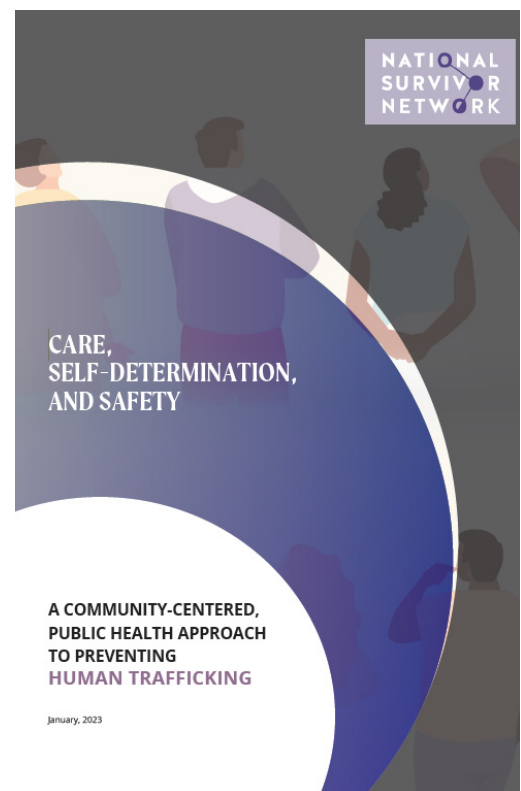


HIGHLIGHTS FROM CARE, SELF-DETERMINATION, AND SAFETY

A COMMUNITY-CENTERED, PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO PREVENTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Recommended citation: National Survivor Network. Highlights from Care, Self-Determination, and Safety: A Community-Centered, Public Health Approach to Preventing Human Trafficking. Los Angeles, CA (2023).

This work is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

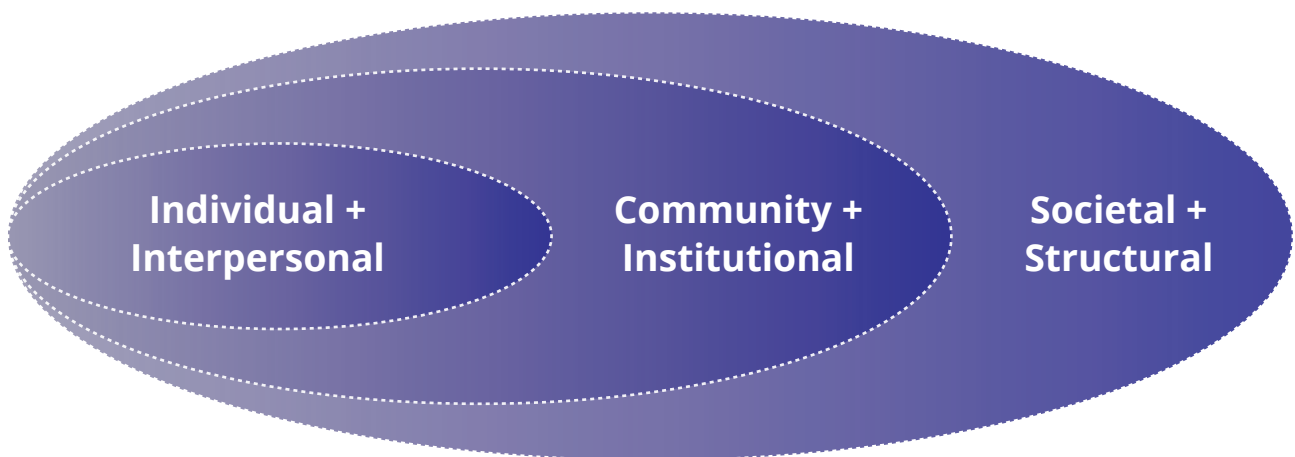


In recent years, there has been an increased emphasis in the anti-human trafficking sector on the value of public health and rights-based approaches to addressing human trafficking. A “public health” approach can be applied to both response and prevention. Public health interventions aim to treat the impacts of human trafficking on individuals, families, communities, and systems. Many of these approaches include ensuring appropriate medical and mental health care for survivors, and strengthening healthcare systems’ ability to care for and assist survivors. A [public health approach](#) to violence prevention is an effective way of ending violence by focusing on the “[health, safety, and well-being of entire population](#),” rather than a focus on individual instances of violence and punishment for [crime](#).

