CHAPTER 14

Drug-Abused Women and Children

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This chapter is written for nurses as an introduction to three main addiction substances that sex trafficking victims are most likely to experience: heroin, cocaine, and alcohol. Any contact a nurse has with women and children who abuse substances is an opportunity to refer a possible victim for treatment. Nurses will find useful resources to deliver effective care based on current evidence, and practical suggestions are given for caring for drug-addicted patients who are victims of sex trafficking.

Nurses have a significant role in screening for substance abuse and related problems. Basic assessment can uncover multiple problems (Clancy, Coyne, & Wright, 1997). The drugs used in trafficking are a form of control and intimidation by traffickers to remind women and children "who is in command." Many victims have found ways to survive violence by using drugs. Drug addictions keep the trafficking business profitable by adding a second source of revenue.

The words "drug" and "substance" will be used interchangeably and are related to both legal and illegal forms. Drug addiction is considered a multifactorial health disorder that follows the course of relapsing and remitting chronic disease. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is the leading classification system used for all categories of addiction. For this chapter, the DSM-IV (2004) is referenced.

It is a challenge to care for people who have both mental illness and substance use disorders (SUDs). These co-occurring illnesses complicate assessment, care, and treatment of victims. In many societies, drug addiction is not recognized as an illness and many women, adolescents, and children are stigmatized. Unfortunately, some nurses share this view, complicating their ability to establish rapport with people who abuse drugs. Another barrier to identifying victims of sex trafficking and substance abuse is that women and children initially may resent intervention because they do not always know they need to be