

Outcomes for Human Trafficking Survivors: Development Brief



Background

Providers know firsthand that service programs can transform the lives of survivors of human trafficking. However, the field lacks systematic information about service program outcomes. Specifically, little information exists about the extent of change and the areas in which change occurs as a result of program participation. The Outcomes for Human Trafficking Survivors (OHTS) Instrument was developed to help human trafficking service programs evaluate how their services change lives.

Defining outcomes in human trafficking service programs is often challenging because “success” means much more than clients exiting trafficking situations—it means clients rebuilding their lives. Success will therefore look different for each individual, and pathways to success will vary depending on characteristics such as age, citizenship, and trafficking experiences. Measuring outcomes can also be difficult for programs due to organizational capacity, time limitations, client language differences, literacy challenges, and the need to be trauma sensitive and minimize burden for clients. *Yet human trafficking service programs need information about survivor outcomes to demonstrate program impact.*

Service programs need information about outcomes

At the individual client level	Outcome data can identify progress toward success and point to challenges that may be addressed with more or different resources
At the program level	Outcome data can identify areas in which clients are making progress and those in which changes in resources or service delivery strategies may be needed
At the organizational level	Outcome data can allow leaders to identify program successes and support requests for additional funding
For the human trafficking field	Outcome data can build the evidence base about what works for different groups of survivors and support development of intervention service models

How the OHTS Measures Outcomes

The OHTS reflects the realities of human trafficking survivors and the programs that serve them.

Assessment is based on 14 outcome categories. These outcome categories represent essential life dimensions situated within larger domains of safety, well-being, self-sufficiency, and social connectedness. The outcome categories also correspond to the range of services required by federally funded human trafficking comprehensive service programs. The outcome categories are applicable to diverse program participants: both adult and minor, domestic and foreign born.

The assessment is completed by a case manager who is knowledgeable about the client's current situation. The client is not present at the time the assessment is completed. This approach supports objective assessment of the client's progress and preserves time spent with the client for service delivery. Assessment is based on a 5-point scale that represents the range of client experience and captures meaningful and achievable increments of growth over time.

The OHTS uses *descriptors* that can be observed or understood based on case management interactions with the client. These describe a range of behaviors, situations, knowledge, and skills needed to sustain and advance progress toward goals. The descriptors reflect circumstances that can be addressed through client efforts and program support, even in the context of conditions that may be beyond the client's control.¹

The instrument is programmed in Microsoft® Excel® to facilitate scoring, data management, and data visualization. Data from the OHTS can be exported to analytic software packages such as IBM SPSS® and can also be merged with other evaluation data. This allows evaluations to understand outcomes in relation to process measures such as client characteristics, service needs, program interactions, and client-provided information such as coping, self-efficacy, or satisfaction with services.

OHTS outcome categories

- Behavioral Health
- Physical Health
- Safety
- Housing
- Language and Literacy
- Education
- Employment
- Resource Management
- Public Benefits
- Life Skills
- Legal
- Immigration
- Social Support
- Parenting

Focus on outcomes that clients can control and that programs can facilitate

- **Safety:** Threats to safety may always exist, but clients can make progress by recognizing these threats and making plans to address them.
- **Resource management:** Resources to meet clients' needs may always be limited, but clients can make progress in managing these resources and building stability.
- **Cases may be complex and lengthy,** but clients can make progress in understanding processes and developing self-advocacy skills.

¹ For more information about using the OHTS Instrument, see the *Outcomes for Human Trafficking Survivors Instrument: User Guide* on www.rti.org/human-trafficking-ohts.

Microsoft® Excel® are registered trademarks of Microsoft Corporation. IBM SPSS® is a registered trademark of International Business Machines Corporation, registered in the United States.

Outcomes for Human Trafficking Survivors: Development Brief

OHTS Development and Testing

The OHTS was developed by a team of evaluation researchers at RTI International, with collaboration from human trafficking service providers, researchers, survivors, and program funders. The process addressed key components of measurement, as described in this section.

The starting point for development was a practice-based assessment developed by The Coalition Against Slavery and

Trafficking (CAST), which was a key partner throughout the instrument development process. At each stage of instrument development, RTI incorporated findings from data collection activities involving service providers, researchers, and survivors into revisions that improved the resulting instrument.²

Content validity: Does the OHTS measure what programs need to measure?

