



For Reporters and Other Media Professionals: Understanding and Using Correct Sex Trafficking Terms and Vocabulary

It is critical that you, as a member of the media, use correct terms and vocabulary when talking about sex trafficking and exploitation. Using the wrong words when discussing this important issue can have unintended consequences: revictimizing survivors and misleading the public on the true nature of sex trafficking and exploitation.

Incorrect	Correct
Prostitute	Victim/survivor of sex trafficking
Call girl, escort	Victim/survivor of prostitution
Hooker, streetwalker, whore, ho, etc.	Woman/girl used in sex trafficking/prostitution
Sex worker	Prostituted/trafficked woman/girl

Note: *The correct terminology used above indicates that the vast majority of women/girls involved in prostitution/sex trafficking are not there by their own free choice and are victims of traffickers and the men who purchase them.*

Survivors of sex trafficking at Breaking Free believe that words like “prostitute” and “hooker” are labeling, insulting, revictimizing, and do not accurately reflect the abuse and oppression they survived.

Survivors also find that the term “sex worker” incorrectly indicates that a victim of sex trafficking is not engaged in a system of abuse and slavery and is instead working in a job/profession like any other person.

Incorrect	Correct
Patron, customer	Offender
John, trick	Commercial sex abuser
	Sexual predator

Incorrect	Correct
Pimp	Trafficker

Note: *Popular culture has normalized the word “pimp” and made it into a common and even positive word to use to call someone, whether or not they abuse and control women and girls. The word “trafficker” better describes the seriousness of the abuse and oppression such people inflict upon the women and girls they traffic and enslave.*

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