Whose story, whose benefit? Returning (to) the power of authentic narrative

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Acknowledgement
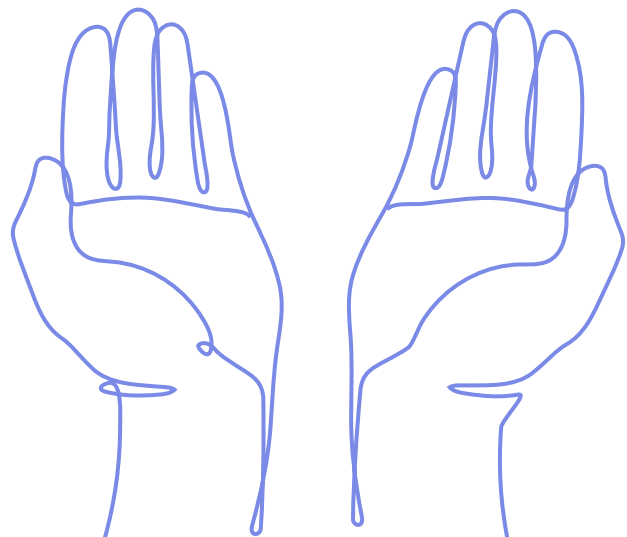
Executive summary

Sharing stories is an important way people shape social change, political advocacy, learning, social connection, and community care. The Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery (HTMS) sector that developed to end human trafficking has typically relied on the stories of people with lived experience to shape policy, program norms, and public perception. However, people with lived experience of trafficking often report that the approaches typically used in the anti-trafficking sector have insufficient protections in place to avoid harming them, may misrepresent what trafficking is and the individuals most vulnerable, and at times actively cause harm. This study engaged with existing frameworks for ethical anti-trafficking storytelling as well as interviews with organisers and professionals with lived experience in order to identify promising practices for a storytelling model that is driven by and responsive to survivors.

The review of existing models showed that most models encouraged trauma-informed, culturally responsive survivor storytelling that focused on the experiences of marginalised populations and provided supportive infrastructure to support wellness for the survivor and their community. However, this encouragement often lacked clear, practical guidance, and the expert interviews confirmed that: The experiences of the interviewees suggest that these concepts are not implemented meaningfully, or that they are given superficial treatment or used as buzzwords without substance. Interviews also found that the kinds of details, purposes, and content often expected of them in anti-trafficking storytelling are not always aligned with their own personal preferences or with what they believe is effective or needed.

Stakeholders are encouraged to mitigate power dynamics that externally shape the person's story as much as possible. This may include choosing public storytellers out of a pool that people with lived experience can opt in to (rather than asking an individual to share their story before they have initiated); working with survivor collectives to ensure people have access to mentors and "elders" who have been walking the path longer; supporting programming that teaches the skills needed to determine what does and does not feel good (such as somatic skills, boundary-setting, and how to assess if one has the emotional capacity to do a certain kind of storytelling); and investing in financial security through economic support and fellowship structures to reduce the need to take on unwanted storytelling out of financial necessity.
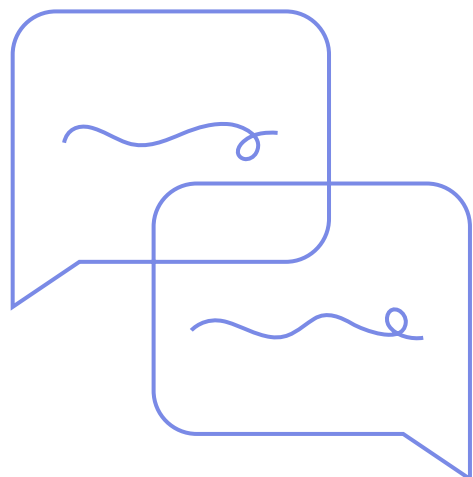
Introduction

The 2022 research project "A review of current promising practices in the engagement of people with lived experience to address modern slavery and human trafficking" gathered information from existing a broad range of anti-trafficking professionals in a range of global regions.[1] The North American report for this project found that models of storytelling typically employed within the anti-trafficking sector exacerbate exploitation and tokenisation,[2] yet storytelling by and for impacted communities is how people learn, share wisdom, and create community. The present research project aims to reconcile this dichotomy by exploring the research question: What promising practices enable people with lived experience to leverage their own stories for personal empowerment, community wellness, and structural change? This report, which is part of the University of Liverpool and Modern Slavery Policy and Evidence Centre's research on meaningful survivor engagement in modern slavery policy and programming, hopes to identify storytelling practices that are less influenced by the political and funding norms of the anti-trafficking sector.

