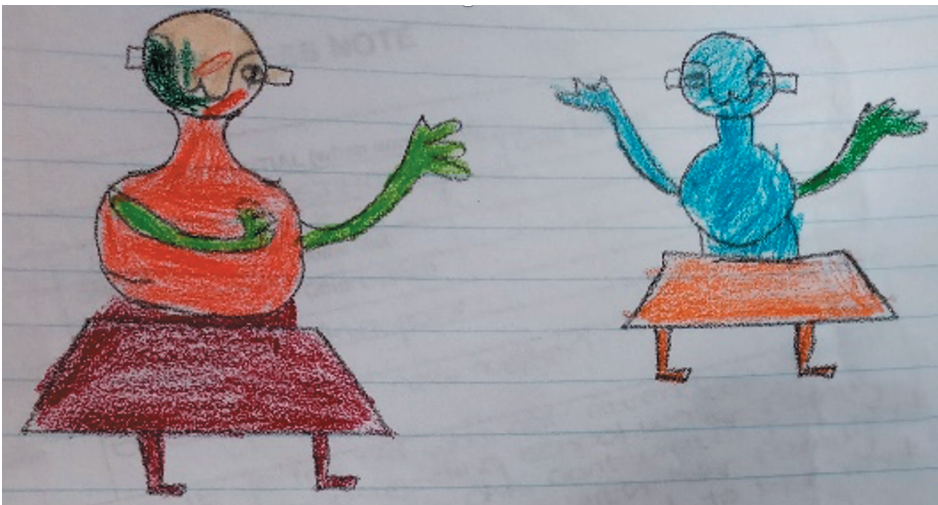


Victim voices are crucial to preventing and combatting trafficking



The protection of trafficking victims is one of the core principles of international, regional and national anti-trafficking and child protection legislation. The provision of a continuum of appropriate, timely and holistic services is integral to helping trafficked persons heal.

A drawing by a child trafficking survivor depicting the most important people in their life.

Rights-based, trauma-informed, and survivor-led culturally transformative approaches must inform counter-trafficking efforts.

Designing wide-ranging, gender-sensitive, and culturally relevant prevention, protection, and prosecution strategies is crucial to ensuring that no victim, irrespective of the exploitation or trafficking experienced, is left behind. All trafficking— regardless of the migration status, age, nationality, or gender of the affected victim— must be addressed.

Transformative and sustainable interventions involve putting victims’ voices at the forefront.

Collaborating with victims and survivors in ways that ensure their needs and rights are met is essential to their healing and recovery. Therefore, principles of social justice, human rights and sustainable development are fundamental foundations of transformative anti-trafficking interventions.

The trauma, abuse and exploitation experienced by victims have profound implications: the cost of trafficking for the victims is severe and can be devastating. To reflect on the extent and impact of trafficking and on counter-trafficking efforts, a study* explored the experiences of trafficked adult and child victims and survivors in South Africa.

Listening and learning from victims’ experiences and turning their suggestions into concrete actions will lead to a more transformative victim-centered, survivor-led and effective approach to combatting human trafficking. The voices of survivors should be included in all anti-trafficking efforts.

The study applied qualitative research methods. The design of the adult study used a narrative research approach, while case file analysis was undertaken for the child study. For both studies, purposive sampling was used with the assistance of a social work supervisor. The specific exploratory purpose was to tap into the unique, intersecting and critical personal and collective trafficking journeys and narratives of healing and recovery. Both data sets were analysed using thematic analysis. No judgement was interpolated during the data collection and analysis.

*The Research on the Nature and Scope of Trafficking in Persons (TIP) in South Africa was conducted by Khulisa Management Services and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It was produced for the LASER PULSE project, managed by Purdue University. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

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The study adhered to the World Health Organization (WHO) Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Interviewing Trafficked Women. The WHO recommendations were contextualised for male and LGBTQ+ victims, and for the information extracted from the child case files. The assent and consent of the trafficked child and parent or caregiver were waived, and instead the Child and Youth Care Centre manager, in consultation with the social work supervisor, permitted access to the files. Ethics clearance was granted by the University of Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) (# H20/05/35).

Trafficking is multifaceted, and victims' needs are layered and complex

The study findings include:

- South Africa is a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking.
- Different forms of trafficking can be identified in South Africa.
- Victims' vulnerability is not inherent, but instead created through structural inequalities.
- More than one victim and perpetrator per case were identified, with various actors identifying the victims.
- Domestic or internal trafficking of women is more prevalent than reported.
- Drug abuse and adverse childhood experiences increase vulnerability to trafficking.
- Men and boys continue to be invisible and silent victims as they are overlooked, under-identified, and under-reported, with limited or no interventions in place.
- Trafficking has far-reaching consequences for the victims and their families.
- Social services have an essential role in the assessment, healing and recovery process of survivors.
- COVID-19 impacted victims' healing process and general service provision.
- The criminal justice system responses consistently failed victims.
- Responses must be tailored to victims' vulnerabilities, needs, agency, and rights.
- The preference for being referred to as either a victim or a survivor depends on a person's healing journey and should be viewed along a continuum.

Long-term support is required to journey from victim to survivor

- Victims feel the impact of trafficking in the short, medium and long term, during rescue, healing and recovery, and reintegration. Each phase of the healing journey has different needs, which can overlap.
- Government *must* take action to strengthen the multi-level and systemic response for adult and child victims of trafficking, alongside the continuum of care.
- Professionals *must* provide multiple specialised services not as a one-off event but as long-term iterative engagement. Supporting the journey from victim to survivor requires in-depth preparation by professionals; ongoing well-being, social and financial support; and follow-up services beyond the victims' time in the care facility.



CASE FILE ANALYSIS OF CHILD VICTIMS

- Many child victims were from other African countries and were undocumented.
- Service provision was mainly rendered by social workers.
- Placements in a Child and Youth Care Centre were marred by language barriers and safety challenges.
- Children were returned to their families, with the assistance of the International Organization for Migration and the International Social Services.
- Most perpetrators were known to the child's family.

“I’m going to start seeing a psychologist. I’m on a waiting list. The sooner I can confront that battle that I have with myself – or maybe open that box of feelings, the sooner I can heal ... in the meantime I’m just beating myself up.”

Trafficked woman

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