

Selah Freedom

Americans' Understanding of Sex Trafficking



Key findings

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OPINIUM RESEARCH

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Project details

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PROJECT NAME	Americans' Understanding of Sex Trafficking
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Sex trafficking awareness

Nearly half of American adults rank sex trafficking as one of their top three crime concerns

When asked to choose the top three types of crimes they think are most problematic in the US, nearly half (46%) of Americans picked sex trafficking. Only drug trafficking (51%) and gun crime (59%) saw a higher percentage of selections. These selections follow the same trends as in 2020, when the top three selections were the same. Younger Americans are more concerned with sex trafficking than older Americans: 55% of Gen Z and Millennials ranked it as one of their top 3 concerns, compared to 45% of Gen X, 38% of Baby Boomers, and 33% of the Silent Generation.

Americans are split on their self-reported knowledge of sex trafficking. 51% say they have some or a lot of knowledge about this issue, and 46% say they have very little or no knowledge. Millennials report more knowledge than other generations – 62% said that they have some or a lot of knowledge about sex trafficking.

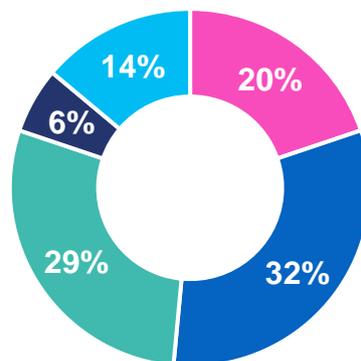
When asked where in the US they thought that sex trafficking was most prevalent, Americans did not have a clear consensus as to where it's most prevalent. Over a quarter of respondents chose the South Atlantic (29%), Northeast-Mid Atlantic (29%), and West South Central (26%) regions, and a quarter (25%) chose the West Coast. In general, residents of a particular region were more likely to select their own region as having prevalent trafficking.

One in five think there is a high risk of sex trafficking in their area

A fifth (20%) of American adults think there is a high risk of sex trafficking in their city or town, and an additional third (32%) think there is a medium risk. In 2020, about six in ten (59%) Americans said they thought their area was at a high or medium risk, compared to 51%* now.

Perceived Risk of Trafficking in Local Area

■ High ■ Medium ■ Low ■ None ■ Don't know/prefer not to say



51%*
of Americans think there is a high to medium risk of trafficking in their area

* The sum here is 51% because using the unrounded numbers, 19.54% (20%) + 31.9% (32%) = 51

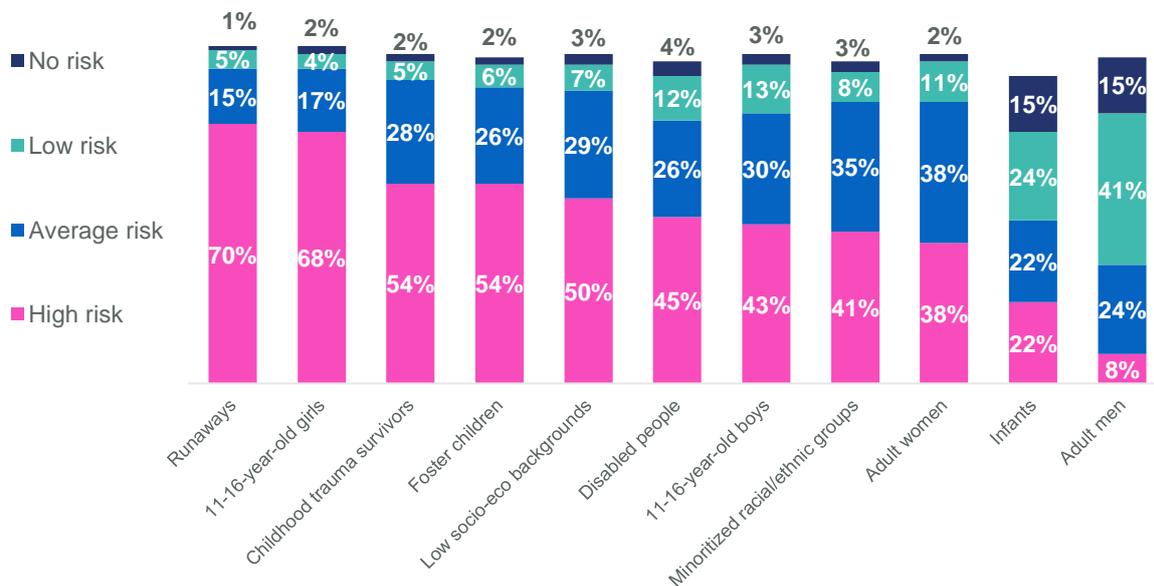
Black and Latino respondents are more likely to indicate there is a high risk of sex trafficking in their area (29% and 28% respectively). Additionally, people who self-reported having some or a lot of knowledge about sex trafficking are more than twice as likely (26% vs. 12%) to believe their area is at high risk when compared to people who say they have very little to no knowledge.

Americans feel young girls and runaways are at higher risk of trafficking than the general public

Seven in ten respondents said that they think young girls aged 11-16 (68%) and/or runaways (70%) are at a higher-than-average risk of trafficking.