No simple definition of “success” exists for survivors of human trafficking. Therefore, the essential first step in the process of developing the OHTS was defining relevant and meaningful outcomes to measure.

Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RTI reviewed evaluation approaches and instruments used by human trafficking service programs.• Expert panels of providers, survivors, and researchers provided diverse perspectives on what should be measured and how it should be measured.
Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expert panels refined conceptualization of “success” to represent progress toward outcomes that occur within multiple life dimensions.• Instrument outcome categories were streamlined to simplify use.• Service providers supported the value of a case manager–completed instrument to reduce burden on survivors and preserve interactive time for service delivery.
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The instrument was refined to include 14 outcome categories that correspond to services provided by comprehensive programs and to address circumstances of diverse clients.• Two categories offer alternative response options for adult and minor clients (housing and education).• Users can opt out of categories that may not be applicable to certain clients (employment, resource management, public benefits, immigration, parenting).• Users can identify outcome categories as client priorities.

Scoring: Does the OHTS represent the range of survivors’ experiences and capture meaningful increments of change?

In order for the OHTS to be useful to providers, its scoring range must represent the range of clients’ circumstances, from the most vulnerable to the most favorable. Because change often occurs in small steps, distinctions between each stage must be clear and meaningful.

Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RTI conducted an online survey with 23 human trafficking program directors and case managers.• Participants viewed descriptors for each of the instrument’s 14 outcome categories and assessed how well these represented their clients who are in crisis, stable, or thriving: were they too positive, too negative, or about right?
Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Across all categories, participants identified 85% of the descriptors they saw as about right (range = 71%–100%).• Participants also shared feedback on the phrasing of descriptors.
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RTI adjusted the range from most vulnerable to most positive functioning and the increments between levels.• Revisions increased focus on components of progress that can be facilitated through program participation and areas where change can occur even in the context of external challenges.• Descriptors were modified for consistent strength-based and trauma-informed language.

² Full reports of the instrument testing process will be published in 2021 and made available at www.rti.org/human-trafficking-ohts.

Outcomes for Human Trafficking Survivors: Development Brief

Instrumentation: Does the instrument’s design make it easy to enter data and produce scores?

The OHTS is intended to be user-friendly and make it easy for service providers to complete the assessment and generate client scores.

Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine case managers participated in cognitive interviews in which they talked with an RTI researcher via web conferencing while they completed the OHTS. Case managers were asked to base their responses on a current client that they knew well. • As case managers completed the instrument, the researcher asked questions about whether the instructions were clear, how they interpreted terms used in the instrument, and how they selected the score for each outcome category.
Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case managers readily understood the terminology used within the outcome categories. • Case managers were frequently confused about the instructions about navigating the instrument, how many selections to make within an outcome category, and how to respond when an outcome category did not apply to the client they were thinking of. • Case managers used different strategies to select scores for each outcome category.
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RTI revised the layout of the OHTS and developed visual instructions to facilitate consistent use. • RTI programmed the OHTS in Excel® to automate and standardize scoring.

Reliability and concurrent validity: Does the instrument consistently measure outcomes over time and when used by different people?

To support evaluations of multiple clients over time, the OHTS needs to be reliable and have strong concurrent validity. In other words, it needs to produce consistent results across users and accurately measure the quality being measured. Because the human trafficking field does not have a standard instrument against which the OHTS could be compared, the RTI team created an innovative approach to validating this instrument.

Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RTI developed six case narratives representing hypothetical clients, which could be used for testing the OHTS. The case narratives included hypothetical clients who were minors and adults, males and females, foreign born and domestic, and victims of sex and labor trafficking. • Each case narrative was assessed by five highly experienced program leaders and 36 experienced case managers, using the OHTS. Assessments by the program leaders represented the standard against which assessments by case managers were compared.
Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ratings by program leaders demonstrated strong consistency in their assessment of the hypothetical clients. Reliability analyses for the 14 outcome categories found that 12 had excellent reliability scores, and the remaining 2 categories had good reliability scores. • Ratings by case managers were also consistent with those of program leaders. Among the 14 outcome categories, 13 demonstrated good or fair reliability between the 2 groups.
Result	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With encouraging results from these preliminary validity and reliability tests, the OHTS is being disseminated for use.

