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**Forward to the COVID-19 Supplemental Issue**

**COVID-19's Impact on Anti-Trafficking Efforts: What do we know?**

**The Impact of COVID-19 on the Identification of Victims of Trafficking and Their Access to Support Services in Australia**

**Critiquing America's Response to Human Trafficking: Race, Gender, and Colonialism Narratives in a COVID-19 Context**

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**Pivoting technology: understanding working conditions in the time of COVID-19**

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**The Impact of COVID-19 on Survivors of Modern Slavery in Kenya**

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## COVID-19 SUPPLEMENTAL ISSUE

### ABSTRACTS

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## **Foreword to the COVID-19 Supplemental Issue** *The Journal of Modern Slavery*

**Dr. Helen McCabe**

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The global pandemic of COVID-19 represents a large and sudden exogenous shock to the world, and is having a significant impact on almost every single human being's life in 2020 either in terms of their health, or those of their loved ones, or the consequences of the ensuing economic downturn. Given this, there are likely to have been severe consequences for people experiencing modern slavery; people at risk of modern slavery; survivors of modern slavery; those engaged in, or profiting from, modern slavery; and those working to combat it across the world. At the moment, however, as the pandemic continues to rage, a comprehensive understanding of the economic and social evidence of the effects is not available.

This Special Issue gives us the opportunity to highlight some of the research which is being done across the world to investigate, chart, and analyse the impact of COVID-19 on human trafficking solutions. A wealth of work is being done, both new research and the adaptation of existing projects to respond to this crisis. Researchers share insights into the impact on people vulnerable to modern slavery; those already experiencing it; those perpetrating it; those trying to fight it; and those trying to understand it as researchers and practitioners.

Hanley and Gauci sound an important warning note as to how COVID-19 might push efforts to monitor and address human trafficking down the international political agenda, while Chazal looks at the specific case of the impact of COVID-19 on the abilities of relevant agencies to work on preventing modern slavery in Australia during the pandemic. Mahaffrey considers the impact on anti-trafficking efforts in Oklahoma, particularly among indigenous populations. Several researchers consider the impact of COVID-19 on those already at risk of modern slavery. Byrne, Bradley, Khumallambam and Sahariah explore how COVID-19 has impacted on women in India, and how the pandemic highlights how vulnerability and resilience to modern slavery is fluid. Thinyane and Gallo track the impact of COVID-19 on companies in Southeast Asia. Hansen et al

consider its impact in the Ready-Made Garment industry in Bangladesh, while Sahai explores the impact on migrant workers from the same country. Niezna, Kurlander and Shamir scrutinise the impact on migrant workers in Israel. Ewan considers the impact on forced sexual exploitation across the world, while Iyer et al consider the specific impact on child sexual exploitation in India.

McGaughey tracks the impact of COVID-19 on increased risk of modern slavery in Australian companies' supply chains – and the question of whether these were tackled, or whether the pandemic has let some companies off the hook in meeting their obligations to tackle this problem.

Others are exploring the effects of COVID-19 on survivors. Hogan and Roe-Sepowitz explore the impact of COVID-19 on survivor-support services in Arizona, and Chazal and Raby for Australia. Cordisco Tsai and Eleccion report on the impact of survivors in the Philippines. Lastly, Brewster examines the impact on “county-lines” child exploitation for drug-trafficking in the UK.

The research in this special issue also looks at good practice, resilience and adaptation. Valverde-Cano considers good practice by some European states regarding asylum and migration during the pandemic, and what lessons could be learned from this for the future. Thinyane and Gallo explain how changes to their research due to COVID-19 led to the adoption of remote monitoring with modifications to their existing Apprise Audit tool so that working conditions could continue to be scrutinised during the pandemic. Brady, McCabe and Otiende report their methodological adaptations for working remotely with survivors of human trafficking in Kenya

There is no doubt that COVID-19 has had, and will continue to have, a significant, negative effect on modern slavery and efforts to end it, seriously jeopardising our chance of achieving the global goal of ending it by 2030. There are important lessons to be learned from this research in order to try to mitigate these impacts as much as possible. We look forward to sharing more in-depth findings in 2021 when this on-going research has more detail, and more recommendations, to communicate.

# COVID-19's Impact on Anti-Trafficking Efforts: What do we know?

**Idel Hanley**

Research Fellow, The British Institute of International and Comparative Law

**Jean-Pierre Gauci**

Senior Research Fellow, Public International Law and Director of Teaching and Training, BIICL

Early analysis indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying emergency measures have not only increased individual vulnerability to human trafficking<sup>1</sup>, but have severely disrupted victim access to, and state provisions of, protection services. It is therefore as urgent as ever that state anti-trafficking efforts are interrogated, evaluated and held to account.

This submission endeavours to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on the development and implementation of national anti-trafficking laws and policies. The aims of the submission are twofold. Firstly, it will take stock of the impact that the pandemic and accompanying measures have had on anti-trafficking efforts; this will include examining gaps both created and exacerbated in anti-trafficking law and policy. Secondly, in light of these findings, it will analyse existing international legal and institutional anti-trafficking frameworks to examine whether they are fit for purpose to deal with sudden onset crises, including public health crises.

The impact of COVID-19 and corresponding measures will be analysed in the short and the long term. This will allow the research to firstly capture their immediate impact on the implementation of anti-trafficking efforts (e.g. restrictions on services due to social distancing requirements). Secondly, it will examine the longer-term obstacles and difficulties, including the direct consequences of resource reallocation and the shifting of political and policy priorities, and the indirect impact of the prolonged economic downturn. It will question whether the

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<sup>1</sup> Global Protection Cluster: Anti-Trafficking Task Team, 'COVID-19 Pandemic Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Considerations in Internal Displacement Contexts' (Global Protection Cluster 2020) <[https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/GPC-Task-Team-on-Anti-Trafficking\\_COVID-guidance\\_final\\_SM.pdf](https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/GPC-Task-Team-on-Anti-Trafficking_COVID-guidance_final_SM.pdf)> accessed 16 September 2020; OSCE, ODIHR, UN Women, 'Guidance: Addressing Emerging Human Trafficking Trends and Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic' (OSCE, ODIHR, UN Women 2020) <[https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/a/458434\\_1.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/a/458434_1.pdf)> accessed 16 September 2020; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Trafficking in Persons' (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2020) <[https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/HTMSS\\_Thematic\\_Brief\\_on\\_COVID-19.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/HTMSS_Thematic_Brief_on_COVID-19.pdf)> accessed 16 September 2020.

current international legal frameworks are adequate to deal with sudden crises, and explore routes to strengthen existing frameworks to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and future emergencies.

Discussions with leading anti-trafficking experts, [through our webinar and summarised in our blog](#), indicate that in the short-term, the pandemic and corresponding restrictions have exacerbated individual vulnerabilities to trafficking; increasing poverty levels and decreasing employment opportunities risk pushing workers into illegal economies with a higher risk of exploitation and trafficking. The pandemic is economically affecting 'low-skilled workers, undocumented migrant workers and workers in the informal economies', rendering them more vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking.<sup>2</sup> The experts emphasised that traffickers are quick to adapt, shifting to online exploitation and exploiting particular vulnerabilities. The agility of traffickers is yet to be matched by governments.<sup>3</sup> The discussion further highlighted the disruption to accessing protection from state and non-state actors and limited assistance provisions for those in trafficking situations. Meanwhile, processes for monitoring state efforts and their compliance with international obligations have also been hampered.

The grey literature reviewed thus far echoes the insights of our webinar. Research reveals the difficulties that social distancing requirements and mobility restrictions have imposed on protection service providers, resulting in shelter closures and NGO advice only being available by phone.<sup>4</sup> A survey conducted by UN Women, OSCE and ODIHR reveals the negative impact on governments' capacities to combat trafficking, particularly affecting the functioning of NRM systems, 'identification procedures, sheltered accommodation and social services'.<sup>5</sup> Border closures may also be negatively affecting international cooperation and

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<sup>2</sup> Livia Wagner and Thi Hoang, 'Aggravating Circumstances: How Coronavirus Impacts Human Trafficking' (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime 2020) Policy Brief 1 <<https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Aggravating-circumstances-How-coronavirus-impacts-human-trafficking-GITOC-1.pdf>> accessed 16 September 2020.

<sup>3</sup> OSCE, ODIHR, UN Women (n 1) 24.

<sup>4</sup> Group of Experts on Action and against Trafficking in Human Beings, 'In Time of Emergency the Rights and Safety of Trafficking Victims Must Be Respected and Protected' (Council of Europe 2020) <<https://rm.coe.int/greta-statement-covid19-en/16809e126a>> accessed 16 September 2020; see also OSCE, ODIHR, UN Women (n 1) 25; Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT), 'COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact for Victims and Survivors of Trafficking in Persons' (Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT)) 1 <[https://icat.network/sites/default/files/publications/documents/28%20April\\_COVID%20ICAT%20webstory%20and%20list%20of%20resources%20%283%29.pdf](https://icat.network/sites/default/files/publications/documents/28%20April_COVID%20ICAT%20webstory%20and%20list%20of%20resources%20%283%29.pdf)> accessed 16 September 2020.

<sup>5</sup> OSCE, ODIHR, UN Women (n 1) 22.



communication.<sup>6</sup> More broadly, the pandemic has shone light on and exacerbated existing gaps in governments' protection systems, including health provisions for trafficked persons.<sup>7</sup>

In the longer-term, research underscores that COVID-19 has forced governments to re-consider their priorities and divert resources to address the pandemic. This has resulted in reduced capacity for anti-trafficking efforts by law enforcement, justice systems and service providers.<sup>8</sup> The UNODC highlights that 'there is a looming danger that investigating trafficking in persons will become a lower priority and that proactive inspections of suspect sites and cases are reduced', which may impact 'arrests, investigations, prosecutions and convictions, leading to a climate of practical impunity'.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, there is concern that the economic downturn and the urgency of public health measures will have a prolonged impact on governments' abilities to mobilise sufficient resources to redress the negative impacts of the pandemic thus far, to adapt to the changing nature of trafficking, and to prepare for a sudden onset of future crises.

Whilst there are examples of good practice<sup>10</sup>, the question remains as to whether these policies are reaching those in most need of protection. Respondents to the UN Women, OSCE, ODIHR survey emphasise the need for more efforts 'to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic on at-risk groups vulnerable to THB... and those whose vulnerability has been exacerbated due to the subsequent economic downturn'.<sup>11</sup> They notably express a 'strong interest' in developing a national protocol on prevention and protection 'during states of emergency, including pandemics'.<sup>12</sup>

With regard to the question of whether the current legal and institutional frameworks are fit for purpose, our webinar discussion emphasised the need to ensure that crises cannot be used as an excuse for neglecting non-derogable

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<sup>6</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (n 1) 3.

<sup>7</sup> Wagner and Hoang (n 2) 21.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (n 1); Group of Experts on Action and against Trafficking in Human Beings (n 4).

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (n 1) 3.

<sup>10</sup> Wagner and Hoang (n 2) 22. See also [our webinar and blog](#).

<sup>11</sup> OSCE, ODIHR, UN Women (n 1) 26.

<sup>12</sup> OSCE, ODIHR, UN Women (n 1) 27.

obligations, a view echoed by GRETA.<sup>13</sup> The creation of a more resilient protection system that is not vulnerable to funding cuts and that adopts a broad rights-based approach to address systemic inequalities was urged. Our research (through methods outlined below) endeavours to analyse the impact of the pandemic on anti-trafficking efforts and further examine the suitability of existing international anti-trafficking frameworks.

This submission will build on a research project currently being undertaken at the British Institute of International and Comparative Law assessing the [determinants of anti-trafficking efforts](#) worldwide. It will be based on an expert webinar, expert interviews, a global survey and accompanying desk research.

