**Know the Language of Human Trafficking: A Glossary of Sex Trafficking Terms**

[July 3, 2014](http://inpublicsafety.com/2014/07/know-the-language-of-human-trafficking-a-glossary-of-sex-trafficking-terms/)

[](http://inpublicsafety.com/2016/11/kingsley-case-pretrial-detainees-use-force-will-examined-court/)

**[The Kingsley Case and Pretrial Detainees: How Use of Force Will Be Examined in Court](http://inpublicsafety.com/2016/11/kingsley-case-pretrial-detainees-use-force-will-examined-court/)**

Correction officers in our nation’s prisons and jails may be among the best positioned of all law enforcement officers to throw roadblocks in the way of human trafficking crimes.

John Meekins has been a correctional officer in a women’s prison for more than nine years and has witnessed inmates being solicited and coerced while behind bars. [Sometimes these women are recruited by other female inmates who are paid by outside pimps](http://inpublicsafety.com/2014/01/combatting-human-trafficking-networks-within-prison-walls/).

“These recruiters coerce female inmates into working for the traffickers,” says Meekins. “When they walk out to what they think is freedom, the traffickers are right there to pick them up to lead them into the worst kind of slavery.”

In other cases, female inmates are directly contacted by sex traffickers through websites like [paperdollpenpals.com](http://www.paperdollspenpals.com/) and [jailbabes.com](http://www.cowtowninfo.com/personals/jailbabes-main.html), which provides inmates’ mailing address.

**But how can correctional officers identify the signs of human trafficking within facilities?**

The most common way, says Meekins, is to pay attention to what’s being said and written. Many traffickers send letters and money to prisoners in an effort to build a relationship with them. In these letters traffickers try to convince inmates to live with them when they leave prison.

Correctional officers, especially those who screen phone calls and mail, need to be educated and well versed in the language of human trafficking.

**Here is glossary of sex trafficking terms and slang phrases commonly used by traffickers:**

**Automatic**: A term denoting the victim’s “automatic” routine when her pimp is out of town, in jail, or otherwise not in direct contact with those he is prostituting. Victims are expected to comply with the rules and often do so out of fear of punishment or because they have been psychologically manipulated into a sense of loyalty or love. All money generated on “automatic” is turned over to the pimp. This money may be used to support his concession/phone account or to pay his bond if he’s in jail.

**Bottom** or **“Bottom Bitch”**: A female appointed by the trafficker/pimp to supervise the others and report rule violations. Operating as his “right hand,” the Bottom may help instruct victims, collect money, book hotel rooms, post ads, or inflict punishments on other girls.

**Branding**: A tattoo or carving on a victim that indicates ownership by a trafficker/pimp/gang.

**Caught A Case**: A term that refers to when a pimp or victim has been arrested and charged with a crime.

**Choosing Up:** The process by which a different pimp takes “ownership” of a victim. Victims are instructed to keep their eyes on the ground at all times. According to traditional pimping rules, when a victim makes eye contact with another pimp (accidentally or on purpose), she is choosing him to be her pimp. If the original pimp wants the victim back, he must pay a fee to the new pimp. When this occurs, he will force the victim to work harder to replace the money lost in the transaction. (See *Reckless Eyeballing*)

**Circuit**: A series of cities among which prostituted people are moved. One example would be the West Coast circuit of San Diego, Las Vegas, Portland, and the cities in between. The term can also refer to a chain of states such as the “Minnesota pipeline” by which victims are moved through a series of locations from Minnesota to markets in New York.

**Coercion**: Threats or perceived threats of serious harm to or physical constraints against any person; a scheme intended to cause a person to believe that failure to perform will result in serious harm to or physical restraint against any person.

**Commercial Sex Act**: Any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person.

**Cousin-in-Laws**: Victims of pimp partners who work together.

**Daddy**: The term a pimp will often require his victim to call him.

**Date**: The exchange when prostitution takes place, or the activity of prostitution. A victim is said to be “with a date” or “dating.”

**Exit Fee**: The money a pimp will demand from a victim who is thinking about trying to leave. It will be an exorbitant sum, to discourage her from leaving. Most pimps never let their victims leave freely.

