

Transcript: The psychology of modern day slavery

(Transcript prepared by Tasha Dorsey)

Transcript: The psychology of modern day slavery

Thema Bryant-Davis: This is a call to action and awareness. It really is past time for us to set the captives free. The realities of modern slavery are really an atrocity that we have to address. I'm Thema Bryant-Davis, president of the Society for the Psychology of Women and we felt it was so important to raise awareness about the mental health components and effects of modern day human trafficking and slavery. And so that's what we attempt to do during this series. You're going to hear from psychologists, hear from survivors, and then hear what you can do to make a difference.

Screen Narrative: Human trafficking: is the illegal trade in human beings for purposes of commercial sexual exploitation or forced labor: a modern-day form of slavery.

Voiceover: It's a multi-billion dollar industry. And after drug dealing, human trafficking is the second largest illegal industry – criminal industry- in the world. And it's growing rapidly on a yearly basis.

Screen Narrative: An estimated 12.3 million are enslaved around the world today.

Voiceover: This is happening in our backyards. This is happening in suburbia. This is happening in San Diego, where I'm from in D.C. This is happening all over this country right here. This is happening at an alarming rate.

Screen Narrative: It is the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – a nine billion dollar industry.

Jennifer: I spent so much time medicating myself and holding onto my pain that I couldn't step out of it and just do what you're supposed to do. I was still fighting.

### **The Psychology of Modern Day Slavery**

Ugandan Woman: I left Dora. I left her when she was two years, way back in Uganda. And when I left Uganda for United States, I left her in the care of my sister - my young sister. After some years, my sister passed away and this child had nowhere to go. So she stayed with friends and that's where she met the passer who brought her here promising that she was going to show her to me.

Michelle Contreras: Trafficking is about somebody approaching you and telling you "I'm here to help you. I'm here to offer you something good." And it turns out that the reality becomes something very different.

Ugandan Woman: They promised her that they were going to show her to me, that they were going to put her in school, and they were going to give her a better life. And she believed it. So when she reached the United States, she was put under house arrest. She was told not to speak on

the phone. She was told not to talk to anybody. She was told that they don't know me and they don't know where I am.

### **The Definition**

Nancy Sidun: Well, basically human trafficking involves three major elements. There's force, fraud, and coercion to get someone involved and be a trafficked person. I mean they're affected at psychological, behavioral, medical, physical. It is just devastating. I mean, the price is steep for the effects of what happened to them.

Melissa Farley: Trafficking has nothing to do with transportation. No legal definition includes the word transportation. This is a common misunderstanding about trafficking. It has to do, as Nancy said, force, fraud, coercion. That's the legal definition. I want us psychologists to develop our own language. It has to do with control, coercion, and exploitation - third party control. You have a buyer and a seller. Most of the research has been done on victims. But there's a buyer and a seller who are equal parties to the crime.

Jennifer: I was molested at five years old. I wasn't taught about my body. I wasn't taught about sex. When I was five, the Caucasian guy would pick me up and he would give me 50 cents, a dollar. My mind was conditioned as a young child to, you know, have sex. Sex is associated with money. Those were two things that led to my life of prostitution. And then the sex traffic.

Melissa Farley: If there's one place where everything bad that can possibly happen to women happens, it's in trafficking for prostitution. Domestic violence, sexual violence, racism is an integral part of everything - poverty made worse - discrimination. Organized crime jumps into the mix. It's just, it's just where if you can think of something somehow to hurt women, that's where it's all happening. There's a complexity to addressing the harm of trafficking for prostitution and that complexity is a result of the fact that we're talking about domestic violence. We're talking about sexual violence, racist violence, poverty, childhood trauma and neglect and we're also talking about organized crime, and this is what few people are talking about yet, but it's critical to get there, governmental and community complicity with the crime of trafficking. Sex trafficking is the global form of prostitution. People in prostitution, people who have been trafficked describe it in these words, volunteer slavery and the choice that's not a choice and in those words you can see the appearance and the reality of what we're talking about. A woman in a legal Nevada brothel, legal prostitution, said "no one really enjoys getting sold." It's like you sign a contract to be raped."

Jennifer: This guy, just this - I mean a beautiful Black man, dressed really really nice, and he'd come up to the school and see me and talk with me, and you know made me feel like I was just so special, what I did not receive at home. And so he asked me to go to a motel room with him. So I go to the motel room with RC, that's what I'll call him, and as soon as I got in the room, and he had me take off my clothes, he took a wire clothes hanger, and he hit me, and he hit me, and I couldn't feel it anymore. And he was hitting and I couldn't feel it anymore. And I couldn't feel it

and I couldn't feel it. And he just kept hitting. And then he told me that I had to go out on the street. He told me what I had to do. He told me how much money I had to ask the person for. And I just remember I didn't have any more feelings. I didn't have any more feelings. I didn't feel anything. Nothing.