Further to the webinar discussion, we will undertake a series of expert interviews. This research will also collect a new evidence base through a global survey concerning the determinants of anti-trafficking efforts. This survey will include questions specifically concerning COVID-19 and will be distributed to stakeholders globally. The questions will ask respondents to evaluate the extent to which COVID-19 has impacted their country's anti-trafficking efforts, and to provide examples thereof. Respondents will include, but are not limited to, government officials, non-governmental organisations, trade unions, survivor groups, lawyers, local government and intergovernmental organisations.

The desk research will involve analysing grey literature from government, non-governmental and inter-governmental sources to explore the intricacies of state responses and evaluations thereof. It will endeavour to highlight good and poor practice. It will also review early academic analysis (including journal articles, blogs and reports) of state responses to COVID-19.

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<sup>13</sup> Group of Experts on Action and against Trafficking in Human Beings (n 4) 2.

# **The Impact of COVID-19 on the Identification of Victims of Trafficking and Their Access to Support Services in Australia**

**Dr. Nerida Chazal**

University of South Australia

**Ms Kyla Raby**

Australian Red Cross

Research has highlighted the difficulty associated with detecting victims of human trafficking and slavery (Segrave & Milivojević 2010) and explored the numerous barriers that prevent victims from accessing support services (Davy 2017; Larsen & Renshaw 2012). COVID-19 is likely to exacerbate the underlying challenges for victims of slavery in both being identified and accessing support services. The pandemic has produced profound social change, and this has placed significant strain on the criminal justice system, government agencies and non-government organisations all of which play a key role in identifying victims and offering them support. Additionally, a heightened climate of fear, generated from misinformation or lack of information on COVID-19, may further prevent slavery victims from accessing help or receiving adequate support if they are detected. This article will explore these issues by using empirical data and qualitative interviews to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on human trafficking victims in Australia. The article answers two key research questions: how has COVID-19 impacted the identification of victims of human trafficking and slavery in Australia? And, how has COVID-19 impacted victims' access to support services in Australia?

Firstly, the article will measure how the diversion of police resources is impacting the detection of trafficking and slavery victims and limiting the referral of victims to support programs. In Australia, the provision of support services is closely linked to criminal justice procedures, and the Australian Federal Police (AFP) play a key role in referring trafficking victims to support services (Davy 2017). Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the AFP have been an integral part of the national COVID response, and in early April the AFP redeployed 102 staff to COVID-related "Operation PROTECT" (AFP 2020). Similarly, state and territory police forces have poured considerable resources into policing state borders,

enforcing quarantine measures, and undertaking COVID-19 compliance checks (Hunt 2020). To determine how this redirection of resources is influencing the detection of trafficking and slavery victims, we will compare the monthly statistics of referrals by the AFP to the Australian Government funded victims support services for the 6 months between March to July 2020, with the previous 6 month period of October 2019 to February 2020. Based on initial conversations with key stakeholders, it is expected that data will show a notable decline in referrals. Secondly, the article will explore how restrictions on community services and infrastructure will impact the identification and support of victims. Hospitals and medical staff play an important role in identifying victims of trafficking, slavery and slavery like offences (Hachey & Phillippi 2017). Cancellation and limitations of elective surgeries and medical procedures to resource the COVID-19 response may have decreased the opportunities for people in a situation of trafficking or slavery to be identified or actively seek help from medical staff. Additionally, a notable proportion of referrals to the AFP in relation to cases of forced marriage in Australia are made directly from schools (ARC 2019). School closures and a move to online learning may have decreased opportunities for minors to access support from teaching and education staff (in particular school counsellors) and increased their time in the family home, potentially exposing them to higher levels of coercion and pressure to marry (Sundari & Gill 2009).

Finally, the article will examine how financial and resource-based pressure stemming from COVID-19 on the non-government organisations who deliver support services to victims is likely to compromise the provision of victim support. Many grassroots, community organisations that play key roles in both identifying and supporting victims of trafficking and slavery, have had to place limitations on their services. The impacts from the economic fallout will likely continue for many years and therefore the support services available to victims of trafficking and slavery will be long term.

To understand how these issues are playing out in the field, the article includes the findings from semi-structured interviews with staff from organisations supporting victims of trafficking and slavery in Australia. This includes interviews with national government organisations such as the Australian Federal Police, The Department of Home Affairs, the Department of Social Service and the Australian Institute of Criminology. Interviews will also be conducted with key non-government organisations working at the national level to support victims of trafficking. Examples of the organisations working in this space include: the Australian Red Cross, the Salvation Army, Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans, the Walk Free Foundation, and Anti-Slavery Australia.

These governmental and non-governmental organisations have been selected based on their roles in identifying victims and referring them to official support program, as well as their broader role in supporting victims of modern slavery. The interviews will be conducted in November 2020 which will enable participants to comment on trends they have experienced over the past year, giving a good picture of the impact on COVID-19 on victim identification and support. Interview data will be analysed using thematic analysis in NVivo to elicit key themes raised by participants. The interview data will complement the analysis of empirical referral data to offer a fuller picture of the impact of COVID-19 on the identification of victim and provision of victim support in Australia.

### **Timetable:**

August: ethics approval for interviews (The University of South Australia is fast-tracking the ethics process for COVID-19 related research and we are currently working on this submission).

September & October: collate data from sources, undertake literature review on victim identification and the provision of support services.

November: Conduct interviews.

December & January: analyse interview data and data on referral numbers.

February & March: write up article for submission by April.

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# Critiquing America's Response to Human Trafficking: Race, Gender, and Colonialism Narratives in a COVID-19 Context

**Lucy Mahaffey**

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## Overview

In January President Trump signed an executive order<sup>1</sup> creating a position on his domestic policy team to focus exclusively on human trafficking. The summit for this commemorated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, the backbone of US trafficking legislation and a foundation for legislation globally. Some anti-trafficking groups praised Trump's attempt to spotlight the issue, but others boycotted it pointing out immigrant victims have been ignored or harmed by his response. Barely two months later, the world saw the outbreak of COVID-19, and its ever-growing presence and impact has caused unprecedented shifts in how humans interact with policy, the economy, and each other.

While the US has had twenty years to evolve anti-trafficking efforts, Bales<sup>2</sup> describes it as "simplistic, emotive, disparate, and disorganized." Risley<sup>3</sup> breaks down US response further, commenting it "supports the infantilization, demonization, dehumanization, and sexual commodification of the 'Other.'" In 2016, there were an estimated 40.3 million<sup>4</sup> human trafficking victims globally and 60,000 in the US. Gerasimov describes human trafficking as "a symptom, not as a disease itself,"<sup>5</sup> citing larger structural vulnerabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has created more vulnerable populations, stressing family and nonprofit finances alike; it has also caused a rise in online child sexual exploitation, an increase in violence towards victims, and a loss of support systems for survivors.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Contrera, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Bales, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Risley, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Walk Free Foundation, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Hoang, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Tech Against Trafficking, 2020.

Layered on this unprecedented health crisis, there is unprecedented involvement in antiracist action globally, most notably through Black Lives Matter.<sup>7</sup> These two unforeseen global shifts have forced systematic vulnerabilities to the fore, creating a “crisis-induced window of opportunity”<sup>8</sup> for actors to change policies to address exploitation. There is an added sense of urgency with the upcoming US presidential election. With Trump's recent promise to commit \$42 million more to trafficking programs and prosecutions, the question arises: who is protected, who is prosecuted, and who is the ‘Other’ especially in light of COVID-19?

## Research Objectives

This research focuses on US trafficking response, considering current antiracist action and COVID-exacerbated vulnerabilities like race, gender, socioeconomic status, and colonialism. It will examine what is being overlooked and implications for future policies. Due to the timeline and previous work, the author will use one state as a case study. Objectives include:

- Identify groups responding to trafficking in the state
- Explore activities and narratives of their responses, especially with COVID-19 caused limits
- Determine how race, gender, socioeconomic status, and colonialism are discussed (if at all) and if there is intersectionality with antiracist action etc.
- Examine how the state can create a “truly inclusive and multicultural”<sup>9</sup> response in the midst of COVID-19 and changing leadership; where *should* things go in future?

## Methodology

The author wishes to explore if they may add to this discussion, and particularly hopes to learn from indigenous leaders. To do so, they propose the following methods:

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<sup>7</sup> Black Lives Matter.

<sup>8</sup> Hoang, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Meghji, 2019.



- *Investigate archival and academic materials* - They will conduct preliminary research on available literature on statewide trafficking response and relevant sociological studies, which may include discussions of otherization, deservingness, and categorical inequality.<sup>10</sup> This will create a framework to inform interviews.
- *Conduct interviews* - To put participants at the center of knowledge production and to avoid becoming a 'car-window sociologist,'<sup>11</sup> they will utilize snowball sampling. Their connections with one state's 93 groups responding to trafficking, including 25 Tribal governments, NGOs, law enforcement, and task forces<sup>12</sup> will prove invaluable. They anticipate discussions may include white savior narratives, gendered approaches, and indigenous perspectives on colonialism. They will code these themes, which will illustrate various (and likely conflicting) narratives.

## Background Literature

There is a dearth of literature on local, on-the-ground responses to trafficking. Foot<sup>13</sup> examines these local responses, considering financial resources, status, race, gender, beliefs, and values in the US. In particular, she finds that "whites only start to care ... when they realize that it happens to people who look like them or their children." However, it is "glossed over" that African American females are the population most likely to be victimized by sex trafficking; in 2011 ninety-eight percent of US labor trafficking victims and seventy-four percent of sex trafficking victims were non-Caucasians.

Williamson<sup>14</sup> elaborates on how the US perpetuates a concept of the "ideal victim" as passive and simultaneously ignores girls of color as victims of sex trafficking. Butler traces racial roots of trafficking in the US and argues that a process of "othering" makes people of color and Native people particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking and describes the intersecting vulnerabilities of race,

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<sup>10</sup> Doidge and Saini, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Meghji, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Oklahoma Human Trafficking Task Force, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Foot, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Williamson, 2017.

class, age, and gender. Risley<sup>15</sup> agrees and argues many anti-trafficking policies are re-victimizing trafficked persons and also undermining women's rights.

Kujawa<sup>16</sup> explores one state's context: the highest female incarceration rate per capita in the world, low economic standards, low education ratings, and high levels of abuse. This incarceration rate is particularly relevant in COVID-19 times as the US has turned to prison labor to meet mask and sanitizer demands.<sup>17</sup> Logan<sup>18</sup> discusses Native American tribes in a trafficking context and explores the historical distrust between tribes and the federal government, describing how complicated trafficking responses are due to layered jurisdictions. Native American vulnerability is sadly compounded by COVID-19, as Natives are five times more likely to be hospitalized than white people.<sup>19</sup> To date, there is a dearth of trafficking literature considering intersectional vulnerabilities, especially in localized on-the-ground responses and virtually none exploring this in a world of COVID-19. Further study is needed, bearing in mind the connection between the local and the global today and the urgency of this current policy window.

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<sup>15</sup> Risley, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Kujawa, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Smith and Cockayne, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Logan, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> McPhillips, 2020.

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# **Fluid Vulnerabilities: Narratives of Modern Slavery in India during Lockdown**

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This article considers the ways in which COVID-19 has made visible the limitations of ‘ending modern slavery’ as an overarching goal of global development. On the surface, this seems to be a reasonable, meaningful, and clear objective. But it also raises difficult questions that have been further complicated by the pandemic, not least how and where can it be tackled most effectively? We address this question using qualitative data collected in India over an eight-week period from April to July 2020, during which we conducted interviews with ten stakeholders working in INGOs and CSOs and listened to the accounts of twenty ‘community narrators.’

