

Not an Ideal Victim? Trafficking, Homelessness, and Risks Faced by LGBTQI+ Young People



ReportOUT

A Global Scoping Report for the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery



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Registered Charity Number (England and Wales): 1185887

Who are ReportOUT?

Since 2019, ReportOUT have been at the forefront of protecting the human rights of sexual and gender minorities in the United Kingdom and globally. As a registered charity in England and Wales (registered charity number 1185887) we are **fearless, determined and relentless** in our belief that human rights are fundamental to advancing the lives of sexual and gender minorities, and their communities.

We recognise that we need to succeed in our aims and objectives by also using principles from international development alongside human rights frameworks, and we believe that both of these approaches should **always include sexual and gender minorities as part of them**. We align all of our work with Agenda 2030, in that no one should be left behind.

ReportOUT's official aim and objectives are:

To promote human rights (as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent United Nations conventions and declarations) throughout the world for sexual and gender minorities by all or any of the following means:

- Eliminating infringements of human rights;
- Research into human rights issues;
- Raising awareness of human rights issues;
- Educating the public about human rights;
- Monitoring abuses of human rights;
- International advocacy of human rights;
- Providing technical advice to government and others on human rights matters.

Our guiding principles:

- **Principle 1:** No one should be left behind in delivering the articles set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- **Principle 2:** Every person has a part to play in achieving the goals and targets set out in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Principle 3:** Positive change should be led by communities within a nation state and ReportOUT will support them to do this.

When it comes to formal research projects, ReportOUT is proud to follow the Amsterdam Network Guiding Principles, which were born out of concern that an advocacy community in one country should not speak for groups in another country, without a clear and informed mandate to do so. It sets out clear guidance about how we at ReportOUT, work as an organisation with others in different nation states, and parts of the globe. ReportOUT is a volunteer-led charity, with volunteers and Trustees originating from over thirty nation-states.

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Executive Summary: Drew Dalton

Whilst the anti-trafficking field has excelled in documenting research, elevating voices, and providing services to many marginalised and vulnerable populations, trafficked LGBTQI+ people, and especially LGBTQI+ young people still go ignored, underserved, or unserved by the sector.

Additionally, LGBTQI+ young people and homelessness, and its clear links to sex trafficking is similarly overlooked and rarely reported by local and national governments, leading it to become insufficiently tackled via global mechanisms.

This underreporting of sex trafficking amongst LGBTQI+ populations and especially LGBTQI+ young people living homeless, make it difficult to understand the specific nature of trafficking crimes, and the total number of people who have been affected by it across the globe. It is clear from the evidence that trafficking is happening to homeless LGBTQI+ young people and they live at a heightened risk of it. This population are falling through gaps in research, detection, and provision, and so now it is time to act.

The first part of this report will outline some of the issues with the current narratives around trafficking and the resources which have been put into place, as well as problematising some of the language and discourses used by the anti-trafficking field. It will then examine the available literature which meshes together LGBTQI+ young people, homelessness, and trafficking, which has been emerging in North America. It then explores more sporadic global research data from different nation states and regions, though we recognise that the current research and screening of LGBTQI+ populations conducted so far, is not enough.

However, this scoping report is an attempt to 'jump start' the conversation about LGBTQI+ young people, homelessness, trafficking and modern-day slavery, and the precarious risks which they face on a day to day basis. We hope that you will find this report a useful starting ground, which has aimed to bring together some of the official literature about this topic area, to provide a useful and empowering set of recommendations from various sources. We hope these recommendations will be used by nation states, governments, civil society, academics, and institutions, to tackle this issue.

At ReportOUT, we enthusiastically welcome people to contact us about this report and to discuss our findings and recommendations further. It is time to recognise that childhood for many people around the world face very different challenges, and that for many young, homeless LGBTQI+ people, the risks that they face are particularly magnified.

We would like to personally thank Lauren Harper a Research Assistant, from the University of Sunderland, for the additional research which contributed to this report.

Drew Dalton
Chair of Trustees



Drew Dalton
Chair of Trustees
ReportOUT

Review of the Literature



A Review of the Literature

Not an ideal victim? Trafficking and LGBTQI+ people:

Much of the human trafficking policy as it stands so far in relation to sex trafficking, is what Valentine (2007) calls 'culturally constructed' in that certain identities are deployed, resulting in the inclusion of some, and therefore, the exclusion of others (Robertson and Sgoutas, 2012). Much of the anti-trafficking activism, law enforcement, and victim response through services has often reproduced heteronormative and cisnormative understandings of what trafficking is.

