Editorial: The Embeddedness of Human Trafficking within Family and Community

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Abstract

Family and community play varied and important roles in facilitating human trafficking and helping victim-survivors recover from it. Despite this, many trafficking studies are individualistic in nature and do not consider the broader positioning of victim-survivors within complex social, family, and community structures. The discussion in this Editorial to a special issue of *Anti-Trafficking Review* provides an overview of the myriads of ways that family and community are central to trafficking. From the recruitment stage through to the recovery stage, the role of family in trafficking cannot be overlooked. In addition, trafficking has such a profound impact on family members, and in particular dependant children, that they should also be considered victims of this crime. The aim of this Editorial is to demonstrate that human trafficking is embedded within family and community and cannot be understood without studying the relational components that define it. It argues that to effectively respond to trafficking, the intergenerational impacts must be considered and holistic family-centric responses developed.

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Introduction

Discourse, research, policy, and support strategies relating to human trafficking are often highly individualised. When human trafficking is framed through criminal justice imperatives, the people involved become individuated, divided into neat categories of 'the offender' and 'the victim'. References to connections or groups are often only used to refer to 'criminal networks' or an abstract notion of the 'community' to which victim-survivors must be promptly returned. Such discourses render the complex web of relationships which underpin our lives obsolete and remove individuals from the rich context of their social and cultural environments. Family, community, and interpersonal connections are central to the

human experience. They are also central to trafficking. The use and manipulation of relational bonds often lie at the heart of exploitation, meaning that trafficking is inherently embedded within family and community.

The articles in this special issue of *Anti-Trafficking Review* broaden the focus of much trafficking literature, moving away from an individualised perspective and towards a contextualised understanding of the role of family and community at each stage of the trafficking process. This Editorial provides a brief, introductory overview of the spectrum of roles families play in trafficking, from facilitating the trafficking process to motivating individuals to migrate and shaping victim-survivors' recovery. The impetus for this special issue came from research I conducted in Australia, which explored the experiences of victim-survivors with dependant children and family. From listening to the perspectives of victim-survivors and service providers in this research, it became very clear that families were a fundamental part of trafficking and integral to victim-survivors' recovery. Often, family members experienced such trauma themselves that they should have also been considered victims of trafficking. Yet it also became apparent that this perspective is not supported by most policies and practices that take a highly individualised focus to the problem. To understand the complex dynamics of trafficking, including why and how it happens, and how to best respond, we must take a collectivist approach that repositions family and community at the centre. By exploring families as traffickers, facilitators, protective and supportive forces, and as victims themselves, this Editorial, and the articles in this special issue, provide the first step towards embedding trafficking research within the family.

Families as Traffickers

A common myth that shapes popular trafficking narratives is that offenders are unknown to their victims and operate as part of sophisticated international criminal networks.[1] However, as the descriptions of trafficking in this special issue highlight, multiple actors play a role in the trafficking process, and family members are often central. A growing body of research is recognising that a

[1] K Raby and N Chazal, 'The Myth of the "Ideal Offender": Challenging Persistent Human Trafficking Stereotypes through Emerging Australian Cases', *Anti-Trafficking Review*, issue 18, 2022, pp. 13–32, https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201222182; E O'Brien, 'Human Trafficking Heroes and Villains: Representing the Problem in Anti-trafficking Awareness Campaigns', *Social and Legal Studies*, vol. 25, issue 2, 2015, pp. 205–224, https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663915593410.

significant proportion of trafficking offences are facilitated by family members, acquaintances, and friends who have ready access to vulnerable people.[2] A key example is the trafficking of minors for sexual exploitation in the United States. Multiple studies have found that the facilitators are most often family members, legal guardians, friends, or intimate partners of the victim-survivors.[3] Furthermore, recruitment by family members was the most common strategy reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in cases of trafficking in the United States between 2020 and 2022.[4] Evidence of familial trafficking has also been found in trafficking for labour exploitation[5] and trafficking for sexual exploitation of adults.[6] Families, including parents and extended family members, are also most commonly responsible for coercing victim-survivors into marriage.[7]

