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### The Terrors of Modern-day Slavery

What is a mother's worst fear? The simple answer: to lose a child. What is a child's worst fear? Not to feel love from a parent. Humans are designed from birth to be nurtured by their parents – to crave physical and emotional affection. A lack of connection between a child and a parent can result in many struggles later in life, such as depression, anxiety, falling behind in school, and more. A child may not have a good sense of moral ethics, thus choosing to hang around with the wrong crowd or becoming involved in criminal activities. Heather, an average 14-year-old girl, began to slip away from reality when her mother started working around the clock to provide for her family. Heather was left with an empty house and free time to host parties and drink with friends. Then, at age 17, Heather met a guy who would change her life in the worst ways possible. The guy introduced her to the underground sex trafficking business in Baltimore, Maryland and for years she was abused and exploited. This awful experience remains a blur in Heather's head because she was under the influence of drugs and alcohol most of the time, taking a mental and physical toll on her body. She recalls looking like hell and weighing less than 100 pounds, nearly escaping death (*In Plain Sight: Stories of Hope and Freedom*). Heather's tragic story is not the only one, sadly there are many young girls who can relate to her experience. Sex trafficking – the selling of people for sex to make a profit – is a large and growing criminal enterprise that happens globally. In the United States alone, an estimated 100,000 children and thousands more women are being sold for sex each year (*In Plain Sight*).

Sex trafficking victims in the United States often hail from the most vulnerable and poverty-stricken groups of minors lacking adequate support systems; therefore, it is crucial for local, state, and federal governments to take action by enforcing more stringent laws,

investigating and punishing traffickers, and funding effective education programs to inform people about the warning signs. Domestic minor sex trafficking – also known as DMST – is a complex problem, but the origins are simple. Going back to the example of a mother and a child, if a child has someone to guide them, they are less likely to fall victim to DMST. And if a mother/father/guardian makes an effort to be involved in their child's life, they will most likely avoid losing their child to DMST. This child-parent relationship is one of the foundations of moral and ethical upbringing. At the same time, however, it is valid to point out that even with support, some kids can fall through the cracks and be victimized by DMST. One of the many solutions to ending this horrific form of slavery is reducing the number of minors who become victims of sex trafficking.

Sex trafficking is defined in the article “Federal and State Responses to Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: The Evolution of Policy,” as “Commercial sex acts performed by an adult under force, fraud, or coercion for the profit of a third party...” (Roby and Vincent 203). DMST differs from prostitution, in that minors are forced to participate in sexual activity without compensation. Another way to view the means of sex trafficking is as a contemporary form of slavery. Sex trafficking has an extensive history and is known as one of the oldest professions in the world. There were key periods throughout history when sex trafficking was prominent. For example, in the article “A Short History of Sexual Slavery,” author Rosemary Regello states, “In Rome, at the height of its far-flung empire, one in every three persons is thought to have been a slave.” She elaborates on how female slaves were typically used for entertainment purposes. The Roman Empire, like many societies, failed to recognize women as more than mere objects.

History repeats itself. During the African slave trade in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, women were sold for higher prices than men (Regello). This alludes to the fact that women slaves were used

for sex and men were used for labor. During the 13<sup>th</sup> century then, sex was more valuable than labor. Next, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "...a white slave trade had sprung up in Europe and North America, involving thousands of young women who were transported as sex slaves, often to Mexico" (Regello). Sex trafficking, especially the treatment and selling of women as if they are pieces of property, was and still is degrading. However, most of these acts went unnoticed because it was acceptable to own and sell people in most past societies. Then in World War II, concentration camps enslaved about a quarter-million women who were used for sex by Japanese soldiers (Regello). Now here we are in 2020. The profession of sex trafficking never ended; over time it has become better masked, as it is deemed unacceptable. And with other severe and timely issues in the world, such as global warming and a pandemic, DMST doesn't receive the undivided attention it deserves.

