



## ADDRESSING THE INTERNAL WOUNDS: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AFTERMATH OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The trauma associated with trafficking and its psychological effects can be devastating and, if left unaddressed, can undermine victims' recovery and potentially contribute to vulnerability to re-victimization. Because traffickers dehumanize and objectify their victims, victims' innate sense of power, visibility, and dignity often become obscured. Traffickers also use coercive tactics and force to make their victims feel worthless and emotionally imprisoned. As a result, victims can lose their sense of identity and security.

A variety of psychological symptoms can surface over a period of time even after victims escape or are rescued from the trafficking environment. Thus, it is critically important to incorporate psychological support and treatment within victims' services and protocols.

Steps to reinstating psychological well being include:

- ❖ Establishing a dependable safety network for victims to utilize and ensuring all their basic needs are met.
- ❖ Ensuring privacy and confidentiality to protect victims and their families and friends.
- ❖ Soliciting the support of medical experts, social workers, and psychologists who are trained in human trafficking and can provide trauma-specific therapy.
- ❖ Attending to victims' physical well-being, as sometimes there are physical symptoms existing simultaneously with or indicative of underlying psychological disorders.
- ❖ Providing collaborative therapies that are culturally sensitive.
- ❖ Fostering an empowering environment in which victims actively participate as consumers of therapeutic and other services.

- ❖ Assessing victims for self-injurious and suicidal behavior.
- ❖ Screening for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse/dependence, depression, and anxiety – mental disorders that can develop as a result of being trafficked.
- ❖ Providing unconditional support, especially amidst victims' potential denial, distrust, reticence, shame, or anger.
- ❖ Working towards social and familial reintegration.
- ❖ Rebuilding identity.
- ❖ Reestablishing skill-sets, self-esteem, and personal interests.



Photo Courtesy of the CNN Freedom Project