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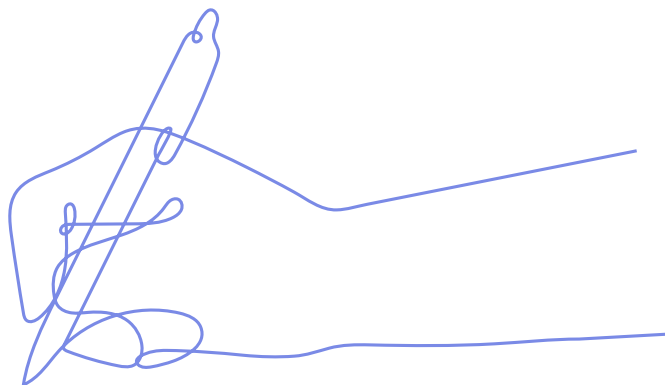
1. Wendy Asquith, Allen Kiconco, and Alex Balch, *A review of current promising practices in the engagement of people with lived experience to address modern slavery and human trafficking* (London: Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre, 2022). Available at: https://modernslaverypec.org/resources/best-practice-engagement-lived-experience.

2. Chris Ash, *Engagement of lived experience in international policy and programming in human trafficking and modern slavery: reflections from North America* (London: Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre, 2022). https://modernslaverypec.org/assets/downloads/Engagement-lived-experience-north-america.pdf.

Research methods

This report was prepared by Chris Ash, an anti-trafficking professional in the southeastern United States whose work centres around empowering survivor leadership and public health approaches to violence prevention. Five participants were identified within the professional networks of the research consultant. All these individuals with lived experience engage in anti-violence work as professionals and/or community-based leaders within the United States. The participant pool was selected to ensure strong representation from individuals who have less experience with sharing their personal story in the context of anti-trafficking sector advocacy. This approach helped draw upon wisdom from their communities and storytelling traditions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted over Zoom with all participants. Three of the interviewees participated in a follow-up Zoom focus group. Interviews were then transcribed, and thematic analysis conducted.

Separately, a review of existing models for ethical storytelling about and by impacted people and communities was conducted. "Model" was defined loosely as any publicly available document or product offering a framework or guidance for ethically engaging stories of lived experience. After excluding models that were less relevant to this study, 14 were reviewed based upon criteria developed after a review of the 2022 reports mentioned above as well as a recent publication about survivors' experiences of harm in the anti-trafficking sector.[3] The criteria were:

1. Survivor-driven identification of whose story is shared (or self-initiation of storytelling);

2. Addressing organisational power dynamics;

3. Inclusion of evidence from impacted communities about the kinds of stories they want to tell;

4. Whether the model emphasises individual or collective storytelling;

5. Whether the model uses trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches;

6. Any guidance the model provides on infrastructure needed for safe, impactful, and empowering storytelling by individuals with lived experience;

7. Survivor-driven story crafting using only the elements the person with lived experience wants to include;

8. Prioritisation of empowerment of vulnerable individuals/communities;

9. Ensuring that stories are used in ways that benefit impacted people and communities rather than just systems; and

10. Ensuring that people with lived experience and impacted communities maintain control and ownership over their stories.

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3. Lived and Professional Experience Working Group, *We Name It So We Can Repair It: Rethinking Harm, Accountability, and Repair in the Anti-Trafficking Sector* (Los Angeles: National Survivor Network, 2023). Available at https://nationalsurvivornetwork.org/harmandrepair/.

Definitions

While both the author and the participants have far broader conceptions of what constitutes storytelling, prior research suggests that sector-wide harms are often specific to expectations of sharing lived experiences of trafficking and trauma. For this reason, throughout this report, "storytelling" refers specifically to sharing someone's lived experience of trafficking or related trauma by the person or a designated representative unless otherwise indicated.

While the concepts of public and private exist along a spectrum, for the purposes of this report, interviewees agreed that the public sharing of their stories includes sharing it in a way that it can be found by anyone, whether the initial sharing was done in a one-on-one or group setting. Thus, this could include storytelling at a large event, conducting a media or research interview, writing a memoir, or recording an interview for an oral archive. Interviewees held varying opinions on classifying sharing in small, communal spaces (such as peer healing spaces or with groups of family and friends). The term "storytelling model" refers broadly to a framework or formalised guidance on ethical public sharing of the stories of people with lived experience. Finally, "anti-trafficking sector" and "anti-trafficking movement" are used separately and specifically throughout. The movement is the work to end trafficking being led by people and communities most impacted, and the sector is the organizational and governmental infrastructure that has developed to address trafficking. These may be best thought of as a Venn diagram, as much movement work occurs entirely outside the sector and not all sector work aligns with movement values.[4]
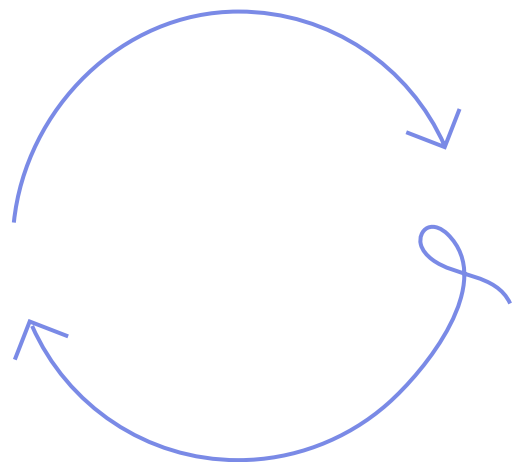
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4. Lived and Professional Experience Working Group, *We Name It So We Can Repair It: Rethinking Harm, Accountability, and Repair in the Anti-Trafficking Sector* (Los Angeles: National Survivor Network, 2023). Available at https://nationalsurvivornetwork.org/harmandrepair/.

