

## Women and Children Ordered ‘Like Pizza’—Human Trafficking in Orange County

BY SCOTT RINGWELSKI | November 12, 2019



Orange County, [California](#), which boasts a median household income of \$86,000, is often viewed as a relatively safe, wealthy, and conservative region, one unlikely to be associated with human trafficking. But research has revealed the county to be a destination for traffickers.

The official Orange County [Human Trafficking](#) Task Force (OCHTTF), set up to fight real time sex and labor slavery in the county, released their latest victim report in 2019. Approximately 80 percent of both victims and traffickers in Orange County travel to the area from other parts of the region, the state, and the entire nation.

“This is due in part to Orange County’s tourist attractions, sports venues, beach cities and affluent population,” states [the report \(pdf\)](#). “Traffickers bring their victims expecting to have an abundance of customers and higher profits.”

There were 415 human trafficking victims rescued in the county in the past two years, compared to 509 in 2015-2016 and 371 in 2013-2014. According to the OCHTTF report, a full 73 percent were new victims in 2017 or 2018. Of that total, 87 percent were trafficked in the sex trade while 12 percent were in forced labor.

The United Nations Orange County Chapter 74th Anniversary event, held last month, highlighted this local tragedy. The United Nations defines human trafficking as “modern slavery” — the act of utilizing threat, force, deception, or coercion for the purpose of exploitation.

Kelly Galindo, a professor of film and media arts at Chapman University’s Dodge College, directed an upcoming documentary series on sex trafficking called “26 Seconds.” She visited and filmed sex slave survivors around the globe, including in Thailand, Iraq, Cambodia, India, East Africa, Mexico, and the United States.

“It may sound strange, but of all the places I have visited, I have been most afraid right here in Orange County — tough pimps and lots of guns,” Galindo said.

The title of Galindo’s documentary refers to the UN statistic that every 26 seconds, a child is trafficked somewhere in the world. Each episode of the series guides the audience through a survivor’s experience and point of view in a particular country.

Despite continuing attempts to halt trafficking, she said access to trafficking victims has become far easier due to technology.

“We live in this amazing, yet horrifying online world in which one can be anywhere and order up women and children like pizza,” Galindo said. “They are delivered to [a] home or hotel. The saturation level is at a whole new increasing intensity.”

Paul Chang, the regional anti-human trafficking coordinator at the U.S. Department of Labor, said people desperate for work are at high risk of being trafficked.

“The number one way of entrapping people in sex trafficking is through falsely advertised job opportunities. It accounts for 43 percent of those in the supply and demand chain. Others are sold in by relatives, drop outs from foster care, and even those enticed by a so-called love interest,” he said.

Linh Tran, the administrator of the Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force, said that vulnerabilities developed in children within broken homes also expose them to higher risk of being trafficked. Young victims are forced to carry out duties ranging from providing sex to delivering drugs and even marriage.

She said local traffickers can quickly and easily earn more money selling young women in Orange County than in Riverside or San Bernardino counties.

“One can sell a girl here for an average range of between \$800 to about \$1000 a night,” Tran said. “That’s eight to ten different customers that the girl would be forced to solicit that night.”

The Orange County Task Force has assisted more than 1,037 human trafficking victims since 2004, relying on a wide array of neighborhood partnerships and volunteers in prevention and assisting in rehabilitation after the rescue. In 2010, the organization was one of three task forces identified as a model for combating human trafficking by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Former Chapman student and California state-certified counselor for survivors of sexual assault and human trafficking, Melissa Hoon, said human trafficking is the most invisible crime.

“Human trafficking in Orange County is hidden right in plain sight, right before our eyes,” said Hoon. “It is one of the least known atrocities and it’s happening in our own backyards.”