In addition to understanding the extensive history of sex trafficking, it is crucial to identify the three main roles within DMST, so that this pattern of repetition hopefully ends or at least changes for the better. The first player is the trafficker, also known as a "pimp," whose primary goals are to lure minors into the "game" and sell them for sex to make a profit. According to the scholarly article "Routes of Recruitment: Pimps' Techniques and Other Circumstances That Lead to Street Prostitution," "Black's (1990) law dictionary defines a pimp as someone who obtains customers for a prostitute" (Kennedy 5). Traffickers come from various backgrounds, but they all share two commonalities: a motive to make money and an expertise in utilizing psychological and manipulation tactics on their victims. How does one become a trafficker? There are many ways a person enters the lifestyle, one of the most prominent being a connection to someone already in the "game." In the article "Pimp Culture Glorification and Sex Trafficking," Mellissa Wither found that "...nearly one-third of the pimps interviewed reported

that they were influenced by people they grew up with at home and in their neighborhoods who were engaged in the illegal sex trade.” This is typical of any profession; people tend to enter a job they know and feel comfortable with. Another way of becoming a trafficker – typical for female traffickers – is being a prior victim. In “The Sexual Exploitation of Girls in the United States: The Role of Female Pimp,” the authors analyzed 49 cases of female pimps. Out of 49 women, ten female traffickers, equivalent to roughly twenty percent, had been sex trafficked as minors (Roe-Sepowitz et al. 2827). DMST is a continuous vicious cycle of abuse, and one way out for trafficked females is to “climb the ranks” and become a pimp, as horrendous as it sounds.

The second player in DMST is the victim. According to authors Roby and Vincent, a minor victim of sex trafficking is defined as an individual who is younger than 18 years-old (203). Minors who come from unstable homes, lack a support system, and who crave attention are the most vulnerable populations to sex trafficking because traffickers lure their victims in with unfulfilled promises. The documentary *In Plain Sight: Stories of Hope and Freedom* reveals that a trafficker approaches one in three runaways within 48 hours of hitting the streets. As mentioned previously, traffickers are expert manipulators. They can spot a minor in need of attention, especially one on the streets without a home. The way many minors become victims is similar to the way a person becomes a pimp: connections. In the CNN special “Freedom Project: Children for Sale” actress Jada Pinkett Smith interviews Sasha Ray, a DMST survivor who recalls how she felt alone at home and school, until one day a girl befriended her and introduced her to pimps who eventually gained her trust. Although this isn’t always the case, minors need to be aware of their friends and be able to distinguish between people they can and cannot trust. In an article published by Polaris titled, “Sex Trafficking in the U.S.: A Closer Look at U.S. Citizen Victims,” the techniques used by traffickers are explored. For example, traffickers “...may make

elaborate promises of a place to live, a job, or gifts of clothing and jewelry. Controllers may also act as romantic pursuers and initially offer love and support in order to gain their victim's trust." All these psychological tactics used by traffickers make it easier for victims to confide in them and see them as a good person rather than destructive. Victims are blinded by their needs, and traffickers take advantage of this.

Finally, among the "who is who" in DMST are the johns: the ones who purchase the sex. What are the characteristics of a john? Lauren Gambino, a writer for *The Guardian*, claims, "There's a fallacy to think that johns are 'creepy guys in trench coats'... There's just not enough creepy guys in trench coats to make this a multi-billion dollar business." Instead, "It's men with money. It's upper-middle-class white males from the suburbs married with a family." It is vital to recognize that a john can be anyone. Just as it is challenging to identify a trafficker, the same applies to johns. One thing is certain though: Johns must be "well off" or have enough money to afford the sexual transactions. Most johns know their actions are wrong, resulting in them being subtle when they purchase sex. Further, they are good at ignoring the dilemmas and prioritizing their own needs. In an article discussing the Florida day spa prostitution crackdown, 264 men were identified and arrested for purchasing sex. Among the 264 johns, the only real commonality was their gender; all were men. The article states, "Demographic traits are poor predictors of sex buying: Race and sexual orientation have almost no profiling power" (Holsman and Moore), thus making it easier for johns to slip under the radar. The documentary *In Plain Sight: Stories of Hope and Freedom* discusses how easy it is for johns to obtain sex. They make a call, arrange a location, and experience momentary power and pleasure while the traffickers accumulate wealth.

