

GROWING EPIDEMIC OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN OKLAHOMA!



Over the last ten to fifteen years, the spotlight has been put on the crime of human trafficking. Unfortunately, this spotlight did not come with community understanding of the dynamics of human trafficking. Every year in the United States, thousands of human trafficking cases are reported, but **many more go unnoticed and unreported.** Human trafficking is a hidden crime, even if it is happening right in front of you, let's bring the crime out of the shadows, and report the cases. (*US Department of Homeland Security*)



Polaris, an organization created in 2002 to address human trafficking in the US, reports that there are 25 million people trafficked worldwide each year.



In 2013 and 2014 the Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women collaborative studied the issues and held a summit. This report is reflective of the summit recommendations. Since the summit, there has been an increase in services, awareness of reporting and collective data from Oklahoma.

FACTS

What is Human Trafficking?

According to the International Labor Organization, human trafficking, known as modern-day slavery, is the second largest criminal activity in the world and is a \$150 billion a year industry.

Three Types of Human Trafficking

Sex trafficking of adults and labor trafficking of adults and children occurs when force, fraud, or coercion are used to engage a person in commercial sex acts or labor. Sex trafficking of minors occurs when minors are compelled in any way to perform a commercial sex act.

Labor trafficking is defined as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provisions, or obtaining of persons for labor or services using force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery. Labor trafficking is the most prevalent type of human trafficking.

Domestic Servitude pertains to the economic sectors that profit most from human trafficking from agriculture, restaurants, manufacturing, domestic work, entertainment, hospitality, and the commercial sex industry.

Scope of Human Trafficking

Although it may seem that human trafficking is a new atrocity in all actuality, it has been around for years. Almost 100 years ago, the League of Nations held the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children. This convention was held to address labor and sex trafficking of white women and children. Oftentimes, the scope of the problem is equated with prosecution or court cases.

This very issue is addressed in the 2019 Federal Human Trafficking Report. More than 48,000 reached out to the National Human Trafficking Hotline for help and guidance. According to this report, only 145 new Human Trafficking cases were filed in 2019. During the same period, only sex trafficking cases were filed by the federal courts.

MISCONCEPTIONS REGARDING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

KEY FINDINGS

The truth is that Oklahoma has a human trafficking problem, because there are people in Oklahoma who purchase human beings for cheap labor and illicit sex.

If we truly want to prevent human trafficking and make sure that those who have been trafficked get help, then we must dispel these misconceptions.

Only then can Oklahomans truly stop human trafficking in its track.

Human trafficking happens mostly in other countries or to people who are brought to the US from other nations. This misconception ignores the fact that human trafficking—both sex and labor trafficking—take place in Oklahoma’s cities, suburbs, and rural areas and that Americans, too, are victims of this crime.

Many Oklahomans believe that only children are victims of human trafficking. However, many current adults who are trapped in human trafficking were first exploited as children, often by their mothers or fathers. Often lacking education, employment history, and/or severe physical and psychological traumas, these individuals tend to face enormous barriers to exiting human trafficking in order to start different lives. We must also acknowledge that adults can become victims of the crime of human trafficking. This happens when a trafficker uses force, fraud, or coercion—often targeting someone in a desperate or vulnerable situation—to compel them to perform labor or commercial sex acts.

Another common misconception is that most victims’ entries into human trafficking occur through random abductions from front yards or big box store parking lots. This misconception dangerously ignores a far more common tactic that reaches potential victims right in their homes—recruitment through the internet. It is far more efficient and effective for traffickers to recruit many people at a time, using social media and apps to create a false friendship, or romance, or to make false promises and job offers.

Finally, the misconception that Oklahoma has a human trafficking problem because of our highway system, forming the nation’s “crossroads,” continues to pervade our state. The truth is, many other states in the country say the exact same thing about their own highway systems. This misconception ignores the fact that for many human trafficking victims in Oklahoma, traveling on the highway system was never a part of their experience. Many were born and/or grew up in Oklahoma, were trafficked right here in Oklahoma, and were purchased by Oklahomans, often without leaving the state or even their hometowns.