By heteronormativity, this means a socially constructed process which works to make heterosexuality within society seem coherent, natural, and privileged. It involves the assumption that everyone is 'naturally' heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is an ideal, which is superior to homosexuality and bisexuality. In addition to this, cisnormativity assumes that everyone identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth, that there is only a rigid gender binary where there are only two distinct opposite genders, and that sexual and marital relations fit people only of the opposite sexes (Warner, 1991, Butler, 1999). As a result of both heteronormativity and cisnormativity working in tandem, cisgender and heterosexual populations are privileged in social attitudes, family structures, institutions, cultures, legal frameworks, and wider discourses. This leads to the overlooking, editing, or erasure of those who are minority groups and who may not fit this narrative, such as LGBTQI+ populations.

A clear side effect of heteronormativity and cisnormativity is evidenced within trafficking and modern-day slavery narratives, which have tended to follow a pattern which reproduces gender binaries that exist in wider society, constructing vulnerable and passive cisgender female bodies, and stronger or dominant 'invincible' male bodies. In doing so, this produces an 'ideal victim' narrative (Forringer-Beal, 2022). This ideal victim narrative tends to be presented as a 'feminised' cisgender woman, in alignment with heteronormative associations between victimhood and femininity, leading to the construction "of a young woman who has come to be a stand-in for an 'ideal victim' of trafficking" (Forringer-Beal, 2022: 88). The focus on youth, femininity, innocence, and sexual exploitation in sex trafficking images is often used as a broader narrative of what trafficking is said to be, where the victim is also socially constructed as weak, innocent, and socially (and sexually) respectable (Christie, 1986). This easily palatable visual is commonly:

"Represented by the image of a young girl, kidnapped, and sold from hand to hand until she ends up in a brothel in a large city, or sold by impoverished parents to a criminal network. She disappears into the world of sex work which she services thirty men a night. Although this offers a neat, easily digestible narrative, the lives of trafficking survivors are generally messier and more complex than this idealised archetype gives space for" (Merry and Ramachandran, 2017 cited in Forringer-Beal, 2022: 91).

This also leads to a lack of understanding as to the victimisation of men and boys and is underpinned by the assumption that men and boys cannot be, or are much less likely to be, victims. This is further complicated by gay, bisexual and transgender men and boys, who sell sex to men, meaning they become marginalised by their status on the lower rungs of the wider sexual hierarchy. This becomes problematic, as individuals who participate in same-sex acts are less likely to garner sympathy from more mainstream (cisnormative and heteronormative) victim services networks. The trafficking of gay and bisexual men is a serious issue with its own particular set of difficulties, because sexual violence against males is considered taboo in most societies, and so many male victims are constrained by societal barriers from reporting their ordeals. These significant environmental factors contribute to the lack of reporting and documenting of trafficking victims, including the absence of services available for gay, bisexual, and transgender men.

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This is not aided much of the anti-trafficking rhetoric, which has often reproduced heteronormative and cisnormative understandings of gender relations and sexual identities in terms of heterosexuality (Mai, 2012), whilst placing emphasis in public debate on the 'women and children' paradigm (Doezema, 2002). As a consequence of this promotion of the ideal victim, non-heteronormative voices of people trafficked, and their voices in the wider sex industry, have largely been neglected (Browne, Cull and Hubbard, 2010, Mai, 2012).

Due to this, many of the policies and approaches which have concerned sex trafficking have revolved around heteronormative ideas about commercial sex, where sexual exchange is always heterosexual and where presumed heterosexual girls or women sell sex, and the buyer is always a heterosexual and cisgender male. This heteronormative obscuring of sex trafficking and its identification of victims and perpetrators tends to overidentify women and girls as (heterosexual) victims and men as (heterosexual) perpetrators. The impact of this has led to resources and policy responses which actively or inadvertently excluded sexual and gender minorities (Valentine, 2007), which is "hugely problematic for irregular migrants or queer victims of exploitation who by definition always fall outside of the bonds of heteronormative legal frameworks" (Forringer-Beal, 2022: 100). As such, the evidence suggests that LGBTQI+ sex trafficking victims are often overlooked and rarely reported by local and national governments (Martinez and Kelle, 2013, Hogan and Roe-Sepowitz, 2020). It is vital that the ideal victim narrative of 'who' is sex trafficked needs to be reframed, so the lives of young LGBTQI+ people, who often sit outside of this trafficking narrative, can be adequately addressed.