Key findings

This section begins with a brief overview of the findings of the model review and provides insights gained through semi-structured interviews.

Model review overview of findings

The model review found that most frameworks provided some guidance on the criteria assessed, but the nature of that guidance varied in quality, inclusivity, and tone. For example, although six models asserted that the person should retain control over their story, only two provided practical guidance on how to ensure survivors' control and ownership of their stories. Just over half of the models discussed how stories should be used to benefit the impacted communities. However, all but two were either unclear about who the community was or focused on the *organisation's* self-defined community rather than the impacted person's communities, which may not be the same. All models discussed prioritising marginalised communities, but guidance on cultural sensitivity was missing or often insufficient; recommendations against bias were rarely followed by clear guidelines, and no frameworks addressed stereotyping of gender or sexual minorities.

Elements included in storytelling models
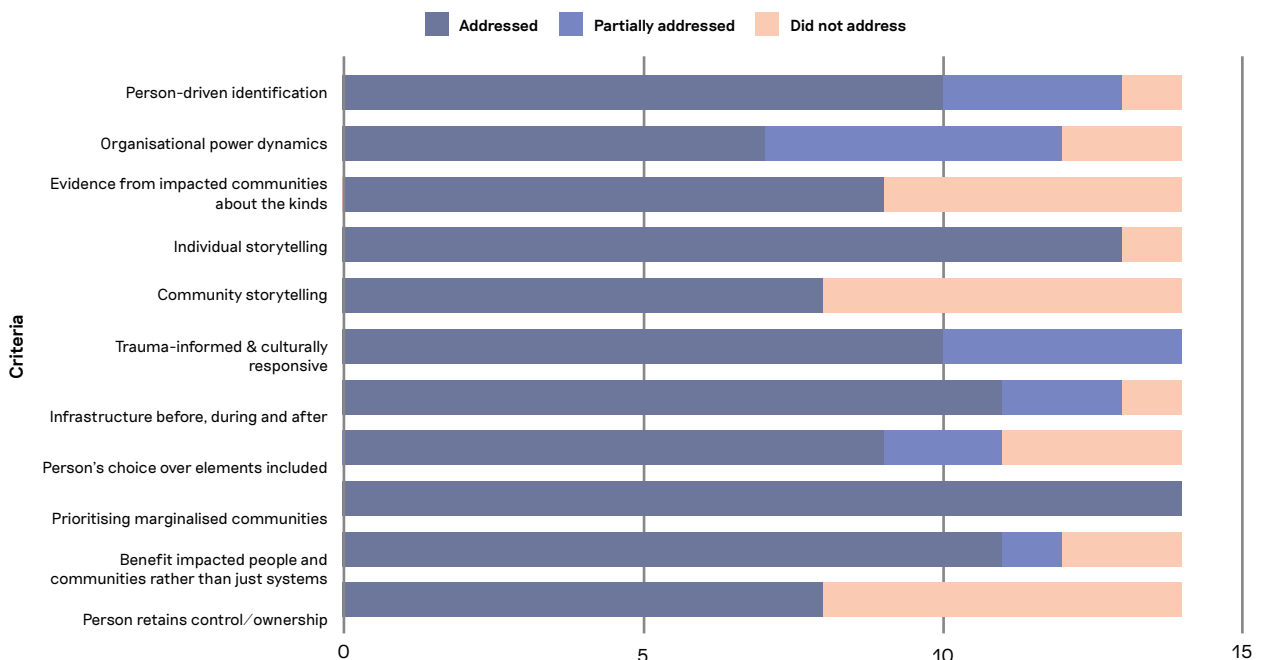
Few conceived of storytelling as anything other than a linear narrative, with only two models including creative storytelling through art, craft, or performance (one from Africa and one focused on indigenous communities), even though these creative modalities were favoured by most interviewees. While models consistently referred to empowerment as a goal of storytelling, none provided evidence or clarification for what makes storytelling empowering. Most begin with the assumption that survivor storytelling is for external purposes (rather than driven by innate desire) and causes some degree of harm to the storyteller. Most of the models' guidance is on how to mitigate the inherent harm. Only Azadi Kenya's framed storytelling represents a possible formal healing modality.

