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Why IPA Has Launched a Human Trafficking Research Initiative (and What's Next)

In recent years, human trafficking has captured the public's attention. Activists and service providers share stories of terrible atrocities committed by traffickers in crimes ranging from commercial sexual exploitation to forced labor on fishing vessels and in palm plantations, forced marriage and abuses in domestic servitude, forced child begging, and more. Increased economic uncertainty and unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded with the existing humanitarian and environmental crises, are likely to push more vulnerable individuals into risky migration and increase incidences of human trafficking in the coming months and years.

Policymakers and civil society groups have been working for decades to reduce instances of human trafficking through prevention, protection, prosecution, policy, and partnership efforts. Many advances have been made in putting necessary frameworks and laws into place, such as the widespread ratification of the Palermo Protocol, which establishes an international definition of trafficking in persons and enhances international cooperation to prosecute trafficking crimes and assist victims of trafficking. However, more needs to be done within the human trafficking field to critically examine current counter-trafficking interventions and strengthen the evidence base for effective interventions to reduce trafficking and support survivors.

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Through funding from the US Department of State's Program to End Modern Slavery, IPA has established the Human Trafficking Research Initiative (HTRI), which is dedicated to supporting the generation of rigorous research on counter-trafficking programs and strategies to inform future counter-trafficking interventions. Guided by scientific advisors [Guy Grossman](#) and [Cecilia Hyunjung Mo](#) and led by human trafficking expert [Jeni Sorensen](#), HTRI will generate actionable findings and produce high-quality studies by encouraging cooperation across a multidisciplinary network of leading researchers from public health, law, criminology, psychology, political science, sociology, public policy, and economics. HTRI will

foster partnerships between researchers and practitioners; initiate formative pilot testing of programs; and conduct large-scale studies on efforts to prevent trafficking, prosecute traffickers, and protect trafficked persons.

What We're Doing Now

To cultivate early-stage projects, HTRI has opened a call for seed funding for partnership building, pilots, and data analysis. These grants will help researchers and implementers start conversations about how to measure anti-trafficking impact, pave the way for larger research projects, and provide space for researchers to explore existing data for new insights. We believe this is a crucial step for evidence strengthening. If you are interested in applying for this opportunity, please see our [announcement](#).

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In the next two years, IPA will release two to three larger competitive funding opportunities. We expect to grant about \$3 million in total research funding. We will fund large, rigorous trials to understand the best way to combat human trafficking in all its forms.

If you are interested in collaborating with HTRI as a partner organization or researcher, please reach out to us at ipa_htri@poverty-action.org.

What We Hope to Do

HTRI will continuously compile learnings from these projects and internal HTRI research and generate shared resources, both information about combatting trafficking and best practices for researching human trafficking. We look forward to working with partners to build up their programs using evidence-supported research about what works.

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