

## **Sex Trafficking in Nebraska**

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ENGL 2410: Critical Approaches to Literature

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November 07, 2023

## **Introduction**

In 1865, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution abolished slavery. However, today there are more people enslaved than there were when slavery was legal. These slaves can be found across the United States and are trafficked and sold for sex or sexual acts. Sex trafficking can be defined as a form of human trafficking for the sole purpose of sexual exploitation. It is a crime that involves compelling or coercing a person to provide labor or services, or to engage in commercial sex acts. Coercion can be subtle or overt, physical, or psychological. Exploitation of a minor for commercial sex is human trafficking, regardless of whether any form of force, fraud, or coercion was used (The United States Department of Justice, 2020).

While Nebraska may seem unlikely to be a part of these heinous crimes, it is the hub for much of trafficking's selling and trading. Sex trafficking is a multifaceted problem that is extremely difficult to understand. Unfortunately, this is not a dilemma that is going to go away with time. As this issue only continues to grow, it is imperative to understand the truth behind sex trafficking, its implications, and the ways that survivors and those impacted by it can be supported.

## **Sex Trafficking in Nebraska**

Sex trafficking is a multi-billion-dollar industry that is only able to operate through its victims being kept in its shackles. Among the states in the Midwest, Nebraska has one of the highest rates of sex trafficking. The sex trafficking enterprise operates underground, which makes it difficult to quantify the number of victims with accuracy. However, it is estimated that every month there are around 984 individuals in Nebraska who are sold for sex. Of the 984 sold each month, it is estimated that many of those individuals are sold multiple times (Nebraska's Commercial Sex Market, n.d.).

Nebraska's geographic location in the center of the United States makes it a convenient place for traffickers to buy, sell, and transport victims. Additionally, Interstate 80 makes Nebraska a revolving door for trafficking to happen in the state. Not only are the major cities such as Omaha, Grand Island, and North Platte large hotspots for trafficking but so are the small towns that can be found along I-80. Of the 984 victims trafficked each month in Nebraska, 27 of those victims were then later identified in other states such as New York, Florida, Oregon, Massachusetts, and California. Moreover, the smaller the city the initial trafficking happens in, the greater the chance that the victims will be transported to a larger market. In Omaha, the largest city in Nebraska, only 30% of victims are transient. Whereas in North Platte, 83% of victims are transient and will be taken across state lines (Nebraska's Commercial Sex Market, n.d.). Understanding that Nebraska's interstate system has vast implications when it comes to trafficking within the state, and surrounding states, helps us to understand the depth of trafficking within the Midwest fully.

### **The Implications of Human Trafficking**

Of the suspected 984 victims of human trafficking in Nebraska every month, the hope is for these victims to become survivors. There is no doubt that human trafficking has vast implications that span far beyond what we can understand if we have never experienced surviving human trafficking. Each survivor has their own unique and individual experience. However, one aspect that is similar among all victims is that they experience complex physical and emotional primary trauma. While no two survivors will respond in the same way, and symptoms of trauma vary for everyone, common symptoms include challenges with coping with daily life stresses, anxiety, depression, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, and many other things. These effects can occur immediately or have a delayed onset. Knowing these symptoms can be crucial in helping to identify victims (Trauma and Human Trafficking, n.d.).

Additionally, those who know someone who has been a victim of human trafficking can experience secondary and tertiary trauma, a form of trauma that is a result of indirect exposure to trauma. No matter how one is involved in sex trafficking, it has extreme implications. However, there are resources across Nebraska to aid in your liberation, and healing journey.

### **Resources For Sex Trafficking Victims in Nebraska**

If you are a victim of trafficking, or you are under the impression that someone you know may be a victim of trafficking, there are resources to help.

If a safe phone call can be made, the 24-hour **Nebraska Human Trafficking Hotline** can be reached at **833-PLS-LOOK (833-757-5665)**. These trained hotline advocates can provide emotional support and instant connection to emergency services if required. If a phone call is not safe, you may **text 4HELP (44357) with your current location**. A trained professional can get you in contact with emergency services (Nebraska Launches New Human Trafficking Hotline, Nebraska Attorney General Mike Hilgers, 2022). Additionally, if you are in person, do not be afraid to ask for help. Look for a yellow sign that reads, “**Safe Place**” outside of gas stations, libraries, etc. (Safe Place, n.d.). Another useful tip to know is that if you are being forced to get your haircut against your will, ask your hairdresser for an “**Angel Cut with Layers.**” This notifies the stylist that you are getting your haircut against your will, so no services will be performed, and the local authorities will be notified immediately.

If you have been liberated from sex trafficking, and you are unsure where to go and what resources are available to you, there are many available all throughout Nebraska. The **Women's Center for Advancement (WCA)** aims to help victims of human trafficking through free legal action, emotional support, and financial support. All employees at the WCA work to meet their needs by connecting with clients where they are at. The WCA can be contacted through a simple phone call (HOW WE HELP, WCA, Stay safe, grow strong, n.d.).

Additionally, the Nebraska Legislature has created the *Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force* which strives to end all human trafficking in Nebraska by doing the following:

1. Find Human Trafficking in Nebraska
2. Stop Trafficking
3. Recognize each victim.

The *Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force* has worked to identify over 20 different sexual violence networks in Nebraska to support victims, which can be found on their website (Nebraska Attorney General Mike Hilgers, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

Sex trafficking in Nebraska is a real and pertinent issue. Each month, 984 people in Nebraska are being sold for sex against their will. Moreover, the implications of sex trafficking are lifelong for both the victims and those interacting with the victims. The fight against sex trafficking does not end after a victim becomes a survivor. If you, someone you know, or you suspect someone to be a victim of sex trafficking in Nebraska there are resources. You are not alone, and there are people here who want to see you walk in freedom from this.

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