

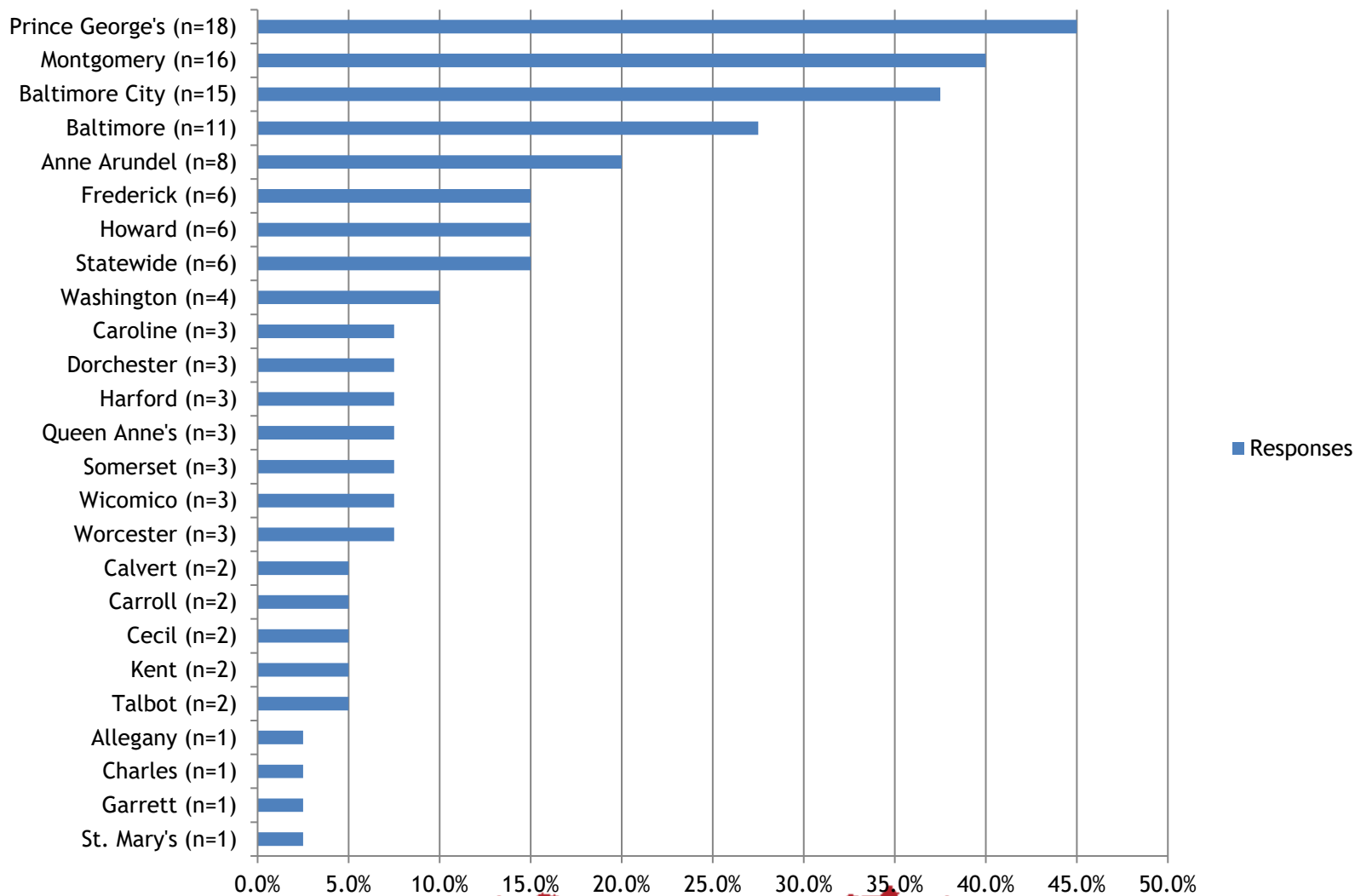
Access to Benefits for Immigrant Survivors Workgroup Meeting

Victim Services for Immigrant Survivors Survey Report

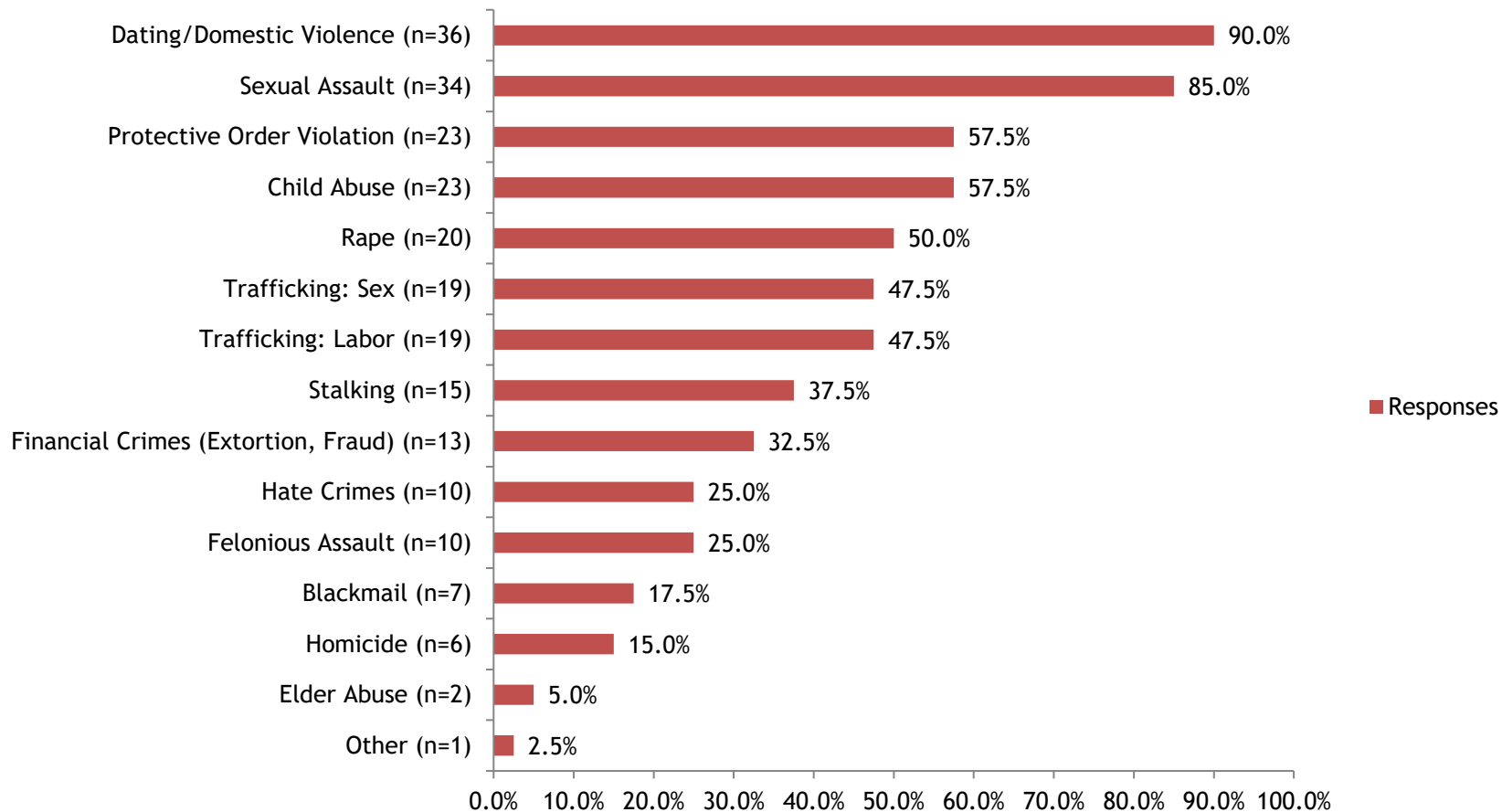
The Survey

- 40 people answered the Survey
- Organizations participating in the survey: House of Ruth, CASA Inc, Life Crisis Center, Ayuda, Women's Law Center, Calvert County State's Attorney's Office, Asylee Women Enterprise (AWE), Angeles Guerreros, Delegate Joseline Pena-Melnyk, JHCP, Just Neighbors, JCADA, Dorchester County State's Attorney's Office, When Trauma Hurts, Community Crisis Services, Caroline County State's Attorney's Office, Solutions in Hometown Connections, Heartly House, Mid Shore Council of Family Violence, Maryland Latinos Unidos, Calvert County State's Attorney's Office, Latinas que inspiran, EsperanzApp.