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2 M Viuhko, 'Hardened Professional Criminals, or Just Friends and Relatives? The Diversity of Offenders in Human Trafficking', *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, vol. 42, issue 2–3, 2017, pp. 177–193, https://doi.org/10.1080/01924036.2017.1391106; E E Edwards, J S Middleton, and J Cole, 'Family-Controlled Trafficking in the United States: Victim Characteristics, System Response, and Case Outcomes', *Journal of Human Trafficking*, vol. 10, issue 3, 2024, pp. 411–429, https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2022.2039866; C N White *et al.*, 'When Families Become Perpetrators: A Case Series on Familial Trafficking', *Journal of Family Violence*, vol. 39, 2024, pp. 435–447, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-023-00522-w; L Puigvert *et al.*, 'A Systematic Review of Family and Social Relationships: Implications for Sex Trafficking Recruitment and Victimisation', *Families, Relationships and Societies*, vol. 11, issue 4, 2022, pp. 534–550, https://doi.org/10.1332/204674321X16358719475186.

3 Viuhko; V K Voller *et al.*, 'The Hidden and Misunderstood Problem of Familial Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States: A Scoping Review of the Literature', *Child Welfare*, vol. 102, issue 2, 2024, pp. 145–180.

4 Polaris Project, *Human Trafficking during the COVID and Post-COVID Era: An Analysis of Data on Human Trafficking Situations Reported to the US National Human Trafficking Hotline from 2020–2022*, Polaris Project, 2023, https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Hotline-Trends-Report-2023.pdf.

5 S Thulander and C Benjamin, *In Harm's Way: How Systems Fail Human Trafficking Survivors – Survey results from the first National Survivor Study*, Polaris Project, January 2023, https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/In-Harms-Way-How-Systems-Fail-Human-Trafficking-Survivors-by-Polaris-modifed-June-2023.pdf.

6 *Ibid.*

7 H Askola, 'Responding to Vulnerability? Forced Marriage and the Law', *UNSW Law Journal*, vol. 41, issue 3, 2018, pp. 977–1002, https://doi.org/10.53637/IPTD3484; see also, in this special issue: J Nelson and J Burn, 'Forced Marriage and Family Relationships', *Anti-Trafficking Review*, issue 24, 2025, pp. 141–164, https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201225248.

One of the main reasons for familial involvement in trafficking is that close connections are often required to build a sufficient level of trust for individuals to be manipulated and exploited.[8] Understandings of the types of coercion used to facilitate trafficking and exploitation are becoming more nuanced, with research showing overlap between the strategies of coercive control used in both trafficking and intimate partner violence.[9] Traffickers often use multiple forms of abuse to manipulate and exploit victims, including intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, denying, blaming, minimising, economic abuse, and sexual and physical abuse.[10] These strategies often build over time and rely on close relationships between victim-survivors and offenders for their success.[11]

Even if there are no pre-existing family connections, traffickers can build intimate connections with victim-survivors that mimic family relationships to facilitate exploitation. One example of this is the mother-like identity adopted by some female traffickers. In their research on Thai migrants in Australia, Macioti *et al.* explore the role of the 'Mother Tac' (also referred to as 'mamma tac' or 'mae tac'), a term which is short for 'mother of contract' and describes the woman who hosts Thai migrant sex workers, collects money from them, and organises their work once they are in their destination country. The study describes the complexity and ambivalences associated with the role of the 'Mother Tac' who may simultaneously care for a victim-survivor, while also playing a key role in her exploitation. The Mother Tac is described as being shaped by 'quasi-familial respect relations of subordination'.[12] In the Australian case of *R v Rungnapha Kanbut*, this family-like bond between the Mother Tac and the women she exploited was key to keeping the victim-survivors in a 'prison without bars'.[13]

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8 E Koegler *et al.*, "'When Her Visa Expired, the Family Refused to Renew It," Intersections of Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence: Qualitative Document Analysis of Case Examples from a Major Midwest City', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 37, issue 7–8, pp. NP4133–NP4159, https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520957978.