**Facilitators**: It is important to realize that human trafficking operations often intersect or exist alongside legitimate businesses. As a result, certain industries may help to enable, support, or facilitate human trafficking. This “support structure” may include a wide range of individuals, organizations, businesses and corporations, and Internet sites and practices. Common facilitators on which traffickers frequently rely include:

1. Hotels and Motels
2. Landlords
3. Labor brokers
4. Taxi and other driving services
5. Airlines, bus, and rail companies
6. Advertisers (Websites like Craigslist.com and Backpage.com; Phone books; Alternative newspapers)
7. Banks and other financial services companies
8. Inmate pen-pal services

**Family/Folks**: The term used to describe the other individuals under the control of the same pimp. He plays the role of father (or “Daddy”) while the group fulfills the need for a “family.”

**Finesse Pimp/Romeo Pimp**: One who prides himself on controlling others primarily through psychological manip­ulation. Although he may shower his victims with affection and gifts (especially during the recruitment phase), the threat of violence is always present.

**Force (Federal TVPA Definition):** Physical restraint or causing serious harm. Examples of force include kidnapping, battering, kicking, pushing, denial of food or water, denial of medical care, forced use of drugs or denial of drugs once a victim is addicted, forced to lie to friends and family about their whereabouts, being held in locked rooms or bound.

**Fraud**: Knowingly misrepresenting the truth or concealing an actual fact for the purpose of inducing another person to act to her/his detriment. Examples of fraud include false promises for specific employment, being promised a certain amount of money that is never paid, working conditions are not as promised, being told she or he would receive legitimate immigration papers or a green card to work but the documents are not obtained.

**Gorilla (or Guerilla) Pimp**: A pimp who controls his victims almost entirely through physical violence and force.

**Head Cut**: A victim getting beaten down by their pimp.

**Human smuggling:**The facilitation, transportation, attempted transportation, or illegal entry of a person or persons across an international border, in violation of one or more countries’ laws, either clandestinely or through deception, such as the use of fraudulent documents.

**In-Pocket**: Not paying any other pimp than the one controlled by the victim. Not speaking to any other pimp.

**“John” (a/k/a Buyer or “Trick”)**: An individual who pays for or trades something of value for sexual acts.

**Kiddie Stroll**: An area known for prostitution that features younger victims.

**Loose Bitch**: Pimps call a loose bitch a victim who keeps choosing different pimps.

**Lot Lizard**: Derogatory term for a person who is being prostituted at truck stops.

**Madam**: An older woman who manages a brothel, escort service or other prostitution establishment. She may work alone or in collaboration with other traffickers.

**Out of Pocket**: The phrase describing when a victim is not under control of a pimp but working on a pimp-controlled track, leaving her vulnerable to threats, harassment, and violence in order to make her “choose” a pimp. This may also refer to a victim who is disobeying the pimp’s rules.

**Pimp:** A person who controls and financially benefits from the commercial sexual exploitation of another person. The relationship can be abusive and possessive, with the pimp using techniques such as psychological intimidation, manipulation, starvation, rape and/or gang rape, beating, confinement, threats of violence toward the victim’s family, forced drug use, and the shame from these acts to keep the sexually exploited person under control.

**Pimp Circle**: When several pimps encircle a victim to intimidate through verbal and physical threats in order to discipline the victim or force her to choose up.

**Pimp Partner**: Two pimps who are friends and allow their victims to work together.

**Quota**: A set amount of money that a trafficking victim must make each night before she can come “home.” Quotas are often set between $300 and $2000. If the victim returns without meeting the quota, she is typically beaten and sent back out on the street to earn the rest. Quotas vary according to geographic region, local events, etc.

**Reckless Eyeballing**: A term which refers to the act of looking around instead of keeping your eyes on the ground. Eyeballing is against the rules and could lead an untrained victim to “choose up” by mistake.

**Renegade**: A person involved in prostitution without a pimp.

**Seasoning**: A combination of psychological manipulation, intimidation, gang rape, sodomy, beatings, deprivation of food or sleep, isolation from friends or family and other sources of support, and threatening or holding hostage of a victim’s children. Seasoning is designed to break down a victim’s resistance and ensure compliance.

