

Editor's note: this FOCUS column aims to introduce readers to topics outside occupational health and safety.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING: IT'S EVERYWHERE

by Sandy Biback

We all stay in hotels, most of us travel by plane or train and go to conferences, sporting events and fundraisers. Have you ever said to yourself "that looks strange" and then let it pass from your mind because of what you are in the middle of doing – **DON'T!**

As an event planner and educator, I've spent the last 18 months researching this human tragedy. Why? Because it is happening in Canada's hotels, on our airplanes, in our restaurants, at our sporting events, at our conferences, at trucking stops along main high-

ways. There is no barrier to what "star" a hotel or convention centre or sporting arena has. From one star to five stars, human trafficking is present. I've spent the last 30 years planning conferences and events and I know there have been times when I thought something was wrong – and I let it pass because "I was too busy".

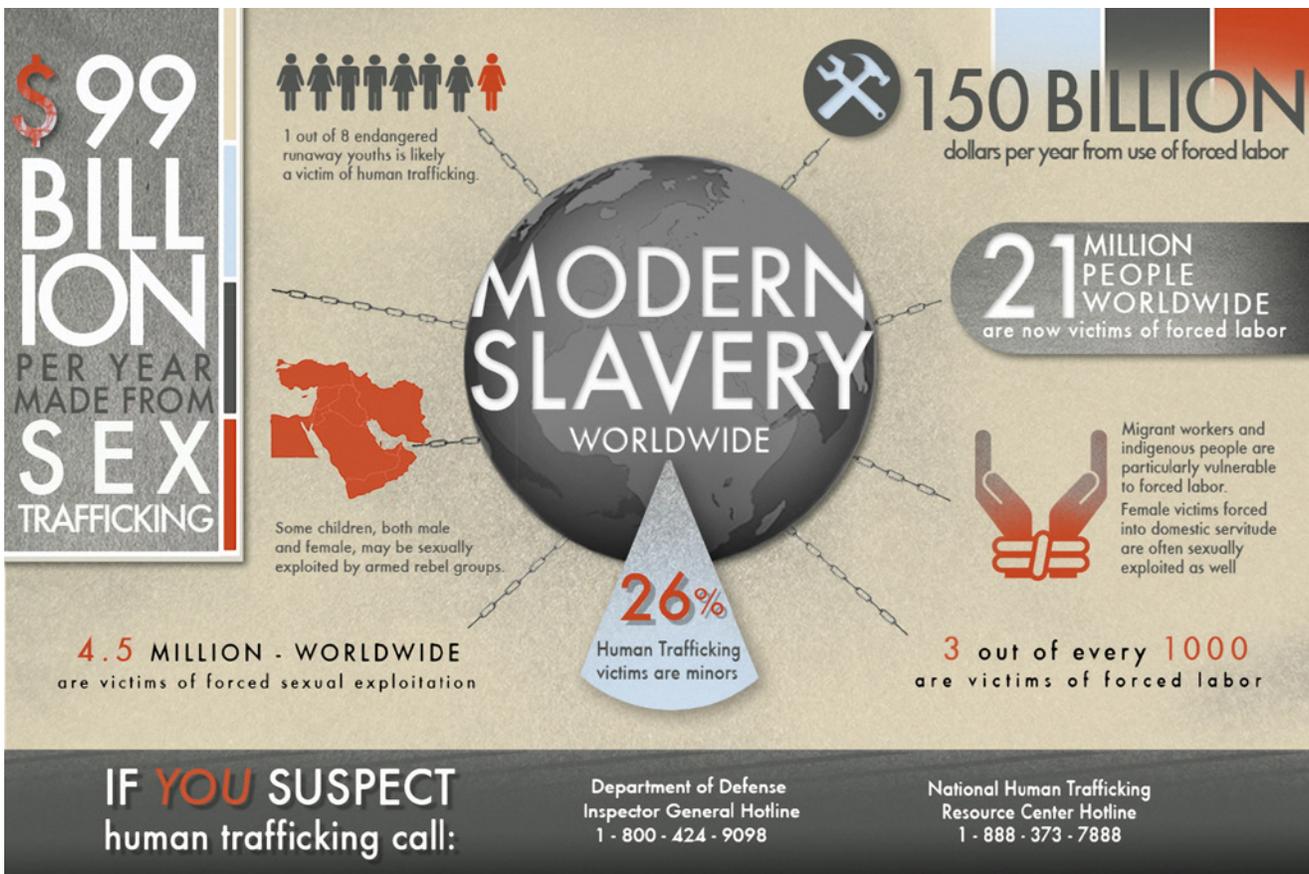
Girls and boys as young as 12 are being trafficked

