# Say This, Not That - Glossary

Recommended Terminology for Sex Trafficking and Prostitution

The words and language we use as we raise awareness regarding the complex issue surrounding human trafficking (slavery), often consciously or unconsciously, intentionally, or unintentionally, generate some impression on the listener’s mind. The language society uses around exploited children and adults can be crucial to their recovery and to avoiding re-victimization. This glossary is a tool to help us build consistency in our language to create a supportive environment for those who are victimized and to help prevent normalization of exploitive acts and criminal behaviors.

| **Say This:** | **NOT that:** | **Comments** |
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| Human trafficking  Sex trafficking, Sex exploitation. Labor trafficking, Labor exploitation  Victims/survivors of sex trafficking or exploitation | Slavery  Modern day slavery  Sex slaves | “Slavery” is a term related to institutionalized or systemized oppression. In the United States chattel slavery particularly impacted African Americans. Slavery and trafficking are two different experiences with similarities and should not be conflated. |
| Survivor  Trafficked Person | Victim (\*In some context, such as law and legal, the term victim is appropriate) | These words have very different connotations - “victim” often implies helplessness or pity, whereas the term “survivor” is more strength based and empowering; it implies that one was able to take control of their own lives. However, we must keep in mind that experiences vary from person to person, it is best to use the term in which the individual personally identifies. |
| Left the life  Left their pimp/trafficker | Rescued, saved | Trauma-informed messaging is empowering and hopeful, avoids re-traumatization and supports the rights, dignity, autonomy, and self-determination of the survivor. |
| Sex Trade | Sex Industry | “Trade” is the business of buying and selling or bartering commodities, whereas “industry” is a distinct group of productive or profit-making enterprises. Commercial sexual exploitation or prostitution is not productive, as it often preys on and exploits the most vulnerable. |
| Prostituted (person, people); person/people in prostitution  Prostituted women/men (or children), women/men (or children) in prostitution  Prostitution/sex trade survivor | Prostitute, escort, hoe, whore, sex slave  sex worker, commercial sex worker, adult services provider, adult sex provider | Those who view prostitution as a form of inherent violence often advocate for the preferred terms list, as many are not there by choice, but rather exploited by force, fraud, or coercion. While the preferred terms accurately convey the activity that is occurring (i.e., prostitution), they neither label the person using derogatory or offensive language, nor normalize prostitution as just another form of work. They are indicative of prostitution as an experience, not a state of being. These terms help express the idea that persons in the sex trade are caught up in the exploitive system of the prostitution industry. |
| Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE)  Exploited (person, people) | Forced prostitution, voluntary prostitution  Forced trafficking, voluntary trafficking  Sex work, commercial sex work, consensual sex work, transactional sex  Sex slavery | The result of splitting prostitution into so called forced and voluntary prostitution is the creation of two classes of prostitution: bad/forced and good/voluntary (or less bad). Members of the first  are viewed as deserving of aid and assistance since  they are considered “innocent” and as having no culpability in their exploitation, whereas the latter are often viewed as “sex workers”—individuals exercising sexual autonomy. These assessments are often made with little to no knowledge about how an individual came into prostitution, with no consideration of prostitution as a system of exploitation, or of prostitution resulting from a lack of choices as opposed to a variety of viable options. |
| The language of consensual sex when it cannot be consensual | Use language specific to the crime committed. For example, a minor cannot consent to sex and therefore cannot “have sex” or “perform sexual acts” with an adult. | The minor is a victim of criminal sexual conduct. Alternative language to criminal sexual conduct is sexual assault or criminal sexual acts.  Using terms and language that suggests a minor can consent to sex or sex acts with an adult when the minor cannot consent due to age implies that minors are not victims. Because of their age, minors are victims, even if they say they had a choice. The crime should be made clear with the language used. |
| Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)  Child Sex Trafficking (CST)  Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking (DMST)  Prostitution of children | Teen/child prostitute  Child sex slave  Underage prostitute | Children cannot give legitimate consent to commercial sex acts, therefore, any use of a child or minor (under the age of 18) for the purpose of commercial sex - including the making of pornography - is a form of child sex trafficking. In these cases, elements of force, fraud, or coercion do not need to be proven according to federal law.  (Domestic minor sex trafficking is the commercial sexual exploitation of American children within U.S. borders for monetary or other compensation) |
| Alleged | Reported  Alternatively, use the terms “police say” or “prosecutors say.” | The term “alleged” is not as neutral a term as “reported” because it suggests skepticism of a victim/survivor’s experience.  Using “say” is another way to avoid this issue by stating who is handling the report |
| Youth whose vulnerabilities have been exploited | Youth that have consciously made bad decisions | Do not put the blame on the person. Bad decisions do not mean one deserves exploitation. |
| Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)  Illegal Child Abuse Imagery | Kiddie porn  Child porn/pornography  Nude photos of underage girls/boys | Federal law defines child pornography as any visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct involving a minor (a person less than 18 years old). Outside of the legal system, however, many choose to refer to these images as Child Sexual Abuse Material in order to most accurately reflect the *severity* of what is depicted – the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. |
| Sex buyer, exploiter, purchaser, purchaser of commercial sex acts, commercial sex buyer, perpetrator | John, client, customer, hobbyist, punter, trick, date, curb crawler | These words (client, john, etc.) are frequently used to describe the male buyers of commercial sex acts. However, use of these terms normalizes their role in commercial sex—as if buying sex is as normal and legitimate an activity as buying a car or dining at a restaurant—and they obfuscate their true identity as abusers and perpetrators.  “Trick” makes the exploitation sound like a game while stigmatizing the victim/survivor. It implies the buyer is the one being taken advantage of instead of the victim/survivor |
| Trafficker, Exploiter, Abuser | Pimp | “Pimp” minimizes the seriousness of the harm because it is a common popular culture term. It also perpetuates stereotypes when applied to specific racial and ethnic groups. Use in quotes when |
| Undocumented individual, undocumented immigrant  Foreign national | Illegal immigrant, illegal alien  Migrant sex workers | By using the term "undocumented", you skip the dehumanizing aspects of calling someone "illegal" and simply describe the situation at hand - an undocumented immigrant is someone who resides in a county without proper documentation. |