Most addressed organisational power dynamics in some way, but largely without directly acknowledging the role organisational goals often have in shaping narratives. The Antislavery Knowledge Network's *Toolkit for Ethical Antislavery Work* offers the most comprehensive discussion on mitigating power dynamics.[5]

Regarding economic power dynamics, just over half addressed the need to compensate storytellers with lived experience (or the challenges posed by not being able to in research), but few offered extensive guidance on compensation or the incidental costs of sponsoring survivor storytelling. The *Survivor Storytelling Workbook* (co-authored by the author of this report) was the only model to provide direct guidance to survivors on how to negotiate compensation.[6] Protocols *for Using First Nations Cultural and Intellectual Property in the Arts* offered comprehensive guidance around compensation of vulnerable groups for their labor,[7] and Azadi Kenya's storytelling model offered the clearest guidance on incidental costs of sponsoring survivor storytelling.[8] The latter model acknowledged that financial pressures can lead to the sharing of stories based on marketing tactics or financial pressures (rather than genuine survivor interest), and established storytelling fellowships to allow people with lived experience economic support to explore their storytelling approaches with creative freedom.

5. Sophie Otiende, *A Toolkit for Ethical Anti-Slavery Work* (Liverpool: Antislavery Knowledge Network, 2022). https://aknexhibition.org/toolkit/ Accessed 10 May 2023.

6. Sabra Boyd and Chris Ash, *Survivor Storytelling Workbook for advocates with lived experience working in the many movements to end violence* (Los Angeles: National Survivor Network, 2023).

7. *Protocols for Using First Nations Cultural and Intellectual Property in the Arts* (Sydney: Australia Council for the Arts, 2019). Available at https://australiacouncil.gov.au/investment-and-development/protocols-and-resources/protocols-for-using-first-nations-cultural-and-intellectual-property-in-the-arts/.

8. Interview with the founder.

Expert interview findings

Interviews focused on two areas:

1. Dynamics in interviewees' other communities that have a strong storytelling tradition and

2. The desired dynamics of storytelling in their own anti-trafficking advocacy.

All interviewees indicated that they would be interested in sharing their experiences of trafficking publicly for social change. Thus, questions were asked for both of the above: areas about the purposes of storytelling, selection of storytellers, types of stories told, and things that contribute to storytelling feeling safe. Finally, interviewees were able to provide guidance on how to ensure their choices and informed consent. For each section that follows, there will be an identification of any relevant themes regarding the interviewees' other community-based storytelling traditions before initiating a discussion of their desires and recommendations for survivor storytelling.

Findings: what are the purposes of the storytelling?

When asked about the purposes of storytelling in their other communities, all interviewees named education and community connection, and these purposes also focused on their personal motivation for potential future storytelling. With regard to education, almost all interviewees noted that a key purpose would be to disrupt narratives about how trafficking happens and challenge stereotypes regarding who is involved in trafficking. Interviewee 02 highlighted that when the only narratives put forward are the ones that are "acceptable" to put forward, "it creates a large gap where the community is not looking for the other things" – other ways in which trafficking often happens to marginalised communities. One interviewee experienced this firsthand: In the one time he has shared his story within the context of the anti-trafficking sector, attendees were surprised by the elements of his exploitation and found it "eye opening". "And I'm so clear on the fact that my story is pretty unremarkable and that there are just so many other stories just like mine", he added. "Like almost identical to other black trans people in the US." (05) This reflects the discrepancy noted in our model review between the acknowledgement of marginalised populations and cultural responsivity compared to what is normalised and experienced in practice, and how bias may be perpetuated unintentionally.

It also suggests a significant gap that occurs when the stories made available to policymakers are not inclusive of multiple marginalised communities: solutions developed based on stories that are safe enough to tell will fail to meet real needs. Interviewees also noted the importance of connecting personal storytelling to larger issues: risk factors, systemic failures or corruption, structural violence, and how societal changes can reduce vulnerability to all kinds of exploitation. When personal

stories emphasise broader issues and system gaps, more inclusive and effective solutions can be developed.

The second purpose shared by interviewees focused on community care for people experiencing or who have experienced trafficking: education about safety and understanding what is happening to you (in mixed or lived experience-only audiences) and supporting healing and growth (lived experience-only spaces). Interviewees noted the importance of people with lived experience being able to recognise and better understand their own experiences through hearing the stories that are told both to support self-identification and to reduce isolation. This self-recognition and understanding is less likely when survivors' stories are driven, limited, or told by "helpers" without lived experience. Bakari Roscoe described this as the difference between "cautionary" and "warning" tales.[9]

Image: 1 "Traffic: Then and Now, #6" by Bakari Roscoe

When people outside of the impacted community share stories of in-community violence, they often tell cautionary tales that highlight the importance of making "good" choices so that you don't experience harm. In-community storytelling is more often a warning tale alerting people that there are harms you may experience, even if you do everything right. Use of warning tales for education is focused instead on helping people learn to "anticipate reactions from the larger community through the lens of those stories." Cautionary tales often perpetuate and are driven by paternalism and saviorism, leading to the development of ineffective and harmful programming and prevention policy that rely on stereotypes and "rescue".