### **The Effects**

Nancy Sidun: I mean they're effected at psychological, behavioral, medical, physical. It is just devastating. The price is steep for the effects of what happen to them

Michelle Contreras: To me what's most salient and what's most interesting and challenging is how much people's ability to trust is affected. And that just poses a series of complications clinically. I've sat with people who really don't trust me at all. It takes being interested in being with people – where they're at. And the providers that we work with, I would say that's probably their biggest challenge too.

Angela Rosa: I'm the founder and executive director of PAVE, it's Promoting Awareness Victim Empowerment. I founded PAVE to use art education and grassroots action to shatter the silence of sexual and domestic violence. This is a huge problem. And the silence that surrounds these issues allows this public health crisis to continue. So here's where it gets a little tough. We're going to share some real life stories and I share these with you to really give face. PAVE as an organization believes in the power of using survivor stories. Now the consumers of this – and this is one thing I can't drive home enough – the consumers were high profile members of the community - various law enforcement, dean of students, well known businessmen in the community consuming people, children. And they became a slave in their own home and both think that their mothers knew about what was going on. Amanda: "it started when I was really young, I didn't know what was happening. All I know was that it hurt. My dad would bring me to the basement. It was more of a torture chamber. He'd tie me up and literally whip me. Him and his law enforcements friends use me. He loved to let other men and women do the same. And he forced me to watch him do these things to other girls. He loved the pain more than anything." Stacy: "My stepfather began to sexually abuse me when I was 5 years old. He moved us into a multi-million dollar home, but he put my room in the basement. The first time he sexually abused me he had to cut me in order to penetrate me. That same night his doctor friend came over, and I heard the words that I will never forget as long as I live. The doctor said 'this is how you do it without doing too much damage.' The doctor then proceeded to rape me as well. The younger the child, the more money that men will pay. At the end of the day my stepfather would always tell me I had to make more money if I ever wanted to see my mother again" – again fear. "I was trapped. Literally trapped in this basement room. Day after day, men would come in and have sex with me however they wanted. Most of them were sadistic in nature and all they cared about was seeing how much pain they could cause." Now there's a lot of victim blame that goes on. Stacy in terms of self blame, "I really thought because I was 21, that it didn't matter because I'd let this happen." Even when she was older – again – this abuse lasted her entire life.

And the family blame, Amanda: “the only reason I was born was so that my father could have sex with me, that’s what my mom always told me. My mother hated me, because he had sex with me more than he had sex with her. She knew the entire time what was going on.” Now there’s so much emotional aftermath. It wasn’t just these horrific experiences these young women dealt with, but the emotional aftermath is something that we all need to be aware of. Eating disorders - you want that control over your body you that didn’t have during the abuse. So a lot of survivors starve themselves, or overeat. A lot of the self mutilation – cutting, and there’s a lot of depression, suicidal thoughts and tendencies, alcohol and drug abuse, hypo versus hyper sexualization, PTSD, and trust issues with multiple victimizations.

Jennifer: You know the pain from those childhood experiences, they affected me, you know, so badly in my adult life. I would “Oh God, I wish he would hurry up” in a relationship, you know “Oh just get him off me.” I couldn’t stand the way, you know, my kids’ father, I couldn’t even stand the way they smelled. But I didn’t express it. I got up. I fought. I wasn’t able to hold jobs. I was just so unstable mentally, you know, because of all the abuse. Just being hugged by anybody, I didn’t feel anything. And to say I love you – I said it because I was supposed to say it, not because I felt it.

### **The Risk Factors**

Thema Bryant-Davis: It’s crucial that we pay attention to the risk factors -those things that really make people vulnerable to modern day slavery and trafficking. One of the key components is income. When people are living in poverty, then they’re much more at risk for being enslaved. Not only poverty on the individual level, but when we look at countries that are in poverty. In developing countries, there’s much more of a risk of being enslaved and being trafficked within those borders and outside of those borders. One of the things that goes along with income is education. Education we know is really an entryway for opportunity. And when you don’t have a lot of opportunities for yourself, within your community, within your family, then you’re much more open to believing the stories that people tell you that they can help to give you a better life, or they can help to give you a job opportunity, or believing that someone is going to marry you when really their intention is to traffic you.