9 M Segrave, B Hedwards, and D Tyas, 'Family Violence and Exploitation: Examining the Contours of Violence and Exploitation', in J Winterdyk and J Jones (eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2020, pp. 437–450, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63058-8_24; S Bessell, *Fact Sheet: Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence*, The Human Trafficking Legal Center, 2018.

10 Koegler *et al.*

11 Raby and Chazal.

12 P G Macioti *et al.*, 'Framing the Mother Tac: The Racialised, Sexualised and Gendered Politics of Modern Slavery in Australia', *Social Sciences*, vol. 9, issue 11, 2020, pp. 192–211, p. 200, https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9110192.

13 *R v Kanbut* [2019] NSWDC 931.

This is not the only situation where trafficking relies on a replication of family type bonds and hierarchical subordination. In this special issue, **Élodie Apard, Precious Diagboya, and Vanessa Simoni** describe the role madams play in facilitating trafficking for sexual exploitation from Nigeria to France. Based on their extensive fieldwork in these countries, the authors explain how madams, who are well-integrated into and connected within the wider Nigerian community, are described as a 'surrogate' family for victim-survivors, demonstrating again a reconfiguration of relational bonds to gain the trust and ensure compliance of victim-survivors. Madams rely on family connections to recruit women and girls, to encourage them to migrate, and to ensure ongoing control and compliance.

Apard *et al*.'s article highlights that control and coercion operate within existing social and cultural structures, practices, expectations, and networks, within which complex family relationships and dynamics are embedded. Definitions of family must therefore include the broad nexus of social relationships within which individuals and traditional family structures are situated. A nuanced and dynamic approach to the concept of family is needed, one that prioritises interconnectedness as the defining characteristic. As Carol Smart highlights in her theory of personal life, individuals are increasingly shaping their interpersonal connections in ways that are meaningful to them, and their definitions of family may go beyond the confines of the legal and biological bonds, which have traditionally been the organising principle of family.[14] In relation to trafficking, this broader conceptualisation of family can be useful to unpack the range of roles and relationships that shape the trafficking process and to move beyond binary interpretations of victim–offender identities.

In relation to forced marriage, **Jacqueline Nelson and Jennifer Burn**'s article in this special issue argues that characterising young people experiencing coercion as victims and their parents, siblings, and extended family members as perpetrators is a reductive approach that should be replaced with a deeper focus on family dynamics, experiences, and histories. Reflecting on interviews with eight women who have experienced force marriage in Australia, and citing Smart and Shipman, they note that theorisations about family life need to 'capture the complex tapestry of competing obligations and aspirations'.[15] Such an approach is vital to shedding light on the location of traffickers within family circles and to understanding how trafficking relies on relational dynamics and a matrix of control that is socially situated within families and communities.

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[14] C Smart, *Personal Life: New Directions in Sociological Thinking*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2007.

[15] C Smart and B Shipman, 'Visions in Monochrome: Families, Marriage and the Individualization Thesis', *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 55, issue 4, 2004, pp. 491–509, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2004.00034.x.

Family as a Risk Factor and Facilitator

Another way that family is embedded in trafficking is by the role family plays in shaping an individual's life experiences, trajectories, and motivations. Family can be a risk factor or a protective factor against trafficking. Several studies have found that familial disfunction and a history of abuse are key risk factors for victim-survivors.[16] For example, Reid *et al.* note that exposure to intimate partner violence during childhood increases the risk for victimisation in trafficking during young adulthood.[17] These findings are supported by other studies which have identified commonalities in vulnerability factors, including negative childhood experiences, dysfunctional family dynamics, and parental substance abuse, that increase the risk of victimisation in both intimate partner violence and trafficking. One study found that intimate partner violence and associated trauma-related shame are both significant predictors of child sexual exploitation.[18] Trafficking and exploitation can also be an outcome or part of intimate partner violence. In this special issue, **Haezreena Begum Abdul Hamid** provides a nuanced understanding of women's motivations for migration. Drawing on three months of observations and 18 qualitative interviews with female victims of trafficking in Malaysia, her article describes how women in abusive relationships are exploited by their boyfriends and partners as an extension of the dynamics of control used in the relationship. Alternatively, escape from a situation of family or intimate partner violence may increase an individual's vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation.[19]