DMST is essentially a market whereby the supply is the victims, the demand is sex craved by the johns, and the suppliers/distributors at the top are the pimps. In this market, it

appears everyone except the victim gets what they desire. As mentioned previously, the dismantling of this market is crucial to resolve the issue of DMST, but the emphasis should be placed on exploring the correct means to go about doing this. And if terminating one of these roles is not be possible, reducing the number of people entering the roles could be beneficial. For example, educating boys from a young age how to treat women properly and avoiding the misogyny of women could reduce the number of johns or traffickers and even contribute to a better society.

Now that the key terms have been established, what is the scope of the DMST problem in the United States? Evaluating the statistics proves that sex trafficking is not a practice of the past, nor does it happen exclusively in third-world countries. In 2019, the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline reported 14,597 sex trafficking victims and survivors. Keep in mind this number represents one year, and these are only cases that were reported. This number would be immensely larger if it accounted for all the current victims in threatening situations and if more survivors had the courage to speak out.

A common misconception is that DMST occurs exclusively in cities and locations with high criminal activity rates; this is false. According to the documentary *In Plain Sight: Stories of Hope and Freedom*, DMST victims have been rescued from all 50 states. Some states have higher numbers of traffickers, victims, and johns, such as Atlanta, Georgia, explored in “The CNN Freedom Project: Children for Sale.” Since DMST is a market, the scope of the problem can be measured economically. The article “Sex Trafficking in the U.S.” by the Polaris Project references a study completed in 2014 with the purpose of examining the underground commercial sex economy. It is estimated that sex trafficking generated between \$39.9 million and \$290 million in revenue, depending on the city. Further, Smith’s interview with a convicted

trafficker reveals that she made about \$2,000 a day with one female victim “working” and anywhere between \$3,000 to \$5,000 with multiple victims, all in a single night (CNN). Do the math, and in total, a trafficker can make anywhere between \$15,000 to \$25,000 in income per week. In contrast, a quick Google search reveals the average pay for a full-time employee in the United States is \$876 a week! And guess what? There are zero educational requirements to become a trafficker. For someone who isn’t concerned with risks or punishments for their actions, this profession is extremely enticing. And just as a trafficker can’t resist money, a decent human being can’t look at these numbers and believe DMST is not a problem or one that will be solved easily.

A key issue related to DMST is the amount of misinformation and misinterpretations by the public. The question remains, how does stereotyping roles in DMST complicate the matter? Professor Withers at the University of Southern California argues that pop culture romanticizes the sex trafficking industry through all forms of media. Further, the word “pimp” is portrayed in media as being synonymous with “cool,” when in reality there is nothing cool about being a pimp. Withers points out the sickening example of the slogan “Pimp My Lounge” used by Virgin Atlantic Airways in an advertising campaign for their new airport clubhouse. It is not appropriate for a television show, movie, book, song, or any media to use this language. The word “pimp” should instead be synonymous with evil to reflect their actions: exploiting minors and women. This derogatory language used in products teaches consumers that there is nothing wrong with selling minors and women for sex when it is entirely wrong, and the truth needs to be revealed to combat sex trafficking. It is not enough for radio stations to play inexplicit versions of songs. Take, for example, Justin Bieber’s newly released song, “Holy,” which bleeps out the lyrics:

“The pimps and the players say...” Some argue that lyrics are open for interpretation, while most would say otherwise, claiming any inclusion of degrading language is unethical.

