

Youth Experiences Survey

2021

Exploring the Human Trafficking
Experiences of Homeless Young
Adults in Arizona, Year Eight.

Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, MSW, PhD

Kristen Bracy, MA, MSW

Arizona State University

Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research



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Authors

Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, MSW, Ph.D.
Kristen Bracy, MA, MSW
Arizona State University

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2021 Youth Experiences Survey (YES) Study: Exploring the Human Trafficking Experiences of Homeless Young Adults in Arizona, Year Eight.

The Youth Experiences Survey (YES) is a study of the experiences of homeless young adults in Arizona that has been conducted for the past eight years, from 2014 to 2021. The YES focuses on how the life experiences of Arizona's homeless young adults (ages 18-25) increases their risk of experiencing human trafficking. The study was conducted in partnership with four agencies from Phoenix and Tucson that provide direct services to homeless persons: Our Family Services of Tucson, and Native American Connections, UMOM, and one.n.ten of Phoenix. The findings from the YES study have consistently provided insight into the challenges and needs of Arizona's homeless young adults to better target needed services as well as the first of its kind knowledge of the scope of the sex and labor exploitation of this population in Arizona.

Identifying sex and labor trafficking among homeless young adults is confounded by access issues, which makes this population challenging to study. Topics such as that they are transient, are challenging to find, and are involved in fewer social service and medical service agencies than other homeless youth due to their status as adults. These factors, coupled with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, has made studying this population more difficult in the past two years, resulting in lower sample sizes for the 2020 and 2021 data collection periods. This study targeted homeless young adults in multiple settings, including transitional housing, drop-in centers, and on the streets of Tucson and Phoenix.

A seven-page paper survey was distributed to homeless young adults over two weeks in July 2021 by staff from the above mentioned homeless young adult serving partner agencies. This report includes the findings from all of the participants, including details about their homelessness experiences, substance use, mental and medical health history, family challenges, as well as risk and protective factors. The sex trafficking and labor exploitation experiences of the participants are also discussed, and a comparison of the trafficked versus non-trafficked participants is provided. Finally, notable findings from the 2021 data collection period are highlighted and future research and targeted service provision recommendations are discussed.

Brief Summary of Findings

Status of Homeless Young Adults in Arizona in the 2021 Youth Experiences Survey (N = 89)

Participant Profile

- Eighty-nine participants responded to the Youth Experiences Survey in 2021.
- The average age of the 89 homeless young adult participants was 21.2 years old.
- The majority of participants identified as females, representing 56.2% of the participants, followed by males at 33.7%, transgender 4.5%, non-conforming 2.2%, genderqueer 2.2%, and two-spirit 1.1%.
- Participants identified as LGBTQ (49.4%) and heterosexual (36%).

- 53.9% of the participants were raised in the State of Arizona, and the others were from 14 other states.

Housing and Homelessness

- The average age of the participants' first homelessness experience was 17 years of age.
- 46.1% of participants first experienced homelessness as a child, under the age of 18.
- Participants reported currently living in: a transitional housing program (n = 26, 29.2%), living in a shelter (n = 23, 25.8%), living on the streets (n = 14, 15.7%), couch surfing (n = 12, 13.5%), living in their own place (paid by self) (n = 5, 5.6%), "other" living situation (n = 5, 5.6%), or living in a hotel (n = 3, 3.4%).

Challenges and Risk Factors

- **Educational attainment:** 51.7% of participants dropped out of school as one point in time. Only 50.6% of participants graduated from high school.
- **Drug Use:** Drug use was reported by over half of the sample (n = 53, 59.6%), with average age of first drug use being as a child, 15.4 years old. the most frequently used drugs reported being marijuana (n = 32, 26%). Although a small number of participants reported an addiction to drugs (n = 13, 14.6%) and alcohol (n = 11, 12.4%), a disproportionate number reported their addiction began after experiencing homelessness.
- **Self-Harm:** About half (n = 43, 48.3%) of the participants reported engaging in self-harm behaviors. A suicide attempt was reported by over one in every three (n = 34, 38.2%) participants.
- **Mental Health Challenges:** 61.8% of participants reported a current mental health diagnosis, and over half (n = 47, 52.8%) reported having more than one mental health diagnosis. The most common mental health diagnoses reported by participants included depression (n =46, 51.7%) and anxiety (n =45, 50.6%).
- **Medical Challenges:** Over half (n = 46, 51.7%) of the participants reported experiencing a current medical problem. Only 16 (18%) participants reported receiving treatment for their medical condition.
- **Family Instability:** 71.9% (n = 64) of participants reported being kicked out of their homes by their families, with the average age of first being kicked out being 17.1, or as a child. One in every three participants (n = 35, 39.3%) reported being kicked out before the age of 18. About one in every three participants (n = 29, 32.6%) witnessed domestic violence in the home.
- **Adverse Childhood Experiences:** Participants experienced an average of four ACEs, with 44.9% (n = 40) of participants experiencing between zero and three ACEs and over half (n = 47, 52.8%) of participants experiencing four or more ACEs.

Status of Homeless Young Adult Victims of Human Trafficking in Arizona

Of the 89 homeless young adult participants, 21 (23.6%) reported experiencing sex trafficking exploitation, and 21 (23.6%) reported experiencing labor exploitation. At least one form

of human trafficking (either sex or labor) was reported by 36 (40.4%) participants, and eleven (12.4%) participants reported experiencing both sex and labor exploitation.

Sex Trafficking Findings (n = 21)

- Twenty-one (23.6%) of the total sample (N = 89) reported experiencing sex trafficking exploitation.
- Sex trafficked participants identified as female (66.7%), male (19%), transgender (4.8%), Two-Spirit (4.8%), and genderqueer (4.8%).
- The average age of first sex trafficking experience was 16.9 years old, with 38.1% (n= 8) reporting that they were sex trafficked before the age of 18.
- 90.5% (n = 19) of the participants who reported being sex trafficked reported that they had at some point had a sex trafficker.
- The most common items of value the participants were forced/tricked/coerced for sex for was a place to stay (57.1%) and money (52.4%).

Comparing Sex Trafficked and Non-Sex Trafficked Young Adults

When comparing the sex trafficked homeless young adult participants with the non-sex trafficked homeless young adult participants, the sex trafficked group was found to be significantly more likely to:

- Addiction to drugs
- Addiction to alcohol
- Ever used meth
- Self-harm
- Cutting
- Drinking alcohol excessively
- Risk taking behavior
- Not eating for long periods of time
- Binging/vomiting
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Sexual abuse (ACE)
- Physical neglect (ACE)
- Mental Illness in the household (ACE)
- Have 4 or more ACEs
- Sexually abused (molested or raped) as an adolescent (age 13-17)
- Sexually abused (molested or raped) as a child (age 12-under)
- Physical abuse by parent/guardian
- Dating violence
- Negative contact with law enforcement
- Involvement in Juvenile Justice System
- Bullied by school peers
- Harassment by peers

Labor Exploitation Findings (n = 21)

- Twenty-one (23.6%) of the participants (N = 89) reported experiencing labor exploitation.
- Labor exploited participants identified as female (47.6%), male (38.1%), transgender (4.8%), non-conforming (4.8%), and Two-Spirit (4.8%).
- The average age of first labor exploitation experience was 16 years old, with 33.3% (n = 7) reporting that they were first exploited for labor before the age of 18.
- 42.9% (n = 9) were promised work where the work or payment ended up being different than what they expected.

- 38.1% (n = 8) reported having someone they worked for control or keep money they earned.
- The most common sectors that participants reported experiencing labor exploitation included: domestic servitude (n = 6, 28.6%) and drug-related work (n = 5, 23.8%).

Comparing Labor Exploited and Non-Labor Exploited Young Adults

When comparing the labor exploited homeless young adult participants with the non-labor exploited homeless young adult participants, the labor exploited group was found to be significantly more likely to report:

- Attempted suicide
- Current medical issue
- Being kicked out of the home for using substances

Key Findings

Vulnerability of LGBTQIA+ population

The homeless young adult population continues to be overrepresented by individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+, with almost half (49.4%) of the sample identifying as LGBTQIA+. Participants who identified as LGBTQIA+ were significantly more likely to report engaging in self-harm behavior ($\chi^2 (1, N = 76) = 3.95, p < .047$), attempted suicide ($\chi^2 (1, N = 72) = 6.14, p < .013$), a current mental health dx ($\chi^2 (1, N = 76) = 3.94, p < .047$), more than one mental health diagnosis ($\chi^2 (1, N = 76) = 5.47, p < .019$), and an anxiety diagnosis ($\chi^2 (1, N = 76) = 6.02, p < .014$).

Homelessness as a child

The average age that 2021 YES study participants first experienced homelessness was age 17, or as a child, with first time experiencing homelessness ranging from four years old to 23 years old. Almost half of the 2021 YES participants (n = 41, 46.1%) first experienced homelessness under the age of 18. The average number of times homeless was 3.1 times, with number of times experiencing homelessness ranging from one time to ten times.

Educational Attainment

Education is a critical challenge for this population. Over half of participants (n = 46, 51.7%) reported dropping out of school at some point, and almost half of participants (n = 39, 43.8%) did not graduate from high school. The top three reasons cited for dropping out of school included moving around a lot (n = 17, 19.1%), homelessness (n = 15, 16.9%), academic difficulty (n = 12, 13.5%), and pregnancy or having a baby (n = 12, 13.5%).

Drug Use

About three out of every five participants (n = 53, 59.6%) reported drug use, with the average age of first drug use being 15.4 years old and the youngest age of first drug use being eight years old. Although a relatively low number of participants reported an active addiction to drugs (n = 13, 14.6%) or alcohol (n = 11, 12.4%), and disproportionately high number of those participants reported that their addiction began after experiencing homelessness. Almost half of the participants (n = 6, 46.2%) that reported an addiction to drugs reported that their addiction

began after experiencing homelessness. The majority (n = 7, 63.6%) of participants who reported an addiction to alcohol reported that their addiction began after experiencing homelessness.

Mental Health

Almost half of participants (n = 43, 48.3%) reported engaging in self-harming behavior, which often serves as a maladaptive coping skill, similar to substance use, to cope with overwhelming trauma. About two out of every five participants (n = 34, 38.2%) reported a history of attempted suicide. A significant number of participants (n = 55, 61.8%) reported a current mental health diagnosis, with over half of the total sample (n = 47, 52.8%) reporting having more than one mental health diagnosis. Concerning Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), over half of participants (n = 47, 52.8%) reported experiencing four or more ACEs which has been found to lead to significant long-term mental health and medical challenges, including early death.

Sex Trafficking and Labor Exploitation

At least one form of human exploitation was present in two out of every five participants (n = 36, 40.4%) of the 2021 YES study. Although the total sample size for the 2021 YES study was smaller than years past, the number of participants who reported experiencing exploitation remained relatively stable, with almost one in every four participants reporting both sex trafficking (n = 21, 23.6%) and labor exploitation (n = 21, 23.6%). The average age of first sex trafficking experience was 16.9 years old, with the youngest age of first sex trafficking experience being twelve years old. Those that identified as having experienced sex trafficking were significantly more likely to report a multitude of other challenges, including addiction, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, various self-harming behaviors, and significant trauma histories, including sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect, dating violence, and were more likely to report experiencing four or more ACEs.