Community narration is an innovative methodological tool, which involves using an intersectional lens to identify individuals who represent a cross section of those who may be especially vulnerable to exploitation. Researchers then conduct face-to-face, in-depth, monthly check-ins that allow changes to the situation of the community narrators and the challenges they face to be better understood. These narratives offer a longitudinal lens through which to trace the experience of the individual, but they also provide insights into vulnerability and resilience at the community level. This includes revealing how communities and networks change and move over time, and the impact this has on the people who are most at risk.

Our rapid research into the impact of COVID-19 on modern slavery in India was carried out amidst the chaotic circumstances that emerged during the country’s

initial response to the outbreak. The aim was to ensure that, rather than being lost, the experiences and narratives of the people whose lives were being most affected were being heard and documented in order to inform policy responses as quickly as possible. But the outbreak brought with it many obstacles that needed to be addressed. For example, to overcome the restrictions on travel and face-to-face contact in both the UK and India, the research interviews were conducted either remotely from the UK or by researchers who were already located in India. This allowed for most of the community narrators to be interviewed at least twice, even during the different stages of the national COVID-19 lockdown.

We found that, in most cases, working with researchers already in India and/or conducting remote check-ins was possible, though our concern is that the most vulnerable might also have been the least able to make contact. In some instances, proved to be more effective and efficient. It also strengthened international cooperation between researchers, and led to engagement with people who have expertise outside of academia. Researchers from women's organisation in India were recruited and trained, bringing with them local contextual knowledge and an ability to respond appropriately to the trauma and risks they would encounter. For example, when these researchers encountered sex workers who had experienced violence or were without food, they had the necessary knowledge of and access to services to intervene. In some cases, participants themselves have also been trained in collecting community narratives and taking an active role in the research, which presents a possibility of expanding the scope of the research to understand the broader, and longer-term, impact of COVID-19.

The narratives presented in this article provide insights into the varied impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerability and resilience to modern slavery over a short but critical period. In doing so, it builds upon previous research conducted in 2019 as part of the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery's (GFEMS) Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Unit (MELU). This allows us to identify which challenges remain how they have changed, and which new challenges are emerging. The initial findings of our eight week rapid review have already been instrumental in informing policy responses, and are now being used to guide the next stage of our ongoing longitudinal study as part of a Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) project, which will allow for the community narrators to be revisited up until July 2021.

Among these initial findings is that, although specific sectors (such as the garment industry or domestic work) are a useful entry point through which to identify people who may be at risk, a sector-based approach to understanding modern slavery is not sufficient. COVID-19 has highlighted the fluid nature of

vulnerability, bringing into focus both the extent and complexity of the risks people face. This raises many questions, such as how can the experiences garment workers be understood when the garment factories have closed? And how can interventions that focus on domestic workers account for a person's shift into sex work?

By focusing on the person and their narrative, rather than the sector, the community narrator approach allows for qualitative research to continue over an extended period of time, regardless of whether a person moves into or out of particular industries or localities. As such, it provides nuanced qualitative data that contributes to a more robust longitudinal analysis of the rapidly changing and highly complex challenges that are emerging as a result of COVID-19. This is particularly important at a time when long-term ethnographic research may not be possible (or could be unethical) for the foreseeable future. Social intimacy, as opposed to social distancing, is at the heart of much qualitative research (Fine, Johnson and Abramson, 2020), especially in anthropology of development. As such, understanding the impact of COVID-19 is hampered by the virus itself, meaning that confronting these limitations and overcoming them represents a critical step toward addressing the crisis.

Our analysis so far of the data we have collected has begun to provide insights into the changing landscape of modern slavery in India, as well as the new challenges that the community narrators face. It has highlighted that, contrary to the views associated with the neoliberal humanitarian resilience paradigm, vulnerability and resilience are not simply personal or community characteristics. Narrow understandings of resilience can potentially shift responsibility from the state to the individual, fitting the narrative of particular forms of governance that seek to decentralize the state's functions in favour of non-state actors (Hilorst, 2018). But conversely, placing the emphasis entirely on the state overlooks the crucial role of local and grassroots organising and the potential for 'entrepreneurship of resilience', which is dependent upon a level of social-cultural embeddedness that 'facilitates access to local resources and legitimacy, and creation of social value in the community' (Vlasov, Bonnedahl, and Vincze, 2018).

A person's vulnerability and their resilience, then, depend on where they are positioned within a web of interconnected and overlapping social, cultural and economic factors at multiple levels from the individual to the global. The social-ecological perspective emphasises the collective nature of resilience, while simultaneously reaching beyond 'place-based analyses of people bound to a specific resource' (Brown, 2015). But during our research we found that the social-ecological context is changing more rapidly than ever, with narrators shifting between high risk sectors, such as garment work, domestic work, and sex work.

Many found themselves in no sector at all, dislocated from support networks, and with little hope of finding any work at all in the near future. This can leave particular people highly vulnerable to exploitation in general by limiting their access to the various resources that might otherwise strengthen their resilience.

We argue that in order to address this more effectively and to better serve the most vulnerable groups and individuals in India and elsewhere, the typical sectoral approach of interventions that seek to end Modern Slavery must shift towards programming through a vulnerabilities lens, and must do so in a way that takes into consideration the fluid and intersectional nature of vulnerability.

In that sense, effective Modern Slavery programming might begin where it ends. That is to say, building resilience and ending slavery in all its forms means addressing the structural inequalities that make it possible (and profitable). This means acknowledging and seeking to better understand how and why people flow into, out of, and between different high-risk contexts, rather than simply seeking to address incidences of abuse and exploitation in specific sectors where and when they take place. The community narrator approach seeks to contribute to filling this gap in knowledge while providing a channel through which the support networks of vulnerable people can be expanded and strengthened.



## **Ready Made Garment (RMG) Study: Bangladesh and India**

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NORC at the University of Chicago is conducting a five-month rapid assessment of COVID-19's impact on the Ready Made Garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh and India with funding from the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS), with an emphasis on the increased risk of forced labor among vulnerable working populations. This abstract represents a component of our strategy to disseminate findings stemming from the rapid assessment.

The RMG industry employs millions of workers in India and Bangladesh, accounting for two percent and twelve percent, respectively, of each country's

Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>1</sup> Garment workers are vulnerable to forced labor due to high rates of poverty, the fragmented and informal nature of textile supply chains, and lack of enforcement of legal protections for workers.<sup>2</sup>

Even before COVID-19, forced labor was a major risk in the RMG sectors, particularly in the informal sector comprised of “unregistered factories”. In India, an earlier NORC scoping study for GFEMS estimated that 320,000 workers are subject to forced labor in the RMG sector in the Delhi-NCR region. This figure represented the greatest scale of forced labor out of all sectors and regions included in the study. The research team also found that over 80 percent of RMG workers in the Delhi-NCR region are migrants, most from the poor states of the Hindi Belt.<sup>3</sup>

Though the apparel sector has long come under criticism for poor working conditions, sexual harassment, forced labor, and workplace health and safety issues, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed major, existing flaws in the global garment supply chain. Global brands (“buyers”) looking to cut corners after a reduction in revenue due to the pandemic, responded by cancelling orders, halting production, and refusing to pay factories (“suppliers”) in developing countries. This creates a downward pressure on export-oriented suppliers, who cannot or do not pay workers, which then leaves already impoverished workers in an incredibly vulnerable position. Though these trends have emerged differently in India and Bangladesh, and affected Bengali and Indian workers differently, in both cases there may be a high risk of workers being subject to forced labor, particularly because of a likely uptick in the number of people who will resort to working in “unregulated” factories, which – as per the name – are not subject to government or buyer oversight. In India, this situation is further complicated by large numbers of smaller factories in rural areas, as well as the prevalence of home-based workers.

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<sup>1</sup> IBEF (2019). “Textile Industry in India: Overview, Market Size, Exports, Growth...| IBEF.” 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Mezzadri, Alessandra, and Ravi Srivastava (2015). “Labour Regimes in the Indian Garment Sector: Capital-Labour Relations, Social Reproduction and Labour Standards in the National Capital Region.” Centre for Development Policy and Research. ; Verite (2010). “Indian Workers in Domestic Textile Production and Middle East-Based Manufacturing, Infrastructure, and Construction.” content/uploads/2016/11/HELP-WANTED\_A-Verite%CC%81-Report\_Indian-Migrant-Workers.pdf; Noman, Abu, Md Aslam Mia, Hasanul Banna, Md. Sohel Rana, A S A Ferdous Alam, Sok-Gee Chan, Che Isa, and Ah Choy Er (2016). “City Profile: Narayanganj, Bangladesh.” *Cities* 59 (May): 8–19.

<sup>3</sup> Handfield, Roberg, Maruerite Moore, Rejaul Hasan, and Balaji Soundararajan (2019). “Beneficiary Vulnerability Analysis & Engagement for Apparel, India.” GFEMS Scoping Study. Supply Chain Resource Cooperative North Carolina State University.

In response to the effects of COVID-19 on the RMG sector, NORC designed a rapid assessment to address descriptive and normative questions about COVID-19's short- and long-term impact on India and Bangladesh's RMG industries. Three research questions and their related sub-questions guide the rapid assessment. The overarching research questions are as follows:

1. What are the impacts of COVID-19 on RMG supply-chains and factory-level business?
  - Sub question 1.1: How has the formal RMG export sector been affected in the short term (such as changes in orders, buyer cancellations/non-payment of outstanding contracts or completed (not yet shipped) orders, shutting down operations, or changes to business models)?
  - Sub question 1.2: How has the informal sector, including unregistered subcontractors, been affected in the short term (such as changes in orders, supplier cancellations/refusal to pay for completed (not yet shipped) orders, shutting down operations, consolidations, reduced access to credit or increased interest rates, or changes to business models)?
  - Sub question 1.3: Have any particular buyers shown best practice? Or worst practice? What are the good/poor practices being demonstrated by buyers?
  
2. How have workers been affected by COVID-19?
  - Sub question 2.1: How are workers affected in terms of employment status during the pandemic? Including their job itself, as well as payment of wages, hours, etc.
  - Sub question 2.2: How many workers continued to work though portion of lockdown, since factories were considered essential businesses? And/or, how have workers experienced the "return to work" after lockdowns ended?
  - Sub question 2.3: Are particular demographic groups affiliated with the RMG industry (migrants, women, geographic/ethnic groups) differentially impacted by the impact of COVID-19?
  
3. How do the COVID-19 impacts on business and on workers affect vulnerability and possible forced labor?
  - Sub question 3.1: Is there an identified risk of increased forced labor? If so, who is most vulnerable?
  - Sub question 3.2: What is the relationship between the formal and informal sectors, as it relates to risk of forced labor?

- Sub question 3.3: Have any programs or regulations been put in place that would reduce vulnerability and/or integrate OSH measures and help curb an increased risk of forced labor?

In order to answer the research questions, the research team is using qualitative methods to gain a holistic and deep understanding of topic. Qualitative data collection methods include approximately 20 semi-structured key information interviews (KIIs) with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders as well as actors across the RMG supply chain. As a first step to answering these questions, NORC conducted a desk review of recently published media articles, reports, white papers, and other online content to help answer the research questions as well as inform the approach to forthcoming primary data collection activities.

Table 1 shows NORC’s work plan and timeline for meeting key milestones. All data collection and analyses will be completed by Fall 2020, aligning well with the Journal’s April 2, 2021, deadline for full submissions.

Milestone	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct
■ Start up and concept note	■				
■ Desk research	■	■			
■ Identify stakeholders, develop interview instruments		■			
■ Qualitative data collection		■	■		
■ Transcriptions / translations of interviews			■	■	
■ Analysis			■	■	■
■ Develop report and recommendations				■	■
■ Dissemination / outreach					■

# **Overseas Labor Recruitment (OLR) Study - Bangladesh**

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NORC at the University of Chicago is conducting a six-month rapid assessment of COVID-19's impact on Overseas Labor Recruitment (OLR) in Bangladesh with funding from the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS), with an emphasis on the increased risk of forced labor among vulnerable migrant worker populations.

