

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

Acknowledgements

The 2021 YES Study was made possible by the following four participating agencies:



ourfamily services



NATIVE AMERICAN CONNECTIONS





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. The transition from childhood to adulthood is full of life changes that have long term consequences (Osgood, 2005). 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, may have missed several of these important transitional milestones, such as graduating from school, beginning full-time employment, gaining stable housing, etc. Instead, this population is known to have a history of child welfare involvement, homelessness, and other traumatic childhood experiences that may have prevented them from successfully transitioning into 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.



Introduction

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

GENERAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the life experiences of homeless young adults in Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona related to place of origin, education, use of drugs and alcohol, mental and physical diagnoses, family connectedness, and reasons for homelessness?
2. What Adverse Childhood Experiences have homeless young adults in Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona faced?
3. What are the risk factors and protective factors present for homeless young adults in Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona?

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?
2. What is a profile of a sex trafficked homeless young adult from Phoenix/Tucson, Arizona?
3. How prevalent was the use of technology in their sex trafficking experience?
4. What are the differences between sex trafficked homeless young adults and non-sex trafficked homeless young adults?

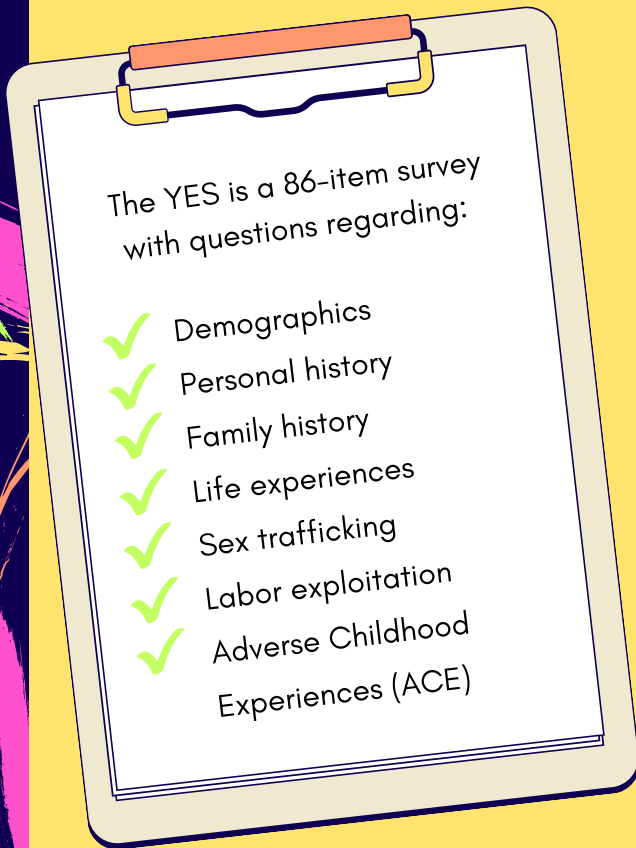
WITHIN THE LABOR EXPLOITED HOMELESS YOUNG ADULTS

1. What were the most common reasons the labor exploited victims identified as how they were exploited for labor?
2. What is a profile of a labor exploited homeless young adult from Phoenix/Tucson, Arizona?
3. What sectors did the labor exploited homeless young adults experience labor exploitation?
4. What are the differences between labor exploited homeless young adults and non-labor exploited homeless young adults?

Method

INSTRUMENT

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.



PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Eighty-nine (N=89) homeless young adults participated in the 2021 YES Study, representing a 9.8% increase in number of participants from the 2020 YES survey. The number represents 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.

All participants received a \$5 gift card incentive.



77.5%

Paper and Pencil Surveys



22.5%

Online Surveys

Participants of the YES study were receiving services from Our Family Services in Tucson, Arizona (n = 64, 71.9%), and three agencies from Phoenix, Arizona, including: Native American Connections (n = 22, 24.7%), UMOM (n = 2, 2.2%), and one.n.ten (n = 1, 1.1%).

Participants

SETTING

Participants responded to the survey from housing programs (n = 43, 48.3%), street outreach (n = 22, 24.7%), resource or drop-in centers (n = 18, 20.2%), and this data was missing for six (6.7%) participants.