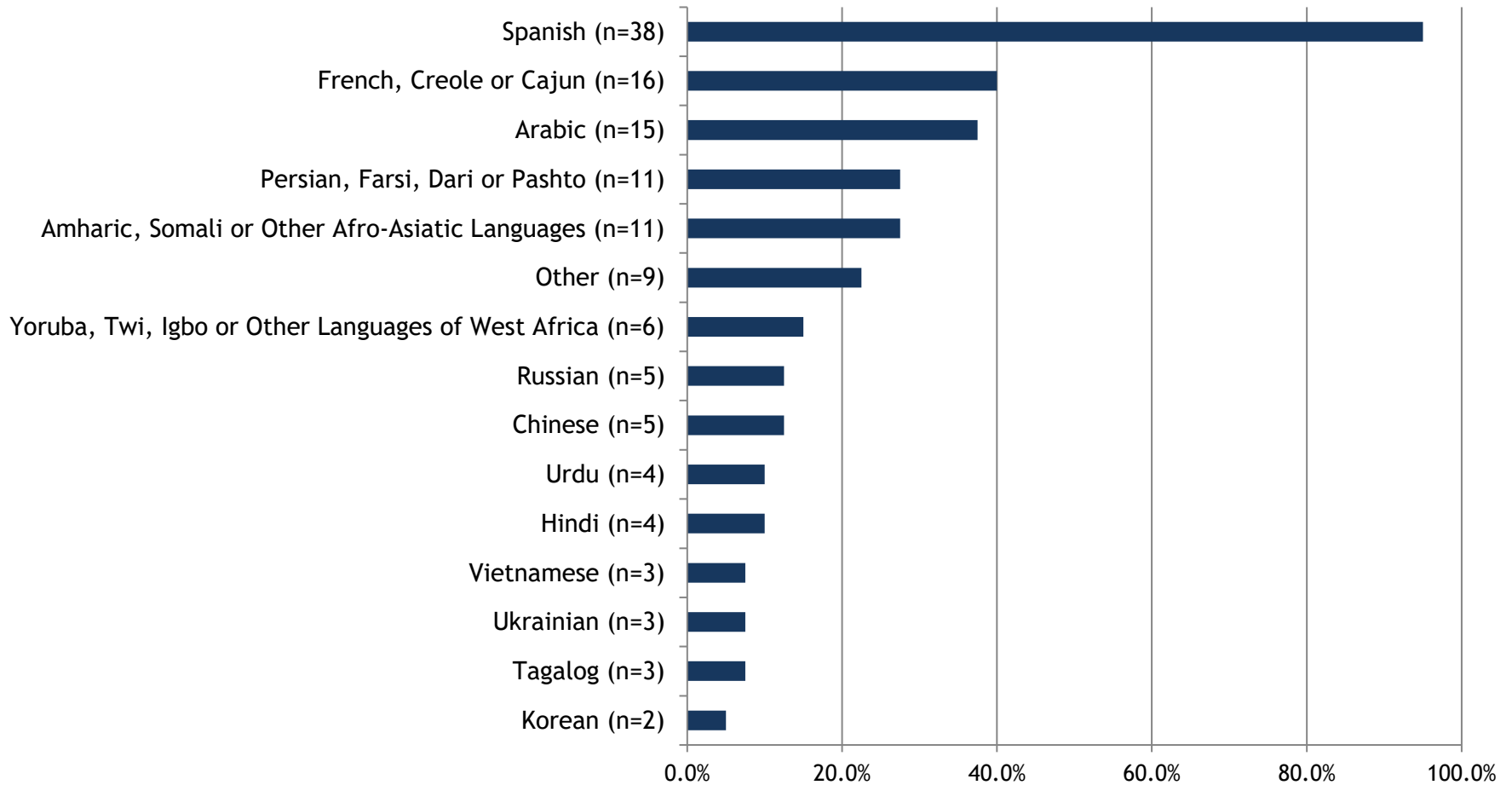
COUNTIES



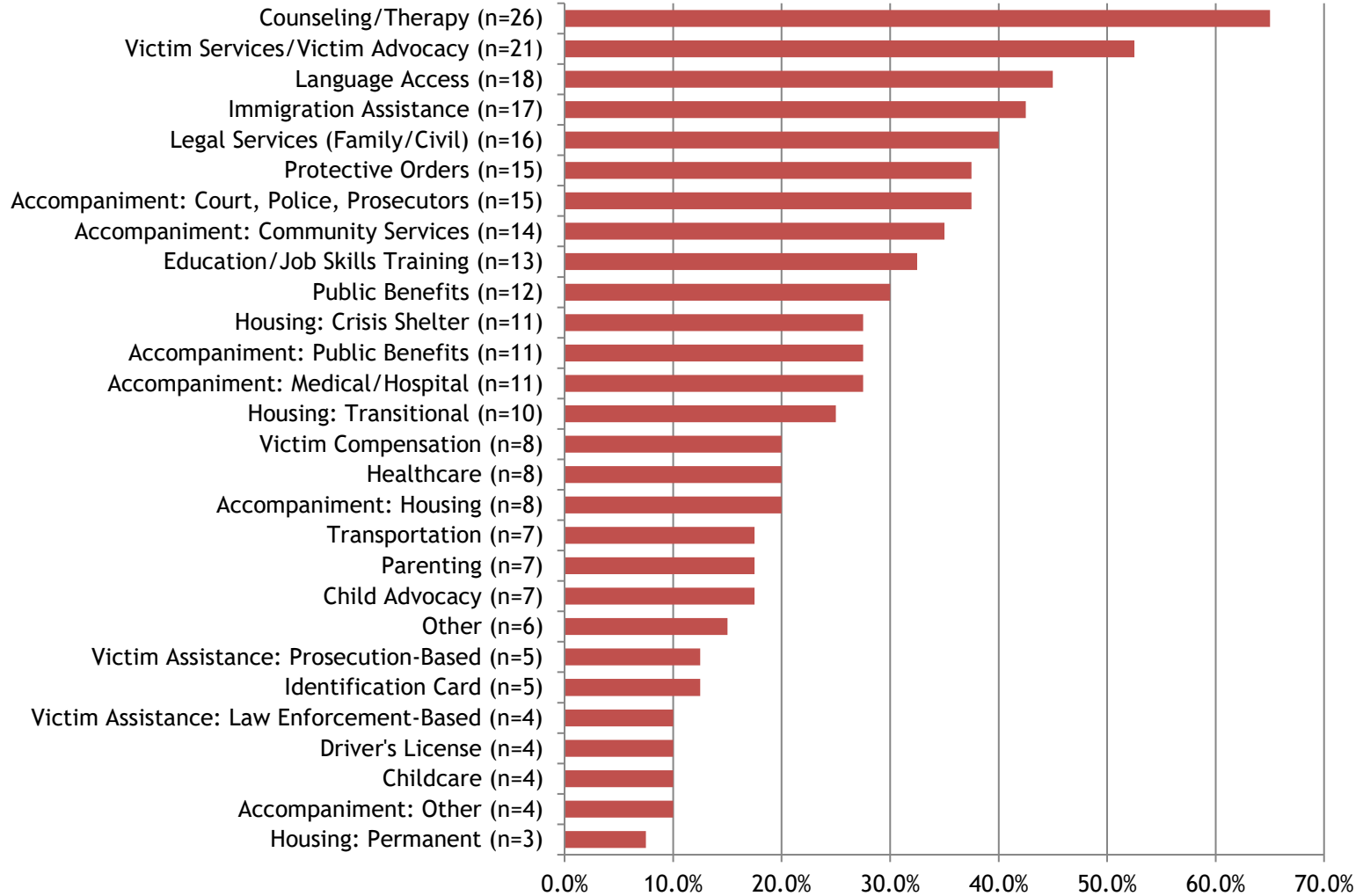
Types of Criminal Activity Most Experienced by Immigrant Survivors That You Serve