Overseas labor migration is currently one of the most important contributors to the economy of Bangladesh and is a highly profitable form of labor for Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) countries. In 2019 alone, 700,159 migrant workers from Bangladesh<sup>1</sup> traveled abroad for employment purposes. GCC countries are a major destination for Bangladeshi migrant workers with Saudi Arabia being the most common destination for Bangladeshi migrant workers since 2016. In 2019, 57% of Bangladeshi migrants departed for Saudi Arabia and 18% departed for Oman.

Despite the high rate of migration between these countries every year, the OLR industry remains complex and often leaves migrants susceptible to human trafficking, forced labor, and modern slavery. While the prevalence of forced labor among Bangladeshi migrants in GCC countries is still unknown, the IOM estimates international migrant workers comprise one fourth of the victims of forced labor.<sup>2</sup> Recruitment agencies and third-party brokers in Bangladesh often

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<sup>1</sup> BMET, <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction>

<sup>2</sup> IOM, 2019

misinform prospective migrants about the migration process and costs, leaving them to endure difficult and abusive working conditions to pay off their large debts. Once arriving in the destination country, workers often learn that their location of work or the type of work they will be required to do differ from what was agreed upon.

The onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic has exposed migrant workers to additional adverse situations, making them even more vulnerable and exposed to health risks. Existing labor systems in GCC countries combined with poor living conditions, restricted access to health care, scarce legal protection and limited information have amplified the vulnerabilities of the migrant worker population<sup>3</sup>. In addition, forced repatriation of Bangladeshi migrant workers has led to a mass exodus of migrants back to their home country. After battling employment uncertainty and stressful working and living conditions in the GCC countries, migrants return to Bangladesh and have to deal with issues arising out of adjusting to life in their home country amidst a global pandemic. Bangladeshi returnee migrants are vulnerable to health and safety concerns due to poor implementation of quarantine and COVID-19 containment protocols combined with the mental stress and trauma associated with a loss of livelihood and societal discrimination. They are also vulnerable to experiencing various forms of economic and social discrimination in their communities.

The medium and long term effects of the global pandemic on migrant workers and overseas labor recruitment remains unclear. However, given that preliminary research suggest the likelihood of an immense effect on migration trends and recruitment of migrant workers in GCC countries, there is an immediate and pressing need to better understand the multi-faceted impacts of COVID-19 on the OLR industry and migrant workers conditions and vulnerabilities.

NORC's COVID-19 rapid assessment is designed to address descriptive and normative questions about COVID-19's short- and long-term impact on OLR. Five research questions and their related sub-questions guide the rapid assessment. The preliminary are as follows:

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<sup>3</sup><https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2020/04/covid19-makes-gulf-countries-abuse-of-migrant-workers-impossible-to-ignore/>

1. What repatriation activities and/or policies are GCC countries considering and implementing in response to the global crisis?
2. What discrimination is faced by returnee migrants in their home country because of the stigma that they may be carriers of COVID-19?
3. What policies or actions is the Government of Bangladesh implementing to repatriate and reintegrate returnee migrants and support potential migrants?
4. What are the possible medium and long-term implications of COVID-19 on OLR and the willingness of Bangladeshi workers to migrate to GCC countries?
5. What are some medium and long-term recommendations for governments, policy makers, program implementers, NGOs, donors and other key stakeholders in Bangladesh and GCC to repatriate, reintegrate and protect migrant workers affected by the global pandemic?

To answer the research questions, the research team will use a mixed-methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a holistic and deep understanding of the topic as well as mitigate potential bias in the data and findings through triangulation. Qualitative data collection methods include semi-structured key information interviews (KIIs) with a range of stakeholders to understand the multi-faceted impact of COVID-19 on OLR. Quantitative data collection includes a social-media based survey of returnee and pre-departure migrant workers. Finally, we will conduct a rapid systematic desk review of recently published media articles, reports, white papers, and other online content to help answer the research questions as well as inform the approach to primary data collection.

The research team will complement the findings from the desk review with qualitative data collected through 25 KIIs with government officials, local NGOs, international organizations, migration researchers, and formal and informal recruiting agencies. We will supplement qualitative data with quantitative data collected from migrant workers. Given the travel and social distancing challenges associated with COVID-19, we will conduct all data collection virtually, implementing best practices in remote-data collection.

Table 1 shows NORC’s proposed work plan and timeline for conducting the research.

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>June</b>	<b>July</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sep</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>
■ Start up and research design	■						
■ Desk research, consultant and partner contracting	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
■ Identify stakeholders, develop interview instruments		■	■				
■ Qualitative data collection			■	■			
■ Qualitative transcriptions and analysis				■	■		
■ Develop initial report and recommendations				■	■		
■ Supplementary quantitative data collection					■	■	■
■ Final analysis and report							■



# **Underlying conditions: The Commodification of Migrant Workers Under COVID-19**

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, and following the introduction of closures and quarantines by governments, many countries have adopted decommodifying policies, granting employees increased social protections through direct benefits or through support in their continued employment. However, these policies have generally not been extended to non-citizens, who have thus found themselves either without income or deeply commodified, working long hours in sectors designated as 'essential' such as care, agriculture, food processing, construction and the like, often under strict and new restrictions and at risks to their health. In this article, we will map the impact of some of the main policies that were introduced in response to the spread of COVID-19 on temporary migrant workers and other 'unskilled' non-citizen workers in the labour market, focusing on the complex case of non-citizens in Israel (Palestinian workers, temporary migrant workers, and asylum seekers). We will focus on the link between restrictive policies and measures resulting from COVID-19 ('COVID-19 Restrictions') and the increased commodification of workers, putting workers at greater risk for

trafficking and slavery. Yet, some of the new risks also created new—albeit, at times narrow—opportunities for grounds for new rights claims by non-citizens.

As the article highlights, existing labour-market characteristics, such as economic precariousness, restriction of movement, high level of control, isolation, and exposure to risk and health and safety hazards all already characterise the labour-intensive sectors in which migrant workers are employed. Yet as a result of COVID-19 related policy, these characteristics have been heightened and intensified. Accordingly, we argue that the impact of COVID-19 restrictions has generally manifested not in the creation of new forms of exploitation and coercion, but rather in the exacerbation and intensification of existing structural vulnerabilities to slavery and trafficking. COVID-19 restrictions, in other words, introduces new mechanisms within the persistent commodification of workers. However, the intensification of vulnerabilities has also presented new opportunities for solidarity and resistance.

We consider the impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers through a specific case study: that of non-citizen workers in Israel during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the Israeli case study, we map and analyse what has happened during the COVID-19 pandemic to key elements of vulnerability across the three largest sectors employing non-citizen workers in Israel: care, construction, and agriculture. All three sectors are part of a secondary labour market, characterised by low wages, strong commodification of workers, poor conditions, and employment of mostly non-citizens. All three sectors were designated as ‘essential’ during the pandemic. While the Israeli case is unique in many ways, it also bears a similarity to other migrant-receiving countries in the Global North. Particularly, the Israeli temporary migrant-worker regime is characterised by mobility restrictions, housing restrictions, and exclusion from labour laws. Analysis of the impact of COVID-19 policies on structural vulnerabilities to slavery and trafficking in the Israeli context may therefore be relevant to other migrant-receiving countries.

The Israeli case study offers a comparative look at the impact of COVID-19 policy on different groups of non-citizen workers that were subject to different regulations before and during the pandemic. Thus, alongside the case of temporary migrant workers, the pandemic policies have posed significant challenges with respect to the employment of Palestinian workers in Israel, who are subject to special arrangements. Asylum-seekers, employed mostly in precarious jobs in the ‘non-essential’ hospitality sector, make up the third group particularly harmed by the pandemic policies in Israel.

The article will proceed as follows. Part I will explore the different understandings of commodification and will introduce the link between intense

commodification, COVID-19 restrictions, and the structural vulnerabilities of temporary migrant workers and other non-citizen workers to severe forms of labour market exploitation. Part II will turn to the Israeli case study and will discuss three key elements of vulnerability to severe forms of labour exploitation and the ways they have been exacerbated, to the detriment of non-citizen workers, by policies geared towards reducing the risk of the spread of COVID-19. We will discuss three elements of such policies:

1. Increased control, surveillance, and severe restrictions of movement (focusing on Palestinian construction workers and migrant care workers)
2. Deterioration of living conditions and violations of basic health and safety conditions at the workplace (focusing on non-citizen workers in agriculture and construction).
3. Unemployment, loss of income, and exclusion from safety nets (focusing on asylum seekers).

Taken together, these three key elements demonstrate how measures intended to reduce the spread of COVID-19 increased the commodification of workers and denial of their humanity, creating new opportunities for exploitation amounting to forced labour, trafficking and slavery. The article will further map the ways in which COVID-19 policies, by heightening and intensifying the structural vulnerabilities of non-citizen workers, have also drawn attention to their socio-economic rights and created some (even if limited) opportunities to re-examine policies and create new coalitions, solidarities, and opportunities for change by non-citizen workers and civil society actors that support them. Part III will offer a holistic analysis of the case study, focusing how COVID-19 restrictions mesh into existing commodifying policies and exacerbate them, and what the emergency order teaches us about the normal order. These conclusions will also offer policy recommendations based on the lessons from the case study, and review the main arguments COVID-19 restrictions has made available to workers and civil society actors, and their anticipated impact and post-COVID endurance.

**Methodology:** Our data regarding this case study was gathered through document review and analysis of legislation, emergency orders, court opinions, policy papers and publications in the media. We further rely on data from practitioners who work closely with the workers and document their conditions, as well as our own engagement as scholars and activists with civil society organisations working with non-citizen workers in Israel.

# The Finance of Sex Trafficking and Impact of COVID-19

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The global outbreak of COVID-19 led to the shutdown of industries, shrinking economies, border closures, and national laws and curfews put in place to socially distance communities. COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on economies globally, with millions of people losing their jobs<sup>1</sup>. Small businesses and those heavily reliant on daily wages to support themselves and their families have been impacted particularly heavily by this crisis. People continue to need money to survive, and yet the required income simply is not available in many cases. One community that has been gripped by the impact of COVID-19, yet which is receiving a disproportionate lack of support, is the commercial sex worker community. Within the context of the commercial sex work industry, an underworld of sex traffickers operate, exploiting victims into forced labour situations and capitalising on the heightened vulnerabilities of millions of people. Sex workers are increasingly turning to unregulated lenders and criminal gangs for loans and support. Victims of abuse also find themselves homeless or even confined to the homes of abusers, further compounding the severity of their situation and their vulnerability to further exploitation. Economic hardship is also a driver for risk of trafficking from outside of the existing sex worker community, as families struggle to make ends meet, and creeping desperation creates a new pool of prey for unscrupulous traffickers to pick from. The traffickers themselves have also no-doubt been impacted, their regular income streams drying up, moving to new online platforms through which to exploit their victims.

Finance and sex trafficking are intrinsically linked. The criminal underworld of sex traffickers is driven by profit, the ability to repeatedly exploit human beings for financial gain. Often those victims have been recruited and exploited as a result of their financial desperation, entrapped by their need to provide for themselves and their families. Cash generated through these cycles of exploitation and abuse are laundered through legitimate financial systems, generating billions of dollars

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<sup>1</sup> Rymer, Andrew, 'What impact Is COVID-19 having on global economies and markets?', Schroders Wealth Management, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2020, Accessed June 2020. URL: <https://www.schroders.com/en/hk/wealth-management/insights/strategy-and-economics/what-impact-is-COVID-19-having-on-global-economies-and-markets/>

each year. Those financial institutions and agencies responsible for identifying, investigating, and halting this flow of money have also been directly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Backlogs of suspicious activity reports continue to pile up as Financial Intelligence Units operate at decreased capacity, the agencies relied upon to investigate criminal activity. Compliance and anti-money laundering teams are unable to visit customer premises to carry out checks, and many due-diligence processes are operating in a simplified manner to counteract the physical and logistical challenges of COVID-19 restrictions on access to finance.