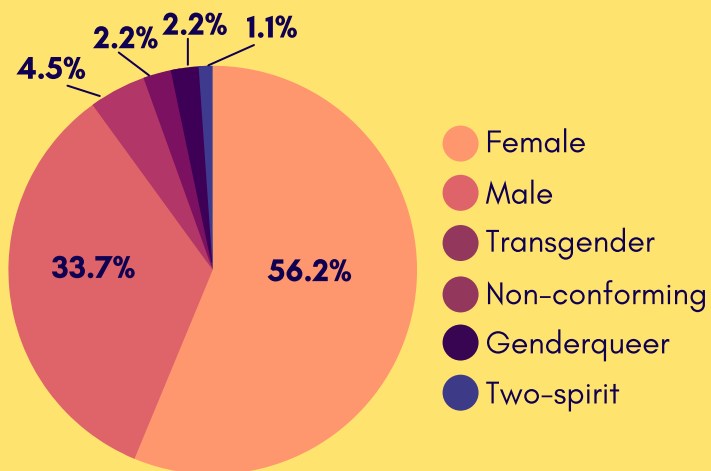
AGE

The age of participants ranged from

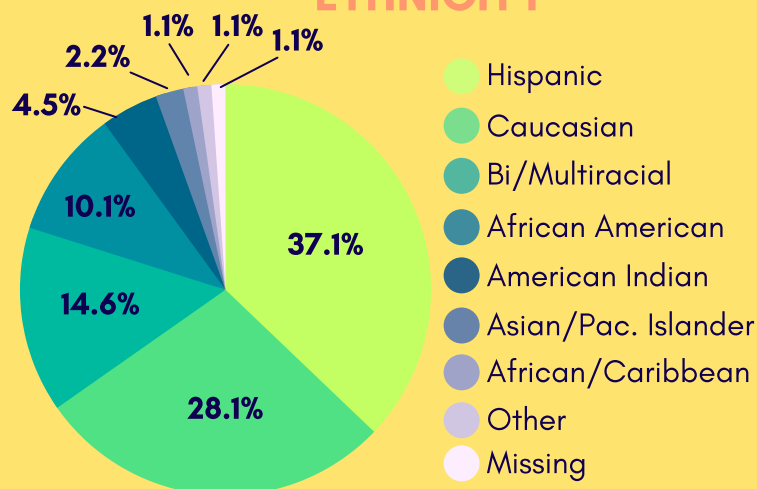


(M = 21.2, SD = 2.19)

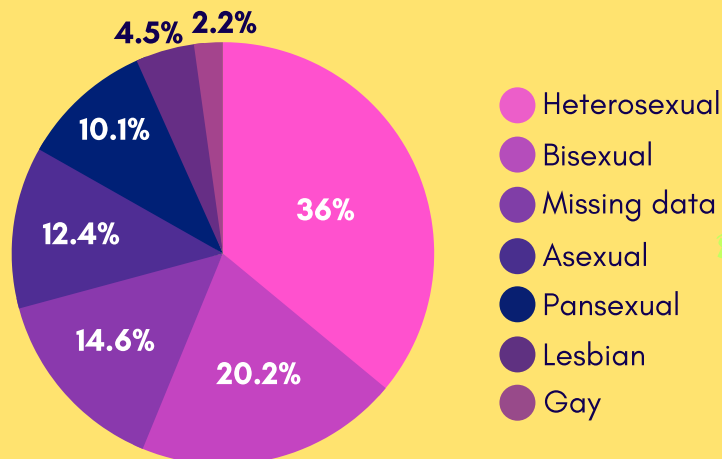
GENDER



ETHNICITY



SEXUAL ORIENTATION

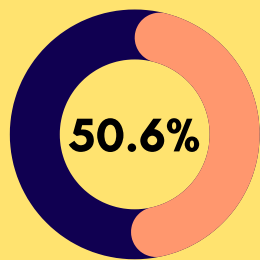


49.4%
identified as
LGBTQIA+

Findings (N = 89)

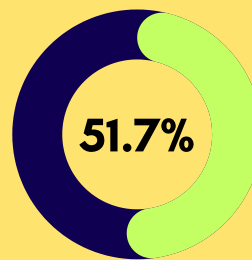
EDUCATION

The YES study asked a series of questions on educational attainment to gain a better understanding of the education 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.

Graduated High School



Half (n = 46, 51.7%) of participants reported dropping out of school at some point during their education career.

Dropped Out of School

Dropping Out

Participants' reasons for dropping out of school included:



(n = 17, 19.1%)
I moved around a lot



(n = 15, 16.9%)
I was homeless



(n = 12, 13.5%)
Academic difficulty



(n = 12, 13.5%)
I was pregnant/ had a baby



(n = 7, 7.9%)
I had to work to support myself



(n = 4, 4.5%)
I was using substances



(n = 3, 3.4%)
I was expelled



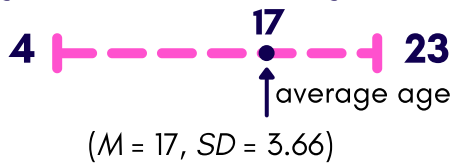
(n = 3, 3.4%)
Bullying

Findings (N = 89)

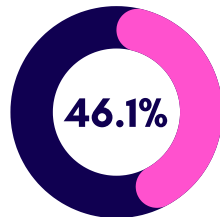
HOMELESSNESS + HOUSING

Participants were asked questions regarding their homelessness experiences, regarding age range of homelessness experiences, place of origin, and current housing situation.

