

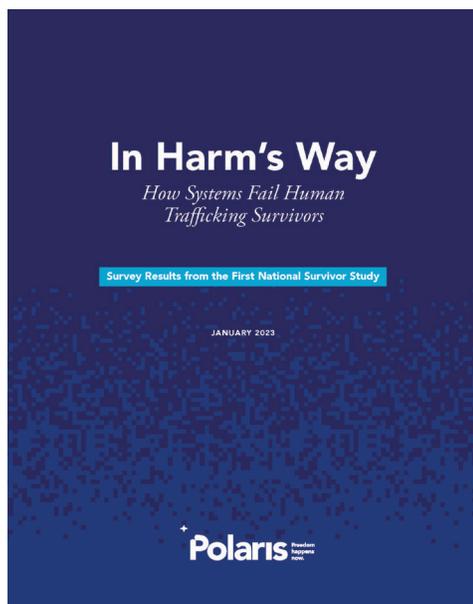
Stop Trafficking!

Awareness Advocacy Action

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FOCUS: This issue highlights the findings of the National Survivor Survey as published by Polaris in the recently released document *In Harm's Way: How Systems Fail Human Trafficking Survivors*.

Failing Human Trafficking Survivors



Polaris, who has operated the National Human Trafficking Hotline since 2007, has built the most extensive known data set on human trafficking in the United States due to that work. In light of this, in January 2023, Polaris published *In Harm's Way: How Systems Fail Human Trafficking Survivors*, which highlights some of the critical findings of the National Survivor Study (NSS); the survey designed to examine survivors' experiences and perceptions of the institutions, structures, and organizations, including health care organizations, that impact their ability to achieve positive livelihood outcomes.

Polaris partnered with survivors from the inception of this project, asking them what areas of the trafficking experience they were most interested in having studied. They also requested partners in the anti-trafficking community to respond to two short surveys to help understand what information would be most helpful in advancing their work. Based on their input, the NSS was designed to examine survivors' experiences with and perceptions of the institutions, structures, and organizations that impact their ability to achieve positive livelihood outcomes. This was achieved through a survey of

457 survivors in the United States, focus groups, and cognitive interviews.

The National Survivor Survey was online and self-administered, with options open for respondents to call in via telephone and participate with the help of NSS team members. The survey and data collection were offered in English, Spanish, or Mandarin Chinese.

Of the survivors surveyed, 86 percent identified as female, and the same percentage reported being born in the United States. Forty-three percent identified as a person of color, while forty-five percent of the survivors identified as a sexual minority (gay, lesbian, bisexual, other). Ninety-one percent of respondents reported experiencing sex trafficking, and 59 percent reported experiencing labor trafficking. This indicates a significant number of respondents experienced both sex and labor trafficking. Thirty-seven percent of respondents experienced familial sex trafficking.

To read more, please click [here](#).

“There are so many needs that you can't get when you have a criminal record. It makes it more difficult to get your employment, it makes it more difficult to get housing, it makes it more difficult to get services. It affects everything.”

– A survivor expert



Awareness

National Survivor Survey

The National Survivor Survey (NSS) is the largest and most significant attempt to learn from the survivors of sex and labor trafficking. This study's data help provide a more detailed picture of human trafficking. This includes the conditions that make people vulnerable to becoming victims, as well as barriers to healing when those same people break free after experiencing exploitation. Furthermore, the data may be used by policymakers and allies seeking to make a change that will benefit survivors.

The NSS is distinctive for two reasons. First, it is the first research study on human trafficking where the primary focus was not on the traumatic experiences survivors have faced in the past, but on their future and what stands in the way of their well-being. Having a complete picture of their experience is the first step towards creating policies and programs to assist former victims not only to survive, but to thrive.



During Trafficking and Exit: The Systems that Fail Survivors

The availability and efficacy of a range of systems, from legal structures and policies to the systems that comprise the social safety net, all play a significant role in how survivors fare during and after their trafficking situations. However, according to the report recently published by Polaris, *In Harm's Way: How Systems Fail Human Trafficking Survivors*, the National Survivor Survey findings show that many of these institutions are failing survivors during their trafficking and as they exit.

Worker Protections

Of survivors who reported experiencing labor trafficking, the most common form of exploitation was being tricked into doing work different from what they were told they would be doing for little or no pay. Many respondents also reported having wages or payments withheld or experiencing debt bondage. Moreover, approximately half of the respondents indicated they were threatened, harmed, or intimidated while working or afraid to leave the place they were forced to work. At the same time, 40 percent reported they were not allowed to leave their workplace, even if they wanted to.