This paper examines how COVID-19 has impacted the lives of sex workers and how changing circumstances may make them and others even more vulnerable to exploitation into sex trafficking. It explores the perceptions and policies that keep sex workers from receiving the financial support needed to keep them safe at this time. It considers how sex work may be driven further underground, and the implications of this on the security of the workers involved. It also considers how the behaviour of clients may change as a result of the virus, examining the supply and demand drivers of online sexual exploitation of adults and children. This paper also outlines the fluidity of criminal nature, how criminals are adapting to changing circumstances and finding new ways to identify, groom, and exploit victims into sexual slavery. Finally, it analyses the implications that COVID-19 has had on the nature of money laundering and the related affects on the ability of financial institutions to operate as the ‘eyes and ears’ in the fight against global sex trafficking. It concludes with recommendations that can be made to financial institutions and related agencies, to respond rapidly to emerging risks and new trends in sexual exploitation and money laundering.

## **Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Study - India**

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NORC at the University of Chicago is conducting a five-month rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) and the sex industry in Maharashtra, India. The purpose of this rapid assessment is to support frontline organizations in adapting their CSE protection and prevention programming to new realities on the ground, with a specific focus on interventions for minors affected by the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). This project is funded by the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS), through the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DfID).

In the wake of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, persons in India's commercial sex industry have faced social and economic calamity. On March 24<sup>th</sup>, the government of India announced a nationwide lockdown with just four hours' notice, leaving those who depend on commercial sex work for survival immediately vulnerable to food insecurity, eviction/homelessness, and indebtedness. A "non-essential" economic activity that involves large degrees of contact, sex work has been further singled out by researchers as a significant vector for the spread of COVID-19 due to potentially high rates of transmission. According to a study conducted by researchers at Yale University and the Harvard Medical School, the closure of red light areas in India will reduce the number of projected new COVID-19 cases by an estimated 72 percent nationwide, with the

number of deaths in Mumbai estimated to decrease by 28 percent.<sup>1</sup> The classification of red light areas as primary vectors for the pandemic may lead India's sex workers to face growing social stigmatization and targeted persecution by law enforcement.

According to NORC's preliminary desk research, both adults and children in the commercial sex industry face *de facto* exclusion from the Indian government's relief efforts. Meanwhile, existing social protections for sexually exploited children have been interrupted, including emergency rescue operations and prosecution of CSE perpetrators in the court system. As those currently in the sex industry struggle to survive, vulnerability to CSE has simultaneously increased for first-time victims and reintegrated survivors. This appears particularly true in the known source districts of West Bengal, where Cyclone Amphan has exacerbated the myriad effects of lockdown and significantly increased vulnerability to exploitation.

While the economic desperation of families has expanded CSE supply channels, desk research suggests that demand for commercial sex in its traditional form has dropped precipitously due to lockdown restrictions, income loss, mass migration, and international travel restrictions. The extent to which the commercial sex industry in India—at least in its traditional form—will rebound from COVID-19 remains uncertain. In the near term, it is clear that there is not much by way of a “demand gap” for commercial sex traffickers to fill. Other forms of child exploitation including forced marriage, labor trafficking, and online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC) may therefore displace CSEC over the shorter-term.

The longer-term effects of COVID-19 on CSE in India remains unclear. There is thus an immediate and pressing need to better understand the scope and scale of COVID-19 impacts on the commercial sex industry in order to ensure responsive and informed social protections. In response to this need, NORC designed a rapid assessment to address descriptive and normative questions about COVID-19's short- and long-term impact on India's sex industry. Six research questions and their related sub-questions guide the rapid assessment. The overarching research questions are as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> The Economic Times, “India can avoid 72 per cent of projected COVID-19 cases by closing red light areas: Report,” *The Economic Times*, May 16, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/science/india-can-avoid-72-per-cent-of-projected-covid-19-cases-by-closing-red-light-areas-report/articleshow/75772505.cms?from=mdr>

1. How has government response to COVID-19 differentially impacted sex workers in Maharashtra?
2. How have existing social protections for sex workers in Maharashtra been affected by COVID-19?
3. What unique challenges have child victims of commercial sexual exploitation in Maharashtra faced vis-à-vis aforementioned government response and social protections?
4. Has COVID-19 led to any shifts in the mechanisms for buying and selling sexual services in Maharashtra?
5. Is COVID-19 likely to lead to any changes to supply and demand for sexual services in Maharashtra?
6. What are the possible long term implications of COVID-19 on the sex worker community, and the CSEC population in particular?

In order to answer the research questions, NORC will use a mixed-methods approach, to gain a deeper, holistic understanding of the topic and mitigate potential bias in the data and findings through triangulation. Qualitative data collection methods will include semi-structured key information interviews with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders as well as actors across the supply chain including brokers and sellers of sexual services. Quantitative data collection will include social media-based surveys of buyers of sexual services as well as data extracted from online sex sites using web scraping algorithms. Finally, a desk review of recently published media articles, reports, white papers, and other online content will inform the research questions directly as well as the approach to primary data collection.



Table 1 shows NORC’s proposed work plan and timeline for conducting the research.

<b>Table 1: Work Plan – CSEC Rapid Assessment Study</b>							
<b>Milestone</b>	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
■ Start up and research design	■						
■ Desk research, consultant and partner contracting	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
■ Identify stakeholders, develop interview instruments		■	■				
■ Qualitative data collection			■	■			
■ Qualitative transcriptions and analysis				■	■		
■ Develop initial report and recommendations				■	■		
■ Supplementary quantitative data collection					■	■	■
■ Final analysis and report							■

## **Pivoting technology: understanding working conditions in the time of COVID-19**

**Hannah Thinyane**  
**Michael Gallo**

United Nations University, Institute in Macao

The new coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that has swept across the world is not just a health crisis, but also gravely threatens the livelihoods and economic well-being of millions. While the effects of the pandemic are being felt across all areas of society, it is yet another factor that drives those already in low paid and informal work situations towards employment with higher risks of exploitation.<sup>1</sup> The rapidly changing dynamics of COVID-19 are exacerbating such precarious forms of employment and therefore it is a significant priority to understand how working conditions are being resultantly affected.

Our work recognizes the critical role that private sector can play in fighting labour exploitation and forced labour within their own supply chains. Over the past four years, we have been working with civil society, auditors, corporate social responsibility experts, and private sector representatives to understand the role that technology can play to support them.<sup>2</sup> Worker interviews have always been notoriously difficult, with communication, training and trust barriers impacting the traditional face-to-face interviews that occur. Through our engagement, we have co-developed and released Apprise Audit, an innovative solution used by multinational corporations as part of the worker interview process in social compliance auditing to detect exploitation and forced labour in their supply chains. Apprise Audit is a multi-language mobile app that an auditor downloads onto their phone and then uses to interview workers through an audio questionnaire. After completing interviews, the app summarises findings, highlighting indicators of vulnerability that were identified in any of the interviews, to inform auditors on-site inspections.

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<sup>1</sup> Urmila Bhoola, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Including Its Causes and Consequences” (Human Rights Council: United Nations, 9-27 September)

<sup>2</sup> Sassetti, Francisca, Mera, Silvia and Thinyane, Hannah (2019). Apprise Audit Impact Assessment: Detecting labour exploitation in supply chains. United Nations University. <https://collections.unu.edu/view/UNU:7548>

Apprise Audit has been actively used in factories across several countries in Southeast Asia by four multinational corporations within the garment and footwear sectors for over one year. In early 2020 and in response to growing awareness of the impact that COVID-19 would have on the practice of social compliance audits, these corporations formed a working group, aimed at understanding how Apprise Audit could be adapted to help them understand current conditions within factories. Firstly, auditors that did not face travel restrictions requested support to gather data on factories' response to COVID-19. For auditors who were unable to travel due to movement restrictions, they sought a way to still gather information from workers while they were unable to undertake in-person interviews. In response to the first request, we extended the question list to include new questions specifically targeted towards understanding current conditions in factories related to COVID-19 measures. In response to the latter, we extended the functionality of Apprise Audit, to enable self-reporting direct worker feedback as a data collection method. Using this method, a brand sends a QR code (with instructions for use in the form of a text-free comic, and a URL) to each factory to be included in inspections. Factory staff are required to post the printed sheet in a surveillance-free environment, where workers have direct access to their personal mobile devices. Workers then scan the QR code (or enter the link provided on the page) and navigate directly to a web-based frontend to the Apprise Audit questioning system. This allows workers to undertake the interview themselves, on their own mobile device, and uploads responses to the brand's existing Apprise Audit account.

Based on stakeholder consultation and extensive field research, Apprise Audit's original functionality was intentionally designed to not allow for worker-initiated direct feedback because of certain limitations this approach has. If a digital reporting tool is not being administered by a trusted or external third-party actor (i.e. the auditor), vulnerable workers may be subject to coercion by factory management to misrepresent working conditions through self-reporting as being compliant with labour standards, when in reality exploitation is occurring. Workers also might not own a mobile device or have access to one to be able self-report feedback, making the auditor a crucial intermediary in soliciting trustworthy and representative responses. However, because of the circumstances brought about by COVID-19, we decided to investigate what role this modality could play in allowing private sector partners to understand what is happening on the ground.

Between now and the full submission in April 2021 (if invited) we will be working with our private sector partners to understand the implications and effectiveness of these two new COVID-19-specific features of Apprise Audit. We

further aim to understand how companies' longer-term social auditing strategies have been adversely impacted by COVID-19. We will ask open-ended questions in virtual interviews to facilitate an in-depth discussion of challenges and findings unique to each individual stakeholder and also distribute an online survey with a standardized set of questions. These findings will be compiled into a series of case studies for thematic analysis. We will draw on the findings of this impact assessment on the use of these two new features to provide practice-oriented recommendations that aim to support multinational corporations to understand the conditions of work within factories in their supply chain in the times of COVID-19 and beyond. This discussion will also be framed in an overarching context that weighs the pros and cons of worker self-reporting vs auditor administered. This can help inform relevant policy recommendations to stakeholders and provide useful insights to the target audiences of the *Journal of Modern Slavery*.

#### Timetable for research

- Rollout of new question list and data collection strategy from August 15
- Ongoing discussions and problem solving with brands August - November
- Virtual interviews & survey distribution: November - December 2020
- Analysis and publication drafting January –March 2021

## **Australia's Modern Slavery Act and COVID-19: a get out of jail free card?**

**Fiona McGaughey**

Law School, University of Western Australia

It is widely understood and acknowledged that COVID-19 increases risks to already vulnerable workers, including risks of modern slavery. The United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery's report on the impact of COVID-19 on 'modern slavery' identifies a number of new risks as well as impacts on those already in forms of modern slavery.<sup>1</sup> As the Special Procedures, like all UN human rights mechanisms, are State-centric, there is limited engagement with the question of *business* responsibilities in light of COVID-19. Paragraph 100 of the report does provide that States should ensure implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) and increase awareness of contemporary forms of slavery and the risks faced by the vulnerable workers among businesses.<sup>2</sup>

Business reporting and due diligence laws on modern slavery, or broader human rights and environmental risks, are becoming more prevalent across jurisdictions.<sup>3</sup> In 2020, businesses and Australian Commonwealth government entities with an annual turnover of \$100 million or more are expected to publish their first statements under *Australia's Modern Slavery Act 2018 (Cth)* (MSA). COVID-19 not only impacts on the risk of modern slavery in these entities' operations and supply chains but may affect the entities' ability to engage with their obligations under the MSA. In light of this, Australian Border Force - the Government agency responsible for supporting the implementation of the MSA - firstly extended the deadlines for reporting, and secondly, issued an information

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, *Impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic on contemporary forms of slavery and slavery-like practices*. UN Doc: A/HRC/45/8, 4 August 2020, Human Rights Council Forty-fifth session 14 September–2 October 2020.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, para 100.

