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Moving Past Victimization and Trauma Toward Restoration: Mother Survivors of Sex Trafficking Share Their Inspiration

Monica Faulkner[1*], Neely Mahapatra[2], Laurie Cook Heffron[1], Maura Busch Nsonwu[3], Noël Busch-Armendariz[1]

Little research examines the experiences of victims of sex trafficking after they have been rescued and only a handful of studies collected primary data from these victims. This qualitative study involved in-person interviews with immigrant sex trafficking victims. Findings reveal that female victims face challenges similar to transnational mothers; they experience separation and their role as mothers is largely focused on self-sacrifice. Findings also suggest that it is important for practitioners to understand that female immigrant sex trafficking victims who are mothers may have a strong commitment to their children that may assist them toward restoration and looking toward the future.

Human trafficking victims are forced into slavery for domestic servitude, labor industries, street peddling, agricultural work, restaurant services, factory work, and/or for sexual exploitation (prostitution, strip clubs, peep shows, etc.) (Bales & Lize, 2005; Busch-Armendariz, Nsonwu, Cook Heffron, & Mahapatra, 2013). In the United States and internationally, sex trafficking is the fastest growing form of human trafficking (Hodge, 2008; Macy & Johns, 2011; United Nations, 2002) primarily because of the demand for paid sexual services. While the United States is a destination country for sex trafficking victims, exact numbers of individuals trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation are unknown (Macy & Johns, 2011). However, the U.S. Department of Justice estimates that 82% of suspected trafficking cases are classified as sex trafficking (Banks & Kyckelhahn, 2011).

The impact of sex trafficking as a human rights, criminal justice, and public health issue is garnering increased attention by advocates and scholars because of its impact on victims and communities (Raymond & Hughes, 2001; World Health Organization, 2000). Sex trafficking victims experience physical violence, long-term emotional distress, and health problems (Busch-Armendariz, et al., 2013; Decker, Silverman, & Raj, 2007; Hodge, 2008; Macy & Johns, 2011; Raymond & Hughes, 2001). As sex trafficking victims are more likely to be women (Macy & Johns, 2011), sex trafficking is recognized by the World Health Organization as a form of violence against women (WHO, 2000). The WHO has noted that trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation has likely increased the global spread of HIV/AIDS.

Despite the impact of sex trafficking there is little empirical information about victims of sex trafficking. Indeed much of the literature focuses on debates on how best to estimate the number of trafficking victims rather than how to serve victims. Different agencies, governments, and advocates use estimates to account for the lack of systemic data collection (Feingold, 2010). Much of the information on trafficking, and sex trafficking, in particular, involves moral debates about definitions and differences between prostitution and sex trafficking (Laczko, 2005; Zhang, 2009). Rather than engage in an ongoing debate about human trafficking estimates and definitions, this research contributes to existing literature by listening to the needs of trafficking victims as they report. There is also limited information regarding victims of sex trafficking to inform service delivery models (Macy & Johns, 2011). Additionally, there is still little information about the wellbeing and needs of victims once they are identified and rescued (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2013; Logan, Walker, & Hunt, 2009; Macy & Johns, 2011). In particular, information about the long-term experiences of trafficking victims is nearly absent from the literature. In a comprehensive literature review of services for sex trafficking victims, Macy and Johns (2011) note the absence of literature on the unique needs of sex trafficking victims who are mothers.

[1] School of Social Work, The University of Texas at Austin, One University Station, D3500, Austin, TX 78712, [2] University of Wyoming, 1000 E University Ave, Laramie, WY 82071, [3] A & T State University, 1601 East Market Street, Greensboro, NC. *e-mail: mfaulkner@mail.utexas.edu

This study contributes to the existing literature by presenting information from in-depth interviews with victims of international sex trafficking who are mothers. Few studies have interviewed victims of trafficking living in the United States after their rescue (Aron, Zweig, & Newmark, 2006; Busch, Fong, Heffron, Faulkner, & Mahapatra 2007; Busch-Armendariz et al., 2008; Busch-Armendariz, Nsonwu, Cook Heffron, Hernandez, & Garza, 2009; The Florida State University Center for the Advancement of Human Rights, 2003). More often literature regarding trafficking involves interviews with service providers about the services victims need. Thus, the *voice of victims* is not readily represented in the literature on trafficking, specifically sex trafficking.