The average age of first labor exploitation experience was 16 years old, with the youngest age of first labor exploitation experience being twelve years old. Of those that reported experiencing labor exploitation, about one in every three (n = 7) reported being under the age of 18. Those who reported labor exploitation were significantly more likely to reported attempted suicide and having a current medical issue.

Conclusion

The findings from the 2021 YES study demonstrate the significant toll that the experience of homelessness takes on this young adult population, with addiction to substances prevalent post-homelessness and the presence of significant mental health challenges indicating that participants' ability to cope is being overwhelmed. The findings consistently demonstrate that this population is at an increased risk of sex trafficking and labor exploitation, due to the multitude of life challenges present as well as the pressing necessity for basic needs to be met. The findings continue to demonstrate that homeless young adults are facing sexual and labor exploitation not just as they attempt to make money, but traffickers are also exploiting their need for shelter and food most consistently.

The findings from the 2021 YES study shed light on the ongoing needs for homeless young adults in the state of Arizona: substance abuse programming and mental health support, particularly to address maladaptive coping and the significant effects of trauma. With regard to

sex trafficking and labor exploitation, social serving agencies must be equipped to screen for the presence of these forms of exploitation and must strengthen their organizational programming to address this occurrence within this population. Efforts such as street outreach, mobile resource units, and drop-in centers can serve as touchpoints for prevention and intervention. Additional funding opportunities from local and state government should be made available to specifically target service provision for this population.

Perhaps even more importantly, these findings demonstrate the need for prevention and early intervention efforts for school-age children at risk for homelessness. The findings indicate that homeless young adults were experiencing not only homelessness prior to adulthood, but also a significant number of other negative life experiences and traumas that may have contributed to their homelessness. Continued research is needed to identify specific points of intervention in childhood in which children experiencing poverty, abuse, or even academic difficulty can be identified and targeted for homelessness and human exploitation prevention.

Finally, COVID-19 has presented critical challenges to service provision for vulnerable populations around the state of Arizona. The impact of COVID-19 on both the homeless population and the trafficking victim population is yet to be known, but the findings demonstrate that homeless young adults continue to face significant challenges, including sexual and labor exploitation, due to their unique vulnerabilities. Further research should be conducted to understand the impact of COVID-19 on this population.

FULL REPORT

2021 Youth Experiences Survey: Exploring the Human Trafficking Experiences of Homeless Young Adults in Arizona, Year Eight.

Introduction

The Youth Experiences Survey (YES) was first developed in 2014 to address a significant gap in understanding about the unique vulnerabilities of homeless young adults in the state of Arizona. Having aged out of childhood, this age range is expected to enter adulthood with a sense of agency and the ability to cultivate a stable livelihood on one's own. Homeless persons in this age range, however, are known to have a history of child welfare involvement, homelessness, and other traumatic childhood experiences prior to entering adulthood. With the services available to them in childhood no longer being provided combined with the lack of experience in adulthood, the young adult homeless population, ages 18-25, was thought to be at increased risk of exposure to violence and exploitation.

To further explore these vulnerabilities, the YES study was developed and distributed to four partner agencies across the state of Arizona. The findings of that seminal study in 2014 illuminated the extensive trauma histories present within the homeless young adult population as well as additional critical needs that created increased risk of exposure to violence. The findings demonstrated that homeless young adults are significantly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. In the years since, the study adapted to explore the Adverse Childhood Experiences of homeless young adults and the presence of labor exploitation. The findings have consistently demonstrated that homeless young adults have experienced an average of four ACEs, which has been linked to many negative long term mental and physical health ramifications. The study has also found the same significant vulnerability to labor exploitation. Over the past eight years, the YES study has consistently demonstrated that homeless young adults, ages 18-25, have unique trauma histories and critical needs that are being exploited for sex and labor. These findings have helped to build capacity in the state of Arizona to better serve this population and work to address and reduce the vulnerabilities that may result in the sexual and labor exploitation of this population.

Since its inception, the YES study has been replicated in states across the nation, including in Kentucky, Hawaii, and Nevada. The study has enabled agencies to secure increased funding to tailor services and programming that specifically address sexual violence and exploitation in this population. The findings of this study have been presented in front of state councils, published in peer-reviewed journals, and presented at national and international conferences. The 2021 YES study continues to build the body of knowledge on the experiences of homeless young adults, to increase awareness, inform practice, and innovate solutions to the exploitation of vulnerable populations.

Method

The purpose of this study is to understand the scope and complexity of sex trafficking and labor exploitation among homeless young adults in Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona. Homeless young adults were surveyed by staff at four agencies about their life experiences, including sex trafficking and labor exploitation.

Research Questions

The specific research questions are:

1. What are the experiences of homeless young adults in Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona related to place of origin, use of drugs and alcohol, mental and physical diagnoses, family connectedness, reasons for homelessness, experiences of trauma, and risk (childhood maltreatment, school problems, being bullied, history of foster care placement) and protective factors (said no to drugs when offered, able to stand up for themselves, practicing safe sex, being part of a club or organization, having supportive friends/family, knowing area resources)?
2. Are sex trafficked homeless young adults different from non-sex trafficked homeless young adults on demographics, family connectedness, sexual orientation, medical and mental health issues, high-risk behaviors, school and social issues, child abuse experiences, drug and alcohol use/abuse and risk and protective factors?
3. Are labor exploited homeless young adults different from non-labor exploited homeless young adults on demographics, family connectedness, sexual orientation, medical and mental health issues, high-risk behaviors, school and social issues, child abuse experiences, drug and alcohol use/abuse and risk and protective factors?

Within the sex trafficked homeless young adults:

1. What were the most common reasons the sex trafficking victims identified as how they were sex trafficked (money, food, clothes, drugs, protection, a place to stay)?
2. How prevalent was the use of technology in their sex trafficking experience?
3. What is a profile of a sex trafficked homeless young adult from Phoenix/Tucson, Arizona?
4. What are the adverse childhood experiences of participants who experienced sex trafficking?

Within the labor exploited homeless young adults:

1. What were the most common reasons the labor exploited victims identified as how they were exploited for labor (money, food, clothes, drugs, protection, a place to stay)?
2. How prevalent was the use of technology in their labor exploitation?
3. What is a profile of a labor exploited homeless young adult from Phoenix/Tucson, Arizona?
4. What are the adverse childhood experiences of participants who experienced labor exploitation?

Instrument

The Youth Experiences Survey is an 86-item survey with questions regarding demographics and personal history (place of origin, living situation, drug and alcohol use, a health history, self-harm, suicide attempts, mental health diagnoses/treatment, medical issues/treatment, and pregnancy). A family history section includes questions about how participants define their family, how they feel about their connectedness and support from their families, reasons for being kicked out, and if participants witnessed domestic violence in the home. A life experiences section includes questions about how participants make money and if they have experienced sex trafficking and/or labor exploitation. Due to the unique challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 YES instrument was made available in both a paper-and-pencil format as well as an online survey format.

If participants reported a sex trafficking or labor exploitation experience, the survey directed them to questions about the presence of a trafficker and what technology was used in the trafficking situation.

Sex trafficking was identified if the participants answered yes to any of the following questions:

1. Have you ever been compelled, forced, or coerced to perform a sexual act, including sexual intercourse, oral or anal contact for: money, food, clothing, drugs, protection, or a place to stay?
2. Do you currently have a person who encourages/pressures/forces you to exchange sexual acts for money, drugs, food, a place to stay, clothing, or protection?
3. In the past, has anyone encouraged/pressured/forced you to exchange sexual acts for money, drugs, food, place to stay, clothing, or protection?

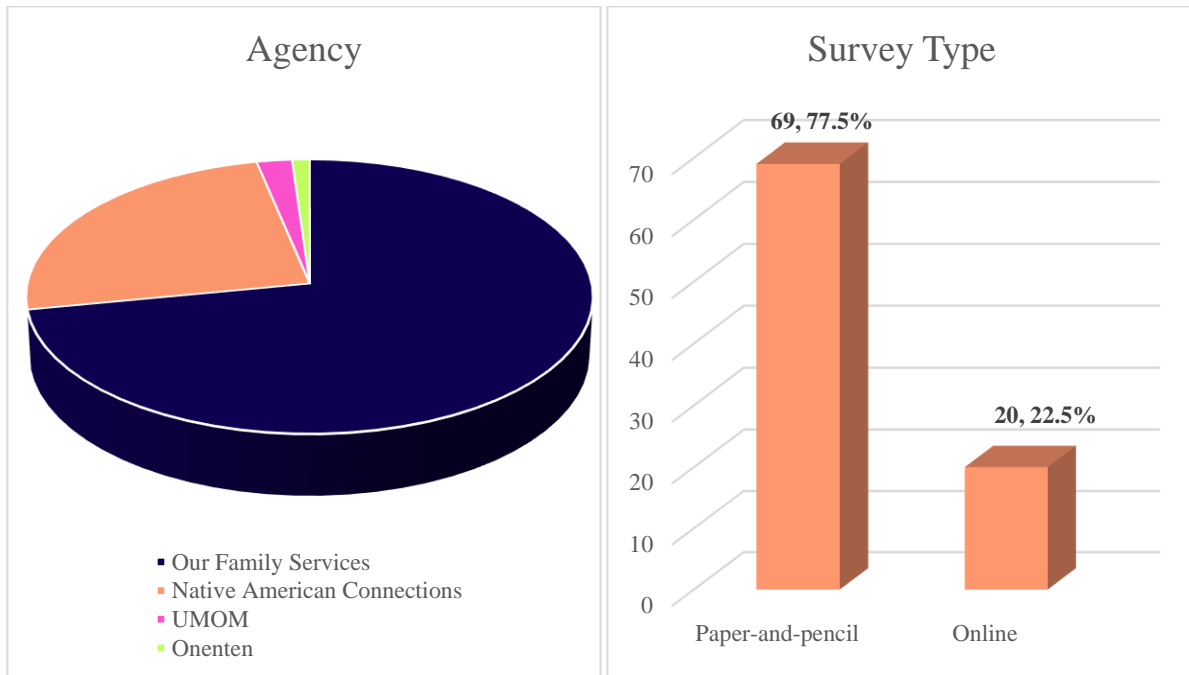
Labor exploitation was identified if the participants answered yes to any of the following questions:

1. Have you ever been tricked or forced into doing any kind of work that you did not want to do for money, drugs, food, place to stay, clothing, or protection?
2. Have you ever been promised work where the work or payment ended up being different than what you expected?
3. Has someone you worked for ever controlled the money you earned or kept the money you earned in exchange for money, drugs, food, place to stay, clothing, or protection?
4. Do you currently have a person you work for who controls the money you earn, or keeps money you earn in exchange for money, drugs, food, place to stay, clothing, or protection?