DIFFICULTIES IN DATA COLLECTION

There are several issues that create barriers to accurate data collection both in Oklahoma and nationally. These issues are as follows:

- The lack of understanding what constitutes human trafficking leads to under-reporting. Many survivors of human trafficking do not self-identify when seeking services. When talking with survivors, most have preconceived ideas of what trafficking is and don't recognize the force, fraud, or coercion in their personal situations.
- Survivors of human trafficking may engage resources through several entry points. These entry points may not recognize the situation as human trafficking or facilitate the collection of data on this issue. Consider the difficulty in collecting data from jails, hospitals, health clinics, and counseling centers.

OKLAHOMA DATA

Recent statistics (as of 12/31/19) reflected by NHTH provide the following information about HT victims in Oklahoma: 328 contacts with 109 cases reported involving 207 victims (<https://polarisproject.org>. 2019 statistics).

Sex Trafficking	77
Not Specified	12
Sex & Labor Trafficking	5
Labor Trafficking	15

The National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH) collaborates with service providers, law enforcement and other professionals in Oklahoma and across the nation in order to identify, respond and serve human trafficking (HT) victims.

Accurate unduplicated data is complicated, because one survivor could receive services from all three agencies multiple times, and this would be counted as at least 3+ "people" even though it is one actual human. They are likely counted multiple times due to confidentiality. This means that the numbers we have are not "clear cut."

Gaps in statewide data and resource services exist for many reasons. Until now, there has been no statewide study of HT in Oklahoma. There is no centralized database and anti-trafficking players' turnover with some regularity, making it difficult to form a coherent picture. The three state-certified victim service providers collaborate to provide referrals and services. Black and American Indian Oklahomans are disproportionately impacted by sex trafficking. There is almost no Oklahoma data on juvenile sex trafficking or labor trafficking. Additionally, there is a critical need for a centralized data collection effort across the state (Mahaffey 2020, *Mapping Oklahoma's Response to Human Trafficking: Data And Partnerships* (63431) [MRes, University of Nottingham] Nottingham ePrints).



Location of the 3 Certified Human Trafficking sites

The three Oklahoma certified programs reflected the following data.

In 2019, a total of 217 human trafficking victims received one or more services with 1,437 calls to the Hotline.

In 2020, a total of 161 human trafficking victims received one or more services with the Hotline answering 1,005 calls.

RESOURCES

Of the 77 counties in Oklahoma, there are three nonprofits in two counties that have Oklahoma Office of the Attorney General (OAG) certification to provide services to help adult HT survivors, and their services can expand beyond county boundaries.

There are three unique programs; 1) Domestic Violence Intervention Services (DVIS) (Tulsa, OK); 2.) The Dragonfly Home (Oklahoma City) and 3) The Spring (Sand Springs). Each organization provides different, wide-ranging services, which may include services from a crisis hotline, or residential or shelter programs, to crisis intervention, case management, access to medical care, court advocacy, outpatient counseling, transitional housing, sexual assault nurse examiner, legal, educational, and/or advocacy services. There are few human trafficking programs for underage survivors. This lack of resources leads to survivors seeking services with uncertified programs or having to travel in order to get services. Many underage survivors, who don't have family support, are put into juvenile detention centers or shelters in order to remain safe or with foster parents most of whom have little training in the needs of human trafficking survivors such as evidence - based trauma - informed care.

This lack of resources also leads survivors to seek assistance with programs that have no oversight. Programs that are certified are expected to stay up to date on issues related to human trafficking and trauma as well as follow state guidelines. Furthermore, there are several faith-based programs that provide out-reach, advocacy or other services to survivors.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide educational opportunities to the general public as well as all educational, business, industry, and professional sectors. With education, we will be able to identify and assist those who are survivors of human trafficking. Education should include understanding force, fraud, and coercion as well as information on perpetrators and victims. There is a need for trauma - informed care and prevention education.

Actively include all tribes in the HT response.

Improve all forms of communication. Suggestions include: statewide newsletter, weekly city check-ins, central database, and an updated service directory.