Mary Crawford: How does a girl get trafficked in Nepal? Well, sometimes it’s through a promise of marriage. So a young man will come to the village and he’ll say, “my family’s not from around here. We’re from the south. But we’re a very respectful family. I’d like to marry your daughter.” And the parents, not having any better prospects, having too many mouths to feed, choose to believe him. And he takes her over the border and sells her. He’s a broker. Another way that it happens is sometimes bride kidnapping especially when a girl has been displaced or is trying to emigrate. Once she’s outside the protection of her native family, she’s very much at risk. But by far the most common mode of trafficking, which we and other researchers have found, is the promise of jobs. So an attractive well dressed woman or man will come to the village and will say, “I can get your daughters jobs. I can get them good jobs in hotels. They’ll

start out in the kitchen. They'll work up. They'll be maids. They can send money home. You can get that new roof for your house." And families let their daughters go. And these people are brokers. As soon as they cross the border, they sell the girl to a brothel.

Thema Bryant-Davis: So we have to pay attention to income, to education, and also knowing that young people are the most vulnerable. Children are very vulnerable to traffickers. They can get a lot more years out of them when they traffic them when they're very young.

Elise Hopper: Estimates range from 70 to 90 percent of these kids have experienced some kind of abuse in the home. Kids who are runaways, who are homeless, kids who've been in and out of foster care, who are in residential treatment programs are much more at risk. So we're taking a group of youth who are already vulnerable and then they're experiencing yet another trauma.

Heather Bullock: Placing low income individuals and vulnerable families at heightened risk and danger

Thema Bryant-Davis: In terms of race disparities, you should know that in terms of price, it is more expensive to purchase a White woman. It's less expensive to purchase an Asian and Latina woman. And then the cheapest women and girls to purchase are Black women. And that is not only locally, but globally in terms of buying slaves in Africa, in Asia, in Europe, and here in the United States. And so there is racism within the experience of human trafficking. Another vulnerable population when it comes to trafficking are those who have been victimized or traumatized in the past, whether these are survivors of childhood abuse, childhood sexual or physical abuse, oftentimes those who are homeless and runaways are very vulnerable. And also when we're thinking about trafficking from a global perspective, those who have experienced war, who are displaced, living in refugee camps, separated from family, from friends, from their resources, sometimes out of context where they don't even know the language, they don't know the resources that are available. And so they're very much dependent on those who pretend to be resources, those who pretend they're going to help them. And it's unfortunate, because when we talk about the least of these, that really those who have already been traumatized are the ones that predators often go after. Lastly, I want to mention the issue of gender. While men are more likely to be trafficked when it comes to manual labor, when it comes to sex trafficking girls and women are particularly vulnerable to being victimized and we must respond to those factors.

## **Counseling**

Jennifer: I was sitting at a park on Century and West Street and I thought about the rapists. I thought about the 11 times I was raped. I thought how I got hit in back of the head with a brake shoe and all the miscarriages I had and hit in the face with a gun and a nail going through my forehead, and just all the walking until my feet busted open. Staying up six days for two weeks smoking crack and drinking 15 bottles of liquor a day, two packs of cigarettes. I thought about my babies. I thought about it and I said I spent so much time fighting the system. I spent so much time medicating myself and holding on to my pain, because I still held on to that pain. I spent so

much time holding on to that, that I couldn't see - step out of it and just do what you're supposed to do. And your children will be returned and life will get back to normal, and you'll be okay and continue in your therapy, and continue praying to your higher power, and continue the groups, and you know, but I just, I was still fighting.

Michelle Contreras: The one thing that always sticks in my head when I consult with providers is how frequently they say I really want to help this population, I really want to help these women, but they just don't trust me. They just don't believe I'm there to help. And something I always try to explain to providers is this - well, think about this. Trafficking is about somebody approaching you and telling you I'm here to help you. I'm here to offer you something good. And it turns out that the reality becomes something very different. People are hurt. They are coerced. And all the promises that were made to them are broken by traffickers. So that's definitely going to play out in our work.

### **Survivor**

Survivor: Therapy has helped me because before, I was very very traumatized. But now I have been helped because I have been going to therapy once a week. I have learned to be in good spirits and have a positive outlook. I keep thinking positive. I keep telling myself I can make it. And when you want to be well, you learn to fight for those around you too. I am fighting to overcome all the things I have been through. I do it for my children. My children motivate me. I have dreams here. I have many dreams I want to come true. I keep thinking positive. That is why I don't want to get stuck. I get very excited about many things here in the U.S. There are many opportunities here. I want many of the things I want to become a reality. This is why I am going to therapy. I need to move forward. We can't keep quiet about the things that are happening. I never kept myself quiet. I asked for help and people helped me. Now I have the help I wanted. To God thanks that I am moving forward. I am putting a lot of effort into it for my family, my children and the people of my town. I want to help my people. That is one of the most important things for me. And that is why I am moving forward.