Participants

During two weeks in July 2021, 89 homeless young adults from the greater Phoenix, Arizona area, and Tucson, Arizona, completed the Youth Experiences Survey. This total represents a 9.8% increase in number of participants from the 2020 YES survey and a 46.7% decrease in number of participants from the 2019 YES survey. Low number of participants in the past two years of data collection has been attributed to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

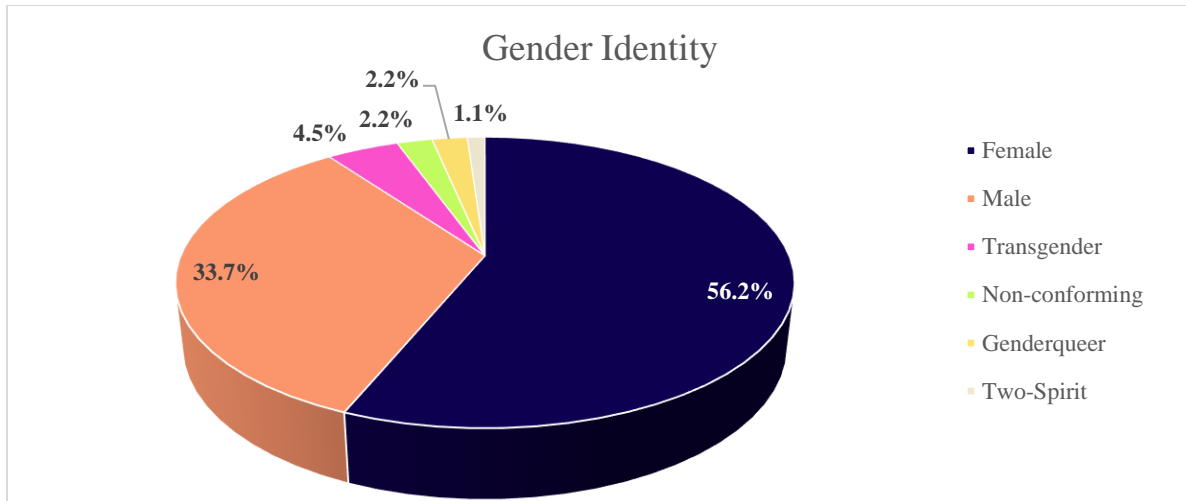
Participants completed surveys from four agencies, including Our Family Services (Tucson, Arizona), Native American Connections (Phoenix, Arizona), UMOM (Phoenix, Arizona), and one•n•ten (Phoenix, Arizona). Our Family Services had 64 (71.9%) participants; Native American Connections had 22 (24.7%) participants; UMOM had two (2.2%) participants; and one•n•ten had one (1.1%) participant. Participants completed the YES survey via paper-and-pencil surveys (n = 69, 77.5%) and online surveys utilizing SurveyMonkey (n = 20, 22.5%).



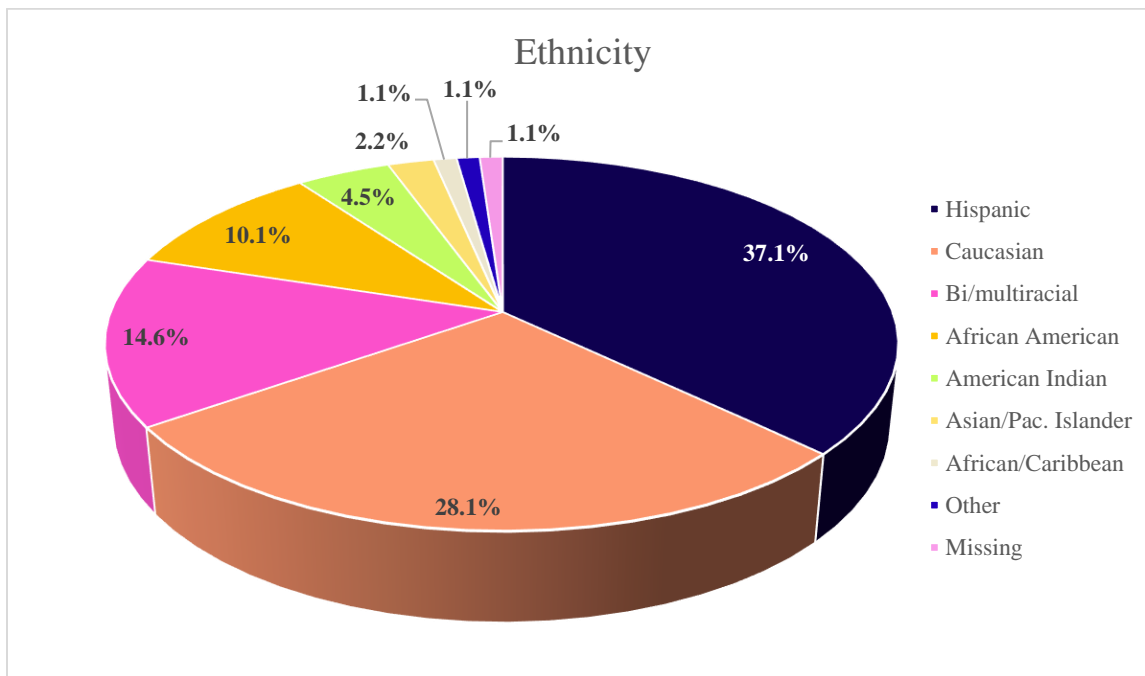
Participants completed surveys at housing program (n = 43, 48.3%), during street outreach (n = 22, 24.7%), at resource centers (n = 18, 20.2%), and this information was missing for six (6.7%) participants.

Demographics

The age of the homeless young adult participants ranged from 18 to 25 years old, with the average age being 21.2 years old ($M = 21.2$, $SD = 2.19$). Participants identified their gender identity as female (n = 50, 56.2%), male (n = 30, 33.7%), transgender (n = 4, 4.5%), non-conforming (n = 2, 2.2%), genderqueer (n = 2, 2.2%), and two-spirit (n = 1, 1.1%).



Participants identified their ethnicity as Hispanic (n = 33, 37.1%), Caucasian (n = 25, 28.1%), bi/multiracial (n = 13, 14.6%), African American (n = 9, 10.1%), American Indian (n = 4, 4.5%), Asian/Pacific Islander (n = 2, 2.2%), African/Caribbean (n = 1, 1.1%), Other (n = 1, 1.1%), and this information was missing for one (1.1%) participant.

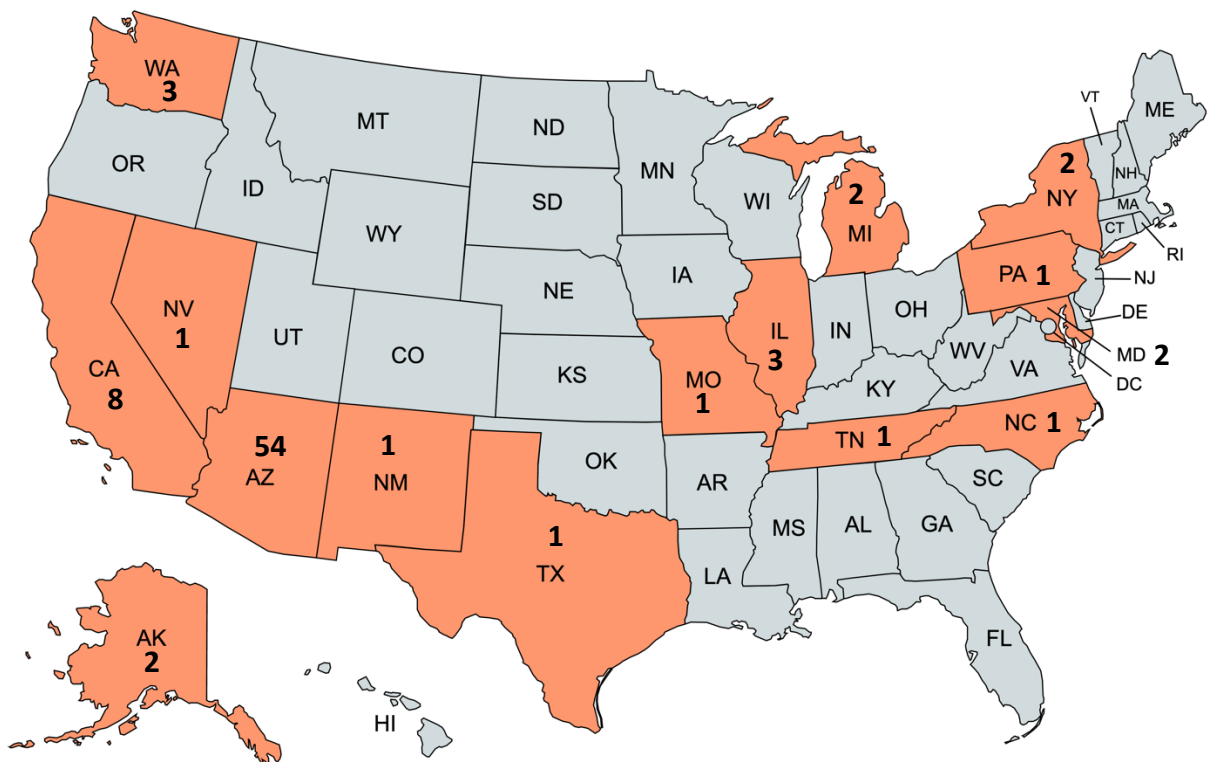


Participants identified their sexual orientation as LGBTQIA+ (n = 44, 49.4%), heterosexual (n = 32, 36%) and 13 (14.6%) participants did not disclose sexual orientation. The participants who identified as LGBTQIA+ reported the following sexual orientation:

Sexual Orientation (N = 89)	n	%
Bisexual	18	20.2%
Asexual	11	12.4%
Pansexual	9	10.1%
Lesbian	4	4.5%
Gay	2	2.2%

Findings

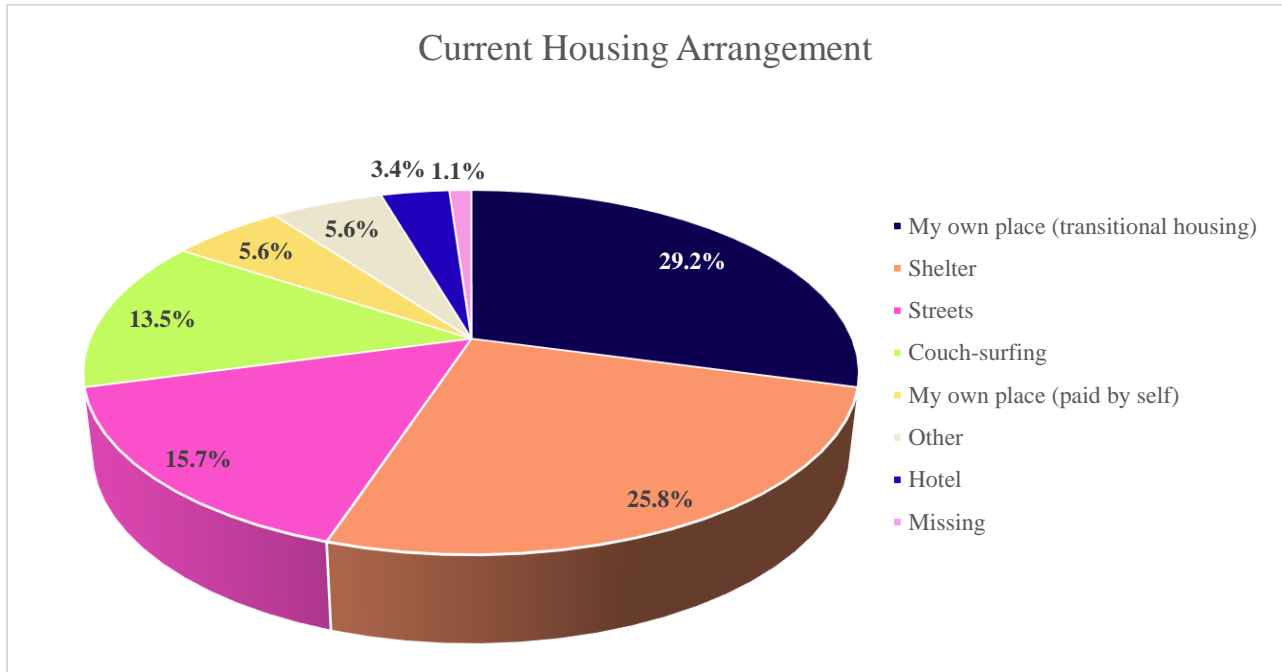
The 89 homeless young adult participants reported they were from Arizona and 14 other states in the United States. Four participants were foreign nationals from Mexico ($n = 3$, 3.4%), Iraq ($n = 1$, 1.1%), and Russia ($n = 1$, 1.1%). Over half ($n = 48$, 53.9%) of the participants reported that they were raised in the state of Arizona, with the length of time living in the state of Arizona ranging from one month to 25 years, and the average length of time living in the state of Arizona being 14.9 years ($M = 14.9$ years, $SD = 8.38$ years).



