

Human Trafficking

in Aviation

Houston Rickard
Special Agent

Homeland Security
Investigations



15:30 - 16:30





Human Trafficking Awareness in Corporate & Private Aviation

HONOR | SERVICE | INTEGRITY

Who Am I

- Houston Rickard
- Special Agent – HSI Charlotte
- Human Exploitation Investigations Unit
- 14 years of Law Enforcement Experience
- Over 8 years investigating Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking



Why This Matters

- Human trafficking occurs in private and corporate aviation
- Privacy and reduced screening create risk
- Crew may be the only independent observers
- Awareness can disrupt trafficking



What is Human Trafficking?



Types of Human trafficking:

- **Sex trafficking**, in which a commercial sex act is induced by *force, fraud, or coercion*, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age
- **Forced labor**, when individuals are compelled against their will to provide work or service through the use of *force, fraud, or coercion*

Who Trafficking May Affect

Human trafficking victims can be any age, race, or nationality. They may come from any socioeconomic group. Human trafficking vulnerability factors may include:

- Economic instability and dependence
- Homelessness/runaway
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Immigration status



Smuggling vs Trafficking

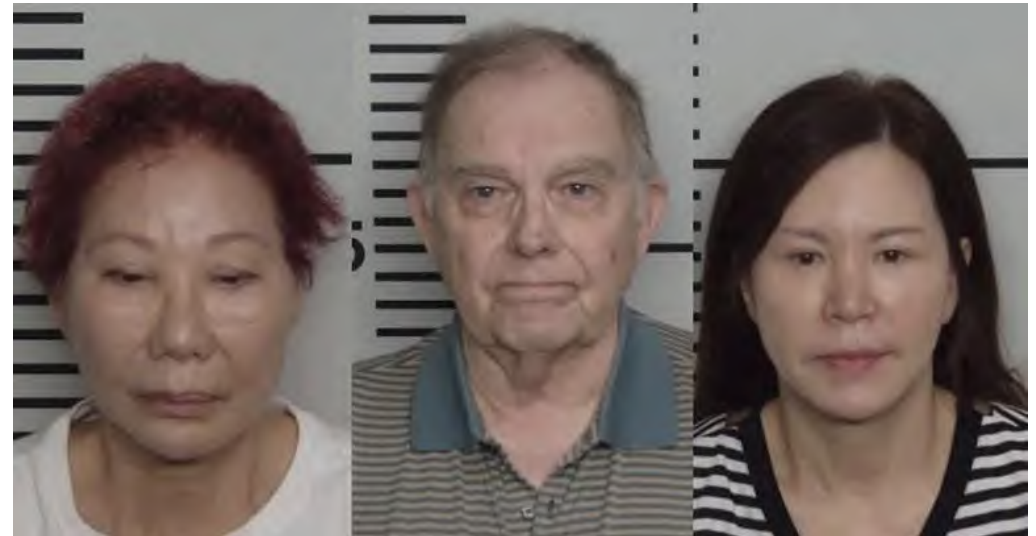
Smuggling	Trafficking
Crime Against a Border	Crime Against a Person
Transportation Based	Exploitation Based
Requires Border Crossing	No Border Crossing Required
Voluntary	Involuntary

Who Are Traffickers

There is **no single face of traffickers**; they can be any sex, age, or race.

To victims, they can be:

- “Boyfriends,” “girlfriends,” or other romantic partners
- Community leaders or people of prominence
- Strangers with no relation to the victim
- Employers or other professionals
- Family members or friends
- Peers or other students



Human Trafficking Myths

MYTH	REALITY
Victims will attempt to seek help in public.	Victims are often afraid to seek help because of threats from their trafficker.
Victims are only foreign-born individuals.	Victims can be any age, race, or nationality. Human trafficking happens to United States citizens.
Victims are usually physically restrained, held in bondage, or otherwise physically abused.	Physical force can be present in a human trafficking situation, but cases also often involve psychological and emotional forms of abuse.

