

Improving Trafficking Victim Identification: Screening Tool and Guidelines



Center on Immigration and Justice, Vera Institute of Justice

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Overview of the presentation

- What is the Trafficking Victim Identification Tool?
- How was it developed and tested?
- How do we know it works?
- What did we learn from the testing and implementation?
- How can it help you identify trafficking victims in practice?

Why low numbers? Under-identification

- Victims not self-identifying due to **fear and stigma**
- Signs of trafficking may go **unrecognized.**
- **Lack of standardized screening tools** and procedures



Vera's work in human trafficking

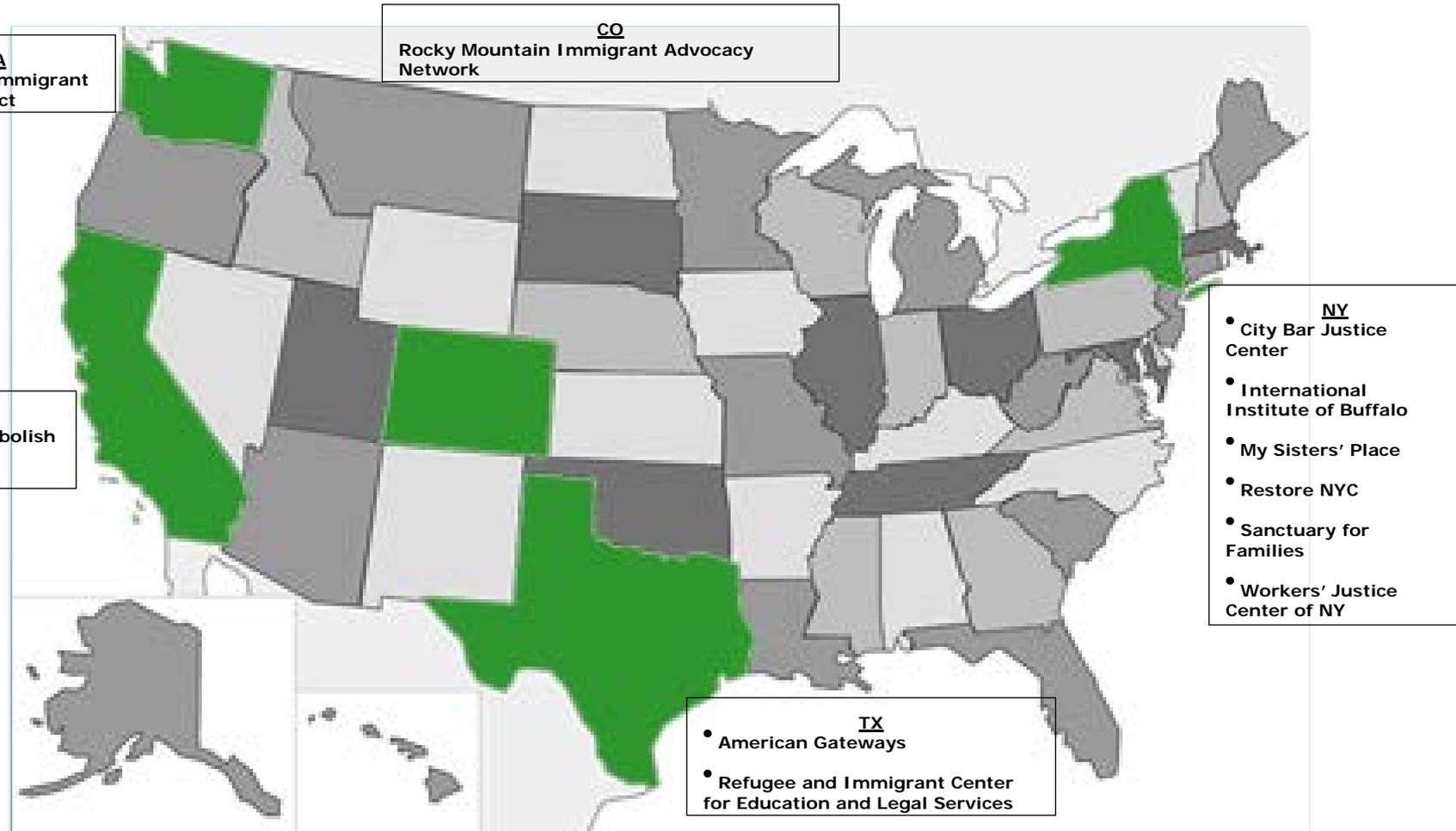
2006 - 2008

- Vera developed a screening tool to identify likely victims of trafficking in partnership with NYC anti-trafficking agencies

2011 - 2014

- Vera updated, field-tested and validate the screening tool in real-world settings
- ***Result:*** the first-ever validated instrument that can reliably identify sex and labor trafficking victims in the United States

Who did we work with to test the tool?



Research Methods

Tool Validation

- 230+ cases examined
- Interviews with 180 **potential** victims
- 53 case file reviews
- Statistical analysis of reliability and validity

Process Evaluation

- Focus groups with study partners
- 24 in-depth interviews with service providers and trafficking survivors
- Qualitative analysis of transcripts

Knowledge Translation

- 12 in-depth interviews with law enforcement personnel
- Feedback from study partners on final tool and user guide

Who was screened?

