



## HUMAN TRAFFICKING AS A SYMPTOM OF POVERTY

### *An Overview*

On almost every continent, children of poor, marginalized communities that have experienced violent political conflict or natural disaster in recent past decades – much like those in Haiti, Colombia, Indonesia, and Uganda – are at high risk of being sold or kidnapped into sex slavery. Destruction of social, economic, and political systems have left these communities without the protections that would otherwise serve as defenses against “traffickers” or “slavers,” who in the aftermath of crises, are exploiting the desperation of the impoverished.

Effected communities are often considered by their country’s majority to be marginal because of their people’s religious beliefs or ethnicity; moreover, in most cases, women and children are viewed as the least valuable members of these societies. As a result, while these populations already have little to no access to education, women have the least economic prospects and chances to acquire marketable skills. If recent crises have resulted in the death of parents or other important social networks, young females have practically no viable economic options and no protections. Many are subject to severe abuses – rape, forced marriage, kidnapping.



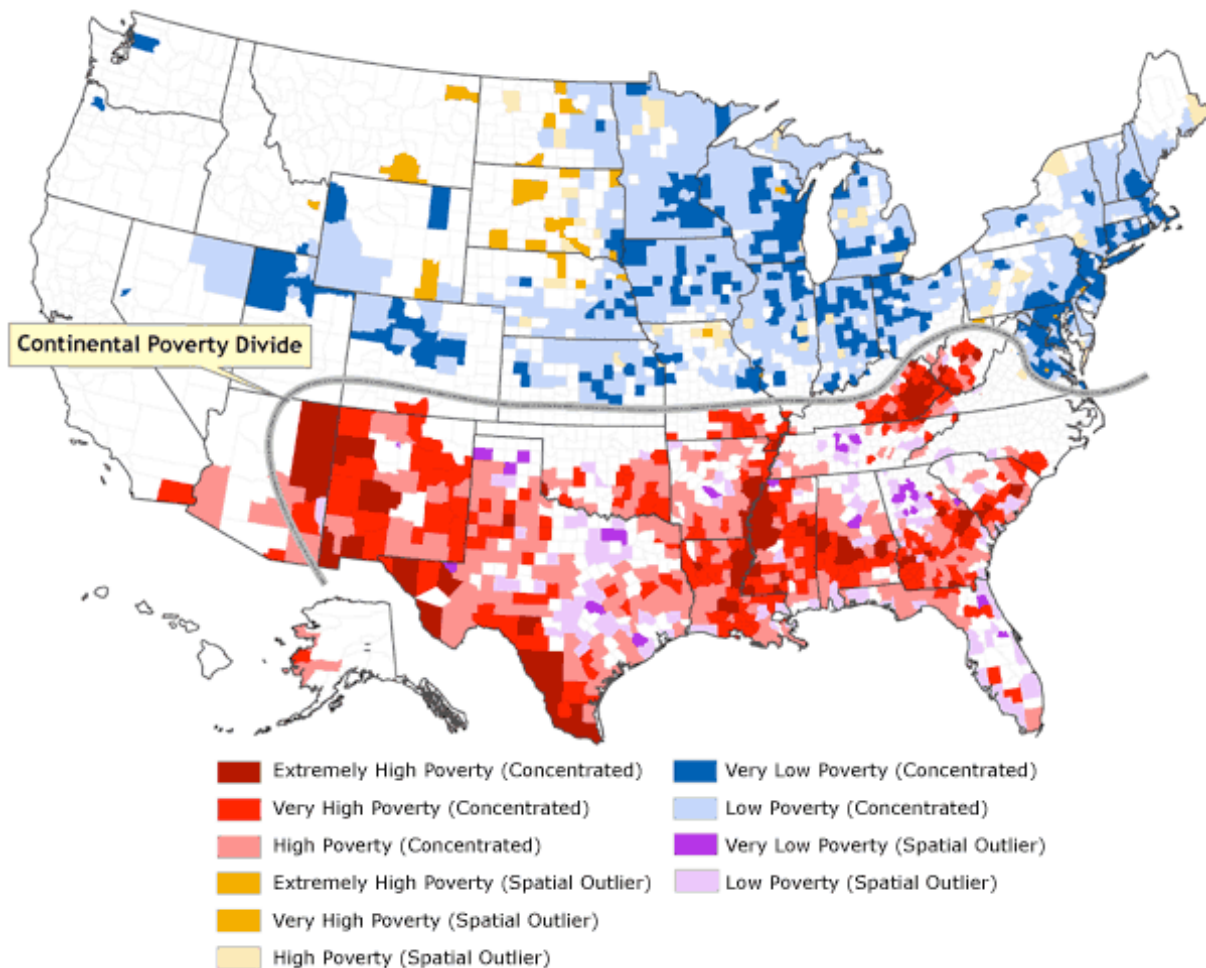
Due to their communities’ already being viewed as unimportant, compounded by broken economies and political infrastructure, victims of crime do not find refuge with the police. In countries like Cameroon and Cambodia, police are paid poorly and are not trusted by the populations they monitor. If community members are aware of abuses, kidnappings, and so forth, they cannot turn to local authorities for assistance. They have no access to legal defense, and are often scared of authorities, who are also known for their harsh treatment of poor citizens.