Moreover, the very existence of criminalising and anti-LGBTQI+ laws, merged with hostile narratives toward LGBTQI+ populations, serve to reinforce public prejudice against LGBTQI+ people in many countries across the world, leaving many LGBTQI+ people vulnerable, isolated, and therefore moving across the globe seeking refuge from discrimination, harm, and criminalisation. Social vulnerabilities such as this ensure that traffickers can offer opportunities for travel to nation states where LGBTQI+ laws are not as punitive, are already decriminalised, or nation states are viewed or presented as 'safer.' Research is scarce in this area and is needed, however accounts have emerged where large trafficking organisations have "heard of cases where vulnerabilities as a result of being LGBTQI+ has been used against victims by their traffickers, who threaten to report or return the victim to a place where they may face potentially life-threatening consequences" (Stop the Traffik, 2020). Many young people living in nation states where they face hostile government reactions and negative legal, social and media rhetoric toward LGBTQI+ people, are exposed to vulnerabilities in that younger LGBTQI+ continue to seek exit routes from that nation state, thereby increasing their risk of exposure to trafficking.

"LGBTQI+ children and young adults can be especially vulnerable to trafficking in persons for forced labour and sexual exploitation. First, their high vulnerability arises from their young age, as they are assumed to be easily manipulated and unable to protect themselves. Second, their LGBTQI+ identity increases their vulnerability, as they are often marginalized in society and ostracised by friends and relatives who may force them out of their home. This combination is particularly appealing to traffickers who seek persons who are at the margins of societies and are less protected" (UNODC, 2020).

This scoping report will examine the most documented literature on the link between LGBTQI+ young people, homelessness, human trafficking, and modern-day slavery, in order to examine this often-overlooked area. It must be noted that much of the existing data and research linking LGBTQI+ young people, homelessness, and being at risk of trafficking, has begun to emerge from North America (especially the USA), with a dearth of literature from other parts of the globe. Due to this, the first part of this report will examine the literature from North America.

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Research from North America:

Whilst research from North America is still greatly underexplored, there have been some significant studies from the region. Research from various geographical areas of North America has found that sex traffickers exploit intersectional identities such as gender identity and sexual orientation to reinforce the oppressions and the inequalities that affect LGBTQI+ populations (Hogan and Roe-Sepowitz, 2020). Due to higher rates of family rejection, discrimination, stigma, and prejudice faced by LGBTQI+ populations, alongside fewer familial and social supports, fewer resources and being in desperate situations, they serve to create a 'perfect storm.' The impact of this perfect storm has supplementary side-effects whereby drug use and risk-taking has been reported more often by LGBTQI+ young people versus their heterosexual counterparts (Whitbeck, et al, 2004). Consequently, homeless LGBTQI+ young people have been evidenced to engage in more high-risk sex behaviours such as engaging in the commercial sex market compared to their heterosexual peers (Burwick, et al, 2014), they are more likely to be sexually victimised (Schwarz and Britton, 2015), and are more likely to be forced to engage in sex to meet survival needs (Dank, et al, 2015). Having access to fewer resources or capital, and facing deeper levels of poverty, has led to one in five LGBTQI+ homeless young people owing money to an individual or institution, trading sex for money to pay for phone bills, books for school, and/or to pay debts owed to others (Dank, et al, 2015, Mooney, 2020).

Fundamentally, LGBTQI+ young people are overrepresented in the homeless youth populations of the USA, particularly amongst runaway and homeless youth (RHY) populations (Polaris Project, 2015). Research has revealed that LGBTQI+ young people face a 120% chance of being made homeless compared to other heterosexual and cisgender young adult groups (Hogan and Roe-Sepowitz, 2020). In terms of ethnicity, the limited data available reveals that homeless LGBTQI+ African American, Black, and multiracial young people face a significant risk of trafficking, with 56% of homeless LGBTQI+ young people being Black or African American, and 32% as multiracial (Atlanta Youth Count Report, 2018). The high rates of LGBTQI+ populations within a much wider homelessness population, creates an ideal opportunity for traffickers to focus on more marginalised, and at risk LGBTQI+ groups.