Pimps are not the only ones being stereotyped in the media; women have been stereotyped since the beginning of film and television. American culture tends to idolize and portray women as sexual objects in movies, shows, and commercials. Take for example, Teleflora, a floral delivery service that produced a provocative commercial during the 2012 Super Bowl. In the video, a tall, skinny, beautiful actress is shown wearing a black sexy dress with a deep cut in the front. The commercial ends with the actress looking directly into the camera reciting the lines, “Guys, Valentine’s Day is not that complicated. Give and you shall receive,” eluding that if a man gives a woman flowers, they will receive sex in return (“Adriana Lima Teleflora Ad”). The phrase “sex sells,” is sadly accurate in today’s media landscape. It is crucial to note that the Teleflora commercial did not go unnoticed, as the Super Bowl is the largest media event of the year, with over 99 million people watching. On an average day, most consumers are generally fed up with advertisements, choosing to ignore or fast-forward by them, but the Super Bowl is the one time of the year when many choose to pay attention. The Teleflora commercial is degrading for both men and women. It teaches men that women are objects, and to gain possession is as easy as giving a woman a materialistic item. And it teaches women that one must wear makeup and dress sexy to gain men’s attraction. These examples don’t compare to real-life. Women are more than sexual objects, they are mothers, CEO’s, nurses, teachers, sisters, and more. Women are not limited to one appearance or job; instead they are diverse. It is vital that young girls have inspiring and diverse women to look up to, so they don’t mistake their body for an object.



Although many stereotypes can be harmful to society, at the same time, messages spread via media can help create awareness for the dangers associated with DMST. Not all platforms complete the necessary research to depict sex trafficking accurately. When the media does choose to address sex trafficking, the mistake of overdramatizing it can be made – which can be good so that people learn how horrific this slavery is – but bad because people don’t know how to recognize the signs in real life. It is crucial to differentiate between myths and rumors shown in social media versus facts supported by evidence. For example, many adults warn their children of strangers in white vans. Maybe you have heard a version of this story, “Don’t take candy from a strange man in a white van,” says a mother to her young daughter. As conveyed earlier, a trafficker can be anyone, and further, traffickers drive all kinds of vehicles (“Human Trafficking Rumors”). Second, a trafficker is rarely a stranger to the victim, what with many victims trafficked by people they know, such as family members or romantic partners (“Human Trafficking Rumors”). And in those rare cases when the trafficker is a stranger, they use manipulation tactics to make themselves appear approachable rather than “a creepy guy in a van.” To support this claim, a study found that 31% of sex trafficking survivors’ relationship with their traffickers was intimate, and they considered them their “partner” (“Sex Trafficking in the U.S.”). The trafficker plays with the victim’s psyche and convinces them that they are a good person. Parents and guardians must realize the rarity of a DMST victim being taken by a stranger, so they can teach their children what to be careful of.

This leads to another essential myth of sex trafficking - the confusion between sex trafficking and kidnapping. Kidnapping is a serious issue but in most cases is a separate offense from sex trafficking. In most sex trafficking cases, minors are not taken against their will, and as mentioned previously, many are lured in with elaborate promises. A standard image associated

with human trafficking is one of dozens of starved children tied or chained up with their mouths duct-taped shut. This image is unrealistic in most human trafficking cases, especially because the children are the product, and they need to be taken care of. A recent case prosecuted by the Department of Justice (DOJ) reveals that a defendant used violence on his victims, such as handcuffing victims, punching victims, and even burning a victim on the leg with a cigarette (National Strategy 4). This abuse is brutal, but this case is unique because many traffickers avoid physical force, as one of the witnesses from this case explained "...the defendant never hit the victims in the face because it would damage his 'merchandise'" (National Strategy 4). This is not an accurate depiction of what a victim looks like because "In reality, most human traffickers use psychological means such as tricking, defrauding, manipulating or threatening victims into providing commercial sex or exploitative labor" ("Human Trafficking Rumors"). This makes it difficult for law enforcement agents to identify victims, but even more difficult in attempting to convince a victim they need saving. Due to the psychological tactics, most victims create an emotional bond with their controller, which makes it difficult for them to leave the situation ("Sex Trafficking in the U.S"). Even worse, victims become comfortable in their situation. For example, Smith's team followed Sargent Torrey Kennedy from the DeKalb County Police Department around Georgia. During one of their busts, a young girl refused to accept Kennedy's help and be taken to a safe house. Kennedy explains to Smith and the CNN film crew that he wants to treat the minors as victims, but they sometimes don't want to be treated that way because this is the only life they know. The solution is more complicated than merely rescuing a child off the street – the child needs to be willing to leave on his or her own accord, and when ready, adequate support needs to be provided by the government. Further, parents and guardians should be better educated on the facts and myths of DMST so they can educate their children,

