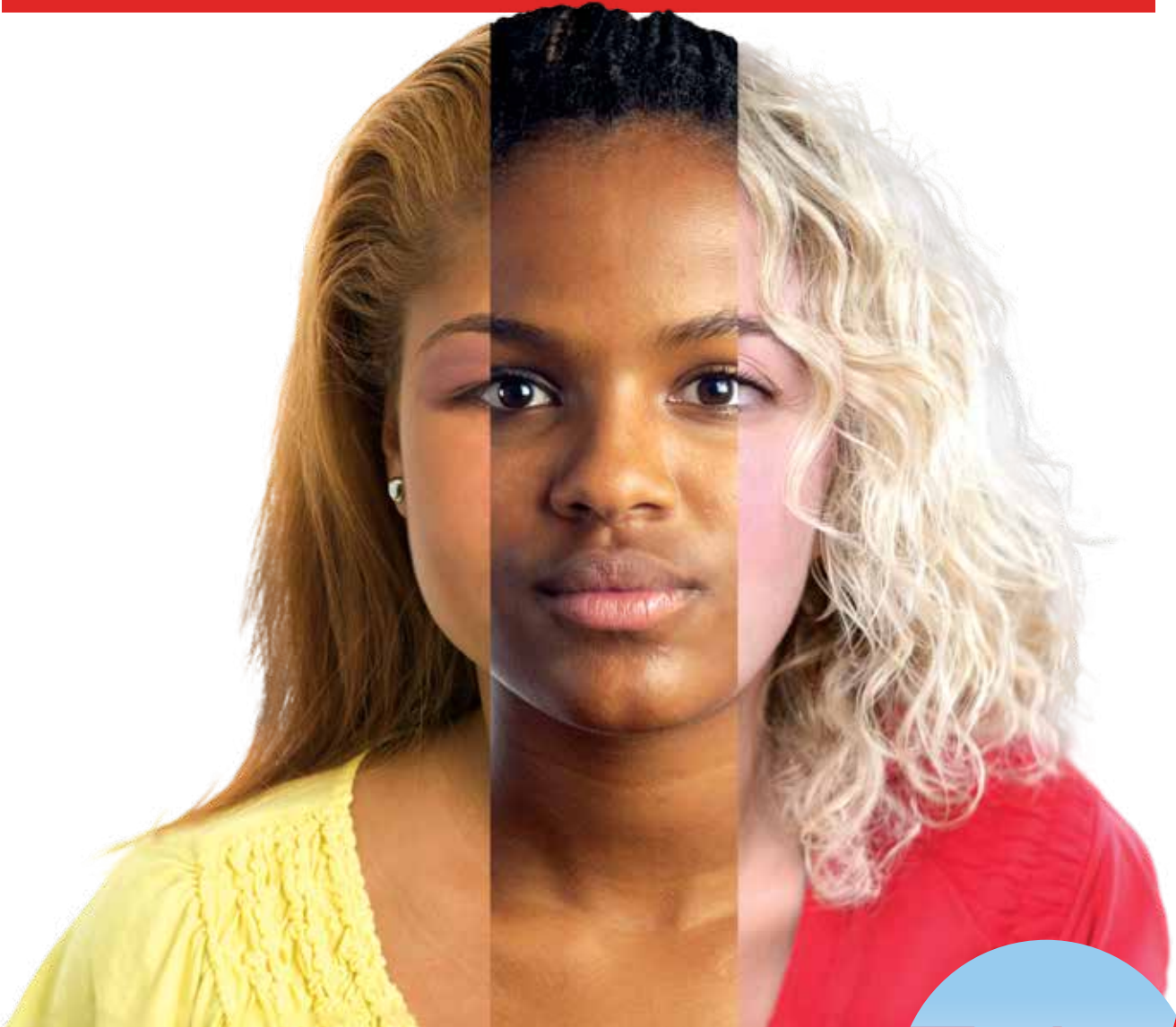


NOTHING ABOUT WITHOUT US

SEX TRAFFICKING IN NEBRASKA: THE SURVIVOR VOICE



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Nothing About Us Without Us *2016 Survivor Voice Report*

The quotes reproduced herein come from Nebraska survivors of sex trafficking who participated in a research study conducted by Dr. Shireen S. Rajaram in the College of Public Health at University of Nebraska Medical Center and Sriyani Tidball in the College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. The survivors whose words appear here are adult female sex trafficking survivors who were 19 years and older at the time of the interview, and who may have been sex trafficked while they were minors. Their words are presented without alteration except to ensure clarity and are reproduced here with anonymity. Photos used throughout this report are NOT photos of the survivors represented within this report. Instead, the photos used are stock images (professional, licensed photos) and are meant to represent the diversity of individuals who are forced, tricked, or coerced into participating in the commercial sex industry.