In terms of sex trafficking, research spanning across the USA and Canada, has found that half of all LGBTQI+ young people living homeless have engaged with the sex trade during their lifetimes, noting that LGBTQI+ young people were significantly more likely to be sex trafficked than their heterosexual counterparts (Murphy, 2016). Other studies appear to confirm this, noting that homeless LGBTQI+ young people are disproportionately affected by sex trafficking compared to their heterosexual peers (Dank, et al, 2015, Roe-Sepowitz, 2014). In their research into young people sex trafficked in the USA, Hogan and Roe-Sepowitz (2020) evidenced from their sample of 215 homeless young adults aged 18-25, that over a third of their sample reported being sex trafficked, and of these, over half of their sample were LGBTQI+. The report found that the odds of being LGBTQI+ and sex trafficked were two times higher than that of their heterosexual peers. Furthermore, findings from the Atlanta Youth Count Report (2018), revealed that 54% of homeless young people had experienced some form of human trafficking in their lifetime, with 37% experiencing it since becoming homeless. When disaggregating the data and analysing only LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual) young people from it, these numbers increased. The data affirms that 61% of LGB homeless young people experienced human trafficking in their lifetime, with 44% of LGB young people who had been trafficked whilst they were living homeless.

Additionally, transgender youth of colour in the USA face an especially high risk of trafficking (Morton, et al, 2018) and some transgender young people have reported engaging in risky employment or commercial sex in exchange for much needed hormone treatments (Polaris Project, 2015).

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Research shows that young transgender women are most likely to be trafficked above their LGB+ counterparts, however the numbers are still unclear as to the total number of transgender women trafficked in the USA, as there appears to be no current consensus among studies and service providers. Notably, actual trafficking amongst this population have revealed that 71% of homeless transgender young people had experienced trafficking during their lifetimes, and 65% had been victims of it while they were living as homeless (Atlanta Youth Count Report, 2018). Further disproportionate representation can be seen at the intersection of both ethnicity and gender identity and expression, with transgender and GNC (Gender Non-Confirming) young people of colour being at some of the highest levels of risk for sex trafficking (Tomasiewicz, 2018). Almost all transgender young women who are child sex trafficking victims were originally missing from care (91%), and of all the transgender young women made homeless, 24% were known to have been a previous child sex trafficking victim (National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, 2018).

There is a palpable relationship between the stress on transgender children, and their relationships with supportive adults in such situations that drives the rates of homelessness, lack of security in care, and therefore a heightened risk of trafficking. The number of transgender child sex trafficking victims is higher, since many transgender children face stigma and rejection regarding their gender identification alone. Sexual victimisation, most often by adult male perpetrators, increases the likelihood of these victims not reporting their abuse. It is also postulated that the number of transgender children may also be higher due to their gender identity itself not being reported (National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, 2018). False promises from traffickers act as 'pull' factors for transgender young people to be placed at a higher risk of trafficking incidents, including ideas of "a better life; as well as providing shelter, resources, drugs, hormone replacement therapy, and money [which] are only a handful of tactics that can be used by traffickers to exploit trans folk for their own personal gain" (Polaris Project, 2017b).

In the research of Greeson, et al (2019) in the USA, comparing young people who were sex trafficked and seeking shelter services with that of non-trafficked young people seeking post-trafficking shelter services, there were disparities in terms of LGBTQI+ young people. Findings indicated that those young people who were trafficked seeking shelter services were more likely to be transgender or identifying as bisexual and pansexual. Additionally, as a result of LGBTQI+ young people being sex trafficked, the impact of wider exclusion and discrimination on their lives, and the impact of this on their mental and physical health, Greeson, et al (2019) reported higher suicide attempt rates (69%) compared to cisgender and heterosexual sex trafficking victims (37.5%).

Furthermore, trafficked and sex work survivors who are LGBTQI+ young people are overrepresented in USA detention facilities, namely for sex work-related offences, reporting higher levels of police misconduct than that of their heterosexual peers. This leads many LGBTQI+ survivors of human trafficking more likely to be convicted of sex work crimes and remaining characterised as perpetrators, whilst unrecognised as a victim of this crime (Mooney, 2020). Furthermore, many of their traffickers can go unrecognised and are unaccountable because they may seem to be peers or mentors, but instead, use their positions of power, privilege, or experience, to exploit vulnerabilities facing some LGBTQI+ young people, such as homelessness, immigration status, or being at risk (Mooney, 2020).

The following section of the report will examine research linking LGBTQI+ young people, homelessness, and sex trafficking from various parts of the globe, which is largely fragmentary, partial and under-examined. However, it is hoped that this may give a broader global scope of the complexities of this issue.