Few labor trafficking survivors knew who they could contact to make a complaint about their working conditions at the time of their trafficking. Only 11 percent of respondents reported an inspector or outreach worker visiting their workplace at least once. This suggests the vast inadequacy of labor inspections across the country, allowing for labor trafficking to go on unchecked. Even worse, it denies labor trafficking survivors the support they are entitled to.

Supporting Recovery: What's Needed and What's Failing

Access to trauma-informed behavioral and mental health services was the top reported need by respondents both when they exited their exploitation and when they answered the survey.

Respondents reported resourcefulness as their most valuable resource in exiting exploitation and rebuilding their lives. Moreover, the respondent indicates a failure of support systems to provide survivors with the resources they most need, including healthcare, employment, and financial services. Essentially, survivors are or feel that they are on their own.

One of the more devastating and distressingly consistent systemic failures survivors reported is how frequently the family court system failed them as they tried to rebuild their lives by gaining or regaining custody of a beloved child. The data shows a severe lack of understanding of the trafficking context within the family court system. Of note, more than 35 percent of respondents with children reported having children with their exploiter.

Employment and Income After Exit

Most survivors had at least regular work, if not both regular and temporary, with only 13 percent reporting that they were unemployed. Nearly 30 percent indicated they worked both regular and temporary positions. Of survey respondents, 43 percent made under \$25,000 annually, compared to 26 percent of the general US population. Moreover, 57 percent of respondents reported they did not have stable work that provided benefits, such as health care, basic disability insurance, retirement, etc. For respondents who reported living in rural locations, 44 percent had an income of less than \$25,000.

These initial findings suggest that most survivors face significant livelihood challenges upon exiting their trafficking situation and for a considerable time afterward. This is the case regardless of their time since exit or racial, sexual, or gender identity.

To read more, please click [here](#).

Law Enforcement and Criminal Records

Whether as a juvenile, pre-trafficking, or after exiting from the trafficking experience, law enforcement and the justice system play a large role in many survivors' lives. Encounters with law enforcement are some of the first institutional interactions for many survivors of trafficking.

Of respondents in the NSS study, 62 percent stated that they were arrested, detained, or cited by law enforcement, and of these, 81 percent reported that this happened during their trafficking experience. The impact of the arrest on survivors is both an emotional challenge

and a logistical one. Of those who were arrested, detained, or cited, 71 percent had a criminal record as a result.

The high proportion of survivors with criminal records indicates that even if adequate support services exist in a given survivor's environment or community, they may not have access to them because of their record.

To read more, please click [here](#).



Advocacy

Australian Companions Offer Unique Support to Victim/Survivors of Human Trafficking

Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking of Humans (ACRATH), was asked by the Australian Federal Police about 14 years ago to support a trafficked woman, to provide the sort of support that a caseworker could not offer. Today, ACRATH's Companionship Program is a crucial part of the organization.

Through the Companionship Program, ACRATH's 13 trained and supervised volunteer Companions offer support and friendship to 34 trafficked women and their 45 children as they face the day-to-day struggles along the journey of healing.

Some of the volunteers have been offering companionship to the same woman for 14 years, others Companion a woman for a short time until she moves on in her life.

The role of each Companion is different, depending on the needs of the woman they are supporting. They listen a lot, they support women through court hearings and finding housing and they accompany parents to parent/teacher interviews to try and achieve better educational outcomes for the children of trafficked women.

Through grants and philanthropic donations, the ACRATH Companions have also been able to help women access emergency dental care and eye surgery, furniture, computer support, tertiary education, rent assistance, prescription glasses, and food during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

"The Companionship program, which receives no government funding and runs on donations, is unique because it offers victim/survivors a consistent kindness without any judgment," said ACRATH's Executive Officer Christine Carolan.



Advocacy

Two ACRATH Companions also offer support to seasonal workers who come to Australia for a short time to work under a government scheme. This work has been crucial in preventing exploitation of workers. It has also helped those suffering exploitation.

Several months ago, after more than a decade of advocacy, ACRATH helped 22 men from the Pacific finally receive an Act of Grace payment as redress from the Federal Government for the exploitation they suffered in Australia while employed under the Seasonal Worker Program.

Christine said the Companions are also an important link between trafficked people and the policy development that comes from advocacy by NGOs, including ACRATH.

To learn more, visit the ACRATH website [here](#).

We welcome this guest article to the Stop Trafficking Newsletter by Angela Duthie, Communications Leader, ACRATH - Australian Catholic Religious Against the Trafficking of Humans.