Capacity Considerations

The OHTS was designed for easy use in a variety of settings. However, program leaders should assess its “fit” with their program before adopting it. Consider the following factors:

- **Computers.** The OHTS is not intended for use as a paper form. Case managers enter data directly into the electronic form, which then computes scores for each outcome category. The instrument also creates summaries for individual clients (outcome category scores at a single point in time or over time) and for all clients (average scores across outcome categories).
- **Staff time.** Case managers need dedicated time within their busy schedules when they can access computers and enter client assessments in the OHTS. This function can complement routine case management notes.
- **Training and supervision.** The OHTS was developed to maximize user-friendliness. However, it is essential that case managers understand key definitions and are familiar with the structure of the form. The *Outcomes for Human Trafficking Survivors: User Guide* provides this information and can be used as the basis for an initial training. Equally important, ongoing supervisor review and coaching is needed to ensure that assessments are completed on a timely basis, represent all available information, and reflect case management notes.
- **An evaluation strategy.** The OHTS offers limited data displays, as described above. However, its best use will be as part of a structured evaluation plan. Such a plan would define the program’s evaluation questions, identify all sources of information to address the questions (client characteristics, identified needs, services received), establish guidelines for how data are collected (how soon after intake, how often), and identify analysis strategies. For programs without in-house evaluation expertise, support is often available through university faculty and students or volunteers with related experience.

Building Evidence for Human Trafficking Services

The OHTS is a practice-informed evaluation tool that is grounded in collaboration among researchers, practitioners, and survivors. Its structure and content are developed specifically for the human trafficking field. Stakeholder input and prior evaluations informed definition of outcome categories representing survivor progress in key domains representing successful life beyond victimization.

Testing with experienced practitioners informed RTI’s ongoing refinement of the instrument to include the appropriate range of client experiences, meaningful steps toward success, trauma-informed and strength-based language, clear instructions, and automated calculation of outcomes scores. The OHTS performed well in tests of reliability and concurrent validity. The OHTS is thus the first psychometrically tested evaluation instrument designed to measure outcomes for clients of comprehensive human trafficking service programs.

Development of the OHTS was inspired by the providers and survivors whose passion and hard work create service programs for those affected by human trafficking. Researchers and evaluators support this work by building evidence of “what works, for whom, and how.” Thoughtful and rigorous outcome evaluations are essential to informing human trafficking services and expanding the resources that support them.

Accessing the OHTS and Supporting Documents

The OHTS is available at no cost for use by service providers, evaluators, and researchers. The OHTS, this OHTS Development Brief, and The OHTS User Guide can all be downloaded from www.rti.org/human-trafficking-ohts. Additional information about the OHTS testing process, updated versions of the OHTS, and other information will be posted at this site in the future.

Users who modify the OHTS should acknowledge it as a resource but should not use the name “Outcomes for Human Trafficking Survivors (OHTS),” nor cite the validation study described within this guide or other publications.



Acknowledgements

The OHTS was developed by RTI International, a nonprofit institute dedicated to research that improves the human condition. This work was supported by funding from the National Institute for Justice (Grant No. 2016-VT-BX-0001). Stacey L. Cutbush, PhD, was the Principal Investigator.

The research team acknowledges the critical contributions of generous participation from human trafficking service providers, researchers, and survivor-advocates. In particular, the Coalition Against Slavery and Trafficking

provided early models for the OHTS and was a valued collaborator in the development and testing process.

The suggested citation for the OHTS is: RTI International. (2020). *Outcomes for Human Trafficking Survivors Instrument*. Research Triangle Park, NC.

The suggested citation for this document is: RTI International. (2020). *Outcomes for Human Trafficking Survivors: Development brief*. Research Triangle Park, NC.



RTI International is an independent, nonprofit research institute dedicated to improving the human condition. Clients rely on us to answer questions that demand an objective and multidisciplinary approach—one that integrates expertise across the social and laboratory sciences, engineering, and international development. We believe in the promise of science, and we are inspired every day to deliver on that promise for the good of people, communities, and businesses around the world. For more information, visit www.rti.org.

RTI International is a trade name of Research Triangle Institute.
RTI and the RTI logo are U.S. registered trademarks of Research Triangle Institute.