hopefully preventing their child from ever entering a dangerous situation or the need to be rescued.

It may come as a surprise to many that despite the high numbers of DMST victims each year, there are existing laws in place to protect minors and prosecute traffickers. One of the most significant efforts that have improved over the years is law enforcement agents and government officials treating a victim of DMST as an innocent victim of abuse rather than a criminal. For example, the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (JVTA) was signed in 2015 which modified the phrase “child prostitution” to “child sex trafficking, including child prostitution,” to emphasize that a child is simply engaged in sex trafficking, not a prostitute (Roby and Vincent 204). This change can be viewed as a minor detail, but it is a huge victory in the world of sex trafficking because criminalizing victims results in the same outcomes of criminalizing those who broke the law: they will go back to their old habits. Instead, law enforcement can now label minors caught in prostitution as victims, which means they will receive the help they need and hopefully leave the abuse cycle.

Compared to the information on victims and reports of help received, there is far less information on the punishment traffickers receive. There are few studies on traffickers because they are experts at staying hidden. One cannot come close to estimating the number of people on the streets who exploit minors because not all are caught or on record. A helpful resource is the U.S. Department of Justice’s special report of the “Federal Prosecution of Human-Trafficking Cases in 2015.” The report reveals that ninety-eight percent of the convicted sex trafficking defendants received a prison sentence in 2015 (Motivans and Snyder 10). Further, in 2015, the median prison sentence imposed on defendants for sex trafficking, peonage, slavery, or forced labor offense was 134 months – or about 11 years – compared to only 93 months or eight years

in 2003 (Motivans and Snyder 12). This shows that law enforcement agents and government officials are doing their jobs and putting a high percentage of convicted felons behind bars where they belong. More significant is the noted increase in the length of punishments for convicted felons. The question remains: is 98 percent or 11 years good enough? Unfortunately, the answer is no, as short-term justice, such as a prison sentence, is not the ideal solution. Instead, the United States needs a social movement to end DMST. This social movement should include education, rehabilitation of victims, pimps, and johns, and enforcing and improving existing laws combatting DMST.

It is evident that every DMST case is unique, meaning that each victim's needs are unique. That makes it crucial for every state to have uniform Safe Harbor laws – intended to provide partial or whole freedom to minors coerced into commercial sex – that mimic federal laws and that require the establishment of multidisciplinary task forces in an effort to most efficiently and effectively help DMST victims (Roby and Vincent 201). Task forces vary by state but are typically a group of professionals – including, but not limited to prosecutors, educators, medical professionals, mental health workers, advocates, etc. – who collaborate in helping victims (Roby and Vincent 206). Further, Roby and Vincent argue that social workers are the most fitting professionals to organize and facilitate the teams (Roby and Vincent 207). This concept of having multiple people involved rather than one person or agency is logical. All the professionals are held accountable for their part, ensuring the victims do not get “lost” in the system. It is also best for someone in the field – for example, a social worker – who interacts with survivors and victims of DMST daily to lead the effort to improve laws, as opposed to government officials who lack first-hand experience and knowledge. Finally, DMST is an intra-state issue crossing state boundaries, laws must be uniform in all states, so the victim receives

adequate justice. Sex trafficking is a global enterprise, meaning that a victim could be lured by a trafficker in one state and then brought to another state to be sold for sex. Each state needs to be on the same page to punish the traffickers and help the victims, no matter the origin.

