





Companion Guide to the Video Anti-Trafficking: Harming While Trying to Help

#### **Acknowledgements**

**Authors:** Alison Clancey & Andi Wiseman

Reviewers: Dr. Julie Ham, Dr. Joel Quirk

Layout & Design: Christa Ledding

Thank you to our funder: LUSH Cosmetics

#### **SWAN VANCOUVER SOCIETY**

#### VISION

Safety, Rights &
Freedoms for Im/Migrant
Women Engaged in
Sex Work

#### **VALUES**

Safety
Rights-Based
Self-Determination
Anti-Racism
Equity
Integrity
Intersectional Feminism

#### MISSION

To promote the rights, health & safety of im/migrant women engaged in sex work, through front-line service & systemic advocacy

#### For more information, go to swanvancouver.ca

Copyright: SWAN Vancouver Society, 2020

Please contact SWAN Vancouver Society for conditions of copyright if you wish to reproduce a portion or the entirety of this guide.

#### **Table of Contents**

r	ntroduction
	1. Raising Awareness about the Negative Consequences of Anti-Trafficking Campaigns5
	2. The Rescue Industry is Born10
	3. When the Solution is the Problem: Identifying Ineffective or Harmful Anti-Trafficking Campaigns 14
	4. Ensuring You Do Not Harm While Trying to Help25

## Transforming Anti-Trafficking Sentiment into Effective Action



## Introduction

Since the early 2000s, SWAN Vancouver Society (SWAN) has mobilised against human trafficking. We have worked hard to prevent trafficking. We have supported women who were trafficked. We have also supported women who were anti-trafficked, i.e. women negatively impacted by anti-trafficking enforcement and awareness campaigns. Through this work we've learned a few things about what makes an anti-trafficking action or campaign effective. This companion guide to the 'Anti-Trafficking: Harming While Trying to Help' video is a collection of the most important things we've learned.

More and more people are learning about human trafficking and feel compelled to do something about it. Unfortunately, this desire to take action is not always expressed in productive ways. Some campaigns are ineffective. Some campaigns are harmful, and actually increase vulnerability to human trafficking. By raising awareness about the negative consequences of some antitrafficking campaigns, SWAN hopes to reduce the harms associated with anti-trafficking

interventions and channel this desire to help in more productive directions.

This companion guide introduces the concept of 'harming while trying to help'. Outlining what harm looks like in antitrafficking work, and offering alternatives to engage in ethical and responsible antitrafficking campaigns, this guide supports good intentions to become effective actions. Whether you're a celebrity, a high-profile activist, a government official, or just a member of the general public who wants to make the world a better place, we invite you to reflect on the anti-trafficking work you engage in.

SWAN is as invested as anyone in preventing and addressing human trafficking. We want every anti-trafficking action to be effective. After all, doesn't everyone want to rest easy knowing that their efforts have maximum impact?

<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie, K. & Clancey, A. (2019). Im/migrant sex workers, myths, and misconceptions: Realities of the Anti-Trafficked. 2nd Ed. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/2ER417Y



### Raising Awareness about the Negative Consequences of Anti-Trafficking Campaigns

Anti-trafficking campaigns are now everywhere. When we travel, we see trafficking warnings in airports, hotels, and taxis.





- 2 Airport anti-trafficking campaign. Retrieved from https://peakpacificgroup.com/ blog/shining-the-light-on-human-trafficking/
- Taxi anti-trafficking campaign. Photo credit: Bonzo/Alamy. Retrieved from https://www. theguardian.com/global-development/2015/ mar/27/human-traffickers-face-life-sentencebritain-slavery-bill#img-1

When we relax, human trafficking stories grab our attention in Hollywood blockbusters, on social media and in the evening news.





5

- 4 Dunnan, T. (2019, February 12). Experts say more 'community kids' being targeted by human traffickers in Palm Beach County. Photo retrieved from https://www.wptv.com/news/region-c-palm-beach-county/experts-say-more-community-kids-being-targeted-by-human-traffickers-in-palm-beach-county
- 5 Rodrigues, G. & Mauracher, J. (2019, October 16). Human trafficking ring dismantled in multijurisdictional investigation: York Regional Police. Retrieved from https://globalnews.ca/ news/6036064/human-trafficking-arrests-yorkregion/

How did you first become aware of human trafficking? Did you see a moving personal account on social media or read an article in a magazine about it? Did you travel to another country and come back changed by what you saw? Did you participate in human trafficking training at your workplace? Did your favorite celebrity star in a film about human trafficking or become a campaign's spokesperson?

While people learn about human trafficking via different routes, their emotional responses to trafficking tend to have similar features: human trafficking philanthropy, activism and volunteerism are driven by passionate urgency to do good. Human trafficking campaigns pack an emotional punch and they often tell one story: there are bad guys (villains), who prey on women and girls (victims), who are saved by law enforcement (heroes). One Google search about human trafficking discovers a global chorus that validates this one story, which fuels a moral panic the world over.

# Moral Panic & the Conflation of Human Trafficking and Sex Work

Moral panic is defined as "the outbreak of moral concern over a supposed threat from an agent of corruption that is out of proportion to its actual danger or potential harm." Moral panic about human trafficking spreads easily. As the sex industry and human trafficking are consistently depicted as being one and the same, many people believe that trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, often referred to as 'sex trafficking', is a global epidemic and the second (or third, depending on the source) largest form of criminal activity. Sex work and human trafficking are separate, complex issues that should not be confused with one another.

Sex work is *not* human trafficking. Many people earn a living by working in the sex industry. Everyone makes income-related decisions based on available options; the number of options are dependent upon one's circumstances. Sex workers are no different.

