Implementing Human Trafficking Law and Policy
Implications for Survivors

ALICIA PETERS, Associate Professor of Anthropology
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12:00 – 1:00 PM
Columbia University School of Social Work
1255 Amsterdam Avenue, Room 1109

RSVP required: https://cupop.formstack.com/forms/rsvp

The U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act criminalizes the forced or deceptive movement of people into exploitative conditions of labor and provides protections for victims. While the law applies to women and men, children and adults, international and domestic victims, and compelled commercial sex and forced labor, human trafficking in the United States has become synonymous with ‘sex trafficking’ and youth prostitution. Despite evidence that 50 percent or more of individuals trafficked in the U.S. have been forced into sectors other than commercial sex and a significant number of them are men, the idea of an imagined prototypical victim persists – that of a young girl, forced into prostitution at the hands of a ruthless pimp, who has been beaten or branded and held in the most extreme conditions imaginable. This talk explores the ways in which this construction is incorporated into the application of the law resulting in the invisibility of the many victim-survivors who do not fit this image. Drawing on ethnographic examples from her new book and ongoing research, Peters will examine how survivor accounts challenge this system of meaning and discuss potential policy changes that privilege survivor experience.

Alicia Peters, PhD, is associate professor of anthropology and affiliated faculty in the Women's and Gender Studies Program at the University of New England. Professor Peters earned her PhD in 2010 from Columbia University’s program in sociomedical sciences and anthropology. Her research examines how cultural understandings of gender and sexuality influence conceptions of human trafficking and the implementation of U.S. anti-trafficking law and policy. She is the author of the book, Responding to Human Trafficking: Sex, Gender, and Culture in the Law, published as part of the Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights series by the University of Pennsylvania Press. She has received grants from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the National Science Foundation, and the National Institute of Justice to conduct her research.