Many interviewees discussed the roles of stories in facilitating healing and growth for themselves and for others with lived experience, emphasising how survivor storytelling can "pull folks out of the isolation of their experiences." (Interviewee 05) Peoples' purposes for storytelling may change over the course of their healing and engagement with the anti-trafficking sector. One interviewee expressed how fostering connection became the primary motivation for any storytelling they might do at this point in their journey:

9. While we do not typically identify interviewees' quotes, we are crediting this interviewee in this instance in order to properly credit his framework.

I'm not, you know, like, 'I want to stop human trafficking, etc., etc.' I think that is how I may have been when I first started this [work]... Now? - No. My goal in telling my stories is to let people know that there are places for them and people that will hold space for them and support them whatever they need to do... I want people to know it is possible to change if they want to. And even if they don't, then I'll be here holding them up when they need it, right? (Interviewee 03)

Two interviewees focused on storytelling as a healing modality, with one noting the ways that activation of mirror neurons through storytelling can foster reframing of trauma narratives through seeing oneself in the stories of the other.[10] This raises questions about the psychological impacts of mirror neuron activation through continuous externally framed storytelling by individuals who do not share that lived experience, and additional research may be needed into potential mental health impacts of sensationalised and stereotyped storytelling practices within the sector on people with lived experience.

Findings: who are the storytellers?

Within community-based traditions, storytellers may be community elders who have walked the path the longest and are often selected by others who are themselves part of the community based on their ability to "lift others up beside them." (Interviewee 03). The interviewees highlighted the possibility of using similar approaches in survivor storytelling spaces. For public-facing storytelling, interviewees perceived the benefit of tapping into collectives by and for people with lived experiences rather than individual survivors or consultants. Collectives ensure that storytellers are well supported and often have the infrastructure to better prepare newer storytellers without the same power dynamics as when an organisation prepares a single survivor consultant, making it more likely that storytelling will remain survivor-driven. Additionally, while people with lived experience of trafficking may not be "elders" in the traditional sense of native communities, interviewees valued the deepening experience of people who have been "walking the path" of healing the longest (Interviewee 03)

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10. Mirror neurons are "a variety of visuospatial neurons which indicate fundamentally about human social interaction. Essentially, mirror neurons respond to actions that we observe in others. The interesting part is that mirror neurons fire in the same way [when observing others' experiences as] when we actually recreate that action ourselves." Acharya, Sourya, and Samarth Shukla. "Mirror neurons: Enigma of the metaphysical modular brain." Journal of natural science, biology, and medicine vol. 3,2 (2012): 118-24. doi:10.4103/0976-9668.101878

Findings: what kinds and elements of stories are told?

In the interviewees' other community-based storytelling traditions, stories shared can be those of individuals, stories of communities, or partially or completely fictionalised stories. Interviewee 03 described how storytellers will "read the room" and its demographics, and share what is most helpful to the storyteller, weaving in bits and pieces of lived experience as relevant. This concept of reading the room revealed how many interviewees understood survivor-driven storytelling for social change. Interviewee 03 noted that

'Lethal Dose: 99-19' by Bakari Roscoe

support spaces to "vomit" your story (such as therapy or with a trusted person) are different from both educational and group healing spaces. Specific to "educational" spaces, interviewees shared a sense that sensationalised stories are what external actors often want from them and are more likely to gain traction through the algorithms of public and media interest. As survivors become more involved with the sector (and thus less reliant on having to "play the algorithms" to get opportunities), they may gain the power to choose which parts of their story to share and for what purpose and which audience.

Interviewees noted that gruesome details are not for the benefit of the survivors but rather for fundraising, to be taken seriously, or for other purposes, and that personal stories of trafficking are shocking even without the details.

Shock value is a kind of touchy [issue]. Because on the one hand, it does a lot to draw attention. But if that doesn't build into the audience then developing that attention into focus, then it doesn't amount to much. So, it might feel good to sort of get those reactions from the audience, but if they're not leaving wherever it's being told… [thinking] 'there's this story and now I have this awareness of things that need to happen', then you are kind of just up there for entertainment. (Interviewee 02)

In addition to sharing stories about how their personal trauma experiences connect to larger issues, interviewees wanted opportunities to share their experiences of services and their full journey (rather than just their extracted trauma), stories that fill gaps in knowledge or challenge assumptions, and stories that highlight systems gaps, structural violence, and societal vulnerabilities.