GLOSSARY

Below are terms commonly used in this report and understood within the commercial sex industry and related fields. Their definitions are presented below to ensure thorough comprehension for readers.

“John” (aka Buyer or Trick) — An individual who pays for or trades something of value for sexual acts.

“The Life” — Refers to the subculture of the sex trade, complete with rules, a hierarchy of authority, and language. Those involved in the sex trade will say they’ve been “in the life” to refer to their time living in this manner.

“Pimp” — A person who controls and financially benefits from the commercial sexual exploitation of another person (i.e. the trafficker). The relationship can be abusive and possessive, with the pimp using techniques such as psychological intimidation, manipulation, starvation, rape and/or gang rape, beating, confinement, threats of violence toward the victim’s family, forced drug use, and the shame from these acts to keep the sexually exploited person under control.

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INTRODUCTION

Sex trafficking occurs when someone uses force, fraud, or coercion to cause a commercial sex act with an adult. Any acts of commercial sex of or with a minor is de facto sex trafficking. National data estimate the average age of entry into the sex trade is 16 years old. Coercion or fraud often include psychological manipulation. Given that commercial sex often involves pimps and facilitators who engage in psychological manipulation, many individuals in the sex trade have, in fact, been trafficked.

This report:

- ▶ Contains information about the context of sex trafficking in Nebraska;
- ▶ Expresses both immediate needs and long-term needs of trafficked individuals seeking to escape and leave “the life;”
- ▶ Identifies solutions proposed by the survivors interviewed;
- ▶ Begins to articulate a vision of a survivor-informed approach to systems change.

The information presented in this report is drawn from an exploratory qualitative research study conducted by Dr. Shireen S. Rajaram in the College of Public Health at University of Nebraska Medical Center and Ms. Sriyani Tidball in the College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Through one-on-one, in-depth interviews with 22 survivors of sex trafficking in the Omaha-Lincoln area, the study amplifies the voices of survivors of sex trafficking in Nebraska, who shared their experiences and beliefs in their own words. While this study focuses on women and girls, it’s important to understand individuals of all genders are trafficked.

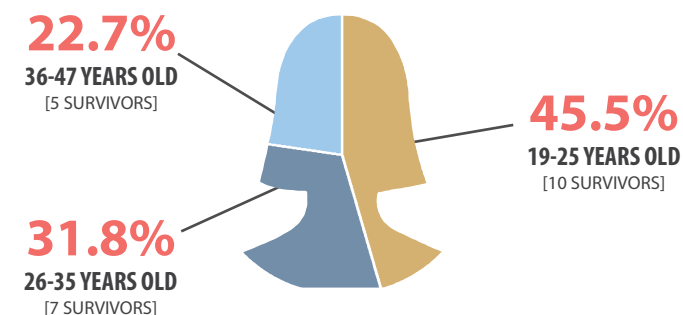
If you suspect sex trafficking, report it to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 888-373-7888 or text HELP to BEFREE (233733). **If you see something, say something.**

VIEW THE FULL RESEARCH REPORT ONLINE AT
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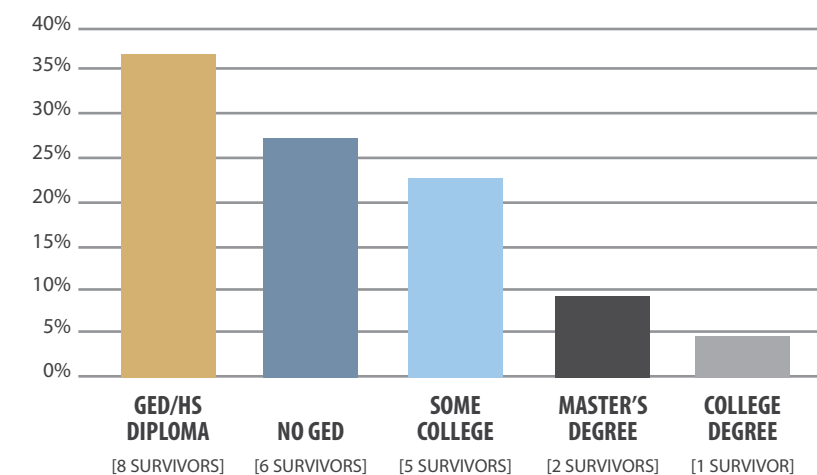
THE SURVIVORS

