

2020 Youth Experiences Survey

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Special Thanks

The 2020 YES Study was made possible by the following four participating agencies:



THANK YOU FOR YOUR LONGSTANDING PARTNERSHIP AND DEDICATION TO THIS PROJECT, EVEN AMIDST THE CHALLENGES AND PRESSURES OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC.

2020 YOUTH EXPERIENCES SURVEY

Introduction

The Youth Experiences Survey (YES) is a tool that has been developed and utilized to gain a deeper understanding of the life experiences of homeless young adults, ages 18 to 25. The YES has been administered through four partnering social service agencies for the last seven consecutive years in the state of Arizona. The purpose of the YES study was to determine the gaps in service needs for this particularly vulnerable population and explore how prevalent sex and labor exploitation was as a result of these vulnerabilities. The findings from the YES study have been groundbreaking, providing empirical evidence to demonstrate that homeless persons in the state of Arizona are uniquely vulnerable to sexual and labor exploitation while trying to secure access to basic needs. Since the inception of the YES study, multiple states across the nation have begun to implement the YES across sectors, including mental health, medical, and social service agencies, in order to better understand the needs of their vulnerable clients and learn about the scope of sex and labor exploitation within their community.

The year 2020 has presented unique challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic created additional critical barriers to providing services to the most vulnerable clients. At the writing of this report, 39, 944, 882 cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed worldwide, with 8, 019, 237 confirmed cases in the United States alone (World Health Organization, 2020). The novel COVID-19 virus has already been responsible for 217, 659 American deaths. It is still too soon to know the ultimate impact that COVID-19 has had on the homeless population. However, it is known that homeless populations are uniquely vulnerable to contracting the novel COVID-19 virus and to experience the more extreme symptoms and conditions of the virus, due to the fact that many homeless persons have pre-existing health complications (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2020).

Similarly, the true impact of this global pandemic on the prevalence of human trafficking is yet to be known. It is clear, however, that global shutdowns of country borders and businesses, large and small, have resulted in increased financial insecurity, through increased unemployment, poverty, and subsequent reduced access to food, housing, and healthcare (Armitage & Nellums, 2020). These factors exacerbate the dire circumstances for already vulnerable populations, and increase the risk of sexual and labor exploitation, as traffickers are adept at exploiting vulnerabilities for their own gain. Additionally, restricted movement has reduced healthcare and social serving agencies capacity, shifted law enforcement resources, closed national borders leaving people unable to return home regardless of visa status, and forced victims behind closed doors with their captors; all factors that have created increasing vulnerabilities while resources and supports are diverted away (UN News, 2020).

Due to the limited capacity of social service agencies during COVID-19, the number of homeless young adults who participated in the 2020 YES study represents the lowest sample size in the history of the YES study. However, the findings still reflect the dire circumstances that homeless young adults continue to find themselves in, including housing instability, job insecurity, mental health and medical challenges, substance use, and the presence of sexual and labor exploitation.

Research Questions

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



Instrument

Due to the unique challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 YES instrument was made available in both a paper-and-pencil format as well as an online survey format.

The Youth Experiences Survey is a 83-item survey with questions regarding demographics and personal history, family history, and life experiences, including questions about sex trafficking and labor exploitation and questions from the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study.

Participant Demographics N = 81

81 homeless young adults participated in the 2020 YES Study, representing a 48.5% decrease in number of participants from the 2019 YES survey, due to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants received a \$5 gift card.



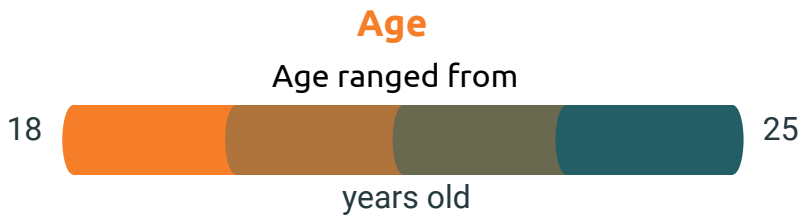
76.5%
Paper and Pencil
Surveys



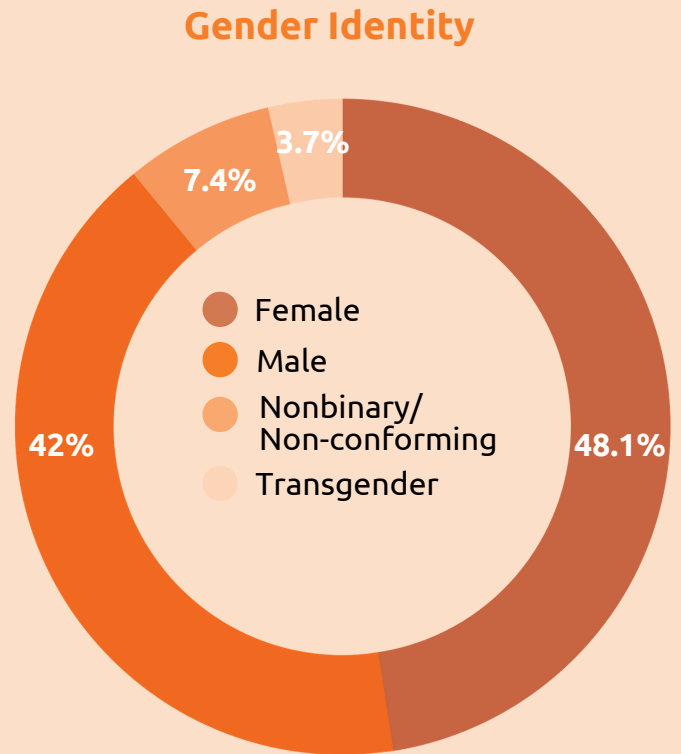
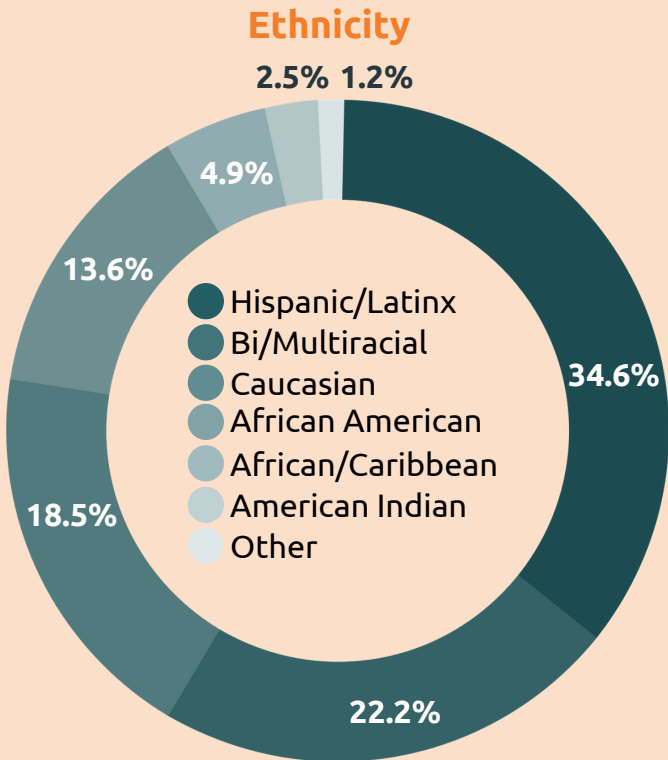
23.5%
Online Surveys

