

What is the National Survivor Study?



The National Survivors Study, launched by Polaris in 2020, is a scientifically rigorous research project designed to shed light on how trafficking really works - not just how we think it works - so that we can design effective strategies to fight it. The National Survivor Study builds on Polaris's work of more than a decade developing the largest known data set on trafficking in North America through operation of the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline.

Why is it necessary?

To tackle the complex systems that enable human trafficking, we need to understand how human trafficking actually works - not just how we think it works.

The data that exists now is largely either anecdotal, or collected as a by-product of other work, such as serving survivors and prosecuting traffickers. This leads to biases in the results, which can in turn lead to programs and policies that don't represent

the complexity and diversity of human trafficking experiences and survivors. **The single best source for high-quality data, information and insights are survivors themselves, acting as full partners in the endeavor,** from determining what information matters, to providing it purposefully, and voluntarily. By intentionally engaging stakeholders through the entire process, we ensure we are asking the most relevant questions for anti trafficking, broaden the diversity of survivor participation and thereby improve the validity of the data.

How is it different from existing research about human trafficking?

The National Survivor Study incorporates survivor expertise into every aspect of the project, shifting from the conventional model of research done **on** a community to a research agenda guided **by** the affected community.

What about the data from the Polaris-operated U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline?

Polaris's data set - the largest known to exist on trafficking in the United States - stems from work on more than 70,000 situations of human trafficking. As such, it serves as a vital baseline for understanding how this human rights violation manifests in real time by showing us trends, and changes at a larger scale. But as we have always made clear, data collection is secondary to the mission of the Trafficking Hotline. The NSS will add an additional layer of value and allow us to dig deeper by addressing the limitations inherent in collecting data as a secondary process.

Specifically, the NSS process will:

- Allow for data collection that is purposefully driven by survivors
- Reflect input from survivors who may not have known about or chosen to utilize the Trafficking Hotline at the time of their trafficking.
- Allow for directed questioning that may not be appropriate in the context of the work of the Trafficking Hotline - which only collects data as necessary to provide appropriate support and assistance.



How will you use what you learn?

Working with survivors and other partners, Polaris will analyze the data, share it with other stakeholders, and apply what we learn to our long-term strategy designed to fundamentally reduce the amount of trafficking by reforming - and in some cases entirely upending - the systems that allow it to thrive - poverty, discrimination, lack of worker and immigration protections, failed social safety nets - to name but a few.

How will survivors be involved?

Every step of the way, diverse survivor communities will be engaged to flip disparate power dynamics between survivors and the research process. The project will benefit survivors by creating meaningful, compensated professional opportunities. More importantly, survivor voices, perspectives, and priorities will be the foundation of the study.

How will survivors be involved?



Determine Need and Approach

Assess what information the anti trafficking field needs and design a process for filling those gaps.

Initiate Stakeholder Engagement

Bring survivor consultants and other partners together to share information about the project and get feedback on whether we have identified the right gaps, and the right process.



Design

Work with survivor consultants and an advisory group of anti trafficking professionals to determine the feasibility of the design, the nuts and bolts of the study - everything from the specific questions asked to the different methods used in the study (e.g. interviews, group discussions, online surveys).

Sample / Recruit

Reach out and find a diverse and representative pool of survivors to participate in the study.

Collect Data

Have survivors participate in the study.



Utilize / Act

Come together with survivor consultants and partners to strategize how to use the data to address human trafficking.

Analyze

Work with a research consultant team with combined qualitative and quantitative expertise and lived experience to analyze the data collected. Bring survivors together and make sense of the findings.



Learn more at polarisproject.org/national-survivor-study/ | To contact, email: LIDS@polarisproject.org

Polaris's mission is to lead a data driven social justice movement that reduces, prevents and ultimately ends sex and labor trafficking and supports survivors on their paths to freedom and healing.

 **Polaris** Freedom happens now.