**Serving a Pimp**: The actual phone call one pimp makes to another after “taking” his victim.

**Squaring Up**: Attempting to escape or exit prostitution.

**Stable**: A group of victims who are under the control of a single pimp.

**The Game/The Life**: The subculture of prostitution, complete with rules, a hierarchy of authority, and language. Referring to the act of pimping as ‘the game’ gives the illusion that it can be a fun and easy way to make money, when the reality is much harsher. Women and girls will say they’ve been “in the life” if they’ve been involved in prostitution for a while.

**Track (a/k/a Stroll or Blade)**: An area of town known for prostitution activity. This can be the area around a group of strip clubs and pornography stores, or a particular stretch of street.

**Trade Up/Trade Down**: To move a victim like merchandise between pimps. A pimp may trade one girl for another or trade with some exchange of money.

**Traffickers**: Traffickers are people who exploit others for profit. They can be any demographic, individuals and groups, street gangs and organized crime, businesses or contractors.

**Trick**: Committing an act of prostitution (*verb*), or the person buying it (*noun*). A victim is said to be “turning a trick” or “with a trick.”

**Turn Out**: To be forced into prostitution (*verb*) or a person newly involved in prostitution (*noun*).

**The Wire**: (1) A pimp hotline, like a phone tree pimps use to get the word around, to find out which city is on/off. (2) Wiring money from victim to pimp in different cities/states (“put it on the wire”).

* **Wifeys/Wife-in-Law/Sister Wife**: What women and girls under the control of the same pimp call each other.
* [April 7, 2014](http://inpublicsafety.com/2014/04/tips-for-identifying-suspected-victims-of-human-trafficking/)

**By John Meekins**

The term “human trafficking” makes headlines every day, but those headlines often miss the point of a truly sordid story of women locked into lives for which there is no end—often because law enforcement and corrections officials do not recognize the true situation.

Many times officers assume that someone busted for prostitution is just another drug-addicted hooker, so they do not take the time to investigate. In reality, if officers were trained about what signs to look for and what questions to ask these women, they could help stop this tragic cycle of slavery.

[](http://inpublicsafety.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/woman-sitting-in-jail.jpg)

Slavery is how I often refer to “human trafficking” because that is what it is: modern-day slavery. A ‘pimp’ or human trafficker controls every aspect of these women’s lives, even to the color of her hair. He controls her because she is valuable to him and his way of making a living. The average sex slave in the United States annually makes a clear profit of $67,382 for the trafficker. That is the value of just one woman.

My own experience in learning about this “business” comes from nearly 10 years of working as a corrections officer at a female prison. [[Go here to learn more about the prevalence of human trafficking in our nation’s prisons.]](http://inpublicsafety.com/2014/01/combatting-human-trafficking-networks-within-prison-walls/)

Throughout my career, I have spoken with dozens of women who tell me how rapidly and easily they were enslaved. During these conversations, many of these women admit to drug addictions and say they initially entered the sex trade willingly in order to earn money to support their habits. However, the situation they eventually wound up in was anything but willing and closely resembled the prison they now find themselves in.

In addition to first-person accounts, I have conducted hundreds of hours of research on human trafficking and talked with academics, experts, human trafficking investigators, traffickers, and slaves.

Dr. Vincent Giordano, director of the criminal justice program at [American Military University](http://www.amu.apus.edu/), said that in 2011 there were 125 total human trafficking cases, 70 of which resulted in a conviction, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. But it is estimated that hundreds cases of trafficking go unreported and unnoticed by the justice system, with many of the victims being incarcerated themselves.

Dr. Celia Williamson, chair of the Research and Analysis Committee of Ohio’s Human Trafficking Commission and author of several studies on trafficking, reports that trafficking victims are in jails across America, many of whom are repeatedly victimized by their traffickers.

“It is the responsibility of the corrections system to identify the indicators, develop a protocol for reporting suspected coercion of traffickers to their victims via mail for instance, and reporting it,” she said.

**The Role of Law Enforcement and Corrections**As law enforcement and corrections officers it can be difficult to determine if women are victims of human trafficking—under the control of someone else—or if they are freely engaging in the sex trade.