The current study involves a secondary analysis of 13 interviews conducted by Monica Faulkner and colleagues as part of an evaluation of a local human trafficking coalition in Austin, Texas, United States of America. Anti-trafficking coalitions have formed across the United States as service providers collaborate to advocate and coordinate services for victims of trafficking identified in their geographic area. The purpose of the larger program evaluation was to explore the effectiveness of the local collaboration in serving the needs of trafficking victims. Using the data from that larger program evaluation, the current study explores the experiences of immigrant sex trafficking victims who were also mothers.

Overview of Human Trafficking

The U.S. Department of State publishes an annual report providing updated estimates on the number of individuals suspected of being trafficked internationally. A recent report estimates that there are approximately 27 million trafficking victims worldwide (US State Department, 2011). However, there are no national or internationally representative statistics that document the exact number of victims trafficked to the United States every year because trafficking victims are difficult to identify (Brennan, 2005; Tyldum & Brunovskis, 2005). The United States Department of Justice has created a Human Trafficking Reporting System (HTRS) that is the only system currently used to collect information on trafficking investigations in the United States (Banks & Kyckelhahn, 2011). The HTRS is limited because it only captures data on trafficking victims whose cases were investigated by a federally funded law enforcement task force and currently contains information from only 527 victims. However, given the lack of information otherwise available, HTRS provides exploratory information about sex trafficking victims.

Based on HTRS data, 48.4% of sex trafficking cases involved adults and 40.4% of sex trafficking cases involved sexual exploitation of a child. Of these cases, 94% of the victims were female and only 13% were over the age of 25. More than half were Black and the majority were U.S. citizens. Only 17% of sex trafficking cases involved international victims (Banks & Kyckelhahn, 2011).

International data on trafficking suggest similar patterns to the United States data—80% of all trafficking victims are women and 50% children. That is, the majority of sex trafficking victims are women and many female victims are under the age of 18 years. While the United States government has called for more awareness of the possibility that male children are being trafficked into the sex industry (U.S. Department of State, 2008a), research suggests that girls and young women in impoverished countries are most likely to be victims of sex trafficking (Macy & Johns, 2011).

Trafficking Victims Protection Act

The United States has addressed human trafficking by enacting major legislation intended to prevent trafficking, prosecute perpetrators and assist victims of trafficking. The *Trafficking Victims Protection Act* (TVPA) was enacted in 2000 and has been reauthorized several times. Among other policy statements, the TVPA recognizes survivors of trafficking as victims of a crime rather than individuals who are in the United States without legal permission. TVPA defines trafficking as the "recruitment, harboring, transporting, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, slavery or forced commercial sex acts" (TVPA Section 103[8]).

Whether or not a victim is entitled to services authorized under the TVPA depends on that person being "certified" as a victim of human trafficking by a recognized official. A victim who is willing to cooperate with law enforcement and whose presence in the United States is necessary for her safety and/or prosecution of traffickers can be "certified" as a victim of trafficking (Bishop, 2003). Certification entitles the victim to certain federal and state programs such as Medicaid and food stamps. However, advocates working with victims of trafficking report the certification process to be slow and difficult for victims due to bureaucratic hurdles related to coordination among multiple agencies such as law enforcement and immigration (Busch, Fong,

Heffron, Faulkner, & Mahapatra, 2007).

Once a victim has been certified, he or she may apply for a T-Visa that allows permanent residency in the United States. Not only does the T-Visa allow victims to remain in the U.S. legally, it also provides a path for future citizenship and promotes family reunification—it permits victims to apply for a T-Visa for their children, spouse, parents, and unmarried siblings under the age of 18 (Busch-Armendariz, 2012). In the HRTS data presented above, only 90 of the 527 identified victims were in the United States without immigration documentation and of that number, 21 received T-Visas and more than half had paperwork that was still pending (Banks & Kyckelhahn, 2011).

