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**ABSTRACT**

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

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

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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*.