When sex work and trafficking are presented as a single issue, it results in oversimplification. Complex realities are lost as a one-dimensional trafficking story becomes the

- 6 Goode, E. & BenĐYehuda, N. (2011). "Grounding and Defending the Sociology of Moral Panic," chap. 2 in *Moral Panic and the Politics of Anxiety*, ed. Sean Patrick Hier. (Abingdon: Routledge).
- 7 Stossel, J. (2019, May 15). *The Sex Trafficking Panic*. Retrieved from https://reason.com/2019/05/15/the-sex-trafficking-panic/

basis for the urban myths<sup>8</sup>, viral scarelore<sup>9</sup>, and unsubstantiated statistics<sup>10</sup>, which are repeated by anti-trafficking campaigns and then in turned into policy and law by decision makers.<sup>11</sup>

Here are some of the many negative impacts that result from superficial, sensational and misleading narratives about human trafficking:

- A narrow focus upon 'innocent' victims. Trafficking victims are almost always portrayed as women and girls
- 8 Ham, J. (2011). What's the Cost of. Rumour. A guide to sorting out the myths and the facts about sporting events and trafficking. Retrieved from http://www.gaatw.org/publications/WhatstheCostofaRumour.11.15.2011.pdf
- 9 Palma, B. (2019, July 29). Are Sex Traffickers Leaving Zip Ties on Cars, Mailboxes of Potential Victims? Retrieved from https://www.snopes. com/fact-check/zip-ties-cars-mailboxes/
- 10 Weitzer, R. (2014, October 8). Miscounting human trafficking and slavery. Retrieved from https:// www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-traffickingand-slavery/miscounting-human-traffickingand-slavery/
  - Engle Merry, S. (2015, January 26). How big is the trafficking problem? The mysteries of quantification. Retrieved from https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/how-big-is-trafficking-problemmysteries-of-quantification/
- 11 Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights (2018). Moving Forward in the Fight Against Human Trafficking in Canada: Report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Retrieved from https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/JUST/Reports/RP10243099/justrp24/justrp24-e.pdf

- in need of rescue. This gendered lens dismisses the trafficking of men, trans, and non-binary folks both in and outside of the sex industry. Moreover, the gendered trafficking lens presents a particular type of feminine victim, the stereotypical 'girl next door'. 12 Women who do not fit this particular feminine narrative are often excluded from mainstream 'help'.
- 'Sex trafficking' sidelines other forms of labour trafficking. Human trafficking occurs in many industries, including agriculture, construction, manufacturing, domestic work, factory labour, food service. 13 With the majority of resources allocated to trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, other forms of labour trafficking are given far less attention than they should. In sectors outside of the sex industry, victims of labour trafficking cannot access much-needed services and support.
- 12 Scott, L. (2015, December 19). Girl next door is typical human trafficking victim. Retrieved from https://torontosun.com/2015/12/18/girl-next-door-is-typical-human-trafficking-victim/wcm/7bd2f35a-ba9b-4e3a-b52e-2e0dc97200a8 Legislative Assembly of Ontario. (2016) Bill 158, Saving the Girl Next Door Act. Retrieved from https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-41/session-1/bill-158
- 13 International Labour Organization. (2017). Forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking.

  Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.html

- Under-resourced non-profits rebrand themselves to secure anti-trafficking funding. To access the meagre social service funding available, some organizations rebrand themselves as anti-trafficking organizations to secure much-needed core funding. When this happens, other forms of victimization such as domestic violence or sexual assault are labelled as trafficking and human trafficking statistics are inflated. Consequently, these inflated numbers are reported to government and the media, who in turn broadcast the numbers irrespective of the accuracy of that information, which creates the perception that human trafficking is much more prevalent than it is.<sup>14</sup>
- Anti-trafficking organizations
   uphold systems of state oppression.
   Racial profiling, police surveillance,
   border control, detention centres,
   and prisons are all essential parts of
   the fight against human trafficking.<sup>15</sup>
   Marginalized and racialized individuals
- 14 Bogdan, S. (2020, May 12). Loss of funding to fight human trafficking to impact over 600 women and girls, LAWC says. Retrieved from https://globalnews.ca/news/6936793/loss-human-trafficking-funding-impact-lawc/
- 15 Suchland, J. (2020, June 8). Anti-trafficking, Policing, and State Violence. Retrieved from https://gaatw.org/blog/1055-anti-traffickingpolicing-and-state-violence?fbclid=IwAR2XmTKh S9wQRLj1YploRgoBAWrzTgC42QsRpBdftc7SHhO wJmI7DwFtPBA

- disproportionately experience state scrutiny and surveillance as a means of social control under the guise of trafficking 'rescue'.<sup>16</sup>
- Stigma and harms to sex workers increase. Sex workers do not identify human trafficking as a main concern they contend with in the sex industry, yet non-sex workers and antitrafficking crusaders insist that it is. Sex workers' primary concerns, such as robbery, assault, sexual assault and other serious acts of violence, are rarely investigated by police as criminal justice mandates prioritize trafficking given the cash cow it is.
- 16 Rawles, T. (2020, February. 6). SD Uber driver calls police on gay dads, child "needed his mother. Retrieved from https://sdlgbtn.com/ news/2020/02/06/sd-uber-driver-calls-policegay-dads-child-needed-his-mother?fbclid=lwAR 2ui6RtFZZe0EJLs7K7ncmKU9II60cH0aMk0Pgffo MLPzVb8YSslw9W1RI

Nolan Brown, E. (2019, October 9). Another multiracial family falsely accused of sex trafficking while flying. Retrieved from https://reason.com/2019/09/10/another-multiracial-family-falsely-accused-of-sex-trafficking-while-flying/

Lance, N. (2019, November 28). Woman feels she was profiled after being mistaken for human trafficking victim on Delta flight. Retrieved from https://www.11alive.com/article/news/woman-feels-she-was-profiled-after-being-mistaken-for-human-trafficking-victim-on-delta-flight/85-495073681

Nolan Brown, E. (2019, February 5.) Are You a Woman Traveling Alone? Marriott Might Be Watching You. How big hotel chains became arms of the surveillance state. Retrieved from https://reason.com/2019/02/05/hotel-surveillance-state-sex-trafficking/

As a result, perpetrators act with impunity. This does not make anyone in society safer. Unfortunately, many people believe the best way to act on their concerns for women in the sex industry is to support an anti-trafficking campaign. Supporting

an anti-trafficking campaign often increases sex work stigma and misconceptions, and in turn makes it harder for sex workers to report violence when it happens.

"Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will."

- Martin Luther King Jr.