Not only do adverse family experiences and situations increase a person's vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation, but they also shape and form the lives

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16 S Kyriakakis, B A Dawson, and T Edmond, 'Mexican Immigrant Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence: Conceptualization and Descriptions of Abuse', *Violence and Victims*, vol. 27, issue 4, 2012, pp. 548–562, https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.27.4.548; R D Sanborn and A P Giardino, 'Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence: Etiology, Intervention, and Overlap with Child Maltreatment', *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*, vol. 6, issue 1, 2015, https://doi.org/10.58464/2155-5834.1251.

17 J A Reid, T N Richards, and T C Kulig, 'Human Trafficking and Intimate Partner Violence', in R Geffner *et al.* (eds.), *Handbook of Interpersonal Violence and Abuse Across the Lifespan: A Project of the National Partnership to End Interpersonal Violence Across the Lifespan*, Springer, Cham, 2022, pp. 3339–3360, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-89999-2_159.

18 E D Walker and J A Reid, 'On the Overlap of Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Intimate Partner Violence: An Exploratory Examination of Trauma-Related Shame', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 39, issue 15–16, 2024, pp. 3669–3686, https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241233268.

19 A Richert, 'Failed Interventions: Domestic Violence, Human Trafficking, and the Criminalization of Survival', *Michigan Law Review*, vol. 120, issue 2, 2021, pp. 315–343, https://doi.org/10.36644/mlr.120.2.failed.

and motivations of traffickers. Far from being 'ideal offenders',[20] traffickers are often individuals with complex histories of abuse, socio-economic disadvantages, and low educational attainment.[21] There is commonly an overlap between victims and offenders, with many trafficking offenders once being victims of exploitation or abuse themselves.[22] In Australia, between 2005 and 2019, five of the ten women convicted of human trafficking for sexual exploitation offences had themselves been prior victim-survivors of trafficking, and many had experienced family or intimate partner abuse.[23] Furthermore, all of these women came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and the majority moved into trafficking as a way to financially support their families. To return to the case of *R v Kanbut*, for example, the judge's sentencing remarks highlight the significant economic disadvantage Kanbut had experienced and the burden of her role of financially supporting her family, even from a young age.[24] Such cases challenge the 'victim' and 'villain' stereotypes often used in trafficking narratives.[25] They also highlight that family needs and dynamics can provide the motivation for trafficking offenders to exploit others.

As with traffickers, victim-survivors are often drawn into exploitation through the manipulation of a desire to financially provide for their families. Financially supporting family is often a key motivation for individuals to migrate under risky conditions in search of better opportunities and improved income. The need to financially support family is raised in several articles in this special issue.

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20 N Christie, 'The Ideal Victim', in E A Fattah (ed.), *From Crime Policy to Victim Policy: Reorienting the Justice System*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1986, pp. 17–30, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-08305-3_2.

21 A L A Baxter and N Chazal, '"It's About Survival": Court Constructions of Socio-Economic Constraints on Women Offenders in Australian Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation Cases', *Anti-Trafficking Review*, issue 18, 2022, pp. 121–138, https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201222188.