Jennifer: With relationships, me being able to trust again, and opening up to a person, and being able to you know, go out, I want to say okay, it's okay- this guy, he's not Jack the Ripper. It's okay if he takes me to the movies. So I want to get past the isolation and my trust issues. And that's where I am today.

### **Policy**

Thema Bryant-Davis: Dr. King said a threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. And trafficking is happening globally and it's happening locally. Often I hear people talk hypothetically about what they would do if they were living during the time of slavery. If they're people of African descent they often say that I would have never been a slave and these are all of the fantastical things and the people that I would have freed. And if I'm talking to people of other ethnicities, they would say I would definitely be on the side of abolitionists. Well this is not

a hypothetical question. Slavery is happening now. And so as psychologists and as individuals we have to answer that response with what is it we will do with the fact that there are slaves living amongst us.

Advocate: Slave victims must be looked at as vulnerable, but that has to be separated from weak and powerless because the problem is even now in the modern abolition movement, in intervention and prevention efforts, people are going in and they're assuming that these victims or these communities that are at risk and these children that are at risk are somehow weak and powerless. It's that hero complex - that we have to somehow go in and save them and rescue them when in reality what we need to do is empower them.

Angela Rosa: And a lot of the perpetrators, especially when we're talking about domestically, are very powerful. We see a lot of white collar perpetrators that are doctors and police officers and lawyers. And it's hard for us to wrap our minds around these powerful people living right in our community, in our back yards, that are participating and that are perpetrating these horrific crimes.

Heather Bullock: We must make visible what is currently invisible. Invisible experiences and conditions – things such as poverty and violence. If we are to succeed in our efforts to reduce disparities among women, this will require, as Nancy and Thema's presentations point out, that we are vigilant and we learn to identify signs of human trafficking and develop strategies for communicating with potential survivors. It also means, and I think all the presenters do this, that we must work mindfully across multiple intersecting levels, thinking closely about physical health, mental, and the consequences of systematic inequality and the impact of deep power differences. Working across multiple levels means that we must ensure that policies protect and serve women – all women.

## **Prevention**

Elise Hopper: Psychologists have an important role to play in anti-trafficking work. They can both provide public education and raise awareness which can lead to prevention of trafficking. They can do research to identify the scope of the problem. They can advocate for policy change. And they can also do direct intervention with survivors of trafficking.

Thema Bryant-Davis: The very first issue we have to look at when it comes to preventing human trafficking and modern day slavery is on the side of the consumer. Many times we think about how we can warn women and warn girls what to look out for, but the truth is as long as there continues to be a demand for those who are trafficked, while there continues to be a demand for prostitution then this will continue to happen. So we really have to interrupt the cycle early and look at those messages that teach boys and men that women are a commodity, that sexuality is something to purchase. We have to really look at the images of pornography that objectify and eroticize all women, and particularly women of color that get presented as objects that are



available for you to buy. And we have to really understand the impact of that on intimacy, to understand even in our media in the movies how sexuality really gets associated with violence. So you have a nude woman and then violence is done to her and that's supposed to somehow be erotic. We have to look at American culture, where even the term pimp has become positive. When People talk about pimping their ride or pimping their house, that somehow that is a beautification of something, instead of recognizing the realities of what pimps do. They commit violence and atrocities. And even we have to be careful about our language. Many who have had to work in the realm of prostitution will use the term the game. How long have you been in the game, and what was your introduction to the game. And the truth is there is nothing funny about it, nothing enjoyable about it. And so the prevention is not just working with those who are vulnerable to being trafficked, but really interrupting these messages in our society that say the sale of human beings is okay and we have to say never. It's not okay for anybody anywhere.

Nancy Sidun: I want to do whatever I can to help at least raise the awareness of it because my sense is, that at least in my field of psychology, very few psychologists are really aware of it and even the larger public is less aware of it – that this is an epidemic that's really a horrible human rights violation.

Thema Bryant-Davis: This is happening right now. And not only is it happening somewhere far away from here, but it's happening right here. I had to say to myself, you know, I learned about Harriet Tubman. I learned about Sojourner Truth. I learned about Frederick Douglas. And we said wow, how marvelous what they did was. What am I going to do right now? Here I am this psychologist. I'm now the president of this organization. What can I do with what I know and the resources that I have to really make a difference and to say that I am not amongst those who sat back and said nothing. Judith Herman, who was one of my mentors, in her book *Trauma and Recovery* said, it's very easy to side with the perpetrator. All they ask us for is our silence. And it's so true. If you do nothing, then you're supporting the status quo. And so I knew that I had to say something and that I couldn't sit on the sidelines. And for me that's from a moral perspective, not just a professional perspective. And just emotionally that there is a pull on my heart to do everything I can so that people can live with freedom.