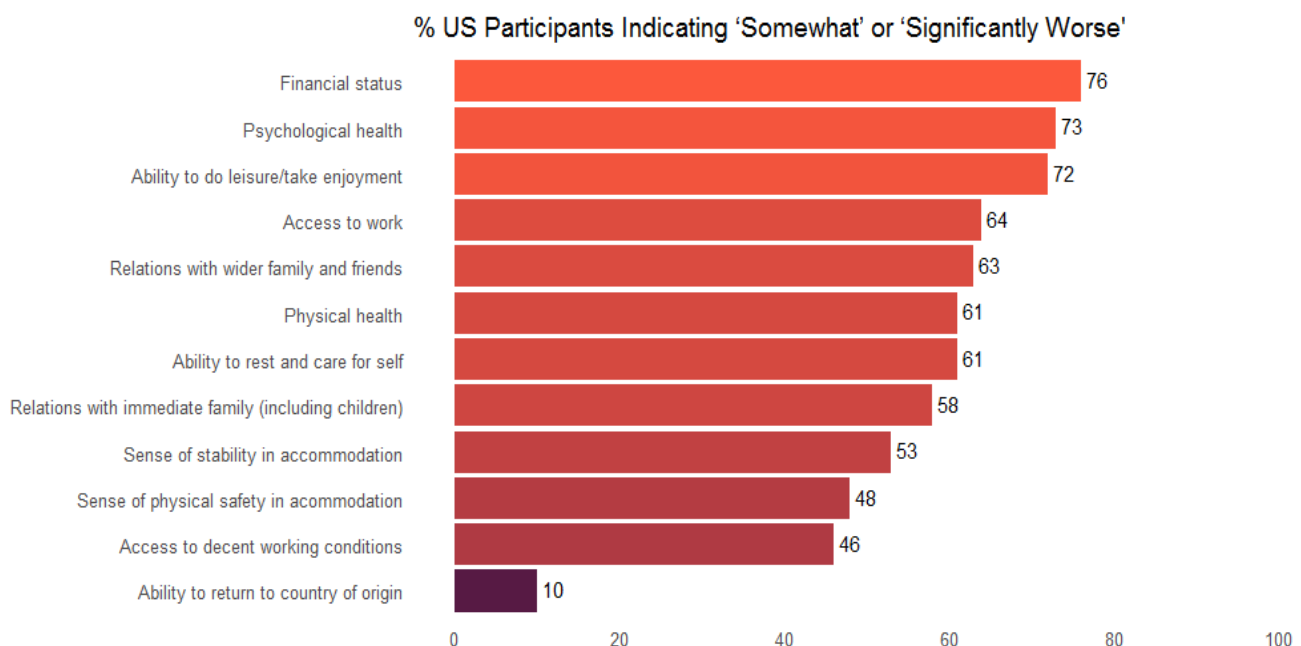# Amplifying Survivor Voice in Research Recommendations: Addressing Risks & Impacts of Covid-19 for Survivors of Trafficking in the USA