Through one-on-one, in depth interviews with 22 survivors of sex-trafficking in the Omaha-Lincoln area, the study amplifies the voices of survivors of sex trafficking in Nebraska, who shared their experiences and beliefs in their own words. **Here is a snapshot of those interviewed:**

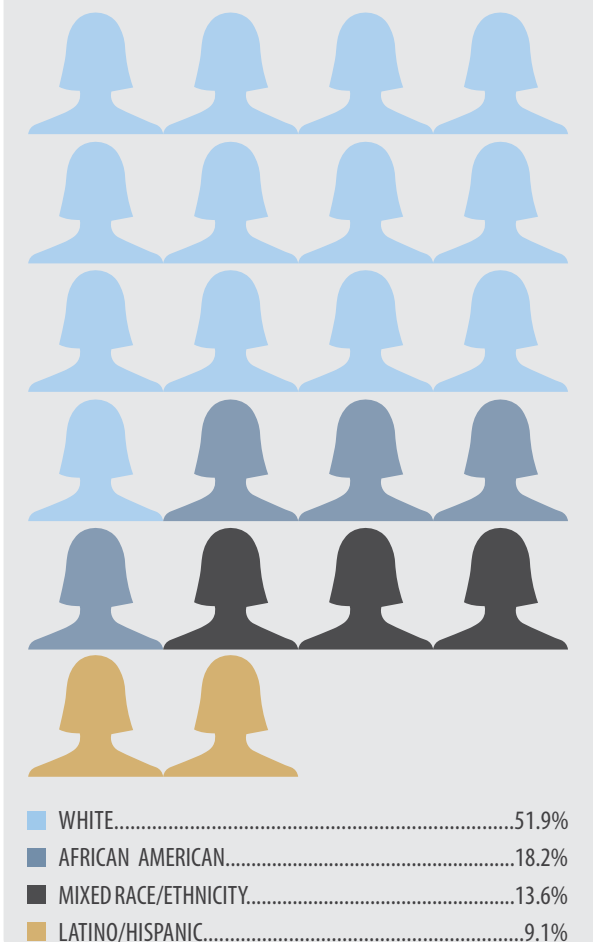
CURRENT AGE



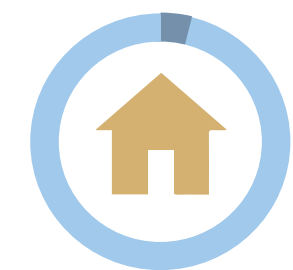
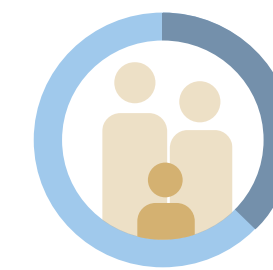
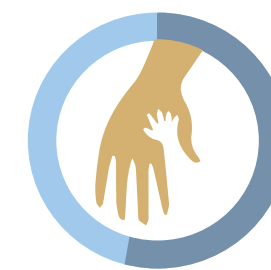
LEVEL OF EDUCATION



RACE/ETHNICITY



LIVING SITUATION WHILE GROWING UP



A LIFE OF FEAR

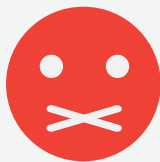
“I was held out of fear. And they’re going to think that their parents are going to be killed. Those are the kind of things that the trafficker, the pimp, holds over you. **To threaten you, to make you submissive . . .** And it isn’t just intimidation, it could actually be torture . . . They withhold things from you so that you just submit to them even more . . . **So that when they say jump backwards, you don’t hesitate but to jump backwards.”**



THE CONTEXT OF SEX TRAFFICKING IN NEBRASKA

According to participants, sex trafficking in Nebraska represents a complex interplay of sex, money, drugs, and coercive threats designed to instill fear in trafficked individuals. Further, participants identified a social and cultural ignorance and unwillingness to recognize and discuss the complex reality of sex trafficking in Nebraska. As a result, the gravity and proliferation of trafficking in Nebraska is largely unknown. Participants indicated that poor understanding of sex trafficking and its distinction from voluntary commercial sexual activity intensifies the stigmatization that many survivors feel. Moreover, participants reported that a fear of retribution or penalization from law enforcement, service providers, and trusted individuals deepens a lack of trust in aid systems. Together, these elements of sex trafficking represent formidable barriers to trafficked individual's ability to leave their traffickers.