Participants of the YES study were receiving services from Our Family Services in Tucson, AZ (n = 36, 44.4%), and three agencies from Phoenix, AZ, including: UMOM (n = 23, 28.4%), Native American Connections (n = 19, 23.5%), and one.n.ten (n = 3, 3.7%).

Participant Demographics

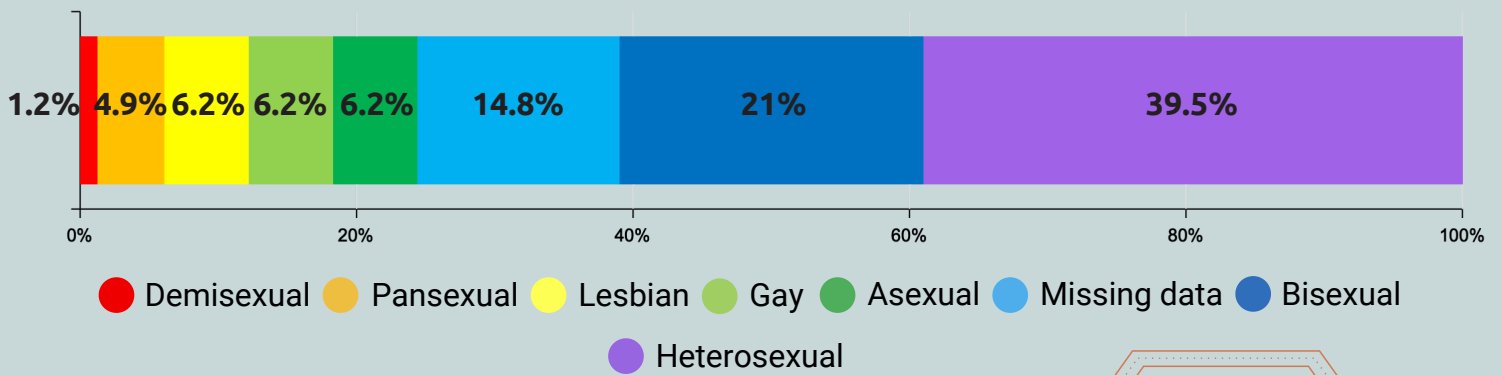


20.6
Average Age



Sexual Orientation

Participants identified as:



48.1%
identified as
LGBTQIA+

Education

Participants reported their last completed grade level ranging from



The average grade level completed was 11th grade.



50% of participants (n = 41, 50.6%) did not complete their high school education.

27% of participants (n = 22) reported their last completed grade level was 11th grade.

4.9% of participants (n = 4) completed some college.

1.2% (n = 1) participant received a technical training certificate.



2 out of 5

participants (n = 33, 40.7%) graduated from high school, reporting their last completed grade was 12th grade.



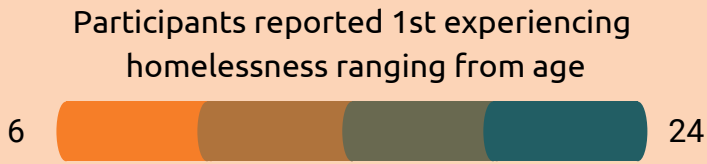
49.4% of participants (n = 40) reported dropping out of school.

Reason for Dropping Out	#	%
I moved around a lot	21	25.9%
I was homeless	16	19.8%
Other	11	13.6%
Academic difficulty	4	4.9%
I was pregnant/had a baby	3	3.7%
I had to work to support myself	3	3.7%
Bullying	2	2.5%
I was expelled	1	1.2%

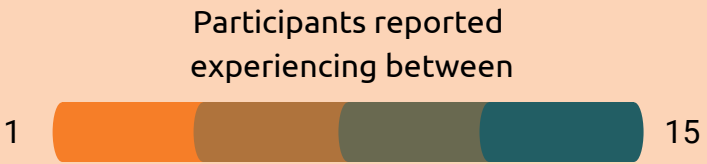
Participants who selected "other" wrote in:

- "DCS"
- "Family moved and I stayed"
- "Just hated school"
- "Mother passed away"
- "Parents kept placing me in mental institutes"
- "Problems at school"
- "Using drugs"