### The 'Rescue Industry' is Born

The moral panic about 'sex trafficking' has resulted in the birth of the 'rescue industry' – a term coined in 2007 by anthropologist Laura Agustín.<sup>17</sup>

If you think traffickers make a lot of money, wait until you hear how much the rescue industry makes! The rescue industry has flourished and become incredibly lucrative. In North America, the rescue industry is a multi-million-dollar business.<sup>18</sup>

#### What is the Rescue Industry?

The rescue industry is comprised of social 'helpers' who are deeply invested in rescuing women in the sex industry from trafficking.

These social 'helpers' include celebrities; police; religious groups; social workers; cis, white, anti-sex work feminists; and 'anti-trafficking' non-profit organizations.

"Tell me who's your friend and I'll tell you who you are"

#### - old proverb

- 17 Agustín, L. 2007. Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry. London: Zed Books.
  - Agustín, L. (n.d.) *Rescue Industry*. Retrieved from www.lauraagustin.com/site-map/rescue-industry
- 18 Moore, A.E. (2015, January 27). Special Report: Money and Lies in Anti-Human Trafficking NGOs. Retrieved from https://truthout.org/articles/ special-report-money-and-lies-in-anti-humantrafficking-ngos/

These groups form a surprising alliance given significant differences in their mandates and politics. However, when it comes to antitrafficking, they unite around a moralizing, anti-sex work agenda that fuels mainstream sex trafficking campaigns. The rescue industry is largely disinterested in addressing other forms of labour trafficking.<sup>19</sup>

### If the Rescue Industry Means Well, How Can it be Harmful?

"Are they so caught up in their projects that they do not stop to measure the effects on the people they want to help?"

#### – Laura Agustín

On their own, rescue industry groups are not necessarily harmful (e.g., women's organizations that provide safe houses for women and children fleeing violence, churches that provide food to the homeless). However, when it comes to anti-trafficking, these otherwise disparate sectors can reap harms that far exceed any single sector's

19 LeMoon, L. (2017, March 9). Why Ashton Kutcher's Tears are Everything that's Wrong with the Anti-Trafficking Movement. Retrieved from https:// wearyourvoicemag.com/ashton-kutcher-tearsanti-trafficking/ capacity.<sup>20</sup> For instance, the rescue industry has played a major role the world over in successfully advocating for 'end demand' prostitution laws, which increase stigma, violence and harm for sex workers whom the rescue industry purports to 'help'.<sup>21</sup> Colonial and carceral in nature, the rescue industry's anti-trafficking approach rarely addresses socio-economic root causes such as poverty, inequity and systemic racism. Rather, it opts for a law and order approach to trafficking, which encourages heavy-handed police enforcement in the lives of racialized women.

#### A Slippery Grasp on Trafficking Realities & Firm Grasp on Anti-Trafficking Funding

"Repeat a lie often enough and it becomes the truth"

- a law of propaganda

- 20 CBC. (25, September 2009). Human Trafficking Fight Draws Criticism: Mannequins clothed in blood-stained dresses suggested. Retrieved online at www.cbc.ca/news/canada/britishcolumbia/human-trafficking-fight-drawscriticism-1.814529
- 21 Global Network of Sex Work Projects. (2018).

  Policy Brief: The Impact of 'End Demand' Legislation
  on Women Sex Workers. Retrieved from https://
  www.nswp.org/resource/policy-brief-the-impactend-demand-legislation-women-sex-workers

Global Network of Sex Work Projects. (2019). *Policy Brief: The Impact of Anti-trafficking Legislation and Initiatives on Sex Workers*. Retrieved from https://www.nswp.org/resource/nswp-policy-briefs/community-guide-the-impact-anti-trafficking-legislation-and-initiatives

The rescue industry promotes misinformation about human trafficking. Unsubstantiated trafficking claims become undisputable through sheer repetition. Many buy into the moral panic created by the rescue industry; unsubstantiated claims about the prevalence of trafficking are repeated as fact and spread far and wide by average citizens everywhere.

As a multi-million-dollar business, the rescue industry has become a funding mainstay for police, immigration authorities, non-profit organizations, foundations, faith-based groups, and many government institutions to promote anti-sex work agendas. Massive anti-trafficking revenues are available and each sector is heavily invested in promoting the dominant trafficking narrative, which is not supported by research evidence.<sup>22</sup>

In order for the rescue industry to justify anti-trafficking resources, there is a continual need to demonstrate that human trafficking is a vast and growing problem. Human

22 Juha, J. (30, July 2020). New funding to fight human trafficking won't meet growing need, says women's agency head. Retrieved from https:// www.thesudburystar.com/news/local-news/ new-funding-to-fight-human-trafficking-wontmeet-growing-need-says-womens-agency-head/ wcm/d9dd481f-a36e-4984-863d-85bcf44b8c83 ?fbclid=lwAR0MzAjx2gmLdqy\_S84Ap1u6R6H\_ wLNmrEr0PFn4dMJJn7QkPNg2f7geWbM

Government of Ontario. (2019). \$20 Million in Yearly Funding for Anti-Human Trafficking Programs. Retrieved from https://news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2019/11/20-million-in-yearly-funding-for-anti-human-trafficking-programs.html

trafficking statistics can be manipulated to make the case. "Police-reported instances of human trafficking" make sensational headlines but the majority of these instances do not make their ways through the courts.<sup>23</sup> Between 2006-2018, there have only been 92 prosecuted trafficking in persons cases in Canada.<sup>24</sup> 92!

"Trafficking-related offences" is another way police report statistics in a misleading manner to justify budgets propped up by anti-trafficking resources. Trafficking-related offences can include crimes such as document forgery, theft of documents, threats and sexual assault among others. Although serious crimes in and of themselves, human trafficking is thought to be more prevalent than it is when crimes such as these are counted as cases of human trafficking.