Age of 1st homeless ranged from:



Forty-one (46.1%) participants first experienced homelessness **under the age of 18.**



Current Housing Arrangements

Participants reported currently living:



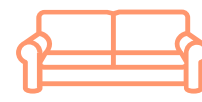
(n = 26, 29.2%)
 In my own place
 (transitional)



(n = 23, 25.8%)
 In a shelter



(n = 14, 15.7%)
 On the street



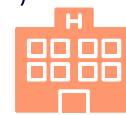
(n = 12, 13.5%)
 Couch-surfing



(n = 5, 5.6%)
 In my own place
 (paid by self)



(n = 5, 5.6%)
 Other



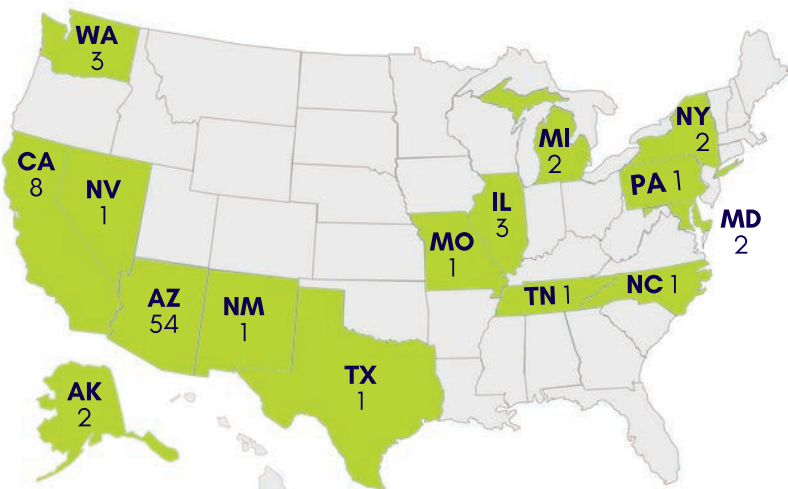
(n = 3, 3.4%)
 In a hotel

Place of Origin

Participants originated from around the United States, as well as from:

- Mexico (n = 3, 3.4%)
- Iraq (n = 1, 1.1%)
- Russia (n = 1, 1.1%)

Only six (6.7%) participants lived in AZ less than 1 year, and over half (n = 48, 53.9%) reported being raised in AZ.



Findings (N = 89)

SUBSTANCE USE

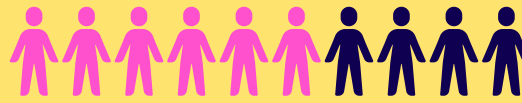
Questions about substance use are included in the YES study to explore use and addiction as possible challenges within this population. Questions on substance type, frequency of use and onset of use are included on the survey.

Participants reported using the following:

Substance used, by type	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%

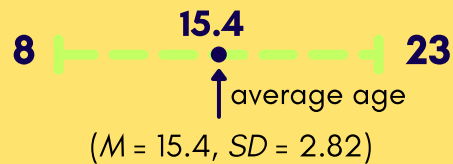
Frequency of Drug Use

- Not currently using (n = 39, 43.8%)
- Daily (n = 17, 19.1%)
- Weekly (n = 9, 10.1%)
- Monthly (n = 4, 4.5%)
- Did not disclose (n = 20, 22.5%)



Fifty-three (59.6%) participants reported drug use.

Age of 1st drug use ranged from:



14.6%
(n = 13) of participants ever used meth.

5.6%
(n = 5) of participants ever used heroin.

About **1 in 3**
(n = 27, 30.3%) participants vape.



Findings (N = 89)

ADDICTION

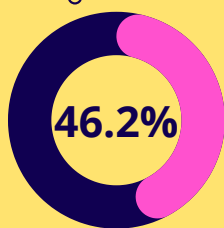
Thirteen participants



14.6%

identified as having an **addiction to drugs**.

Of the 13 that identified as having an addiction,



46.2%

(n = 6) began experiencing addiction **after** becoming homeless.

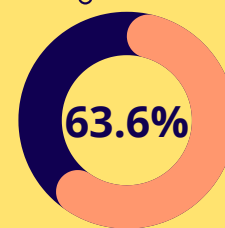
Eleven participants



12.4%

identified as having an **addiction to alcohol**.

Of the 11 that identified as having an addiction,



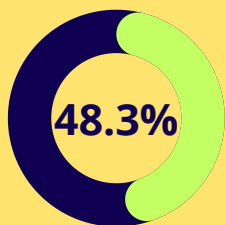
63.6%

(n = 7) began experiencing addiction **after** becoming homeless.