Housing

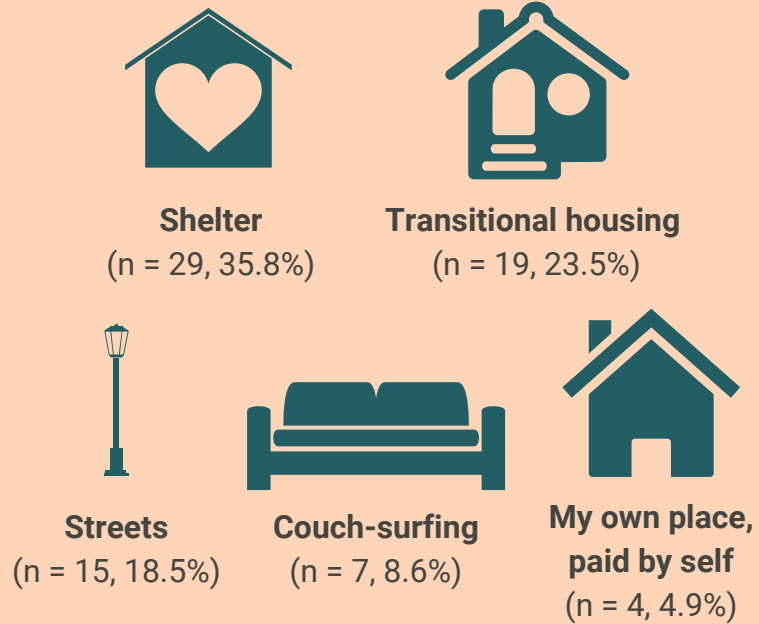


The average age of 1st homelessness was 16.6 years old.



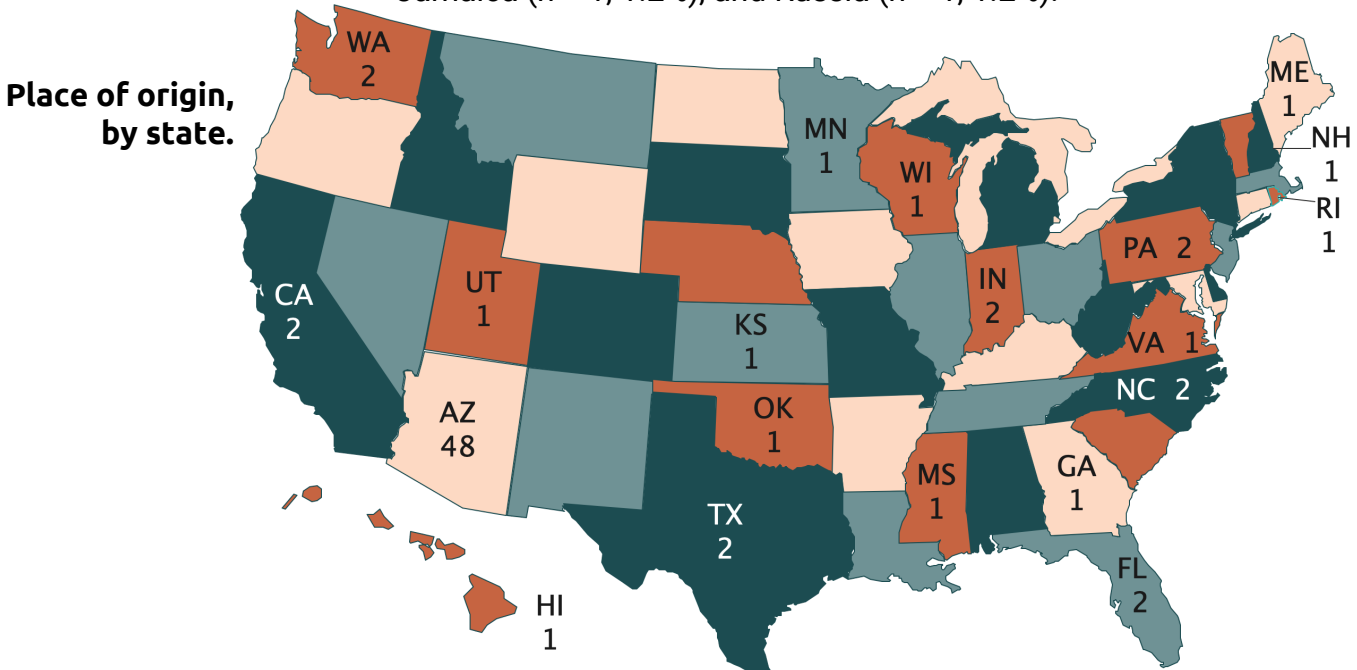
The average number of times homeless being 3.5 times.

Participants reported their current housing situation to be:



The average time living in Arizona was 13.7 years.

The majority of participants (n = 50, 61.7%) were raised in Arizona, but participants originated from 20 different states within the United States of America, as well as three countries: Mexico (n = 2, 2.5%), Jamaica (n = 1, 1.2%), and Russia (n = 1, 1.2%).



Substance Use



50.6%
of participants
(n = 41) reported
using substances.

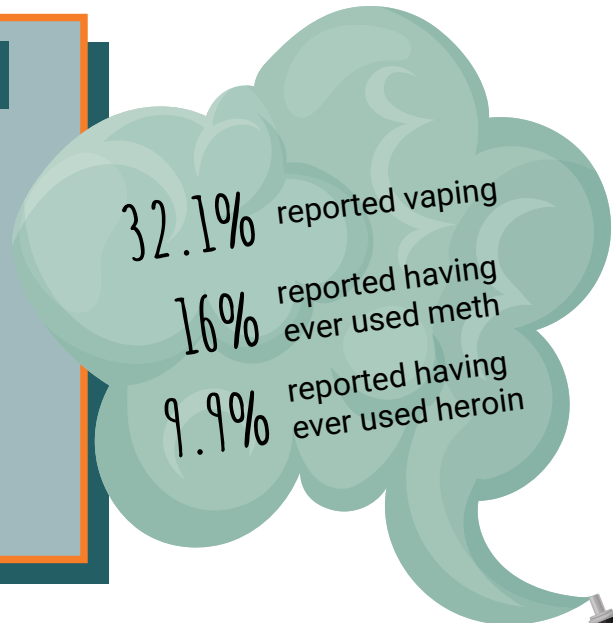
Participants reported age of 1st substance use ranging from



years old.