<sup>3</sup> Fiona McGaughey, 'Australia's proposed Modern Slavery Act for business reporting - part of an international trend in business and human rights' (2018) 36(3) *Australian Resources and Energy Law Journal* 29.

sheet on COVID-19 and the MSA.<sup>4</sup> The information sheet notes that as a result of COVID-19, entities may be unable to undertake planned activities to address modern slavery risks, may have limited capacity to prepare statements, and their normal supply chains may have been altered.<sup>5</sup> Australian Border Force therefore encouraged reporting entities affected by COVID-19 to clearly explain in their statements under the MSA how COVID-19 has impacted their capacity to assess and address modern slavery risks. It remains to be seen whether the extended deadline and acknowledgment that COVID-19 may have impacted reporting entities' capacity will be used to avoid in-depth engagement with the obligations of the MSA. It has already been identified that the MSA lacks enforcement mechanisms, such as penalties for non-compliance.<sup>6</sup> Rather, we see a form of transnational non-state regulation wherein regulatory arrangements are carried out by corporate actors and civil society, in collaboration or separately.<sup>7</sup>

To facilitate oversight by civil society and others, the Australian MSA differs from that of the United Kingdom and other comparable laws, such as the French Duty of Vigilance Law,<sup>8</sup> in that Australia is the first jurisdiction with a Government repository for MSA statements. The repository is now open for reporting entities to submit their statements and statements will begin to be made available for public scrutiny later this year.<sup>9</sup> Some Australian companies already reporting under the UK MSA had begun to prepare a statement intended to meet the requirements of both Acts.<sup>10</sup> The first examples of Australia's MSA statements are being published on company websites and there are some early indications of engagement with the challenges of COVID-19 regarding modern slavery.

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Border Force, 'Modern Slavery Act Information Sheet: Coronavirus'. Available at: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/criminal-justice/files/modern-slavery-covid-19.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>6</sup> See, eg, Justine Nolan and Nana Frishling, 'Australia's Modern Slavery Act: Towards Meaningful Compliance' (2019) 37 *C&SLG* 104.

<sup>7</sup> Natasha Tusikov, 'Transnational non-state regulatory regimes', in Drahos, P. (Ed.). (2017). *Regulatory theory: Foundations and applications* 339-354.

<sup>8</sup> *Modern Slavery Act 2015 (United Kingdom)*; Loi no. 2017-399 du 27 Mars 2017 relative au devoir de vigilance des sociétés mères et des entreprises donneuses d'ordre.

<sup>9</sup> <https://modernslaveryregister.gov.au/>.

<sup>10</sup> See, eg, Wesfarmers, '2019 Modern Slavery Act for Wesfarmers'. Available at: <https://sustainability.wesfarmers.com.au/media/3118/wesfarmers-modern-slavery-statement-2019.pdf>.

For example, mining and metals company South 32's 2020 Modern Slavery Statement includes a section on COVID-19.<sup>11</sup> This lists proactive steps taken by South 32 with regard to COVID-19 risk assessment, as well as delays to planned work on modern slavery as a result of COVID-19. It is reported that the heightened risks of modern slavery on vulnerable workers was recognised and in particular, tailored human rights due diligence was carried out in response to high demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies, to identify risks and drive responsible decision-making for rapid sourcing of these items. It is also reported that commercial teams worked closely with shipping suppliers as travel restrictions were creating additional risks for seafarers such as impacting the ability for crew changes and repatriation, resulting in physical and mental exhaustion. The company report that they are continuing to work in partnership with ship-owners to address these impacts, reviewing fatigue and safety controls, crew change protocols and providing safe and accessible ways for seafarers to communicate grievances. Although COVID-19 has created specific risks in relation to travel restrictions for shipping suppliers, it is noteworthy that grievance mechanisms do not appear to have been in place and so the pandemic may have expedited this process. Grievance mechanisms are recommended in the government guidance on the MSA, drawing on Principle 31 of the UNGPs.<sup>12</sup> The report lists these tasks as being in progress and it will be interesting to review the 2021 Modern Slavery Statement to assess progress. In terms of delays, it is reported that two independent supplier audits were postponed due to travel restrictions and social distancing controls, some human rights and modern slavery training was postponed and planned initiatives to support the human rights working group of the Sustainable Shipping Initiative were also postponed. With regard to training, given the rapid transition to online meetings and education during COVID-19, there is insufficient information or whether online training could have been a feasible alternative.

However, a commendable feature of the South 32 statement is some of the specificity (e.g. PPE, shipping) that is provided with regard to the modern slavery risks. Other reporting entities have acknowledged the risk of COVID-19 but provided no detail on what the *specific* risks are in their operations and supply chains and the steps being taken to address them.<sup>13</sup> Providing specific details on

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<sup>11</sup> South 32, '2020 Modern Slavery Statement'. Available at: [https://www.south32.net/docs/default-source/sustainability-reporting/fy20-sustainability-reporting/2020-modern-slavery-statement.pdf?sfvrsn=b81e4476\\_4](https://www.south32.net/docs/default-source/sustainability-reporting/fy20-sustainability-reporting/2020-modern-slavery-statement.pdf?sfvrsn=b81e4476_4).

<sup>12</sup> Australian Government, *Commonwealth Modern Slavery Act 2018: Guidance for Reporting Entities*. <<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/criminal-justice/files/modern-slavery-reporting-entities.pdf>>.

<sup>13</sup> See, eg, KPMG, 'KPMG Australia's Modern Slavery Statement 2020'. Available at: <https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/au/pdf/2020/kpmg-australia-modern-slavery-statement-fy20.pdf>.

emerging risks in this rapidly changing time could be of significant benefit in building the knowledge-base regarding manifestations of modern slavery so that other businesses, governments and civil society can act accordingly. For example, an identified COVID-19 related risk is unilateral cancellations and suspensions of orders from overseas suppliers which, with economies in lockdown and few alternative employment possibilities, leaves workers at risk of exploitation and modern slavery.<sup>14</sup> Knowledge of such cancellations would provide valuable information to international aid agencies, civil society, governments and others about where labour inspections, humanitarian support and other measures may be required. However, it remains to be seen whether reporting entities disclose such COVID-19 related impacts.

The primary data source for this paper is a qualitative analysis of available Australian MSA statements to determine: a) whether COVID-19 is acknowledged, b) whether the entity reported reduced capacity to engage with their MSA obligations as a result, c) whether the entity identified specific, increased modern slavery risks as a result of COVID-19 and d) if so, how they responded. There are an anticipated 3,000 reporting entities under the MSA,<sup>15</sup> and a representative sample will be selected for the analysis on the basis of SIC (Standard Industry Code) Division. Within this sub-set, comparative analysis will be carried out on any available statements from the 23 companies we have identified as already reporting under the UK MSA and French Duty of Vigilance Law and expected to report under the Australian MSA as our previous studies have established base-line data for these entities. A secondary and supporting data source is relevant extracts from a broader qualitative dataset from interviews with Australian reporting entities, which I am currently conducting. Both datasets will be subjected to qualitative analysis using NVivo software to thematically code the data.

This analysis will be used to identify trends in reporting, to identify whether reporting entities appeared to grapple with COVID-19 related-risks, or, whether COVID-19 challenges risk being used as something of a 'get out of jail free card'. It will document what specific, increased risks exist according to the statements and draw on global datasets for triangulation.<sup>16</sup> The research is intended to be of an applied nature, developing recommendations to inform government policy and

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<sup>14</sup> Hinrich Voss, 'Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for human rights and modern slavery vulnerabilities in global value chains' (2020) 27(2) *Transnational Corporations* 113, 114.

<sup>15</sup> Australian Government, *Commonwealth Modern Slavery Act 2018: Guidance for Reporting Entities*. Available at: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/criminal-justice/files/modern-slavery-reporting-entities.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Including the Global Slavery Index, US State Department Trafficking in Persons Report and other contemporary online sources such as those provided by the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre.



business best practice and can be incorporated into a submission to the Australian Government's three-year review of the MSA.

## **Services and Safety for Survivors of Human Trafficking: A Social Service Agency Statewide Survey on the Impact of COVID-19**

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### **Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, MSW, Ph.D.**

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\*Please note. We have decided to include both sex trafficking and labor trafficking services into this research study.

In the United States, the year 2020 has been a unique and challenging time for social service agencies in dealing with the detrimental impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Many social service agencies have faced unique challenges in providing services to survivors of human trafficking, given shutdowns, stay at home orders, staffing shortages, social distancing regulations, and a potential loss of funding due to economic shortfalls. In recent years, the State of Arizona has become increasingly engaged in addressing human trafficking by providing economic investments to conduct comprehensive human trafficking training for law enforcement, probation officers, teachers, forensic nurse examiners, medical personnel, and child welfare staff. While economic investment and many subsequent human trafficking trainings have been beneficial, there continue to be gaps in social service delivery systems for children and adult victims of sex trafficking and labor trafficking in Arizona. This article will address information about gaps in services and the impacts of COVID-19 on the social service delivery systems and safety for survivors of human trafficking (both labor and sex trafficking) in the State of Arizona through a comprehensive needs assessment survey.

**Methods:** This study will target social service agencies within the State of Arizona that come into contact, or may come into contact, with sex and labor trafficking

victims (both juvenile and adult victims). Social service agency participants were identified through existing provider relationships through the Arizona State University's Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research and the State of Arizona Governor's Human Trafficking Council. To date, researchers have compiled the most comprehensive list of known agencies that provide services to victims of human trafficking and those that may come into contact with victims. This list totals 350 agencies who will be contacted in October and November 2020 to take part in the study. Other participants will be referred to the study through a snowball recruitment method. Participants will be contacted over the phone for an appropriate email address and will be asked to participate in a brief 30-minute survey that will be delivered over email. Only one person per social service agency will be interviewed in their professional capacity and within their role/responsibilities to the agency, and all persons interviewed will be an adult. The survey questions and study methodology were reviewed and approved by the Arizona State University institutional review board.

The purpose of the State of Arizona human trafficking services needs assessment is to:

1. review current service providers for sex trafficking and labor trafficking adult and youth victims in Arizona,
2. identify all of the agencies that could provide services to victims of sex and labor trafficking in Arizona,
3. understand how the coronavirus pandemic has impacted service delivery systems and life experiences of sex trafficking and labor trafficking survivors, and
4. develop a statewide summary of services and the development of targeted recommendations.

Regarding COVID-19, the following questions will be posed:

1. What has changed due COVID-19 in your provision of services for victims of human trafficking?
2. How are sex trafficking clients experiencing the pandemic?
3. How are labor trafficking clients experiencing the pandemic?
4. During the current pandemic, what are the best ways to collaborate with other agencies to assist human trafficking victims?

These answers will offer insights into the impacts on service delivery systems and the barriers for sex trafficking and labor trafficking survivors during the coronavirus pandemic. The needs assessment survey includes both closed and open-ended questions; quantitative data will be analyzed through SPSS and qualitative data will be theme coded.

**Results:** This survey will take place in October and November 2020. This study is anticipated to highlight the importance of developing strong partnerships to improve human trafficking survivors' services during a global crisis. Researchers hypothesize that there will be a sustained need for awareness building on sex trafficking and labor trafficking and training, specifically for rural communities. This survey will also establish which agencies are providing services, or are capable of providing services, to sex trafficking and labor trafficking victims around Arizona and will assist in decision making for future investment of training, resources, and partnerships. Furthermore, several adaptations and considerations will be recommended for social service delivery systems for human trafficking survivors in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

## **Timeline**

**October and November 2020:** Researchers will contact agencies within the State of Arizona. Five full-time Arizona State University Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research researchers and ten student researchers will attend training on the study's mission, objectives, and steps in conducting the telephone survey.