Hence, a manipulation of statistics and a continually expanding definition of human trafficking ensures that the rescue industry's anti-trafficking funding keeps growing and

- 23 Canadian Press. (2015. April 1). 500 Asian women smuggled into Canada as part of prostitution ring: RCMP. Retrieved from https://www. hamiltonnews.com/news-story/5537014-500asian-women-smuggled-into-canada-as-part-ofprostitution-ring-rcmp/
  - Statistics Canada. (2020). *Police-Reported Human Trafficking*. Retrieved from https://www150. statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2020025-eng.htm
- 24 Millar, H. & O'Doherty, T. (2020). Canadian
  Human Trafficking Prosecutions and Principles of
  Fundamental Justice: A Contradiction in Terms?
  Retrieved from https://bit.ly/2Cje4l1

flowing. Public support is key to keep the coffers full.<sup>25</sup>

Being honest about the numbers is important. Inflating or cherry-picking statistics to increase funding is unethical. Acknowledging human trafficking's wildly divergent statistics does not mean that the problem does not exist. Rather, it indicates a lack of knowledge about the nature and extent of the issue. Social policy and laws that are created based on inaccurate or incomplete information is very problematic.

#### **Beyond Reproach**

On the rare occasion when a human trafficking myth is debunked, condemnation by its proponents is swift and severe.<sup>26</sup>

Any critique of the rescue industry that suggests the trafficking narrative is oversimplified, anti-trafficking funds are misspent, or trafficking statistics are inaccurate is inevitably met with:

"So, you're pro-trafficking?"

"You support traffickers?"

- 25 Petition to the Government of Canada. Retrieved from https://petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/ Petition/Details?Petition=e-2646
- 26 See https://www.facebook.com/polarisproject/, comment section on "How Unproven Trafficking Stories Spread Online and Why Stopping Them Matters' posted July 22, 2020.

"You deny that trafficking happens?"

"You think sex slavery is okay?"

"You don't believe the survivors?"

"You don't care about the children?"

Questioning specific campaigns or claims is not the same as denying that human trafficking exists. Thinking critically about human trafficking does not condone exploitation, dismiss survivors' stories, or lessen the need for children and youth to be safe. But for some, exhibiting curiosity about the effectiveness of trafficking campaigns can be disconcerting, if not outright offensive.

We recognise that the information in the Anti-Trafficking: Harming While Trying to Help video and companion guide might initially appear surprising or confusing. The good news is that if you're still reading, you're curious to see where these new ideas take you in your understanding of human trafficking, and what you can actually do – or stop doing - to help.

#### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Were you aware anti-trafficking campaigns could be ineffective or harmful?
- Knowing what you know now, are you curious to learn more?
- If you determined that you were supporting an anti-trafficking campaign that wasn't helpful or effective, would you redirect your time, efforts or money?

"Helping, fixing, and serving represent three different ways of seeing life. When you help, you see life as weak. When you fix, you see life as broken. When you serve, you see life as whole. Fixing and helping may be the work of the ego, and service the work of the soul."

- Rachel Naomi Remen

# 3.

# When the Solution is the Problem: Identifying Ineffective and Harmful Campaigns

It can be challenging to sort the helpful from the harmful when all anti-trafficking campaigns appear to be championed by good people doing good things. However, there are signs to look for in order to distinguish a harmful or ineffective campaign. Some of these signs were marked by red flags in the <a href="#">Anti-Trafficking: Harming While Trying to Help video</a>.

# Red Flags of a Harmful Campaign

#### Look out for

- Interchangeable language (sex work, sex slavery, prostitution, trafficking)
- Immorality is the foundation for intervention
- Self-proclaimed experts
- Urban myths and viral scarelore
- Raids, rescue & rehabilitation
- The state is the protector
- The sole survivor's story
- The conflation of child trafficking and the sex industry
- Tragedy porn is the fundraising strategy

#### The Campaign Uses Sex Work, Prostitution and Human Trafficking Interchangeably

Any interchangeable use of the terms prostitution, sex work, sex slavery, sex trafficking and human trafficking is irresponsible, misleading and deeply harmful. It's not just words; we draw meaning and actions from those words.

Refusing to acknowledge the difference between sex work and trafficking is a

# THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What are your personal morals and beliefs about sex?
- Do your morals and beliefs about sex affect the way you perceive sex work and sex workers?
- Are you projecting your personal belief system about sex on people you have never met?
- Do your morals and beliefs about sex motivate your involvement in antitrafficking work?

deliberate manipulation, which is designed to support arguments for the elimination the sex industry entirely. This is a very different goal to addressing human trafficking, since sex work and human trafficking are not the same thing.

Sex work is the provision of sexual services for money or goods. Human trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability for the purpose of exploitation.<sup>27</sup>

If you are unsure what the difference is, contact your local sex worker rights organization to learn more.<sup>28</sup> However, you may find yourself asking how do I identify a sex worker rights organization?

- 27 United Nations, (2000). Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Retrieved from https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/ pages/protocoltraffickinginpersons.aspx
- 28 In Canada, contact the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform to identify your local sex work organization. https://sexworklawreform.com In the United States, contact Sex Workers Outreach Project USA. https://swopusa.org

## A sex worker rights organization does *not*

- work to eliminate the sex industry
- force individuals to leave the sex industry
- use words such as rescue, rehabilitation, victim or prostituted woman
- advocate for john schools<sup>29</sup>
- promote 'end demand' laws<sup>30</sup>
- · conduct anti-trafficking rescue missions

## A sex worker rights organization does

- condemn trafficking in all its forms
- advocate against the sexual exploitation of children and youth
- advocate for decriminalization of the sex industry in order to address human trafficking
- · recognize sex work as work
- want sex workers to have the same safety, protections and rights as other workers
- use words such as 'peer-led', 'by, with and for', and 'rights not rescue'
- 29 John schools are a diversion program offered by courts as an alternative to criminal prosecution.
- 30 Laws that purport criminalizing the purchase of sex will reduce demand and result in sex work going away.

### 'Immorality' is a poor foundation for intervention

Many forms of sexuality are condemned as immoral by conservatives who support a highly restrictive and repressive approach to the sex industry and the people who work in it (whether they're trafficked or not). Morality-based campaigns are often promoted by faith-based organizations, and tend to narrowly focus on trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Other forms of trafficking rarely enter into the picture. The role of Jesus Christ in anti-trafficking campaigns can have less to do with stopping trafficking and more to do with telling others how to live their lives based on one's moral code. 'Immorality' is a poor foundation for policy.

# THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What is your motivation in doing anti-trafficking work?
- In what ways are you allied with those you help? How do you make space for affected individuals? If you are not a trafficking survivor, how do you ensure you are not front and center?
- Have you ever been criticized for your anti-trafficking work? What steps did you take to address the criticism or did you simply dismiss it?

What workers really need, both in and outside the sex industry, is greater rights and protections while they are working. Condemning certain kinds of work as immoral is simply not helpful.

### The Self-Proclaimed Expert's Self-Serving Agenda

There's no cause as ripe with self-proclaimed experts, including celebrity experts, as anti-trafficking.<sup>31</sup> Passionate interest or a sense of calling alone does not an expert make.<sup>32</sup>

Neither does travelling to Southeast Asia for voluntourism or watching a Hollywood trafficking movie. Anti-trafficking advocacy and philanthropy is unique in that anyone can become an 'expert' irrespective of their knowledge. Can you imagine if this applied to other complex issues?

Self-proclaimed experts who view themselves as altruistic, selfless, goodwill

- 31 Klein, B. (2017, February 17). *Kutcher passionately testifies on his anti-sex trafficking efforts*.

  Retrieved from https://www.cnn.com/2017/02/15/politics/ashton-kutcher-testifies-before-the-senate-on-sex-trafficking/index.html
  - Christian Broadcasting Network. (n.d). Ashley Judd: Sounding the Alarm on Human Trafficking. Retrieved from https://www1.cbn.com/700club/ashley-judd-sounding-alarm-human-trafficking
- 32 Dickson, J. (2020, May 23). How a Canadian country star became an anti-human trafficking advocate. Retrieved from https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-how-a-canadian-country-star-became-an-anti-human-trafficking-advocate/

ambassadors often have subconscious motivations for their anti-trafficking work. 'Sex trafficking' victims become ideal subjects for educated, autonomous, White, middle-class saviors to act upon. Key to the self-proclaimed expert's production of a role for themselves is a lack of awareness of being complicit in the harms outlined in the Anti-Trafficking: Harming While Trying to Help video and this companion guide.

Laura LeMoon, a trafficking survivor, states,

"The difficulty for many in being a responsible and ethical ally to a survivor-lead (sic) anti-trafficking movement is that an ally should be personally gaining NOTHING through their activism. In fact, if you are an ally, you should be losing things through your activism; space, voice, recognition, validation, identity and ego.

This is precisely why, in the current non-survivor-dominated anti-trafficking movement, I have yet to meet anyone who is not using this cause as a catalyst to obtain more power and privilege for themselves."33

33 LeMoon, L. (2017, March 9). Why Ashton Kutcher's Tears are Everything that's Wrong with the Anti-Trafficking Movement. Retrieved from https:// wearyourvoicemag.com/ashton-kutcher-tearsanti-trafficking/

### Urban Myths and Fodder for Viral Scarelore

There are particular urban myths that persist within the anti-trafficking movement, which drive the moral panic behind trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. No matter how many times the myths are debunked, they are repeated over and over.

One of the most popular myths is that there is a spike in human trafficking at major sporting events.<sup>34</sup> Empirical evidence does not support a causal or correlative link between Super Bowls and sex trafficking.<sup>35</sup> There has been no link established between World Cups or the Olympics and sex trafficking either.<sup>36</sup>

Another popular myth is that the average age of entry for girls into prostitution is 12-14 years old. This statistic is not supported

- 34 Ham, J. (2011). What's the Cost of. Rumour. A guide to sorting out the myths and the facts about sporting events and trafficking. Retrieved from http://www.gaatw.org/publications/WhatstheCostofaRumour.11.15.2011.pdf
- 35 Martin, L. & Hill, A. (2019). 'Debunking the Myth of "Super Bowl Sex Trafficking": Media hype or evidenced-based coverage', *Anti-Trafficking Review*, issue 13, pp. 13-29. doi.org/10.14197/atr.201219132. Retrieved from https://gaatw.org/ATR/AntiTraffickingReview\_issue13.pdf
- 36 Ham, J. (2011). What's the Cost of. Rumour. A guide to sorting out the myths and the facts about sporting events and trafficking. Retrieved from http://www.gaatw.org/publications/ WhatstheCostofaRumour.11.15.2011.pdf

by empirical evidence.<sup>37</sup> The myth's origin has been traced back to a 2001 study that was misquoted, yet the myth persists.<sup>38</sup>

Armchair activists have been largely responsible for the spread of false trafficking information online.<sup>39</sup> The trafficking narrative is permeated by 'viral scarelore' defined by Snopes as fictional tales intended to frighten audiences, often prompting them to share without questioning the story.<sup>40</sup> One such story has human traffickers targeting women by leaving zip ties on their car door handles. The story made its way to Canada in early 2020, which resulted in police releasing a statement that the story was

- 37 Polaris Project. (2016). The Age of Entry. Retrieved from https://polarisproject.org/blog/2016/01/theaverage-age-of-entry-myth/
- 38 Hall, C. (2014, September 5). Is One of the Most-Cited Statistics About Sex Work Wrong? Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/business/ archive/2014/09/is-one-of-the-most-citedstatistics-about-sex-work-wrong/379662/
- 39 Brown, M. (2020, August 11). Fact check:

  Mask-wearing not connected to child trafficking.

  Retrieved from www.usatoday.com/story/news/
  factcheck/2020/08/11/fact-check-mask-wearingnot-connected-child-trafficking/3318642001/?fbc
  lid=lwAR35sDg8-Zj2aJ2Xn2T5BVZv8nQkrfUyrhnN
  BAMdtZbUJ\_55DWAz6GxmbVE
- 40 Palma, B. (2019, July 29). Are Sex Traffickers
  Leaving Zip Ties on Cars, Mailboxes of Potential
  Victims? Retrieved from https://www.snopes.
  com/fact-check/zip-ties-cars-mailboxes/

a hoax.<sup>41</sup> Another example of trafficking-related viral scarelore is QAnon, the 2020 internet conspiracy theory about government involvement in trafficking and pedophilia.<sup>42</sup>

### The Campaign Promotes Raid, Rescue and Rehabilitation

Storytelling is central to human existence and there's nothing new about the hero/villain/victim formula. Heroic narratives permeate art, film and literature the world over. Equally timeless is the damsel in distress, which is the perfect vehicle for the hero's purpose and journey.

