



## The Intersection between Trafficking, Domestic Violence, and Technology



According to an [article](#) posted on the Office of Family Violence Prevention and Services site, written by Chic Dabby, trafficking and domestic violence are two interconnected issues that often share similar power dynamics and control tactics. Perpetrators of domestic violence frequently employ the same methods as traffickers to groom and manipulate their victims, using psychological manipulation, physical abuse, financial control, substance abuse coercion, and sexual violence. It is not uncommon for survivors to experience both trafficking and domestic violence. Additionally, technology plays a significant role in both situations, with abusers misusing it to stalk and harass victims in cases of domestic abuse, while traffickers exploit digital platforms to groom, deceive, control, and exploit victims. The overlap in the abuse of technology emphasizes the interconnected nature of these issues.

### What is Trafficking?

According to the Federal Office of Trafficking in Persons, the terms are defined as follows:

- **Sex Trafficking** - the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age.
- **Labor Trafficking** - the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

## Power Dynamics in Trafficking Situations:

When considering the issue of human trafficking, it is important to understand the full scope of what trafficking can involve. For more insight, please refer to The **Power and Control Wheel**, adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project's Duluth Model Power and Control Wheel below:



## How is Technology Misused in Trafficking and Domestic Violence Situations?

### Trafficking

- **Social Media Platforms:** Individuals often share posts, updates, and content that describe their hobbies and interests and express their frustrations and hardships. Traffickers leverage this information to exploit vulnerabilities, gradually escalating manipulation by offering empathy and support, forming emotional connections, and building trust and confidence. ([U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Report](#))
- **Online Marketplaces:** An analysis of court cases showed that online marketplace sites, on which anyone can post or browse advertisements to sell or buy any service (from job vacancies to the sale of equipment, cars, and clothes), are being used to advertise services involving victims of human trafficking. ([United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#))
- **Communication Tools:** The National Human Trafficking Hotline found that traffickers exploited individuals through technologies such as webcams, text-based chats, and phone lines, and that traffickers feel more emboldened due to the lack of physical contact between them and the individuals they recruit. ([Polaris](#))

### Domestic Violence

- Abusers in intimate partner violence misuse technology in many ways: to stalk and monitor victims, to harass victims through the “anonymity” of the technology, and to impersonate victims through technology, such as creating false social media accounts.

Survivors of domestic violence may be coerced into trafficking due to existing patterns of control. Survivors of trafficking may also be victims of domestic violence due to overlapping experiences of abuse, power, and control.

Technology is a common tool to both exploit and silence survivors. This can include someone who is experiencing domestic violence and trafficking at the

same time. It is important to remember that these experiences of abuse and exploitation are connected, not isolated.

## **How Can Advocates Support Survivors?**

### **Safety Planning:**

- Discuss strategic ways to enhance digital security for survivors and navigate technology use safely and privately.
  - Discuss the importance of using strong passwords that are different for each account and changing them often.
  - Encourage the use of two-factor authentication on accounts for added security.
  - Remind survivors to regularly update their software and apps to fix any security vulnerabilities.
  - Educate survivors about the risks of sharing personal information online and encourage them to adjust their privacy settings on social media to fit their needs.
- Non-judgmental Support and Patience:
  - Understand that building trust in relationships and partnerships takes time.
  - Just because someone is not able to seek help at that moment does not mean they don't need your support or will never seek help in the future. A key component of advocacy is providing options and allowing survivors to make the decision that works best for them, at the time when they are ready.
- Resources: Provide trusted hotlines, legal support, and safe platforms.
  - National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233
  - National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1-888-373-7888

It is crucial to emphasize the significance of comprehending how technology is misused in trafficking and domestic violence situations. Understanding the various ways in which technology can be exploited in these contexts is essential

for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. This includes recognizing how perpetrators may use technology to control, monitor, and exploit victims. Creating safety plans that are responsive to tech misuse concerns is extremely important to prioritize safety, identify abuse, and increase security. Our guide to [Technology Safety Plans](#) can help support survivors and advocates in developing safety plans that prioritize these goals.

### **Safety Net Resources:**

- [Removing Sensitive Content from the Internet](#)
- [Password Safety](#)
- [Technology and Sexual Assault](#)
- [Assessing For Technology Abuse](#)
- [Assessing for Technology Misuse and Privacy Concerns with Survivors of Sexual Assault](#)
- [Financial Abuse & Technology](#)
- [Image-based Abuse Resources](#)

### **PACT Resources:**

- [Social Identity Quest](#)
  - Social Identity Quest is designed to stimulate student-driven discussion and create awareness of potential online risks.
- [E-Learnings](#)
  - PACT offers training programs for professionals and establishes partnerships with key stakeholders in the hospitality and travel industry, equipping them with the tools and knowledge to recognize and respond to signs of trafficking.
- [Youth & Community Education Workshops](#)
  - PACT's educational initiatives are designed for parents, caregivers, and schools. They provide practical guidance, child protection resources, safety tips, and educational materials.
- [Online Safety Guides](#)

- A Parent Guide to Better Protect your Child from Online Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking.

### **Additional Resources:**

[National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. \(n.d.\). \*Identification resource: Child sex trafficking.\*](#)

[U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. \(n.d.\). \*What is human trafficking?\* Administration for Children and Families.](#)

[U.S. Department of Justice. \(n.d.\). \*Domestic violence.\* Office on Violence Against Women.](#)

[U.S. Department of State. \(2024\). \*2024 Trafficking in Persons Report.\*](#)

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