 Poinsettia Road, #344, Belleair, FL 33756*

The goals of this presentation are to (1) describe types of injuries and illness that trafficking victims often acquire, (2) identify forensic evidence that could be gathered by the forensic nurse to aid in the investigation of crimes of human trafficking, and (3) discuss implications for forensic nursing practice concerning detection, intervention and prevention of this violent crime against humanity.

The presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating how “trafficking in persons” is a crime against humanity and an act of modern day slavery.

Approximately 900,000 persons are trafficked around the world every year and it is estimated that half of these victims are children. Following the illicit drug trade, trafficking in persons is tied with firearms trafficking as the second most lucrative business among organized crime groups. Unlike drug and firearms trafficking, however, human traffickers can continue to exploit their victims long after the initial point of sale.

Victims may be hidden underground as laborers or servants while others are sold into the sex trade. Through the use of force, fraud or coercion victims are often beaten, tortured, raped, or drugged into compliance. To their captors, trafficked persons are commodities whose value diminishes when they become injured or sick. Victims overcome by illness or injury may be escorted by their captors or a designee to seek treatment at healthcare facilities. The forensic nurse may be the trafficking victim's first point of contact in the healthcare system. Through comprehensive nursing assessment, forensic nurses may detect evidence that points to the crime of human trafficking. Musculoskeletal injuries, patterns of injuries in various stages of healing, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, and drug addiction are common health problems often acquired by trafficking victims.

Similar to the profile of a domestic violence victim, persons who have been trafficked live in fear of being further harmed or have been threatened that their loved ones would be killed if they were to report their situation to anyone. Victims feel that they cannot trust anyone and will be reluctant to disclose information about where they live or what has happened to them. Bio-psycho-social needs of the trafficked are like those of domestic violence victims in that they require a plan for safety, shelter, health care, mental health services and legal assistance.

Victims who have been trafficked from foreign countries fear that they will be arrested, incarcerated or deported by immigration authorities. For some, returning to their country of origin may be more dangerous than if they remained with traffickers. Personal documents such as birth certificates, passports, insurance information are likely not in possession of victims because they have been confiscated or destroyed by the traffickers. Sometimes victims are issued false documents.

Forensic nurses must be aware of the crime of human trafficking and have knowledge of laws, protocols for reporting, and resources for referring victims in the venues where they practice. This presentation will provide the audience with awareness of the prevalence of human trafficking, describe types of injuries and illness that trafficking victims often acquire, identify forensic evidence that could be gathered by the forensic nurse to aid in the investigation of crimes of human trafficking and discuss implications for forensic nursing practice concerning detection, intervention and prevention of this violent crime against humanity.

Human Trafficking, Forensic Nursing, Evidence