

## What are human trafficking myths?

Human trafficking ‘myths’ refer to persistent claims, statements, or statistics that are inaccurate or untrue. Despite being proven false, these popular myths remain in use.

Below are three common claims about human trafficking that have been shown to be false, but are still widely used by many organizations today.

### AGE OF ENTRY

**The false claim that the ‘average age of entry’ into sex trafficking is 13 years old has been around for years.**

It has been disproven many times<sup>12</sup>, including by an author of the original research conducted 25 years ago<sup>3</sup>.

While some groups have publicly recognized the inaccuracy of this statistic—for example, in 2018, the Canadian Women’s Foundation stated “the organization no longer stands behind the data”<sup>45</sup>, —many anti-trafficking organizations continue to use it.

### TRAFFICKER’S AVERAGE INCOME

**Many anti-trafficking campaigns say that a trafficker’s average income is \$280,000 a year.**

This figure comes from a 2008 Criminal Intelligence Service report<sup>6</sup>, which relied on rough estimates based on assumptions about sex work earnings. It was always just a guess and is now outdated. Despite this, the \$280k figure is often presented as fact in anti-trafficking materials.

### “TRAFFICKING IS EVERYWHERE!”

**Claims that ‘trafficking is everywhere’ and ‘anyone can be a victim’ are often repeated.**

This oversimplification gives the impression that trafficking occurs randomly, and ignores the underlying factors that make some people more vulnerable than others—such as poverty, homelessness, and other hardships.

*“Within a kilometre of you, someone is being sex trafficked.”*

IS THERE A WAY TO MEASURE THIS CLAIM? IF SO, HOW? WHAT EVIDENCE BACKS IT UP?

# What's the problem?

Because they are sensational and attention-grabbing, these myths make it easier for organizations to raise money, attract media attention, and gain public support.

**So what's the problem? If these myths are used to mobilize efforts against human trafficking, [why does it matter that they aren't true?](#)**

**Unfortunately, when campaigns use inaccurate information, they can create unrealistic expectations for fighting trafficking and justify actions that often don't work and don't meet victims' and survivors' needs.**

When myths are used to promote quick fixes and 'rescue', the following things can become normalized and actually [undermine efforts to fight trafficking and help people](#):

- Resources are not put toward thorough investigation of trafficking cases
- Less funding for complex, long-term support for victims and survivors
- Root causes are left unaddressed
- Failure to recognize cases of trafficking that don't look like what we see and hear in the media<sup>7</sup>



## There's a better way.

By resisting exaggerated, sensational claims about trafficking, we can focus on accurate information that leads to meaningful action, better support for victims and survivors, and less exploitation.

[Learn More Here >](#)

### Footnotes

- 1 Hall, C. (2014). *Is one of the most-cited statistics about sex work wrong?* The Atlantic.
- 2 Kessler, G. (2015). *The four-Pinocchio claim that 'on average, girls first become victims of sex trafficking at 13 years old'.* Washington Post.
- 3 Estes, R. J., & Weiner, N. A. (2001). *The commercial sexual exploitation of children in the US, Canada and Mexico.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, School of Social Work, Center for the Study of Youth Policy.
- 4 Smith, A., & Hale, A. S. (2021). *PC's human trafficking statistic based on withdrawn reports.* Politics Today.
- 5 Canadian Women's Foundation. (2023). *Brief for the Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) for its study on the Human Trafficking of Women, Girls, and Gender Diverse People.*
- 6 Criminal Intelligence Service Canada. (2008). *Strategic intelligence brief: Organized crime and domestic trafficking in persons in Canada.*
- 7 Lloyd, A., & Albright, E. (2023). *Sound of Freedom is everything an anti-trafficking film shouldn't be.* openDemocracy, Beyond Trafficking And Slavery: Review.