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Psychological Perspectives on Human Trafficking: Implications for Early Identification and Victim- Centered Intervention

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ABSTRACT

Human trafficking represents one of the most severe forms of exploitation, often involving coercive psychological control mechanisms that operate beneath the threshold of visible violence. This article explores the psychological dimensions of human trafficking and their implications for the early identification of victims and the development of effective, trauma-informed intervention strategies. The aim of the study is to deepen the understanding of how psychological manipulation—such as grooming, dependency creation, fear conditioning, and the emergence of Stockholm Syndrome—contributes to the recruitment, retention, and silencing of victims.

The article pursues four main objectives: (1) to examine the psychological tactics used by traffickers to gain compliance and suppress resistance; (2) to identify psychological risk factors and vulnerabilities—such as childhood trauma, low self-efficacy, and social isolation—that increase susceptibility to victimization; (3) to assess the psychological consequences of trafficking, including PTSD, dissociation, depression, and learned helplessness; and (4) to evaluate the barriers that impede early victim identification, particularly when victims do not perceive themselves as such or fear retaliation.

Through a review of interdisciplinary literature spanning clinical psychology, victimology, and criminology, the article argues that conventional legal or procedural approaches are insufficient in the absence of psychological insight. A victim-centered framework—grounded in psychological assessment, trauma-informed interviewing, and multi-agency collaboration—is essential for improving detection and support systems. Ultimately, the paper calls for integrating psychological expertise into anti-trafficking policies and practices to better address the complex realities of victimhood and resilience.

Keywords: human trafficking, intervention, psychological manipulation, trauma, victim identification, vulnerability