

RESET (WesteRn capE Stop ExploiTation) community survey study

BACKGROUND

South Africa is noted as the primary destination for trafficked persons in the Southern African region and within Africa. It is also an origin and transit country for trafficking towards Europe and North America.¹

Available data sources provide limited clarity on the prevalence of human trafficking in South Africa.² What is known is that more than half of the victims involved in identified (ongoing) cases are from outside of South Africa, including over 90 victims from Mozambique, Bangladesh, China, and Zimbabwe, with several victims from Lesotho, Botswana, and Mozambique.³

Trafficked individuals are exploited for forced labour, commercial sex, forced begging and forced criminality. Determining the estimated prevalence of persons at risk of trafficking in persons (TIP) in the South African context is therefore vital in creating focused efforts and targeted intervention strategies to address human trafficking.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This research project was supported through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Southern Africa and the South Africa Department of Science and Innovation as part of the LASER PULSE program, funded by USAID’s Innovation, Technology and Research Hub and led by Purdue University under the terms of Cooperative Agreement No. 7200AA18CA00009. The research was conducted by the University of the Western Cape and three U.S. universities.

Anti-trafficking infrastructure and service provision throughout government and social services has made Cape Town an ideal location in which to conduct this research.

KEY POINTS

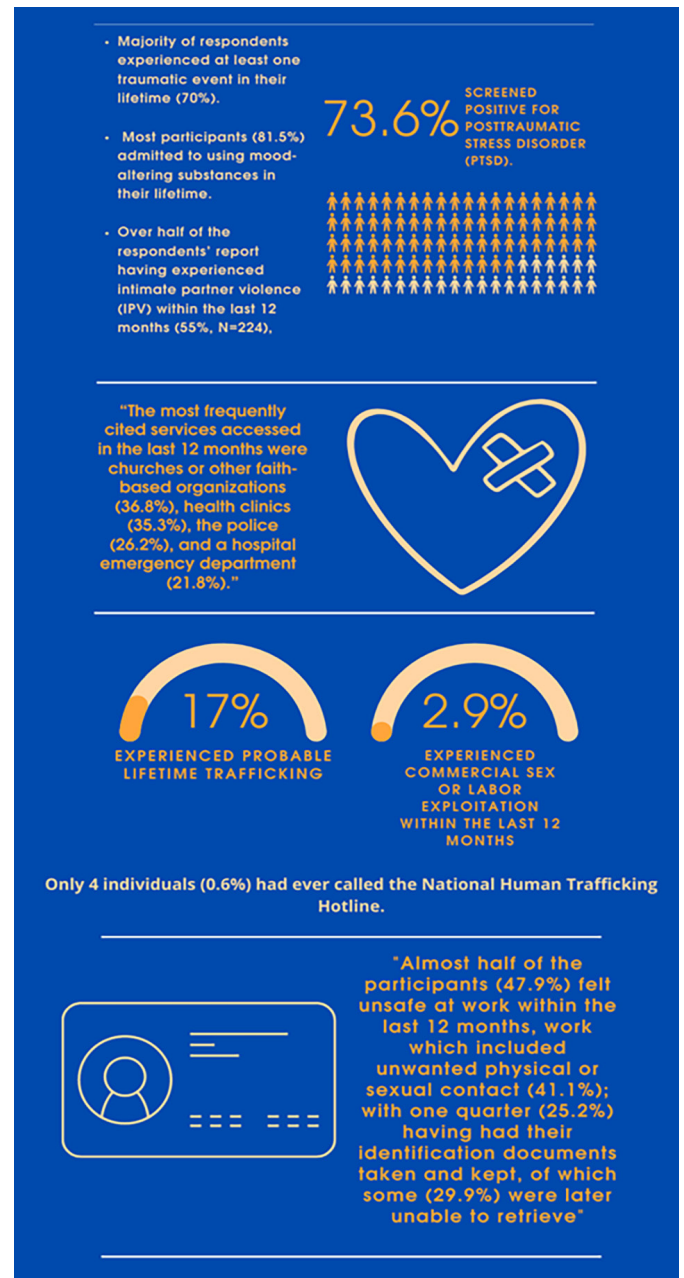
 1 Targeted Interventions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aimed at identified vulnerable populations • Accessible & user-friendly • Allow timely access to legal aid and health care. 	 2 Contextual response <p>Interventions which are needs sensitive to the contextual factors facing high risk persons susceptible to trafficking.</p>
 3 Data & surveillance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparent reporting • Secure data sharing amongst stakeholders • Supported surveillance activities to improve knowledge 	 4 Whole-of-society approach <p>Promote and improve cooperation and alignment among government, essential services, and civil society to create an integrated response towards trafficked persons.</p>

The city has been identified as a prime destination for trafficked victims,^{3,4} particularly from what was noted to be “refugee-producing countries”⁵ and has been the location of other South African TIP studies.⁶ The current survey findings deliver tools to expand monitoring and research in South Africa and to provide locally based policy recommendations to improve knowledge and response on TIP. COVID-19 impacted the sampling strategy, and participants were not able to be selected randomly, which limits the generalisability of the results, although they are likely to be reproducible. The final sample size, presented here, includes all 665 participants who were selected as part of a high-risk sample and were identified through two screening tools.