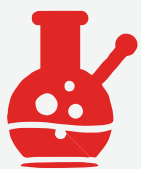
Fear Coerces Women into Being Trafficked and Staying in "The Life"



- ▶ Threats, coercion, violence, and psychological manipulation are used as tactics of control, and represent an integral part of sex trafficking.
- ▶ Fear of being harmed or fear of traffickers harming loved ones makes exit out of "the life" of being trafficked challenging.

"I was held out of fear. And they're going to think that their parents are going to be killed. Those are the kind of things that the trafficker, the pimp, holds over you. To threaten you, to make you submissive . . . And it isn't just intimidation, it could actually be torture . . . They withhold things from you so that you just submit to them even more . . . So that when they say jump backwards, you don't hesitate but to jump backwards."

Drug Trade and Addiction Are Intertwined with Sex Trafficking



- ▶ Drugs and addiction are tactics traffickers use to make escaping and leaving the life harder for trafficked individuals.

"Most of the females out there are under age or they are of age and they're forced to do it. They're hooked on drugs and that's how they can't get out is because they're on drugs and they get that money to keep the drugs in their system...a man that's controlling them and abusing them."

Technology Eases Buyers' Access To and Exploitation of the Market



- ▶ Access points to commercial sex online, including Backpage, allow trafficking to proliferate and remain largely undetected.

"I think the internet drives the demand . . . And just the internet makes it such an easier way to purchase. There's more and more and more because it's so easy and I think that's the thing. It's just so easy for them to find a girl. It's not like you've got to search or anything . . . [Trafficked individuals] don't have to walk corners no more so it's not obvious."

- ▶ Social media is viewed as a threat to young individuals who might be susceptible to being trafficked.

General Public's Lack of Understanding Leads to Systematic Repression of Choices for Change



- ▶ The general public is unaware and ill-informed about the realities and prevalence of sex trafficking in Nebraska.
- ▶ The illicit and stigmatized nature of commercial sexual activity leads to both apathy and discomfort around discussing or recognizing trafficking.

"People use discomfort as an excuse to not get involved or to not discuss it...but, the people who are vulnerable, the people who need us to speak up, we can't just keep walking past them every day and expect them to be okay. If we want to get to prevention, we have to stop being passive by-standers in this."

- ▶ The silence around trafficking can lead to some survivors not recognizing their own victimization.

"The first time it happened that's not what they called it and it wasn't even considered. I didn't figure out until like years later what had actually happened to me and what it was."

Fear of Judgement, Shame, and Victimization from Providers Limits Ability to Seek Help



- ▶ Participants reported being blamed for their experiences of trauma as a result of large-scale misunderstanding of sex-trafficking.
 - Law enforcement and service providers either misunderstand or do not believe the circumstances of sex trafficking, leaving survivors to convince providers that they need help.
 - This re-traumatizes those seeking help and diminishes trust in aid systems.

"I find out about a lot of victims...we all have the same story. When we finally do break free and escape... you're not breaking free, you're not escaping because you're still fighting. Now, you're trying to fight to prove your point...like I was done wrong and a lot of people don't see it like that."

- ▶ Widespread stigma against individuals engaging in commercial sexual activity increases the likelihood that participants would be shamed or mistreated by providers or trusted individuals.

Current Law Enforcement Responses Are NOT Survivor-Friendly



- ▶ Participants reported being blamed by law enforcement for their trauma and disbelieved, due to lack of understanding of sex trafficking.
- ▶ Current practices among law enforcement and the justice system are not trauma-informed, and the sole focus on interrogation and information gathering at the time of reporting can be traumatizing for survivors.

"It's no longer that you are the victim or anything else. You are the information center, and they want all your information, and it doesn't make a difference about torment . . . They're forgetting this is a human who has—just went through, yeah . . . This is somebody who has been murdered inside already."

- ▶ Participants reported being anxious to provide information to law enforcement, but also being fearful of retaliation by their traffickers against themselves and their loved ones.

