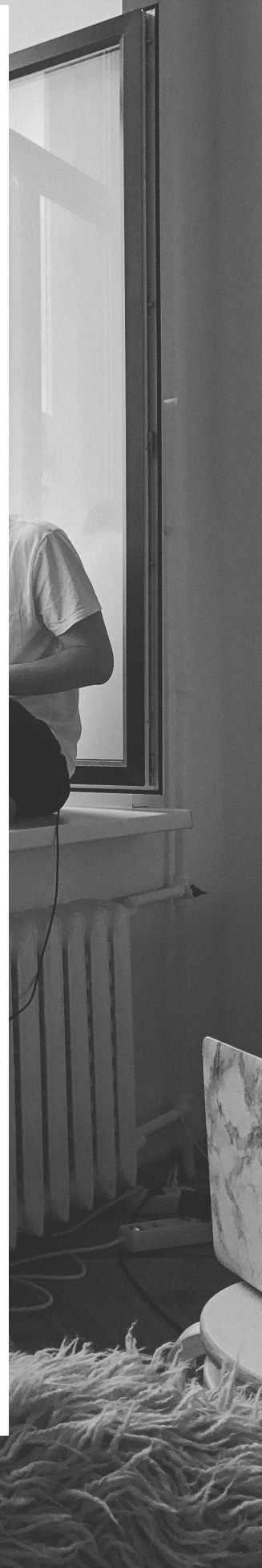


Crisis in Human Trafficking During the Pandemic

A Snapshot: April 2020

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happens
now.



Background

Over the last few months, Polaris has been carefully tracking the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on victims and survivors of sex and labor trafficking. As part of this effort, Polaris has undertaken a systematic examination of relevant data from the Polaris-operated U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline. The analysis compares a post-shelter-in-place period to two deliberately chosen pre-shelter-in-place periods (see box below). Daily numbers of trafficking situations in various categories in the different pre-shelter-in-place periods were compared with the post-shelter-in-place period using independent sample t-tests. A t-test is used to examine if differences in the average values between two groups is likely to represent an actual difference rather than one that arose as a result of chance variations. In this analysis, significant findings were noted if differences against both time periods were significant at $p < 0.05$ levels (a standard level used in social science research, indicating a less than 5 percent probability that the difference is due to chance).

It is important to note the limitations to this analysis. First, this is an exploration of correlation and not causation, meaning that the findings are not proof that the changes are caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, the Trafficking Hotline exists to assist victims and survivors of human trafficking, and data is gathered only for the purpose of providing that assistance; therefore, every caller is not asked the exact same questions, contributing to possible measurement variation. Finally, data in the pre-shelter-in-place data sets are “clean”, meaning they have been reviewed and categorized. As Polaris works to respond on a 24-7 basis to the increased urgent needs of callers, we have not finished cleaning the most recent data set, which may change upon further review or case follow-up.

This brief is the first in a planned series presenting timely analysis and evidence to guide efforts to respond to emerging needs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Time Periods

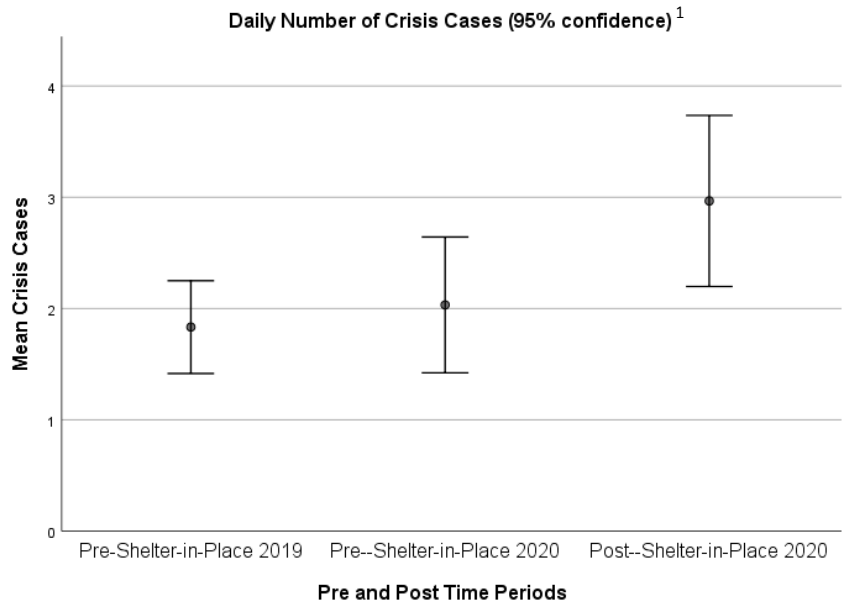
- **Pre-shelter-in-place 2019:** April 1st - April 30th, 2019
- **Pre-shelter-in-place 2020:** Feb 14th - March 15th, 2020
- **Post-shelter-in-place 2020:** April 1st - April 30th, 2020

