



What is freedom?

Wales research briefing on a study defining 'freedom from modern slavery' by Juliana Semione

This study engaged UK and US participants from six locations over the question, 'What is freedom from slavery?' The Wales Anti-Slavery Leadership Group facilitated participation in Wales during Summer 2019. Participants were survivors of modern slavery and individuals who engage professionally in anti-slavery efforts.

This briefing is a summary of the Wales research findings.

Key research findings

Among participants from Wales, there is **little consensus** on a definition of freedom. Rather, six definitions of freedom were identified. Two are shared by a small number of participants:

- Freedom is having free will within normal societal constraints and being healed from the effects of modern slavery
- Freedom is determining your own way of life, beginning with choosing where you live and work

The additional four definitions of freedom were the personal perspectives of four individual participants. Their perspectives had little in common with one another or with the two definitions listed above.

These several and distinct conceptions represent a low level of agreement among Wales participants; there is no general consensus on the meaning of freedom. Furthermore, it is clear from interviews that local anti-slavery professionals do not regularly discuss the topic of freedom.

Why is this important?

Anti-slavery researchers and practitioners have long focused on defining and measuring modern slavery. However, little attention has been paid to how we define or measure freedom. Anti-slavery efforts around the world work to identify victims and support them toward 'freedom'. Many anti-slavery professionals and organisations say they do their daily work in the name of 'freedom'. But what does this mean? What is freedom?

This study allows UK and US anti-slavery stakeholders to better understand one another; to initiate meaningful

conversations around freedom; to better understand the substance of freedom; and to consider how we might begin to measure freedom in the future. This series of six research briefings is one output of the 'What is freedom?' study. The briefings are designed to provide each research site with localised findings so that individuals and anti-slavery organisations can share in those same benefits at the community level.

Local Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1: Discuss these findings with your clients, your peers, or other participants.** The findings from Wales indicate a low level of shared definition around freedom. Are there strengths and/or challenges to having such a variety of conceptions of freedom among the local anti-slavery community? Discuss freedom with others and do so often. Is it important to have a shared definition or definitions of freedom? Furthermore, there was no consensus around freedom between survivors and anti-slavery professionals in Wales. It is recommended that anti-slavery professionals explore this locally and include survivors in any ensuing conversations.
- **Recommendation 2: Share your thoughts on these findings.** Do you see your own perspective reflected in any of these definitions? What do the findings mean to you? Do you have insights from your local work or experience that could provide further context for these findings? *Your reflections are very welcome. Contact information is above.*
- **Recommendation 3: Consider what these findings mean for you.** Do you think of your work primarily in terms being against modern slavery, or for freedom? Do you see new connections between freedom and the work of others? If you work with survivors, ask how these findings resonate with their ideas about freedom. If you are a survivor, consider sharing your perspective on freedom with local service providers.
- **Recommendation 4: Imagine how you would measure freedom.** Is there value in measuring freedom for the local anti-slavery community? If so, how might these findings help anti-slavery professionals and survivors in Wales measure freedom or gauge the success of programmes?

Research overview

This study took place at six sites—three in the US and three in the UK. There were a total of 73 participants. Of these, 43 were from US sites and 30 were from UK

sites. Nine individuals in Wales participated. Of these nine, three were direct victim service providers, four were law enforcement professionals, and two were survivors.

This study used Q methodology to understand how individual participants define freedom and how their definitions compare or contrast to one another across locations and between countries. The aim of the study is to learn what definitions of 'freedom' exist among individuals in the anti-slavery field—not to define freedom legally or philosophically.

Participants were given a deck of 49 cards, each displaying a different possible answer to the question, 'What is freedom from slavery?'¹ They sorted these into three piles according to their level of agreement with the cards: Agree, Neutral, and Disagree. Participants then sorted the cards onto a grid, which required them to rank them in relationship to the other cards in the deck. This process is called 'Q sorting'. Each participant was also interviewed.

The results were analysed using KADE, software designed to show patterns and differences among Q sorts. Key elements of the Wales research findings are described below. They are based on KADE results and on interviews with participants.

Freedom is having free will within normal societal constraints and being healed from the effects of modern slavery

This definition of freedom represents the viewpoints of three law enforcement professionals (33.3% of Wales participants).

For these individuals, the most important quality of freedom is that survivors have 'free will, or the ability to do things without feeling controlled, coerced, pressured, or forced to do so'. But this necessarily exists within the societal limitations that every person is subjected to—for instance, not causing harm to others. These societal limitations exist for the good of all people in society and support—rather than contradict—the anti-slavery movement. People cannot 'follow whatever values or moral authority' they choose without these limitations, otherwise 'we [would have to] let people enslave people.'

After free will, the second most important quality of freedom is that a survivor is 'healed from the damaging effects trafficking had', both physically and psychologically. These participants believe that 'healing means healing fully', that is, no longer 'suffering or experiencing the impact' of modern slavery. No other definitions of freedom from within the Wales participant group rate 'being healed' as a significant component of freedom.

Finally, these participants do not believe that freedom is merely an ideal. Freedom as they define it is

attainable for survivors of modern slavery.

Freedom is determining your own way of life, beginning with choosing where you live and work

This definition of freedom represents the viewpoints of two direct victim service providers (22.2% of Wales participants).

According to this definition, the most important element of freedom is that individuals have 'the right to choose where you live and where you work'. These choices must be independent of a perpetrator's influence, including the influence of being groomed for exploitation from a young age.

Beyond choosing where to live and work, survivors should be able to '[determine their] own way of life, as long as it does not negatively affect others'. This includes a variety of decisions regarding their lifestyles, goals, character, and general life decisions. Furthermore, they should be able to make these determinations 'without fear'.

Both of these participants said that freedom may require a 'process of adjusting to not being trafficked and being less impacted by your ... experience', but the process itself is not freedom.

Four individuals had standalone definitions of freedom

Four individuals held definitions of freedom that had little in common with one another or with the two definitions described above. These participants include one direct victim service provider, one law enforcement professional and two survivors (44.4% of Wales participants). As Q methodology looks for patterns, these definitions have been recorded but are not included in this briefing.

It is not uncommon in Q methodology for some study participants to fall outside of the patterns that emerge. However, 44.4% represents an unusually high number of participants. Multiple anti-slavery professionals said in interviews that they do not regularly discuss freedom with their colleagues. Survivors' support needs and operational multi-agency matters are common topics of conversation, but 'freedom' itself is not. This may account for some of the diversity of views that emerged from the Wales-based research.

Furthermore, there was very little in common between the definitions held by survivor participants and those held by anti-slavery professionals. Whilst it is not unusual for at least one survivor to have a standalone definition of freedom at each of this study's six locations, it is worth noting that no consensus between survivors and anti-slavery professionals was found in Wales.

¹ A PDF file containing this deck of cards (the 'Q sample') can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/y4cg3otg>