The average age of 1st substance use was 14.8 years old.

Substance used, by type	#	%
Marijuana	27	33.3%
Methamphetamines	11	13.6%
Heroin	5	6.2%
Cocaine/crack	3	3.7%
Ecstasy	1	1.2%
Pills	1	1.2%
Opiates	1	1.2%



The majority of participants reported that they were not currently using drugs (n = 71, 87.7%). Other participants reported frequency of drug use to be daily (n = 6, 7.4%), weekly (n = 1, 1.2%), and monthly (n = 2, 2.5%).



Addiction

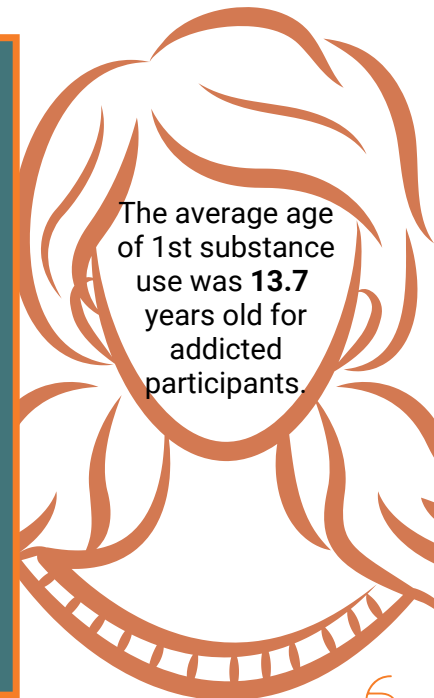
12 (14.8%) participants identified as having an addiction to drugs.



(4.9%) participants reported an addiction to alcohol.

50%
(n = 6) of participants reported that their drug addiction began after experiencing homelessness.

75%
(n = 3) of participants reported that their alcohol addiction began after experiencing homelessness.

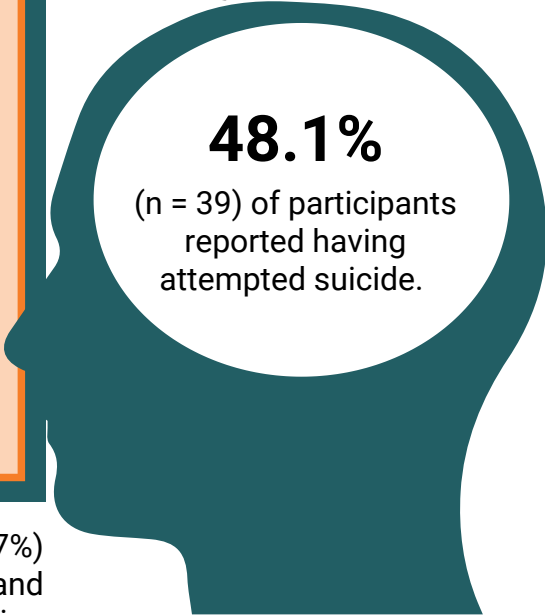


The average age of 1st substance use was **13.7** years old for addicted participants.

Mental Health

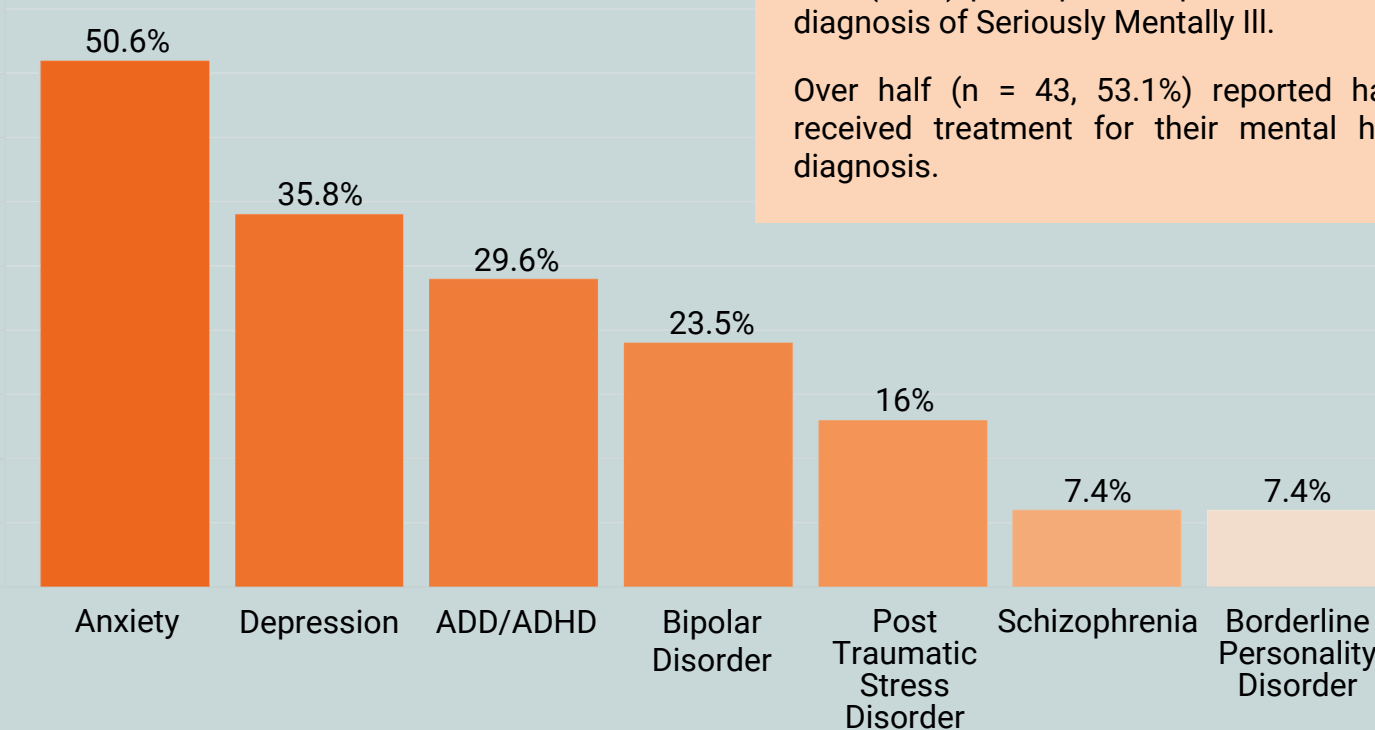
Almost half (n = 38, 46.9%) of participants reported in engaging in self-harm behaviors, including:

Self Harming Behaviors	#	%
Cutting	26	31.2%
Not eating for long periods of time	21	25.9%
Drug use	17	21%
Risk taking behaviors	16	19.8%
Drinking alcohol excessively	9	11.1%
Binging/Vomiting	9	11.1%
Sex with strangers	6	7.4%
Scarification	5	6.2%
Body modification	4	4.9%
Punching self	1	1.2%



About three out of every five participants (n = 50, 61.7%) reported having a current mental health diagnosis, and almost half (n = 38, 46.9%) of participants reported having more than one mental health diagnosis.

Mental Health Diagnoses (N = 50)



Two (2.5%) participants reported receiving a diagnosis of Seriously Mentally Ill.

Over half (n = 43, 53.1%) reported having received treatment for their mental health diagnosis.

Physical Health

About half (n = 40, 49.4%) of participants reported having a current medical issue, including:

Medical Challenge	#	%
Poor vision	19	23.5%
Asthma	17	21%
Dental problem	10	12.3%
Chronic pain	8	9.9%
Open wounds	2	2.5%
Skin problems	2	2.5%
STIs	2	2.5%



The majority of participants (n = 51, 63%) reported having AHCCCS.



A small number (n = 12, 14.8%) of participants reported utilizing a mobile health resource in the Phoenix community, the Crews'n Healthmobile.

Family Disconnection



Four (4.9%) participants reported a current pregnancy.



One in five (n = 17, 21%) participants reported having between one and three children.



Six (7.4%) participants reported having DCS involvement with their children.



2 out of every 3

participants (n = 54, 66.7%) reported being kicked out of their home.

Almost half (n = 25, 43.6%) of those who reported being kicked out identified as LGBTQ. Of the LGBTQ participants in the study, **64.1%** reported being kicked out of their home.

Participants reported that their children were:

In their care (n = 8, 9.9%)	With family (n = 5, 6.2%)
in foster care (n = 2, 2.5%)	

Kicked out of home, by reason	#	%
Family conflict	41	50.6%
Family poverty	10	12.3%
Using substances	8	9.9%
Family did not approve of sexual orientation	8	9.9%
Other	7	8.6%
Family did not approve of gender identity	4	4.9%

Other reasons cited for being kicked out include: "I got pregnant", "my dad was an alcoholic", and two (2.5%) participants reported that they were kicked out by their foster family.

Life Experiences

Domestic Violence



- 29.6%** participants reported witnessing domestic violence in their home.
- 1 in 3** participants (n = 28, 34.6%) reported being physically abused in an intimate partner relationship.
- 1 in 5** participants (n = 17, 21%) reported physically abusing their partner in an intimate partner relationship.

Income

In response to the question, "How do you make money to live?", participants responded:

Job, by type	#	%	Job, by type	#	%
I have a steady job	40	49.4%	Day labor	6	7.4%
Side jobs for cash	15	18.5%	Selling drugs	4	4.9%
Other	13	16%	Selling own things	2	2.5%
Pandhandling	7	8.6%	Selling stolen things	1	1.2%

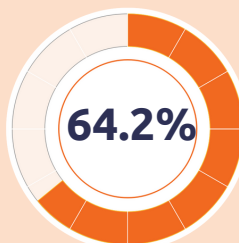
Other included: art for money, freelance gardening, gifts from family, I help clean yards, odd jobs, selling pictures, SSI disability, temporary unemployment.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

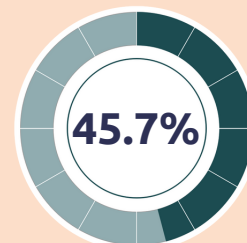
Participants reported experiencing between



Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs),
with an average of 3.7 ACEs.



Reported more than 1 ACE



Reported 4 or more ACEs



60.5%

Parents Separated/
Divorced



46.9%

Emotional Neglect



42%

Substance Abuse in
the Household



40.7%

Emotional Abuse



37%

Physical Abuse



32.1%

Mental Illness in the
Household



32.1%

Incarcerated
Household Member



25.9%

Physical Neglect



21%

Sexual Abuse



18.5%

Witness Domestic
Violence

Life Experiences

Negative Life Experiences

Participants reported experiencing additional life challenges, including:



Impermanent/Unstable Living Conditions

Participants reported running away from home (n = 38, 46.9%), living in a Foster care/Group home setting (n = 32, 39.5%), and spending time in Residential treatment (n = 21, 25.9%)



Justice System Involvement

Participants reported involvement in the Juvenile Justice System (n = 24, 29.6%) and experiencing negative contact with law enforcement (n = 20, 24.7%).



Academic and Peer Difficulties

Participants reported experiencing bullying by school peers (n = 34, 42%), academic difficulty (n = 27, 33.3%), being expelled from school (n = 21, 25.9%), facing harassment by peers (n = 18, 22.2%), being in Special Education classes (n = 11, 13.6%), and gang affiliation (n = 8, 9.9%).