LASER PULSE is a five-year (2018-2023), \$70 million program funded through USAID’s Innovation, Technology and Research Hub, that delivers research-driven solutions to field-sourced development challenges in USAID partner countries.

KEY FINDINGS

- Demographic:** Most participants were female (58.8%), Coloured (of mixed descent) (68.4%), English-speaking (86.7%), South Africans (89.4%), with a mean age of 36.4 years.
- High-risk sample prevalence estimate:** Based on participants' responses to each of the human trafficking screening tools, and after sampling adjustment, the estimate of probable lifetime trafficking in this sample was 17%, and 2.9% of respondents had experienced labour or commercial sex exploitation in the previous 12 months.
- Exploitative, unsafe work conditions:** Individuals reported feeling unsafe at work (lifetime, 25.2%; 12 months, 47.9%), and had been threatened or harmed by co-workers (lifetime, 22.1%; 12 months, 45.9%) or threatened by their employer for not making enough money (lifetime, 8%; 12 months, 45.3%). Individuals reported staying in these unfair or unsafe jobs for fear of what their employer would do if they left (lifetime, 7.7%; 12 months, 42%).
- Commercial sex exploitation:** Individuals reported being tricked or pressured into doing something they did not want to do on the job (lifetime, 19.4%; 12 months, 39.8%), which included having unwanted physical or sexual contact (lifetime, 14.5%; 12 months, 41.1%). Furthermore, respondents had engaged in sexual activity for things of value, such as money, food, rent, transportation, or something else (lifetime, 24.6%; 12 months, 38.9%), of whom 29% said they were coerced into this sexual activity, and 34.6% that they were under age when this experience occurred.
- Loss of control (identification, finances, freedom of movement):** Participants said that someone had taken and retained their personal identification (lifetime, 25%; 12 months, 44.8%), and some were later unable to retrieve it (29.9%). Fifteen percent of respondents said a boss or co-worker had taken money from them for things such as rent or transportation (12 months, 47.4%), with 53.6% not agreeing to it. Furthermore, participants said they had been forced to do things (unspecified) to repay a debt (lifetime, 10.4%; 12 months, 50%). It was also reported that employers would restrict some participants' activities outside of work (lifetime, 6%; 12 months, 51.3%), and from contacting family or friends (lifetime, 10%; 12 months, 43.8%).
- Health and wellness:** About 70% of participants reported having been exposed to at least one traumatic event during their lifetime, with 73.6% of those screened as positive for likely post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Most participants said they had used a mood-altering substance, whether licit or illicit, during their lifetime (81.5%). Tobacco (65.5%), alcohol (64.5%), and cannabis (42%) were the substances most cited as well as those frequently used. More than half of the respondents reported having experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) in the previous 12 months (55%), with 40%



saying they had witnessed their parents engaging in IPV and had themselves been affected by child maltreatment on more than one occasion.

- Services accessed:** The most frequently cited services accessed in the previous 12 months were churches or other faith-based organisations (36.8%), health clinics (35.3%), the police (26.2%), and a hospital emergency department (21.8%). Approximately one-fifth (20.9%) were currently, or had been until recently, receiving treatment for a substance use disorder, and 17% had been admitted to hospital during the previous year. Nearly 16% were currently residing in a shelter or temporary housing for homeless individuals, and 14.3% received welfare assistance in the form of social grants from the South African government. Only four individuals (0.6%) had ever called the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Targeted interventions

Have focused interventions aimed at identified vulnerable populations and centred on raising awareness of TIP and increasing opportunities for secure, quality employment. Furthermore, interventions and support services need to be accessible and user friendly, and provide assistance in a manner that aligns with the rights of the victim in accessing timely legal aid and health care.



Needs assessment

Have interventions that are contextualised and needs sensitive to factors facing high-risk persons susceptible to trafficking. Hence, transparent reporting and secure data sharing among stakeholders is required to aid the identification of prevalence and response. Supported surveillance activities will improve knowledge of the extent of trafficking and the early identification of victims, as promoted in the Trafficking in Persons National Policy Framework.



Whole-of-society approach

Promote and improve cooperation and alignment among all government departments and essential services, as well as with civil society organisations engaged in assisting and supporting trafficked persons, to create an integrated response, guided by national frameworks and legislation, and informed by evidence. Furthermore, these activities can be facilitated through aligned common goals and agendas, which can only be achieved through political will and meaningful collaboration.

Endnotes

1. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2 May 2019. [South Africa launches Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons National Policy Framework](#).
2. Institute of Security Studies. 30 November 2018. [The perplexities of human trafficking in South Africa](#).
3. US Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. [2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: South Africa](#).
4. United States Department of State. June 2019. [Trafficking in Persons Report 2019: South Africa](#).
5. Martens J, Pieczkowski M, Van Vuuren-Smyth B. 2003. [Seduction, sale, and slavery: Trafficking in women & children for Sexual Exploitation in Southern Africa](#). Pretoria: International Organization for Migration. Page 14.
6. Gould C. 2011. [Trafficking? Exploring the relevance of the notion of human trafficking to describe the lived experience of sex workers in Cape Town, South Africa](#). *Crime, Law and Social Change* 56(5), 529 - 546.

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