



Economic Empowerment Survey Brief

Participant Demographics:

- All identified as female/feminine
- Racial Identity
 - 7 participants identified as black, African-American, or African
 - 3 identified as Hispanic
 - 2 identified as a mix of races or other
 - 1 identified as white
- Age
 - Participants' range from 19-55
 - 7 participants were between 30-39
 - Average age: ~39 years old

13 of 14 respondents agreed that they had been either trafficked or exploited, with most replying that they had been a victim of both.

One respondent expressed some ambivalence with the question, saying “yes and no” and that she was able to get out quickly.

Purpose of the survey:

To better understand the economic empowerment needs of survivors of human trafficking and those with experience in it, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of existing economic support and empowerment programs, in order to create accountability and provide better support for survivors to thrive.

Economic Empowerment:

When asked how they would define economic empowerment, we found that this was not a term that resonated with most participants. In most cases, we went on to explain that others might define it as financial independence and security. Five of the participants mentioned autonomy, financial freedom, and owning their own business. Repeatedly, we heard that the ability to make their own decisions was important to these women.

“

I didn't have any money, when I was in the life, I could not manage any money, [I was] provided [with] everything I needed. When I left, I had to leave all my belongings, when I left, I was in survivor mode.

Several survivors expressed that they needed time to recover from the trauma of their trafficking before they could consider their finances and job prospects. They also wanted more help with financial education, finding scholarships and employment, and other paths to independence.

What economic needs did you have after leaving your trafficking or exploitation situation?

Learning how to drive, finishing school, learning how to cook. Basically everything that has to do with transferring over to adult life: like budgeting, learning how credit works, banking, trying to start a business legally and not being overwhelmed by the process, housing and what it's like paying bills, how to keep up with bills.

Immediate Needs:



64%

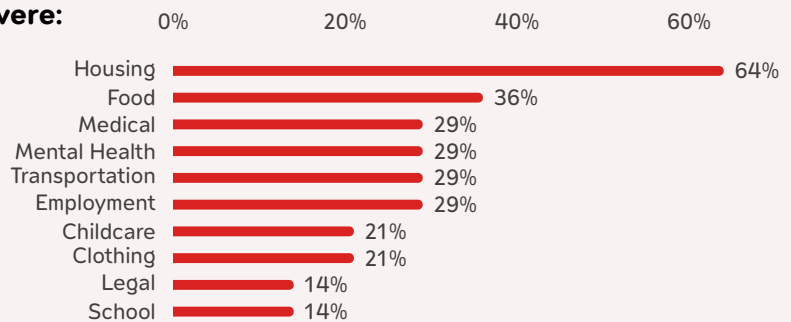
of participants were concerned with finding housing or shelter

Participants were most concerned with finding housing and food assistance. Others still mentioned basic needs which would imply a need for housing and food, among other basic necessities.

Overall, there was a trend among participants that in first coming out of the life, their basic needs had to be met to move forward in other avenues, such as receiving physical and mental health care, finding transportation, and seeking employment.

Finally, child care and clothing were mentioned by three participants, respectively, legal assistance and education, and ESL classes were needed by one participant.

Participants were asked about their immediate needs. Most common needs were:



Access to Benefits:

When asked about access to services or benefits, seven respondents mentioned shelter or rental assistance, three mentioned help with transportation. One or two of the respondents mentioned at least one of the following: Mental health services, physical health services, education/reskilling and upskilling, literacy, substance abuse treatment, child care and supplies, furniture, and legal assistance.

Another trend in the responses (4) was job/career readiness and/or scholarships. This next step seemed particularly challenging, but necessary for the autonomy that many of them desire.

▶ **71%** of respondents felt that services rendered to them were quite effective



▶ **93%** of respondents said they would return to the agency they are currently working with for more services.

Challenges:

Transportation, childcare, and immigration needs were amongst the challenges mentioned. Another trend in the responses was a need for help with navigating paperwork for benefits and job readiness.

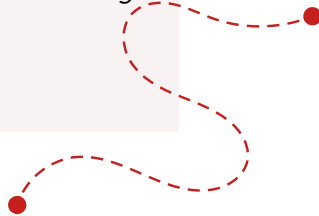
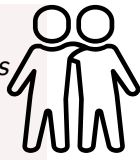
Too often, our support for survivors ends when they are out of their trafficking situation. However, in order to support survivors through the full, complicated path to healing, we must recognize their need for continued resources in rebuilding a life insulated from the forces that exploited them in the first place.



The majority (8 of 14) of respondents did feel comfortable speaking to their service providers about their needs. However, 6 of 14 respondents were uncomfortable providing details about their finances or needs, with one even saying that she felt like the more information she provided, the more it could be used against her.

Significance of Personal Relationships:

The vast majority of respondents came to their current case manager through referral. This suggests that resources such as the Pathway can be enormously helpful to survivors.



Eight respondents expressed hesitation or discomfort in reaching out for help. The majority of those eight expressed experiences of shame or disappointment in needing to ask for help, but of those who became comfortable, almost every single one mentioned particular people (caseworkers, mental health providers, fellow survivors) that helped them to feel that way. It was important to survivors to feel genuine connection and compassion versus feeling like “just a number.” For those who did say that they felt comfortable, most echoed or qualified that by specifying specific people who made them feel cared for and comfortable.

Respondents had valuable advice for the service providers with whom they worked. First and foremost, respondents emphasized the value of relationships. They urged their service providers to be **empathetic** and **patient** with them, and expressed their gratitude for the work service providers did for them.



The majority (8 of 14) of respondents did feel comfortable speaking to their service providers about their needs. A personal relationship, lack of judgement, and trust were the three most important factors in whether a respondent had grown to feel comfortable or not.

However, 6 of 14 respondents were uncomfortable providing details about their finances or needs, with one even saying that she felt like the more information she provided, the more it could be used against her.

Three most important factors in whether a respondent had grown to feel comfortable or not:

- Personal relationships
- Lack of Judgement
- Trust

Too often, our support for survivors ends when they are out of their trafficking situation. However, in order to support survivors through the full, complicated path to healing, we must recognize their need for continued resources in rebuilding a life insulated from the forces that exploited them in the first place.

Once removed from a trafficking situation, survivors who experienced these hardships don't have many resources to restabilize and often don't have much job experience, especially if they were trafficked as a child. Returning to a life of poverty, homelessness, or addiction with the immense trauma of trafficking victimization often prevents true recovery and healing.



At CHILDREN AT RISK, we see immense promise in programs focusing on economic empowerment for survivors of human trafficking and those at risk of exploitation. The Texas Attorney General identified economic empowerment as a key prevention tactic in their 2020 strategic plan to end human trafficking: “[e]conomic insecurity poses a significant vulnerability to human trafficking, and individuals may become entangled in either sex or labor trafficking out of economic necessity. Increasing economic opportunities for high-risk populations can help remove the financial strain that places many at risk for exploitation.”



“

It was difficult to share my needs, but I received the confidence through my Advocate and Economic empowerment case manager to be able to talk about what I was needing. I knew that if I stayed in bed I was going to start thinking about my situation and I wanted the opportunity to do things and not focus only on my circumstances.