The figure of the damsel in distress drives the rescue industry. Kamala Kempadoo states, "rather than producing a self-reflexive white subject, we are presented with the image of a daring knights and damsels, whose moral obligations are to save the world – especially Asia and Africa – from itself, as well as affirmations of white masculinity and femininity as amongst

- 41 Magione, K. (2020, Jan 17). Posts about \$100 bills, zip ties left by sex traffickers believed to be a hoax: police. Retrieved from https://bc.ctvnews.ca/posts-about-100-bills-zip-ties-left-by-sex-traffickers-believed-to-be-a-hoax-police-1.4772560
- 42 Donegan, M. (2020, September 20). *QAnon conspiracists believe in a vast pedophile ring. The truth is sadder*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/sep/20/qanon-conspiracy-child-abuse-truth-trump

other things, powerful, benevolent, and morally superior."43

The rescue industry promotes rehabilitation following rescue. Rehabilitation is the act of restoring someone who has been damaged to their former condition, which when used in the context of anti-trafficking is paternalistic. Rehabilitation is such a foundation of the rescue industry that the raid, rescue and rehabilitate trifecta is known as 'the anti-trafficking rehabilitation complex'.44



45

The reframing of 3D (dirty, dangerous or demeaning) low-wage labour (e.g., janitorial, sewing, baking, factory work) as rehabilitation for women 'saved' from the sex industry is a popular solution to human trafficking among the rescue industry.<sup>46</sup> While these vocational trades satisfy rescuers' moralizing agendas, in practice the

- 43 Kempadoo, K. (2016). Revitalizing Imperialism:
  Contemporary Campaigns against Sex Trafficking
  and Modern Slavery. Cadernos Pagu, (47),
  e16478. doi.org/10.1590/1809444920160047000
  8. Retrieved from https://www.scielo.br/scielo.
  php?pid=S0104-83332016000200405&script=sci\_
  arttext&tlng=en
- 44 Shih, E. (2015). The anti-trafficking rehabilitation complex: commodity activism and slave-free goods. Retrieved from https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/antitrafficking-rehabilitation-complex-commodity-activism-and-slavefree-goo/

- 45 Logo of the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers. For more information see https://www.apnsw.info
- 46 Christian Today. (2019, April 26). The baking school that means freedom for girls trapped in Thailand's sex industry. Retrieved from https://www.christiantoday.com/article/the-baking-school-that-means-freedom-for-girls-trapped-in-thailands-sex-industry/132295. htm?fbclid=lwAR2Yh-3l1zalBiLiob0q73xMWYic\_N2erv\_Az-nZ5A91\_T9WGP\_VTAHZuTE

Empower. (2010). The Last Rescue in Siam. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70rPAxLFFKU

programs are prescriptive and arbitrary.<sup>47</sup> Elena Shih states some programs include an element of 'moral rehabilitation', which may include a requirement to live in mandatory shelters, a nightly curfew, no male visitors during the weekdays, and some offer optional daily Bible study.<sup>48</sup> As part of the 'rescue', the strict conditions on movement and other freedoms are not lost on us.

Another characteristic of rehabilitation is 'perverse humanitarianism', which Kimberly Hoang describes as a practice that involves the cooperation of local police and NGO workers in raid and rescue missions that reclassify criminalized sex workers as victims of trafficking. Through this reclassification, sex workers who would otherwise end up in state detention centers

find themselves trapped in NGO facilities as victims in need of 'rehabilitation.'49

### The Campaign Regards the State as a Protector

For marginalized and racialized folks, interactions with the state are not often seen as protective as 2020 protests the world over in the wake of the murder of George Floyd have highlighted.

Be aware of anti-trafficking campaigns that do not question the state's role in creating systemic vulnerability to human trafficking. The state and many anti-trafficking organizations uphold each other's moral, political or economic agendas. Jennifer Suchland writes, "there is a deep and serious connection between anti-trafficking strategies and systems of oppression and violence endemic to policing, border control, prisons, detention centers,

- 47 Global Network of Sex Work Projects. (2012).

  Don't talk to us about sewing machines: Talk
  to us about worker's rights. Retrieved from
  https://www.nswp.org/news/don-t-talk-usabout-sewing-machines-talk-us-about-workers-rights
- 48 Shih, E. (2015, August 19). The anti-trafficking rehabilitation complex: commodity activism and slave-free goods. Retrieved from https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/antitrafficking-rehabilitation-complex-commodity-activism-and-slavefree-goo/
- 49 Hoang, K.K. (2016), "Perverse Humanitarianism and the Business of Rescue: What's Wrong with NGOs and What's Right about the "Johns"?", Perverse Politics? Feminism, Anti-Imperialism, Multiplicity (Political Power and Social Theory, Vol. 30), Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp. 19-43. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0198-871920160000030007. Retrieved online from https://www.academia.edu/24075336/PERVERSE\_HUMANITARIANISM\_AND\_THE\_BUSINESS\_OF\_RESCUE\_WHATS\_WRONG\_WITH\_NGOS\_AND\_WHATS\_RIGHT\_ABOUT\_THE\_JOHNS\_

and surveillance."<sup>50</sup> When it comes to 'fighting the war against trafficking', many antitrafficking organizations frame the state's role as the good guys (police) saving helpless female victims from the bad guys (traffickers). In Canada, anti-trafficking organizations regularly call for police to intervene in the lives of racialized women who are perceived to be trafficked.<sup>51</sup> As long as systemic racism remains a serious problem in policing, these calls are nonsensical and can be downright dangerous.

## The Campaign Hinges on a Sole Survivor's Story

Personal stories are powerful. Antitrafficking campaigns should include survivors' stories.<sup>52</sup> Sometimes, however, what an individual personal story ends up doing can indicate a harmful campaign.

