

An Introduction to Housing Male-Identifying Survivors of Human Trafficking

Male survivors of human trafficking experience unique barriers when seeking shelter and housing assistance. This document provides foundational guidance on the challenges that male survivors face, along with strategies to increase the availability of services and supports. For the purpose of this document, all “male survivors” terminology is interchangeable and synonymous with “male-identifying survivors”.

Unique Challenges for Male Trafficking Survivors

Male survivors are often hindered from seeking or receiving services due to personal, community, and societal biases, myths, and discrimination. They may be blamed, belittled, and not believed.

For example, common myths include that:

- Sex trafficking doesn't happen to boys and men, or straight/heterosexual men;
- Men enjoy all sexual interactions and can fight off perpetrators;
- Men are too strong to cry or access mental health services;
- Male survivors become perpetrators because they have dominant/aggressive personalities;
- Only men at the intersection of poverty, substance abuse, and immigration status are targeted by traffickers.

Getting Started

Service providers who have less experience with certain demographics or populations can feel like they don't even know how to get started. However, many male trafficking survivors are not aware of, being offered, or receiving baseline advocacy services and supports. Because of these challenges, many of the following recommendations will be familiar as best practices for programs that support survivors. The key will be the transition to actual implementation, with intentional inclusion of male survivors who may have not been considered as a trafficking survivor needing housing assistance. Effective implementation will include mindfulness of personal beliefs and biases, alongside the intentional practices and protocols to address them.

Trauma Informed Care (TIC)

- TIC involves recognizing the widespread impact of and reactions to trauma. Write and revise your policies, procedures, intakes, assessments, and other documents in a way that reflects the fact that male trafficking survivors will have a range of emotional and behavioral responses to what has been done to them. For example, due to men being stereotypically considered “aggressive”, male survivors may be threatened with program termination when anger is interpreted as aggression. Validate that their feelings are “normal” and that you believe them. Avoid requesting unnecessary information or documentation that may cause re-traumatization. Also focus on listening to understand, rather than to respond.

Safety planning

- Regularly engage in discussions on physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and technological harm reduction strategies. One example is that traffickers are aware of, and exploit, social “norms” and stigmas. Mainstream society encourages men and boys to embrace a “lone wolf” mentality, based on independence and self-reliance. Because perpetrators thrive by isolating victims, it’s important for advocates to provide opportunities for male survivors of trafficking to build new social connections.
- Consider individualized ways to plan for wellness, self-care, and trauma triggers. For instance, self-injurious behaviors tend to be associated with survivors who identify as female. Therefore, advocates may not ask males about self-harm because they either don’t want to “emasculate” survivors or because the possibility of self-harm does not seem likely.
- Talk to male trafficking survivors about how to decipher illegitimate work opportunities or conditions. Some examples may include sleeping at the same place where they work, working excessively long hours, and working for their landlord in exchange for rent.

Economic justice

- Male survivors’ feelings around masculinity can be closely tied to income and the ability to “provide”. Inquire to see if male survivors would like assistance with repairing credit, increasing income, applying for jobs (especially considering that trafficking survivors may lack legal work references), and criminal record expungement or sealing.
- Economic advocacy is closely tied with housing assistance, and male survivors may not communicate that they lack knowledge around housing applications, security deposits, utilities payments, and other leasing information. Make it a practice to explain processes, jargon, and acronyms before survivors even ask.