SELF-HARM

Homeless young adults have been found to face significant mental health challenges due to the instability of their living situations and acquisition of basic needs. Crisis situations that overwhelm the individual's ability to cope may result in self-harming or risk-taking behaviors, and suicidal ideations. To better understand the incidence of self-harm, the YES survey includes questions pertaining to self-harm engagement and suicidal ideations.

Almost half (n = 43)



48.3%

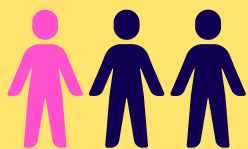
of participants reported engaging in some form of self-harming behavior.

Self-Harm Behavior, by type	n	%
Cutting	28	31.5%
Not eating for long periods of time	27	30.3%
Risk taking behavior	21	23.6%
Drinking alcohol excessively	19	21.3%
Binging/Vomiting	17	19.1%
Drug use	16	18%
Sex with strangers	14	15.7%
Body modification	9	10.1%
Scarification	6	6.7%
Overdosing on prescription meds	1	1.1%

Findings (N = 89)

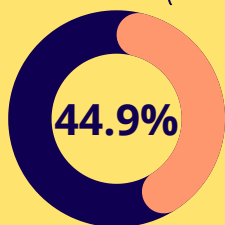


MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES



Over 1 in every 3
(n = 34, 38.2%)
participant reported
attempting suicide.

Less than half (n = 40)



44.9%
reported receiving
treatment for their
mental health disorder.

Fifty-five (61.8%) participants reported having a current mental health diagnosis, and over half (n = 47, 52.8%) reported more than one mental health diagnosis.

Mental Health Diagnosis, by type	n	%
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%

PHYSICAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

The most common
medical issues
reported included:



(n = 19, 21.3%)
Asthma



(n = 13, 14.6%)
Poor vision



(n = 9, 10.1%)
Dental problems



(n = 6, 6.7%)
Skin problems

Forty-six (51.7%) participants reported having a current medical issue, but only 16 (18%) participants reported receiving treatment.

Participants also reported experiencing chronic pain (n = 5, 5.6%), open wounds (n = 3, 3.4%), sexually transmitted infections (n = 3, 3.4%), lupus (n = 2, 2.2%), broken bones (n = 1, 1.1%), and diabetes (n = 1, 1.1%).

Findings (N = 89)

PREGNANCY + CHILDREN



Seven (7.9%) participants were pregnant at the time of the 2021 YES Survey.

Twenty-seven (30.3%) participants reported having children.

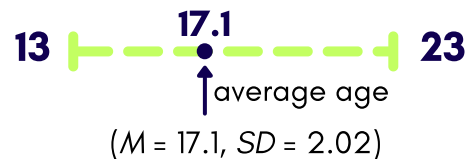


Child amount ranged between one to two children ($M = 1.5$, $SD = 0.51$) with children reportedly living:

- In the participant's care ($n = 19$, 21.3%)
- With family ($n = 10$, 11.2%)
- In DCS custody ($n = 4$, 4.5%)
- 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:

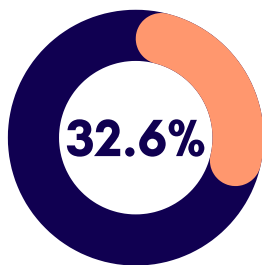


Over **one in every three** participants ($n = 35$, 39.3%) reported being **kicked out before the age of 18**.

Reasons for being kicked out included:

- Family conflict ($n = 47$, 52.8%)
- I was using substances ($n = 15$, 15.7%)
- Family poverty ($n = 10$, 11.2%)
- Family did not approve of my sexual orientation ($n = 6$, 6.7%)
- Family did not approve of my gender identity ($n = 5$, 5.6%)
- I got pregnant ($n = 1$, 1.1%)

VIOLENT RELATIONSHIPS



($n = 29$) of participants witnessed domestic violence in the home.



Witnessing Domestic Violence

About one in every three participant reported witnessing their father hit their mother ($n = 28$, 31.5%), and one in five participants reported witnessing their mother hit their father ($n = 18$, 20.2%) in childhood.

In adulthood, half of participants ($n = 45$, 50.6%) reported experiencing abuse in their relationship and 28.1% ($n = 25$) reported also being abusive to their partner.

Findings (N = 89)

MAKING MONEY

Participants were asked how they make money to live:

Jobs, by type	n	%
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	5	5.6%
Selling drugs	4	4.5%
Selling stolen things	3	3.4%

Participants also reported receiving financial support from family (n = 3, 3.4%), selling art/photography (n = 2, 2.2%), door-to-door sales (n = 1, 1.1%), pickpocketing (n = 1, 1.1%), donating plasma (n = 1, 1.1%), GED/Job program (n = 1, 1.1%), Social Security Disability Insurance (n = 1, 1.1%), and Supplemental Security Income (n = 1, 1.1%).