This briefing presents survey results from an ongoing UKRI-funded project to assess the accrued risks, impacts and mitigating responses of Covid-19 for victims and survivors human trafficking.
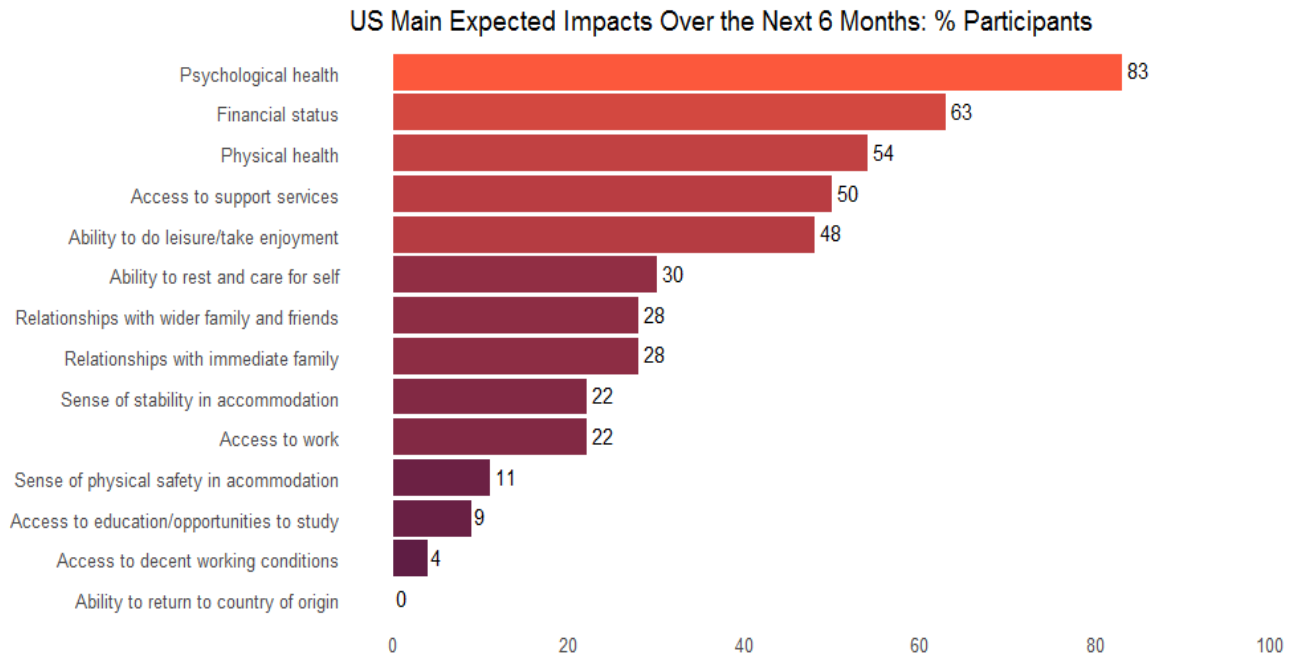
- 102 survivors in the UK and USA participated in a survey between December 2020 and January 2021 on: the main impacts of Covid-19; expected future impacts; and actions that participants would like people in positions of power to take to mitigate these impacts.
- Results presented here are from the 46 USA survey participants, identifying 96% female 4% non-binary, aged between 28 and 60 years (mean age 41 years), all of whom but one indicated originating from the USA.
- **Results 1 and 2 (graphs below):** Financial and psychological health impacts of Covid-19 were found to be the commonly selected (highest proportion of survey participants) over the year prior to survey participation. They were also the most commonly expected impacts (selected by highest proportion of survey participants) over the upcoming 6 months. These results are consistent with those indicated by US participants on impact severity, see here.
- **Result 3 (tables below):** When asked what action they would most like people in positions of power to take to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19, survey participants provided clear and practical calls for action on psychological and financial support.
- **Recommendations:** A representative sample of requests for action from survey participants are listed as the key recommendations arising from this survey research.
- The full list of survey questions can be found here, and further results from the US survey can be found here.

Result 1: Financial then psychological health impacts of Covid-19 were found to be the most commonly selected impacts (by the highest proportion of participants) by Dec 2020/Jan 2021:

% US Participants Indicating 'Somewhat' or 'Significantly Worse'

Impact	%
Financial status	76
Psychological health	73
Ability to do leisure/take enjoyment	72
Access to work	64
Relations with wider family and friends	63
Physical health	61
Ability to rest and care for self	61
Relations with immediate family (including children)	58
Sense of stability in accommodation	53
Sense of physical safety in acommodation	48
Access to decent working conditions	46
Ability to return to country of origin	10

Result 2: Psychological health then financial status were found to be the most commonly selected *expected impacts* (by the highest percentages of participants) over the following 6 months:

US Main Expected Impacts Over the Next 6 Months: % Participants

Impact	%
Psychological health	83
Financial status	63
Physical health	54
Access to support services	50
Ability to do leisure/take enjoyment	48
Ability to rest and care for self	30
Relationships with wider family and friends	28
Relationships with immediate family	28
Sense of stability in accommodation	22
Access to work	22
Sense of physical safety in accommodation	11
Access to education/opportunities to study	9
Access to decent working conditions	4
Ability to return to country of origin	0

Result 3: When asked what action participants would most like 'people in power' to take now ('e.g., local government, national government, NGOs or others') to address the issues they faced, and may continue to face, due to Covid-19, survey participants provided clear and practical calls for action.