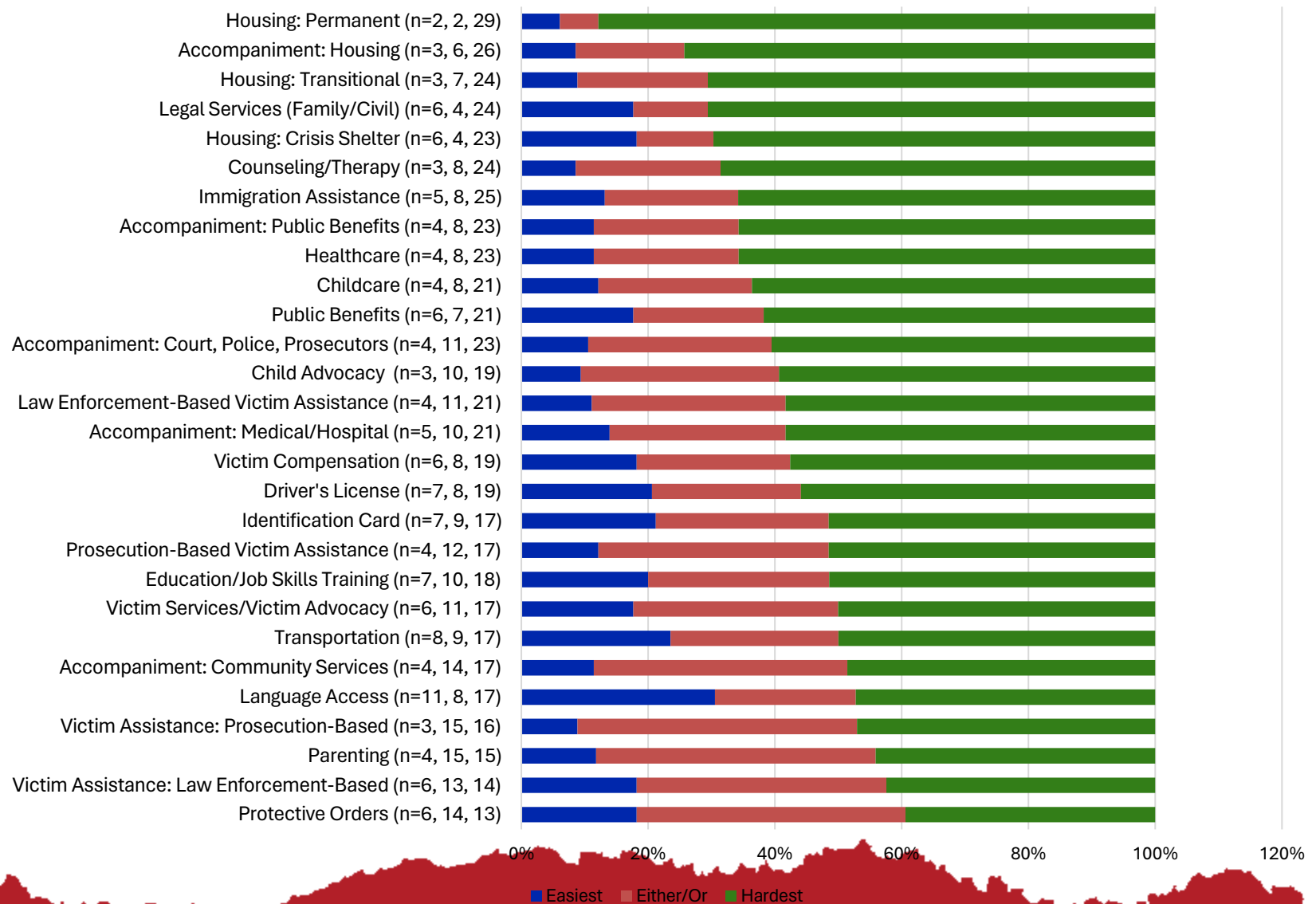
Languages most spoken



Victim Services Provided to Immigrant Survivors



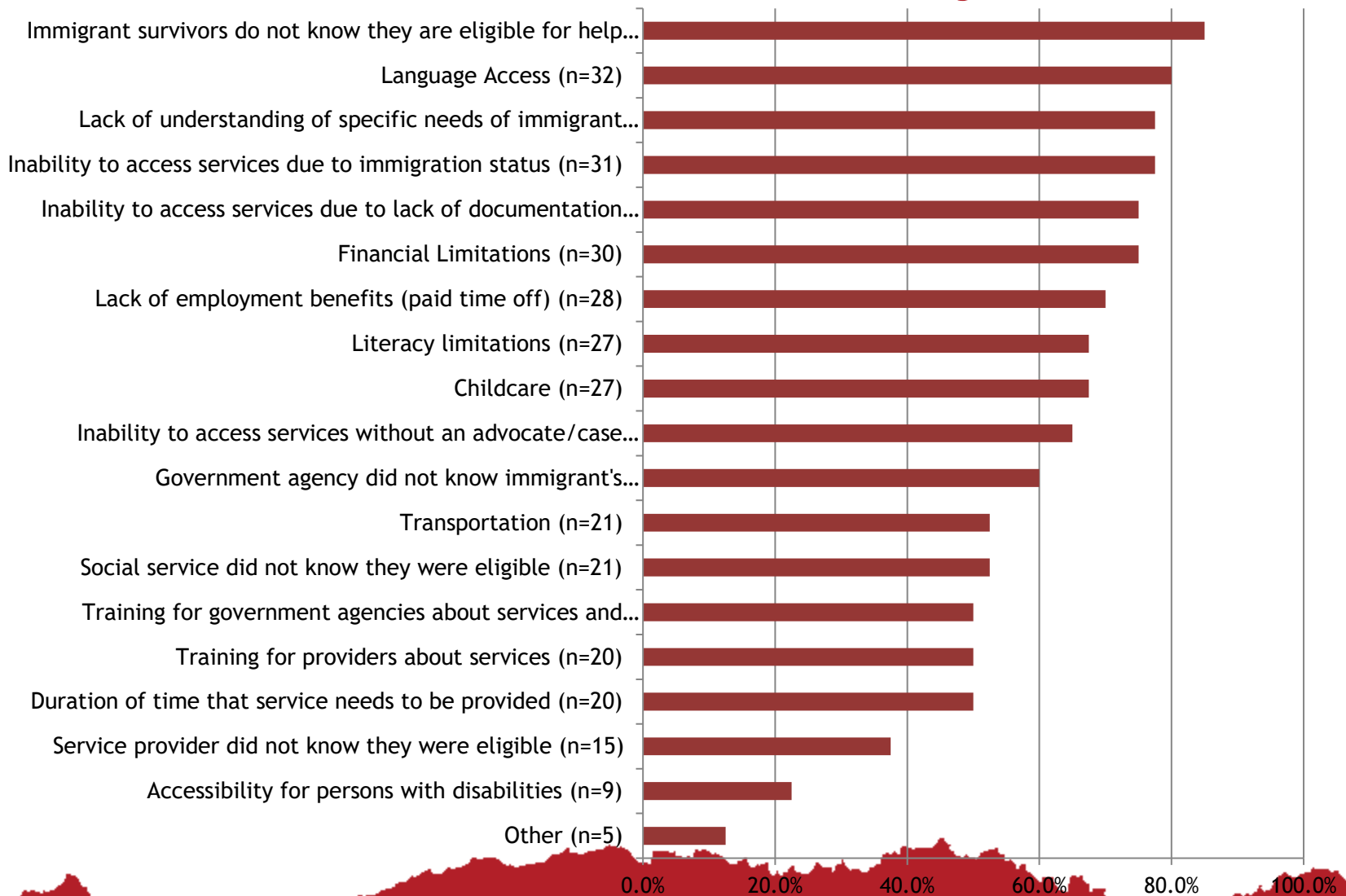
Difficulty in accessing services



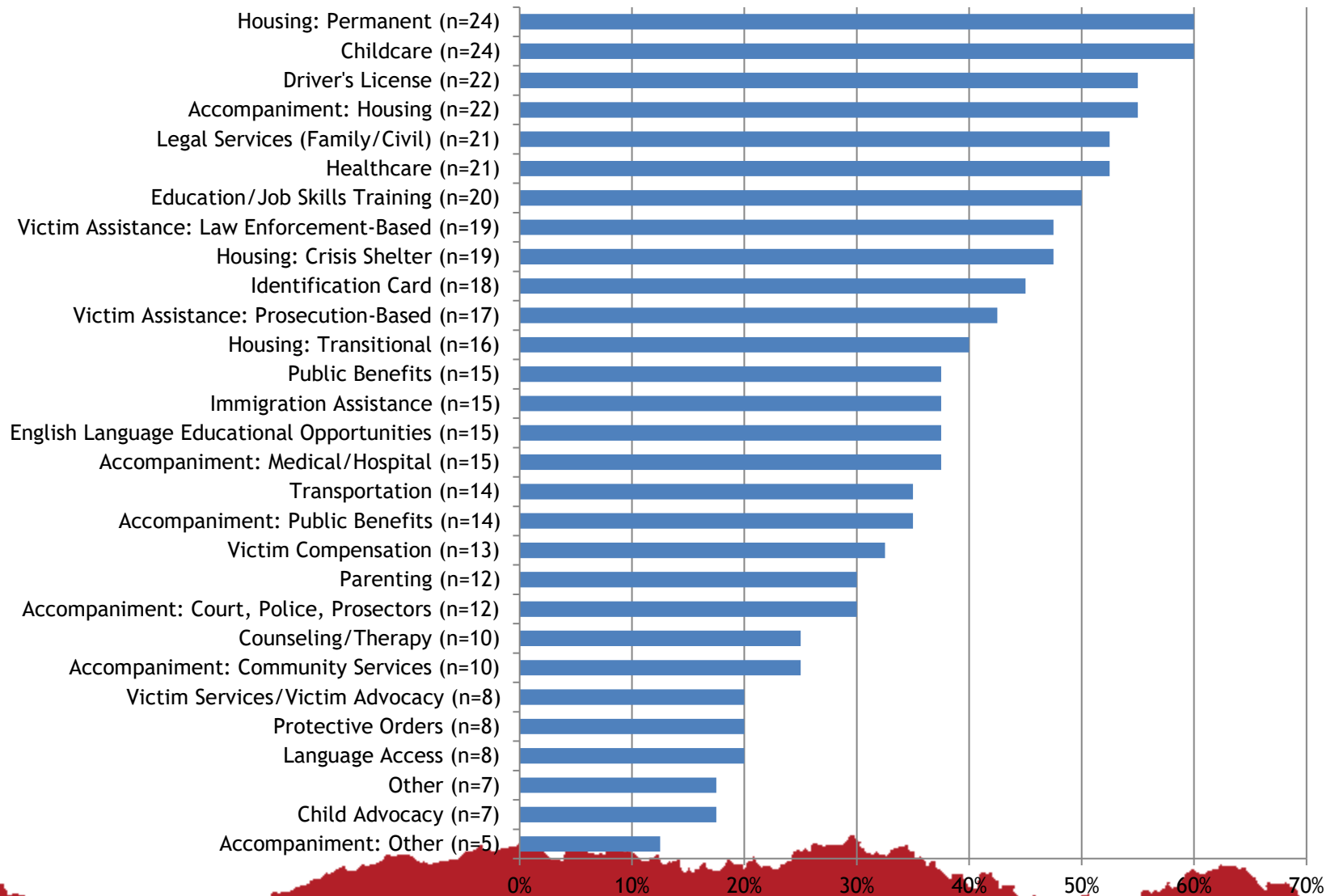
Difficulty in Accessing Services

- Participants answered that the easiest services to access were:
 - Language access – 30.5%
 - Transportation – 23.5%
 - Identification Card – 21.2%
- The hardest services to access are:
 - Permanent Housing – 87.8%
 - Accompaniment: Housing – 74.5%
 - Transitional Housing – 70.6%
 - Legal Services (Family/Civil) – 70.6%

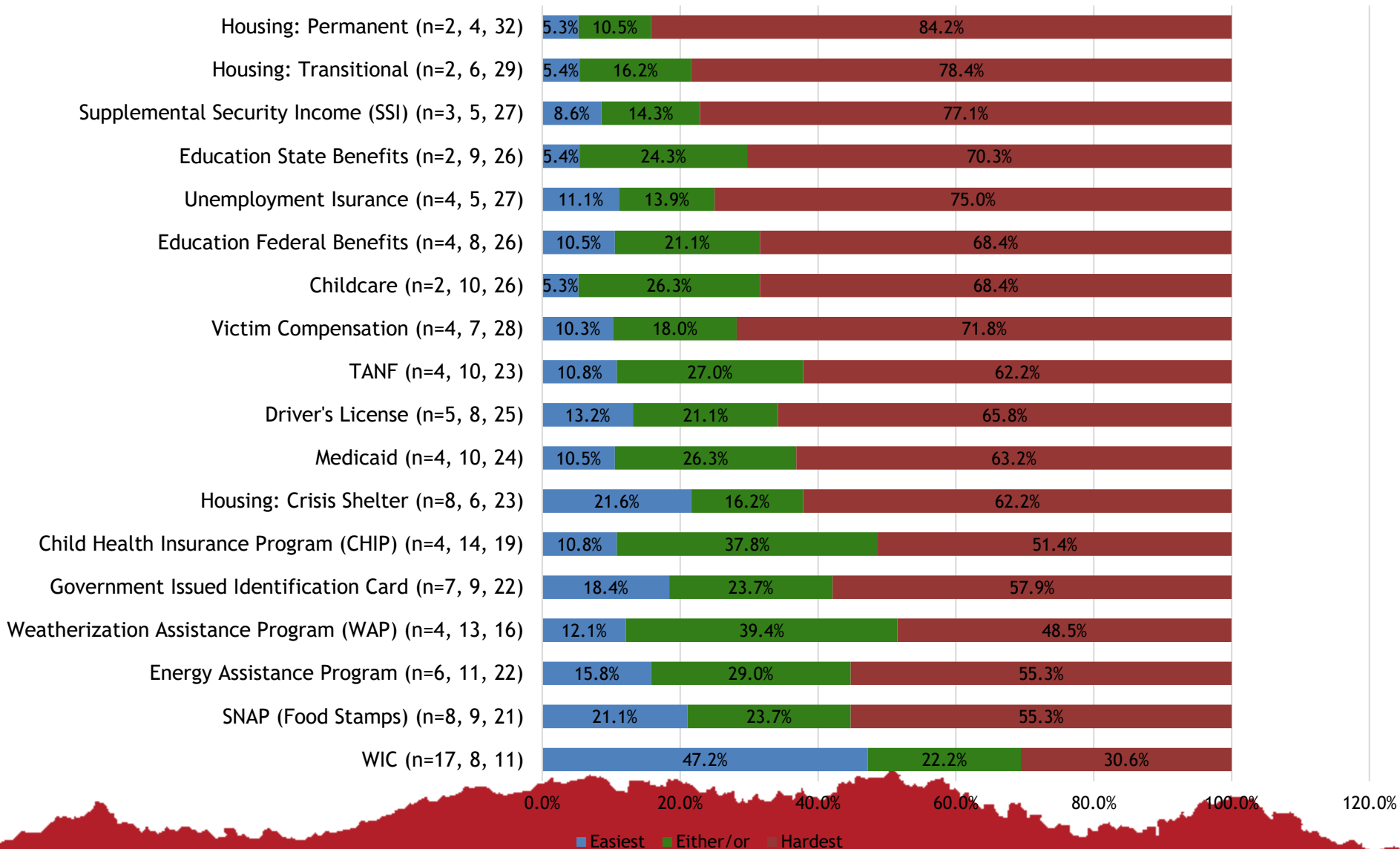
Barriers Encountered by Survivors



Services NOT Provided to Immigrant Survivors



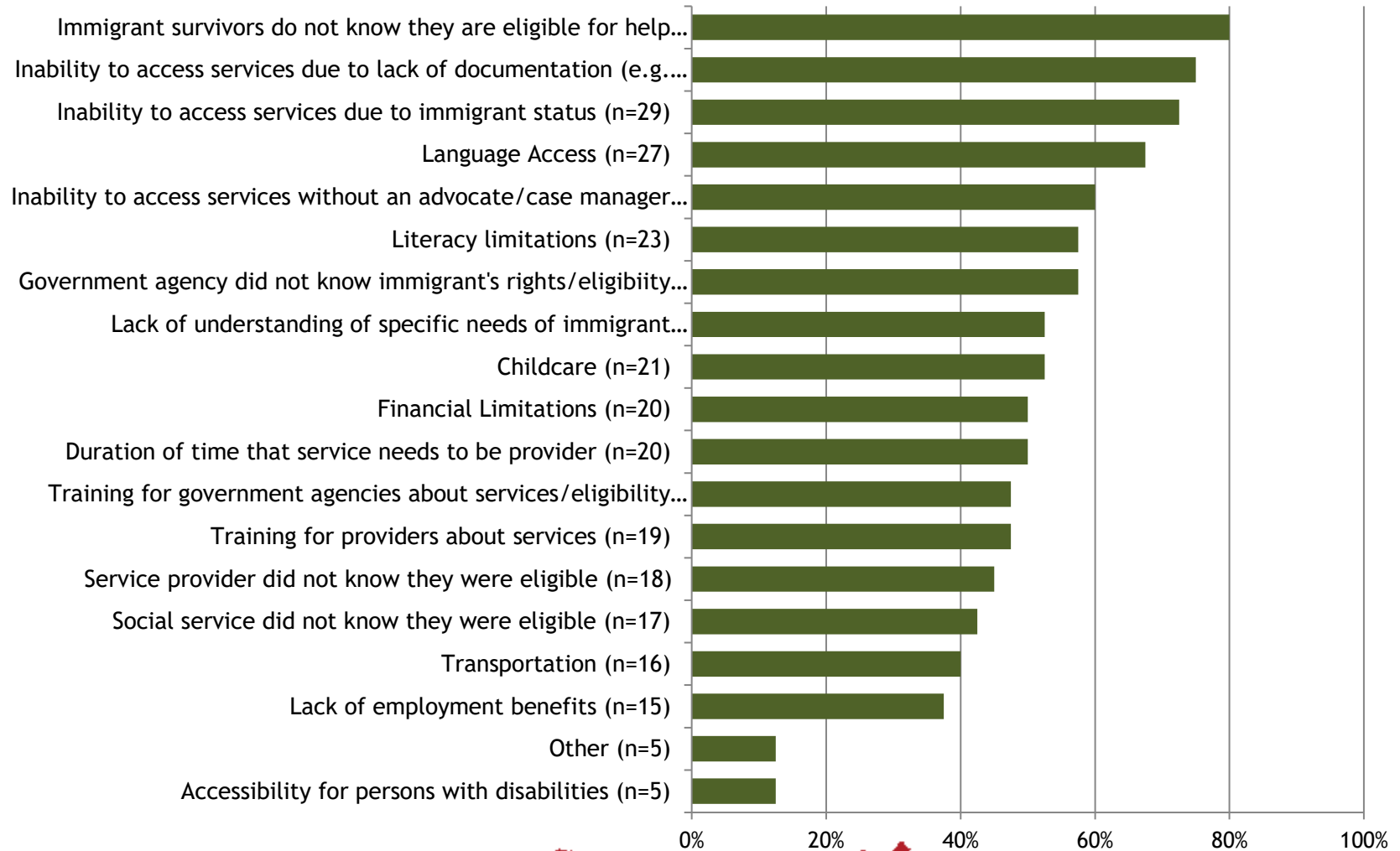
Difficulty in Accessing Public Benefits



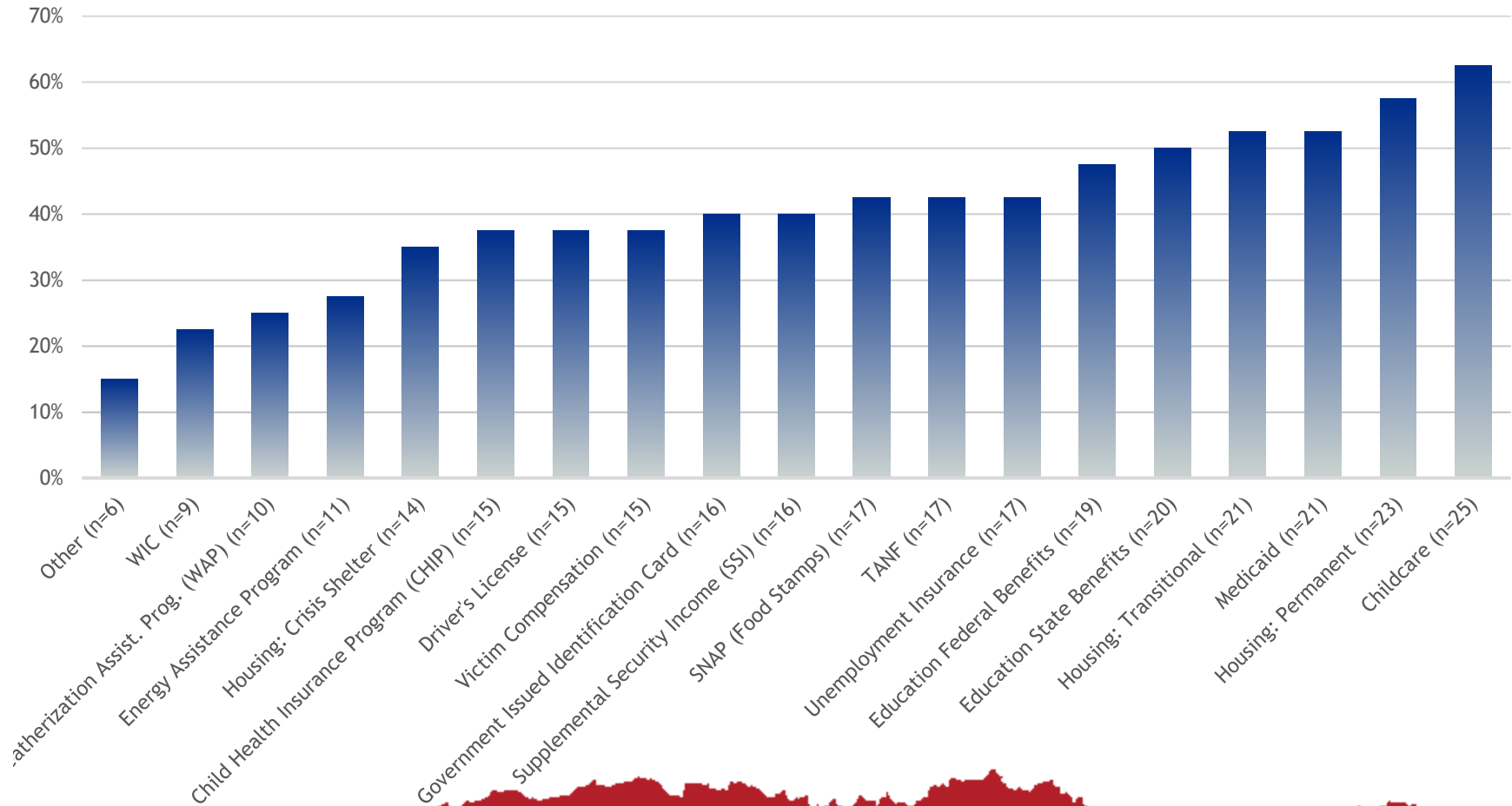
Difficulty in Accessing Public Benefits

- Participants answered that the easiest public benefits were:
 - The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) – 47.2%
 - Crisis Shelter – 21.6%
 - SNAP – 21%
- The hardest public benefits to access are:
 - Permanent Housing – 84.2%
 - Transitional Housing – 78.3%
 - Supplemental Security Income (SSI) – 77.1%