Create local and state coalitions to address human trafficking. These coalitions or networks can work together to provide continuity of care for victims of human trafficking. Oklahoma should center survivors' voices. Very few groups actively include survivors in policy, task forces, or decision-making. Survivor Alliance (founded by survivors) has guidance at www.survivoralliance.org.

Encourage statewide collection of data on human trafficking not just the collaborative reporting of the certified human trafficking providers, but all agencies who touch or impact human trafficking. This data will give better insight into those impacted by human trafficking.

Support legislation that promotes the prosecution of perpetrators of human trafficking as well as those who buy the services. Oklahoma should change the labor trafficking statute of limitations from "three years from commission" to "three years from discovery" immediately.

Develop a statewide strategic HT response plan, following the example of the Tulsa's task force, clearly listing community needs assessment results and 2020-22 objectives.

Expand local efforts by learning from Houston, which is a citywide approach with annual reports, diverse partners, and a 95-point plan available at www.humantraffickinghouston.org.

Fund human trafficking efforts. The most critical need is funding, not only for these recommendations and any future task forces, plus for the human trafficking service providers.

TAKE PERSONAL ACTION

Arrange for experts in human trafficking to talk at your faith center or workplace.

Volunteer at your local human trafficking center.

Support lawmakers and agencies who place human trafficking as a priority.

If you suspect a person is a victim of human trafficking, reach out to state or national resources.



CONCLUSION

Oklahoma is on a learning curve and has tremendous potential. Working with human trafficking survivors demands that we consider multiple and interconnected impacts of sexism, racism, ageism, and other systems of oppression. These are issues which influence the systems within which we work. The array of services required to address human trafficking is complex and multifaceted, ranging from concrete services to long-term and intensive therapeutic interventions. Throughout this paper, there has been many issues that have been identified as areas of concern. By working together with various groups and organizations throughout the state, such an effort would provide greater accuracy to the data as well as enhance the collaboration of needed services for human trafficking victims and continued training and education across private and public arenas. 2021 is pivotal to shape Oklahoma's human trafficking response. Our state can take the above listed actions in order to improve the lives of our vulnerable populations.

A Project of the Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women

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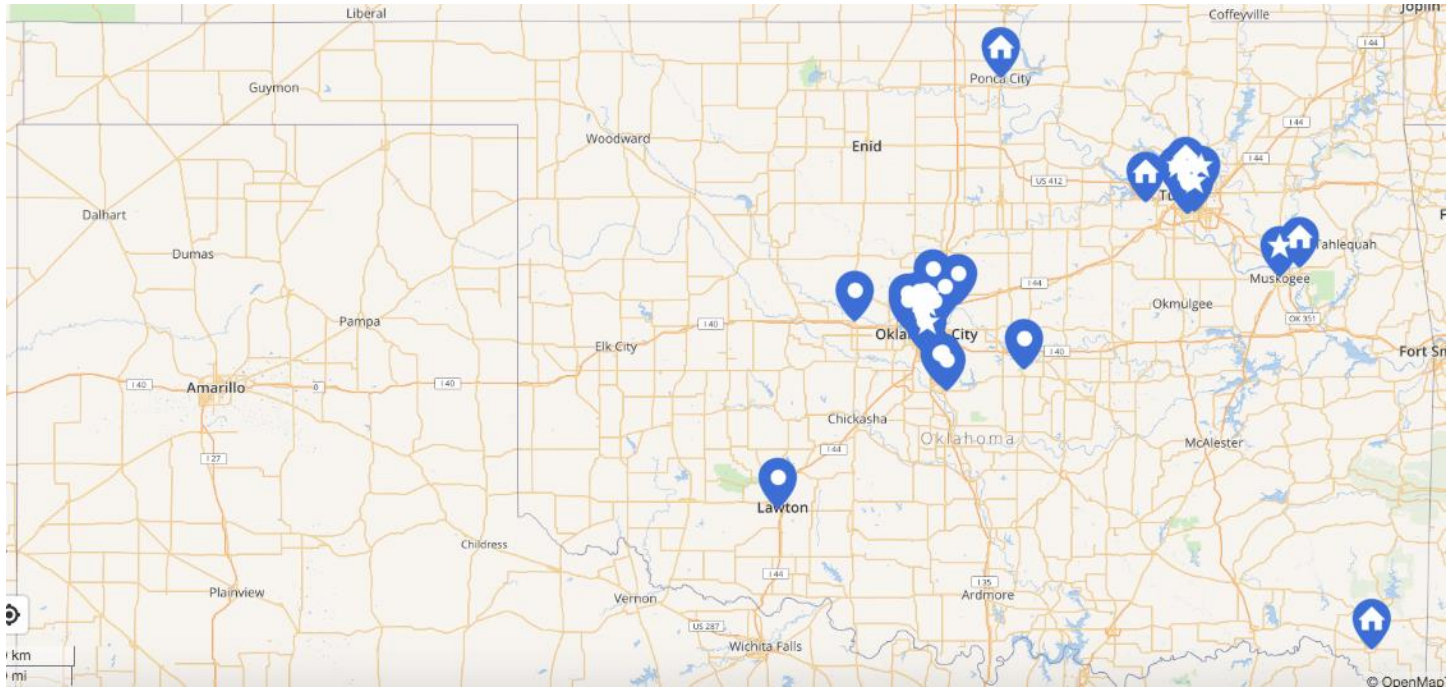
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Mapping Oklahoma's Response to Human Trafficking