- 50 Suchland, J. (2020, June 8). Anti-trafficking, Policing, and State Violence. Retrieved from https://gaatw.org/blog/1055-anti-traffickingpolicing-and-state-violence?fbclid=lwAR2XmTKh S9wQRLj1YploRgoBAWrzTgC42QsRpBdftc7SHh0 wJml7DwFtPBA
- 51 Sayers, N. (2020, June 25). Behind the veil of police support. Retrieved from https://www. thelawyersdaily.ca/articles/19802/behind-theveil-of-police-support-naomi-sayers?fbclid=lwA R2v3HLWcpduyGyFKzwpfnZ-Sh2kN4iGW4L01sYk0 HZ7b9ALafGCYl8UcME
- 52 LeMoon, L. (2017, April 28). The Groups
  "Rescuing" Sex Trafficking Victims are as
  Bad as the Pimps. Retrieved from https://
  wearyourvoicemag.com/sex-trafficking-rescueindustry/

Perhaps the most infamous example of the risk of relying on one person's story is the fall of the Somaly Mam Foundation. Somaly Mam, a self-proclaimed trafficking victim, claimed to have rescued thousands of girls and women from trafficking in Cambodia. A darling of the global elite, Mam travelled the world raising money for her foundation. In 2014, Newsweek uncovered Mam had not only fabricated her own trafficking story but also that of the girls she claimed to have rescued. In a spectacular fall from grace marked by scandal, sensationalism, and unsubstantiated claims, the Somaly Mam Foundation closed in 2014. However, in 2016, the Foundation rebranded and opened under a new name.<sup>53</sup>

Personal stories are an optical mainstay in the selling of products and in the promotion of causes, especially in the anti-trafficking conference and speaking circuit. While a personal story can tell you a lot about an individual's experience, be mindful of its limitations of what it can teach you about

53 Hoefinger, H. (2016) 'Neoliberal Sexual Humanitarianism and Story-Telling: The case of Somaly Mam', Anti-Trafficking Review, (7), 56—78. Retrieved from https://www.antitraffickingreview.org/index.php/atrjournal/article/view/200/199

Marks, S. (2014, May 21). Somaly Mam: The Holy Saint (and Sinner) of Sex Trafficking. Retrieved from https://www.newsweek.com/2014/05/30/somaly-mam-holy-saint-and-sinner-sex-trafficking-251642.html

Joseph, P. (2014, June 5). Victims Can Lie as Much as Other People. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/somaly-mam-scandal-victims-can-lie/372188/

human trafficking on a global scale. Human trafficking is much more complex than any one story can represent.

There are other potential consequences when an anti-trafficking campaign relies on a personal story. Individuals can be revictimized by telling their personal stories over and over again. Moreover, when ideology trumps verifiable facts, survivors can and do become tokenized as the evidence that

# THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Have you heard a personal account of human trafficking that stayed with you long after? Why do you think the story affected you so much?
- Have you ever considered that public storytelling may force a person to relive what they went through, and that this can be another form of trauma?
- What supports should be in place for the storyteller who shares their experience publicly?
- When is storytelling healing? When is storytelling exploitative?
- Would you denounce a personal story if it did not cohere with your understandings of human trafficking? Would you dismiss it as unrepresentative?

supports the ideology.<sup>54</sup> Pay attention to how a campaign may be exploiting an individual's story for its own financial gain.

# The Campaign Conflates Child Trafficking with the Sex Industry

This conflation is common in many anti-trafficking campaigns. Harmful anti-trafficking campaigns roll women, children and youth into a single helpless victim in need of rescue, and portray the sex industry as the menacing evil she needs to be saved from. As a result, sex workers are routinely the target of aggressive anti-trafficking enforcement – all in the name of 'saving the children!'

It doesn't have to be this way. Sex workers want to be allies to end child trafficking. Respecting sex workers' input on how best to address trafficking and removing children from exploitative situations is not mutually exclusive.

Pay attention if a campaign uses child trafficking statistics to justify its means. The claim that "300 000 children are trafficked in the United States every year" is constantly referenced, but like other statistics that drive the moral panic, multiple sources denounce

54 Lawrence, K. (2020, March 12). Why I'm No Longer an Abolitionist. Retrieved from https://medium.com/@klawrencewcf/why-i-am-no-longer-an-abolitionist-bdb5642c7ad1

the 300 000 statistic as bogus.<sup>55</sup> The Washington Post states that "this is another one of those nonsense statistics, based on data so old that the original researcher even says it is no longer relevant."<sup>56</sup>

### The Campaign Uses Tragedy Porn to Fundraise

As Sarah Ditum writes, "suffering sells, especially when it's women who are doing the suffering, and as with any trend, the pressure is for each new iteration to outdo what came before."<sup>57</sup>

Tragedy porn - that is the painful suffering that gives the audience a vicarious thrill from a safe distance to pity the poor, broken, tragic victim – sells. When it comes to marketing human suffering, no industry does it more masterfully than the rescue industry. A Google search of anti-trafficking campaigns reveals hyper-sexualized, violent, commodifying images of women.

- 55 ReasonTV. (2019, August 7). Ashton Kutcher Helped Promote a Bogus Sex Trafficking Claim. Will We Ever Shake It? Retrieved from https:// www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKnWByMs4DQ
- 56 Kessler, G. (2015, May 28). The bogus claim that 300,000 U.S. children are 'at risk' of sexual exploitation. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2015/05/28/the-bogus-claim-that-300000-u-s-children-are-at-risk-of-sexual-exploitation/
- 57 Ditum, S. (2018, May 12). Never-ending nightmare: why feminist dystopias must stop torturing women. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/2AjAjpR

Visual indicators of harmful antitrafficking campaigns include stark, highly stylized images, featuring any combination of the following elements of racialized women or the 'girl next door':