The United States DOJ supports the multidisciplinary approach, addressing it as a critical component in the “National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking.” For five years, between 2010 and 2015, the DOJ claims the task forces conducted 5,544 investigations resulting in 1,558 federal, state, and local trafficking charges. Further, 1,052 out of 2,071 victims identified and recovered were minors (National Strategy 12). The percentage of successful legal charges out of investigations is low, but no explanation is supported. The low percentage supports the argument that DMST is an extensive issue that needs more time, attention, and money. What happened to the other 3, 986 investigations? Maybe the federal, state, or local government did not have enough means to move forward with the investigations. This is not acceptable – anyone suspected of trafficking a minor should be sufficiently investigated and charged. On the other hand, the number of victims saved – especially minors – is high. Again – due to it being a report – details are left out. Readers are unaware if the 1,052 minor victims received the help they needed, one can only hope they were able to leave that chapter in their lives behind.

What happens to the rescued victims? If the victims are compliant, they are usually taken to a safe house or residential facility to recover from the abuse endured. Establishing safe houses across the United States is necessary to assist DMST victims and keep them out of prison and unstable homes. The study “Finding a Path to Recovery: Residential Facilities for Minor Victims of Domestic Sex Trafficking” examines four residential facilities intended solely for victims of DMST and identifies the most successful practices. It is important to note that one of the authors is a licensed independent clinical social worker (LICSW), one of the designated professions to

help victims most efficiently. Some of the key suggestions for the creation of a safe house were: the setting of the program should be small and intimate, the minimum length of stay should be at least 18 months, and the staff should consist of mostly females because most female victims have been exploited by males (Clawson and Grace 3). Further, certain services such as basic needs, life skills, job training programs, intensive case management, medical screening/routine care, mental health counseling/treatment, education, and family involvement/reunification should be offered to victims (Clawson and Grace 6). There are a number of variables involved with rehabilitation, thus it is important these steps are done right. Education and job training programs are essential for a victim to re-enter the real-world on the “right foot.” While all of this sounds superb, one must wonder how these programs “stay afloat.” As exemplified, these programs are complex, requiring sufficient funding, dedicated employees, and adequate space. For better or worse, most programs rely on volunteers and donations.

The documentary *In Plain Sight: Stories of Hope and Freedom*, focuses on about four to five safe houses/programs and the stories of the founders and survivors. Louise Allison, the founder, and executive director of Partners Against Trafficking Humans (PATH), runs a Christ-centered recovery program that provides shelter. It offers many of the services identified above: life skills, education assessments, counselors, and more. Allison’s motivation to create a place for victims came after talking to many law enforcement agents who expressed the demand for places to put rescued girls so they would not end up back with their trafficker in less than 24 hours. In the film she gives a tour of the abandoned building they use to house victims so that nobody knows their location. It is essential to recognize that the entire building was painted and fixed by volunteers. Further, all the furniture, including beds and couches for the survivors were donated. Without the help of generous people, the establishment of most safe houses would not

be doable. If people are unaware or misinformed of DMST or about the rehabilitation process then there are less people to help, making it crucial for society to be educated on this issue so that victims receive the help they need. The cliché “it takes a village to raise a child” relates perfectly to the matter at hand, in that these victims need a village of people to help them recover.

One must not be naïve to believe that donations will provide enough support to rehab victims and combat DMST. The funding provided by the U.S. government plays a crucial role in solving the dilemma. This year, in 2020, the DOJ awarded more than \$101 million to combat human trafficking (“Justice Department Awards Nearly \$101 Million”). Unfortunately, this money had to be distributed among certain organizations and specific causes. Concerning shelter, \$35.1 million was awarded to 73 organizations to provide housing to victims of human trafficking. This is good because as noted above, one of the biggest issues in DMST is the need for shelter for recovering victims. Further, only \$1.8 million was left for the prevention of girls from being trafficked, which includes training, early intervention services, and mentoring for girls who are at risk of becoming victims (“Justice Department Awards Nearly \$101 Million”). Grants and awards are a great way to help reduce the volumes of minors trafficked each year, but it is not enough. The government does not distribute its money equally, choosing to spend more on what they deem more timely issues. Of the \$29.2 billion DOJ budget for 2020, only \$101 million was allocated for human trafficking (“FY 2020 Budget Summary”). That’s only about 3% of the department’s budget. The federal government has to do better. Further, this money only goes to specific organizations, leaving the smaller programs and safe houses in the dark.