22 A L A Baxter, 'When the Line between Victimization and Criminalization Blurs: The Victim-offender Overlap Observed in Female Offenders in Cases of Trafficking in Persons for Sexual Exploitation in Australia', *Journal of Human Trafficking*, vol. 6, issue 3, 2019, pp. 327–338, https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2019.1578579; I Chatzis *et al.*, *Female Victims of Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation as Defendants: A Case Law Analysis*, UNODC, Vienna, 2020; E Veldhuizen-Ochodničanová and E L Jeglic, 'Of Madams, Mentors and Mistresses: Conceptualising the Female Sex Trafficker in the United States', *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, vol. 64, 2021, pp. 1–13, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcj.2020.100455; M Wijkman and E Kleemans, 'Female Offenders of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation', *Crime, Law and Social Change*, vol. 72, 2019, pp. 53–72, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-019-09840-x.

23 Baxter and Chazal.

24 *R v Kanbut*.

25 O'Brien.

For example, **Lauren Moton, Stephen Abeyta, Meredith Dank, and Tsigereda Tafesse Muluge**'s article explores how familial financial responsibility in Ethiopia is one of the main factors that motivates women to seek domestic work in the Middle East. They conducted 100 in-depth interviews with migrant domestic workers seeking employment in the Middle East and found that over 80% of the women planned to send some, or all, of their earnings to their family members, specifically parents, siblings, spouses, children, or extended family members. Similarly, **Hamid**'s article states that for women in countries such as Indonesia and Myanmar, migration is sometimes the only viable option to escape poverty and unemployment and to earn a reasonable income for their families. Furthermore, in their short article, **Mary Caparas and Nadia Gapur** draw on their extensive experience as service providers in the United States to paint an illuminating and illustrative picture of the ways in which the need to financially support family can be a primary motivating force and risk factor for Bangladeshi men to enter into exploitative labour migration situations.

Risky migration underpinned by financial motivations can therefore be a family affair, with labour migration often a strategic decision for families to improve their financial situation. This is clearly demonstrated in the article by **Anta Brachou, Runa Lazzarino, Carole Murphy, and Eva Karra** in this special issue, which explores familial pressure as a primary driver of migration in Albania. Analysing a large dataset collected through mixed-methods study, the authors highlight that the decision to migrate is rarely an individual one; rather, it is a collective decision where parents, siblings, and extended family members play a crucial role. This type of 'sacrificial logic' whereby one family member is sent abroad to support the family is also described by **Moton *et al*.** who note that a sense of duty towards family and a desire to be financially supportive drives many Ethiopian women to seek out domestic work in the Middle East, despite its notoriety for exploitative conditions. Similarly, **Apard *et al*.** analyse how Nigerian families encourage one of their female family members, often daughters, to seek out sex work abroad as a way of furthering the family's financial prospects and social status, despite the known risks of trafficking in Europe.

Given the family's centrality in decision making, family members often facilitate migration by assisting in the process or providing loans to support the travel. **Moton *et al*.** and **Apard *et al*.**'s articles demonstrate the facilitating role family members and social networks play through the practical support of providing loans and assistance with the logistical elements of labour migration.

Once an individual is in an exploitative situation, their family can also be a motivating factor for keeping them there. Throughout this special issue, authors describe threads of complex and deep emotions such as shame, guilt, responsibility, pressure, and duty. Those who have migrated to support family but found themselves in an exploitative situation and unable to send money home, can experience a great sense of shame. For example, several participants in

Hamid's study reported feeling unable to return home until they could earn some money to support their family. Similarly, **Rebecca Treadaway**'s article analysed data from the UK Salvation Army's Beyond Programme and 12 interviews with practitioners to describe how migrants and victim-survivors of trafficking can experience feelings of guilt, anxiety, and powerlessness about an inability to provide financially, contributing to the family's perception of them as 'failed' migrants. In an Australian study I conducted looking at victim-survivors with children, financial considerations and the ability to support dependants in their country of origin was one of the greatest concerns reported by victim-survivors.[26] They prioritised sending money to family over funding their own needs, often leaving them surviving on the bare minimum. This situation can lead to an increased risk of revictimisation or further exploitation.[27]

The findings described above demonstrate that supporting family is one of the primary drivers for risky migration, for staying in exploitative situations, and for a heightened risk of future victimisation. Traffickers can strategically exploit family ties and encourage individuals to migrate to support family. They can also use threats against the family to manipulate their victims, for example, by demanding that family pay ransom or by threating to injure or kill family members.[28] Such threats are a common method used to keep victim-survivors in positions of exploitation and prevent them from talking to authorities.[29] The complexity of family relationships, the depth of emotions involved with family, and the strong influence family has over our lives are consequently key factors that facilitate the trafficking process.