Housing

Participants reported that their first homeless experience ranged between the ages of four and 23 years of age, with the average age of first homelessness being under the age of 18 ($M = 17$, $SD = 3.66$). Almost half of participants ($n = 41$, 46.1%) first experienced homelessness as a child, or under the age of 18. The total number of times participants' reported experiencing homelessness ranged from one time to ten times ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 2.41$).

Participants reported their current housing arrangement to be: living in a transitional housing program (n = 26, 29.2%), living in a shelter (n = 23, 25.8%), on the streets (n = 14, 15.7%), couch-surfing (n = 12, 13.5%), living in their own place (paid by self) (n = 5, 5.6%), other (n = 5, 5.6%), staying in a hotel (n = 3, 3.4%), and this information was missing for one (1.1%) participant. Those who reported “other” wrote in “living with family” (n = 3, 3.4%), “House” (n = 1, 1.1%), and “Program” (n = 1, 1.1%).



Educational Attainment

The YES study asked a series of questions on educational attainment to gain a better understanding of the educational challenges that homeless young adults face, and the underlying causes of potential low educational attainment. Half (n = 45, 50.6%) of participants reported successfully graduating from High School, while 44 (49.4%) participants never completed high school. Last grade completed ranged from 8th grade to 11th grade. Over half of participants (n = 46, 51.7%) reported dropping out of school at one point in time. Participants reported the following reasons for dropping out of school:

Reasons for Dropping Out (N = 89)	n	%
I moved a lot	17	19.1%
I was homeless	15	16.9%
Academic difficulty	12	13.5%
I was pregnant/had a baby	12	13.5%
Other	8	9%
I had to work to support myself	7	7.9%
I was using substances	4	4.5%
I was expelled	3	3.4%
Bullying	3	3.4%

Those who wrote selected “Other” wrote in: “A lot of stress was put onto me”, “my family never pushed me like family should”, “family issues”, and “mental hospitals for 2+ years and didn’t feel like it”.

Drug Use

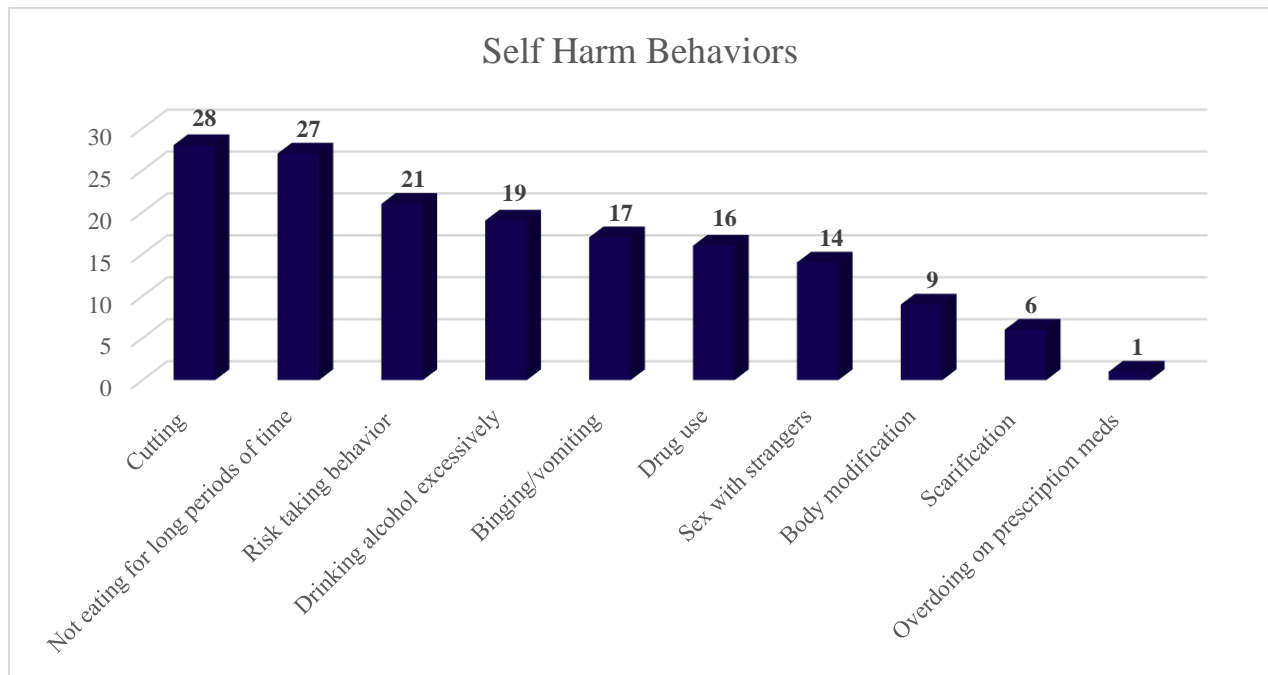
Drug use was reported by 59.6% (n = 53) of the homeless young adult participants. The age of first drug use ranged from eight to 23 years old, with the average age of first drug use being under the age of 18 ($M = 15.4$, $SD = 2.82$). Thirteen (14.6%) participants identified as having an addiction to drugs, and eleven (n = 12.4%) participants identified as having an addiction to alcohol. Although a relatively low number of participants reported having an addiction to substances, a disproportionately high number of those who did report addiction identified that the onset of their addiction began after experiencing homelessness, with 46.2% (n = 6) of those addicted to drugs and 63.6% (n = 7) of those addicted to alcohol reporting onset after homelessness.

The types of drugs used by the participants varied, and some participants identified using multiple drug types. Participants were explicitly asked if they had ever used methamphetamines and heroin. Five (5.6%) participants reported having ever used heroin, and 13 (14.6%) participants reported having ever used methamphetamine. Almost one in every three participants reportedly vapes (n = 27, 30.3%). Participants reported drug of choice as:

Drug Type (N = 89)	n	%
Marijuana/weed	32	36%
Methamphetamines	6	6.7%
Pills	5	5.6%
Percocet/Percodan	3	3.4%
Opiates/Oxy	3	3.4%
All drugs	2	2.2%
Ecstasy	1	1.1%
Cocaine/crack	1	1.1%
Acid	1	1.1%

Self-Harm Behaviors

Almost half (n = 43, 48.3%) of the homeless young adult participants reported that they participated in some form of self-harming behavior including: cutting (n = 38, 31.5%), not eating for long periods (n = 27, 30.3%), engaging in risk taking behavior (n = 21, 23.6%), drinking alcohol excessively (n = 19, 21.3%), bingeing/vomiting (n = 17, 19.1%), drug use (n = 16, 18%), sex with strangers (n = 14, 15.7%), body modification (n = 9, 10.1%) (defined as altering or modifying the human anatomy or physical appearance for self-expression, shock value or aesthetics (Featherstone, 1999), scarification (n = 6, 6.7%), and overdosing on prescription meds (n = 1, 1.1%).



A suicide attempt was reported by 34 (38.2%) of the homeless young adult participants. Participants reported last suicide attempt within the past week (n = 2, 2.2%), month (n = 2, 2.2%), six months (n = 6, 6.7%), year (n = 5, 5.6%), and over one year (n = 19, 21.3%).

Mental Health Issues

A current mental health diagnosis was reported by over half (n = 55, 61.8%) of the homeless young adult participants, with 47 (52.8%) participants reporting more than one mental health issues/diagnoses.

Types of Mental Disorders Reported (N = 89)	#	%
Depression	46	51.7%
Anxiety	45	50.6%
ADD/ADHD	21	23.6%
Bipolar Disorder	20	22.5%
PTSD	16	18%
Borderline Personality Disorder	10	11.2%
Autism Spectrum Disorder	5	5.6%
Schizophrenia	3	3.4%
Antisocial Personality Disorder	3	3.4%
Oppositional Defiant Disorder	2	2.2%

Dissociative Identity Disorder	2	2.2%
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	2	2.2%

Almost half of participants (n = 44, 49.4%) reported having never received treatment for their mental health diagnosis.

Medical Issues

The majority (n = 55, 61.8%) of the participants reported they had health insurance through the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System. A current medical problem was reported by 46 (51.7%) of the participants. Medical problems included the following:

Medical Issues Reported (N = 89)	#	%
Asthma (n = 19, 21.3%)	19	21.3%
Poor vision (n = 13, 14.6%)	13	14.6%
Dental (n = 9, 10.1%)	9	10.1%
Skin problems (n = 6, 6.7%)	6	6.7%
Chronic pain (n = 5, 5.6%)	5	5.6%
Open wounds (n = 3, 3.4%)	3	3.4%
STI (n = 3, 3.4%)	3	3.4%
Lupus (n = 2, 2.2%)	2	2.2%
Broken bones (n = 1, 1.1%)	1	1.1%
Diabetes (n = 1, 1.1%)	1	1.1%

Most participants (n = 65, 73%) reported that they were not currently receiving medical treatment for their medical issue.

Family and Intimate Relationships

Pregnancy and Children

Seven participants (7.9%) were pregnant at the time of the YES 2021 study. Almost one in three (n = 27, 30.3%) participants reported having children, ranging from one to two children each ($M = 1.5$, $SD = 0.51$). Four (4.5%) participants reported DCS involvement in the custody of their children. Participants reported that their children lived in the participant's care (n = 19, 21.3%), with family (n = 10, 11.2%), and other (n = 4, 4.5%).