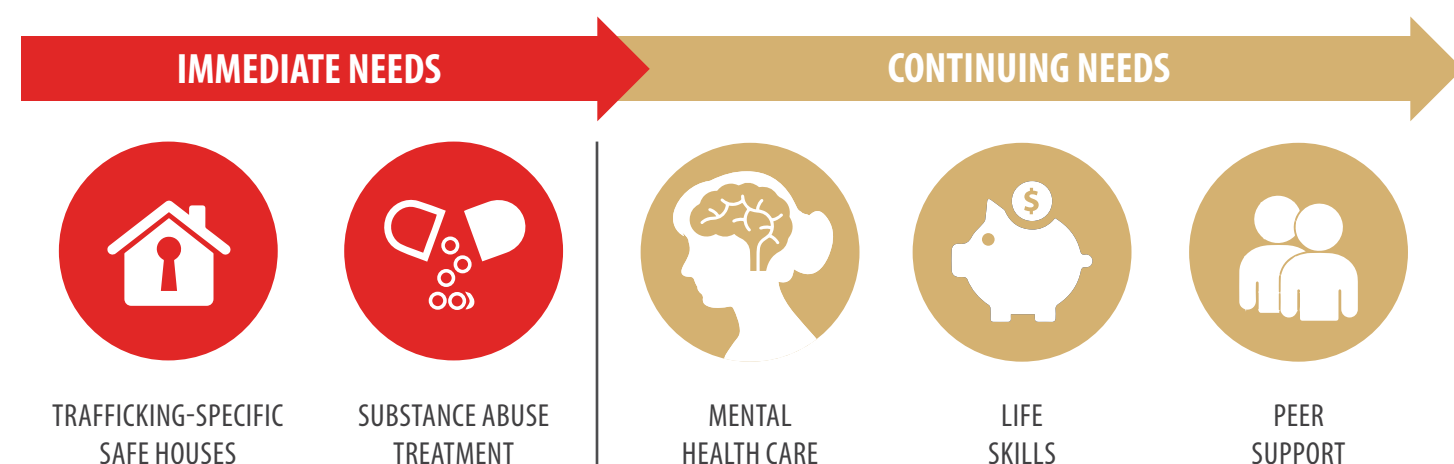
IN SEARCH OF **SAFETY**

“(The community needs) a place where they could feel safe... they don’t have to fear about their trafficker or their pimp coming after them...**they could have basic needs met without any obligations**, but clothes, especially food, warm bed...Is there a safe house for that? **There is a help line but sometimes the phone isn’t the thing that you need. Sometimes it’s knowing the place that you could go to.**”



SURVIVOR NEEDS

The journey to personal freedom for survivors is a long one. Participants expressed that each individual's journey is marked by ups and downs and is often not a straight trajectory towards healing. Instead, they said, each survivor will likely experience both healing and growth alongside setbacks. Nonetheless, participants identified a host of critical needs shared by survivors as they travel through their process of leaving trafficking. These can be separated into two phases—**immediate needs**, and **continuing needs**—with the recognition that individuals experience what are categorized here as “immediate needs” at multiple stages of their journey towards healing.



IMMEDIATE NEED—Trafficking-Specific Safe Houses

- ▶ A safe space away from the trafficker(s) is critical—a hotline is not always enough.
- ▶ Safe houses diminish fear, and should provide basic needs such as food and shelter in the immediate aftermath of escaping traffickers.

*“A place where they could feel safe...they don’t have to fear about their trafficker or their pimp coming after them...**they could have basic needs met without any obligations**, but clothes, especially food, warm bed... Is there a safe house for that? **There is a help line but sometimes the phone isn’t the thing that you need. Sometimes it’s knowing the place that you could go to.**”*

- ▶ Trafficking safe houses should be specific to trafficked individuals, not integrated into general domestic abuse or emergency housing shelters.
 - Trauma specific to trafficking may require counseling distinct from what is available at other shelters.

IMMEDIATE NEED—Substance Treatment

- ▶ Because of the role of drugs and addiction in trafficking, immediate and crisis services need to include a substance abuse treatment element.

*“A safe house with counseling but **it should have rehab in it for the ones that are, you know, they got addicted to drugs.** Because there’s a lot of females out there that have just done cocaine because their pimp got them on that so they don’t leave.”*

CONTINUING NEED—Mental Healthcare

- ▶ On-going, survivor-directed mental health services are needed.

*“Counseling is . . . really big, especially if . . . they’ve gone through it and they’re survivors. Even after they’ve been taken out of the situation, **you still need the aftercare like counseling and support** . . . I know like **in my situation, I received counseling, but it was just until they thought I didn’t need counseling anymore. I think it’s important that you should still have counseling even after that.** Not just immediate counseling, but even you know, some six months a year from then.”*

- ▶ Mental health care helps survivors cope with the trauma of trafficking and their ability to successfully adjust to other parts of their lives, including familial relationships and gaining employment.

CONTINUING NEED—Life Skills (Job Readiness, Financial Literacy)

- ▶ Survivors need to (re)learn basic life skills, such as: basic financial literacy skills (balancing a budget, opening a bank account, applying for a loan), job skills (how to apply for a job, create a resume), and self-sufficiency skills (how to cook a meal).
- ▶ These types of skills are a launching pad for survivors and a potential deterrent to returning to “the life.”