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Global research:

“Traffickers frequently target characteristics disproportionately present within the LGBTQ+ population, such as a lack of strong support networks, financial strain, a history of violence, and general social marginalization... Other groups most vulnerable to trafficking around the world include people without homes, young people in foster care, and sex workers, each of whom is disproportionately comprised of LGBTQ+ people” (Thomson Reuters, 2020).

Global research interrogating young LGBTQI+ people, homelessness, and the links to human trafficking and modern-day slavery has been vastly under-researched, with significant gaps within the literature. Much of the literature available reveals only small mentions in studies, vague estimations, or broader passing mentions about LGBTQI+ populations in reports about trafficking. There is a clear need for research to explore the specific trafficking of LGBTQI+ people in different nation states and world regions, as well as the effectiveness of screening processes of LGBTQI+ trafficked people, and importantly, the documenting of LGBTQI+ homeless young people at risk.

Whilst ‘LGBTQ’ was mentioned 160 times in the Trafficking of Person Report (2022), only limited screening data was at hand to show the trafficking of LGBTQI+ people and no mention was made of LGBTQI+ young people at risk of trafficking. Obtainable data about trafficking and LGBTQI+ populations was mentioned in only some nation states, such as the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Belize, Benin, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Iraq, Peru, and Uruguay. In most nation states, LGBTQI+ people are seemingly excluded from data, screened ineffectively, or not at all. Most of the mentions of LGBTQI+ people and populations in this report stated that LGBTQI+ trafficking is made more problematic by stigma, discrimination, and the criminalisation of LGBTQI+ identities, however it is not yet possible to see whether the identifying LGBTQI+ people who were documented within this report were young people, or whether they were specifically targeted due to their SOGIESC status.

Covenant House (2023) in their examination of homeless youth in North and South America found that LGBTQI+ homeless youth are disproportionately affected by human trafficking, with 33.8% of sex trafficked homeless youth identifying as LGBTQI+ (Covenant House, 2023). Findings show that common underlying features straddle both continents and act as ‘push’ factors across their work in both North and South America, noting that LGBTQI+ young people experience a much higher risk of homelessness than their peers, and, once on the street, they face additional hardships because of stigma and discrimination. Covenant House observe that this is a reality for homeless LGBTQI+ young people across the six countries where Covenant House operate: the United States, Canada, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua (Covenant House, 2023).

Within the United Kingdom, an increasing number of LGBTQI+ young people have been found to have been targeted by traffickers. Young LGBTQI+ people comprise up to 24% of the United Kingdom’s youth homeless population, and it is estimated that 150,000 young LGBTQI+ people were homeless or at risk of homelessness due to homophobia and transphobia. In particular, LGBTQI+ young people more broadly, but especially transgender young people, are more likely to face the dual tensions of being made homeless and face the adverse risks of sex trafficking (Martinez, 2013). The state of being homeless as evidenced earlier, increases LGBTQI+ young people at a risk of being targets for traffickers, however, unlike the United States, in the United Kingdom there is a paucity of research examining LGBTQI+ young people, homelessness, trafficking, and whether this operates differently in the United Kingdom (Stop the Traffik, 2020).

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In the research interviews of Mai (2012), the desire to escape homophobia and to live openly was a recurrent theme and motive amongst LGBTQI+ migrants, especially those from Eastern Europe and Latin America, who came to the United Kingdom to work. Most of the migrants had not worked in the sex industry before coming to the United Kingdom, and they had decided to do so after a string of work experiences within different sectors offering low pay and poorer job prospects. Financial gain fuelled their entrance into the sex industry, which was facilitated by friends and colleagues that they had met in other settings. Whilst Mai (2012) did note that a smaller minority of gay, bisexual and transgender women (6%) were deceived and forced into sex work in situations where they had no control or consent. For the remaining sample of LGBTQI+ migrants the financially exploitative situations within many of their work settings and their difficulties in obtaining and maintaining legal immigration status, led many toward the path of the sex industry. Mai (2012) noted that there is a direct link between gaining legal migration documents and the vulnerability of their respondents to labour and sexual exploitation. This creates another perfect storm, whereby traffickers take advantage of these vulnerabilities faced by LGBTQI+ people by developing intentional relationships, providing basic needs, and then recruiting them into the commercial sex trade or trafficking industry (Boswell, Temples and Wright, 2019).