Public health violence primary prevention strategies look at violence like any other health issue or epidemic: What are the root causes? What is the context in which this health issue happens? How can we decrease the statistical risk of this health issue happening?

Our private, independent funding mandates that the NSN operates with a high degree of independence and autonomy. Therefore, our values statement, organizational practices, decision-making processes, and published findings do not necessarily reflect those of Cast LA or other partner organizations.

In the social-ecological model, risk and protective factors exist at multiple levels: individual, relationship, community, and society. Factors are not “causative” -- this means that having risk factors does not necessarily cause the trafficking, but that it is statistically correlated to the the violence occurring. Having risk factors doesn’t mean someone will traffic others or be trafficked, but rather means they are at increased statistical risk, often due to community and societal marginalization from access to safety and resources. Factors can be either risk or protective, and can exist at different levels.



A simplified version of the social-ecological model

The [social-ecological model](#) is a way public health experts understand how violence, injuries, and harm occur. We use the social-ecological model to organize this resource to demonstrate the ways the societal and community level drivers of human trafficking combine on the individual and interpersonal level to increase vulnerability. For human trafficking, this means acknowledging the role of drivers such as poverty, racism, homophobia, transphobia, [ableism](#), and misogyny in perpetuating human trafficking.

By “drivers” of human trafficking, we are pointing to conditions that exist across these levels in our society that allow human trafficking to occur and increase. These drivers are often functioning within our social, governmental, and community support models rather than happening as an exception to them, which means that [systems advocacy](#) must be a key component of any comprehensive and effective prevention plan.

Spectrums of choice, circumstance, and coercion

Labor in the United States exists along a spectrum from choice to circumstance to coercion. Some experts refer to this as the “[spectrum of agency](#).” The spectrum of agency acknowledges that peoples’ options and choices about what kinds of work they do are largely influenced by circumstances, and that discerning the level of agency they have is not always straightforward.

Work by force, fraud, or coercion is human trafficking.

Work by enthusiastic choice, that is *freely chosen*, is a privilege that is not experienced by many under the current models of [capitalism](#).

Work by circumstance is when someone does work they do not want to be doing because they do not have better options. This is reflected by the sentiment, “I would leave this work if I had better options,” and this is the situation in which many people in the United States find themselves.

⇒ “I do this work which I don’t enjoy because I have to pay my bills or feed my family.”

⇒ “I do this work which I don’t want to do because it pays well and I couldn’t make this much in a different field.”

⇒ “I do this work which pays horribly because of disability and other work options available to me don’t accommodate my needs or limitations.”

⇒ “I do this work that brings significant risks of devastating health impacts because that is the only industry that pays well in my region.”

⇒ “I do this work that contradicts my values because I can’t get hired in a job that aligns with my values.”

⇒ “I do this work I hate because my criminal record prevents the kinds of employment I would like to do.”

⇒ “I do this work that is scary because I lost my stable housing and can’t find work in many other fields because they require a permanent address.”

These are just a few of the emotionally challenging and often physically impactful realities people face in many forms of labor, but often work by circumstance in criminalized industries (like the sex trades) is subject to stigma, religious shame, or treated as an exception to other forms of work.

Societal and Structural

Drivers of Human Trafficking

Public Health Opportunities

The “American Dream” and current models of capitalism leave people vulnerable to exploitation.

Economic justice ensures that the people with low incomes are not as easily exploited in the name of profit.

Structural oppression (based on disability, race, gender, & colonial approaches) make people vulnerable and reduce their access to support.