Debt Bondage Repair Act

In December 2021, President Biden signed the Debt Bondage Repair Act into law. The Debt Bondage Repair Act prohibits consumer reporting agencies (CRAs) from providing consumer reports that contain any negative item of information about a survivor of trafficking from any period the survivor was being trafficked. In addition, the rule creates a process through which survivors can provide information and have adverse credit information resulting from their trafficking experience removed from their credit report. This will allow survivors of human trafficking to do necessary things that require credit scores, like renting apartments, getting sources of credit, gaining access to essential banking services, and being employed.

Unfortunately, there will still be survivors who do not have the evidence they need to prove their victimization.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

Restoring Financial Freedom

Traffickers often use accounts registered in the victim's name to conduct fraud and other financial crimes. Therefore, most banks and other financial institutions will refuse a former victim an account long after they have left the trafficking situation. Unfortunately, there is currently no systematic way for a financial institution to



recognize that an individual applying to open an account is a trafficking survivor. In some cases, NGOs may be able to play a role in verifying for financial institutions that an individual is a trafficking survivor. The bank may provide a “second chance account” or alternative accommodations in these cases.

“Second chance” bank accounts provide an entry point into the mainstream banking system for individuals with poor credit reports or who may have been previously “closed out” by a financial institution after being associated with an account with ongoing suspicious activity. Institutions with second-chance account programs have different requirements, services, and fees. While such program features typically include low or no fees, they also have more restrictions than traditional accounts, such as limiting daily withdrawals.

Given the prevalence of traffickers conducting criminal activity through accounts linked to their victims, special dispensation for survivors, such as second chance account programs, is extremely important. Offering second chance accounts is just one means banks are helping survivors rebuild their lives and prevent further exploitation.

Access to a checking account can be the first step in rebuilding a survivor's line of credit and, therefore, their road to economic stability. Without this crucial resource, survivors may find it extremely difficult or even impossible to regain the most basic necessities, such as safe housing, a new job, a car, or even a cell phone. Such economic desperation, in turn, puts survivors at risk of being re-exploited. For more information, please click [here](#).

Impact of Criminalization on Survivor Health

A **publication** by the University of Wisconsin's UNESCO Chair Working Paper Series - *A Threat to Healing and a Barrier to Recovery: An Assessment of Health Impacts of Criminalization Through the Stages of Domestic Sex Trafficking* by Justine A. Hill and Kelsey J. Mullins, reports on a survey of sex trafficking survivors which found that close to 91 percent had been arrested while being trafficked.

The study finds that criminalization compounds trauma and increases the trafficker's hold over the victim. After the victim escapes trafficking, prior criminalization impedes the survivor's recovery process because it constantly reminds them of the trafficking experience. At the same time, a criminal record disempowers the survivor from reintegrating into society.

The authors call for an interdisciplinary approach focused on the individual survivor and less focused on the prosecution and punishment of the trafficker while continually considering criminalization as a factor of survivor health.

Survivor Alliance

Survivor Alliance is an international non-profit started in 2010 with the vision of uniting and empowering survivors of slavery and human trafficking worldwide to become leaders of the anti-slavery movement. Coming together as a community allows survivors to "speak the same language" and support one another in life after trafficking. These survivor communities are not meant to be the only community in a person's life. Members are encouraged to build communities of faith, profession, recreation, nationality, and any other community that helps them feel a sense of belonging.

Survivor Alliance recently hosted a series of Visioning Workshops as the latest step towards creating its Action Plan for the future of anti-trafficking work. The organization empowers survivors with leadership skills and aims to support the co-creation of a self-led bottom-up movement that will amplify the insight and knowledge of survivors and place them at the forefront of the anti-trafficking sector.

During 12 interactive workshops, 170 survivors from 20 countries engaged in three-hour discussions to collectively reflect on what

they wanted to see and experience from survivor leadership in the sector. Workshops were held in eight languages and different time zones so survivors from diverse geographical and cultural contexts could be involved. Activities included a guided imagination journey, breakout groups for collective discussion, and conversations around five thematic topics: survivor leadership in decision-making positions; survivors leading direct services; survivor-led projects and organizations; the production of knowledge; and a survivor-led anti-trafficking global movement.

For more information, please click [here](#).

Survivor Leadership

The 2022 United States Trafficking in Persons report highlighted the importance of survivor leadership in combating trafficking. The report states how including survivors as partners is critical in establishing trauma-informed, victim-centered, and culturally competent policies and strategies to prevent human trafficking. Engaging survivors in anti-trafficking work will help avoid sensationalism, reduce potential re-traumatization of survivors, and promote more effective criminal justice responses to the crime. Efforts to combat human trafficking and serve victims and survivors are most effective when designed and informed by those who have survived it.