Recommended Guidelines for Images

**Use images that:**

* Are survivor-centered and promote an accurate understanding of human trafficking.
* Represent the diverse spectrum of human trafficking victims (all races, ethnicities, ages, and genders).

**Avoid images that:**

* Display physical abuse. These types of images can be dehumanizing or objectifying and depict victims merely as objects of violence. They can also be re-traumatizing to the community members who may be victims of crime.
* Reinforce misconceptions about human trafficking. Human trafficking is a complex crime that takes many forms. Images that only rely on the most violent examples, like those depicting victims of trafficking in chains, behind bars, or in handcuffs, can promote the common misperception that victims of trafficking must be physically restrained and ignore other forms of force, fraud, and coercion that can be used for exploitation.
* Sensationalize the issue for shock value (e.g., scantily dressed women on the street, highly dramatic kidnapping scenes, children sobbing, etc.).
* Depict survivors without their informed consent.

**References:**

“A Preface to the ‘Chart of Preferred Terminology for Sex Trafficking and Prostitution’” (Thompson, 2014)

<https://endsexualexploitation.org/wp-content/uploads/Chart-of-Preferred-Terminology-for-Sex-Trafficking-and-Prostitution_Final_10-07-2015.pdf>

“Senior Policy Operating Group Public Awareness and Outreach Committee | Guide For Public Awareness Materials” (United States SPOG, 2020)

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SPOG-Guide-for-Public-Awareness-Materials-nonbinding.pdf>

https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/safeharbor/documents/infoguidemedia.pdf

Additional recommendations provided by Melanie Thompson, survivor leader and advocate