



What is freedom?

Scotland research briefing on a study defining ‘freedom from modern slavery’¹

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This study engaged UK and US participants from six locations over the question, ‘What is freedom from slavery?’ Research took place in Scotland—largely in the Glasgow area—during Summer 2019. Participants were survivors of human trafficking and individuals who engage professionally in anti-trafficking efforts. This briefing is a summary of the Scotland-based findings.

Key research findings

Among participants from Scotland, there are four shared definitions of freedom. These are listed below.

- Freedom is having free will and shaping a future without reference to your past
- Freedom is the ability to act according to your own will rather than being compelled by your vulnerabilities
- Freedom is leading a life you love with no fear
- Freedom is the ability to shape who you are and to be dignified by others

Together, these definitions represent the perspectives of 85.7% of participants based in Scotland.

Why is this important?

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

This study allows UK and US anti-trafficking 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-trafficking 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.** Defining freedom is only a fruitful exercise if we engage with one another over the topic. Discuss freedom with others and do so often. Does your definition of freedom differ from those of your peers and colleagues? How so, and why might that be?
- **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* human trafficking, 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-trafficking community? If so, how might these findings help anti-trafficking professionals and survivors in Scotland measure freedom or gauge the success of programs?

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, 30 were from UK sites and 43 were from US sites. At least 20 individuals from Glasgow and the surrounding area were invited to participate; 14 individuals agreed to do so. Of these 14, eight were direct victim service providers, two were law enforcement professionals, and four 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-trafficking 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?’² 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, requiring them to rank the statements in smaller sets and further specify their level of agreement with each card. This process is called *Q sorting*. Each participant was then interviewed.

The results were analysed using software called KADE. Key elements of the local research findings are described below. They are based on KADE results and participant interviews.

Freedom is having free will and shaping a future without reference to your past

This definition of freedom is shared by two service providers, one law enforcement professional and one survivor (28.6% of local participants).

For these participants, the most important aspect of freedom is 'having free will, or the ability to do things without feeling controlled, coerced, pressured, or forced to do so'. This includes being free from the influence of threats for *not* acting in a certain way. Free will extends to a survivor being able to make any choice—even if a support worker would consider it a 'poor' choice.

The second most important aspect of freedom is the ability to build or shape a future without reference to a past experience of human trafficking. To accomplish this, survivors must be 'healed from the damaging effects trafficking had ... and healed from the physical harm that trafficking did', which involves both physical and mental healing. (Free will, as described above, is one result of mental healing.)

A survivor who is healed in this whole-person way will be able to move forward in their life never seeing themselves as a slave and never accepting slavery, refusing to let a trafficking experience in the past devastate or cripple their life, and will be able to live a day without reference to the physical and psychological experience of trafficking. In short, their future will not 'reflect' their past.

The ability to act according to your own will rather than being compelled by your vulnerabilities

This definition of freedom is shared by one service provider and one survivor (14.3% of local participants).

These participants acknowledged that 'vulnerabilities' change over time and can look different in different people's lives. However, freedom is the ability to act and make decisions without reference to those vulnerabilities. A person who is free from modern slavery will be able to 'live without fear' of their vulnerabilities being exploited in the future; be able to do what they want and go where they want without interference from others; be 'protected in the areas of life where [they] are vulnerable'; no longer have to make choices they don't like just to survive; and be

able to defend themselves against people who try to limit their well-being, dominate them or traffic them.

Additionally, compared to all the other definitions of freedom to emerge from the Scotland-based research, this definition places a very high value on '[knowing] your heritage, culture, or origins and to be able to connect to other people who are like you'. This includes being able to understand and take personal ownership of religious beliefs.

Finally, in contrast to the definition under the previous heading, this definition places low importance on 'being healed from the damaging effects' of trafficking.

Leading a life you love with no fear

This definition of freedom is shared by three service providers and one survivor (28.6% of local participants).

For these participants, freedom is not a 'process of adjusting to not being trafficked and being less impacted by [a] trafficking experience', nor is it the ability to act without interference from others. Rather, to be free is 'to enjoy being alive or to feel there is a reason to be alive' and 'to live without fear'. Human trafficking robs victims of joy and causes fear to dominate their lives.

This definition of freedom also values 'being able to make decisions in your own right and on your own terms' but, to these participants, freedom is more than merely having choices—freedom is choosing to do 'what you love'. Similarly, this definition of freedom includes 'to be able to get the basic things you need to live a healthy and normal life', but enjoying life is a significantly higher priority than having a 'normal life'.

The ability to shape who you are and to be dignified by others

This definition of freedom is shared by one service provider and one survivor (14.3% of local participants).

The single most important aspect of freedom is 'choosing your own lifestyle and shaping your own character'. This is an act of 'free will' and represents psychological freedom. Furthermore, embracing values or morals is 'core' to what it means to be human, so a person who can 'follow whatever values or moral authority [they] choose' is shaping a fundamental element of who they are. Importantly, though, a person must be constrained in determining their 'own way of life' inasmuch as it 'does not negatively affect others'.

'To have dignity [or] to have your humanity recognised by others' is also important to freedom. Dignity 'cannot be replaced by anything else' in society. Dignity itself is valuable but so are its implications. For instance, people who are shown dignity by others will not experience the threat or 'fear of negative consequences' for leaving a place, person, or a job.

¹ The term used to describe human trafficking in this study is 'modern slavery'. This is because the University of Nottingham is located in England, where 'modern slavery' is synonymous with what is meant by 'human trafficking' in Scotland.

² A PDF file containing this deck of cards (the 'Q sample') can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/y4cg3otg>