**December 2020:** Data analysis takes place.

**January and February 2021:** A manuscript will then be written on the unique needs of service providers to provide services, especially considering the impacts of COVID-19 on social service delivery systems and human trafficking survivors' safety.

**April 2021:** Manuscript submitted to the *Journal of Modern Slavery*.

# **Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on survivors of human trafficking in the Philippines**

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**Jonna Eleccion**

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Pandemics disproportionately devastate those who are most vulnerable, including people who have experienced human trafficking. To understand the cross-cutting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic upon human trafficking survivors, we must first listen to survivors themselves about how their basic safety, security, and health have been affected. In this manuscript, we will present findings from a rapid assessment we conducted with human trafficking survivors in the Philippines regarding their experiences, needs, and priorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. First, we will briefly describe how the assessment was conducted, followed by key findings and implications for providing services for survivors impacted by COVID-19.

This rapid assessment was implemented by a non-governmental organization (NGO)<sup>1</sup> in Cebu, Philippines that provides economic empowerment and reintegration support programming for survivors of violence and exploitation. The primary populations served by this NGO are survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation and survivors of labor trafficking. During the rapid assessment, a team of NGO staff systematically surveyed a total of 233 human trafficking and child labor survivors regarding their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Surveys were conducted over the phone and virtually with survivors who were already engaged in this NGO's programming. A semi-structured guide was used to ask about the effects of COVID-19 on: survivors' financial status and employment, survivors' physical and mental health, the wellbeing of family members, and sources of support available during the pandemic. The initial rapid assessment

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the organization has been withheld at this time for the purposes of a blind review. The name can be inserted at the appropriate time if we are invited to submit a full manuscript.

regarding COVID-related impacts occurred in March and April 2020, followed by systematic outreach that continues through the present.

Results of the rapid assessment revealed four primary concerns and priorities from the perspectives of survivors: food insecurity, loss of employment, escalation in crisis incidents, and mental health concerns. Overwhelmingly, the most urgent challenges identified by survivors were loss of income (for themselves and family members) and the resulting inability to meet basic needs, specifically food. Survivors reported being considerably more concerned about feeding themselves and their families than about contracting COVID-19. Displaced from employment, survivors began running out of food. Significant barriers to accessing government relief goods were identified, including delayed distribution and limitations on aid provided for unregistered voters or informal dwellers, leaving the most marginalized community members without sufficient government assistance.

Additionally, rapid assessment results and subsequent engagement with survivors revealed an escalation in crisis incidents, specifically in reports of violence at home and a sharp increase in suicidal events. Rates of sexual, physical, and emotional gender-based and intimate partner violence rise in emergencies and humanitarian crises. During our engagement with survivors, we found that COVID-related financial stressors coupled with isolation inside the home with violent partners and family members led to an increase in reports of violence during quarantine and heightened difficulties escaping family violence due to financial dependence upon perpetrators. Furthermore, our engagement with survivors revealed a sizable increase in suicidal ideation and suicidal behavior among survivors with an existing suicidal history. Suicidal incidents during COVID-19 were triggered by loss of income, fear regarding inability to provide for family members, familial conflict, uncertainty about future plans, and experiences of family violence. Survivors reported a general rise in mental health concerns during the pandemic, particularly anxiety pertaining to capacity to meet basic needs. Concurrently, access to psychological and psychiatric services were disrupted during the pandemic, further exacerbating the vulnerabilities of survivors in communities already lacking sufficient access to mental health services.

The findings from this rapid assessment suggest several critical priorities for intervention with survivors impacted by COVID-19: emergency food assistance, enhanced employment services, crisis intervention support, and access to psychosocial support and psychological services. Given these assessment results, our NGO structured its COVID-19 relief for human trafficking survivors around these four priority areas. First, in response to the assessment, we launched a cash transfer program for survivors facing food insecurity. Survivors' financial needs

were continually assessed to determine ongoing eligibility for cash transfers. Secondly, our NGO expanded its employment services, including significant upscaling of our work immersion program (WIP). WIP provides survivors who are in crisis or in school with a part-time, paid work immersion experience in a safe environment. Along with significantly increasing enrollment, we adapted WIP to include remote work-from-home options for survivors in quarantine during the pandemic and prioritized WIP enrollment for survivors with the greatest financial needs and those in crisis.

To address the mental health concerns and increase in crisis incidents, each survivor enrolled in our program was assigned a counselor or social worker to conduct virtual or phone sessions with them at least once every two weeks to understand their ongoing concerns and priorities, provide psychosocial support, facilitate referrals to outside services, and ensure that survivors were connected to the appropriate programs internally to meet their emerging needs. Further, frontline staff provided crisis intervention services to survivors as needed to address concerns related to family violence and suicide. Crisis intervention refers to immediate, short-term counseling and support to people experiencing significant emotional, mental, and physical distress to help them strengthen their coping skills, access additional supports, and enhance their safety.

It is vital that we listen to the lived experiences of survivors about how they have been impacted and how their rights can be protected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Survivors must be engaged as active partners in identifying the best approaches. Through our rapid assessment and the process of providing COVID-19 relief services, we have systematically engaged with survivors affected by COVID-19 – first listening and understanding their concerns, priorities, and suggestions. Together, we are choosing to focus on efforts to promote the safety of the survivor as a whole person, including attention to their basic needs, physical safety, financial needs, and mental and emotional wellbeing. Desperation arising from seemingly impossible circumstances deepens vulnerability to human trafficking, re-trafficking, and other forms of exploitation. It is essential that service providers expand services for survivors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent further exploitation. Survivors' voices and priorities must be at the center of all such efforts.

# **COVID-19 and Child Criminal Exploitation: Implications of the Pandemic for County Lines**

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There has been substantial media speculation (Gierson and Walker, 2020; Pidd, 2020; Tidy, 2020; Eastwood, Aldridge and Spicer, 2020), as well as reports by frontline practitioners (National Youth Agency, 2020; Wedlock and Molina, 2020), about the effects of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions on 'County Lines' drug distribution and Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) in the UK. As the national lockdown limited peoples' capacity to move freely without creating suspicion, reports suggested the 'County Lines' distribution model which relies on the transportation of drugs and money between larger metropolitan and provincial or coastal areas had been 'disrupted' during the lockdown period (Calouri, 2020).

Reductions in the number of children being reported missing were initially taken as a sign that fewer children were being exploited through County Lines (Calouri, 2020). However, reports suggest that drug distribution networks have developed a variety of new approaches and tactics to avoid detection (Calouri, 2020; Saggars, 2020; Pidd, 2020) and youth justice, youth work and child protection practitioners have outlined concerns that lockdown restrictions may have increased the vulnerabilities of young people to being groomed into criminal exploitation including through 'County Lines' operations (National Youth Agency, 2020; Wedlock and Molina, 2020).

This paper will present interim findings from research that seeks to inform efforts to safeguard children and vulnerable adults from CCE, as the impacts of COVID-19 continue to unfold. Our core research question asks:

*What shifts in county lines offending patterns have occurred since the introduction of social distancing methods in response to COVID-19 in the UK, and what impacts have they had on efforts to detect, prevent and combat crime, and on the safeguarding of victims?*



Through delivering new knowledge, the recommendations contained within our paper will equip enforcement and safeguarding efforts with a vital route to understanding the ongoing and longstanding impacts of COVID- 19 across a number of areas, from the dual perspective of detection and enforcement, and prevention and safeguarding. These factors include:

- Changes in County Lines perpetrator behaviour resulting from social distancing;
- Changes in criminal business models, including decreased risk or increased profitability;
- Changes in offending related to potential shifts to online grooming and internet misuse, and changes to the illegal drug markets generally;
- Changes due to restrictions on movement that increase the risk of vulnerable people’s properties to cuckooing, as offenders seek to continue operations with discretion;
- Impacts on already vulnerable children due to the shrinking of opportunities for in- person safeguarding and social care. The connections between children who suffer domestic abuse and CCE have been highlighted.

## **Methods**

Our research is positioned as a “descriptive study based on clear social problems” (Silverman, 2015, p.113), and follows a descriptive case-study design, primarily containing two types of data i) key-informant interviews, and ii) routinely recorded individual-level data from partner organisations at local and national levels (covering both crime and intelligence records, NRM data, and safeguarding case files). Qualitative data derived from interviewing key frontline practitioners will fill a vital evidence gap – providing insights into sudden shifts in perpetrator behaviours, and the emergence of new safeguarding challenges that ensue. Over the project’s medium-term, individual level data from project partners will become available to corroborate (or contrast) findings from the interviews, enabling the formulation of both a comprehensive statistical picture and a rich descriptive understanding of how issues and changes are manifesting on the ground for law enforcement and those in safeguarding roles, aiding practitioners to reformulate existing practices, or develop new interventions.

## **Timeline**

This fourteen-month project will conclude in the summer of 2021. Despite this, the research team has committed to the dissemination of interim findings to key stakeholders every three months throughout its duration as our understanding of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic evolve. Our interim findings draw upon qualitative semi-structured interviews with eight participants.

## **Interim Findings**

The COVID-19 pandemic has, without doubt, created challenges for child protection services, the police, and other stakeholders. Much government and media attention has been paid to how lockdown restrictions have affected County Lines operations and the capacity of frontline services to protect victims of CCE. Reductions in the numbers of children reported missing and fewer incidents of serious crime may have obscured increases in the vulnerabilities of children and young people. Indeed, stretched services, school and college closures, and barriers to effective interventions caused by the pandemic increase risks to victims of CCE through County Lines. A lack of sectoral clarity about the scale and form of the problem as well as a reliance on anecdotal and speculative reporting may be obscuring regional variations in experience as well as risks to children and young people and opportunities for frontline services.

Our findings show that perhaps the most direct implication of COVID-19 has been on frontline services, due to the complications of providing support and risk assessment during lockdown. Even prior to the onset of lockdown frontline statutory services, such as the Youth Justice service, reported that resources were already stretched, and the impediments of working during lockdown have only served to exasperate concerns in this area. Law enforcement, however, have had to continue to provide a ‘business as usual’ service, and in some cases have benefitted from being able to reallocate resources due to closure of the country’s night-time economy. Vast reductions in the use of rail transport also bolstered frontline enforcement efforts to disrupt lines in the initial months following the introduction of lockdown, as British Transport Police benefited from the ability to stop and question a much larger proportion of rail users on their reasons for travel. In other instances, frontline services also reported to us that online and remote working had given rise to a number of positive outcomes, including greater flexibility to engage in multi-agency settings, resulting in stronger and more cohesive partnership working.

Harder to assess is the impact on the illegal drug market generally, and it is currently unclear whether perceived changes in point-of-sale tactics and transportation methods are as a result of actual reconstitution, or rather, if they are a continuity that has so far gone underrepresented in popular County Lines discourse. It is however likely that increased visibility, and possibility of detecting children and young people moving drugs on public transport may also have encouraged distribution networks to change their tactics to evade detection.

Young people themselves have also been affected. Missing from home and care reports have dropped dramatically during lockdown (Calouri, 2020) and these could be cited as evidence that exploitation cases have also decreased. However, the true scale is nebulous at best, with rising concerns that issues are simply not being recorded and that cases of criminal exploitation are roughly the same, if not worse, as a result of lockdown. Some reports have suggested that parents have been less comfortable in disclosing when their children go missing from home, over fears of possible COVID-19 related sanctions. Other participants reported that the number of missing vulnerable children had soared due to the limiting of safeguarding opportunities during the pandemic. In either case, changes in recorded incidence may indicate differences in reporting rather than an actual change. Numbers of missing children, and incidence of violent crime may not proportionately reflect the total number of County Lines operations.