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Action

Changing Destinies Ministry

The Mission of Changing Destinies Ministries, located in North Carolina, is to provide a place of refuge for sex trafficked women through a Christ-centered residential program.



Trauma-Informed Practices for Anti-Trafficking Housing Programs

This resource includes information on housing services for trafficking survivors. The toolkit provides a framework for anti-human trafficking providers that offer housing services can utilize to build trauma-informed, person-centered, and voluntary housing programs for trafficking survivors. Access toolkit [here](#).

Rebecca Bender Initiative



Rebecca Bender brings a message of hope with a radical and fresh perspective on what it means to live in alignment with God's will in today's culture. Rebecca's remarkable story of overcoming a life of sex trafficking has led her to dedicate her life to positively impacting the world.

Rebecca created and hosts [Elevate Academy](#) specifically for trafficking survivors. It is an online, innovative program that equips survivors with business etiquette, professional and leadership development, and a support system for recovery and redemption.

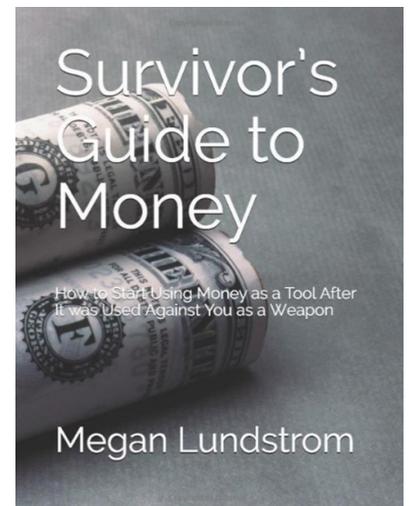
Rebecca is the author of *Roadmap to Redemption*, the story of her journey leading to complete freedom in Jesus. She is also an incredible artist and has an online store featuring her artwork and autobiography, also available at Amazon.

Please click [here](#) for more information.

The Survivor's Guide to Money

Written by a survivor of sex trafficking, *Survivor's Guide to Money: How to Use Money as a Tool When It Was Used Against You as a Weapon* is the first financial literacy curriculum for survivors of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. *Survivor's Guide to Money* is an evidence-based program designed to help survivors develop safety and self-care plans to work through high-stress financial situations and understand financial abuse and its long-term impact on financial wellness issues. This guide examines the concept of self-worth and identifies common triggers around money... and much more!

This workbook is designed to give survivors a framework to understand the financial abuse they endured, identify obstacles, and set goals to work towards on their journey to financial wellness.





The mission of [Fields of Hope](#) is to support young (ages 12-24) female survivors of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation. Through a survivor-inspired curriculum that provides each girl in our programs with challenging learning opportunities and leadership training, they strive to bring hope and empowerment to sexually exploited girls. The program gives each girl the chance to receive valuable job skills training through their program of handmade products, mentorship, counseling, and accountability. These survivors also have the chance to receive hands-on job shadowing at partnering local businesses. One hundred percent of the profits from their products directly supports survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation.

The Avery Center

The Avery Center recently published [Legal Deserts 2.0](#). Human trafficking survivors across the United States find themselves in legal deserts without access to trauma-informed legal services. Efforts to address these legal deserts must be provided with resources, funding, professionalism, and initiatives as outlined in this report in order to change this unjust system.

Promoting Employment Opportunities for Survivors of Human Trafficking

Income security and employment are, for many survivors, the most immediate concern upon escaping a human trafficking situation. Employment and the regular income that comes with it, is the key to long term security and comfort of survivors, however they commonly face challenges in gaining access to high quality jobs and careers. Many workforce development programs often lack the training and practices to effectively support survivors of trafficking with complex barriers. To improve employment outcomes for survivors of trafficking, the Promoting Employment Opportunities for Survivors of Human Trafficking project seeks to help victim service providers identify relevant federal, state, and local workforce development resources in a community; foster collaboration between victim service providers and workforce development programs; and share best practices and models for training workforce development programs on trauma and human trafficking.

[Partnerships and Pathways to Economic Opportunity for Survivors of Trafficking: A Guide](#) offers direction on how victim service providers and workforce development programs can collaborate and form partnerships to enhance survivors' access to quality employment opportunities.

Virtual Panel

Please click [here](#) to view the Virtual Panel: Empowering Human Trafficking Survivors | AFRJ Freedom Council.

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**U.S. Catholic Sisters
Against Human Trafficking**

September 28-30, 2023

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North Shore Conference Center

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