Disability, race, gender, & land justice ensure that we are working toward equity & creating systems that prevent exploitation and support all survivors.

A culture of criminalization & punishment exacerbates the impacts of structural oppression.

Ending criminalization of survival strategies used by people facing multiple forms of oppression mitigates these impacts.

Community and Institutional

Drivers of Human Trafficking

Public Health Opportunities

Poverty wages & housing insecurity leave people vulnerable to exploitative offers for work.

Living wages & housing justice ensure that nobody must put themselves or others at risk to survive.

Funding & programmatic restrictions in non-profits limit long-term prevention & stability.

Transformative organizations support holistic, community-centered responses.

Child welfare, foster care, & juvenile legal involvement increase the statistical risk of trafficking & criminalization.

Family and youth justice give opportunities to support children, families, & communities who are at increased risk.

Interpersonal and Individual

Drivers of Human Trafficking

Public Health Opportunities

Isolation & harmful relationship dynamics normalize abuse for youth & communities.

Offering youth, families, & communities connection & care increases protective factors.

Ways for Health and Public Health to Take Action

Adapted from Human Impact Partners (HIP) report, [Health Equity Now](#)

Use your expertise to speak out

- Write an [op-ed](#), letter to the editor, or blog post using your expertise and making the connections between labor exploitation, violence, and health. In your letters, remember to center people that have lived experience of labor exploitation.
- [Call or email](#) your members of Congress or local elected officials to express your support for proposed policies that advance social and racial justice and public health and human rights approaches to labor exploitation or abuse of minors.

Educate your public health community

- Share this resource and others with your public health colleagues.
- Find opportunities in your professional communities (your workplace, listservs, social media, etc.) to share health equity policy demands, resources, and actions that move away from criminalization and other individual-level interventions.

Take action locally

- Advocate for passing strong local and state policies on these issues while also pushing for them at a federal level.
- [Ensure that local policies](#) both address short-term needs and create long-term, sustainable, and equitable solutions.
- Understand how governmental public health can [leverage its legal authority](#) to make demands regarding COVID-19 response and recovery that considers and supports people in the sex trade or other forms of labor.
- Support [budget campaigns](#) to invest in community health and divest from systems of harm.

Join networks dedicated to systemic and social change

[Public Health Awakened](#) is an example of a national network of public health professionals organizing for health, equity, and justice.

[The Soar Collective](#) is mobilizing to create advocate communities using an anti-racism and anti-oppression lens

Ways for Health and Public Health to Take Action

Adapted from Human Impact Partners (HIP) report, [Health Equity Now](#)

[Connect with local organizations](#) working on the issues you care most about — go to a meeting, get on the email list, connect with a member, or show up at an action. There have been many pop-up organizations created to address trafficking over recent years. Some questions you might consider when vetting organizations to support their work may include:

- Does this organization have representation from or accountability to a diverse array of people with lived experience of human trafficking or worker organizing (including sex workers and advocates for migrant rights)?
- Does this organization advocate for laws and policies that negatively impact the safety and autonomy of survivors of human trafficking and people in the sex trades? (e.g., advocating for increased criminalization)
- Does this organization use terminology and language that further stigmatizes or sensationalizes human trafficking survivors, the sex trades, migrants, or others in precarious forms of labor to further their work? (e.g., using “rescue” or “restore” language instead of a voluntary service approach, “modern-day slavery” to refer to all instances of trafficking, or defining all sex workers as victims of trafficking)

Follow, support, and partner with organizations led by people in the sex trades

- [SWOP USA](#)
- [Red Canary Song](#)
- [Global Network of Sex Work Projects](#)
- [Red Umbrella Fund](#)
- [SWOP Behind Bars](#)

Follow, support, and partner with explicitly sex-positive, survivor led, anti-trafficking and child sexual abuse (CSA) organizations

- [National Survivor Network](#)
- [The Heal Project](#)
- [Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women](#)
- [Mirror Memoirs](#)