While most children and young people remained indoors, the use of social media became one of few modes of entertainment, and frontline professionals reported increasing cases of online harms and abuse, with perpetrators using platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram and Tik Tok as part of their coercive repertoire. The glamourisation of drug-related wealth has been proliferated by increased social media use, aiding perpetrators in their ability to groom and attract varying demographics of young people.

Young people that remained in regular contact with care providers were generally much less comfortable in making disclosures remotely. Doorstep meetings also significantly impacted the safeguarding abilities of frontline services. Where once professionals could identify potential indicators of familial harm during meetings outside of the home, they had become restricted in their ability to offer the usual safe environment that encourages engagement and disclosures from young people.

Despite some clarifications emerging during the initial phases of our research, the extent and exact impact of COVID-19 in many areas remains unclear. It is difficult to assess whether some of the changes reported in the literature are speculative or locality specific, rather than providing evidence of broader national

trends. Due to the lack of frontline reporting and the prevalence of grey literature, it is also difficult to ascertain whether reports which appear to corroborate one another are drawing on speculative or anecdotal evidence from the same places. What is clear however, is that the impact of COVID-19 continues to amplify existing issues, creating challenges for practitioners.

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# **Assessing the impact of ad-hoc migratory and asylum regulations on the vulnerability to human trafficking and forced labour in Spain, Germany, and Italy: identifying good practices during the COVID-19 pandemic**

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The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent measures adopted by States have abruptly changed the regulatory landscape at various levels. The migration and asylum normative frameworks have been particularly affected by these changes and trade-offs, often as a result of improvised State policies in a context of radical uncertainty (OECD, 2020; World Bank, 2020). States have had to deal with the need to both 'flatten the curve' through travel restrictions or outright bans, and attract workers in key sectors heavily dependent on migrant labour (IOM, 2020). Measures have also been taken regarding migrant detention centres (World Health Organisation, 2020), mass regularisation of migrants, asylum policy (Vohnen, 2020; Ahmad, 2020), protection of particularly affected sectors where migrants proliferate –such as domestic work– and on the control of employment in irregular conditions. All these measures have an impact on existing conditions of vulnerability among migrants and asylum seekers, which may lead to an increase in human trafficking or forced labour (UNODC, 2020).

The aim of this article is to assess the extent to which COVID-19-related measures have impacted migrants and asylum seekers' vulnerability to human trafficking and forced labour, with a focus on identifying "good practices" to

mitigate negative effects.<sup>1</sup> To achieve this end, the policy responses of three European countries that have been severely hit by the pandemic but remained important migrant destination countries will be analysed (Spain, Germany and Italy<sup>2</sup>) under three headings: (i) measures to prevent abuse of migrants' rights, for example through regularisation of migrants working in certain sectors such as agriculture and domestic work and/or authorisations for asylum seekers to work in the countryside (Italy and Germany, respectively); (ii) measures to control and monitor migrant workers' conditions, for instance, through the design of specific campaigns in the Labour Inspectorate to combat forced labour in the agriculture sector (Spain); (iii) specific protection and safeguarding measures, such as the automatic validity extension of stay visas and residence cards (Spain and Italy). These measures will be assessed in terms of their impact on the vulnerability of migrants to violence, exploitation and abuse before, during and after migration. Those practices which reduce the vulnerability of migrants will be classified as "good practices" that could serve as a model for other States to follow. Against this backdrop, particular attention shall be paid to the IOM's Determinants of Vulnerability model, which considers the vulnerability or resilience of migrants to exploitation as the net impact of the interaction of various factors at different levels: individual, structural, community, household and family (IOM, 2019).

While recognizing that these are extraordinary measures adopted in a context of extreme uncertainty, and with other interests at stake –predominantly public health– this analysis will provide a better view of the extent to which migration policy options might create/remove/shape various aspects of vulnerability, thus affecting migrants and asylum seekers' risk of being subjected to human trafficking or forced labour. Furthermore, it will allow us to critically assess the proportionality of measures adopted through migration lenses, considering whether the same outcomes could be achieved through other, less harmful, measures. In short, it will help us to identify problematic (disproportionate) and good practices that will serve to build knowledge for recommendations for the ongoing or future crises.

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<sup>1</sup> For the scope of this article, the criteria used to qualify a measure as a "good practice" are i. promoting human rights and ii. aiming at restorative outcomes.

<sup>2</sup> In terms of non-EU citizens living in the country, Germany is the main destination country, Italy scores the second and Spain is the fourth.

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# **The Impact of COVID-19 on Survivors of Modern Slavery in Kenya**

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We are a collaborative team of researchers from the UK and Kenya, working with survivors of modern slavery in Kenya to understand their experience, specifically of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how we might use their insights to tackle modern slavery. Initially, we were interested in their general experience as survivors, but after COVID-19 made us pause the project, on re-starting we followed the lead of survivor-participants, and are focussing on the impact of COVID-19 on their lives. In response to these requests to re-start from survivors, we decided it would be ethical to proceed with a “remote” version, taking precautions to ensure the health and well-being of participants and researchers, and

the continued ethicality of the process. In response to COVID-19, we have changed the focus of our research to ask:

- What unique perspectives can survivor narratives and photography offer those committed to fighting modern slavery, especially in the context of COVID-19?
- What unique perspectives can survivor narratives and photography offer those committed to fighting, and mitigating the impact of, COVID-19
- What has been the impact of COVID-19 on the lived realities of survivors of modern slavery in Kenya?
- Can a new methodology for engaging with survivors, which combines both ethical storytelling and participatory photography be used to effectively raise awareness of modern slavery and the impact of COVID-19 on survivors of human trafficking?
- How can we use technology to further ethical research with survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery in a period affected by COVID-19, and in similar periods in the future?

Significantly, this research is survivor-led both in terms of its methodology and its output. This paper will therefore share both how survivors themselves shape the methodology in response to COVID-19, enabled in part by participatory research practices, and offer an analysis of their outputs and what they reveal about the impact of COVID-19 on their lives.

This impact is likely to be severe. Factors such as increased economic instability – as early reports suggest that demand for crucial exports (fruit, herbs, flowers, tea and coffee) has dropped, and the tourism industry is on the brink of collapse – are likely to increase instability in the region. In addition, survivors are likely to be cut off from the vital support networks that have been assisting in their recovery. This risks exacerbating issues surrounding survivor support in Kenya, as the Trafficking in Persons Report (2020) noted that, despite some improvements, “Kenyan authorities continued to treat some victims as criminals and the availability of protective services for adult and foreign national victims remained inadequate” (292). Although this research will focus on Kenya, the global nature of the pandemic and the worldwide shift to virtual spaces means that the findings may be extrapolated onto other global contexts. Our original project was based on the understanding that gaining survivor perspectives on modern slavery is fundamental to understanding its impact. Yet in the time of a global pandemic, these

perspectives gain an additional timeliness and urgency, as the unanticipated impacts affect survivors in real time. It is therefore vital to assess the impact of COVID-19 on survivors of modern slavery, yet it is important that this is done within a framework that is empowering, community-orientated, and supportive.

Our methodology is a survivor-led participatory research practice, which combines participatory photography with ethical storytelling. Participatory photography combines taking photographs, subsequent discussion, and distribution of imagery to empower survivors, as “the photograph’s narrative becomes a participatory site for wider storytelling, community discussion, and action” (Singhal et al, 2007, 217). Ethical storytelling naturally complements this, as it grants the survivors who choose to tell their stories ultimate agency over them. Gready (2010) states that “the ‘responsibility to the story’ is not a one-off event, but a process spanning the telling and the representation and the reception of the telling” (184). We felt that bringing these methodologies together has the power to create a new mode of ethical, survivor-orientated representation. This is still our primary concern, though COVID-19 has revealed new challenges (technical and theoretical) for both.

In order to answer our research questions, and understand the impact of COVID-19 on survivors of modern slavery, we will conduct a series of remote workshops with 16 survivors of modern slavery in Kenya. Through the workshops, participants will be invited to engage thematically with ideas that will explore the impact of COVID-19 on their lived experience as a survivor of modern slavery. Participants are already known to, and working with, one of the NGO project partners, and a trained counsellor in the research team has determined that they are at a suitable position in their recovery to benefit from participation in this project. Workshops will be facilitated by expert survivor-researchers, and experts in participatory photography and in story-telling.

Participants have previously been equipped with smart phones as part of our partner NGO’s work: we have realised we will need to supply data bundles and phone credit, as well as needing to build in time for our photography expert to learn about the phone’s camera so they can teach the participants how to use it to the best advantage.

We have adapted our usual procedures for securing informed consent to online/“on-phone” working, via one-to-one phone and WhatsApp conversations with a trained counsellor, and WhatsApp group discussions among participants and researchers. Workshops are planned for the whole group. In addition, we have set up three WhatsApp groups based on participants geographic proximity to each other. These groups will serve as the primary forum for discussion amongst

participants, allowing them to reflect on and share their experiences adapting the “subsequent discussion” of participatory photography. This will provide a written record for survivors to reflect on their own changing attitudes to the project. Depending on public health advice during the project, it also means meeting in person for some participants may be possible.

We had originally planned an exhibition of the photographs in Nairobi. We cancelled this because of COVID-19. However, discussion with participants has revealed that physical copies of their photographs are important, and so we are now planning how to print and safely distribute these to participants. Our original plan for project partner World Readert to host the narratives on their reading app continues. This is designed to work on most phones. As we are now assured participants have a suitable phone, and have incorporated credit/data into the project, participants will definitely be able to access their own stories on their own phones, an unexpected benefit of making this project “remote”.

This research is survivor-informed, so our process is yet to be finalised. However, our initial reflections with participants suggest the following workshop structure:

1. Meeting between research team and survivors discussing and establishing informed consent.
2. Individual meetings training survivor participants on how to use their camera phones and practice storytelling techniques.
3. Individual meetings wherein survivors are given a theme, and take photographs and create stories in response.
4. Meeting where survivors reflect on the project, and offer feedback.
5. Follow-up meeting to check-in on survivor well-being.

After the workshops end, we will analyse the stories, images, and participant and researcher reflections on the project. Specifically, we will apply close-reading techniques to analyse what the body of literature and photographic work reveals about the impact of COVID-19 on survivors of modern slavery in Kenya. In addition, we will consider the ways in which survivors moulded the methodologies to accommodate both their artistic visions and their lived realities of working within the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic. Initial engagement with survivors suggests this will reveal: (1) increased emphasis on their communities, rather than individual experiences, (2) use of fictionalised accounts to achieve a more universal experience, and (3) a focus on the activist function of these stories and photographs. We further surmise that these participants will further

adapt the methodologies of participatory photography and ethical storytelling to empower their communities. This project, therefore, will not just assess the impact of COVID-19 on survivors of modern slavery in Kenya – it will assess the impact of COVID-19 on survivor-led methodological approaches, the outputs they produce, and how they intend for these outputs to function.

Our research has been funded by a grant from the AHRC-funded GCRF Network+ Anti-Slavery Knowledge Network (hosted by the University of Liverpool) and made possible via collaboration with Against Human Trafficking Kenya (HAART) and World Reader.

### **Research Timeline**

August 2020: Online workshops with survivor participants begin.

December 2020: Online workshops with survivors participants finish.

December-January 2020: analysis of stories, narratives and reflections from research team (including survivor-participants).

January 2020: preparation of photographs and stories for publication via project partner and other online channels (e.g. podcasts, relevant websites). Collect reflections from research team (including survivor-participants) on efficacy and effects of changes to methods due to COVID-19, and overall success of project in terms of revised aims and research questions.

February-March: co-author article.

April 2020: submission of full-length article to JMSS.