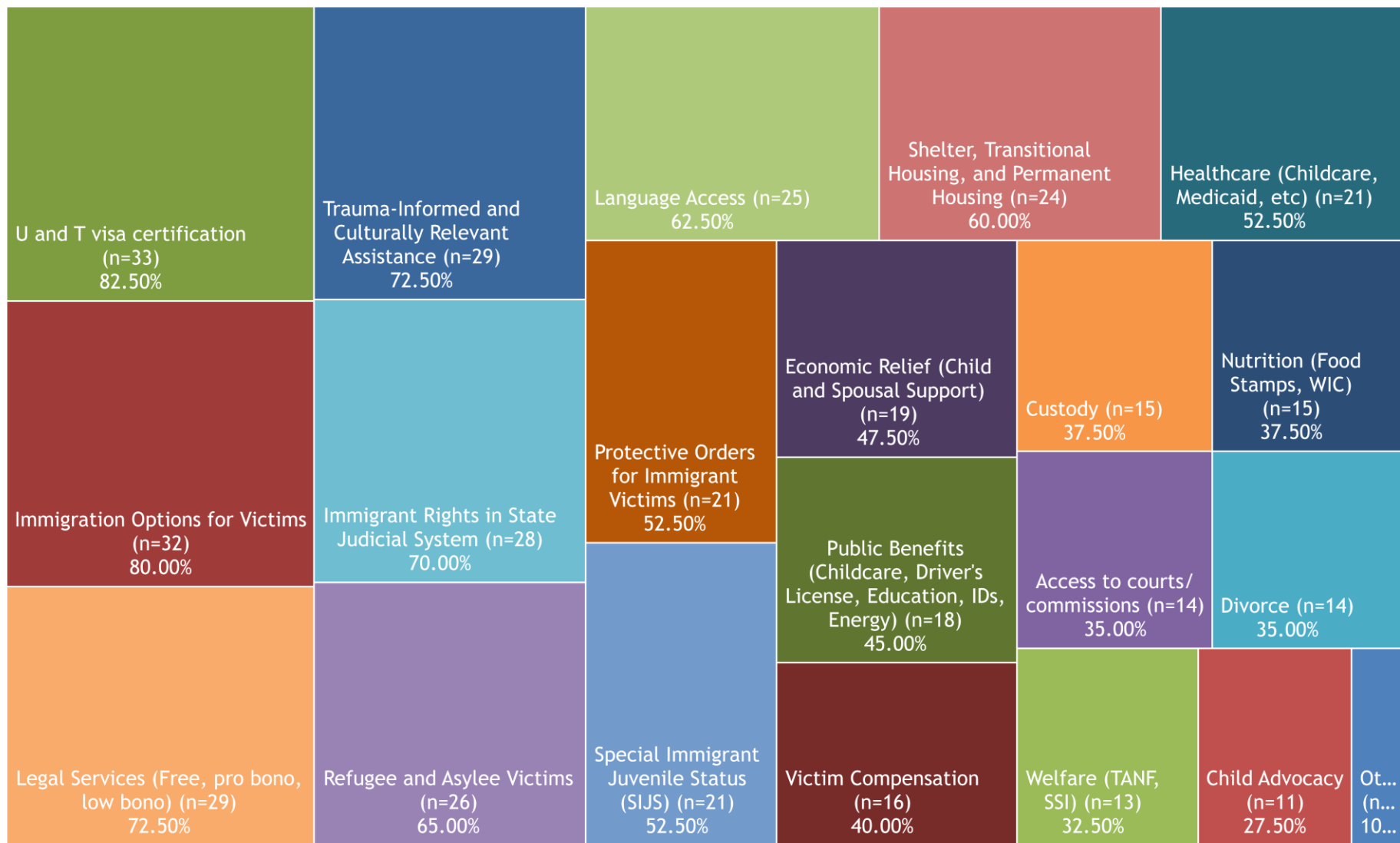
Barriers to Accessing Public Benefits



Public Benefits NOT available to Immigrant Survivors



Most Needed Training Topics



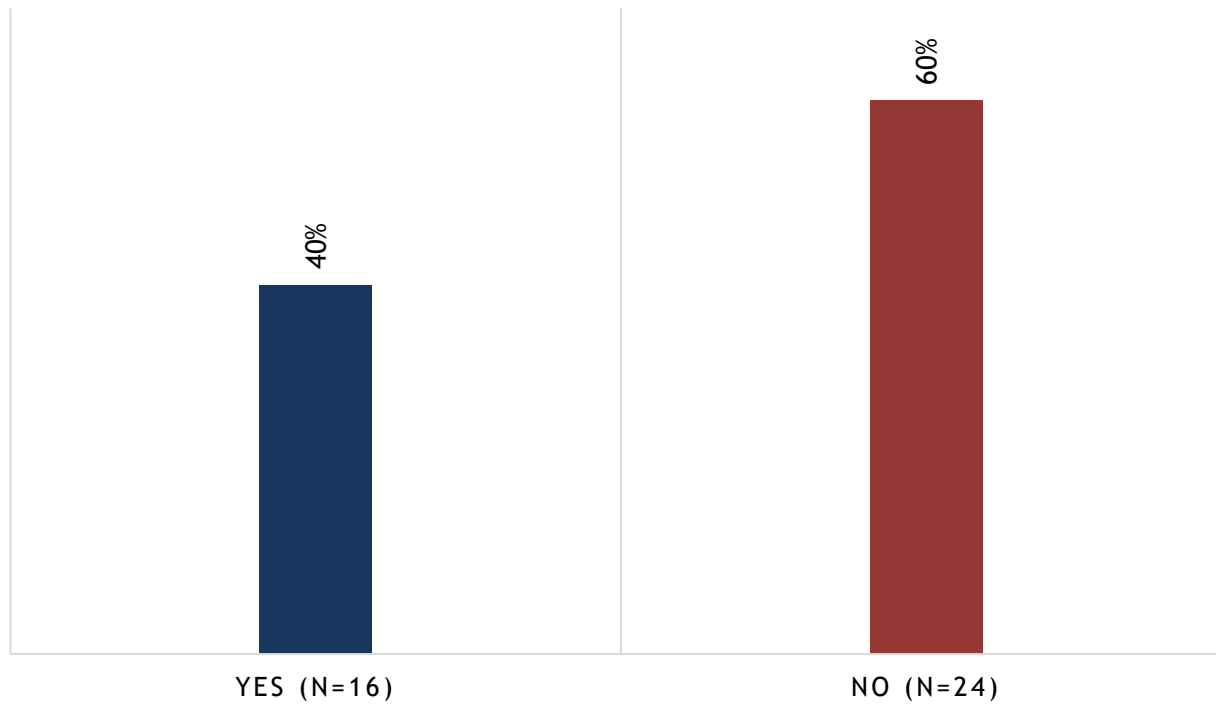
Open-ended Q&A

- Barriers:
 - Although organizations are making referrals to other org. that offer other services, it becomes clear that there is a lack of resources and services to serve immigrant survivor populations (eg. Legal services).
 - Lack of translators and interpreters.
 - Challenges with government employees not knowing immigrant eligibility for benefits.*
 - Lack of training for government employees on Benefits and U and T visas.
 - Administrative Delays and Lack of Clear Policies on Certification.

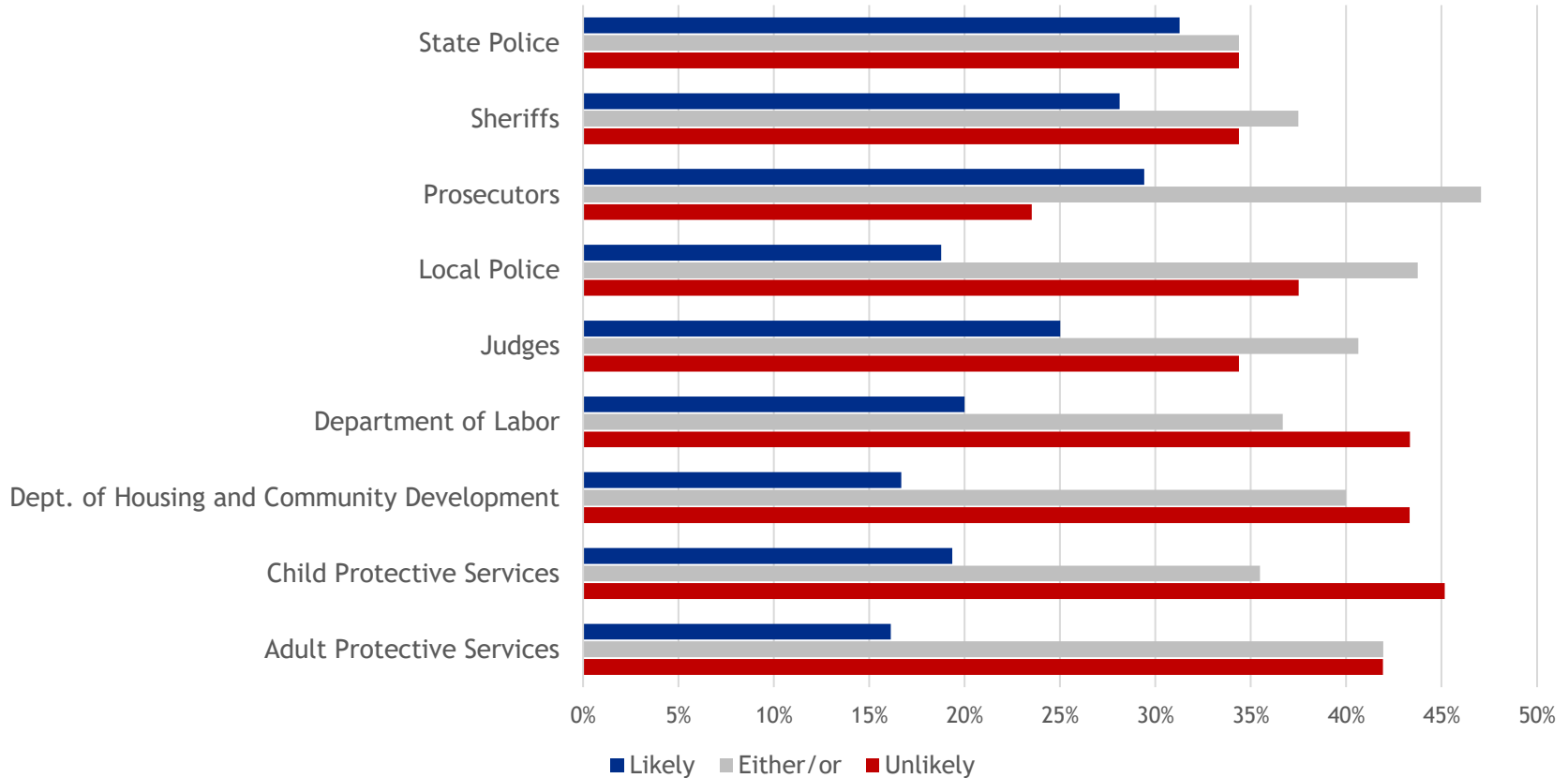
Open-ended Q&A (Cont.)

- Mitigating strategies:
 - Client accompaniment to apply for services or to inquire about the services.
 - Facilitating the application process for public benefits and community resources.
 - Partnering with other agencies to provide support.*
 - Providing transportation.
 - Making efforts to help immigrants obtain immigration status.
 - Educating clients and the community about their rights and available benefits.

