

Kansas Conference on Slavery and Human Trafficking (02/01/2013)

Research Working Group - Executive Summary

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**Executive Summary**

The research working group included students (undergraduate and graduate), faculty, staff, activists, practitioners, and state officials. Participants discussed research partnerships and challenges in conducting human trafficking research, and brainstormed policy suggestions. Perhaps the most important themes from this working group were 1) agreeing on a fundamental definition of slavery, 2) developing testable research questions/hypothesis, and 3) publishing slavery/human trafficking research in well-respected, peer-reviewed journals.

*Developing Research Partnerships*

The goal of the research group was to narrow down the gap in policy research, generate testable questions, and focus specifically on predicting patterns of slavery and human trafficking. Decisive research assertions and findings contribute to advocacy and law enforcement in halting slavery and human trafficking. Kevin Bales and other working group participants called attention to the dearth of pointed research questions and qualitative/quantitative research agendas. Research can help to make invisible problems more visible.

*Research Challenges*

Participants in the working group raised a number of issues to address in promoting a research agenda for human trafficking. The working group suggested a first step would be to define slavery within a community and address this as a cultural issue. Coercion, according to participants, may take on both physical and psychological dimensions. Similarly, research in to human trafficking needs to utilize different analytical programs: gender as an analytical lens, local perceptions of slavery, and non-Western definitions of slavery are missing in current research. Future research stands to benefit from understanding the intersection of gender, race, and other forms of social stratification.

Additionally, participants discussed the relatively inferior position of slavery and human trafficking at universities and government research agendas. Funding shortages inhibit research into human trafficking, and participants suggested that grant proposals to generate data on migration and gender disparity within human trafficking and slavery patterns.

### *Policy Recommendations*

The research group recommended proper dissemination of the knowledge of human trafficking through periodicals like journals and scholarly articles as a solution to the problem of awareness. Instead of working individually or competing, more collaboration and partnerships should exist among stakeholders such as advocacy, political scientists and law enforcement agencies. The research group also advocates for more state protection, cooperative effort and surveillance for children in the United States.