For group healing spaces, interviewees offered guidance on creating the appropriate "container" for vulnerable storytelling – a group facilitation term that refers to a clear and collectively maintained psychological space for a group's work. Interviewees indicated that adequate preparation could ensure that stories shared in group spaces can take into consideration not only the desires of the storytellers but also the capacity and wellness of the story recipients.

Interviewees were asked a series of questions about what they wanted to include when sharing their stories publicly about social change.

All interviewees expressed a desire to include:	*Broad references to*	traumatic experiences before trafficking
		elements that led to their trafficking experience
		types of harm experienced while being trafficked
		events, services, people, policies, and practices that supported their ability to leave their trafficking situation
		the kinds of services, support, policies, and practices that assisted their healing or journey towards greater stability
		services, supports, policies, and practices they were unable to access that would have helped
Most interviewees expressed a desire to include:	*Empowering elements of*	their experiences from before they were trafficked
	Detailed descriptions of	events, services, people, policies, and practices that supported their ability to leave their trafficking situation
		services, support, policies, and practices that assisted their healing or journey towards greater stability
		services, supports, policies, and practices they were unable to access that would have helped
	Broad references to	how their lives are different now than before or during their trafficking
Most interviewees responded "it depends" to the following elements:	*Detailed descriptions of*	traumatic experiences before trafficking
		elements that led to their trafficking experience
		harm experienced while being trafficked
		how their lives are different now than before or during their trafficking

All interviewees replied either "yes" or "it depends" to questions; there were no elements that prompted a "no." For the elements with the response "it depends", interviewees added that these details might be shared in survivor-only spaces depending on the context. While these findings are limited, further research with a larger sample size might prove useful for comparing the types of public storytelling commonly expected of survivors with stories that survivors themselves want to share.

Findings: what makes storytelling feel safe?

Safety: audience

Broadly, interviewees noted that having a known and caring audience and adequate support could increase the emotional safety of sharing their stories publicly. One interviewee described the process of training story recipients on how to hold space, stay grounded while hearing traumatic or potentially triggering stories, and ask questions without being intrusive or extractive. While this is specific to a one-on-one recording of stories for later public sharing, this model may be adapted for use in other settings. For example, it is common for support groups to spend time building trust and group agreements before sharing intimate stories; facilitators of peer healing spaces might also incorporate mentoring on engaged listening and holding spaces for others into their activities. Organisations may explore what it means to prepare an audience by providing clear expectations.[11]

In peer healing spaces, interviewees expressed wanting to share more *practical* details of their experiences than they would in mixed or open spaces but with greater sensitivity to potentially triggering trauma.

Safety: preparation

Interviewees identified important elements of survivors' preparation for publicly sharing their experiences. Multiple interviewees described how skilled storytellers can change the course and switch which version of the story they are telling if they notice that they are feeling overwhelmed. This requires storytellers to develop somatic awareness to notice when they are overwhelmed or dissociated before engaging in communal or public storytelling – a skill which can involve a lengthy process of learning and healing to develop. Stakeholders should not assume that all survivors have this skill and should instead develop readiness programming to build it. Interviewee 05 noted that organisations and advocates can ensure that a significant portion of programming for storytellers with lived experience focuses on (and models) recognising and honouring boundaries, developing their own capacity to recognise and respond to feelings of overwhelm and strengthening their confidence

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11. National Survivor Network's *Event Host Guidelines for Creating an Inclusive and Professional Space for Speakers and Trainers* provides guidance to event hosts on minimizing harm. https://nationalsurvivornetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/HEAL-NSN-Host-Guidelines.pdf Accessed July 9, 2023.

to say "no" to unwanted offers. Organisations and advocates can avoid pressuring people with lived experiences in storytelling practices that continually overwhelm their nervous systems, although this requires consideration of economic instability as a pressuring factor.

Interviewees noted the tension between what is emotionally safe, what fosters healing, and what is effective in creating social change. Interviewee 05 described a process in which survivors received education on memoir and storytelling as part of their preparation for creating a transformative theater experience to learn how to "tell hard stories in a beautiful way." These educational workshops were taught by someone entirely unaffiliated with the organisation to mitigate power dynamics, a strategy that can help stakeholders disrupt the power dynamics involved when helping survivors shape their stories. Interviewees reiterated the importance of not dictating the ways people tell their stories, with interviewee 05 noting that organizations and advocates can provide "[support] with framing but not [try] to take the lead on how the story is told."

Interviews suggested that preparation should also include knowing what to expect during and after the story is shared, reviewing the consent form together (rather than just sending it over), and ensuring that the person understands the contexts in and purposes for which their story may be shared as well as if, when, and how they can revoke consent later if desired. A person can be offered guidance on how to maintain control over their narratives as much as possible. This preparation could also include information and resources for the person to safety plan for any physical, emotional, and digital risks of having their story become public, including if their identity is discovered despite attempts made to de-identify or anonymise.