Family Instability

The majority (n = 64, 71.9%) of participants reported being kicked out of the home, with age of first time kicked out ranging between 13 and 23 years old with the average age of first time being kicked out being under the age of 18 ($M = 17.1$, $SD = 2.02$). Over one in every three participants

(n = 35, 39.3%) reported being kicked out before the age of 18. Reasons for being kicked out included:

Reasons for Being Kicked Out (N = 89)	#	%
Family conflict (fighting with parents)	47	52.8%
I was using substances (drugs and alcohol)	14	15.7%
Family poverty (family could not provide for my needs)	10	11.2%
Family did not approve of my sexual orientation	6	6.7%
Family did not approve of my gender identity	5	5.6%
I got pregnant	1	1.1%

Violent Relationships

About one in three participants (n = 29, 32.6%) witnessed domestic violence in their household as a child. Twenty-eight (31.5%) participants witnessed their father hitting their mother, and 18 (20.2%) participants witnessed their mother hitting their father. In adulthood, half of participants (n = 45, 50.6%) reported experiencing abuse in their relationship and 28.1% (n = 25) reported also being abusive toward their partner.

Economics of Homeless Young Adults

The participants identified a variety of ways they earned money which included: having a steady job, working day labor, selling drugs, selling stolen things, selling their own belongings, working side jobs for cash, door to door sales, panhandling, pickpocketing, and sex trading. Participants who selected “other” wrote in tasks such as donating plasma, a GED/job program, SSDI and SSI.

How the Participants make money to live	#	%
Steady job	36	40.4%
Side jobs for cash	26	29.2%
Other	14	15.7%
Selling my own things	12	13.5%
Day labor	12	13.5%
Panhandling	8	9%
Trading sex for money or things of value	5	5.6%
Selling drugs	4	4.5%
Selling stolen things	3	3.4%
Family	3	3.4%

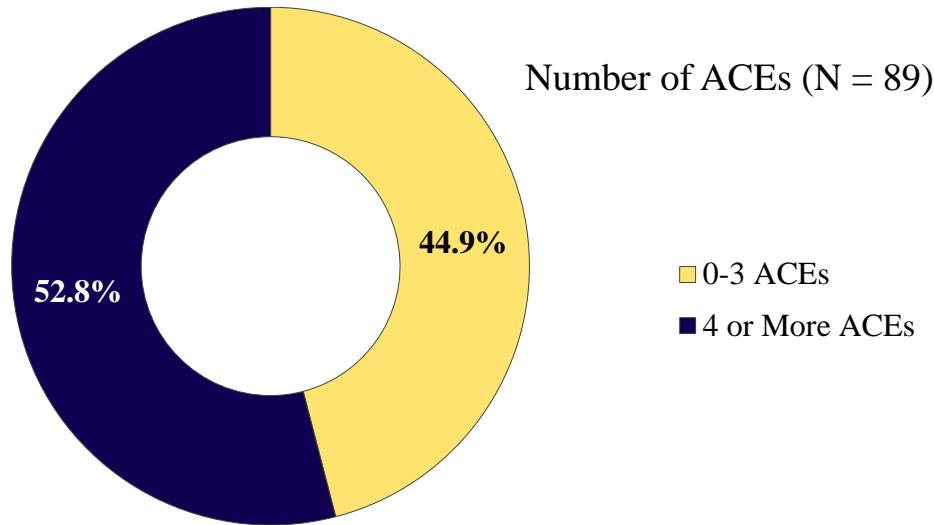
Art/Photography	2	2.2%
Door-to-door sales	1	1.1%
Pickpocketing	1	1.1%

Adverse Childhood Experiences

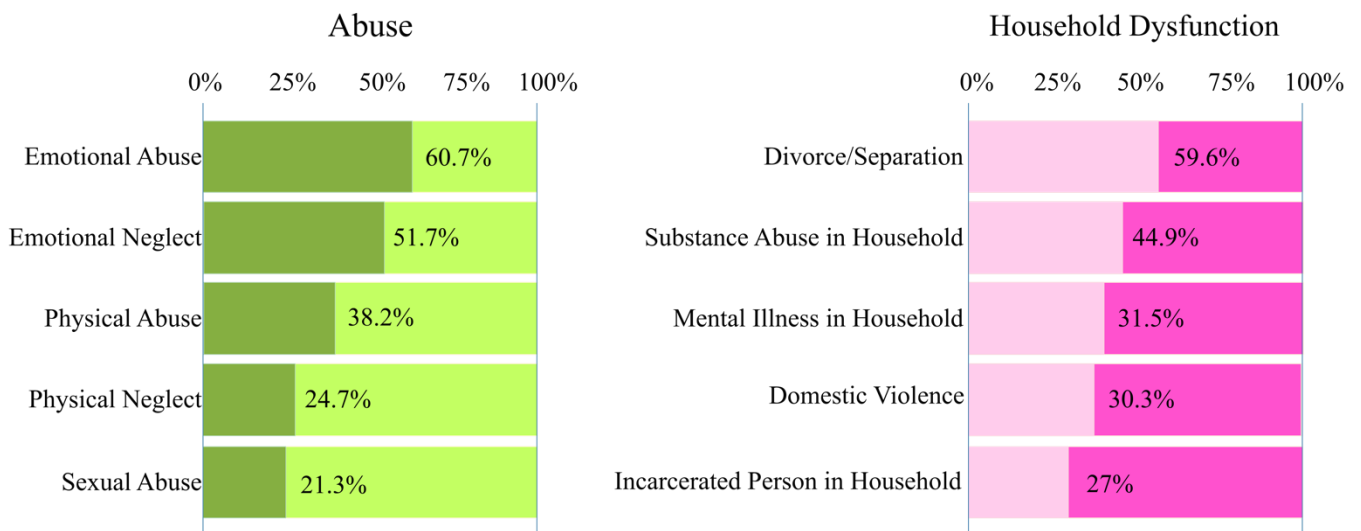
Ten questions were asked that represented different abuse (psychological, physical, and sexual) and household dysfunction (substance abuse, mental illness, divorce/separation, domestic violence, and criminal behavior) categories. The physical abuse category was represented in two questions as physical abuse and physical neglect. The psychological abuse category was represented in two questions as emotional abuse and emotional neglect. The questions on the adverse childhood experiences survey include:

Prior to your 18th birthday:	
Question	Adverse Childhood Experience
Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you or act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?	Emotional Abuse
Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often push, grab, slap, or throw something at you or ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?	Physical Abuse
Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way or attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?	Sexual Abuse
Did you often or very often feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special or your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?	Emotional Neglect
Did you often or very often feel that you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you or your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?	Physical Neglect
Were your parents ever separated or divorced?	Divorce/Separation
Was your mother or stepmother often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her or sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard or ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?	Domestic Violence
Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?	Substance Abuse in the Household
Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?	Mental Illness in the Household
Did a household member go to prison?	Incarcerated Household Member

The number of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) reported ranged from zero to 10 ($M = 4, SD = 2.85$). The majority of participants ($n = 68, 76.4\%$) reported experiencing more than one ACE, with 44.9% ($n = 40$) experiencing between 0-3 ACEs and 52.8% ($n = 47$) experiencing four or more ACEs.

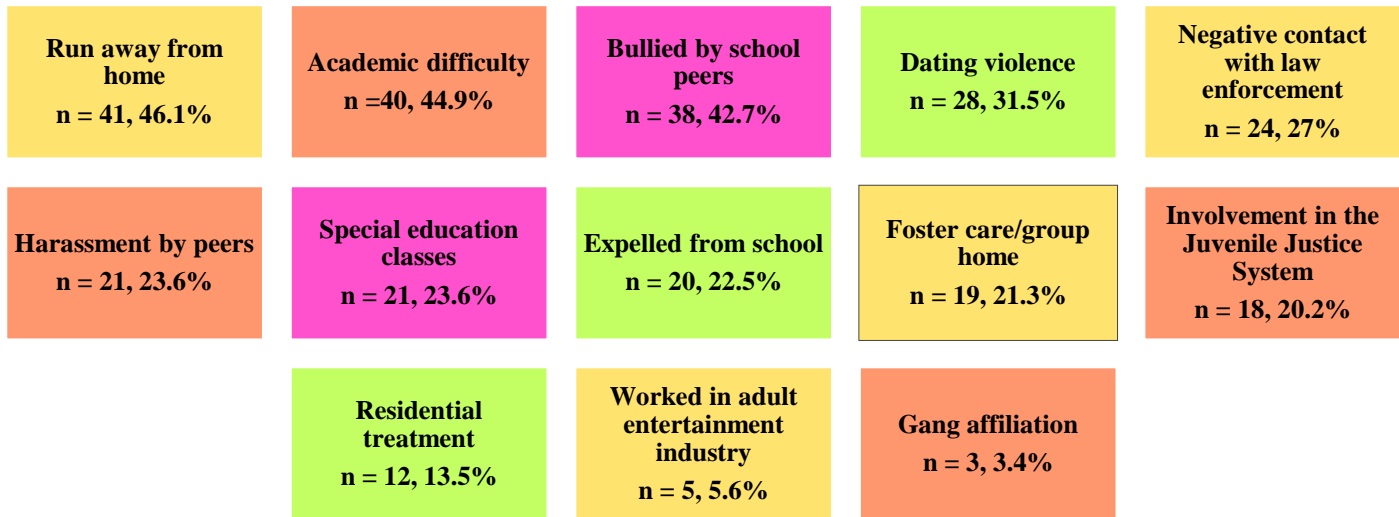


Within the abuse category, 54 (60.7%) participants reported experiencing emotional abuse, 46 (51.7%) reported emotional neglect, 34 (38.2%) reported physical abuse, 22 (24.7%) reported physical neglect, and 19 (21.3%) reported sexual abuse. Eighteen (20.2%) participants reported experiencing sexual abuse as an adolescent (age 13-17) and nineteen (21.3%) participants reported experiencing sexual abuse as a child (under age 12). Within the household dysfunction category, 53 (59.6%) participants reported a parent divorce or separation, 40 (44.9%) reported having substance abuse within the household, 28 (31.5%) reported having mental illness or someone who attempted suicide within the household, 27 (30.3%) reported witnessing domestic violence against their mother figure, and 24 (27%) reported someone in their household being incarcerated.