Family, Recovery, and Victimhood

Not only are family key motivators and facilitators for entering into risky work or migration scenarios, but they are also a crucial part of post-trafficking situations. After leaving exploitative situations, the focus of most victim support programmes is victim-survivors' recovery. At this stage of the trafficking process family remain central. **Caparas and Gapur**'s composite case study in this special issue demonstrates the important role of family and community in supporting victim-survivors after they leave exploitative situations. Their piece argues for a family-centric approach towards support for victim-survivors of trafficking by

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26 N Chazal, *Hidden Victims, Intergenerational Trauma: Supporting the Dependants of Modern Slavery Victim-Survivors in Australia*, University of South Australia, 2023, https://doi.org/10.25954/b2a1-8417.

27 *Ibid.*

28 Viuhko; Voller *et al.*

29 *Ibid.*

showing that family dynamics serve as a protective factor if survivors' families are upskilled to also help carry the family's financial security going forward. Despite the need for a holistic approach, the importance of family is not often recognised in trafficking literature, policies, and programmes. For example, **Treadaway**'s article in this special issue highlights that key modern slavery policies on victim-survivor support standards in the United Kingdom make scant reference to the role of the family in a victim-survivor's recovery. Furthermore, **Andrea Querol and Antonia Lerner**'s article demonstrates that in Peru, families can be stigmatised and separated from victim-survivors, or even blamed for their family member's trafficking experience. Based on interviews with 30 victim-survivors and 10 of their family members, **Querol and Lerner** show how family are often key to helping victim-survivors leave exploitative situations and supporting their recovery, yet they are too often sidelined or marginalised.

A research project I conducted in 2023 found that the structure of Australia's main support programme, the Support for Trafficked People Program (STPP), did not adequately recognise the importance of family, and in particular, dependants, in victim-survivors' recovery. The project found that although 29% of victim-survivors of modern slavery supported by the STPP between 2009 and 2021 had dependants, there was little formalised support for the care of these dependants, nor any additional funding for the expenses associated with raising children.[30] Victim-survivors I interviewed overwhelmingly placed their dependants' needs above their own, expressing, for example, 'I'm all about my child. I don't really think about myself at the moment to be honest'.[31] From this project, it became clear that for victim-survivors with children, their family was their most important priority, and that their own recovery would be put on hold until they could properly support their children. Moreover, having children or being pregnant has been described as 'an additional layer of vulnerability'[32] for victim-survivors of modern slavery, as the desperation to support family brings an increased risk of revictimisation or further exploitation.

For victim-survivors who are separated from their children, the desire for reunification and the need to ensure the safety and support of their children is even more pressing. In my research, victim-survivors with children in their country of origin all described the considerable suffering caused by the separation, and thoughts of reunification often overshadowed all other aspects of recovery.[33] Other research has echoed the importance of reunification for trafficking victims

30 Chazal.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

32 N.a., 'People-trafficking Victims with Children Are "Overlooked"', *BBC*, 23 February 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-35636955.

33 Chazal.

with overseas family members.[34] In this special issue, **Treadaway** notes that separation from family can hamper survivors' recovery due to the significant distress separation causes and an ongoing need for survivors to provide for their family. She also finds that the process of reunification is not always straightforward. Research has shown that the process of family reunification can be complex and difficult, and that it is a time where support is needed to repair connections and rebuild relationships which may have been damaged due to distance and lengthy periods of separation.[35] Some victim-survivors may have ambivalent feelings about reunification with family members, particularly if their family was in some way complicit in the trafficking process. Yet, as **Nelson and Burn**'s article demonstrates, familial involvement in exploitation does not always lead to a breakdown of family relationships, but rather to a reconfiguration and ongoing process of renegotiation of those relationships. The fact that family so often remain central to victims' lives, despite the complexity of these ties, highlights the need to ground trafficking theory and practice within family and community structures.