By Lucy Mahaffey (2020)

Map of groups responding to human trafficking across Oklahoma, based on 32 surveys, 10 interviews, and publicly available data. While this list has attempted to be extensive, it is not exhaustive. Additional organizations/social services can be accessed by calling “211.” A full map/directory is available here:

<https://maphub.net/LMaha/mapping-ok-response>



Task Forces

- Oklahoma Human Trafficking Task Force – Attorney General’s Office (OKHTTF) (OKC)
- Oklahoma Coalition Against Human Trafficking (OCAT) (Tulsa)

Tribal Organizations

- Native Alliance Against Violence (NAAV)

Government – State

- Oklahoma Attorney General
- Oklahoma Homeland Security
- Oklahoma Department of Human Services
- Oklahoma Juvenile Bureau
- Oklahoma Disability Law Center
- Oklahoma District Attorneys Council
- Oklahoma State Department of Health
- Oklahoma State Department of Health, Emergency Preparedness and Response Services
- OKC VA Health Care System

Law Enforcement – State

- Oklahoma Bureau of Dangerous Drugs and Narcotics – Human Trafficking Unit (statewide)
- Oklahoma City Police Department – Vice Unit
- Tulsa Police Department – Vice Unit

Law Enforcement – Federal

- FBI – OKC Division (main office)

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- FBI – Tulsa office
- US Attorney’s Office (W district OK)
- US Attorney’s Office (E district OK)
- US Attorney’s Office (N district OK)
- Homeland Security

Shelter – Adult Sex Trafficking – Certified by OAG

- Domestic Violence Intervention Services (DVIS)
- The Spring (Tulsa)
- The Dragonfly Home (OKC)

Shelter – Juvenile Sex Trafficking – Contracted by DHS

- Believe in Me (Kiamichi Youth Services) - Idabel

Other Shelters – Adult

- Survivor Resource Network, Inc.

Other Shelters – Juvenile

- RISE Shelter
- Youth Services of Tulsa

Nonprofits – Human Trafficking Specific

- Defending Dignity (Tulsa)
- The Red Cord (Lawton)
- No Boundaries International (OKC)

Nonprofits – Not Trafficking Specific

- Mary Abbotts Children’s House
- Spero Project (OKC)
- Branch 15
- Homeless Alliance
- Catholic Charities OKC
- Bethesda Inc
- Pivot Inc
- Care Center - OKC

Family Justice Centers

- Palomar Family Justice Center – OKC
- Family Safety Center – Tulsa
- One Safe Place - Shawnee

Other Organizations

- YWCA (OKC Branch)
- YWCA (Tulsa Branch)
- Oklahoma Interviewing Services
- OK Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence (OCADVSA)
- Intervention and Crisis Advocacy Network – El Reno
- Ascension Saint John Medical Center – Tulsa
- Hope 918 – Springs of Grace Bible Church