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?

WA
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project

CO
Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network

CA
Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking

TX
* American Gateways
* Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services

NY
* City Bar Justice Center
* International Institute of Buffalo
* My Sisters’ Place
* Restore NYC
* Sanctuary for Families
* Workers’ Justice Center of NY
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?