70% were female, average age was 34

94.4% were foreign-born

- Top four countries of origin: Mexico (20%), China (15%), Philippines (10%), and Honduras (9%).

10% were under the age of 18 at the time of the interview.

53% of those screened *had been trafficked*

Sex trafficking: 40% Labor trafficking: 60%

- Of these, 14% (25) had been trafficked as minors.

Validation Findings

- The screening tool accurately measured **several dimensions** of human trafficking.
- It **reliably predicted victimization** for both sex and labor trafficking across sub-groups in the sample.
- The **majority of questions were predictors of trafficking** after controlling for demographics
- A **16-item version** (half the original questions) **can predict trafficking victimization** with small loss in predictive power. Both versions of the tool are useful.

Children's experiences

- Of the children in the study, **56% were female**; about **half** were trafficking victims.
- MINORS were significantly more likely than non-minors to have had **their payments controlled**.
- MINORS were also significantly more likely than non-minors to **have been harmed or threatened at work, or to have had people close to them harmed or threatened**.

What are the best questions to ask?

Strong predictors of trafficking

- Do you owe money for help in traveling to the U.S.?
- Have you been pressured to pay it back?

Strong predictors of sex trafficking

- Did anyone you worked for or lived with trick or force you into doing anything you did not want to do?
- Did anyone ever pressure you to touch another person or have any unwanted physical or sexual contact with another person?
- Did you ever have sex for things of value (for example money, housing, food, gifts, or favors)?

Strong predictors of labor trafficking

- Have you ever worked without getting the payment you thought you would get?
- Have you ever worked in a place where the work was different from what you were promised or told it would be?
- Did anyone at your workplace make you feel scared or unsafe?
- Did anyone at your workplace ever harm or threaten to harm you?
- Have you ever felt you could not leave the place where you worked or lived?

Recommended questions for UAC

1. **Did anyone arrange your travel to the U.S.?**
2. **Did the people or person who arranged your travel pressure you to do anything?** (e.g. to carry something across the border) *You could rephrase this to say, “Did you have to do anything so that they would help you?”*
3. **Did you (or your family) borrow or owe money** (or something else, such as property or land) to anyone who helped you come to the U.S.?
4. Have you worked for someone [or done any other activities] where the **work was different from what you were told** it would be, or **without getting the payment** you thought you would get?
5. **Have you ever had sex for things of value**, including food, housing, money, gifts, or favors?

Best practices in using the TVIT

- A **victim-centered approach is paramount** — victims are fearful and traumatized, and need practical and emotional support.
- **Establishing trust comes first--**

“Until you know what the person's intention is, you wouldn't really start, or you would lie just to protect yourself ... You maybe would be scared to tell the truth.”

— *Female survivor of domestic servitude*

To build trust and rapport

Before the first interview:

- Have **adequate knowledge** of trafficking
- Offer a **sense of safety** and meet victims' immediate needs
- Establish connections **with anti-trafficking service providers**

During all interviews...

- Be **clear when explaining the purpose** for collecting information and how you can help
- Use **open-ended questions** to get into details; you do not need to read the questions *verbatim*.
- Ask **as many questions as possible**, but do not rush to ask everything in a single interview.
- Let your **client set the pace** :

“Always give the person ...the opportunity to take breaks, to know that they can stop, or not answer a question or come back to it....whatever traumatic situation they are in, choice has been taken away from them.”

– *Service provider*

Be aware of trauma and its effects

- Victims are told by their traffickers to **fear everyone:**

“The way we are put in the situation, we don’t have a choice— [it’s] like a prison--we don’t have a life. What you know is what they tell you.”

– Female survivor of domestic servitude from Lesotho

- Victims often suffer the **impacts of trauma**, which may **impair their ability to recall and talk** about their experiences for a long time.
- Interviewers must minimize **re-traumatization.**

Challenges of victim identification

- **Many do not know or do not believe** that they are victims of a crime or have been victimized.

“Some people were tricked into prostitution by friends and relatives. You never believe that they would do this to you.”

– Female survivor of sex trafficking from China

- **Immigration issues and lack of knowledge of rights** are problematic.

Other challenges of interviewing

- **A sense of shame is** felt by many trafficking victims (males as well as females).

“At first [...] you're ashamed, but then you realize not you are the one who actually did something bad. [...] Maybe you were hoping for a better lifestyle, but you didn't do it with a bad intention.”

– *Female survivor of domestic servitude from Eastern Europe*

- **Some assumptions underlie common terms:**
 - Defining sex as “work” (may not be understood)
 - Describing “force” or “coercion,” as in legal definition of trafficking (may not express or match the victim’s own view of the experience)

Service-related challenges

- A major challenge is sharing information because of **confidentiality issues** and different professional requirements of mandatory reporters, attorneys, therapists and law enforcement.
- There are few **resources for meeting victims' needs**, such as housing and mental health care, which makes stabilizing trafficking survivors a challenge.

Please remember...

The user guide and both long and short versions of the tool are available on the flash drive provided to you by the trainers.

Questions? Comments?