Holistically incorporating family and community into conceptualisations of trafficking is also key to understanding the full impact of trafficking and its ripple effects on those within victim-survivors' sphere. Trafficking can shatter family bonds, separate families, and have lasting intergenerational impacts.[36] Many trafficking responses take an individualistic view of victimhood which negates the centrality of the relational aspects of trafficking.[37] My research in Australia found that the dependant children of victim-survivors experienced

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34 M Faulkner *et al.*, 'Moving Past Victimization and Trauma Toward Restoration: Mother Survivors of Sex Trafficking Share Their Inspiration', *International Perspectives in Victimology*, vol. 7, issue 2, 2013, pp. 46–55; K Juabsamai and I Taylor, 'Family Separation, Reunification, and Intergenerational Trauma in the Aftermath of Human Trafficking in the United States', *Anti-Trafficking Review*, issue 10, 2018, pp. 123–138, https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201218108.

35 A Brunovskis and R Surtees, 'Coming Home: Challenges in Family Reintegration for Trafficked Victims', *Qualitative Social Work*, vol. 12, issue 4, 2013, pp. 454–472, https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325011435257; B Meshkovska, A E R Bos, and M Siegel, 'Long-term (Re)Integration of Persons Trafficked for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation', *International Review of Victimology*, vol. 27, issue 3, 2021, pp. 245–271, https://doi.org/10.1177/02697580211011445; K Ramaj, 'The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims' Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges', *Journal of Human Trafficking*, vol. 9, issue 3, 2021, pp. 408–429, https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2021.1920823.

36 Chazal; Hestia, *Underground Lives: Forgotten Children – The Intergenerational Impact of Modern Slavery*, Hestia, London, 2021.

37 M Verhoeven *et al.*, 'Relationships Between Suspects and Victims of Sex Trafficking. Exploitation of Prostitutes and Domestic Violence Parallels in Dutch Trafficking Cases', *European Journal of Criminal Policy and Research*, vol. 21, 2015, pp. 49–64, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10610-013-9226-2.

many negative outcomes because of their parents' trauma.[38] Witnessing the physical and psychological violence associated with human trafficking can cause trauma to be transmitted from parents to children.[39] These experiences can result in vicarious trauma or secondary traumatic stress for children.[40] A study into the health of children of human trafficking victim-survivors found that mental health problems including depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and post-traumatic stress disorder are common, with 80% of them exhibiting at least one of these conditions.[41] Children can also experience behavioural problems and developmental delays, parental attachment issues, and disrupted schooling and social lives.[42]

Furthermore, having a parent who is a victim-survivor of trafficking places children at significant risk of experiencing violence, abuse, and exploitation themselves.[43] There is often an overlap between family violence and trafficking, meaning children may also be exposed to the negative impacts of family violence.[44] A study by Edelson *et al.* found a high rate of co-occurrence of exposure to domestic violence and child maltreatment or abuse, with between 30% and 60% of children who witness violence also directly experiencing violence themselves.[45] Another study by Willis *et al.* also found that children of mothers who are trafficked are significantly more likely to experience physical or sexual abuse.[46] Koegler *et al.* highlight that this is because of the insecurity and trauma of modern slavery, which can create family stress, especially when parents are separated from children.[47] In these situations, dependants may lose the protection of their parents, which can create 'generational

38 Chazal.

39 L Kleinschmidt, 'Keeping Mother Alive: Psychotherapy with a Teenage Mother Following Human Trafficking', *Journal of Child Psychotherapy*, vol. 35, issue 3, 2009, pp. 262–275, https://doi.org/10.1080/00754170903234416.