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Participants were asked the ten questions from the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, which examined exposure to different abuse and household dysfunction categories and the relationship to disease and early death in adulthood (Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz, Edwards, & Marks, 1998). Findings from that seminal ACEs study in 1998 and subsequent studies demonstrated significant negative life outcomes, particularly for individuals who have experienced four or more ACEs.

4
OR MORE
ACEs



12x
MORE
LIKELY

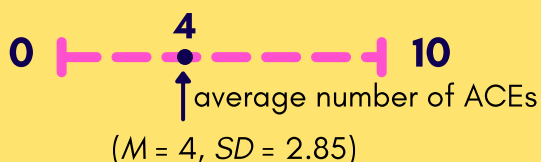


- to attempt suicide
- to experience alcoholism
- to use illicit drugs
- to have 50 or more sexual partners
- to have a history of sexually transmitted infections

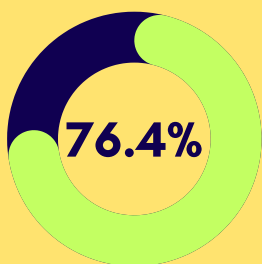
Findings (N = 89)

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES, CONT.

Participants reported experiencing between zero to ten ACEs, with the average number of ACEs being four.

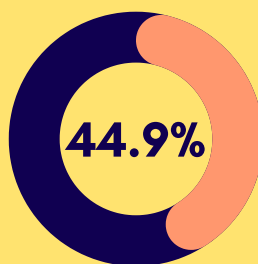


Sixty-eight participants reported experiencing



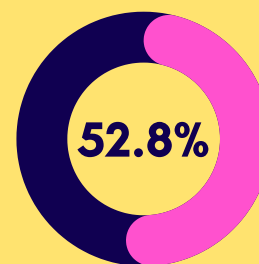
more than one ACE

Forty participants reported experiencing



between 0-3 ACEs

Forty-seven participants reported experiencing



4 or more ACEs

Participants reported experiencing:



60.7%

Emotional Abuse



59.6%

Parents Separated /Divorced



51.7%

Emotional Neglect



44.9%

Substance Abuse in the Household



38.2%

Physical Abuse



31.5%

Mental Illness in the Household



30.3%

Witness Domestic Violence



27%

Incarcerated Household Member



24.7%

Physical Neglect



21.3%

Sexual Abuse*

*19 (21.3%) participants reported experiencing sexual abuse as a child (age 12 or under), and 18 (20.2%) participants reported experiencing sexual abuse as an adolescent (between the ages of 13-17).

Findings (N = 89)

NEGATIVE LIFE EXPERIENCES

Participants reported experiencing additional life challenges, including:



Impermanent/Unstable Living Conditions

Participants reported running away from home (n = 41, 46.1%), living in a foster care/group home setting (n = 19, 21.3%), and spending time in residential treatment (n = 12, 13.5%).



Justice System Involvement

Participants reported experiencing negative contact with law enforcement (n = 24, 27%) and involvement in the Juvenile Justice System (n = 18, 20.2%).



Academic and Peer Difficulties

Participants reported experiencing academic difficulty (n = 40, 44.9%), bullying by school peers (n = 38, 42.7%), facing harassment by peers (n = 21, 23.6%), being in Special Education classes (n = 21, 23.6%), being expelled from school (n = 20, 22.5%), and gang affiliation (n = 3, 3.4%).

POSITIVE LIFE EXPERIENCES

Participants also reported positive life experiences that can serve as protective factors against homelessness or long-term negative effects of trauma.

Said no when drugs or alcohol were offered.
(n = 45, 50.6%)

Said no when pressured for sex
(n = 33, 37.1%)

Enrolled in school or technical program
(n = 32, 36%)

Practiced safe sex
(n = 32, 36%)

Supportive, loving family/group of friends
(n = 31, 34.8%)

Been part of a youth club or organization
(n = 30, 33.7%)

Healthy, safe and permanent place to live (n = 29, 32.6%)

Feel secure standing up for/protecting self
(n = 29, 32.6%)

Volunteered in the community
(n = 23, 25.8%)

Steady employment
(n = 21, 23.6%)

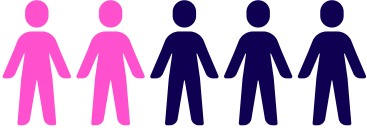
Aware of community resources
(n = 20, 22.5%)

Trust/good relationship with law enforcement
(n = 12, 13.5%)

Findings: Human Trafficking Data

HUMAN TRAFFICKING DATA N = 89

Two out of every five




(n = 36, 40.4%) participants reported experiencing at least one form of exploitation.