*“Things like teaching life skills. Because **a lot of us girls coming out, we don’t have the life skills.** Budgeting—how do you write a budget . . . when all you’ve done is been a prostitute? You don’t know how . . . maybe get a job . . . **All of those things . . . are stripped from you because you’re no longer yourself. So getting all of those things back, your identity, getting those things back so that you can go out and get a job or apply for jobs.**”*

CONTINUING NEED—Peer Support and Community-Building with Other Survivors

- ▶ Participants reported that a peer support group would be helpful in the healing process.
- ▶ A community of survivors would facilitate the process of working through trauma more comfortably.

*“I still have to live with that and I still have to figure that out, and I’m doing it on my own. **It just seems like if I were able to talk to more survivors, there could be more that could happen . . . for healing . . . I’d like to see a certification program for survivors . . . for peer support nationally . . . so that you know . . . all these people can employ peer support along with social workers . . . A lot of people have, gone back afterwards, and I think that peers could gain trust faster and, and, stop some of the recidivism.**”*

- ▶ Participants suggest:
 - Programs that utilize both trained professionals who were not survivors and survivor mentors;
 - Peer support groups that could be integrated into an ongoing program for survivors.



RAISING AWARENESS

“Awareness for not just the girls that might be in the situation, but also for others to know and watch for signs...‘**cause the victims might not always feel comfortable, speaking out, and then that way if everyone’s aware, then others can also come in and try to help.**”



SOLUTIONS

Participants recommended a breadth of comprehensive services and actions steps to address sex trafficking. Many of their recommendations centered on increasing understanding of the trauma specific to trafficking, especially among first-line service providers including law enforcement and medical professionals. Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of clearly defined support services and proper referral protocols ensuring follow-through in service provision. Significant emphasis was also placed on rethinking strategies to punish buyers and reduce demand for trafficked individuals. Finally, participants stressed the need for all services to be survivor-informed and undergo rigorous evaluation. With such reforms, participants said, providers may be better equipped to respond to the need of survivors in a way that inspires genuine trust.

Public Awareness

- ▶ Education about sex trafficking is essential in reducing the stigma associated with sex trafficking while creating a safe environment for survivors to seek help.

"Awareness for not just the girls that might be in the situation, but also for others to know and watch for signs... 'cause the victims might not always feel comfortable, speaking out, and then that way if everyone's aware, then others can also come in and try to help."

- ▶ There is a need for the following kinds of public awareness education:
 - Education about the signs of trafficking for everyday citizens, families of vulnerable populations, and school teachers;
 - Lessons about healthy relationships, respect, and consent for youth;
 - Lessons about the signs of trafficking for youth and how to identify and reach out to safe adults.

Increased Access to Available Services

- ▶ Increasing the accessibility of information about available services is critical and resources need to be made available to suspected trafficking victims at hotels and hospitals.
- ▶ Discreetly brand everyday items (mirrors, toiletries, etc.) with hotlines and other resources.
- ▶ Utilize social media, posts on Backpage, and/or text messages for information.

"I think that we could use the internet against them and have more awareness by creating pages that are used as tools for awareness, to spread awareness, to put the resources out there. You know, having either like a text service . . . or if a woman needs help, she can text something to a number and they can find her location."

Training for Providers

- ▶ Providers need to be knowledgeable about trafficking, and that using sexual or domestic assault protocol as a proxy for sex trafficking is ineffective and harmful.
 - Common practices that left participants feeling exploited included unnecessarily eliciting a survivor's story and ignoring the emotional and re-traumatizing effect of retelling traumatic experiences.
- ▶ Untrained providers risk further marginalizing survivors and discouraging them from seeking care.

"I went through many psychiatrists who would, when I would tell them my story, literally sit on the edge of their seat. Like, 'Well, what happened next? What would your parents say?' You know, and I'm like, 'Would you like some popcorn with this story?' So, you know, that was a major clue to me that they were not going to be helpful for me."

Curbing Demand

- ▶ Current penalties for buying sex are not sufficient in deterring buyers. In order to curb demand and reduce the likelihood that buyers will seek commercial sex multiple times, participants recommend:
 - Stiffer penalties for buyers of sex;
 - A registry of individuals who have purchased sex;
 - Better follow-up investigations on complaints of trafficking.

"I think there needs to be . . . harsher punishment for the men that are getting caught for doing any of these crimes and um, because when people start getting punished, other people aren't going to want to do it . . . So if no one's getting punished, it looks like an open field for play for everybody."