Safety: during the storytelling

Interviewees suggested several strategies to minimise sensationalism and ensure the wellness of the storyteller during the sharing of personal experiences. These include checking in with the person before the storytelling begins to see how they are feeling about the event and anything they may need, and reminding participants of (or even practising, depending on the context) somatic practices for staying grounded or self-identifying when they feel overwhelmed.

For instances of sharing more details… having therapists available for folks if they get triggered or doing somatic practices with people. So doing some breathing techniques together, sharing them before the storytelling starts. Like "if you get triggered, here's a breathing technique that you can do that helps regulate the body." Or "here's this thing called tapping that you can do in your body to help regulate your nervous system." (Interviewee 5)

In peer healing spaces, interviewees suggested that you may initially go into fewer intensely vulnerable details or move more slowly through the content to allow trust to be built. Organisers of larger events or media engagements may consider what might help create a container of trust in that context. While this takes an investment of time and resources, prioritising trust-building enables survivors to voice their concerns and say "no" more confidently to engagements that are potentially harmful to the storyteller. Specific activities that build safety may include allowing the person access to questions that will be asked in advance or moderating audience questions (rather than having audience members ask directly) so that a moderator can determine which questions to ask and screen out or reword overly intrusive, invalidating, or stereotyped questions. Interviewees encouraged having real-time support available for story-sharing engagements, whether an on-call therapist or advocate, and referrals available for any trauma needs that may reactivate in the period after engagement.

Multiple interviewees emphasised the importance of having an interviewer who is trained to recognise when a trauma response may be happening or having an advocate present, when possible, who can support the person in recognising if they are dissociating or triggered. The pre-storytelling check could include requesting guidance from the survivor about what they would like the interviewer or advocate to do if they notice signs of trauma activation, as different storytellers have different preferences.

Safety: after the storytelling

When story-sharing may occur later than story-telling (as in the case when a story is recorded for later release or publication), interviewees recommended offering the person opportunities to edit, revise, and clarify before release or publication. Organisations and advocates can follow up with storytellers after their engagement to see how they feel about it and if they need any support, and can offer wellness funds for the person to engage in the kind of clinical or general wellbeing care that is often necessary after recounting traumatic experiences (Interviewee 05).

How to ensure choice and informed consent

Interviewees generally described three key factors that impact genuine access to choice and informed consent: the ability to self-select, economic need, and "playing to the algorithms" (such as when a survivor specifically includes elements known to increase visibility and audience reception even if they would not otherwise want to include those elements). Whenever a storytelling invitation is offered to a survivor, interviewees suggested that there are power dynamics at play, particularly if the person has never previously indicated a desire to share their story publicly. The interviewees felt that invitations to share their stories publicly should never come from people directly involved in the survivor's care or services and that organisations

and advocates may set up a process through which impacted people can learn about storytelling options and have access to information to help them make decisions before opting into a pool of potential storytellers that can be called upon.

Interviewees agreed that economic need may factor in people's decisions to share their traumatic stories publicly in situations where organisations are committed to paying survivors for their labour. Just as there is a spectrum of agency in all other forms of labour that includes labour by coercion, by circumstance (in which they would not do this kind of labour if they had better options), or by free choice, survivor choice in storytelling can be considered along a similar spectrum. Interviewees agreed that providing economic support and ongoing support for considering capacity and personal motivation can help reduce storytelling out of necessity, but that ultimately people have the right to make choices to do labour they would not otherwise do in order to survive. Our model review found that Azadi Kenya mitigated this power dynamic by creating storytelling fellowships to support storytellers' free choices and artistic agency.[12]

Needing economic security was seen by interviewees as closely related to how people may "the algorithm" to build a consultancy business as a storyteller and ensure regularly paid opportunities for themselves. Thus, survivors who would not otherwise choose to sensationalize their own stories or adopt framings they do not agree with often do in order to earn sufficient income or to avoid backlash from the sector or from other survivor advocates who disagree with them. Organisations and advocates can be cautious of the role they play in shaping survivors' stories and of the ways in which they respond to survivors whose stories do not fit the mainstream narratives in, or recommendations of, the anti-trafficking sector.

The United States Department of Health and Human Services defines informed consent as: "(1) disclosing [any]... information needed to make an informed decision; (2) facilitating the understanding of what has been disclosed; and (3) promoting the voluntariness of the decision about whether or not to participate." Throughout this report, information was shared by the interviewees about facilitating survivor understanding and ensuring voluntary participation. However, it is challenging to offer the information needed to make an informed decision without ongoing research into survivors' experiences of storytelling for personal change to build a robust evidence base for the risks and benefits to the storytellers themselves.
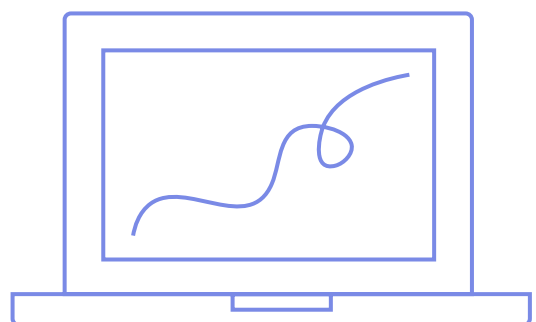
12. Zoom presentation with Azadi Kenya team.