The analysis looks at three distinct 30-day time periods, selected based on the first shelter in place orders put in place on March 15th in San Francisco, CA. By March 30th, most states that eventually enacted a shelter in place order had done so; thus, April 1-30th was selected as the post-shelter-in-place period.

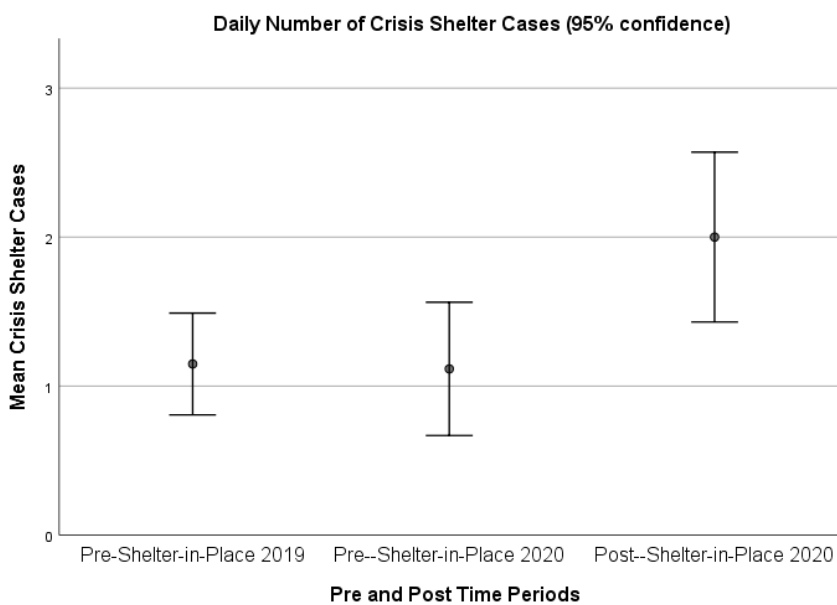
Findings

This analysis highlights findings focused specifically on crisis calls to the Trafficking Hotline.

When comparing post-shelter-in-place time with pre-shelter-in-place time in 2019 and 2020, **the number of crisis trafficking situations increased by more than 40 percent** - from approximately 60 in a 30-day period to 90. Crisis situations are those in which some assistance - such as shelter, transportation, or law enforcement involvement - is needed within 24 hours.



The number of **situations in which people needed immediate emergency shelter nearly doubled** (from around 29 in pre-shelter-in-place periods to 54 in April 2020).



In March 2020, Polaris conducted a survey of service providers to whom we actively refer crisis cases to assess their expectations of service impact as a result of COVID-19.² Of the 80 providers who responded before beginning of April, **50 percent were either considering or already implementing measures that would limit receiving referrals**, and another four percent had already stopped accepting any new referrals.

¹ A 95% confidence interval is the range of values in which we can expect, with 95% certainty, to find the true average for the number of cases in this category.

² Note that this survey is not representative of all Polaris's referral partners and findings are only presented to provide some initial indications of potential reduced capacities to meet increasing demands.

Policy

Recommendations

Housing insecurity is a leading indicator of vulnerability to human trafficking. Policies that help people stay in their homes or get access to housing will help to prevent trafficking. Efforts to stay eviction orders or delay eviction hearings, offer rent and mortgage relief, cover utility payments, and provide temporary housing will all help to reduce immediate vulnerability.

In the medium to longer term, efforts to address the economic impacts of COVID-19 should **prioritize housing for vulnerable individuals, families and communities** - not only those who are currently homeless, but also those on the precipice of becoming homeless including young people who are aging out of the child welfare or foster care system.

Additional resources at the federal, state, and local level for service providers will be critical to filling the immediate needs of trafficking victims and survivors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Needs include **emergency shelter, food, transportation, medical and behavioral health treatment and medication, and more**, as well as resources to continue operating the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline to connect victims and survivors to help and support.