Assistance to obtain U and T visa

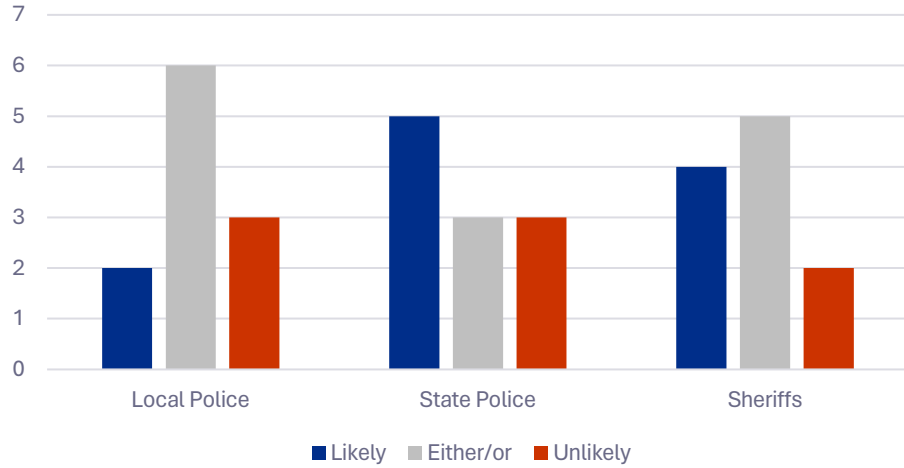


Likelihood of Authorities signing U and T Certification

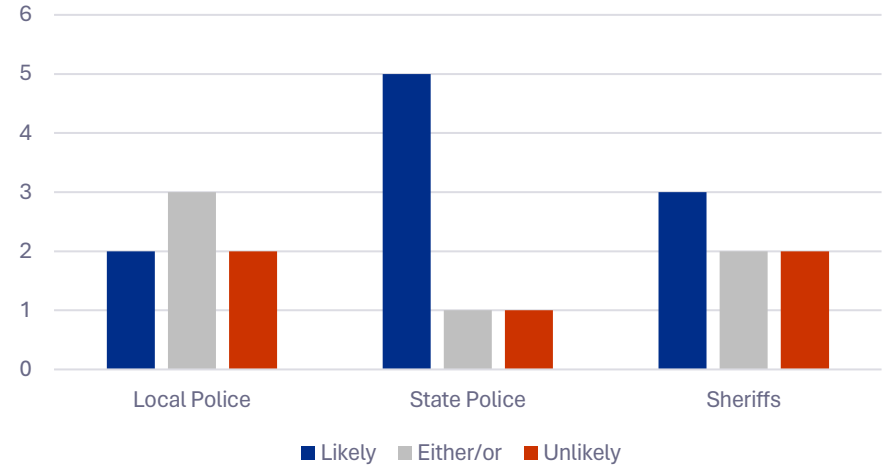


Likelihood of Authorities signing U and T Certification by Counties

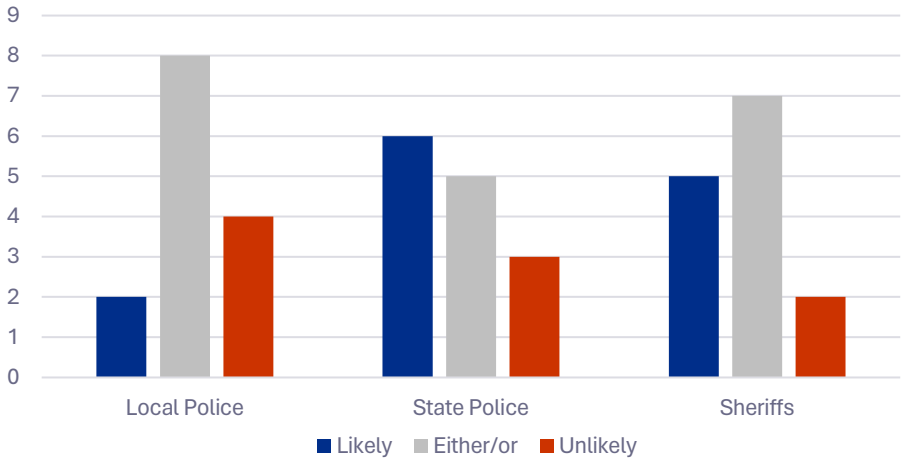
Baltimore



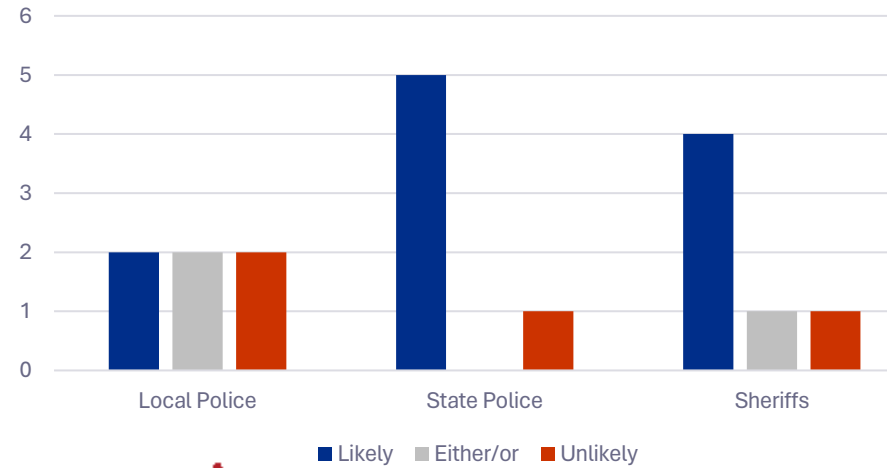
Anne Arundel



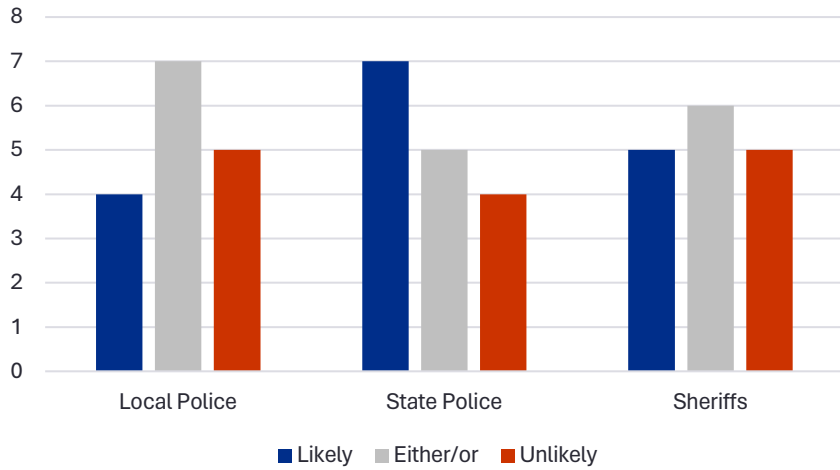
Baltimore City



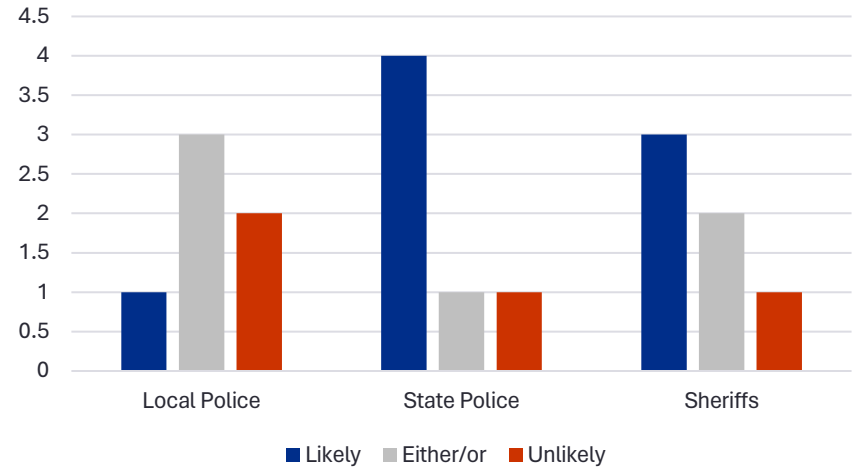
Frederick



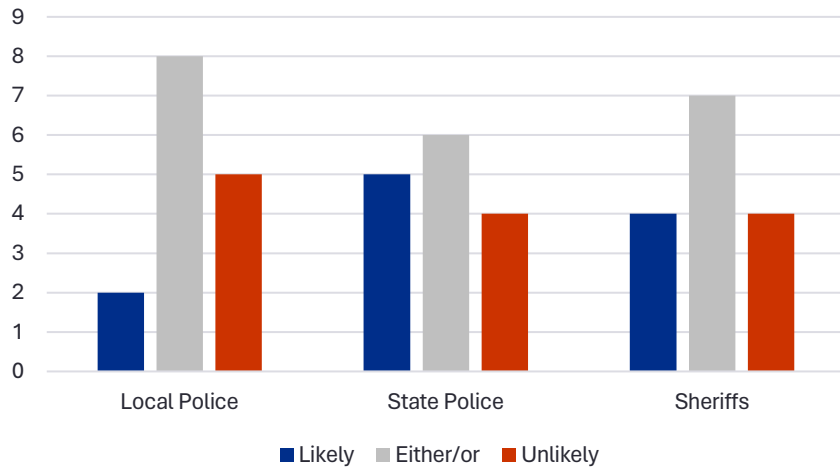
Prince George's



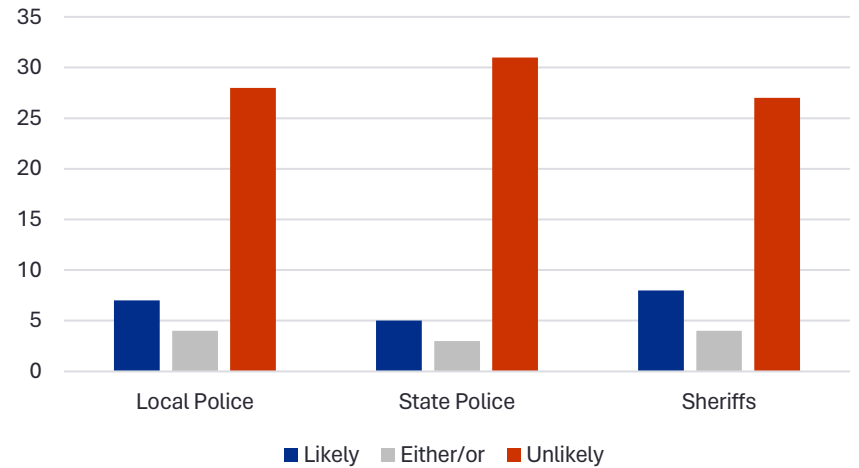
Howard



Montgomery



Other Counties





Predatory Helpfulness: An Empirical Framework to Identify Fraudulent Tactics Used by Pimps to Recruit and Commercially Sexually Exploit Young Girls and Women

Inderjit K Basra, Tatum Kenney, Shandra Forrest-Bank, Lisa K. Zottarelli & Chitra Raghavan

To cite this article: Inderjit K Basra, Tatum Kenney, Shandra Forrest-Bank, Lisa K. Zottarelli & Chitra Raghavan (24 Oct 2023): Predatory Helpfulness: An Empirical Framework to Identify Fraudulent Tactics Used by Pimps to Recruit and Commercially Sexually Exploit Young Girls and Women, Journal of Human Trafficking, DOI: [10.1080/23322705.2023.2259263](https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2023.2259263)

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Predatory Helpfulness: An Empirical Framework to Identify Fraudulent Tactics Used by Pimps to Recruit and Commercially Sexually Exploit Young Girls and Women

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ABSTRACT

Understanding how traffickers entrap and exploit young girls and women has become crucial to correctly identifying sex trafficking. Research shows that pimps use recruitment techniques of seduction, housing assistance, drugs, and emotional support as well as physical violence, debt bondage, and psychological manipulation to entrap women into commercial sexual exploitation (CSE). This pilot study posits that these seemingly dichotomous methods represent two temporal occurrences; pimps use superficially positive offers to lure young girls and women into a relationship via *grooming tactics*, then shift the relationship into a sexually exploitive one via *recruitment tactics*. This study aimed to explore this temporal sequence a two-prong process termed “*predatory helpfulness*.” Data for this preliminary study examined coercive control tactics, and trauma-coerced attachment in sex trafficking survivors. Participants ($N=19$) were all women who had previously been pimp trafficked. Study findings strongly supported the *predatory helpfulness* model; 18 of the 19 participants felt their initial relationships with their pimps were positive and helpful, and 17 of the 19 participants were able to identify a distinct relational shift between this *grooming stage* and the *recruitment stage*, where CSE began. These findings help identify undetected coercive behaviors on the part of the pimp and inform criminal justice interventions and policy. Furthermore, understanding *predatory helpfulness* will shift the focus to the perpetrators’ behaviors, moving us toward a community that embraces and supports the victims impacted by CSE. A 12 Question *Predatory Helpfulness* Screener is proposed as a tool for legal actors and providers.

KEYWORDS

Sex trafficking; pimp recruitment; grooming; coercive control; love-bombing; drug use; physical force; predatory tactics; trauma-coerced attachment

As research on sex trafficking becomes increasingly sophisticated, there is recognition that understanding how traffickers entrap and exploit young girls and women is crucial to correctly identifying sex trafficking.¹ This research is particularly relevant because the number of commercially sexually exploited (CSE) women and girls in the United States increases each year (Polaris, 2019), yet the methods of entrapment that exploiters use are just beginning to be recognized (Farley et al., 2014; Kennedy et al., 2007; Reid, 2016). Building upon this work, this study examines the time period from a woman’s initial contact with a pimp to CSE.

