

## **Localization Story**

While sex trafficking is nationally generating \$99 billion per year, city officials said the Fox Valley area is also largely targeted, despite the disbelief it could be happening so close to home. “Pimps see the Fox Valley area and other areas of the state as lucrative for doing business,” Detective Paul Frey said. “They are able to charge more and face less competition than in major metro areas.”

According to the International Labor Organization, sex trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, coercion, for the purpose of commercial sex or forced labor.

Many neglect to recognize what an issue this is becoming. According to the Department of Defense, sex trafficking of women and children is the fastest growing crime in the world.

In 2018, the Oshkosh Police Department did 58 prostitution related investigations. Police arrested 34 prostitutes, 22 “johns” and 11 pimps were arrested. “Johns” refer to individuals who attempt to pay for sex. Seven of those investigations were labeled as human trafficking investigations, Frey said.

Callie Todarello reported a first-hand sex trafficking experience in 2016. She said it is a topic that’s considered an issue in the Oshkosh area.

“It's happening all around us it's just becoming normalized because we hear about it on the news all the time, but it's also happening right in front of you without you even realizing it,” Todarello said.

Frey said there are several venues for sex trafficking in the area which include online internet ads, strip clubs and massage parlor businesses.

“It is very easy to call or text one of these numbers and have a prostitute come to or be brought to your location,” he said. “Undercover prostitution ads are posted online and up to ten local men would try to buy sex.”

Kathleen Corley, a religious studies professor at UW Oshkosh, also educates herself and other students of the rising sex trafficking problem.

“It’s important for people to step in if they see that someone they know is becoming involved in an unhealthy relationship where it appears someone is being isolated from friends and family,” Corley said.

Frey said there are different kinds of victims who get involved in sex trafficking. Juvenile runaways may find themselves in a sex trafficking situation once they don’t have any food, money, or shelter.

“Obviously the runaway is in no position to pay anything back and they can be forced into trafficking situations,” Frey said. “Sometimes desperate people are forced to engage in sex so they have a place to live or food to eat.”

According to 5Stones.org, one in three runaways will be lured toward prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home.

“Romeo pimps” will often coerce several females into thinking they are in a relationship with them. When in reality, they are being used to make money for the pimp by reeling vulnerable individuals in to be trafficked.

“They may have the victim believing that the pimp loves them and is in a relationship with them,” Frey said. “They may also create a situation where the victim has to rely on the pimp for all their basic needs. This creates a situation where the victim feels trapped.”

Todarello said she believes she was part of a “Romeo pimp” type situation after she encountered two men and two women at a local Toppers Pizza, offering to buy her pizza and convincing her to come back to their apartment.

“There were so many red flags but for some reason I thought it would never happen to me, and to see it so close like that in my own neighborhood was a chilling experience,” she said.

After she reported the full incident to campus police, she said they believed it to be an attempted sex trafficking situation. It couldn't be investigated since it happened off campus. No further investigation was done of her report, she said.

“It's a problem because I've seen it first hand and once you see how real it can be with a personal experience you realize that it can happen to anyone,” Todarello said. “I've been warned about the rise of sketchy activity here but mostly thought it happened at deserted places at night or something.”

It is important to be aware of your surroundings no matter where you are, this is a rising issue everywhere and Fox Valley is not exempt.

“Public awareness and education is very important in preventing trafficking,” Corley said. “It's also important for schools to be aware of those that are higher risk for potential trafficking so that there can be intervention if necessary.”

Original Article: <http://www.oshkoshindependent.com/human-trafficking-awareness-day/>