Households making over \$100,000 a year (65% for \$100,000-\$149,999 and 68% for \$150,000+) are more likely to think that people from low socioeconomic backgrounds are at a higher-than-average risk than households that earn less money (53% for \$50,000-\$74,999, 45% for \$35,000-49,999, and 43% for under \$35,000).

Perceived risk of trafficking for social groups





Trafficking and abuse prevention and education

Traditional news media is the most popular source of information about trafficking

Three-fifths (59%) of Americans say that the news has been a source of their knowledge on trafficking. Half (49%) also get their information from television, and over two fifths (44%) get their information from media sources.

In addition, two fifths (40%) say that social media is a source of their knowledge on this issue. This number jumps to 59% for Gen Z and 52% for Millennials, and is lower for older generations.

Interestingly, people who report having some or a lot of knowledge about trafficking are much more likely to use social media as an information source compared to those who report little to no knowledge (45% vs. 29%). Similarly, people who think that their local area has a high risk of trafficking are more likely to use social media as a source than people who perceive a lower risk.

Americans hold the FBI, federal and state courts, and federal policymakers most responsible for addressing trafficking

Three in ten (30%) Americans think that the FBI should take responsibility for addressing trafficking. A quarter (24% for each) also think that federal and state courts and federal government policymakers should take the lead on these issues. However, the most popular opinion is that many groups need to address this issue: Out of a list of eight possible groups, 35% said that each group should take equal responsibility.

On average, Americans think that children should learn about trafficking and abuse prevention starting at age 9

Three quarters (72%) of Americans believe that children should begin learning safety strategies to prevent sexual abuse and sex trafficking before their teenage years, with the average response being 9.1 years old. Women think that children deserve this education at a slightly younger age (8.5 years) than men do (9.7 years).

In an age-appropriate curriculum on these issues, about four in five (77%) Americans who think kids should learn about trafficking believe that children should be taught who to contact if they suspect sex trafficking. Seven in ten think that kids should learn about identifying red flags and predatory behavior (71%) and/or online safety tips (70%). Interestingly, only six in ten (62%) believe that children should be taught about privacy and bodily autonomy.



Seven in ten (72%) Americans who think kids should learn about trafficking believe that parents and family members should be responsible for teaching children about these issues. About half (53%) think that these issues should be taught in school classes that parents can opt children out of, whereas four in ten (41%) think that they should be taught in mandatory classes.

Understanding of sex trafficking

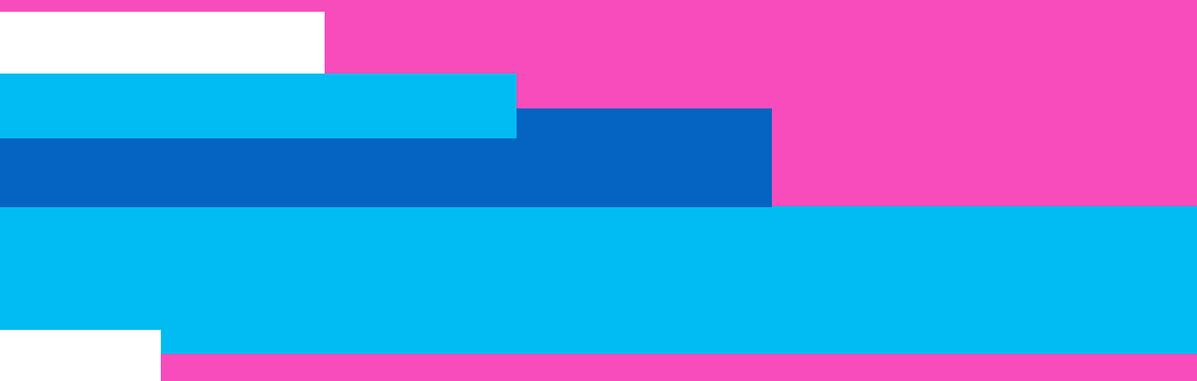
The vast majority of Americans think trafficking can happen anywhere in the US

Almost nine in ten (87%) Americans believe that sex trafficking can occur anywhere from small towns to big cities across the US. In addition, four fifths (80%) of Americans believe that it is not easy for a woman to leave her trafficker, and three quarters (74%) believe that women and girls do not enter sex trafficking by choice.

Younger Americans are more likely to think that it is easy for women to leave their traffickers: 15% of Gen Z and 14% of Millennials said that this was true. Younger respondents are also more likely to think that women and girls enter sex trafficking by choice: 21% of Gen Z and 20% of Millennials think this is true.

Beliefs of whether each statement is true or false

Statement	True	False	Unsure
Sex trafficking can occur anywhere from small towns to large cities across the US.	87%	5%	8%
A common form of sex trafficking is coercion to produce pornography.	72%	8%	21%
Buyers of sex include well-regarded community members such as police, politicians, and clergy.	67%	10%	22%
Sex trafficking is high on the FBI's agenda of crimes to tackle.	53%	20%	28%
Buyers of sex are typically 40–50-year-old males.	43%	21%	36%
Women who are sex trafficked are all from ethnic minorities.	36%	49%	16%
For those over 18, prostitution and sex trafficking are the same thing.	31%	50%	19%
Women and girls enter sex trafficking by choice.	13%	74%	13%
It's easy for a woman to leave her trafficker.	9%	80%	11%



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