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The Dark Side of the Boom; Human Trafficking in the Bakken and Possible Programmatic Responses for Helping Professionals

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Abstract

The Bakken Oil Region is quickly growing to becoming the next big economic hot spot in the country. Thousands have flocked for the opportunities to earn money and cash in on the next big boom town. With this proliferation, Montana and North Dakota towns are scrambling to keep up with spike in crime that results from the influx of money, the transient nature of the population, and the lack of connection to the community and social structure. Law enforcement agencies are not the only ones interested in the money and how it is spent. Organized crime has followed suit. Human trafficking has become a commodity; a commercial good to these remote areas and working ‘man camps’ that span more than 200,000 square miles. Not only do trafficking victims include people taken from other countries, but there is growing evidence to suggest that marginalized populations in the U.S., including Native Americans, are at a greater risk of being forced into the trafficking industry. This directly relates to Intercultural Youth and Family Development, as well as disciplines that work with individuals in helping capacities with attention to cultural impacts and sensitivity. On a broader scope, Montana as a state has large rural populations and reservation lands that lends a level of importance in protecting residents at risk for future victimization.

Montana created a human trafficking force in 2012, but awareness of human trafficking in the state and growth of resources to manage the challenges in tackling this problem have been slow. Advocating the spread of awareness of trafficking, recognition of victims, and best practices towards interacting with these individuals across community agencies, academia, and

direct care professionals can improve state wide communication. Information from legal statistics, and reports from those working to provide resources to trafficking victims will provide insight on current approaches and hopes for the future. Comparisons of evidence based practices and outcomes of expressive arts studies will be provided in the context of direct work and secondary trauma of care providers. This includes interviews with helping professionals and refuge organizations that specialize in providing services to human and sex trafficking victims in Montana. Interdisciplinary professionals working directly with trafficking and exploited victims in various settings can benefit from recognition and accessible treatment approaches. Developed SMART goals organize ways of approaching the kind of support and resources victims identify as most necessary in healing and improving their quality of life after such trauma. Montana is in a place to take a proactive stance on eliminating human trafficking in the state. A clear informational resource outline is needed to be impactful before the Bakken's wild west image becomes a more intensified reality, and the actions we could have taken are made in hindsight.