The first thing to understand is that victimized women will not tell you if they are being abused. They have been terrorized and brainwashed and threatened by their pimp. If they provide law enforcement any information or any indication about their situation, they face severe punishments, either to themselves or to their children and/or loved ones.

Law enforcement must understand that human trafficking victims believe their pimps are all powerful—they know where they are, who they are with, and what they say and do.

**How to Identify a Victim of Human Trafficking**When someone is arrested for prostitution there are signs that indicate she is not freely engaging in the sex trade. Here are some tips about what signs to look for, mainly in a county jail setting:

1. She does not have an ID on her at time of arrest
2. She chooses to use an alias or go by “Jane Doe”
3. She has signs of physical abuse. These wounds are not usually visible on her face, but rather will be around her hairline or on her torso. A pimp will avoid damaging the face of  women he controls because a beat up prostitute costs him money
4. She does not appear to be worried about being arrested. This is an indication that she has a pimp who will immediately pay her bond
5. Being arrested more than once in a 48-hour period. This signifies that someone is making her get back to “work” immediately
6. She appears to have no one to call, yet is bonded out quickly
7. Two or more girls are bonded out by the same person
8. Woman has noticeable tattoos (AKA brands) with a person’s name. These tattoos tend to be large and elaborate and often include “$” symbols or reference to “pimps.” If these tattoos are present, police should document for future identification on other women
9. She uses a paid lawyer instead of a public defender
10. When arrested, she actively seeks out other girls who do not have anyone to pay their bond. This indicates she is “recruiting” for her pimp

**Questions to Ask a Suspected Human Trafficking Victim and Why**Once someone is suspected of being a victim, it is important to ask her in-depth and often blunt questions. Never assume that what a victim tells you is the truth—many victims are coached about how to respond to law enforcement. Be sure to ask follow-up questions to bring to light inaccuracies.

1. **With whom did you reside? What relation are they to you?***Someone in a human trafficking situation does not live alone. Many pimps have several women who live in small living spaces so he can easily control them.*
2. **What kind of work did you do and where were you employed?***Vague responses like “house cleaning” and other under-the-table jobs are often a cover-up. If a job is specified ask for greater details like names of supervisors and dates worked. If she says a “boyfriend” took care of her that is a good indication of HT.*
3. **If she mentions a boyfriend or friend, ask what that person does for work.***Statements like: “He sometimes does side jobs” or “he’s not working now” are indicators that he is a pimp. Many pimps do not work and survive on the proceeds of their women. They convince women it is best for them to stay at home and protect them.*
4. **How do you perceive yourself and what led you to this belief?***This can give you an idea of how she feels about herself. Many victims have been dehumanized and believe nobody cares about them. Many have been brainwashed to think they are worthless.*
5. **Have you ever engaged in prostitution? If so, how did you get introduced to it? What did you do with the money you made?***Asking blunt questions like this can get to the issue at hand.*
6. **What is your past criminal history, what other charges do you have?***Many women are mules for their pimps, so charges like drug trafficking or gun trafficking may indicate that she is under the control of someone.*
7. **What is your relationship with your family? How long has it been the way it is now?***Pimps often do not allow women to have contact with their families. This is another good indicator that they are under the control of a pimp.*

Asking questions and taking the time to investigate a person’s history could not only save her life, but also save the lives of other women in similar circumstances. Keep in mind that many of these women have tried and failed to get themselves out of these situations. After so many failures, they may have given up trying and need the help and support of authorities to save them from this outrageous crime.

Those of us in corrections and law enforcement are on the front lines in the battle against human trafficking and we are the first and often best hope these women have in turning their lives around. Therefore, it is important that we know the signs, the questions to ask, and how to act upon our suspicions.

***About the Author:*** *John Meekins**graduated from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and is a member of the* [*International Association of Human Trafficking Investigators*](http://www.iahti.org/) *and the* [*Florida Gang Investigators Association*](http://www.fgia.org/)*. Meekins has almost 10 years working with female inmates in one of the largest female prisons in the nation. The information and perspective he provided in this article are his own opinions and do not reflect those of any department or agency. You can contact him at:* [*jomeekins@comcast.net*](http://inpublicsafety.com/2014/04/tips-for-identifying-suspected-victims-of-human-trafficking/jomeekins@comcast.net).