Sex Trafficking in the United States

The U.S. State Department (2008a) identifies the United States as a destination country for international sex trafficking victims because of the demand for paid sexual services. Indeed, the United States is thought to be the second largest destination country behind Germany (Mizus, Moody, Privado, & Douglas, 2003). In general, international trafficking victims come to the United States from "source" countries in Central America, East Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and various other parts of Asia. Many victims are trafficked through Mexico that is considered a "transit" country. However, recent research has suggested that sex trafficking victims may be more likely to be trafficked from specific North and Central American countries, primarily Mexico and El Salvador (Clawson, Dutch, Salomon, & Grace, 2009; U.S. Department of Justice, 2008b).

Sex trafficking has become a large and profitable industry. Trafficking generates an estimated US $32 billion according to the International Labour organisation (ILO, 2005), but the exact amount is unknown. Although the extent of trafficking is largely unsubstantiated, the primary reason trafficking exists is demand (Feingold, 2005; U.S. State Department, 2011). In particular, the demand for paid sex, primarily driven by male consumers, encourages sex trafficking in the United States (Barry, 1984; Bishop & Robinson, 1998). Victims of trafficking are often coerced or forced into a trafficking situation based on poverty and gender discrimination in developing countries and the prospect of a better life in more industrialized countries (Everts, 2003). Globalization and the demand for paid sex have created a profitable industry that has become a large source of revenue for organized crime (U.S. Department of State, 2006).

Victims trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation may be forced to work in brothels, massage parlors, pornography sites, or other venues. In some cases, women may be coerced into the sex industry in order to remain in the country or "to buy their freedom" (McDonald, 1998). While in many cases, victims are moved between locations, cities, and states to avoid detection from law enforcement (Raymond, Hughes, & Gomez, 2001), trafficking does not have to include moving victims from one locality to another.

Impact of Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking victims may suffer long-term physical and psychological impacts from their experiences. Victims are often confined and have little to no freedom because of constant monitoring by their traffickers (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Typically, traffickers provide little nutritious food, expose victims to dangerous working conditions, and provide no means to prevent the spread of infectious disease (Spear, 2004). As a result, victims experience health problems such as sexually transmitted infections and urinary tract infections. As they are frequently exposed to physical violence, they are also likely to suffer physical injuries (Raymond & Hughes, 2001). In addition to health problems, victims of sex trafficking experience depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and panic attacks (Flowers, 2001; Raymond & Hughes, 2001). Even years after their rescue, victims report high rates of depression (Raymond & Hughes, 2001).

Victim Assistance

Trafficking has received increased attention in recent years due to several high profile cases and media exposure in the United States, and the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in 2000. Despite this, there are few agencies that exclusively serve victims of trafficking although organizations for assisting trafficking victims continue to emerge (Shigekane, 2007). After the passage of the TVPA, the federal government also began to fund victim assistance programs to meet the needs of victims of human trafficking; many of the direct services staff in these programs were social workers or other human service professionals (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2008). In areas where these specialized services existed, once a victim had been rescued and/or identified, he or she worked with a single-point-of contact case manager to have his/her needs met through a variety of other specialized agencies such as NPOs, law enforcement, medical providers, and legal agencies (Clawson, Small, Go, & Myles, 2003;

Busch-Armendariz et al., 2008). At first, victims need the basic necessities of housing, food, medical care, and safety (Aron, Zweig, & Newmark, 2006; Clawson, Small, Go, & Myles, 2003; Busch et al., 2007; Busch-Armendariz et al., 2008). After basic needs have been met, victims face a long journey to rebuild their lives and heal from their victimization. For example, victims of sex trafficking may need assistance to process the trauma of sexual abuse (Human Rights Watch, 1995). Immigrant victims of sex trafficking also need long-term support that may include learning English, finding permanent housing and employment, and eventually reuniting with their children and other family members (Aron et al., 2006). Immigrant sex trafficking victims may be able to legally remain in the United States, but generally need legal assistance to navigate the immigration process (Macy & Johns, 2011).

