

# IMPORTANT ITEMS IN THE NEWS

## **Human trafficking up 25% globally as demand for young girls fuels growth**

Human trafficking cases globally have jumped exponentially in recent years, fueled by a growing demand for children and people to work in forced labor or slavery, according to a new report from the United Nations.

The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime publication issued Wednesday detected 25% more victims of human trafficking in 2022 alone. Victims included children being trafficked, as well as adults and children trafficked to work and to be exploited in other means, according to the 2024 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons.

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## **Real estate agent brothers charged with sex trafficking: Here's what to know**

Two high-profile real estate brokers and their brother have been charged with sex trafficking, accused of drugging, sexually assaulting and raping dozens of women in multiple states over the course of more than decade.

Federal prosecutors alleged that twins Alon and Oren Alexander, 37, and their older brother, Tal Alexander, 38, used their wealth and connections to lure women to private locations, promising them luxury experiences and accommodations to sexually assault them.

**Million Kids Insights:** *An FBI agent testified in the federal detention hearing that 40 credible witnesses have alleged they were raped by at least one of the brothers. An unsealed federal indictment in Manhattan accuses the three men of luring women with promises of luxury experiences and then forcibly raping or sexually assaulting them, sometimes by multiple men.*

*If you are following any of the news, you know we've had a few high-profile cases this year based on allegations of sex trafficking and rape. It includes the former CEO of Abercrombie & Fitch, Michael Jeffries and his partner Matthew Smith. Harvey Weinstein has new allegations against him. And of course, the big one has been Sean Diddy. All have plead not guilty. The trials are set for next year. If nothing else, hopefully these cases, and the surrounding publicity, will serve as a warning to young people to be wary in certain situations.*

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## **10 Habits To Prevent 'Brain Rot' And Create A Smart Brain In 2025**

Neuroscientists tell us that "Brain Rot" is becoming a trend that can dampen a smart, "thinking" brain. After all, your brain is your best friend. It's with you 24/7, and never leaves your side (or I should say your head). So don't be a Christmas Scrooge and ignore your neurological sidekick. If you do, you could be at risk for "Brain Rot."

**Million Kids Insights:** *Brain rot (or brainrot) was Oxford's 2024 word of the year. The definition from Oxford is: "the supposed deterioration of a person's mental or intellectual state, especially viewed as the result of overconsumption of material (now particularly online content) considered to be trivial or unchallenging. Also: something characterized as likely to lead to such deterioration". It has also been defined as being in a dazed state from excessive exposure to low-quality online content.*

*Many consider the countless hours that young people spend scrolling through social media as contributing to brain rot. The site's algorithms are set to entice viewers to keep going and going as we disassociate from what is going on around us. The scrolling triggers avoidance behaviors and we find it hard to stop scrolling so we can do the things we need to do. What scientists have found is that the scrolling activates the habenula controls in the brain. The habenula effects motivation and decision-making. When the habenula is activated, it can lead to a lack of motivation, a need to be productive or to try something. It can increase brain fogginess, can decrease the ability to focus (and they found that it can contribute to loneliness as people are unable to even focus on relationships). Another word you might hear is "doomscrolling" or "doomsurfing". This is when someone spends an excessive amount of time reading or scrolling through negative news on the web or social media. Health experts say this can negatively impact mental health issues. It is easy for it to become a mindless habit and research has shown that consuming a lot of negative media can cause depression and anxiety.*

*With all of this in mind, Australia recently banned social media for those under the age of 16. Now countries in Asia are considering the same ban. Of course there has been pushback, especially from young people who have only known a world with electronics in the hand and social media to stay connected. Even without the ban, and to avoid brain rot or doomscrolling, parents need to put boundaries in place. Consider having a social media contract that includes limits on the amount time spent mindlessly on a device and putting the phone in another room at night.*

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### **Inside the scam farms enslaving workers**

Miriam thought she had landed her dream job in Thailand, but when she landed, she was smuggled across the border to Myanmar, where she was trained to scam the vulnerable out of thousands.

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### **Nigeria arrests nearly 800 in crypto-romance scam that targeted Americans, Europeans**

Nigeria's anti-graft agency said it had arrested 792 suspects in a raid on a building believed to be a hub for fraudsters who lured victims with offers of romance, then pressed them to hand over cash for

phony cryptocurrency investments.

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**Warning: This fake PayPal email scam is everywhere right now**

"Reminder: You've still got a money request!" That was the subject line of the messages flooding my husband Barry's inbox for weeks. The first couple were concerning, then it was just downright annoying.

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**Teens aren't that into X — but another social media platform is increasingly getting their attention**

A Washington DC-based think tank surveyed nearly 1,400 teenagers between September and October to collect the data, which showed that 17% of teen respondents said they use X, a six-point decrease from 2022 when 23% of surveyed teenagers said they used the site.

YouTube, owned by Google, attracted the highest percentage of teenage users despite falling from 95% to 90% from 2022 to 2024. ByteDance's TikTok came in second place with 63% of respondents saying they used the app, compared to 67% two years ago.

Snap Inc.'s Snapchat recorded 55%, another slight decline from 59% in 2022.

Instagram, owned by Meta, was used by 61%, about the same as two years ago, while Meta's Facebook also held steady at 32%. Reddit also remained consistent, with 14% of teens saying they used the app, the same as 2022.

Threads, which Meta launched in 2023, was used by 6% of teens.

There was only one social media site that grew in popularity with teens over the past two years: WhatsApp.

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