In some unimaginably desperate situations, parents will sell their children in order to pay off debts. Linda, a seven-year-old Cambodian survivor of sex trafficking, communicates the inhumanity that poverty breeds in her statement

**“Even if [our mother] sold us, she only  
did so because she was so poor.”**

It is not that young women agree to a life of sex slavery; rather, they agree to traffickers' false promises of viable economic opportunity elsewhere. Dewi, a sixteen-year-old Indonesian survivor says, "My father died in 1993. My mother has no work. We are a poor family. I went to Tanjung Balai Karimun because a friend of my mother's, Aunt Meta, offered me work in a restaurant with a high wage." Like most who agree to embark on these journeys, Dewi had no way to know that she was actually being sold into a brothel, where she would be forced to have sex with ten to twenty men per day for her pimps' sole profit.

**WHAT ABOUT THE UNITED STATES?**



Source: [http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2007/oct/images/07\\_0091\\_05lg.gif](http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2007/oct/images/07_0091_05lg.gif)

The very same socio-economic dynamics that make children, women, and men vulnerable to trafficking in other countries are at play here, within our own borders. The recent 2012 Census Report highlights the reality that 46.2 million people were living in poverty in the United States in 2011 -- the largest number of persons counted as poor in the 53 years of poverty measurements.

The National Poverty Center reports that children represent a disproportionate share of the poor in the United States; they are 24 percent of the total population, but 36 percent of the poor population.

According to the National Center for Law and Economic Justice, census figures released in September 2012 reveal record-high numbers of people continue to live in poverty in the United States. The latest data reveals

**One out of seven people in the USA are living in poverty.**

The poverty rate (the percentage of all people in the United States who were poor) also remained at record high levels: 15 percent for all Americans and 21.9 percent for children.

The United States Bureau of the Census measures poverty by comparing household income to the poverty threshold for a household of a given size. The poverty threshold is adjusted each year to take account of changes in the cost-of-living. The poverty threshold does not represent what a family actually needs for a decent living. For example, in 2011 the poverty threshold for a household of four was \$23,050.

While the overall percentage of people living in poverty nationwide did not change significantly between 2010 and 2011, individual states saw increases in overall poverty and poverty among children and the unemployed. Seventeen states saw poverty go up, while 14 saw increases in child poverty and 27, more than half of the states, had increases in the number of unemployed people living in poverty last year.

Almost one out of sixteen people in the USA are living in *deep* poverty. The Census defines people in deep poverty when they make 50% below the poverty line; Census figures show that, in 2011, 6.6 percent of all people, or 20.4 million people, lived in deep poverty.

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World Relief: <http://www.wr.org/whatwedo/traffickingvictimprotection.asp>