Conclusion

Storytelling practices that are common in the anti-trafficking sector include assumptions that all survivors want to tell their stories of trafficking, an expectation that these stories will focus on the trafficking trauma itself and include a high amount of detail, and storytelling purposes and content that support the needs of the organisation first and foremost. There is a push to craft guidance for ethical storytelling practices, but much of the guidance from the anti-trafficking sector assumes an organisation-driven or policy-driven framework rather than a community-driven or lived-experience-driven framework. This guidance is often incomplete, creating new rules for storytelling without challenging fundamental assumptions about what storytelling is and what it can be in the hands of impacted communities.

Practices that are first steps toward mitigating these potential harms may include allowing survivors to voluntarily opt-in to speaker collectives rather than asking survivors directly based on a single engagement and ensuring that survivors newly interested in public speaking have regular and unmediated access to mentoring and support from more experienced "elders" in survivor leadership. Survivors who are connected to collectives outside their workplace (rather than just a single mentor or supervisor) will be better protected from organisational manipulation. Stakeholders can invest in the ongoing financial stability of impacted populations so that economic pressures do not lead to exploitative labour, and develop structures that reduce economic pressures such as a fellowship model or ensuring that paid storytelling work is only offered when there is comparably paid non-storytelling work. Survivors can be provided with access to independent coaching and development of storytelling and strategy so that they are less reliant on (and vulnerable to exploitation in the context of) external framing for their stories.

While there have been recent efforts to increase public and stakeholder access to stories from individuals from marginalised communities, these stories are still the exception rather than the norm, and stories from people with multiple marginalisations (such as transgender *and* BIPOC *and* criminalised *and* navigating disability) are rarely platformed unless they fit into a recognisable narrative the sector will readily accept. Stakeholders can begin to remedy this by engaging with organisations and organisers who have already developed trust in these people and communities, as those working in these communities are often underfunded and mistrustful of systems and may be less able to seek or get access to dominant organisational and policymaking spaces.

Stakeholders can recognise that while graphic details and thrilling narratives of rescue or transformation are titillating, they may not be the stories survivors want to share or feel would be useful in developing effective policies and programming. Sensationalised storytelling that moves the donor or policymaker to action may have the unintended impact of reinforcing stereotypes, myths, and the exploitation of survivors (this time for their stories). Finally, policymakers and funders can recognise that all the above changes require an investment of time and resources, additional research into how current frameworks for lived experience leadership impact the long-term health and wellbeing of survivors, and a shift from crisis thinking to clear, sustainable, long-term solutions.
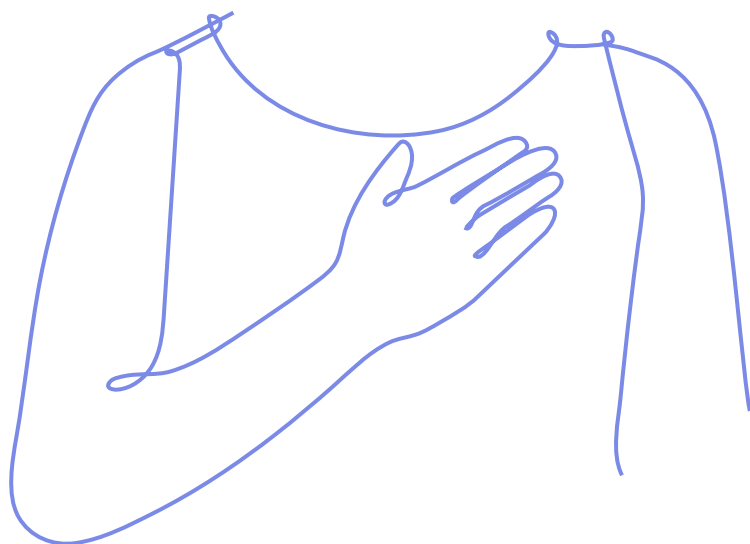
MODERN SLAVERY & HUMAN RIGHTS | POLICY & EVIDENCE CENTRE

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The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC) was created by the investment of public funding to enhance understanding of modern slavery and transform the effectiveness of law and policies designed to address it. The Centre funds and co-creates high quality research with a focus on policy impact, and brings together academics, policymakers, businesses, civil society, survivors and the public on a scale not seen before in the UK to collaborate on solving this global challenge.

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