40 D C Branson, 'Vicarious Trauma, Themes in Research, and Terminology: A Review of Literature', *Traumatology*, vol. 25, issue 1, 2019, pp. 2–10, https://doi.org/10.1037/trm0000161.

41 B Willis *et al.*, 'The Health of Children Whose Mothers Are Trafficked or in Sex Work in the U.S.: An Exploratory Study', *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, vol. 11, issue 2, 2016, pp. 127–135, https://doi.org/10.1080/17450128.2016.1189019.

42 Chazal.

43 *Ibid.*

44 Bessell; Segrave, Hedwards, and Tyas.

45 J L Edleson *et al.*, 'Assessing Child Exposure to Adult Domestic Violence', *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 29, issue 7, 2007, pp. 961–971, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2006.12.009.

46 Willis *et al.*

47 Koegler *et al.*

vulnerability'[48] to abuse, exploitation, and trafficking. Research has also established that weak family relationships influence the risk of trafficking.[49] As dependants are often separated from their parents, family relationships and parent–child attachments can weaken family relationships, thus heightening the risk for children to experience abuse and exploitation themselves.[50]

Conclusion

Overall, this special issue demonstrates that families and communities play an important role in trafficking. In many cases, trafficking would not occur without the involvement of families or without the manipulation of family-like relationships. Families can facilitate trafficking, and they can also be key to helping victim-survivors leave and recover from situations of exploitation. Importantly, families are profoundly impacted by trafficking. The flow-on effect of victimisation reaches family members and the broader community. In particular, dependant children are often the hidden victims of trafficking, with their parents' victimisation creating ripples of trauma that cause mental and physical health challenges, behavioural issues, and an increased vulnerability to exploitation and abuse for children.

Given the impact of modern slavery on dependants, there is increasing recognition in international jurisdictions that dependants should be assessed as primary victim-survivors of these crimes. A recent report by Hestia, one of the UK's main providers of victim-survivor support, concluded that a legislative amendment is required to recognise dependant children of modern slavery victim-survivors within the definition of victimhood.[51] The broadening of victimhood to include more than just the primary victim-survivor is well established in international principles. For example, the United Nations Human Rights Office provides a foundation for this:

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48 V Brotherton, *Time to Deliver: Considering Pregnancy and Parenthood in the UK's Response to Human Trafficking*, The Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, 2016, p. 30.

49 R Surtees, *Trafficking of Men – A Trend Less Considered: The Case of Belarus and Ukraine*, IOM Migration Research Series, No. 36, International Organization for Migration, 2008.

50 Chazal.

51 Hestia.

> *The term 'victim' also includes, where appropriate, the immediate family or dependants of the direct victim and persons who have suffered harm in intervening to assist victims in distress or to prevent victimization.*[52]

Approaches to defining the victim-survivors of domestic violence have already advanced to include dependants as direct victim-survivors. For example, in the UK, 'there is now an analogous example of this approach in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 in which children of domestic abuse survivors are now explicitly defined as victims in their own right'.[53] In outlining the legislative background and impetus for the introduction of this definition of victimhood in the *Domestic Abuse Act*, the UK Home Office highlighted the long-term impact domestic abuse can have on children's wellbeing and development and reiterated that 'children exposed to domestic abuse are victims of child abuse'.[54] Such legislation serves as a precedent for broadening the definition of victim-survivors in modern slavery cases to include dependant children. If dependants are not adequately recognised as victim-survivors, despite the significant impact of modern slavery on them, their needs cannot be fully met, and they can suffer trauma that ultimately exposes them to further harm. Children and other family members of victim-survivors are often the 'hidden victims' of trafficking, and without adequate recognition of their status as victims a cycle of vulnerability to exploitation and abuse is created and maintained.

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52 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 'Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power', OHCHR, 29 November 1985, https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-basic-principles-justice-victims-crime-and-abuse.

53 Hestia, p. 27.

54 UK Home Office, *Transforming the Response to Domestic Abuse. Consultation Response and Draft Bill*, 2019, p. 16.