"Most Johns it's like a \$99 ticket. It's just a little ticket and it's just enough so that it's not on public record. And I feel like they're just as bad as a pimp because . . . like they're the demand so they're making more supply. . . There is no fear, you know, a little \$99 ticket or whatever it says is not going to scare these people."

Developing and Evaluating New Services

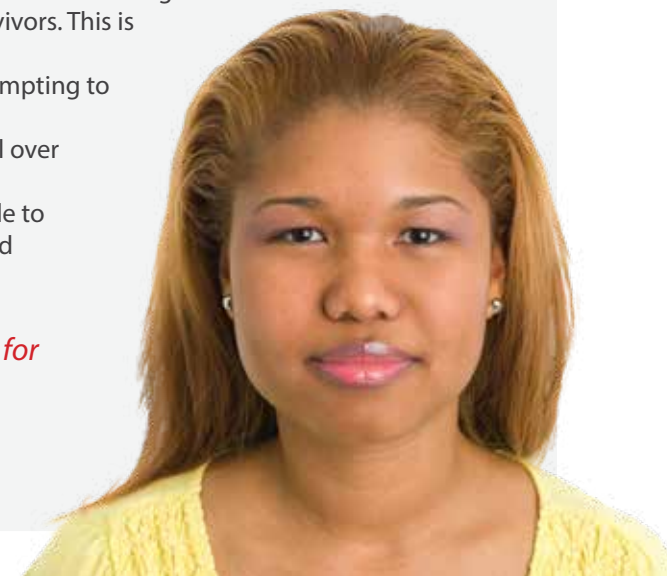
- ▶ In order to be successful, services targeting survivors of sex trafficking must include input and involvement of survivors.
- ▶ Having survivor-informed practices will make survivors seeking help more likely to trust providers/services.
- ▶ Participants identified the following venues for survivor inclusion:
 - Education and outreach;
 - Direct service to other survivors;
 - Collaborative teams that coordinate services to survivors.

"Honestly, the voices of the survivors get forgotten a lot, and we look to professionals in whatever industry we're talking to, to answer the questions that they've never thought about asking . . . I honestly would like to have a survivor that's trained and has a good support system in place to be in some kind of leadership in every part of the state . . . there's a piece that gets missed a lot, that even though professionals might know certain things more, there's some things that they don't know and that's okay, but let's include the people who do know . . . we need to be more welcome to say something and to be listened to."

Record Expungement

- ▶ Participants stressed the importance of expunging survivor records of prostitution charges and eliminating the possibility for such charges being brought upon survivors. This is critical because:
 - The fear of legal consequences prevents some individuals from attempting to leave their trafficker;
 - Traffickers often use legal ramifications as threat to maintain control over trafficked individuals;
 - Felony charges and other citations prevent survivors from being able to access job opportunities and housing, which increases the likelihood that a survivor would return to "the life."

"I think they need to offer them expungement. Expunge their record for those crimes so the girls get their lives together and can function in society again."



CONCLUSIONS



TRAUMA-INFORMED
The complexity of sex trafficking makes the chances of doing further harm to people who are trafficked high. Additionally, ignorance about trafficking allows for it to exist while remaining largely undetected.



AWARENESS
The general public’s lack of understanding of the problem negatively impacts survivor ability to effectively seek help while feeling safe and believed.



SPECIFIC PROTOCOLS
A lack of consistent referral protocols or services means that services are not often successful by design. Services intended for use by domestic violence and sexual assault survivors (i.e. services not specifically created for survivors of sex trafficking) may end up serving trafficking survivors, who are not their target clients.



SERVICES
There is a need to re-adjust the service community’s expectations for the longevity and pace of service provision to take into account the length of survivors’ healing journeys.



SURVIVOR VOICE
The unique perspectives of people who have formerly been trafficked are key to effectively responding to the needs of survivors. Without the input and involvement of survivors, the professional community will not be successful on its own.



TRAINING
Increasing public awareness and understanding of the issue and training those who routinely encounter sex trafficking survivors may help reduce the stigma associated with trafficking and increase the identification of survivors.

