

Human Trafficking and Sexual Assault: Case Studies

CASE #1

Elena was born in Chile but came to the US with her parents when she was three years old. Her parents never explained to her she was not a United States citizen. They wanted to protect her and tried to provide to her everything they never had in their country.

At age seventeen she got tired of fighting with her parents over not being able to date or go out with her friends. She ran away and started hanging out with other teens at the local mall. Her money ran out. She was determined to avoid the police and her family. An older guy befriended her, brought her food, bought her some clothes and told her she didn't need her parents anymore. He offered her a relationship, a home and a job. She thought being with him was better than being with her conservative parents.

Elena was forced into prostitution and lived under total control of her "boyfriend," her pimp. One night, the police picked her up and arrested her for prostitution.

CASE #2

Leandra travelled to Kansas to work at a packing plant. Many of her neighbors and friends had moved to the same small town in the past couple of years. She heard they were sending money home regularly. By working at the plant, Leandra was finally able to provide for her two small children. She asked her mother to take care of them until she could send for them. The plant had hundreds of employees working on different shifts. Many young men and women from her town in Nicaragua worked alongside her.

The hours were long, the work was tiring, and the pay was not as good as promised, but Leandra felt it was her duty to work hard to provide a better life for her family. During the first couple of months, she had seen some of the managers touch some of the women workers in a way she didn't think was appropriate. She kept working hard ignoring what she had seen and hoped they would not notice her. But one day, one of the managers approached her and requested she follow him to the office. Once there he locked the door, cornered her and began undoing her pants. Leandra tried to push him back but he was stronger. When she yelled at him to let her go, he covered her mouth and told her she would be fired immediately, reported to immigration and accused of stealing if she did not comply. The manager raped her repeatedly. Leandra never told anyone at the plant of what happened. She feared losing her job but also feared being called a whore by her co-workers. Leandra also knew that word would get to her mother if anyone found out at the plant. She suffered in silence.

A few months later one of the other workers reported having been raped by the same manager. Social workers and attorneys came to the plant to speak with the workers. Leandra did not know what to do.

CASE #3

At age 19, Ernesto came to the US with his brother, Pedro, and his sister, Luz, to work at a restaurant in Florida. They were young and happy to be able to help their parents who remained in Bolivia. Ernesto was also happy because being openly gay in his country was not an option. His parents did not know. Ernesto was very shy and while growing up he avoided confrontations. People made fun of him and called him names, always accusing him of not being man enough.

Once they arrived, the woman who had contacted his parents about the job opportunity took them to her home where they would be sleeping in her garage on mattresses along with three other workers. She told them they needed to work hard to pay for the airfare to the US and for all the other expenses involved in getting their visas. She also said she would deduct the rent and food from their paychecks.

Ernesto and his siblings didn't speak English and didn't know whom to trust. The woman had told them they were not allowed to speak with the customers. The three of them worked in the kitchen. Every week she gave them \$50 each to send home to their parents. The other workers were older men who drank a lot and made fun of Ernesto regularly. They also tried to get close to Luz but Pedro watched over them. Ernesto feared the men and tried to stay away as much as possible.

One night Pedro was told to stay at the restaurant to help the woman do inventory. Ernesto and Luz went home with the other three workers. Once there, the men started drinking heavily. Ernesto and Luz went to their mattresses trying not to attract their attention. That night the men raped Luz and Ernesto. When Pedro found out he told them they were going to the police. They ran away while the woman and the three men slept.