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¹For the purpose of this study, the terms pimp and trafficker are used interchangeably. As we are investigating the fraudulent nature of pimp-based prostitution, the grooming and recruitment tactics employed in these relationships qualify as trafficking under the federal definition.

Initial contact with a pimp leading up to CSE is sometimes referred to as grooming, a term borrowed from the sexual abuse literature (Whittle et al., 2015; Winters et al., 2022; Wolf & Pruitt, 2019). While the term has different meanings across users, it is often used to describe the priming for sexual activity via seduction or deception. Consistent with other work on commercial sexual exploitation (Reid, 2016; Reid & Jones, 2011; Winters et al., 2022), we refer to grooming as the initial stages where pimps prime their targets specifically via fraudulent or deceptive means. According to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), fraudulent is defined as a “deceitful practice or willful device, resorted to with intent to deprive another of [their] right, or in some manner to do [them] an injury.” Not surprisingly, fraudulent or deceptive practices are hard to detect, and therefore victims of trafficking are not able to recognize that they are being recruited into trafficking.

Differing from other researchers, we additionally use the term recruitment to refer to the period when a pimp shifts the initial relationship into a sexually exploitative one. Occasionally in the literature, researchers have used the terms grooming and recruitment interchangeably to describe the early stages of trafficking (Reid, 2016; Williamson & Prior, 2009; Winters et al., 2022). However, we suggest that a more precise construct involves a two-step process (grooming, followed by recruitment). We refer to this overarching framework as *predatory helpfulness*. Thus, predatory helpfulness refers to initially helpful behaviors offered seemingly unconditionally (and is experienced as positive and helpful by the targeted woman), followed by coercive or manipulative demands to repay/sustain this help or subsequent connection through commercial sex.

In the next section, we outline the definition and prevalence of commercial sexual exploitation and the systemic failings that prevent the correct identification of CSE victims. In the following sections, we explore the current research on the pimp’s role in trafficking, what we know about how they maintain relational control, and what we know about how they initiate relationships with young girls and women. Finally, in light of the current body of research and its gaps in regard to the categorization of grooming and recruitment methods, we propose a new framework to categorize these tactics called *predatory helpfulness*, a two-stage grooming and recruitment process which aims to shift the onus firmly onto the traffickers, and away from the young girls and women upon whom they prevail. To aid in the identification of these tactics, the authors propose a short 12-question screener (see Appendix A).

Definition and Prevalence of Trafficking

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 defines sex trafficking as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age.” While it is unclear how many young girls and women enter into the commercial sex trade through force, fraud, or coercion, there is a growing body of literature on the disconnect between the TVPA and the ongoing criminalization of women who should fall under this protection (Farrell et al., 2015; Mir, 2013; Reid & Jones, 2011; Richie-Zavaleta et al., 2020).

There are several challenges to identifying women in CSE as trafficking victims. First, there is a misalignment of language in state and federal anti-human trafficking laws, resulting in many trafficking cases being prosecuted as lesser or alternative offenses at the state level (Dank et al., 2014). Despite the provision in the federal statute identifying coercion as a means of trafficking, law enforcement interprets many trafficked women as participating consensually in CSE and treats them as criminals. Second, the victim’s own belief that they consented even when they could not have, fear and shame, and trauma-coerced attachment (TCA) to their trafficker, may make them less likely to identify or advocate for themselves as victims of a crime (Doychak & Raghavan, 2018). Victims are particularly likely to identify their own entry into CSE as consensual when they do not recognize the coercive tactics used by the pimp, resulting in their being tricked or seduced under false pretenses, or

do not have the language to articulate the entrapment (Doychak & Raghavan, 2018). The requirement that a survivor testify against their pimp can also inhibit her willingness to cooperate with prosecutors (Farrell et al., 2009).

Third, even when victims recognize that they may have been exploited and the correct standards are recognized, victim-blaming embedded in our culture may leave legal actors vulnerable to bias, so that they continue to view victims as culpable. Victim-blaming is grounded in the belief that victims should have been aware of society's dangers and are responsible when they fail to take the necessary precautions to ensure their own safety (Schoellkopf, 2012). However, when we examine the current knowledge on grooming and recruitment, we see that pimps often initiate relationships by offering perceived improvements in the lives of girls and women via several emotional and tangible avenues. At best, in this light, the formation of these relationships was a prudent decision on the part of the women, made in good faith when offers of love, partnership, or assistance were extended. At worst, many of these encounters were deceptive and staged to seduce victims. Without this nuanced understanding, victims continue to be blamed for their "choice," reducing the focus on pimps, recruiters, and others while increasing the perceived culpability of the CSE victim.

As the culture of victim blaming permeates the criminal justice, medical, and social services fields, it acts as a further barrier to recognizing CSE survivors as potential victims and impedes their ability to obtain support (Danis & Lockhart, 2003). These factors work together to criminalize CSE women, and many victims have reported experiencing "secondary victimization" when engaging in these systems (Rude, 1999). Given the difficulties these fields face in identifying CSE victims, and the legal, medical, and psychological consequences of misidentification, more effort needs to be extended to examine how pimps orchestrate the victim's exploitation.

Pimp-Controlled Relationships and Coercive Control

While young girls and women may become involved in CSE through several avenues, research has shown that between 40% to 85% of CSE women are involved with a pimp at some point (Barry, 1995; Farley et al., 2014; Norton-Hawk, 2004; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). Nixon et al. (2002) found that 19% of young girls and women who were trafficked as minors had been forced, coerced, or intimidated into CSE by pimps or abusive intimate partners. Further, the majority of CSE victims are recruited by someone they know or had built a relationship with over time (Nixon et al., 2002). Once the exploitive relationship is established, the pimp benefits financially from that individual's commercial sexual exploitation while controlling the individual's behaviors and actions (Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). This control is maintained through a collection of tactics known in the domestic violence literature as coercive control (Stark, 2007).

The systematic use of coercive control in pimp-based relationships is being increasingly documented (Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Duron et al., 2021; Pomerantz et al., 2021). Coercive control in such trafficking relationships typically encompasses a myriad of tactics including isolating the victim, intimidation, manipulation, microregulation, degradation, and deprivation, intended to keep women and children in CSE under the pimp's control (Kennedy et al., 2007; Kranick, 2014). Coercive control has multiple deleterious psychological effects including a spectrum of traumatic outcomes from fear, shame, anxiety, and dependency to post-traumatic stress disorder and trauma-coerced attachment. Coercive control provides an excellent framework for understanding how pimps maintain control in long-term sex trafficking situations (Doychak & Raghavan, 2018).

But how do these relationships begin? What precedes the distinct onset of coercive control, or is there an identifiable distinct onset? The earliest research on sex trafficking recruitment tactics focused on physical aggression and captivity, assuming that most trafficked women were physically forced into the situation and were likewise physically unable to escape (Raymond & Hughes, 2001). Subsequent research suggests that pimps do not necessarily use violence or threats at the onset of the relationship but rather seduce, persuade, and convince, victims (Kennedy et al., 2007). The main goal of the current

study was to carefully examine if the framework of predatory helpfulness captures the dynamics of the first pimp-victim encounter among women who have been commercially sexually exploited by a pimp at some point during their lifetime.

The Formation and Initial Stages of Pimp-Victim Relationships

Some existing research suggests that pimps are actively predatory (Reid, 2016). Pimps begin by identifying victims systematically. Early grooming and recruitment strategies include scouting mass transit stations, nightclubs, malls, high schools, college campuses, and online social media sites for disenfranchised young girls and women (Dank et al., 2014). Research has indicated that once pimps initiate contact, they use attention, promises of good protection, and love as a way of initially engaging women in relationships (Raphael et al., 2010). This same research suggests that once the relationship is established, men use the same compliments they have extended as proof that the women have an “asset” they should be using to benefit the couple financially via CSE (Raphael et al., 2010).

Other studies have similarly found that CSE women were exploited by men whom they identified as their boyfriends who were also working as pimps (Kennedy et al., 2007; Raphael & Shapiro, 2004; Silbert & Pines, 1982; Twis et al., 2022; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). These same studies found that the grooming tactics used by pimps included inducing love and a sense of attachment. This initial stage of the relationship was typically intense, characterized by the showering of compliments and heightened expressions of desire, often taking place over many weeks or months with no overt instances of abuse. Referred to in popular literature as love-bombing, these behaviors are often used by abusers as a way to passively establish control over their partner (Strutzenberg et al., 2017). These seductions also frequently happened when the pimp was secretly carrying on relationships with other women (Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002), highlighting their fraudulent nature. Once these relationships were exposed, the pimp “flipped” the script, threatening to end the relationship to demand participation in commercial sex to maintain the relationship.

Pimps have also been shown to induce a sense of indebtedness for gifts presented as being given freely, such as clothing, money, or drugs (Kennedy et al., 2007; Raphael & Shapiro, 2004; Silbert & Pines, 1982). Kennedy et al. (2007) found that the pimps’ predatory behaviors also included focusing on girls and women who needed to obtain drugs or were facing financial difficulties. While the tactics of financial aid and the obtaining of drugs may not appear to relate to romantic seduction, what these methods have in common is the initial relationship pimps establish is a subjectively positive one for the woman, where the pimp fills a crucial need or improves the woman’s life in a significant way.

In contrast to the above grooming tactics, other studies highlight more forceful tactics. Rocha-Jiménez et al. (2018) found that pimps coerced women using violence and the threat of violence, use of pregnancy and children, and addiction and forced substance use. Some research has found that physical violence is replaced by drug dependency to maintain control over the woman or girl (May et al., 2000). In these instances, there is little evidence of seduction or seemingly positive promises, although it is also possible that the researchers did not explore this possibility, focusing instead on violence.

In sum, it appears pimps use recruitment techniques of love, debt, addiction, physical might, and authority, resulting in women believing they have no alternatives to entering CSE (Kennedy et al., 2007). Pimps have also been found to use psychological intimidation, manipulation, starvation, rape, physical violence, confinement, and threats of violence toward the victim’s family, forced drug use, and the shame from these acts to keep the woman or girl under their control (Kranick, 2014). These two bodies of literature suggest two different methods. However, it is also possible that these seemingly dichotomous recruitment methods represent two temporal occurrences. Specifically, we posit that pimps typically use seemingly positive offers to lure young girls and women into a relationship and subsequently increase coercive control in the later part of the relationship to maintain obedience. The goal of this study was to carefully explore and map this temporal sequence if indeed it exists.

The current study contributes to the field by further exploring the potentially predatory nature of grooming and recruitment experiences of CSE victims in pimp-controlled relationships. Specifically, this research fills a gap in the predatory behaviors used by pimps to first initiate a relationship with a young girl or woman via *grooming tactics*, and then mobilize her “into the life” via a separate set of *recruitment tactics*, a two-stage process we define as *predatory helpfulness*. By better understanding and describing the *predatory helpfulness* tactics used during the grooming and recruitment stages by pimps, professionals will be better able to correctly identify commercial sexual exploitation.

Research Questions

This study’s overarching goal was to examine the extent to which pimps used intentionally fraudulent or deceptive tactics that, on the surface, appeared positive or helpful in order to initiate relationships with women, followed by coercive demands to engage in commercial sex. Alternatively, if we did not find a strong pattern of *predatory helpfulness*, we wanted to explore if pimps used explicitly threatening or intimidating coercive control tactics when they initiated their relationships with the intended women. The current qualitative pilot study applied a phenomenology framework to address these aims. The initial question guiding this study was:

- (1) What are the lived experiences of CSE women and girls during the initial stages of the relationship with their pimp, as narrated to the researchers?
- (2) Three additional questions emerged as the phenomenology framework, including:
 - (1) How was the relationship with the pimp initiated?;
 - (2) When did the relationship change?; and
 - (3) When and how did the pimp establish himself as a pimp/boyfriend?

Method

Research Design

Data for this preliminary pilot study examined trauma symptoms, coercive control tactics, and trauma-coerced attachment in sex trafficking survivors. Twenty-one participants were interviewed in person, in a private space in a North Florida community organization. Interviews lasted approximately two hours. Participants were recruited via flyers posted at various organizations and on social media and were provided with a \$30 gift card for their time.

Participants

The initial sample consisted of 21 women and girls; two were excluded from the study because they were under the age of 18 at the time of the interviews. At the time of grooming and recruitment, the participants’ mean age was 24.60 years old ($SD = 7.664$), ranging from as young as 13 to as old as 42 years old; 12 participants reported being under the age of 25. Of the 19 participants included in this study, 11 were trafficked by someone significantly older, defined as an eight-year age difference or if the pimp was of age and the participant was a minor during the trafficking incident. The average age difference for the other 11 participants was 1.64 years ($SD = 3.81$). Participants ranged from age 18 to 60 years old at the time of their interviews; participants were reporting on these events an average of 10.9 years ($SD = 10.01$) after they occurred.

Participants met their traffickers in a variety of ways; some participants met their traffickers at school, work, detox, or other mandated programs. Others were introduced to their trafficker via friends or family members, and others met their traffickers through drugs, or because they needed a place to stay. Many described some state of crisis or instability immediately prior to meeting their trafficker (See [Table 1](#)). The participants were racially/ethnically diverse; 32% of

Table 1. Participant Narratives: How Relationships Were Formed.