Previous Studies

The majority of literature on human trafficking focuses on defining the problem, presenting estimates, and/or calls for increased attention to trafficking. As previously stated, there have been very few empirical studies on trafficking (Gozdziak & Colette, 2005) and even fewer specifically on sex trafficking (Schauer & Wheaton, 2006). Researchers face methodological challenges locating victims due to the hidden nature of the population (Brennan, 2005; Tyldum & Brunovskis, 2005), and thus, few studies have collected data from victims. However, recent studies have emerged in which victims of trafficking have been directly studied (Aron, Zweig, & Newmark, 2006; Busch et al., 2007; Busch-Armendariz, et al., 2009; Raymond, Hughes, & Gomez, 2001).

Raymond, Hughes, and Gomez (2001) conducted the first interviews with victims of trafficking in the United States. They interviewed 40 women in the sex industry and found that 15 women had been trafficked internationally and 11 women had been trafficked domestically. The women interviewed had multiple physical injuries, lacked access to healthcare, had sexually transmitted infections, and reported drug use as a means of coping with their abuse. Furthermore, many of them had also fallen pregnant as a result of sexual assault. Other studies have focused on service delivery and the needs of victims of trafficking (e.g., Aron, Zweig, & Newmark, 2006). Finally, this current project has also explored the needs of victims of sex trafficking through in-depth interviews.

Overall, little research has addressed the long-term experiences of victims of sex trafficking (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2013; Busch et al., 2007; Macy & Johns, 2011; Raymond & Hughes, 2001). To date, research has not captured the experiences of sex trafficking victims who are mothers as they re-create their lives in the United States (Macy & Johns, 2011). The current study explores the experiences of sex trafficking victims as both mothers and survivors of trafficking who are on a path toward restoration.

Method

Interview data from 13 immigrant sex trafficking victims who are mothers were used to analyze their experiences, future plans, hopes, and desires as they attempt to re-build their lives in the United States. The purpose of this present study is to examine the experiences of immigrant sex trafficking victim experiences' following their rescue. Specific research questions addressed are (a) what are the experiences of international sex trafficking victims who are mothers as they attempt to rebuild their lives in the United States, and (b) what are the goals and plans of mothers who are victims of international sex trafficking?

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth face-to-face interviews with victims. While a case manager or social worker at an agency that serves human trafficking victims identified and recruited the participants, owing to the vulnerability of this group, special precautions were taken to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. The agency case manager ensured that all participants were 18 and older, had been trafficked into the United States for the purposes of working in the sex industry and were able to participate in the interview without creating psychological distress or re-victimization. No other demographic or identifying information was gathered. As many victims were engaged in legal proceedings and some may have been involved in cases in the media spotlight, we did not collect any information that could be used to identify victims. However, all the women volunteered the information that they were mothers in the interview even though they were not specifically asked a question about motherhood or had been screened into the sample based on their status as mothers. We obtained only verbal informed consent from the victims before participation in the interview. The study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Texas at Austin. Interviews consisted of 10 open-ended questions (see below) that asked victims about the services they received after rescue.

Interview Protocol for Victims and Survivors of Human Trafficking

1. What services did you need initially? Were these services available? Were they helpful?
2. Were there services that were not helpful or not needed? Were there services or actions that were actually harmful to you or your situation?
3. What services do you currently need? Are these services available to you?
4. What makes it difficult for you to access the services you need?
5. What would make it easier for you to access needed services?
6. What helped you most during this process?
7. Would you change anything about the way services are provided to other victims of trafficking?
8. What was most challenging for you about this experience?
9. In your current situation, do you feel safe?
10. What are your hopes and plans for the future?