Beyond the rehabilitation of victims and money needed, there is an increasing need to collaborate on the education and prevention of DMST. Educating children – the future generation of adults – will lessen the number of people entering the market of victims, johns, and

pimps. The DOJ argues that outreach is a key aspect in combatting the issue at hand and that public awareness could potentially convince a victim to contact law enforcement (National Strategy 10). It is difficult to stop abuse once it has started, and it is even more difficult for a victim to recover and return to their everyday life after the abuse. Thus, prevention is the best course of action to prevent any harm done to minors. One way of increasing awareness is the collaboration of U.S. attorney offices and task forces to hold events with populations most vulnerable to human trafficking and teaching them about the signs of human trafficking (National Strategy 10). Targeting the vulnerable population is more effective than speaking to an entire population to which the message will only be relevant to some.

Including men in prevention work is also a crucial piece of the social movement. As noted earlier, males and females can fulfill all the roles. Both genders can be victims, pimps, or johns, but nine out of ten times, the situation involves a young girl as the victim, a male as the trafficker, and a male purchasing the sex. The young girl is not doing anything wrong, in most cases men are in the wrong. Derri Smith, founder and executive director of End Slavery Tennessee, discussed the importance of “stem tiding” for the next generation of johns. She has set up programs for men to speak to middle school and high school boys about what it truly means to be a man (*In Plain Sight: Stories of Hope and Freedom*). This relates to the concept of media misinformation because boys receive messages that women’s bodies are objects when, in fact, they are not. Young boys and girls should have a positive role model in their lives, teaching them the proper standards of gender in the United States. Smith is not the only one developing education programs for young men. Becca Stevens, founder of Thistle Farms – an organization dedicated to women survivors of prostitution, trafficking, and addiction – focuses on education. For example, “...Stevens has started hosting a ‘johns’ school to educate men who have been



caught seeking prostitutes about the industry. In her view, breaking the cycle of demand so that selling girls is no longer a profitable business is paramount” (Gambino). Stevens has an exceptional vision and means of achieving the dream, but it will take time. As young kids learn the proper way to treat people based on their gender, they will grow up and hopefully teach their children. Of course, some kids will misinterpret or ignore the message, but abolishing DMST begins with reducing the statistics.

There are many potential solutions to DMST, but most are temporary. The long-term solution to eradicating this awful form of slavery that affects hundreds of thousands of minors each year is not a small task. It is a global task; sex trafficking happens everywhere. Even if DMST is abolished in the United States, who is to say that it won't continue overseas. It is clear that traffickers are money hungry and johns crave sex, and that both are willing to go to extremes to satisfy their desires. It is difficult to stop predators, but it is easier to protect our children. The disheartening truth is that DMST may never end, but the number of minors groomed to be victims can be reduced over time with a social movement. The movement will require an “all hands-on deck” approach. Luckily, everyone has something to offer in this fight. Parents can support and educate their children. A wealthy business owner can fund a safe house. A social media influencer can share a post to educate his/her followers. A hotel front-desk attendant can report suspicious activity. As William Wilberforce once said during the slave trade: “You may choose to look the other way, but you can never again say you did not know.” This quote is from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and is still relevant today. After reading this essay one can choose to ignore the problem of DMST, but now one can never claim they were unaware sex trafficking occurred in the United States. And if you decide to look the other way, remember what you are looking away

from; thousands of faces and stories of innocent children suffering. How would that make you feel?

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