Participant Number	How did you and he/she meet?	What was going on in your life at the time?
1	Place to stay.	In an abusive relationship, left relationship (kid of rape), drugs & unstable, work living, didn't know social services
2	addicted to heroin, dealer said guy paid money for cleaning houses, went there, cleaned twice for cash, then cash for heroin, then 4th time, sex became a thing	in an abusive relationship with a heroin user, ended up using myself, then lost my house, lost my job, bouncing around, couch surfing
3	he was neighbor at motel, invited me over for some drinks, dated him for 2 months then he blackened both my eyes, I ran away, met him at a gas station, went with him, gave me/forced me heroin, tied me to bed, 9 months sold me	relapsed and he wanted to get me clean, I believed him
4		father passed away, money ran out, used drugs all my whole life, believed those people were my only friends
5	introduced through friends, "I got you, you deserve better," I was in the life of partying, drugs, etc	I was on drugs, he came and kind of rescued me, I didn't have to do anything, no work, we lived in a mansion, 1 month, my world turned upside down
6	on the bus, Fred offered to put me in a hotel with my kids	my husband of 17 years had just walked out on me and my kids, liked at a DV shelter, using bus, only let you stay six weeks and almost at my time almost up
7	school, he was in a higher grade	he was an escape, my family was abusive, he was all I knew, he was giving me everything I needed, he would give me money for drugs
8	detox rehab program romances	detox at the time still working, called mom after daughter said doesn't like me on liquor
9	In foster care in a group home – park next to it, he stop car and started talking to me, parts I was really hesitant, asked if I want to make money. I don't do that anymore explained I don't do prostitution – call me if you ever want to hang out and I did. He knew the group home, knew it was for victims of trafficking	at group home b/c problems at home, FBI wanted me somewhere safe
10	through another young lady	bouncing around in and out of foster care
11	bonded out of jail – kidnapped, cousin took her to man who became pimp	in jail about 1 month – throwing pizza – battery on an elderly – no abuse no drugs prior to this
12	"you don't have to walk anymore, main girl put you on backpage." Excited for \$100 for little	Where is your \$? Then realized – fighting - why did I have to give you all.
13	his mother-like figure introduced us	I was taking care of my daughter, going to college, working at dry cleaners and restaurant
14	through co-worker	not living with parents since 15 years old, dropped out, living with boyfriends mom
15	he sold dope, drug dealer, 1st time cocaine for sex	my brother got shot in the head in the car, while in the car, younger brother went to prison for 2nd murder, brothers in gangs
16	met through family friend and started cleaning his house	just became homeless, both cars taken, hopeless and homeless, "help working girls get their life together"
17	met a girl in jail, didn't have place to stay, she offered to stay with her and her boyfriend	met girlfriend in prison, relapsed after getting out, back on pills really bad, driving around with no license
18	soft and sweet	runaway, bouncing around – making lots of money
19	I was an overnight cashier at (store) – he would come in and stay upfront with me	going through a divorce and it was the 1st job I ever had

participants identified as Black/African American, Hispanic, or Pacific Islander ($n = 6$), and 68% identified as white/Caucasian ($n = 13$). All participants were women who resided on the First Coast of Florida and had been commercially sexually exploited by a pimp at some point during their lifetime.

Procedures and Materials

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from all participating universities. Two trained doctoral students conducted the interviews. The semi-structured interview guide was adapted from Doychak and Raghavan's (2018) pilot study on sex trafficking and trauma-coerced attachment and designed for a larger study; thus, only relevant data is presented.

Interviews began with informed consent, emphasizing confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation. All participants received payment regardless of whether they completed the interview and were informed as such at the beginning of the interview. Research assistants read the interview instrument out loud using standardized introductory scripts and prompts to mitigate any potential reading or word comprehension difficulties. The interviewers recorded responses on a hard-copy form including notes and direct quotations. Interviews ended with a debriefing and post-interview care with a therapist. Additionally, follow-up care was available to all participants via a 24/7 hotline. One participant ended the interview before completing it due to feelings of distress.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The conducted analysis employed the hermeneutic circle process to gain an understanding of the phenomena which took place during the grooming and recruitment phases of sex trafficking (Peoples, 2021). The first author reviewed the interview text as a whole and the individual parts of the text to gain a better and deeper understanding of the themes (Peoples, 2021). From this process, the interview questions and data specific to eliciting information about the grooming-and-recruitment-specific phases of CSE were identified. These questions and responses, while initially not intended for further development, were finally included in a screener that was vetted by survivor advocates, as part of this hermeneutic circle.

First, to better understand vulnerability and potential fraud/deception, the participant's age and the age difference between the pimp and participant at the time of the initial meeting were noted. Second, the chronology of events in the grooming and recruitment phases of the CSE victim's life was mapped. Third, participants' emotional well-being when they met the pimps was considered to understand the *grooming tactics* used to develop dependence between the pimps and CSE women before trafficking occurred. After themes were synthesized based on the interview text, definitions were developed to describe each theme's specific attributes.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability, a peer review was implemented (Creswell & Poth, 2017). A colleague with a doctorate in a related field and experience in qualitative data analysis reviewed the methods and results of the study. Extensive feedback was provided to clarify thematic and codebook definitions. This examination of themes indicated that core ideas and definitions were supported by existing research on recruitment methods. Interrater reliability provided the second stage of validation. Three trained MA and doctoral students coded participant narratives based on definitions established by the first author. While final categorizations were based on unanimous agreement, original interrater reliability for *grooming tactics* was 54.55%, and the interrater reliability for *recruitment tactics* was 58.97%. Partly these results were due to a need for clarification on code and temporal parameters. Coders used tie-breaking to resolve discrepancies, which was used to further refine the definitions until full agreement was reached.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the pimp-victim relationship in its earliest stages. We further wanted to qualitatively test if the proposed two-step framework of *predatory helpfulness*

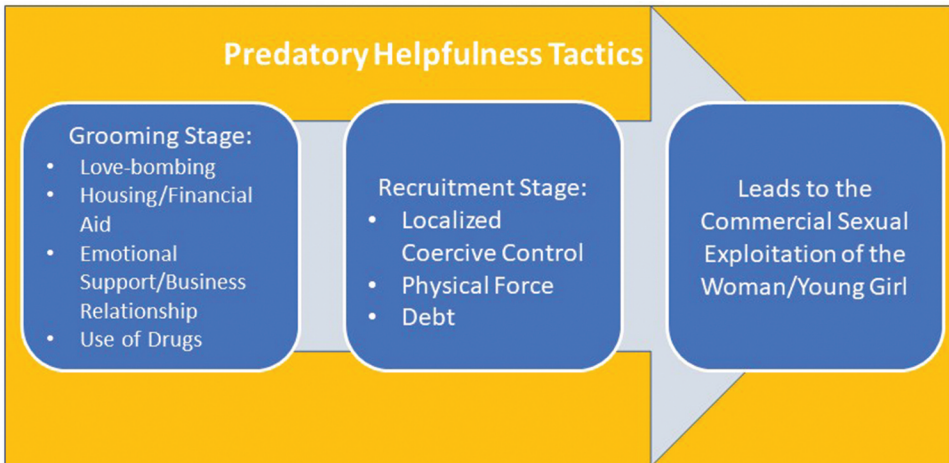


Figure 1. Predatory helpfulness framework. *Note:* Denotes flow from *grooming stage* through the *recruitment stage* to show how these two phases lead to the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of young girls and women.

captured the lived experiences of CSE women and young girls. Overall, the data strongly supported the predatory helpfulness framework (see Figure 1).

Congruent with the *grooming stage* of the hypothesized framework, all except one participant ($n = 18$) described their initial encounter with the pimp as positive. The initial stage was characterized by four specific *grooming tactics*: 1) love-bombing, 2) housing/financial aid, 3) use of drugs, and 4) emotional support/business relationships. Supporting the *recruitment stage* of the framework, 17 women were able to identify when the relationship pivoted into coerced sex via physical force, debt bondage and/or manipulation. In this second phase, the pimp flipped the relationship from one where he provided unconditional support to one where he demanded monetary compensation for his support via commercial sexual exploitation. Three specific *recruitment tactics* emerged in the data; 1) localized coercive control, 2) physical force and 3) debt. Both aspects of the predatory helpfulness framework, *grooming* and *recruitment*, are explicated below.

Stage 1: Grooming Tactics

The initial phase of the relationship is referred to as the *grooming stage*. In this *grooming stage* the pimps offered affection and or showed an intent to help provide a solution to the barriers participants were facing, and by doing so, created a sense of connection. Table 2 highlights the tactics used by the pimp to create dependence during the *grooming stage* of CSE. The most common tactic was Love-bombing, and the least common was Emotional Support/Business Relationship, illustrated further below.

Grooming Tactic 1: Love-Bombing

Ten women narrated how pimps established a relationship with them under the pretense of being their boyfriend. All participants believed they were entering a loving/romantic relationship when they first

Table 2. Grooming Tactics.

Grooming Tactics	Frequency	%
Love-bombing	10	52.62
Housing/Financial Aid	8	42.11
Use of Drugs	8	42.11
Emotional Support/Business Relationship	7	36.84

met their pimp. In all instances, pimps initiated the relationship by providing gifts, compliments and making the woman feel special, unique, and essential. One participant described her feelings of being rescued by her pimp, stating that the pimp would listen to her and provide emotional support. She explained that she was on drugs, and “he came and kind of rescued me, I didn’t have to do anything, no work.” She said that she experienced her pimp as “mature, [and] good looking. I was very much in love, and he made me feel understood, telling me how beautiful I was.”

Participants who experienced love-bombing said that initially, the pimp was caring, compassionate, warm, and welcoming, especially during the first two to three months. One participant stated, “The first three months we were together, very attentive, always seemed to care about my needs or wants, did nice things for me.” Another participant described how her pimp would visit her during her overnight shifts at work and spend hours listening to her, stating, “I was crazy about him; he was romantic, kind, thought he was too good to be true.” Some participants said that when they look back on their experiences with the pimp, they realize now that the pimp entered the relationship with the intention of exploiting the participant, explicitly referring to the experience with the pimp as “grooming.”

Grooming Tactic 2: Housing/Financial Aid

Eight women described how their pimps targeted them by offering financial help or housing. Five participants, all under the age of 18 at the time of grooming/recruitment, were in foster care or living on the streets. Four participants were homeless at the time of grooming, one participant was residing in a motel, and five participants were exiting a program or institution (domestic violence shelter, jail, or detox program).

One participant explained that she and her children were on the bus when they first met the man who would go on to become her trafficker, and they “*were living at a DV shelter that only let you stay six weeks.*” She had nowhere to go, and her pimp offered to pay for a motel room for her and her children. Some participants believed that the pimp was going to rescue them and take care of them. Another participant shared that she was using drugs, homeless, and living on the streets. She met her pimp through a family friend and started cleaning his house. He invited her to move in with him. She felt that “God sent [her] this savior.” This tactic engendered dependence: some women felt they had no choice and did not question the offers, whereas others genuinely believed that this was an opportunity to establish themselves in a safe environment.

Grooming Tactic 3: Use of Drugs

Eight participants described the use of drugs as a grooming tactic. Five participants were using drugs prior to meeting their pimp, and seven said that drugs were provided by either the pimps or his network during the *grooming stage*. Multiple participants provided examples of how drugs were used to be “helpful” when they were non-users and how they became hooked/addicted at that point.

The majority of participants over the age of 25 were using drugs prior to meeting their pimps. The younger participants were introduced to drugs by their pimps or their recruiter. One participant, who was exploited as a minor, said that she was “asked if she wanted to smoke weed.” She did not realize at that time that the drugs had strings attached. For those that were already addicted to substances, by supplying drugs, the pimps were seen as “helpful” and “kind” by the participants. Another participant explained that she used drugs her whole life, her money had run out, and she believed that the pimp and his associates were her only friends. By providing drugs or introducing the participants to drugs, the pimps created a dependence on the drugs, and in turn, on the pimp who supplied the drugs.

Grooming Tactic 4: Emotional Support/Business Relationship

Seven women told stories of how pimps initially provided emotional connection, safety, and a feeling of family for the participant. In these situations, participants described the pimp as “the only person I could depend on.” The distinction from Tactic 2 is that this group experienced no romantic connection between the pimp and themselves, and no gifts or romantic affection was offered by the pimp.

Two participants who experienced this tactic were in the foster care system when they first met their pimps. The participants shared that the pimps knew where these homes were and would wait for them. One participant disclosed that the pimp was “parked next to the [foster care group home] and started talking to” her. Though their pimps were much older, participants felt they were “a cool or nice guy, sweetheart” and “friends in business together.”

In some cases, the participants who had been exploited as minors had already resorted to exchanging sex for money when they met the pimp. When initiating a relationship, the pimps helped find purchasers as part of their grooming tactic while also providing emotional support and protection. One participant shared that she believed that she and her pimp “were going to be a team.” These pimps utilized their ability to provide connection and financial support to build trust and dependence. Once the relationship was established, the pimp then implemented the *recruitment stage*, where participants were actively forced, pressured or manipulated into a sustained and more relentless form of CSE.

