

Human Trafficking: Modern Day Slavery in Athens, Georgia

High school history textbooks across the country celebrate the *Emancipation Proclamation* and the 13th amendment as the glorious resolution to the horrific slavery issue in the United States. However, America and the world continue to battle slavery in the modern era. Human trafficking, which is the subjection of individuals to “involuntary labor or commercial sex through force, fraud, or coercion” (Beeson, “UGA Takes On Human Trafficking”), is “the only industry in which the supply and demand are the same thing: human beings” (UNICEF USA, “How Trafficking Exists Today”). As modern slavery persists both abroad and at home, both awareness and incongruities in human trafficking have arisen.

Human trafficking is a growing concern across the globe as it continues to impact millions of lives worldwide. In 2016, the International Labor Organization estimated that around 24.9 million people were victims of human trafficking, in just that year (“Forced Labour, Modern Slavery, and Human Trafficking”). Women and children are disproportionately affected; 1 in 4 slaves are children, and women constitute 99% of the sex trafficking population, and 58% in all other sectors (International Labor Organization, “Forced Labour, Modern Slavery, and Human Trafficking”). While modern slavery is a clearly heinous enterprise, trafficking is also a very calculated, strategic exploit. Individuals who are destitute, undereducated, displaced, or combatting some type of violence or social oppression are more likely to be targeted by human traffickers (UNICEF USA, “How Trafficking Exists Today”). By capitalizing on these impediments, traffickers have turned modern slavery into a multi-billion dollar industry. The business of selling humans is one with low cost and astronomical profit; human trafficking is estimated to bring a profit of \$150 billion dollars annually, making it the second most profitable industry worldwide after the drug trade (UNICEF USA, “How Trafficking Exists Today”).

Because there is so much money in this enterprise, dismantling human trafficking is a massive undertaking, one that must be aggressively tackled by the international community.

The grip of modern slavery on the international stage has not left Athens, Georgia untouched. In 2015, there were 191 reports of human trafficking in Athens-Clarke County alone (McElhannon, OPINION: Educate Yourself, Human Trafficking Is Happening in Athens). Chris Parker, a detective with Athens-Clarke County Criminal Investigation Division, states that trafficking is something that has been going on [in Athens-Clarke County]; it's a crime that happens behind closed doors" (McElhannon, OPINION: Educate Yourself, Human Trafficking Is Happening in Athens). In addition, statistics most likely underestimate the amount of human trafficking in Athens; because local law enforcement typically only deals with sex trafficking (McElhannon, OPINION: Educate Yourself, Human Trafficking Is Happening in Athens), labor trafficking is typically not documented. The University of Georgia has also struggled with preventing trafficking, with a notable human trafficking arrest happening on campus just two weeks ago. On September 3rd, Nicolas Fernandez, a 23-year-old UGA student, was arrested outside of Park Hall on charges of kidnapping and trafficking a 14-year-old girl (FOX 5 Atlanta, "UGA Student Arrested in Kidnap, Sex Trafficking of 14-Year-Old Girl"). The girl was found in the basement of 50-year-old Brady Hart in Chestertown, Maryland, and Fernandez is facing a slew of charges, including kidnapping, statutory rape, and sex trafficking of a minor (FOX 5 Atlanta, "UGA Student Arrested in Kidnap, Sex Trafficking of 14-Year-Old Girl"). Events like these force Athens and UGA to reckon with the presence of human trafficking in their own backyards and how these communities will step up to prevent it.

While awareness and research about trafficking have certainly increased in recent years, many have voiced concerns about the disparities in labor trafficking prevention. Forced labor

victims represent the overwhelming majority of all modern slaves at a whopping 81% (Human Rights First, “Human Trafficking by the Numbers”). However, labor trafficking only constituted roughly 7% of all prosecutions relating to human trafficking. So, why is there such a disconnect in public fervor between labor and sex trafficking? PBS describes this issue as “a self-perpetuating cycle, wherein agencies may not direct resources toward labor trafficking because the issue is rarely the focus of media attention” (Miller, “Why Labor Trafficking Is So Hard To Track”). PBS goes on to elaborate, saying that lack of public sympathy and proper reporting about these incidents may be responsible for this discrepancy in the prevalence and prosecution of labor trafficking (Miller, “Why Labor Trafficking Is So Hard To Track”). David Okech, a UGA professor who has pioneered research on the trifecta of preventing, prosecuting, and prosecuting human trafficking (Okech, David, et. al, “Human Trafficking: Improving Victim Identification and Service Provision”), spoke to the Athens Banner-Herald, saying that there is very little information on labor trafficking in Georgia, primarily as a result of “unreported, under-reported, or [...] ad hoc basis” cases (Anderson, “UGA Researcher Seeks Data on Human Trafficking in Georgia”). Regardless of the rationale behind these incongruencies, efforts are being made to investigate both labor and sex trafficking and their implications for society. In particular, the 2000 Trafficking Victims Protection Act has been groundbreaking in deterring the crime in the United States; through the “3 P’s” of prosecution, protection, and prevention (US Department of State, “3 Ps: Prosecution, Protection, and Prevention”), the US legislative and judicial systems have assumed a new approach to stopping human exploitation.

Sex and labor trafficking are pressing local and global concerns whose awareness is heightening. While human trafficking is truly a worldwide plague, the issue also disproportionately affects the state of Georgia, the Athens-Clarke Community, and the University

of Georgia. The United States and UGA are rapidly working to ameliorate this attack on human rights through research and continued education. While questions about how to best address these concerns remain, it is clear that human trafficking must be dissolved if the world wishes to be slavery-free once more.

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