In Thailand, LGBTQI+ populations are “vulnerable to trafficking as they are at risk of being homeless (especially for young people) due to experiencing queerphobic or transphobic discrimination within their homes. They are likely to run away from home and be exposed to potential traffickers who might exploit them for forced labour or sex trafficking” (ILA, 2020). Some parallels exist within neighbouring countries, where some LGBTQI+ people in Cambodia have migrated to Thailand to avoid forced marriages and relationships, and to seek jobs. Their subsequent lack of resources, the discrimination faced by this group, and increased exposure to homelessness, ensures that runaway LGBTQI+ people from Cambodia also become more vulnerable to human traffickers (ILA, 2020).

Further examples of other documented migration cases include African LGBTQI+ victims of Arab Gulf-based trafficking rings who end up as sex slaves for the wealthy in United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia (Martinez and Guadalupe, 2013). Israel has seen some evidence of trafficking amongst LGBTQI+ people, with a case of a Palestinian transgender woman (age unknown) who was not recognised as a trafficking victim by the Israeli state (US Department of State, 2022) and so lacked state support, and thereby legal recognition as being a victim of trafficking. It has also been noted that in Afghanistan, the re-emergence of the Taliban has left LGBTQI+ individuals, especially more mobile young people, at higher risks of both homeless and sex trafficking. Due to being left out of social services and coercion and fear due to their sexual orientation, they fear passing through checkpoints, or going into a passport office. Therefore, they seek informal methods to escape Afghanistan and so consequently, face increased risk of trafficking. In addition, the Taliban prohibits women from traveling without a mahram (often a male member of the family), leaving young lesbians and bisexual women not able to escape exploitative situations on their own (US Department of State, 2022).

A failure to report?

“One of the biggest obstacles that prevents people from reporting LGBTQ-related human trafficking cases is the social stigma against these populations. LGBTQ-identified individuals can face discrimination and prejudice based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, physical appearance, and adherence to gender norms. To protect against these injustices and violence, LGBTQ-identified individuals often stay closeted – keeping their identities a secret” (Polaris Project, 2017).

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LGBTQI+ survivors of human trafficking are less likely to get assistance than non-LGBTQI+ survivors, due in part to “severe discrimination against LGBTQ individuals by law enforcement, and others in the criminal justice system. As a result, LGBTQ sex trafficking is commonly overlooked and rarely reported due to the hidden nature of same-sex prostitution and the stigma associated with being LGBTQ” (Mooney, 2020: 266). Those who have been forced into same-sex sexual exploitation tend to be labelled as criminals rather than acknowledged as victims, violating the United Nations Trafficking Protocol, and preventing LGBTQI+ victims of trafficking from exercising their rights and seeking help (UNODC, 2020).

Likewise, many transgender people have a history of abuse by law enforcement, and as a result of this history, are reluctant to seek help from police. It has been noted that due to this, “traffickers specifically target transgender people because they think that most transgender people will not only be loath to engage police, but [they] also face an uphill climb overcoming implicit transphobia or scepticism” (Thomson Reuters, 2020). For example, a young transgender woman was arrested for solicitation after being trafficked to the USA by multiple people (Egyes, 2017). Upon being arrested, and while explaining how she was trafficked and forced into prostitution as a child, the officers “used transphobic language” and “refused to take a police report” (Egyes, 2017: 173). In many cases, sweeping statements from criminal justice authorities such as the police, stating that “there is no such a thing as trafficking of LGBTQ individuals” (Egyes, 2017: 173) exist as concrete barriers to justice.