A representative sample on mental health and financial status are included here (see Annex for the broader set of topics) and are summarised (rather than *verbatim*) in accordance with ethics approval for this project:

Mental Health
The limitations of remote mental and physical health support need to be addressed.
In person (face-to-face) support systems need to be developed for delivery under these kinds of conditions.
Online support needs to be increased to reduce people's sense of social isolation.
Mental health services need to be increased within shelters for survivors.
Understanding of Complex-PTSD and its consequences needs to be increased.
More financial as well as psychological support needs to be delivered.
Long-term support needs to be delivered to address the consequences of trauma and re-traumatisation caused by lockdown(s).
Preventative measures need to be developed to prevent mental health crises.
Increased support mechanisms from a range of sources (including family, friends and service agencies) need to be explored to reduce the sense of social isolation.

Finance
Inconsistencies in the financial stimulus system need to be addressed.
The lack of funding for self-employed people who do not have employees needs to be addressed.
Student loan re-payments need to be halted to prevent vulnerability to re-trafficking.
Financial support needs to focus on grants rather than loans that require subsequent repayment.
Financial support needs to reach those who are out of work.
The financial welfare system needs adjusting to reach those who are earning an income but not enough to survive.
NGOs and programs that support survivors need to be better resourced to provide support.

Recommendations from this research:

1. **For government and NGOs**:
   a. Take into consideration and act upon the survivor participant requests for action in the tables presented under Result 3 when developing policy and frontline responses to Covid-19
   b. See the Annex to this briefing for a broader range of representative recommendations from participants.

2. **For anti-trafficking researchers**:
   a. Generate opportunities for survivors to play a leading or, minimally, an active role in multiple stages of the research process, including the design and delivery of research; the development of recommendations; and the communication of research findings and recommendations to governments and NGOs.
   b. Publicly report learnings from survivor-led and survivor-engaged research to advance knowledge in the anti-trafficking sector on good practice in this area.

ANNEX: Additional representative requests for action from the survey

Food
Direct food support needs to be increased to those with insufficient food and funds.
Food delivery service companies need to accept SNAP benefits.
Duplication of food support services needs to be addressed.

Employment
Employment support for qualified/educated individuals needs to be increased.
Access to work that is specifically conducive to Covid-19 restrictions needs to be increased.
The negative consequences of background checks for employment need to be addressed.
The impacts of school closures and home-schooling demands on people's capacity to engage with/maintain employment needs to be addressed.
Access to educational grants and scholarships need to be increased under crisis conditions so that the time can be used to develop employment prospects, self-sufficiency and reduced vulnerability to re-trafficking.

Shelter and homelessness
The availability of safe housing needs to be increased to reduce the risk of re-trafficking.
Support in *accessing* safe shelters needs to be increased.
Forced evictions need to be prevented.
Increased emergency housing is needed.
Support for homeless people needs to be increased to reduce Covid-19 transmission rates.
The cost of housing needs to be reduced.
Addiction support and housing support need to be better coordinated to reduce the risk of homelessness.
Barriers to presentation of documentation in order to access shelter support need to be addressed for survivors who are homeless.
The connection between domestic violence and homelessness for survivors needs to be addressed.

Physical health
Information and guidance on appropriate action when testing positive for Covid 19 needs to be increased.
Enforcement of mask-wearing (PPE) needs to be increased.
Free Covid-19 testing sites need to be more accessible to enable faster access to survivor support programs.

Personal freedom and Choices
People need the option to make their own choices about how to keep themselves safe.
People need to make their own choices about whether to work in the office or at home.

Discrimination, social and political divides
More needs to be done to support the black community.
The spreading of inter-racial fear needs to be stopped.
The government needs to acknowledge the social divisions that it has directly contributed to.
Community action to rebuild local structures and independence from government handouts needs to be increased.