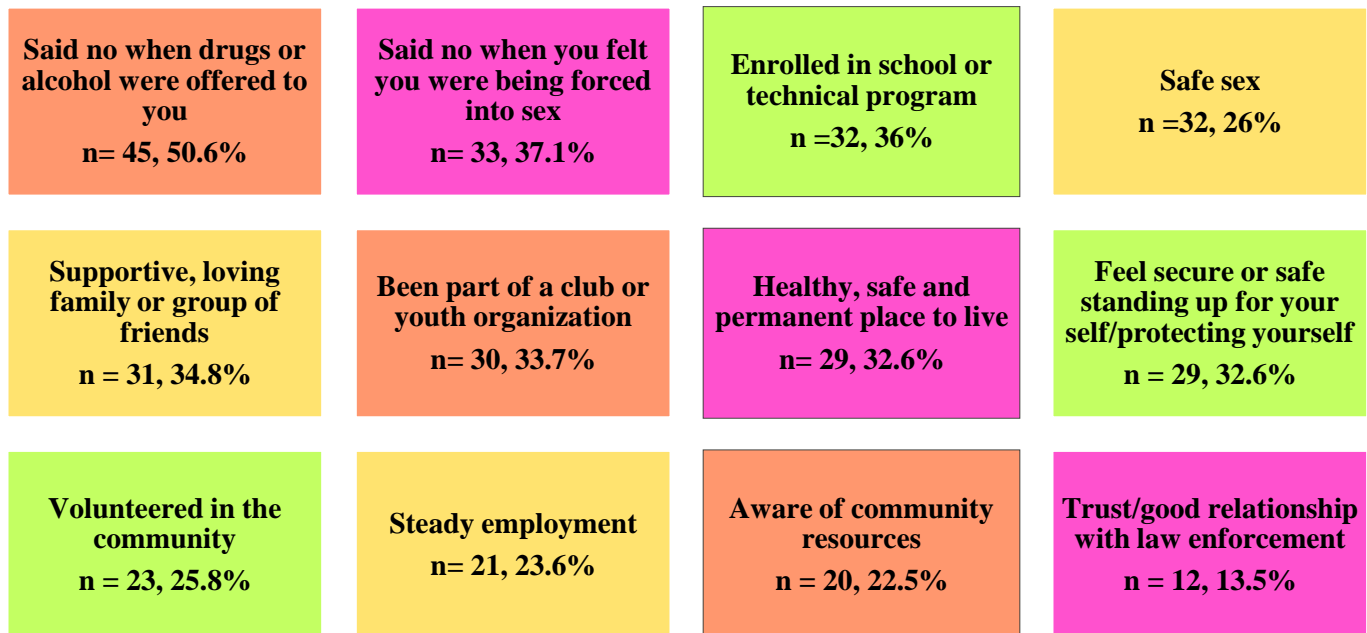
Negative Life Experiences

Participants identified some of their life challenges as:



Positive Life Experiences

Positive life experiences of the homeless young adult participants were reported as follows:



Human Trafficking

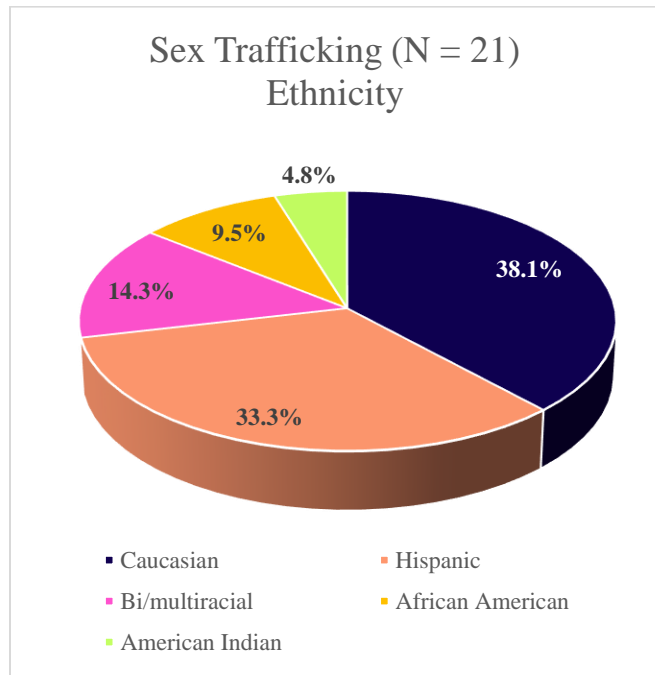
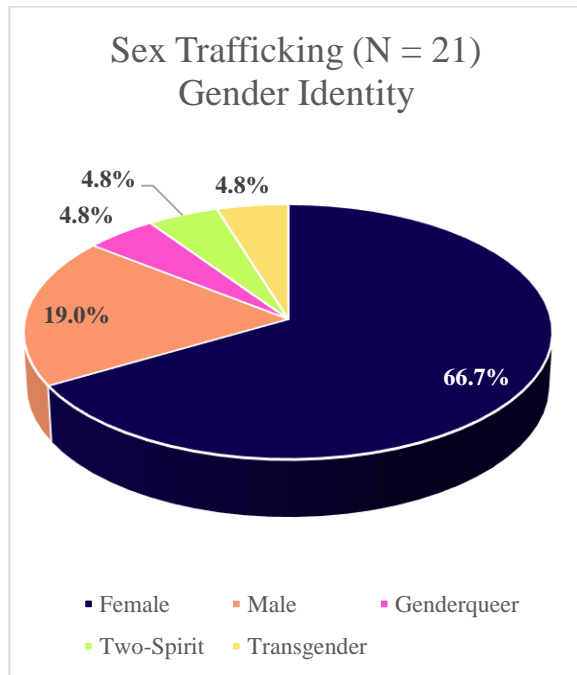
At least one form of exploitation (sex or labor) was reported by two out of every five (n = 36, 40.4%) participants. Eleven (12.4%) participants reported experiencing both sex trafficking and labor exploitation.

Sex Trafficking Experiences of Homeless Young Adults (N = 21)

Twenty-one (23.6%) of the homeless young adult participants reported they had been sex trafficked by answering affirmatively to any of the following questions:

1. Have you ever been compelled, forced, or coerced to perform a sexual act, including sexual intercourse, oral or anal contact for: money, food, clothing, drugs, protection, or a place to stay?
2. Do you currently have a person who encourages/pressures/forces you to exchange sexual acts for money, drugs, food, a place to stay, clothing, or protection?
3. In the past, has anyone encouraged/pressured/forced you to exchange sexual acts for money, drugs, food, place to stay, clothing, or protection?

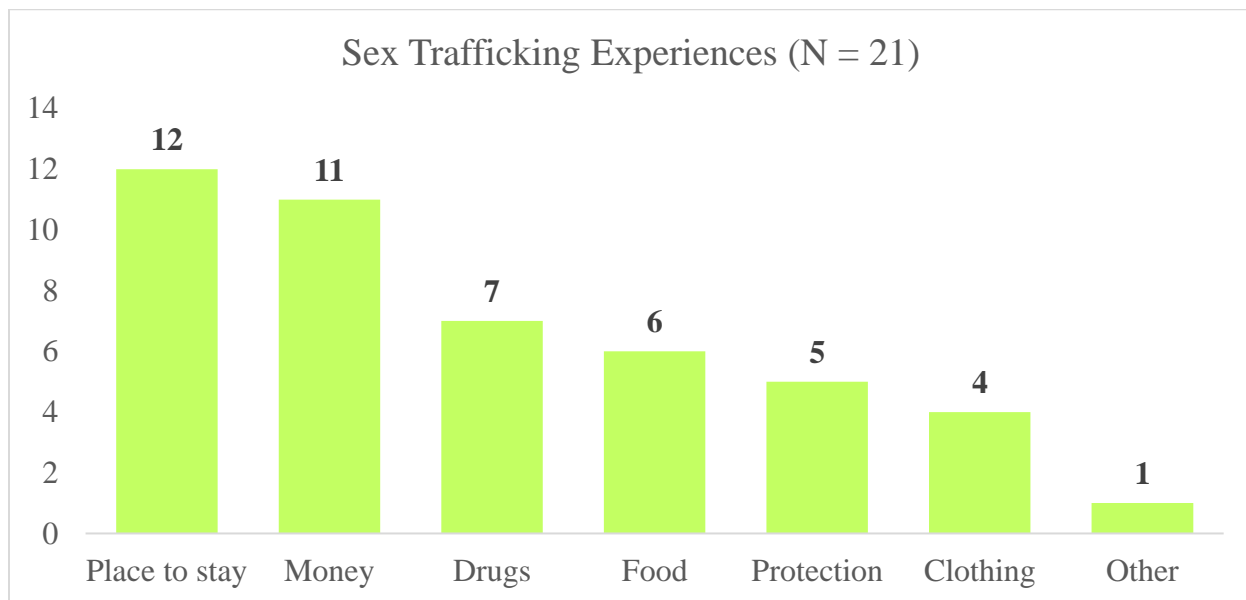
The age of first sex trafficking victimization ranged from twelve to 21 years, with the average age of first sex trafficking experience being under the age of 18 ($M = 16.9$, $SD = 2.31$). Eight (38.1%) participants reported that they were sex trafficked before they were 18 years old. Participants who reported a sex trafficking experience identified as female ($n = 14$, 66.7%), male ($n = 4$, 19%), genderqueer ($n = 1$, 4.8%), two-spirit ($n = 1$, 4.8%), and transgender ($n = 1$, 4.8%). Participants reported their ethnicity as Caucasian ($n = 8$, 38.1%), Hispanic ($n = 7$, 33.3%), Bi/Multiracial ($n = 3$, 14.3%), African American ($n = 2$, 9.5%), and American Indian ($n = 1$, 4.8%). Two (9.5%) participants identified as part/whole American Indian.



The majority of the participants who reported a sex trafficking experience identified as LGBTQIA+ ($n = 14$, 66.7%), and about one in every four ($n = 5$, 23.8%) participants identified as heterosexual. Sexual orientation information was missing for two (9.5%) participants.

Sexual Orientation (N = 21)	n	%
Bisexual	7	33.3%
Heterosexual	5	23.8%
Pansexual	4	19%
Missing	2	9.5%
Asexual	1	4.8%
Gay	1	4.8%
Lesbian	1	4.8%

Twenty-one participants reported a commercial exchange of sex by means of force, fraud, or coercion in exchange for items of value, such as a place to stay (n = 12, 57.1%), money (n = 11, 52.4%), drugs (n = 7, 33.3%), food (n = 6, 28.6%), protection (n = 5, 23.8%), clothing (n = 4, 19%), and other (n = 1, 4.8%).



Having a sex trafficker was reported by 19 (90.5%) of the participants that identified as being a victim of sex trafficking. The 90.5% who reported having a sex trafficker answered affirmatively to the one of the following questions:

1. Do you currently have a person who encourages/pressures/ forces you to exchange sexual acts for money, drugs, a place to stay, clothing, or protection?
2. In the past, has anyone encouraged/pressured/ forced you to exchange sexual acts for money, drugs, a place to stay, clothing, or protection?

The participants reported their relationship with the sex trafficker as a friend (n = 7, 33.3%), boyfriend (n = 5, 23.8%), other family member (n = 4, 19%) (cousin, mother's boyfriend), other (n = 2, 9.5%), a stranger (n = 2, 9.5%), and girlfriend (n = 1, 4.8%). Two (9.5%) participants

reported that they were afraid to leave or quit this situation due to fear of violence or other threats to harm them or their families.

The use of technology for the purpose of the sex trafficking was identified by nine (42.9%) of the 21 homeless young adult participants who reported having been sex trafficked. The participants responded affirmatively to the following survey question:

1. Were any of the following technological devices or means used to recruit you to trade sex, to keep you in the sex trading situation, or used as a tool in the sex trading situation?

Types of technology used in the sex trafficking situations (n = 65)	#	%
Smart phone	4	19%
Pornographic photos	2	9.5%
Grindr	2	9.5%
Instagram	2	9.5%
Facebook	1	4.8%
Tumblr	1	4.8%
Bitcoin	1	4.8%
Dating site	1	4.8%
Skype	1	4.8%

Participants reported that technology was used in their sex trafficking situation in a number of ways, including: as a tool in the sex trafficking situation (n = 5, 23.8%), to recruit the participant into a sex trafficking situation (n = 1, 4.8%), and to keep the participant in a sex trafficking situation (n = 1, 4.8%).

