

## The Uniqueness of Familial Human Trafficking

Formal definition: *Familial trafficking is the abuse or exploitation of a victim at the hands of someone they know*

When we're talking about familial trafficking, we are mainly talking about child trafficking, many of whom began to be abused at an early age, perhaps as young as toddlers.

Family trafficking can remain "hidden in plain sight"

- It can be more invisible than other forms of trafficking
- There is a façade of normalcy presented to those outside the family
- The person in control may be an upstanding member of society or a person of trust in the community

A large percentage of victims develop DID (Dissociative Identity Disorder)

- The brain takes the memory of the trauma while it's happening and moves it from the conscious mind and places it in the subconscious/unconscious area of the brain
- It's a strategy the mind uses to protect itself from the full impact of the severe or repeated abuse
- It's too much to process so the brain chooses to forget
- The memory of the abuse is totally forgotten until a later event triggers it

Victims who began to be abused as toddlers have no sense of "normal"

The average age of victims of familial trafficking in the U.S. is 5 years old

Why is dissociation common in familial trafficked victims?

- There is a "window" of time within the normal stages of brain development (roughly 2 to 2 ½ years old) where dissociation is frequently chosen as a coping mechanism to deal with severe trauma

- Also during this “window” of development, the child’s mind can believe two completely opposite ideas at the same time thus accepting the “Part A” and “Part B” of their abusive life

There may be the presence of non-trafficked siblings in the home

- Not all the children in a family may be trafficked or trafficked at the same time
- As non-trafficked siblings, they may be forced to participate in some aspects or may just be an observer of the sexual abuse
- For them, the incredible pressure to keep the family secrets often leads to emotional problems for many years to come that may or may not be related to DID

Another important distinguishing factor in familial trafficking is the issue of betrayal

- More than in other forms of trafficking where the victim did not know the perpetrators, in familial trafficking the father, or brother or someone else in the family has betrayed the child.
- It is especially devastating when the parent-child relationship is involved
- CTDC (Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative) statistic is that in a study of 12,000 victims, they found that 64% of the familial traffickers were mothers, who were often assisted by a non-relative trafficker
- Instead of being protected, the child is seen as a commodity to be used to secure drugs, money or some other benefit
- Loyalty to the parent, even in the face of parental betrayal, can remain a powerful thing

What’s the best way to help victims of familial trafficking?

- Be aware of clues or signs of trafficking
- Trust your intuition
- Don’t underestimate the power of kindness as you take opportunity to form a relationship with a suspected victim
- Look for evidence to come forward so that action can be taken