Eleven (12.4%) participants reported experiencing **both** sex trafficking and labor exploitation.

SEX TRAFFICKING DATA N = 21

About one in every four



(n = 21, 23.6%) participant reported experiencing sex trafficking.

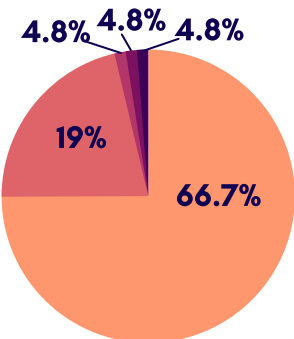
The age of 1st sex trafficking experience ranged from

12 ————— 16.9 ————— 21

↑ average age
(M = 16.9, SD = 2.31)

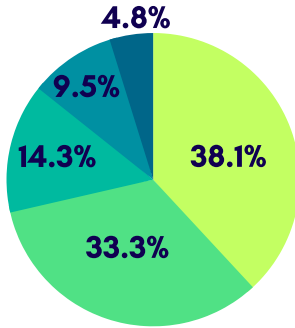
38.1% (n = 8) of those that reported experiencing a sex trafficking situation were **first sex trafficked under the age of 18**.

GENDER



- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Two-Spirit
- Genderqueer

ETHNICITY

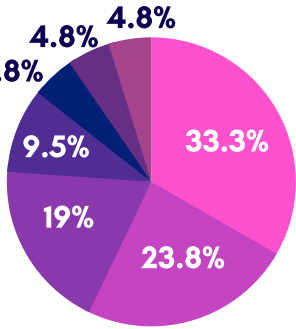


- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Bi/Multiracial
- African American
- American Indian

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

66.7%

identified as LGBTQIA+



- Bisexual
- Heterosexual
- Pansexual
- Did Not Report
- Asexual
- Gay
- Lesbian

Findings Sex Trafficking (N = 21)

SEX TRAFFICKING EXPERIENCE

Participants reported being sex trafficked for:



57.1%

Place to stay



52.4%

Money



33.3%

Drugs



28.6%

Food



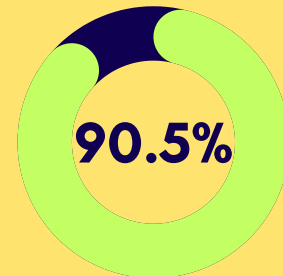
23.8%

Protection



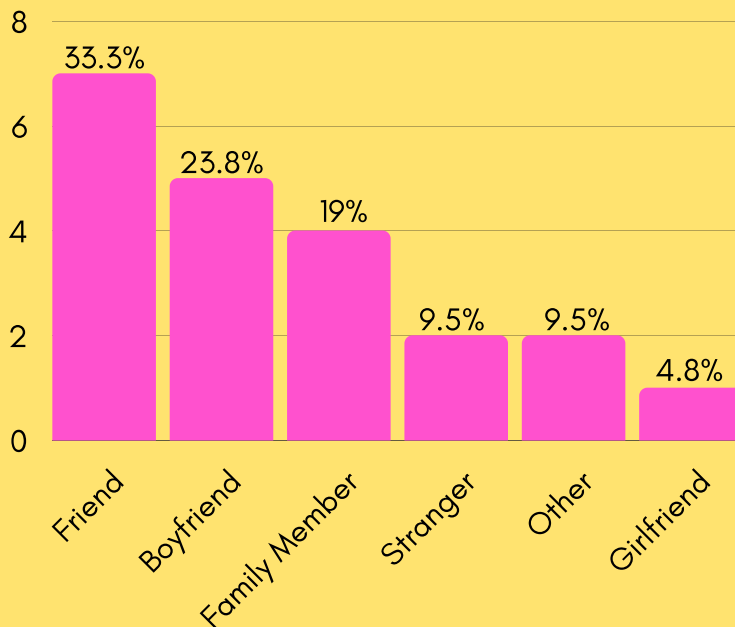
19%

Clothing



(n = 19) of participants identified as ever having a sex trafficker.

Participants identified their relationship to their sex trafficker as:



Participants wrote in "cousin" and "mother's boyfriend" next to family member.



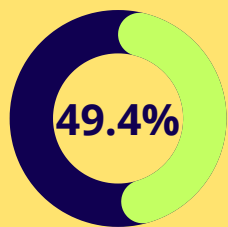
9.5%

reported feeling afraid to leave the sex trafficking situation due to fear of violence or other threats of harm to self or family.

Findings Sex Trafficking (N = 21)

TECHNOLOGY

Technology is often used as a tool to exploit victims of sex trafficking. Participants were asked a series of questions to explore the role of technology in their exploitation experience.



(n = 9) reported that technology was used to facilitate their exploitation.