Positive Life Experiences

Said no when drugs or alcohol were offered to you.
(n = 52, 64.2%)

Feel secure or safe standing up for/protecting yourself
(n = 45, 55.6%)

Enrolled in school or technical program
(n = 41, 50.6%)

Steady employment
(n = 40, 49.4%)

Supportive, loving family or groups of friends
(n = 37, 45.7%)

Been part of a youth club or organization
(n = 36, 44.4%)

Aware of community resources
(n = 35, 43.2%)

Said no when pressured for sex
(n = 34, 42%)

Practiced safe sex
(n = 34, 42%)

Volunteered in the community
(n = 28, 34.6%)

Healthy, safe and permanent place to live
(n = 27, 33.3%)

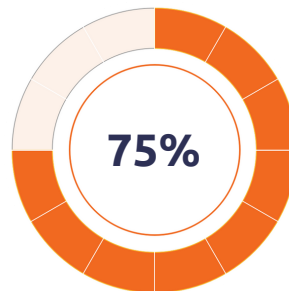
Trust/good relationship with law enforcement
(n = 22, 27.2%)

Sex Trafficking (N = 24)

Almost half (n = 37, 45.7%) of participants reported experiencing some form of human exploitation, either sex or labor. Nine (11.1%) participants reported experiencing both sex trafficking and labor exploitation. Twenty-four (29.6%) participants reported experiencing sex trafficking.

Participants age at 1st sex trafficking experience ranged from 3 to 20 years old.

The average age of 1st sex trafficking experience was 13 years old.



75% reported first being trafficked before the age of eighteen.

Participants reported being sex trafficked for:

37.5%

Money



37.5%

Food



25%

Clothing



20.8%

Shelter



16.7%

Protection

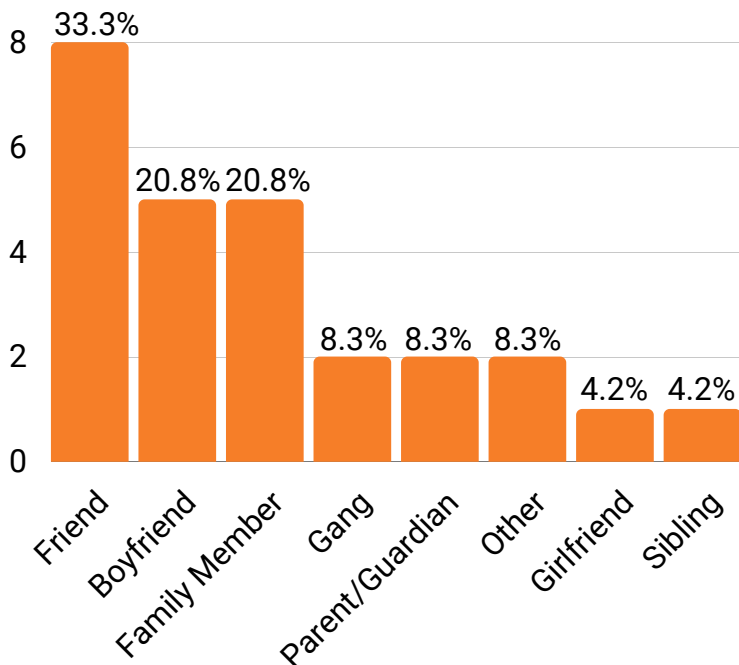


12.5%

Drugs



One (4.2%) participant reported currently having a sex trafficker, and 22 (91.7%) identified as ever having a sex trafficker. Participants identified their relationship to their sex trafficker as:



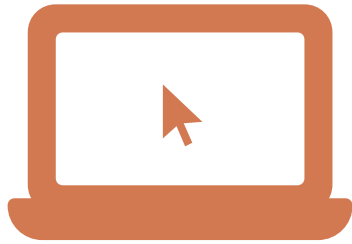
Those who selected other wrote in: "mom's ex-boyfriend" and "family friends".



12.5%

of participants reported that they were afraid to leave the situation due to fear of violence against self or family.

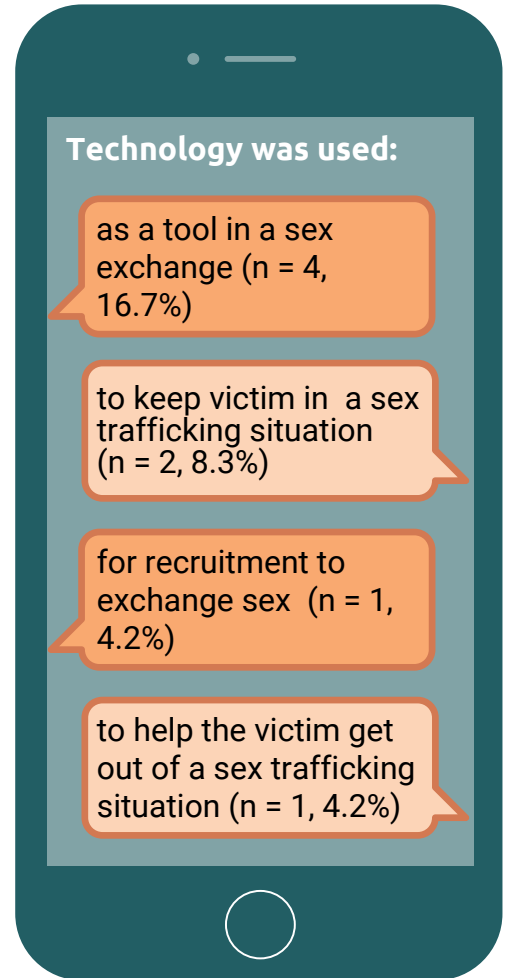
Sex Trafficking (N = 24)



29.2%

(n = 7) reported that technology was used to facilitate their exploitation.