Rescue is a term often used by law enforcement following a raid or undercover investigation. In this study, we did not ask specific questions in English or using a certified translator, about the victims' victimization or rescue or how they were trafficked or how they were able to leave; however, the interview included questions about their future plans. Victims were interviewed at the offices of an NPO that offers legal assistance or in the victims' homes. Most of the interviews were audiotaped, however, when a victim did not consent to the interview being audio-taped or when there were technological difficulties, interviewers took detailed notes. We transcribed all audio taped interviews and destroyed tapes after transcription. Victims were provided with US$50 as compensation for their time.

Data Analysis

After transcribing the interviews, conventional content analysis as described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) was employed. Due to the lack of existing theory and literature on sex trafficking, conventional content analysis is an appropriate analytic design because it allows themes to flow from the data (Kondrack & Wellman, 2002; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This type of analysis has also been described as inductive category development (Mayring, 2000) because researchers analyze the data by labeling thoughts and statements in the data and then grouping the data into broader categories.

An iterative process of coding interviews was employed. In the first step, research team members read transcripts to allow them to get a sense of the larger picture of the interviews (Tesch, 1990). After this initial reading, interviews were open-coded by research team members meaning that researchers noted their initial thoughts and impressions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Research team members then met to discuss their initial coding and to compare results. The transcripts were then revisited and codes were grouped into themes before research team members met again to compare results. The themes identified were specific to the victims' current experiences and future goals and these themes were selected for inclusion in this paper.

Limitations of the Study

The study utilized a non-probability convenience sample and, therefore, the findings are not generalizable to all trafficking victims. In addition, our participants are limited to women (who are also mothers) from other countries and who were trafficked for sexual exploitation into the United States. Nonetheless, the findings from this study are significant, and break ground with regard to our understanding of the needs of human trafficking victims and how they think about their futures. The results have both practice and policy implications for practitioners, leaders, and anti-trafficking advocates.

Results

Although the questionnaire focused on services the victims had received, we also asked victims about their future plans. Through that question, participants spoke openly and extemporaneously about their lives in America, their children and families, and their faith. Three main themes emerged from the interviews regarding the victims' identities as they moved from victimization to restoration: their families' future, hope for reunification with their children and commitment to extended family and their faith. Each gives vigor, strength, and ability to endure past abuse and trauma and keep an eye toward what hope and promise lies ahead.

Theme 1: Focus on the Future of their Families

Each victim commented on her hope for the future and her plans for the future. Although they had experienced severe sexual violence and trauma, the victims were focused on rebuilding their lives. In many cases, their goals were centered on their children and this focus helped them to move from victimization to restoration. The 13 victims expressed

their desire to stay in the United States so that their children would have more opportunities than they would have had in their home countries. One victim said "I want to make my life here and give my son a future here, for him to study here." When speaking about her son, another victim expressed her desire "to see him graduate and become a doctor or something big." In another case, a victim explained that she felt her future was really focused on her son and his goals. She stated "Maybe I am wrong, but I just think I am too old to reach my goals and I am just focusing on (my son)."

Although their hopes for the future were grounded in their children, the women were also eager to obtain stable employment and learn English. One victim stated "[my] goal right now is to work; to work and to learn English because it is very necessary." Various victims also expressed a desire to buy a house, to get a GED, to assist family members to come to the United States, and to earn enough money to visit their family in their home country. There was a general sentiment among the victims that hard work was necessary to survive in the United States. One victim stated "I think that here in this country one of the things you need to survive is to have bravery, to be brave in order to do what you have to do."

Theme 2: Hope for Reunification and Continued Commitment to Family

Thinking about a future for their young children contributed to their decision to originally re-locate to the United States although, at the time, none of the participants anticipated that they would be victimized and trafficked. After their rescue, motherhood seems to have driven them forward as they attempted to rebuild lives in the United States. In general, four victims reported a painful separation from their children during their victimization and a responsibility as a mother to focus on building a new life in the United States despite their pain and victimization.