Since starting my awareness of human trafficking, I have had many interviews with those trying to stop this crime against humanity. In 2016, I spoke with Detective

Rob Heitzner, Human Trafficking Enforcement Team, Toronto Police Service, who said:

"Victims of Human Trafficking are people that live on your street, live next door, your daughters go to school with them. Victims are vulnerable and traffickers attack that vulnerability. The Internet grants a platform for traffickers and enormously increases recruitment numbers".

Yes, sex tourism thrives in many countries and yes, many foreigners are trafficked in Canada. My research and meetings with others has proven Detective Heitzner



right: It is the girl next door. Girls (and boys) as young as 12 are threatened by the perpetrators who often threaten the victims' families. The perpetrators take a young girl's self-confidence, which is not always highly evolved, and play on that by promising many things – then ask for payback.

Rather dwell on the horror stories, here's what you CAN do and here are some resources that can help you.

The overall umbrella that is fighting this scourge is www.ecpat.org, www.ecpatusa.org.

Their website has some exceptional information on what you can do. www.beyondborders.org is the Canadian arm of ECPAT.

Technology helps spread sex trafficking – you can use it to help stem it. When you go to a hotel room, you can take photos using the app, TraffickCam, and submit them. The back end matches any photos with what specialists find online of girls being trafficked www.exchangeinitiative.com explains it all. I've checked and Canadians (in fact anywhere in the world) can submit photos.

A similar tool from Canada is www.cybertip.ca.

Thorn <https://www.wearethorn.org/spotlight/> is the technological brainchild of Ashton Kutcher and his former wife Demi Moore. The results this foundation is achieving are excellent. Kutcher recently made this plea to the US Senate, Feb 15, 2017: <https://www.facebook.com/CBSNews/videos/10154365397640950/>

All of us must be diligent. Please, "Say something if you see Something". As a conference planner and part-time professor, my goal is to create awareness. It is working. A variety of work is being done in Canada, US, Europe, Asia to train the hospitality industry on what to look for; what to do.

Report human trafficking if you suspect it.

Sandy Biback, CMP Emeritus, CMM has been a member of the conference planning community and industry boards for over 30 years. A published author, she has taught at several colleges in Ontario and the US. Semi-retired, Sandy has turned her passion to helping create awareness of sex trafficking in her profession. She welcomes comments at biback@imaginationmeetings.com

ECPAT-USA CHILD TRAFFICKING TRAVEL INDICATORS

Countless children are identified as victims of trafficking at hotels or on airlines across the globe. As a responsible traveler, you can help stop child trafficking in its tracks.

Here's what to look out for:

1. Minimal luggage/clothing
2. Lack of access to travel documents and money
3. Victim seems disoriented and lost
4. Victim lacks physical and verbal autonomy
5. Lack of adequate language skills for foreign victims
6. Trafficker is seen with many young children
7. Trafficker insists on paying solely in cash
8. Victim and trafficker have minimal interaction and eye contact with others, especially with staff
9. No evidence of return ticket; may have tickets to multiple destinations
10. Victim has indications of physical and emotional abuse
11. Trafficker/victim seem anxious to arrive at destination

Here's what to do:

- BE ALERT during large gatherings such as conventions or sporting games
- DO NOT confront the child or adult
- ALERT management, flight attendant, or airport security
- Note: room/seat number, names, and description of individuals
- In case of an emergency, dial 911
- In a non-immediate situation call 1-888-373-7888

ECPAT-USA is a non-profit organization that exists to create a world where no child is bought, sold, or used for sex. To learn more visit www.ecpatusa.org or find us on social media.