Technology used, by type	#	%
Smartphone	4	16.7%
Dating Site	3	12.5%
Craigslist	2	8.3%
Facebook	2	8.3%
Grindr	1	4.2%
Tinder	1	4.2%
Tumblr	1	4.2%
Backpage	1	4.2%
Pornographic photos	1	4.2%



The two dating sites mentioned included MeetMe (n = 2, 8.3%) and Mocospace (n = 1, 4.2%).

Participants who reported being sex trafficked were significantly more likely to experience:



Identify as LGBTQ

$\chi^2(1, N = 70) = 6.83, p < .009$



Self-harming behavior

$\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 13.79, p < .000$



Dating violence

$\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 18.24, p < .000$



4 or more ACEs

$\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 8.34, p < .004$

Cutting

$\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 10.43, p < .001$

Emotional abuse before age 18

$\chi^2(1, N = 79) = 6.09, p < .014$

Drug use

$\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 8.54, p < .003$

Physical abuse before age 18

$\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 9.14, p < .002$

Residential treatment

$\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 6.79, p < .009$

Attempted suicide

$\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 6.69, p < .010$

Sexual abuse before age 18

$\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 12.38, p < .000$

Substance abuse in the home before age 18

$\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 11.26, p < .001$

PTSD

$\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 7.35, p < .007$

Emotional neglect before age 18

$\chi^2(1, N = 78) = 12.87, p < .000$

Labor Exploitation (N = 20)

Twenty participants (24.7%) reported experiencing labor exploitation.

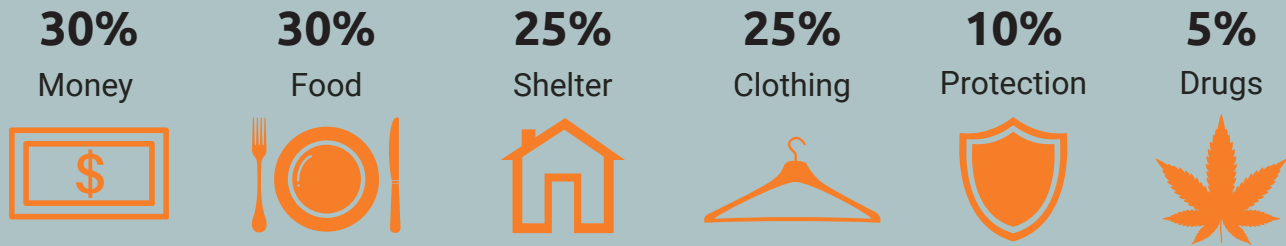
Participant's age at first labor exploitation experience ranged from 6 to 19 years old.



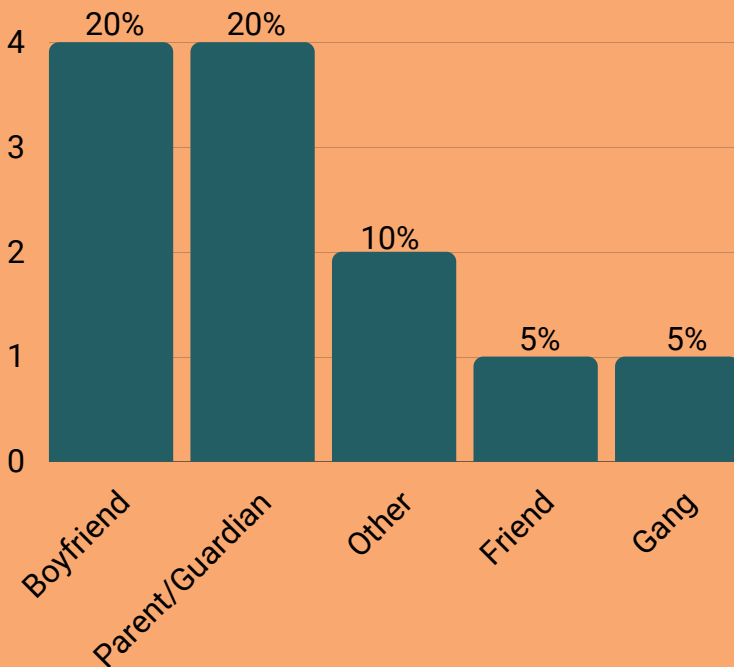
(n = 4, 20%) reported first being exploited for labor before the age of eighteen.

The average age of 1st labor exploitation was 15.4 years old.

Eight (40%) participants reported having been tricked or forced into doing work that they did not want to do. Participants reported being tricked or forced into work in hopes of receiving:



Five (25%) participants reported having a labor exploiter who controlled or kept all of the money earned by the participant. Sixteen (80%) participants reported having a person who exploited them for labor. The participants identified their relationship to the labor exploiter as:



The participants who selected "other" identified their labor exploiter as "employer" and "friend's uncle".



10%

of participants reported that they were afraid to leave the situation due to fear of violence against self or family.

Labor Exploitation (N = 20)



Thirteen (65%) participants reported being promised work where the type of work or payment ended up being different than what was agreed upon.



Four (20%) participants reported being paid less than what was agreed upon.



Three (15%) participants reported never being paid for the work they had done.

Eight (40%) participants reported what sector they experience labor exploitation in:



Domestic Servitude
(n = 4, 20%)



Agriculture
(n = 2, 10%)



Assisted living/healthcare
(n = 1, 5%)



Child care
(n = 1, 5%)



Construction
(n = 1, 5%)



Drugs related
(n = 1, 5%)



Selling magazines
(n = 1, 5%)



Restaurant
(n = 1, 5%)



Moving company
(n = 1, 5%)

Participants who reported being labor exploited were significantly more likely to experience:



4 or more ACEs
 $\chi^2(1, N = 81) = 6.33, p < .012$



Witnessing domestic violence in home before age 18
 $\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 4.62, p < .032$



Physical neglect before age 18
 $\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 11.39, p < .001$

2020 YOUTH EXPERIENCES SURVEY

Discussion

Although a smaller than usual sample, the participants of the 2020 YES Study were diverse in ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation. The homeless young adult population continues to be overrepresented by individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+, with almost half (48.1%) of the sample identifying as LGBTQIA+.