Technology, by type	n	%
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%

Technology was used:

as a tool in the sex trafficking situation
(n = 5, 23.8%)

to recruit into a sex trafficking situation
(n = 1, 4.8%)

to control victim
(n = 1, 4.8%)

SEX TRAFFICKED VS. NON-SEX TRAFFICKED PARTICIPANTS

There was no statistical significance between the sex trafficked group and the non-sex trafficked group with regard to gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. However, participants who experienced sex trafficking were significantly more likely to report:



Addiction to drugs

($\chi^2(1, N = 86) = 5.59, p < .018$)

Addiction to alcohol

($\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 4.24, p < .039$)

Having ever used meth

($\chi^2(1, N = 85) = 8.49, p < .004$)



Anxiety

($\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 4.55, p < .033$)

Depression

($\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 4.06, p < .044$)

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

($\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 4.26, p < .039$)



Self-harm

($\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 8.24, p < .004$)

Cutting

($\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 8.15, p < .004$)

Drinking alcohol excessively

($\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 11.04, p < .001$)

Risk taking behavior

($\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 5.47, p < .019$)

Not eating for long periods of time

($\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 6.11, p < .013$)

Binging/vomiting

($\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 6.24, p < .012$)

Negative contact with LE

($\chi^2(1, N = 87) = 13.66, p < .000$)

Involvement in Juvenile Justice System

($\chi^2(1, N = 87) = 5.90, p < .015$)



Having 4 or more ACEs

($\chi^2(1, N = 86) = 4.85, p < .028$)

Physical neglect (ACE)

($\chi^2(1, N = 87) = 4.52, p < .033$)

Mental illness in the household (ACE)

($\chi^2(1, N = 83) = 11.52, p < .001$)

Sexual abuse as a child (age 12-under)

($\chi^2(1, N = 87) = 8.16, p < .004$)

Sexual abuse as an adolescent (age 13-17)

($\chi^2(1, N = 87) = 5.90, p < .015$)

Physical abuse by parent/guardian

($\chi^2(1, N = 87) = 16.56, p < .000$)

Dating violence

($\chi^2(1, N = 87) = 9.21, p < .002$)

Findings: Labor Exploitation (N = 21)

LABOR EXPLOITATION N = 21

Labor trafficking is a difficult injustice to identify and prosecute. Both labor exploitation and labor trafficking involve unfair wages or wages left unpaid and/or substandard living and working conditions. In order to demonstrate that labor trafficking has occurred, elements of force, fraud and coercion need to be proven.

The exploratory questions in the YES study regarding the work experiences of homeless young adults are not sufficient to prove the presence of

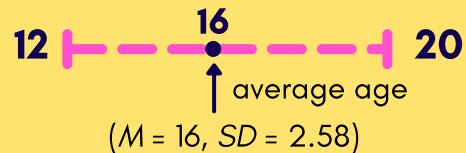
force, fraud or coercion. Therefore, these findings are discussed through the lens of labor exploitation.

About one in every four



(n = 21, 23.6%) participant reported experiencing labor exploitation.

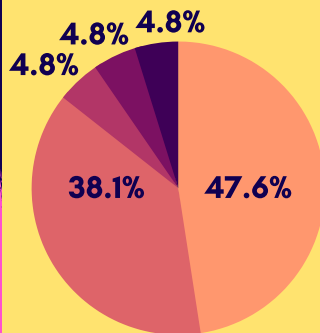
The age of 1st labor exploitation experience ranged from



33.3%

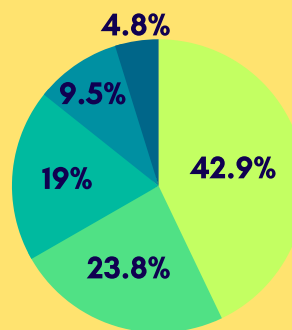
(n = 7) of those that reported experiencing a labor exploitation situation were **first exploited for labor under the age of 18.**

UNDER
18



GENDER

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Non-conforming
- Two-Spirit



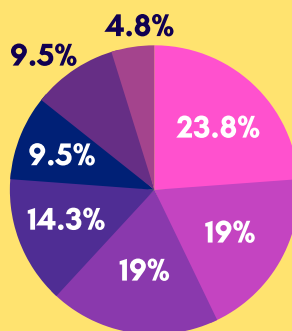
ETHNICITY

- Hispanic
- Caucasian
- Bi/Multiracial
- African American
- African/Caribbean

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

61.9%

identified as
LGBTQIA+



- Heterosexual
- Bisexual
- Asexual
- Gay
- Pansexual
- Lesbian
- Did Not Report

Findings Labor Exploitation (N = 21)

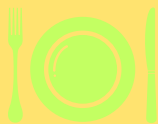
LABOR EXPLOITATION EXPERIENCE

Ten (47,6%) participants reported being tricked or forced into doing work they did not want to do. Participants were attempting to work in exchange for:



52.4%

Money



38.1%

Food



33.3%

Place to stay



23.8%

Drugs



23.8%

Protection



14.3%

Clothing

Exploitation Narratives

"I made an agreement with siblings to care for their children, pets, and clean their houses while they worked... they wouldn't let me have any freedom. The family was threatening to never support me again".