Comparing the Sex Trafficked Group with the Non-Sex Trafficked Group

To compare the sex trafficked and the non-sex trafficked group, chi square and t-test analysis were used. There were no significant differences between the two groups regarding age at the time of the survey, gender or sexual orientation.

Drug Use

Participants who reported a sex trafficking experience were significantly more likely to report an addiction to drugs ($\chi^2 (1, N = 86) = 5.59, p < .018$), an addiction to alcohol ($\chi^2 (1, N = 88) = 4.24, p < .039$), and having ever used methamphetamine ($\chi^2 (1, N = 85) = 8.49, p < .004$).

Drug Use	Sex trafficked group (n =21)	Non-sex trafficked group (n =68)
Use of methamphetamine**	7 (33.3%)	5 (7.4%)

Addiction to drugs*	6 (28.6%)	6 (8.8%)
Addiction to alcohol*	5 (23.8%)	5 (7.4%)

*Significance at a $p < .05$ level. **Significance at a $p < .01$ level.

Self-Harm Behaviors

Sex trafficked participants were significantly more likely than non-sex trafficked participants to engage in self-harm ($x^2 (1, N = 88) = 8.24, p < .004$), particularly: cutting ($x^2 (1, N = 88) = 8.15, p < .004$), drinking alcohol excessively ($x^2 (1, N = 88) = 11.04, p < .001$), engaging in risk taking behaviors ($x^2 (1, N = 88) = 5.47, p < .019$), not eating for long periods of time ($x^2 (1, N = 88) = 6.11, p < .013$), and bingeing/vomiting disordered eating ($x^2 (1, N = 88) = 6.24, p < .012$).

Self-Harming and Risk-Taking Behaviors	Sex trafficked group (n =21)	Non-sex trafficked group (n =68)
Self-harming behaviors**	16 (76.2%)	27 (39.7%)
Cutting**	12 (57.1%)	16 (23.5%)
Not eating for long periods of time*	11 (52.4%)	16 (23.5%)
Drinking alcohol excessively***	10 (47.6%)	9 (13.2%)
Risk taking behaviors *	9 (42.9%)	12 (17.6%)
Bingeing/Vomiting*	8 (38.1%)	9 (13.2%)

*Significance at a $p < .05$ level. **Significance at a $p < .01$ level. ***Significance at a $p < .001$ level.

Mental Health Challenges

Sex trafficked participants were significantly more likely than non-sex trafficked participants to report a diagnosis of Anxiety ($x^2 (1, N = 88) = 4.55, p < .033$), Depression ($x^2 (1, N = 88) = 4.06, p < .044$), and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder ($x^2 (1, N = 88) = 4.26, p < .039$).

Mental Health Challenges	Sex trafficked group (n =21)	Non-sex trafficked group (n =68)
Anxiety*	15 (71.4%)	30 (44.1%)
Depression*	15 (71.4%)	31 (45.6%)
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*	7 (33.3%)	9 (13.2%)

*Significance at a $p < .05$ level. **Significance at a $p < .01$ level.

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Abuse

Sex trafficked participants were significantly more likely than non-sex trafficked participants to report sexual abuse (ACE) ($x^2 (1, N = 87) = 7.16, p < .007$), physical neglect (ACE) ($x^2 (1, N = 87) = 4.52, p < .033$), mental illness in the household (ACE) ($x^2 (1, N = 83) = 11.52, p < .001$), having 4 or more ACEs ($x^2 (1, N = 86) = 4.85, p < .028$), being sexually abused (molested or raped) as an adolescent (age 13-17) ($x^2 (1, N = 87) = 5.90, p < .015$), being sexually abused

(molested or raped) as a child (age 12-under) ($\chi^2 (1, N = 87) = 8.16, p < .004$), physical abuse by parent/guardian ($\chi^2 (1, N = 87) = 16.56, p < .000$), and dating violence ($\chi^2 (1, N = 87) = 9.21, p < .002$).

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Abuse	Sex trafficked group (n =21)	Non-sex trafficked group (n =68)
4 or more ACEs*	15 (71.4%)	31 (45.6%)
Mental illness in household (ACE)**	13 (61.9%)	15 (22.1%)
Physical abuse by parent/guardian***	12 (57.1%)	10 (14.7%)
Dating violence**	12 (57.1%)	16 (23.5%)
Sexual abuse (ACE)**	9 (42.9%)	10 (14.7%)
Physical neglect (ACE)*	9 (42.9%)	13 (19.1%)
Sexual abuse as a child (age 12-under)**	9 (42.9%)	10 (14.7%)
Sexual abuse as adolescent (age 13-17)*	8 (38.1%)	10 (14.7%)

*Significance at a $p < .05$ level. **Significance at a $p < .01$ level. ***Significance at a $p < .001$ level.

Negative Life Experiences

Sex trafficked participants were significantly more likely than non-sex trafficked participants to report negative contact with law enforcement ($\chi^2 (1, N = 87) = 13.66, p < .000$), involvement in Juvenile Justice System ($\chi^2 (1, N = 87) = 5.90, p < .015$), being bullied by school peers ($\chi^2 (1, N = 87) = 10.36, p < .001$), and harassment by peers ($\chi^2 (1, N = 87) = 9.49, p < .002$).

Negative Life Experiences	Sex trafficked group (n =21)	Non-sex trafficked group (n =68)
Bullied by school peers**	15 (71.4%)	23 (33.8%)
Negative contact with law enforcement***	12 (57.1%)	12 (17.6%)
Harassment by peers**	10 (47.6%)	11 (16.2%)
Involvement in Juvenile Justice System*	8 (38.1%)	10 (14.7%)

*Significance at a $p < .05$ level. **Significance at a $p < .01$ level. ***Significance at a $p < .001$ level.

Labor Trafficking Experiences of Homeless Young Adults (N = 21)

For questions regarding labor exploitation in the Youth Experiences Survey, the term “work” was first defined as,

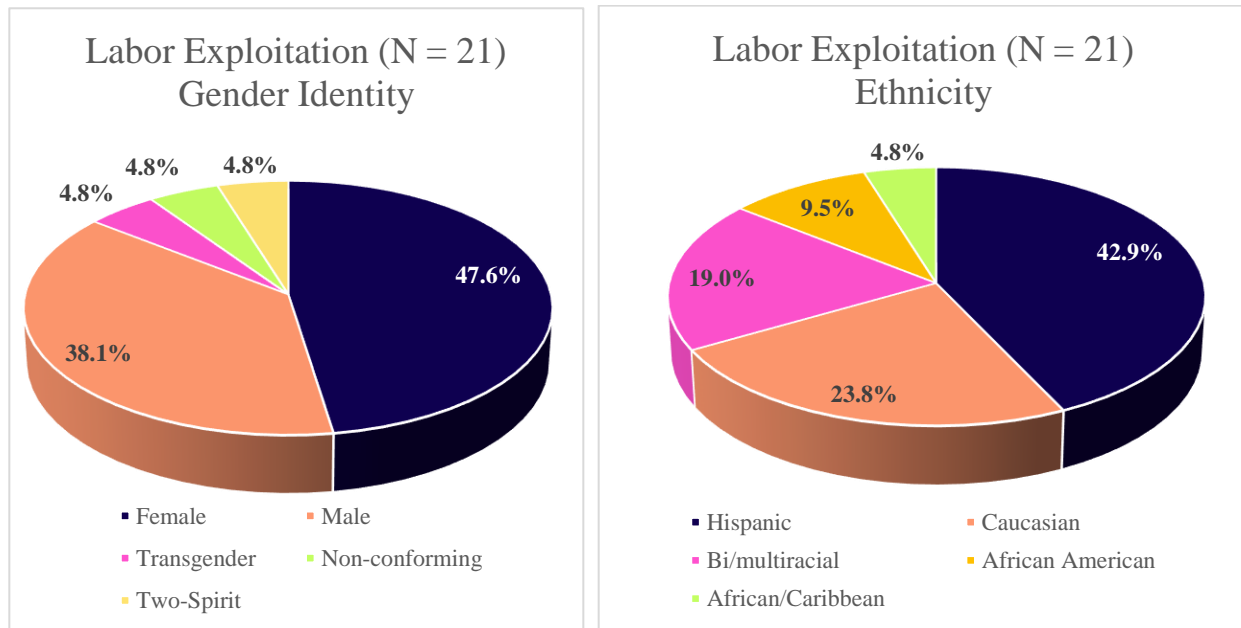
“Anything you have done where you or someone else received something of value, such as money, food, clothing, a place to stay, protection, drugs or gifts in exchange for your work or efforts. “Work” could mean working in a store or restaurant, but it could also mean shoplifting, running drugs, or anything where your efforts were exchanged for something of value. Aside from a typical employer, someone you

worked for could include a family member, a friend, boyfriend or girlfriend, or anyone you lived with or were in a relationship with” (Covenant House, 2013).

Twenty-one (23.6%) participants reported they had been labor exploited by answering affirmatively to one or more of the following questions:

1. Have you ever been tricked or forced into doing any kind of work that you did not want to do?
2. Have you ever been promised work where the work or payment ended up being different than what you expected?
3. Has someone you worked for ever controlled the money you earned, or kept the money you earned in exchange for money, drugs, food, place to stay, clothing, or protection?

The age of first labor exploitation ranged from twelve to 20 years old, with the average age of first labor exploitation being under the age of 18 ($M = 16$, $SD = 2.58$). Seven (33.3%) participants reported that they were exploited for labor before the age of 18 years old. Participants who reported experiencing labor exploitation identified as female ($n = 10$, 47.6%), male ($n = 8$, 38.1%), transgender ($n = 1$, 4.8%), non-conforming ($n = 1$, 4.8%), and Two-Spirit ($n = 1$, 4.8%). Participants reported their ethnicity as Hispanic ($n = 9$, 42.9%), Caucasian ($n = 5$, 23.8%), Bi/Multiracial ($n = 4$, 19%), African American ($n = 2$, 9.5%), and African/Caribbean ($n = 1$, 4.8%).



The majority of the participants who reported a labor exploitation experience identified as LGBTQIA+ ($n = 13$, 61.9%), and about one in every four ($n = 5$, 23.8%) participants identified as heterosexual. Sexual orientation information was missing for three (14.3%) participants.

Sexual Orientation (N = 21)	n	%
Heterosexual	5	23.8%
Asexual	4	19%
Pansexual	4	19%
Missing	3	14.3%

Bisexual	2	9.5%
Gay	2	9.5%
Lesbian	1	4.8%

Almost half of participants (n = 10, 47.6%) who reported a labor exploitation experience reported that they were tricked or forced into doing work that they did not want to do. Participants reported being tricked or forced to perform work while trying to obtain money (n = 11, 52.4%), food (n = 8, 38.1%), place to stay (n = 7, 33.3%), drugs (n = 5, 23.8%), protection (n = 5, 23.8%), and clothing (n = 3, 14.3%).