In terms of reunifying with their children, five victims expressed their desire and determination to bring their children to the United States, as well as their determination to achieve this goal helped them to survive. At the time of this study, most of the participants' children remained in their home countries despite their eligibility to reunite with their mothers in the U.S. One participant talked about her survival: "I think that during that time, the only thing I needed was to bring my son home [to the US]." Another stated that "All I have to do now is wait for my daughter."

For those victims who did not yet have their children with them, supporting their families in their countries of origin was both a concern and a source of their motivation. Two participants talked about their worry about not having enough money to send for continued support of their family members. Because many of the victims were motivated to leave their home countries to support their families, there was a feeling of continued responsibility to be the main supporter. One victim said:

> One of the things that frustrated me in the beginning was that I didn't have anything to send my son. I have a six-year old son in (home country) with my mother. So that frustrated me a lot—to have food, a place to sleep and a good roof and not be able to send money home. Because that is the reason I came here. Right? But now that I have my money and I organize my monthly spending, I decide what I am going to buy, what I pay and how much I send home. I feel better. I feel like I am advancing more.

Theme 3: Strength from Faith

Most participants had experienced several forms of abuse ranging from physical abuse and rape to emotional abuse. Despite experiencing high levels of trauma, these victims exhibited an extraordinary level of resiliency, especially in their confidence in personal strength and functioning. Faith played an important role in providing inner strength and the ability to survive and succeed for some of the women. Besides being a source of comfort in times of crises for some victims, religious faith is critical in promoting tenacity and helping victims of trauma to conquer adversities (West, 2006; Weaver, Flannelly, Garbarino, Figley, & Flannelly, 2003). Church and other religious places helped them connect with others in the community and expand their social circle. Women found these contacts to be instrumental in providing them with various kinds of material, emotional, and moral support. Their narratives communicated the strong influence religion, faith and belief systems had on strengthening motivation to cope and recover. In one victim's case, a priest was responsible for rescuing the woman from her trafficker. The victim explained how her belief in God and prayer helped her forgive her subjugator and, thus, move on with her life. She explained "Now I cover everything with prayer. I cover everything. I carry it to God. I pray about the children [of the trafficker] because the children loved me so much. I pray even for the man. I forgive him."

In addition to the strength they derived from their faith, services from faith-based organizations assisted the women in establishing their lives in the United States. Some victims received assistance in the form of food, clothing, and other household items from churches to settle comfortably into their new homes.

One victim shared how a church member gave her essential items for her apartment. She said "she was from a church that I was attending, she gave me some things that other people had given her. So she gave them to me, and among those things was a bed."

Two victims expressed some doubt about their ability to survive in the United States. They found comfort in knowing that advocates with their local trafficking coalition would be available to help them. The victims were generally very grateful for the help that advocates gave them, especially as they set out on their own. One victim stated "I feel like I always had the intention of being independent to move on my own, but I always knew that if I got a little stuck, that I could count on (coalition advocates) to get me out, that I could call them and tell them."

Discussion

After an extensive review of the literature on services for sex trafficking victims, Macy and Johns (2011) called for specific research on the needs of parents who are sex trafficking victims. The results of the current study provide insight into the experiences of sex trafficking victims who are mothers. Our research found that mothers who are sex trafficking victims face many challenges in re-creating their lives after being rescued and many of these challenges relate to their roles as mothers in transnational families. Overall, their experiences as mothers served as inspiration that facilitated their emotional restoration.

Transnational Mothers

As there is so little research on sex trafficking victims who are mothers, the research available on transnational families is helpful in placing the experiences of these mothers into a broader context. Transnational families are families separated by geographical borders (Orozco, 2006). The concept of "transitional motherhood" in the context of gender, political and social inequalities has been explored by Parreñas (2001). Transnational mothers leave their children behind in their country of origin and endure a lengthy separation from their children to pursue opportunities to strengthen the family (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2001; Zontini, 2007). Transnational motherhood removes mothers from their children's daily activities and thus, contradicts the normative role of mothers in the United States (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). After a sex trafficking victim is rescued and the element of exploitation is removed from her life, she continues to struggle with the transnational separation of her children and family.