"Phone job that I was never paid for."

Fraud

Nine (42.9%) participants reported being promised work where the work or payment ended up being different than what they expected.



Control Tactics



Eight (38.1%) participants reported having someone they worked for control the money they earned or keep money they earned.



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?



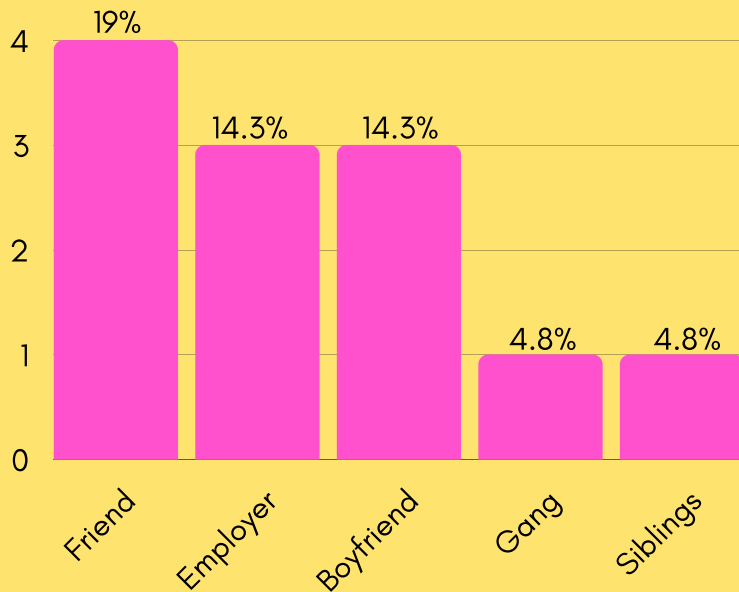
4.8%

(n = 1) participant reported currently having someone exploiting her/him for labor.

Findings: Labor Exploitation (N = 21)

RELATIONSHIP TO LABOR EXPLOITER

Participants identified their relationship to their labor exploiter as:



LABOR EXPLOITED VS. NON-LABOR EXPLOITED PARTICIPANTS

There was no statistical significance between the labor exploited and non-labor exploited group with regard to gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. However, participants who experienced labor exploitation were significantly more likely to report:

Attempting suicide ($\chi^2(1, N = 83) = 4.51, p < .034$)

Having a current medical issue ($\chi^2(1, N = 87) = 6.04, p < .014$)

Being kicked out for using substances ($\chi^2(1, N = 73) = 5.17, p < .023$)

SECTOR OF LABOR EXPLOITATION



Domestic Servitude
(n = 6, 28.6%)



Drug related
(n = 5, 23.8%)



Agriculture
(n = 2, 9.5%)



Child care
(n = 1, 4.8%)



Petty Theft
(n = 1, 4.8%)



Restaurant
(n = 1, 4.8%)



Selling Goods
(n = 1, 4.8%)



Call Center
(n = 1, 4.8%)

Discussion

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the total number of participants remained relatively low for the 2021 data collection. 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
($\chi^2(1, N = 76) = 3.95, p < .047$)



Attempted suicide
($\chi^2(1, N = 72) = 6.14, p < .013$)



Current mental health diagnosis
($\chi^2(1, N = 76) = 3.94, p < .047$)



More than one mental health diagnosis
($\chi^2(1, N = 76) = 5.47, p < .019$)



Anxiety diagnosis
($\chi^2(1, N = 76) = 6.02, p < .014$)



Harassment by peers
($\chi^2(1, N = 75) = 4.05, p < .044$)

Discussion



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.

Discussion



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.

Discussion



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.

T 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.

Discussion

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.

References

Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., & Marks, J. S. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4), 245-258.

Osgood, D. W., Foster, E. M., Flanagan, C., & Ruth, G. R. (2005). *On your own without a net: The transition to adulthood for vulnerable populations*. University of Chicago Press.

Partnering Agencies



Contact Information



Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, MSW, PhD

Director, ASU Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research
Associate Professor, ASU School of Social Work
Dominique.Roe@asu.edu



Kristen Bracy, MA, MSW

Assoc. Director, ASU Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research
Kristen.Bracy@asu.edu

<https://www.socialwork.asu.edu/stir> ● <https://www.sextraffickinghelp.com>