



## **Stigma in Justice: Survivor Experts' Recommendations on Survivor Engagement**

As part of our work combating stigma in justice systems, we shared a short survey with our Survivor Experts following the onboarding session to gather feedback. The survey was designed to better understand how we can ensure any future sharing of experiences or information within the project feels safe, respectful, and useful for all participants.

The intended respondents were Survivor Experts participating in the project. The survey invited them to reflect on their comfort levels with sharing personal insights, and to offer input on how the process of requesting information could be improved. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, with respondents encouraged to share only what they felt comfortable disclosing.

### **Survey Questions and Summary of Responses**

#### **Sharing experiences and information during the project**

Thinking about times when you've been asked to share experiences or stories in past projects (e.g. surveys, interviews, focus groups):

#### **1. What helped you feel safe, supported, or respected?**

Summary of responses:

- **Trauma-informed and Survivor-Centred Approach:** Feeling safe and respected was linked to facilitators understanding trauma, allowing choice in sharing, and respecting boundaries.
- **Empowerment through Contribution:** Respondents felt valued when their lived experiences were treated as essential knowledge for shaping justice processes, leading to co-creation and solution-building.
- **Clear Communication and Consent:** Transparency about how stories would be used, who would access them, and the project's purpose built trust and reduced anxiety.
- **Support Mechanisms:** Aftercare, follow-up support, and access to mental health and psychological support reinforced emotional safety.
- **Respectful Recognition:** Compensation was seen as an acknowledgement of survivors' expertise, time, insight, and energy, demonstrating that their inclusion is structural and intentional.

## 2. Was there anything in those experiences that felt uncomfortable or extractive, or that you would not want repeated?

Summary of responses:

- **Extractive Sharing:** Experiences felt uncomfortable or extractive when deeply personal stories were requested without clear purpose, follow-up, or commitment to healing, justice, or long-term change, often leaving survivors excluded from outcomes or uninformed about how their input was used.
- **Lack of Actionable Impact:** Disappointment arose when reports or findings generated through survivor sharing were not used to influence policy, shift practice, or amplify demands, contributing to fatigue and disillusionment.
- **Insufficient Support and Recognition:** A lack of psychological or emotional support after participation, and the expectation to provide time, energy, and emotional labour without fair recognition or compensation, reinforced power imbalances.
- **Inadequate Consent and Boundaries:** Instances where consent was rushed or not fully informed, and the lack of clear boundaries or ongoing support when asked to share stories, were problematic.
- **Time Constraints:** Some sessions felt rushed, limiting the ability of participants to fully express their perspectives, especially on deeply complex or sensitive issues.

## 3. What should we avoid doing when asking for survivor input?

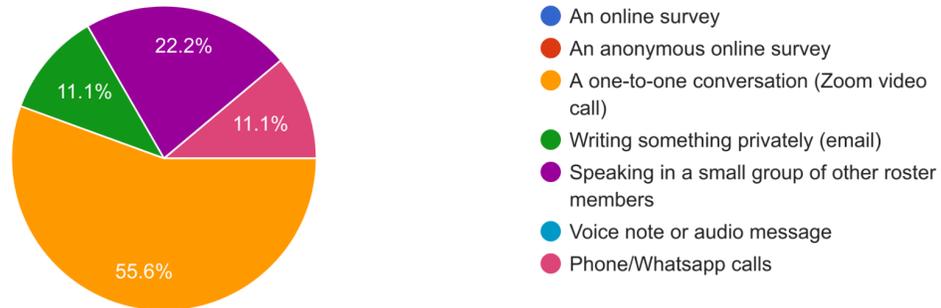
Summary of responses:

- **Respectful Engagement:** Avoid treating survivors as mere sources of information, extracting their stories without clear action pathways, or pressuring them to share beyond their comfort levels.
- **Preventing Retraumatization:** Do not ask survivors to relive painful experiences without support, content warnings, or informed consent.
- **Equitable Reciprocity:** Do not expect survivors to participate without compensation, recognition, or follow-up, and avoid one-sided engagement where they give but receive nothing in return.
- **Inclusive Communication:** Avoid making assumptions about survivors' needs or wants, using academic or legal jargon, and excluding them from decision-making spaces after collecting their input.
- **Authentic Partnership:** Avoid summarising, reframing, or interpreting survivor input through a professional or institutional lens unless explicitly invited to do so.

#### 4. Regarding participants' preferred format for sharing information and feedback:

If we do ask you to share during this project, how would you prefer to do that? What's the format or setting that works best for you?

9 responses



#### 5. Is there anything else you want to tell us about what would make this process feel more safe, respectful, and useful for you?

Summary of responses:

- **Co-creation & Trauma-informed Approach:** Emphasis on the need for a trauma-informed, survivor-centred, and co-created approach at every stage, valuing lived experiences as expertise, involving survivors in design, implementation, and validation, and ensuring they are listened to, included in decision-making, and supported.
- **Safety & Support:** Importance of emotional safety, clear communication, mental health support, and ensuring participation does not retraumatise. This includes respecting pace, boundaries, and preferred ways of engaging, and offering check-ins, optional debriefs, and space to step back.
- **Inclusivity & Recognition:** Need to recognise and affirm the diversity of survivor experiences, particularly for those long silenced or marginalised, and to ensure fairness in recognition through respectful compensation and acknowledgement.
- **Transparency & Impact:** It would be helpful to ensure survivors are kept informed about how their contributions are used and that project outcomes are actively used to transform justice systems and reduce stigma.
- **Time & Respectful Engagement:** Allow more time for deeper dialogue to surface insights beyond personal stories, offering different ways to engage (anonymous, written, intermediaries), respecting pace and boundaries.
- **Ongoing Support & Communication:** Ensure continuous communication about how contributions are used and that project outcomes are actively applied, not shelved.
- **Fair Recognition:** Provide respectful compensation, acknowledgement, and continued engagement to restore dignity and accountability.
- **Specifics for Engagement:** Offer contracts with specific tasks and deadlines.