The cause of separation that families endure in transnational migration is similar to the causes of sex trafficking—economic and gender inequality. Separations in transnational families cause immense strain for both the mother and child (Foner & Dreby, 2011). Parenting and discipline issues are a struggle for mothers who rely on family members to provide the day-to-day care of their children (Dreby, 2010). Children may demonstrate significant stress due to the separation (Parreñas, 2005) and tend to do poorly in school (Kandel & Massey, 2002). Even once these families are reunited, there are long-term impacts on the parent-child relationship (Foner & Dreby, 2011). Parents, such as those in our study, may experience feelings of guilt and worry about their child's acculturation into a new environment.

While the issues faced in transnational families are similar to the experiences of sex trafficking victims who have been rescued, family problems may be exacerbated due to the mother's trauma and lack of acculturation. Although the women in our study did not reveal specific instances of trauma impacting motherhood, they did express fears about how their lack of acculturation into the U.S. may impact their effectiveness as parents. For instance, mothers reported being worried about how their children would adjust, where they would find resources for their child, and how they would enroll their children in school. Unlike other transnational mothers, sex trafficking victims may not have the time in the U.S. to get settled before their children join them.

Transnational Mothers as "Breadwinners"

Regardless of whether or not the mothers in the present study had been reunited with their children, there was a clear sense that they felt responsibility for providing for their children and families. Oftentimes, families are separated by migration based on the idea that the separation will ultimately have a positive impact on their family (Dreby, 2010). In the case of international sex trafficking victims, the desire for economic stability may result in a young woman trusting a trafficker. With the promise of providing financially for their families lost during the trafficking captivity, the victims appear to feel enormous pressure to provide money for their families.

After their rescue, and while they were still separated, the mothers were remitters who regularly sent money back home to their children and other dependents. One mother even indicated that she would go without food until she had sent money back to her family. Her statement is consistent with remittance literature which states that transnational parents strive to meet all their children's material

needs even if it means depriving themselves of food (Abrego, 2009; Coe, 2008; Parreñas, 2001).

Once their children joined them in the United States, mother's concerns shifted to successfully raising their children in a new environment. Like many immigrant families, they desired to improve their family through their child's education (Dreby, 2010). While the mothers did have personal goals such as finding and sustaining employment, completing a GED, and learning English, their primary focus was on the wellbeing and advancement of their children.

Policy and Practice Implications

Despite the limitations of this study, the findings support the idea that there are unique needs of victims of international sex trafficking who are mothers. The study of immigrant sex trafficking victims who are mothers has important implications for policy makers and volunteer organizations. Victims of sex trafficking need a safe environment as they have been subjected to extreme abuse, including bondage, physical violence, sexual assault and rape, and emotional abuse *at the hands of* the traffickers. Safety, therefore, should be a primary concern with regard to policies and assistance to victims of trafficking.

While victims of sex trafficking may share many of the challenges experienced by transnational parents, they have unique needs based on their trafficking experiences. As mothers, victims of trafficking may be particularly concerned about the protection of their families, health care, and day care (Busch-Armendariz, Nsonwu & Heffron, 2011). Policy makers must be aware that an immigrant trafficking survivor does not exist in isolation. Rather, she is likely a mother and a member of a family that depends on her for financial support and emotional guidance. Based on the difficulties of separation, policy and practice should respond quickly to reunite families both for safety and emotional reasons.

While focus of research has been on the immediate impact of trafficking, greater focus should be on long-term coping—the experiences of immigrant sex trafficking victims as they heal over time. Greater understanding is also needed to explore the experiences of their children as they reunite with their mothers and what might be done to help their extended families.

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Additional information

Throughout this manuscript, *survivors of human trafficking* may be referred to simply as "victims" for narrative efficiency and in recognition of their crime victimization. However, it should be noted that all victims of human trafficking have survived a horrifying combination of physical and emotional abuse, trauma, and financial distress. The term victim is not meant in any way to be demeaning or judgmental nor is it meant to label these women. We honor the journey that each woman has made and how she chooses to speak about it.