What's the Connection to Aviation

- Human traffickers are using airplanes to transport victims
- 80% of international human trafficking cases cross official ports of entry
- 38% of 104 survivor respondents indicated airplanes were used
- Survivor respondents indicated that commercial and private airplanes were used to leave their trafficking situation



Why Traffickers Use Private Aviation

- Discretion and privacy
- Flexible routing and last-minute changes
- High-trust environments
- Less public oversight
- Limited security and screening



Transportation-Related Indicators

- Unaware of where they are, where they are going, where they have been, or how they might arrive at their final destination
- No control of identification, documents, tickets, boarding passes, money, and/or phone
- No freedom of movement or social interaction
- Traveling to obtain a job with no specific information
- Improper clothing for weather or travel route
- Traveling on a one-way, last-minute, or same-day booking
- Does not know the person who purchased their ticket, is picking them up, and/or is traveling with them

Aviation Case Examples

- One of the Most Famous examples is Jeffrey Epstein
 - Survivors interviewed for the Netflix documentary “Jeffrey Epstein: Filthy Rich” said that many indicators of the crime were missed by FBO staff, pilots, line service technicians, and other airport workers.
- 2021 HSI Investigation
 - Human traffickers used small charter aircraft to smuggle Venezuelan females into unmanned airports in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The traffickers lured the women onto planes with the promise of restaurant work, but upon landing, they took the women’s documentation and threatened them with deportation if they didn’t engage in sex acts at a brothel.
- Another survivor reported they were moved between 35 different cities in 13 different states, all by air



What To Do If You Suspect Trafficking

- Do not confront or intervene
- Document observations as soon as possible
- Follow company procedures
- Report concerns through proper channels



What to Report

- Name
- Appearance
- Suspicious behavior
- # of travelers
- Time
- Current location
- Destination
- Gate/flight information



Reporting Human Trafficking

- In-flight reporting
 - ACARS
- On the ground reporting
 - 911
 - National Human Trafficking Hotline: **1-888-373-7888**
 - This is not Law Enforcement
 - HSI Tipline: **1-866-347-2423**



What Happens After Reporting

- When choosing a method to report consider the seriousness of what is being reported
 - Suspicion based on observed indicators
 - Victim self identifying as being trafficked
- How its reported will dictate a response
 - Immediate response by uniformed officers
 - Follow up by Investigators
- Human Trafficking investigations are long and extensive
 - Can take months and years
 - Involves interviews, collection of documentation and video, digital forensics, and statements

Professional Travel Safety

Transitions Can Be Dangerous

- Highest risk moment is often the 90 seconds after you think you're safe
- People mentally “relax” when they “arrive”
- Highest Risk Transition Points
 - Airport – Rideshare
 - Rideshare - Lobby
 - Lobby – Elevator
 - Elevator – Hotel Room
 - Parking Deck – Vehicle



Awareness Habits

- Practical Habits
 - Pause before exiting vehicles – scan surroundings
 - Don't become blinded by your phone
 - Quickly assess hallways before leaving an elevator
 - Don't get cornered in the back of an elevator
 - If something feels off, it usually is
 - Awareness is noticing anomalies, identifying exits, and recognizing behavioral incongruence
- Consider Threshold Traps
 - Don't stand at your room door searching for your room key
 - Have car keys ready in your hand when approaching your vehicle
 - Loading/unloading luggage

Predictability Makes You A Target

- What are you advertising:
 - Hotel information
 - Crew status
 - Destination
 - Room Isolation
 - Layover Information
 - Posting real-time location information
- Fatigue is a security vulnerability
 - Fatigue causes – tunnel vision, routine dependency, awareness drops



Anything Can Be A Weapon

- Being prepared is about creating time, noise, and distance
- The goal is escape, not winning the fight
- Examples of improvised weapons
 - Metal water bottle
 - Flashlight
 - Belt or purse strap
 - Pen/Sharpie
 - Rolled magazine/newspaper



Attacks Often Start Soft

- Attacks are often predicated by a softer approach
 - Manipulation
 - Information Gathering
 - Checking confidence/assertiveness
 - Invading personal space
- Attackers frequently abandon targets who:
 - Acknowledge them
 - Appear confident
 - Establish boundaries
 - Appear difficult to isolate



Key Takeaways

- Trafficking hides in plain sight
- Corporate aviation is not immune
- Your awareness matters
- Your observations matters
- Your help is key to stopping trafficking
- Your safety matters
- Maintain awareness of your surroundings
- Be prepared for the worst case scenario



HOMELAND SECURITY INVESTIGATIONS

Contact Information

Houston Rickard
Special Agent



Sean.Rickard@hsi.dhs.gov



704-591-2993



HSI TIPLINE 1-866-347-2423 | Follow us on Twitter @HSI_HQ  | Visit us at <https://www.ice.gov/hsi>

HONOR | SERVICE | INTEGRITY