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Commentary: "Human Trafficking Victims and Their Children: Assessing Needs, Vulnerabilities, Strengths, and Survivorship"

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Busch-Armendariz, Nsonwu, and Heffron have conducted important exploratory research on the needs of foreign-born female survivors of human trafficking. They have documented both short-term and long-term needs of these women, as well as their growing strength and hope for the future. This research should serve as an impetus for social service providers and policymakers to further develop effective services for those who have been trafficked.

These findings have clear policy and practice implications. These women need services for an extended period of time. While they may not need assistance on a regular basis, survivors need a caseworker whom they can contact with questions and who is tasked with checking with the survivors at important points, such as family reunification. As Busch-Armendariz and colleagues state, this case manager should be available to the family during the reunification process, ideally using the toolkit questions supplied by Busch-Armendariz and colleagues as a starting point for assessing service needs.

In addition, services should be made available at a point when survivors are psychologically ready to access them. As one respondent noted, offering her information on saving when she had no money to save was not effective. Information about how to meet children's needs, such as vaccinations, school registration or health insurance, through mainstream social services may not be retained if offered prior to the children's imminent arrival in the United States. Counseling in a person's first language is always important, regardless of the issue with which a person is struggling. It is incumbent upon schools of social work and other social service providers to recruit and train providers fluent in languages other than English in order to be able to provide services in those languages. The children of survivors of human trafficking may also have their own unique needs, as noted, such as grief and loss issues related to the loss of their primary caregiver in their country of origin.

This research, while providing important preliminary findings, should be regarded as an impetus for further research to expand on these findings. An important area to explore would be whether these findings vary based on survivor characteristics such as region of origin, first language, length of enslavement, type of labor into which the survivor was trafficked, sex, or if the person is a natural-born U.S. citizen (an extremely understudied population). For example, while survivors in the current study identified the ability to speak English as an important survival skill, the only identified second language was Spanish. Is this perceived advantage amplified for those whose first language is less common in the United States, for example, Vietnamese or Latvian? The needs of

trafficked children are another area for future research. These children will have acculturation issues that may or may not be similar to those of immigrant children whose parents were not victims of trafficking.

Busch-Armendariz and colleagues are to be commended for exploring the needs of these women from the perspective of their own perceptions in a strength-based manner and it is the hope of this commentator that others will follow in their footsteps.