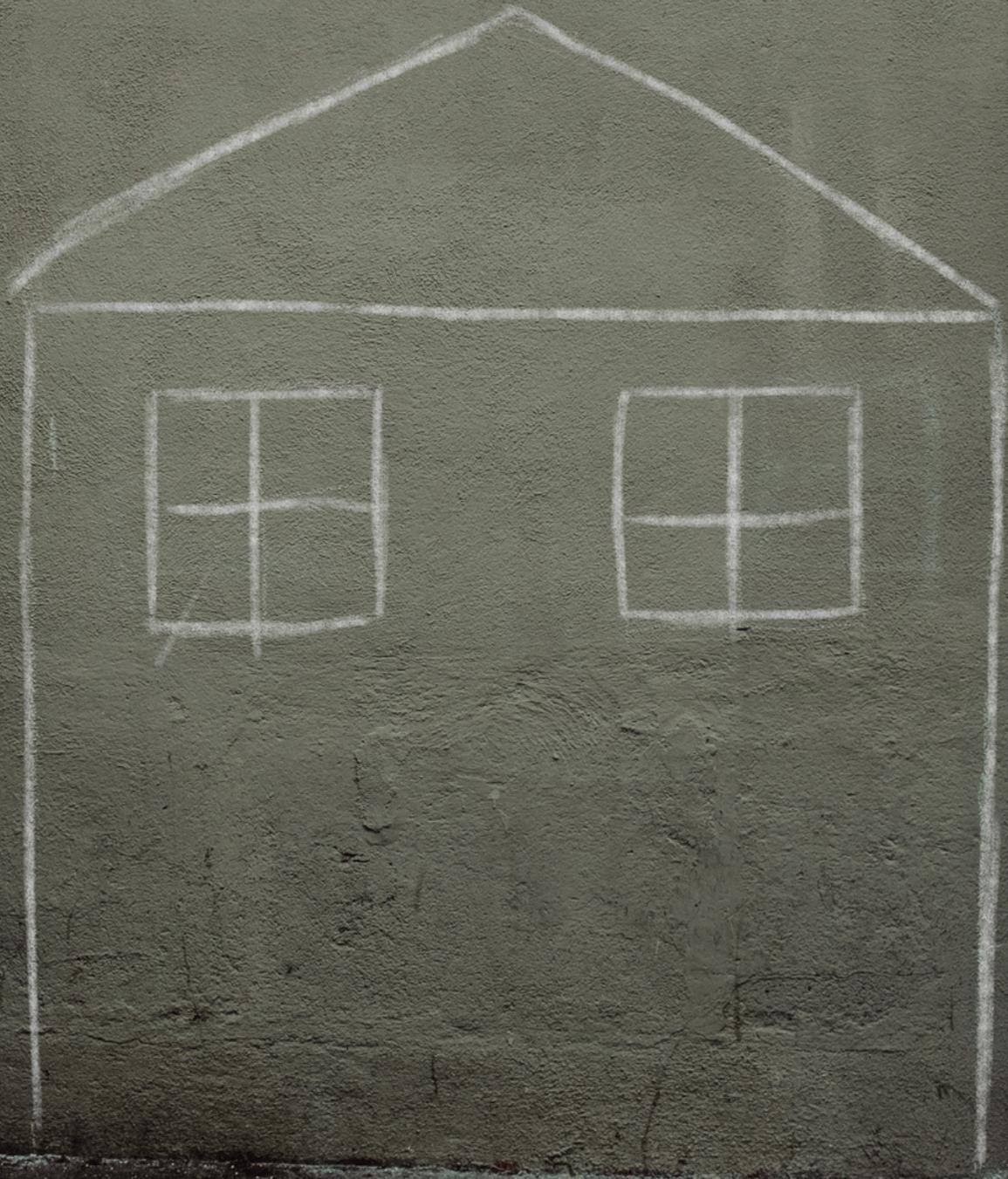
There are scarce resources and specific organisations providing prevention, identification, and interventions for gay and bisexual boys and young men who are involved, or at risk of, sex trafficking (Fitzgerald, et al, 2021). When they do not get the services and resources that they need, they are often re-traumatized, re-victimized, and more likely to return to their trafficking situation (Polaris Project, 2016). Service providers in Sweden working with male LGBTQI+ survivors of human trafficking recommend ‘patience,’ especially with those males who may not initially identify as such:

“Those who identify as gay or bisexual may fear retribution or discrimination if their sexual identity becomes known, or they may come to believe that their sexual orientation led them into commercial sexual exploitation. Lawyers and other service providers should be aware that their trafficked male clients may initially provide inconsistent stories about their customers and may reveal more accurate information over time” (Mooney, 2020: 280).

In terms of migration, many LGBTQI+ people in forced displacement who cross international borders often arrive in countries where they encounter similar, or higher risks of violence, as well as xenophobia, racism, misogyny, ageism, socioeconomic marginalisation, and isolation from traditional support networks. At all stages of their journey, they may be at particular risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation from numerous actors, including though not limited to, immigration and security authorities, traffickers, and smugglers (UNOHR, 2022). LGBTQI+ undocumented immigrants are also vulnerable to higher risks of homelessness and trafficking by the sheer fact they do not have legal immigration status and so are unlikely to report what has happened to them (Egyes, 2017, cited in Heil and Nichols, 2019).