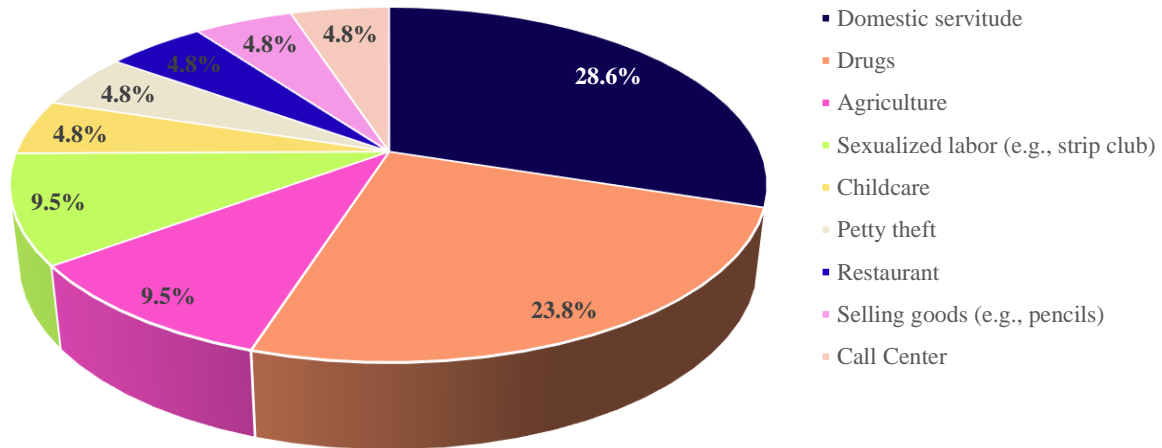


Nine (42.9%) of participants who reported a labor exploitation experience reported experiencing an element of fraud in which they were promised work where the work or payment ended up being different than what they expected. Almost two out of every five participants (n = 8, 38.1%) who reported labor exploitation reported that there was someone they worked for who controlled or kept money they earned. One (4.8%) participant reported currently having someone who was exploiting them for labor. Three (14.3%) participants reported being afraid to leave or quit the labor exploitation situation due to fear of violence or other threats to harm them or their family.

Participants identified the type of relationship with the labor exploiter as: a friend (n = 4, 19%), an employer (n = 3, 14.3%), a boyfriend (n = 3, 14.3%), a gang (n = 1, 4.8%), and a sibling (n = 1, 4.8%).

Participants who reported labor exploitation were asked to select which labor sector the exploitation was experienced. Participants reported exploitation in a number of sectors, including domestic servitude (n = 6, 28.6%) or working in someone's private residence, drugs (n = 5, 23.8%), agriculture (n = 2, 9.5%), sexualized labor (e.g., strip club) (n = 2, 9.5%), childcare (n = 1, 4.8%), petty theft (n = 1, 4.8%), restaurant (n = 1, 4.8%), selling goods (e.g., pencils) (n = 1, 4.8%), and a call center (n = 1, 4.8%).

In which labor sector did you experience exploitation? (N = 21)



Comparing the Labor Exploited Group with the Non-Labor Exploited Group

To compare the labor exploited and the non-labor exploited group, chi square and t-test analysis were used. There were no significant differences between the two groups regarding age at the time of the survey, gender or sexual orientation. Participants who experienced labor exploitation were significantly more likely than those who did not experience labor exploitation to report attempting suicide ($\chi^2 (1, N = 83) = 4.51, p <.034$), having a current medical issue ($\chi^2 (1, N = 87) = 6.04, p <.014$), and being kicked out of the home for using substances ($\chi^2 (1, N = 73) = 5.17, p <.023$).

Labor exploited vs non-labor exploited	Labor exploited group (n =21)	Non-labor exploited group (n = 68)
Current medical issue	16 (76.2%)	30 (44.1%)
Attempted suicide	12 (57.1%)	21 (30.9%)
Kicked out of home due to substance use	7 (33.3%)	7 (10.3%)

Discussion

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the total number of participants remained relatively low for the 2021 data collection period. Social service agencies are still limited in the amount of outreach and in-person services they are able to provide. Utilization of an online survey tool proved effective and enabled agencies to reach an additional 20 (22.5%) participants.

The participants who completed the 2021 YES study were diverse in ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation. Similar to the trend that has been demonstrated across the eight years of YES data collection, the homeless young adult population continues to be overrepresented by individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+, with almost half (49.4%) of the sample identifying as

LGBTQIA+. Participants who identified as LGBTQIA+ were significantly more likely to report engaging in self-harm behavior ($\chi^2(1, N = 76) = 3.95, p < .047$), attempted suicide ($\chi^2(1, N = 72) = 6.14, p < .013$), a current mental health dx ($\chi^2(1, N = 76) = 3.94, p < .047$), more than one mental health diagnosis ($\chi^2(1, N = 76) = 5.47, p < .019$), and an anxiety diagnosis ($\chi^2(1, N = 76) = 6.02, p < .014$).

LGBTQIA+ participants significantly more likely to report:	LGBTQIA+ Participants (n = 44)	Heterosexual Participants (n = 32)
Current mental health diagnosis	33 (75%)	17 (53.1%)
More than one mental health diagnosis	31 (70.5%)	14 (43.8%)
Anxiety	29 (65.9%)	12 (37.5%)
Self-harm behavior	28 (63.6%)	13 (40.6%)
Attempted suicide	23 (52.3%)	7 (21.9%)

Homelessness as a child

The average age that 2021 YES study participants first experienced homelessness was age 17, or as a child, with first time experiencing homelessness ranging from four years old to 23 years old. Almost half of the 2021 YES participants (n = 41, 46.1%) first experienced homelessness under the age of 18. The average number of times homeless was 3.1 times, with number of times experiencing homelessness ranging from one time to ten times.

The majority of participants (n = 64, 71.9%) reported being kicked out of their home, with the most cited reason being family conflict (n = 47, 52.8%), or fighting with their parents. The average age that 2021 YES study participants experienced first being kicked out of their homes was age 17.1, or as a child, with the first time being kicked out ranging from thirteen years old to 23 years old. Over one in every three participants (n = 35, 39.3%) was first kicked out under the age of 18. These findings indicate that although participants of the YES study are adults at the time of data collection, many participants first began experiencing homelessness as a child. This finding demonstrates the need for prevention and early intervention efforts for children who are identified as high-risk for homelessness.

Educational Attainment

The findings from the 2021 YES study indicate that education is a critical challenge for this population. Over half of participants (n = 46, 51.7%) reported dropping out of school at some point, and almost half of participants (n = 39, 43.8%) did not graduate from high school. The top three reasons cited for dropping out of school included moving around a lot (n = 17, 19.1%), homelessness (n = 15, 16.9%), academic difficulty (n = 12, 13.5%), and pregnancy or having a baby (n = 12, 13.5%). These life events demonstrate a significant level of instability in the lives of participants during their school age years. These findings demonstrate that school is a critical touchpoint or point of intervention for children at risk for homelessness. Prevention and early intervention efforts should be dedicated to identifying and providing additional connections, resources and supports to school-age children identified as at-risk for homelessness.

Drug Use

About three out of every five participants (n = 53, 59.6%) reported drug use, with the average age of first drug use being 15.4 years old and the youngest age of first drug use being eight years old. Although a relatively low number of participants reported an active addiction to drugs (n = 13, 14.6%) or alcohol (n = 11, 12.4%), and disproportionately high number of those participants reported that their addiction began after experiencing homelessness. Almost half of the participants (n = 6, 46.2%) that reported an addiction to drugs reported that their addiction began after experiencing homelessness. The majority (n = 7, 63.6%) of participants who reported an addiction to alcohol reported that their addiction began after experiencing homelessness. This finding highlights the need for strong substance use programming in social service providers serving homeless young adult populations.

Mental Health

Consistent with the findings from the previous seven years of data collection, the 2021 YES study participants reported significant ramifications to their mental health. Almost half of participants (n = 43, 48.3%) reported engaging in self-harming behavior, which often serves as a maladaptive coping skill, similar to substance use, to cope with overwhelming trauma. About two out of every five participants (n = 34, 38.2%) reported a history of attempted suicide. A significant number of participants (n = 55, 61.8%) reported a current mental health diagnosis, with over half of the total sample (n = 47, 52.8%) reporting having more than one mental health diagnosis. The two most common mental health diagnoses included depression (n = 46, 51.7%) and anxiety (n = 45, 50.6%), both of which were reported by over half of the 2021 YES study participants. Almost half of participants (n = 44, 49.4%) reported never receiving treatment for their mental health diagnosis. Concerning Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), over half of participants (n = 47, 52.8%) reported experiencing four or more ACEs which has been found to lead to significant long-term mental health and medical challenges, including early death.

Sex trafficking and Labor Exploitation

At least one form of human exploitation was present in two out of every five participants (n = 36, 40.4%) of the 2021 YES study. Although the total sample size for the 2021 YES study was smaller than years past, the number of participants who reported experiencing exploitation remained relatively stable, with almost one in every four participants reporting both sex trafficking (n = 21, 23.6%) and labor exploitation (n = 21, 23.6%). The average age of first sex trafficking experience was 16.9 years old, with the youngest age of first sex trafficking experience being twelve years old. Those that identified as having experienced sex trafficking were significantly more likely to report a multitude of other challenges, including addiction, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, various self-harming behaviors, and significant trauma histories, including sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect, dating violence, and were more likely to report experiencing four or more ACEs.

The average age of first labor exploitation experience was 16 years old, with the youngest age of first labor exploitation experience being twelve years old. Of those that reported experiencing labor exploitation, about one in every three (n = 7) reported being under the age of 18. Those who reported labor exploitation were significantly more likely to reported attempted suicide and having a current medical issue.

Conclusion

The findings from the 2021 YES study demonstrate the significant toll that the experience of homelessness takes on this young adult population, with addiction to substances prevalent post-homelessness and the presence of significant mental health challenges indicating that participants' ability to cope is being overwhelmed. The findings consistently demonstrate that this population is at an increased risk of sex trafficking and labor exploitation, due to the multitude of life challenges present as well as the pressing necessity for basic needs to be met. The findings continue to demonstrate that homeless young adults are facing sexual and labor exploitation not just as they attempt to make money, but traffickers are also exploiting their need for shelter and food most consistently.

The findings from the 2021 YES study shed light on the ongoing needs for homeless young adults in the state of Arizona: substance abuse programming and mental health support, particularly to address maladaptive coping and the significant effects of trauma. With regard to sex trafficking and labor exploitation, social serving agencies must be equipped to screen for the presence of these forms of exploitation and must strengthen their organizational programming to address this occurrence within this population. Efforts such as street outreach, mobile resource units, and drop-in centers can serve as touchpoints for prevention and intervention. Additional funding opportunities from local and state government should be made available to specifically target service provision for this population.

Perhaps even more importantly, these findings demonstrate the need for prevention and early intervention efforts for school-age children at risk for homelessness. The findings indicate that homeless young adults were experiencing not only homelessness prior to adulthood, but also a significant number of other negative life experiences and traumas that may have contributed to their homelessness. Continued research is needed to identify specific points of intervention in childhood in which children experiencing poverty, abuse, or even academic difficulty can be identified and targeted for homelessness and human exploitation prevention.

Finally, COVID-19 has presented critical challenges to service provision for vulnerable populations around the state of Arizona. The impact of COVID-19 on both the homeless population and the trafficking victim population is yet to be known, but the findings demonstrate that homeless young adults continue to face significant challenges, including sexual and labor exploitation, due to their unique vulnerabilities. Further research should be conducted to understand the impact of COVID-19 on this population.

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