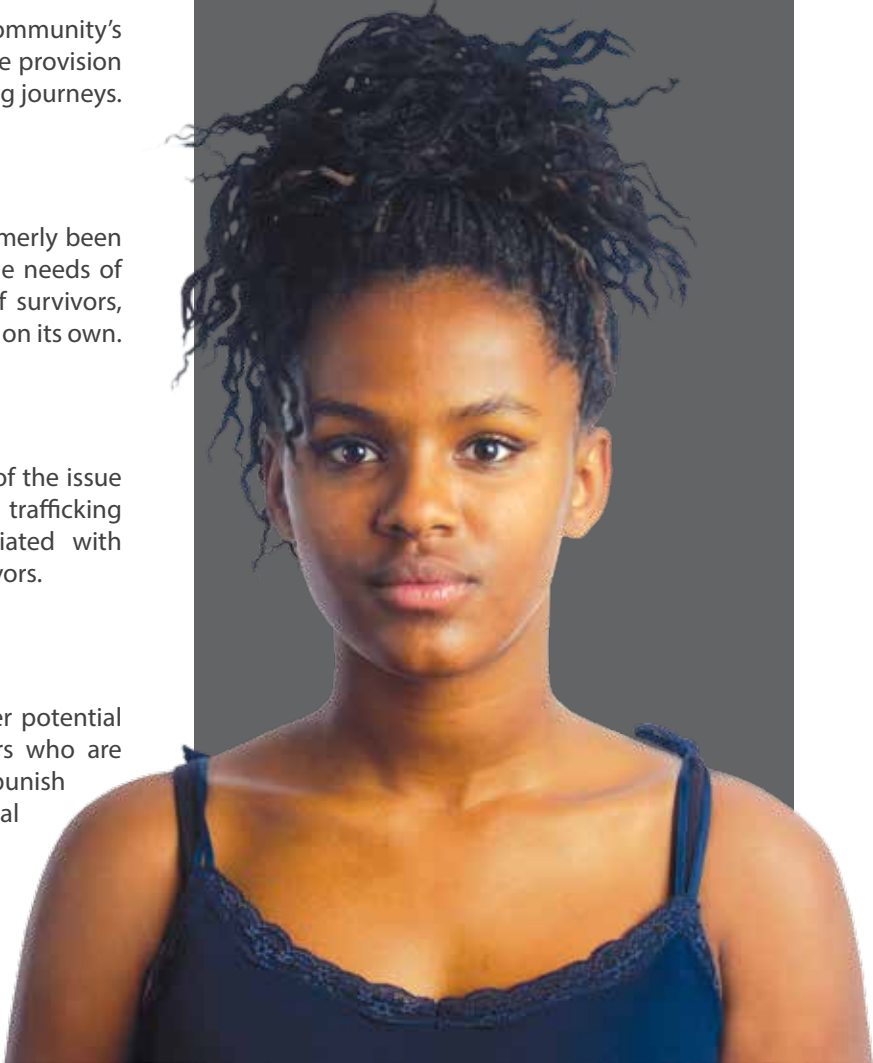


DEMAND
Enhanced penalties for purchasing sex may deter potential buyers and more adequately respond to buyers who are apprehended. Currently, there is little to deter or punish the buyers who perpetuate the cycle of commercial sexual exploitation.

IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING.

If you suspect sex trafficking, report it to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 888-373-7888 or text HELP to BEFREE (233733).

The power to make Nebraska a safe place rests with each of us.
Help us tackle sex trafficking in Nebraska. Exert your influence. Contact your legislators. Support community efforts to serve survivors of sex trafficking.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Preventing, identifying, and serving survivors of sex trafficking and addressing the demand requires **a multi-system, coordinated and collaborative approach** focused on prevention, protection of survivors, provision of services, and prosecution of perpetrators. Across all services, providers must honor and recognize the complex reality of the lived experience of sex trafficking survivors in Nebraska. Services need to be:

1	Easy to access, coordinated support, with few barriers to entry
2	Holistic (tending to multiple needs including mental, physical, and social)
3	Trauma-informed
4	Culturally-appropriate
5	Journey-orientated
6	Collaborative
7	Survivor-informed
8	Non-judgmental

Demand for commercial sex drives the sex trade industry. **An effective strategy to combat sex trafficking must include a comprehensive approach to end demand, including:**

PREVENTATIVE EDUCATION
that focuses on raising awareness about sex trafficking in order to foster a community-wide investment in ending commercial sexual exploitation;

INCREASED PENALTIES
for purchasing sex to deter both potential and former buyers;

INCREASED RECOGNITION
of the signs, vulnerabilities, and risk factors of trafficking, while teaching the importance of consent and respect in all relationships.

Rajaram, S.S. & Tidball, S. (2016). Nebraska Survivor’s Speak – A Qualitative Research Study. Preliminary Report submitted to the Women’s Fund of Omaha.



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