Participants who identified as LGBTQIA+ were significantly more likely to report:



Attempted suicide

$\chi^2(1, N = 71) = 10.16, p < .001$



Depression

$\chi^2(1, N = 71) = 4.19, p < .041$



4 or more ACEs

$\chi^2(1, N = 71) = 4.49, p < .034$



Sex trafficking

$\chi^2(1, N = 70) = 6.83, p < .009$



Emotional Neglect

$\chi^2(1, N = 68) = 4.63, p < .031$



A new addition to the YES study this year were questions about educational attainment and exploration into the factors that created barriers to succeeding in school. A significant 49.4% of participants reported dropping out of school before graduating from high school. Reasons cited for dropping out of school illustrated the level of instability the participants faced with regard to housing, poverty, and other life challenges.



Participants reported that the average age of first homelessness experience began under the age of eighteen, at 16.6 years old. Findings demonstrated that homeless young adults seem to vacillate between periods of housing stability and homelessness, with the average number of times homeless being 3.5 times.



Over half ($n = 48, 59.3\%$) of participants originated from the state of Arizona, and 61.7% ($n = 50$) spent the majority of their life in Arizona. This signifies that much of the participants' homelessness experiences took place in the state of Arizona. Secure housing options for the vulnerable age between childhood and adulthood remains a significant challenge that the state of Arizona must address.



Half of participants (n = 41, 50.6%) reported using substances, consistent with previous years of data collection on this population. A relatively small number of participants reported an addiction to drugs (n = 12, 14.8%) or alcohol (n = 4, 4.9%).

The 2020 YES study included additional questions about substance use to explore the relationship between experiences of homelessness and substance use. Interestingly, of the participants who reported a drug addiction, 50% (n = 6) reported that their drug addiction began after experiencing homelessness. Of the participants who reported an alcohol addiction, 75% (n = 3) reported that their alcohol addiction began after experiencing homelessness. The average age of 1st substance use was younger for those that reported an addiction (13.7 years old) versus those that used substances but did not report an addiction (15.2 years old). One out of every three participants (n = 26, 32.1%) reported vaping, or the use of an electronic cigarette that has been demonstrated to cause significant lung injury, hospitalization and in some cases, death (CDC, October 2020).



Suicidality remains a common challenge for homeless young adults, with almost half (n = 39, 48.1%) of participants reporting a suicide attempt. Self-harm also continues to be a common occurrence among this population, with 46.9% (n = 38) reporting some form of self-harm. Three out of every five participants (n = 50, 61.7%) reported a mental health diagnosis, with almost half (n = 38, 46.9%) reporting more than one diagnosis.



The findings of the 2020 YES Study are consistent with previous years of data collection with regard to the significant life challenges homeless young adults have experienced. Family dysfunction and disconnection remains high, with 66.7% (n = 54) of participants reporting being kicked out of their home due mostly to family conflict (n = 41, 50.6%).



The majority of participants (64.2%) reported experiencing more than one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), with almost half (45.7%) reporting four or more ACEs. Persons experiencing four or more ACEs have been found to be twelve times more likely to attempt suicide, and as the number of childhood exposures increase, so does the prevalence and risk of disease, alcoholism, illicit drug use, having 50 or more sexual partners, and history of sexually transmitted infections and early death in adulthood (Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz, Edwards, & Marks, 1998).



Human exploitation remains a great risk among the homeless young adult population, with almost half (45.7%) of participants reporting some form of exploitation, either sex or labor, and 11.1% (n = 9) of participants reporting the experience of both sex trafficking and labor exploitation. The average age of first sex trafficking experience was 13 years old, which is much lower than in previous years. Of those who reported a sex trafficking experience, 75% reported being first sex trafficked before the age of eighteen. There seems to consistently be a close relationship between sex trafficking victimization and identifying as LGBTQIA+, experiencing four or more ACEs before the age of eighteen, and particularly experiencing sexual abuse before the age of eighteen.



About one quarter (n = 20, 24.7%) of the total sample population reported experiencing labor exploitation, with the average age of first labor exploitation being 15.4 years old. One in five participants (n = 4, 20%) were first exploited for labor under the age of eighteen. Elements of labor exploitation as reported by participants, included fraud (n = 13, 65%), being paid less than agreed upon (n = 4, 20%), or not being paid at all for the labor provided (n = 3, 15%). The industries identified were diverse, and participants did not provide information about the employer that exploited them. Intervening in labor exploitation remains a great challenge due to the victim's reluctance to come forward about the incidence and the untraditional ways in which many homeless young adults tend to come across work opportunities.

Conclusion

Despite a 48.5% decrease in sample size from the 2019 YES Study, the findings from the 2020 YES Study remain consistent across the 7 years with regard to the most critical vulnerabilities to the sex trafficked and labor exploited homeless young adults in the state of Arizona, including self harm, attempted suicide, history of abuse, experiencing four or more ACEs, drug use, and mental health challenges, such as PTSD. Factors that seem to have a significant relationship to homelessness in young adults include identifying as LGBTQIA+, educational attainment, substance use, extensive history of trauma prior to the age of eighteen, and human exploitation. Further research into the causation of homelessness can help educators and service providers to develop preventative programs for juveniles approaching adulthood, particularly in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, as well as high risk students enrolled in school. Policy and advocacy efforts must be made to provide increased funding and resources to this vulnerable population to ensure the proper acquisition of housing and financial security and stability, as well as support for physical and mental health for those that have experienced extensive childhood trauma.

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

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