- bondage: hands or feet bound in cuffs, ropes, chains.
- hands: victims in distress with hands reaching out in fear, placed over their own eyes, or raised in "stop" or selfdefence positions.
- victim's eyes: close-ups of fearful, blind-folded or tearful eyes looking through either victim's or predator's hands.
- predators' eyes: close-ups of menacing eyes often juxtaposed with images associated with animal predators or monsters.
- forcible restraint: pictures of fearful women or children with brown or black male hands covering their mouths, grasping their shoulders or other parts of their bodies, holding them down.
- isolated captivity: single light fixtures in a dark room; dark or dimly-lit empty and windowless spaces, including dungeons, cells, shipping containers.
- victims with bruises, cuts, scrapes, scars, branding, tattooing.

 price tags, bar codes, labels and other themes associated with retail pricing, packaging and "for sale" commodification.<sup>58</sup>

Unfortunately, as Hayli Millar and Tamara O'Doherty point out, "anti-trafficking campaigns that rely on extremism, or depict exploitation along specific lines, such as sexual exploitation, make it difficult to persuade juries, and even judges, about non-extreme but still harmful forms of exploitation occurring in other contexts." Millar and O'Doherty go on to state that this raises the concern that some cases become more difficult to investigate and prosecute in a context of sensationalism as they do not meet the threshold depicted in the violent, graphic imagery of many anti-trafficking campaigns. <sup>59</sup>

The rescue industry is not alone in using shock imagery to promote itself and raise funds. Horrific things do happen in the world, and to all kinds of people and not just women and girls, but commodifying human suffering for the sole purpose of marketing is unethical. And when it comes to anti-trafficking awareness campaigns, 60 gaining donors by soliciting knee-jerk emotional reactions is not at all the same as engaging donors to effectively address the issue. Rather, it's just getting a hand into their wallet.

### "If it bleeds it leads."

#### - Eric Pooley, New York Magazine

- 58 Salvation Army. (2020). Anti Slavery Day Face
  Mask. Retrieved from www.sps-shop.com/100892
- 59 Millar, H. & O'Doherty, T. (2015). The Palermo Protocol & Canada Ten Years On: The Evolution and Human Rights Impacts of Anti-Trafficking Laws in Canada. Retrieved from https://icclr.org/ wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Palermo-Project-Key-Findings-Report-15-October-2015-withcopyright-2.pdf?x79172
- 60 Hayes, D. (2019, June 10). The wastefulness of human trafficking awareness campaigns. Retrieved from https://www.opendemocracy.net/ en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/wastefulnessof-human-trafficking-awareness-campaigns/

# Ensuring You Do Not Harm While Trying to Help

Many anti-trafficking campaigns are far more harmful than they are helpful – even if they're well-intentioned. This makes it important to be prudent with your charitable giving and time, and to ensure your hard-earned dollars aren't creating more harm in the world. This means being well-informed, responsible and ethical in your anti-trafficking efforts.

If the 'harming while trying to help' concept brings your anti-trafficking work into question, don't despair. A few simple principles can ensure that your efforts are more effective.

- Be inclusive. Anti-trafficking campaigns are only helpful if they involve the people they mean to help. Ask: How are trafficking survivors, migrant workers or sex workers involved in the development and delivery? How extensively have these folks been consulted?
- Do No Harm. The Anti-Trafficking:

  Harming While Trying to Help video highlighted global social, political and economic contexts in which anti-trafficking work happens. It showed the ways many anti-trafficking campaigns serve moral, political and corporate interests by influencing unjust migrant labour policies, or

reframing anti-sex work ideology as trafficking rescue. Thanks to technology we are all interconnected like never before. Any global initiative can generate unintended consequences; philanthropy is no different. Doing no harm requires the practice of diligent, thoughtful consideration how your antitrafficking work relates to the bigger picture. Take the time to learn how your efforts are connected to broader issues such as globalization, border control, international migration, immigration policies, corporate supply chains, or prostitution laws and enforcement. Taking a step back from your local anti-trafficking work to think about it in a broader, global context is essential if you want to mitigate the negative impacts of 'helping' you've just read about.

#### • Do an impact assessment.

Anti-trafficking campaigns must be assessed for their consequences. Given the potential risk to marginalized folks, the absence of accountability to the individuals a campaign serves and evaluation should serve as red flags. The ends do not justify the

means.<sup>61</sup> Incorporating do no harm principles means direct accountability for individual and collective actions. Whenever campaigns or actions create *any* harms or negative impacts, they must be redressed immediately regardless of what the original intentions were.

• When in doubt, ask. If anything you've read has raised questions about the anti-trafficking work you are engaged in, there's one sure way to find out whether it's helpful or not - ask the people who are directly impacted by it! When it comes to anti-trafficking, the best way to get genuine feedback about a campaign is to contact your local rights-based sex worker or migrant workers organization to find out.

Keeping these principles in mind can go a long way to ensure you are helping not harming in your anti-trafficking work.

# Thank you

Thank you for your open mind and for your willingness to look at the bigger picture despite uncovering uncomfortable truths. Thank you for joining SWAN in acknowledging the harms of some anti-trafficking efforts, and doing your part to redirect energies in more productive ways.

If you would like to learn more about the strengths and limitations of different models of intervention and protection in regard to modern slavery, human trafficking, or forced labor, check out the online course, 'Forced and Precarious Labor in the Global Economy: Slavery by Another Name?'62

- 61 Lepp, A. (2013). Do Not Harm: A Human Rights
  Approach to Anti-Trafficking Policies and
  Interventions in Canada. Learning Network Brief
  (5). London, Ontario: Learning Network, Centre
  for Research and Education on Violence Against
  Women and Children. Retrieved from http://
  www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/briefs/
  briefpdfs/LB-05.pdf
- 62 Available at www.edx.org/course/forced-andprecarious-labor-in-the-global-economy

#### **ABOUT SWAN VANCOUVER**

In 2002, the Sex Workers Action Network (SWAN) formed.

In 2008, SWAN incorporated as a non-profit society. We changed our name to Supporting Women's Alternatives Network to ensure the inclusion of im/migrant women who do sex work but do not self-identify as sex workers.

In 2017, SWAN became a registered charitable organization.

In the nearly two decades since our inception, SWAN has cultivated a unique network within a sex-working community that experiences systemic vulnerability due to the conflation of anti-im/migrant, anti-sex work and anti-trafficking rhetoric, and the laws and enforcement that result.

#### swanvancouver.ca