The failure to report trafficking amongst many LGBTQI+ people are due to a complex set of reasons as outlined, as well as hostile laws and governments who may refuse to recognise their identities officially. What is clear from the available evidence is that the trafficking of LGBTQI+ people, and young people, is happening, however due to the factors set out in this report, they are not being documented and so are not the ‘ideal victim’ within trafficking narratives. The following section will outline some recommendations for nation states, institutions, and other actors to not only help to bridge this gap in data and research, but to also provide specific support to some of the most marginalised, overlooked, and forgotten communities.

Recommendations



Recommendations:

1. Nation states which continue to criminalise LGBTQI+ identities, same sex behaviour, and non-conforming gender identity and expression, are contributing to the 'push' factors which enable young people from their nation states to become trafficked. Nation states should decriminalise all laws which seek to punish LGBTQI+ people and their communities.
2. Sex trafficking narratives and the programme and policies which react to this population must be viewed away from the 'ideal victim' and reshaped through a new lens that considers a diversity of experiences within the commercial sex trade (Lutnick, 2016). There is no 'typical victim' of trafficking, and instead, victims are varied, come from various backgrounds, and need specialised services according to these different backgrounds. Work is needed to combat and integrate this kind of thinking when confronted with situations, and responses to them, of trafficking.
3. Assuming that all victims of trafficking are heterosexual and/or cisgender makes invisible those victims that identify outside of the traditional sexuality and gender spectrum. Institutions and nation states should take steps to combat this kind of heteronormative behaviour. It can start from changes in day to day thinking and work up to more complex situations.
4. Nation states and institutions should specifically log LGBTQI+ people as a group as needing to be screened and collected in trafficking victim demographics, as well as support needed via services. When young people are screened for demographics, the opportunity to question whether they are LGBTQI+ should be part of the process of documenting trafficking victims. This process needs to be consistent and cohesive in its enforcement, and self-identifying individuals must not be harmed or punished as a result of their self-identification.
5. Including 'abuse of power or a position of vulnerability' in all state definitions of human trafficking, would align approaches to the Palermo Protocol (2000) and would particularly impact LGBTQI+ survivors, who are less likely to be recognised as survivors, and more likely to be disproportionality targeted by law enforcement, and assumed to be perpetrators, rather than victims, of crimes.
6. Law enforcement must be able to adequately identify elements of trafficking across all demographics and demonstrate cultural competency when working with a potential victim of trafficking. LGBTQI+ young people who are victims of sex trafficking may not fit a traditional understanding of pimp-controlled or gang-controlled sex trafficking. Furthermore, in sex trafficking situations, a young person's sexual activity may or may not be consistent with their identity. First responders should not make assumptions about a young person's identity or orientation based on the circumstances of their trafficking situation.
7. There is a growing body of literature in academia acknowledging the relevance of sexuality and gender non-conforming identities and expressions, however this must continue and be resourced so that heteronormative and cisnormative narratives are not given a sole focus within policy and wider public narratives. Future academic and practitioner research must further examine aspects of recruitment of LGBTQI+ people more generally, but also explore LGBTQI+ young people, their relationships with sex traffickers, and research which expands the context of regional and nation state trafficking amongst LGBTQI+ populations.
8. Service providers and civil society organisations need to coordinate with survivors and advocacy groups and to initiatives with law enforcement, court personnel, legal and mental health care services, and others, to productively engage with LGBTQI+ survivors of human trafficking.
9. Finally, we emphasise the message from the Polaris Project (2015), who have identified ten ways in which service providers and criminal justice professionals can improve services for homeless LGBTQI+ human trafficking victims:
 - 1) Agencies should build partnerships in their communities.
 - 2) Train staff to create a welcoming space.
 - 3) Improve their ability to identify human trafficking.
 - 4) Revise the intake process to reduce the fear or hesitancy of disclosing sexual orientation or gender identity.
 - 5) Review practices on confidentiality.
 - 6) Adapt facilities to be inclusive.
 - 7) Adjust safety planning processes to be multidimensional and self-directed.
 - 8) Allow flexibility in treatment or case planning.
 - 9) Host LGBTQI+ inclusive events and activities.
 - 10) Advocate for the rights of LGBTQI+ young people.

Key organisations to contact for trafficked and homeless LGBTQI+ people:

Ark of Freedom Alliance (USA) <https://www.linkedin.com/company/aofalliance>

Bob's House of Hope (USA) <https://ranchhandsrescue.org/bobs-house-of-hope/>

USA Based Organisations (please use the 'Specialised Competency' feature and click 'LGBTQI Individuals' to locate US organisations who support LGBTQI+ victims of trafficking) <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en/find-local-services>

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