Stage 2: Recruitment Tactics

Averaging about two months into the relationship, women ($n = 17$) identified a turning point or a hinge moment when the pimp transitioned from *grooming tactics* to *recruitment tactics* to coerce them into CSE. Fourteen participants said that the shift in behavior of the pimp occurred when they moved in with the pimp or developed a dependence on the relationship. Three *recruitment tactics* emerged: a) the use of establishing control via manipulation and blaming to coerce the woman into CSE; b) use of physical force to instill fear; c) and the expectation of payback through sex for support provided by the pimp (drugs, financial, housing, and emotional; see Table 3).

Additionally, this turning point was marked by two common themes. All participants reported fear; fear of the pimp, fear of losing the pimp, or fear of losing access to drugs – which ensured compliance. Eleven participants described a sudden disconnect between themselves and the pimp, creating an unexpected emotional void leading to efforts to reconnect including agreeing to CSE.

Recruitment Tactic 1: Localized Coercive Control

Almost two thirds of the participants ($n = 12$) described experiencing psychological or emotional manipulation, the most utilized *recruitment tactic* by pimps to establish themselves as a pimp in the relationship. Participants identified common tactics established in the coercive control literature such as intimidation, degradation, surveillance, microregulation and emotional manipulation. What separates these localized moments of coercive control from later chronic coercive control was the goal-oriented and temporal nature of these tactics; the participants described these instances as being characterized by a specific tactic or combination of tactics, geared to position her into CSE where the pimp did not relent until the women complied.

Participants discussed the overnight and unexpected change in their pimps and many were still struggling to understand what caused the shift in the pimp’s behavior. One participant experienced the change in her pimp when he shifted to “much more controlling, more degrading” behaviors, requiring her to “strip down, get in the bathroom,” and made her scrub herself with bleach, “letting [her] know who was in control.” Pimps sometimes executed this tactic in such a way that the participants believed that they consented to participate in CSE. One participant said that her pimp told her, “It would just be one time” because they needed the money, but he continued to bring men to the motel room using her drug use as the reason they needed so much money. Whether participants believed themselves to be willing or felt coerced, all felt confused by the change in their pimp’s behavior and that they had no other choice but to agree to his requests or demands.

Table 3. Recruitment Stage.

Recruitment Tactics	Frequency	%
Localized Coercive Control	12	63.16
Physical Force	10	52.63
Debt (Sex for Payback)	6	31.58

Recruitment Tactic 2: Physical Force

Over half the participants ($n = 10$) stated that their pimps used physical force to coerce them into the life of CSE. Examples of physical violence experienced by the participants toward themselves or their family members from their pimps included hitting, rape, grabbing by the hair, kidnapping, and slamming against the wall. One participant explained that things changed in the relationship when her pimp started showing attraction toward other girls, and he became physically violent toward her and gave her “black eyes” when she said something about it.

Another participant said, “he started to be mean, like something flipped, treating me like a dog, and put his hands on me.” In one example, a participant described an incident when she had missed a call from her pimp and when she returned home, he “jumped on me,” and the participant reported believing it was her fault. Notably, for all 10 participants, as soon as their pimp started to use physical violence in the relationship, the pimp also demanded that the participants participate in CSE.

Recruitment Tactic 3: Debt (Sex for Payback)

Six participants described experiencing an expectation of having sex to payback previous offerings/support in a bait-and-switch tactic. The pimp demanded sex because he had provided financial/housing support or drugs. Unknown to the participant, there was an expectation for payback requiring the participant to have sex with the pimp and/or other men. Participants stated that some pimps were open about the expectation that since they had been providing drugs or financial support, the participant needed to start contributing. Other pimps used manipulative tactics to force the participant to engage in CSE.

In one example, a participant said that her pimp told her it would only be one time because “they really needed the money.” Another participant shared her experience of being locked in a room and having “men coming in and out” once the pimp had told her that she owed him for the drugs he had provided. This power dynamic and dependence created by the pimp resulted in the participants’ entrapment in the commercial sex industry in order to continue having a place to live, regular access to addictive drugs, and/or having their emotional needs met.

Discussion

In this pilot study, we sought to understand the beginning stages of the pimp-victim relationship, and test whether the proposed framework of *predatory helpfulness* would be useful in explaining the lived experiences of CSE survivors. While we expected many women to identify “helpful” behaviors when they first met their pimp, to our surprise almost all of the participants narrated that they truly believed that their pimp intended to be helpful. Only one woman described an experience which was clearly negative from the onset. This belies the belief that physical force is involved from the initial contact with the trafficker. Rather, it appears it is likely that many young girls and women are groomed via seemingly genuine offers of help, and then physical force may begin when they are recruited by their pimps into the commercial sex trade. This also provides a framework for understanding the subtle coercion that gives the appearance that victims willfully engaged in commercial sex. These results shed light on otherwise invisible predatory behaviors, and the methodology we used to identify the behaviors suggests that we can incorporate this clinical assessment strategy systematically.

Historically, there has not been a term to describe the complexity during the early stages of grooming and recruitment in CSE. This research validates a growing understanding of the early stages of trafficking by focusing on the actions of the pimp; how by building connections, providing material goods, fulfilling emotional needs, and offering financial support, the pimps created a false belief that they cared, and their victims started to believe they were safe and desired via these *grooming tactics*. The pimp’s actions induced a life-altering sense of salvation and deliverance from the critical life issues that participants were facing.

When examining how pimps were predatory, we found four *grooming tactics* that systematically restructured the victim’s life toward reliance on the pimp. For those who experienced Love-bombing, the intensity and speed of the romantic seduction shifted the victim’s sense of identity and self-esteem

to hinge on the pimp's perceived opinion of her; in the cases of financial/housing aid, emotional/business relationships, and drugs, the victim's continued survival and access to addictive substances hinged on the pimp's willingness to assist them. All tactics seemed to offer a new lease on life for participants, although these offers were ultimately fraudulent in nature such that the pimps used "deceitful practice or willful device, resorted to with intent to deprive another of his right" (Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000[V-TVPA] 2000). The fraudulent nature of grooming is important because it highlights that women were legally trafficked, lending clarity to situations that have historically been difficult for professionals to identify as trafficking.

Once dependence was formed, pimps began to use *recruitment tactics* (physical violence, debt, and localized coercive control) to exploit this dependence and create fear in the woman. Seventeen participants discussed a distinct shift that preceded the pimp's request for CSE participation. This shift occurred relatively quickly; on average, the grooming process shifted into the *recruitment stage* after two months. One explanation for this rapid entrapment and the creation of these intense dependencies may be the result of the survival-level crises facing many of the women. Future research should explore the levels of preexisting distress and trauma and the efforts during *grooming* to understand how the dependencies were formed.

Eleven participants also spontaneously identified disconnect and a marked change in the pimp's regard for them following the shift, resulting in participants' fearing the trafficker would withdraw their affection or support unless the participants complied with the pimp. Intentionally creating emotional disconnect as a potentially separate tactic during the *recruitment stage* should be explored as a powerful way of creating submission. Women in our sample were able to identify this disconnect, even if the abusive techniques were not obvious to them in the moment. Since many women report being unable to initially detect abuse, it is critical that future research focuses on identifying other markers to reveal the deceptive nature of the pimp's behaviors in the early stages of the relationship.

During the shift and preceding entry into CSE, pimps used an overwhelming array of tactics that we have termed as localized coercive control. The introduction of these tactics indicated a clear turning point in the relationship and at the time, overwhelming the women until they agreed to CSE. Following this, some of these tactics morphed into chronic coercive control. We propose this timeline-driven application is specifically geared toward CSE, and that identifying it as such provides a framework for understanding how pimps entrap intended victims.

Some research documents that pimps use force rather than seduction to traffic women (Kranick, 2014; May et al., 2000; Rocha-Jiménez et al., 2018). With the exception of one participant, we did not find this pattern. Our findings suggest that tracking women's entrapment from *predatory helpfulness* to localized coercive control is a more systematic way to identify how women are trafficked. The context of grooming allows for a fuller understanding of the power of these intense, localized tactics, and demonstrates that they are enacted by a trusted ally or lover on whom the trafficked women's survival and well-being hinges. Future research could explore if these differing methods of fostering dependence result in divergent trauma symptomology or recovery trajectories.

Limitations

While a rich, contextualized understanding of the experiences of the individuals in the sample was afforded by the qualitative methods for this pilot study, the small sample size limits the capacity to generalize the findings (Atieno, 2009). It is our hope that this preliminary research will spur larger studies that undertake rigorous scientific examination of these concepts. A more geographically diverse population could explore the influence geographic location and culture may have on tactic frequency. An additional limitation of this study was the average age at the time of exploitation (25 years old) is older, and the majority of the participants (68%) identified as white/Caucasian. Studies with a larger and more diverse sample would allow for the generalization of our findings. Research in other populations, such as domestic violence survivors, cult survivors, and those who self-identify as consenting to sex work, is likewise highly encouraged. Participation was voluntary, which means there is a potential self-selection bias in participant reporting.

For example, participants who volunteer may have had more contact with social workers, and therefore potentially have had greater opportunity to process their experiences prior to this interview. Likewise, participants were retrospectively reporting on the events of interest; since these events occurred on average 11 years in the past, details and circumstances are potentially less accurate than if they had occurred more recently.

Despite these limitations, study findings strongly supported that the *Predatory Helpfulness* model captured women's lived experience, provided context of compliance and forced consent into CSE, and helped explain what might be otherwise undetected coercive behaviors or alternatively viewed as consensual behaviors. As a preliminary step to aid in the detection of these markers, we propose the 12-Question *Predatory Helpfulness* Screener (see [Appendix A](#)) as a resource for future researchers, clinicians, and legal actors. Reviewed and edited by both clinicians and survivors, at this preliminary level, the screener can be used clinically to detect the subtle deception utilized in *predatory helpfulness grooming tactics*, to identify the shift between *grooming tactics* and *recruitment tactics* in sex trafficking situations, and to establish which tactics were used to enact this shift. These markers can inform both treatment and legal strategy. We encourage the research and practice community to validate and refine the questions through their work to improve upon this first effort, particularly within the context of systemic inequality, societal attitudes, and current legal frameworks to allow for a more robust understanding of the phenomenon.

Implications

This study has important policy and practice implications. Currently, many legal, and social service systems penalize, shame, and blame CSE women. Law enforcement officials continue to arrest CSE women for prostitution. By arresting CSE women, we mirror the coercion present in the relationship with the pimp and validate his messaging that he is only one who will look after and protect her (Rhodes, 2019). Similarly, when CSE women resist treatment, they are considered non-compliant or are seen as having consented to participate in the sex trade by service providers (Rhodes, 2019).

Instead of forcing CSE women to participate in services and recreating the dynamics of coercion they have previously experienced, providers and legislators alike should understand the deep-rooted coercion beginning with predatory helpfulness and have sensitive expectations that do not penalize survivors if they do not complete services. In conclusion, by expanding the definition and stages of CSE to include the grooming and recruitment stages, we can move away from focusing on the risk factors of the woman to focusing on the predatory behaviors of the pimp.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendix A

12 Question Predatory Helpfulness Screener

These are guiding questions that should be reframed to best fit yours and your client's relationship

- (1) How old were you when you met them? (Indicate if client was a minor)
- (2) How old were they? (Indicate if trafficker was a minor)
- (3) Please tell me about what was going on in your life at the time you met your trafficker/boyfriend/name?
- (4) Were there things that you felt were not going well at that time in your life? Can you describe what you felt would improve your situation at the time, if anything?
- (5) How did you meet?
- (6) What can you tell me about how [NAME] acted when you first met? Did they do anything to help improve your situation during that time in your life?
 - (a) Love Bombing: Was it romantic? Can you recall if [NAME] did any of the following? (*E.g., shower you with affection and gifts, tell you that you were special/unique/beautiful, wanted to be with you forever*)
 - (b) Financial Housing: Did they offer to help you financially/offer a place to stay?
 - (c) Business Relationship/Emotional Support: Did [NAME] offer you a business opportunity or emotional support?
 - (d) Drugs: Did they introduce you to drugs/offer you drugs/buy drugs through them?
- (7) Did they make any promises to you that were unfulfilled? *Example: a place to live, gifts, marriage, Etc.*
- (8) Did they give you any reason why those promises were unfulfilled?
- (9) Can you recall/share the first instance they ask you to sell sex for money? Can you tell me what they did or said to influence your decision? (*Examples: demanded/threatened, said it would only be once/a favor, said you owed them, created a disconnected*)
- (10) How did you feel when they asked you? Were you shocked/surprised/didn't expect it?
- (11) Did you feel like you had a choice? Why or why not?
- (12) Can you identify if you experienced any of the following pressures?
 - (a) Forced physically or Threatened (Physical Force)
 - (b) Thought I owed them (Debt/Sex for Payback)
 - (c) Felt pressured/confused/wanted to make them happy (Localized Coercive Control)