

Webinar summary

Survivor Engagement Expert Talks

Foundations of survivor engagement: Connecting and mobilizing people with lived experience

This episode, part of a **six-episode series** on survivor engagement in anti-trafficking work, explored the foundations of survivor engagement.

Featured Expert: Flora Enifo, Co-founder and Community Manager at MIST, France

Flora emphasizes the importance of **meaningful, responsible participation** by survivors, and outlines key reflections that organizations must consider when engaging with individuals with lived experience.

Flora stresses that survivor engagement must go **beyond trends and tokenism**, aiming for genuine participation that aligns with the survivor's interests and values.

She highlights the need for **safe, adaptable spaces** where survivors feel supported, respected, and empowered. The process involves deep questioning and reflection, asking key questions like: *Who are the survivors we are engaging with? How do we ensure that their participation is meaningful?*

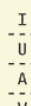
A central point Flora makes is that survivors do not have *superpowers*. They cannot be expected to solve all problems, and organizations must avoid instrumentalizing their experiences. Instead, survivors must be offered the tools, knowledge, and opportunities to build their own capacities.

Power dynamics are another crucial aspect of engagement. Giving survivors the power to make decisions, set boundaries, and decide how they wish to participate is key to their meaningful involvement.

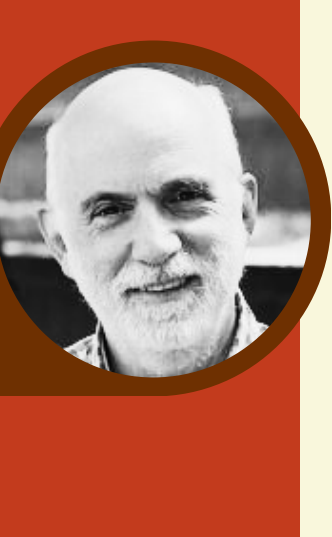
Flora also emphasizes that survivor engagement should allow for **disengagement** when necessary, as engagement is a process and should not be treated as a lifelong commitment. Organizations must respect survivors' needs for flexibility and growth, and their participation should never feel forced.

Flora also distinguishes between **survivor engagement and peer mentoring**, noting that while peer mentoring can be a valuable form of participation, it is not the only way and it's not for everyone. Unlike peer mentoring, which has more hierarchical power dynamics, Survivor engagement focuses on empowering survivors to participate in decision-making and drive **systemic change** through **power-sharing**.

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Survivor Engagement Expert Talks

Therapeutic complexity and how principles of resilience and trauma transformation can enhance survivor engagement practices

This episode, part of a six-episode series on **survivor engagement** in anti-trafficking work, explored therapeutic complexity, resilience, and trauma transformation.

Featured Expert: Professor Renos K. Papadopoulos, clinical psychologist, Jungian psychoanalyst, and expert in refugee care.

Professor Papadopoulos introduced the **Adversity Grid**, a framework that helps professionals approach trauma survivors by considering three critical dimensions:

1. **Damage from adversity:** Recognizing the profound pain, suffering, and trauma caused by adverse experiences such as trafficking, torture, and exploitation.
2. **Retained strengths:** Acknowledging the strengths and dignity that survivors retain despite their suffering. This aligns with Papadopoulos's definition of resilience, emphasizing what individuals have preserved through adversity.
3. **Adversity-activated development:** Highlighting new strengths and capabilities that survivors develop as a direct result of overcoming their challenges.

Key insights:

- **Holistic approach:** Viewing survivors as whole individuals, not merely as "damaged goods," to avoid reinforcing a victim identity that can lead to passivity and dependence. Instead, professionals should foster survivors' agency and empower them to recognize their resilience and strengths.

- **Balance between trauma and strength:** Effective support involves addressing trauma while also focusing on survivors' existing and newly developed strengths. Overemphasis on either aspect risks either neglecting the survivor's pain or diminishing their resilience and positive transformation.
- **Ethical sensitivity:** The need for therapeutic sensitivity to address each dimension appropriately, depending on the survivor's emotional state and context.

Practical applications in anti-trafficking work:

- **Empowerment** comes from a nuanced balance of acknowledging the negative effects from adversity, retaining survivor dignity, and fostering a sense of agency
- Professionals must remain vigilant about **systemic violence** while creating programs that allow survivors to actively contribute to their recovery and growth.
- Survivors should be seen as **co-experts** in their recovery process, and their lived experiences should inform support practices.

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Ethical and responsible research with lived experience of trafficking

This episode, part of a six-episode series on **survivor engagement** in anti-trafficking work, explored the transformative potential of involving survivors in research.

Featured Expert: Michela Semprebon, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Parma, Italy

Michela Semprebon shared insights on the role of universities in anti-trafficking research and the ethical considerations when engaging individuals with lived experience.

Key Highlights:

1. Research centers' role in survivor engagement

- Research centers must adopt a public sociology stance to create alliances with non-academic actors and survivors.
- Research should involve knowledge co-production, empowering participants at every stage—from design to dissemination.

Such practices ensure the research is both meaningful and empowering, challenging social inequalities and amplifying survivor voices.

2. Ethical considerations in survivor-involved research

- Decolonial perspective: Acknowledge power imbalances between researchers and participants.
- Informed consent: Ensure ongoing consent and avoid coercion.
- Avoiding sensationalism: Focus on structural inequalities rather than personal trauma narratives.
- Compassionate engagement: Listen empathetically and provide practical support where possible.
- Language and representation: Use non-stigmatizing terms, involve survivors in the writing process, and explore creative methods like art and imagery to convey their experiences.

3. Critical university studies perspective

- Research should resist academic pressures that prioritize rapid publication over co-production of knowledge. Collaborative, respectful research practices are vital for ensuring survivor voices are heard and valued.

The webinar underscored the importance of co-producing knowledge that amplifies survivor voices, challenges systemic power asymmetries, and drives meaningful change.

