



ORANGE COUNTY HUMAN TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE RELEASES

2025 HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIM REPORT INDICATING FIRST-TIME DATA ON UNDERAGE VICTIMS

In 2023 and 2024, half of the 411 human trafficking victims assisted were minors; data shows where they were taken from for the first time

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 411 human trafficking victims were assisted in 2023 and 2024
- 50% of all victims were minors: The average age was 14; the youngest was 6 years old
- Notable firsts revealed in report:
 - Female minors made up the largest share of victims: 46%, compared to 37% adults.
 - OCHTTF was able to track where these minors were being taken from
 - 76% were from Orange County
 - 24% were from neighboring counties and states
- 88% of cases involved sex trafficking; 83% of victims were U.S. citizens
- 76% of all victims were new cases
- Racial demographics: 36% Hispanic, 24% White, 23% Black, 9% Asian, 8% Other

ANAHEIM, Calif. (November 5, 2025) – The Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force (OCHTTF) has released its 9th Human Trafficking Victim Report, covering 2023 and 2024, with findings that highlight both alarming vulnerabilities and encouraging progress in prevention. For the first time, data shows that **50% of all victims served were minors, with an average age of 14 years old**. The youngest identified victim was 6. The full report is available at <https://bit.ly/4qG0TYa>.

“The fact that we have youth, from Orange County and beyond being victimized shows exactly why prevention is so critical,” said Michelle Heater, Program Director with Victim Assistance Programs, Waymakers. “When half of all human trafficking victims are minors, it’s not just about protection; it’s about reaching young people earlier with awareness and education, so they have a better chance at staying safe and helping their friends.”

Prevention and Education are Critical to Protect Minors

Since prevention efforts were launched in 2019, the OCHTTF has reached thousands of middle-school students through peer-to-peer mentoring and school-based awareness programs. With the latest report indicating the average age of minor victims was 14, focusing on this specific population of young students is critical. In 2023–2024 alone, nearly **9,100 students across Anaheim, Fountain Valley, Fullerton, Huntington Beach, Santa Ana, and Westminster** participated in prevention education. Surveys from these sessions showed measurable impact:



- **84% increase** in students affirming ability to recognize the signs of trafficking
- **115% increase** in students affirming in knowledge of how to report concerns or access help

Building on this momentum, the OCHTTF announced at the November 5 press conference that “Know More, Do Better”, a prevention and pro social safety event for middle school students will now expand to **South Orange County schools** in its 4th year, for January’s National Human Trafficking Prevention Month, extending their reach to even more youth.

“Prevention strategies can be hard to measure in the long term, but the data shows us that it works,” said Lita Mercado, Chief Program Officer, Waymakers. “Our goal is to keep doubling down, because the earlier we equip kids with knowledge, the safer our communities become.”

Decade of Data Reveals Minors’ Origins, Driving New Prevention Partnerships

Also, for the first time, the OCHTTF was able to evaluate a decade of data to determine where minor victims were taken from. With California consistently ranking No. 1 in the nation for cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, underscoring that the issue is not isolated to one community is critical. Orange County’s data mirrors this national crisis while also revealing its role as a destination hub. Of the 477 minors reported to the County of Orange Social Services Agency (SSA) since 2017 with data on the location of origin, a little over three-quarters (76%) came from Orange County and 24% were from 21 counties across California and 18 states, demonstrating how traffickers take missing children from across the country into Orange County and continually move them to different locations to be undetected as victims.

“This kind of data sharing and collaboration between counties is exactly what strengthens our prevention work,” said Veronica Rodriguez, Chief Deputy Director, County of Orange Social Services Agency. “When we understand where children are being taken from and how traffickers operate across regions, we can close those gaps faster and reach vulnerable youth before exploitation occurs.”

Policy, Prosecution and Partnerships

The report also documents progress on the policy front. Senate Bill 14, passed in 2023 and enacted in 2024, reclassified human trafficking of a minor for commercial sex as a “serious” felony under California’s Three Strikes law. While its full impact will take time to measure, early results indicate stronger accountability for repeat offenders.

“The faces of human trafficking are children, the most vulnerable victims who are being exploited by some of the most diabolical predators that exist. How can you look at the face of a child and know that some monster is



selling them for sex?” said Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer. “Human trafficking will never be acceptable in Orange County. We continue to be unrelenting in our efforts to rescue each and every victim of human trafficking from the clutches of their captors and let me make it unequivocally clear – anyone who trafficks human beings in my county will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.”

“Human trafficking investigations are complex, but through collaboration and training, we’ve become better equipped to identify victims and hold traffickers accountable,” said Anaheim Police Chief Rick Armendariz. “Our partnerships across the Task Force allow us to act quickly and connect survivors with the support they need to move forward.”

The OCHTTF emphasizes that victim assistance referrals continue to come primarily from law enforcement, but community-based organizations are playing a growing role in identifying and connecting victims to resources, an encouraging trend that demonstrates the power of collective action.

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About Waymakers

Every day throughout Orange County, people find hope after trauma. They don't simply survive; they find ways to heal – all with the help of Waymakers, formerly called Community Service Programs. Waymakers' eight model programs guide over 120,000 abused children, crime victims, struggling families, acting-out adolescents and people needing mediation services annually. Waymakers has been sheltering children, supporting victims, counseling families, resolving conflicts and educating communities in Orange County since 1972. Learn more at WaymakersOC.org.

About the Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force

The Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force (OCHTTF) is a multidisciplinary anti-human trafficking effort linked by a network of over 70 organizations including law enforcement, victim service providers, prosecution, nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations, government agencies and the community. The OCHTTF is committed to combating all forms of human trafficking, recovering victims, prosecuting offenders, advocating on behalf of victims, raising community awareness and strengthening collaborative partnerships. For more information on the OCHTTF and resources, visit ochumantrafficking.com.