



What are Child - Related Challenges for Survivors of Human Trafficking?

The ideas presented below are from focus groups and interviews with survivor experts

Polaris's National Survivor Study:
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What Survivor Experts Said:

Overall, Family Courts and Child Protective Services (CPS) do not have an understanding of how human trafficking can affect a survivor's experience with **obtaining and keeping custody of their children, especially when the other parent is a trafficker.**

"I struggled with my son who is still in [state] with my trafficker, who is his dad. CPS was like, 'Oh, we don't care that you went through that [trafficking]. Your son lived in this state for a certain amount of months, so he has to stay there.' They didn't look at how he could be harmed by living with my trafficker. Even though I had proof that trafficking was still going on with other females there, it was really ignored. It was more like, 'Well this was your choice.' 'You did this.' 'You did that.' They didn't look at it as maybe the best thing for me to do was to leave my son where he was and then come back for him when I'm more stable. They didn't look at it like that."

"I was just looking at the child support questionnaire if you want to file child support online, and all the questions on there address issues of domestic violence. I would really like to see that child support address issues with human trafficking as well because sometimes women have children by their traffickers. I know, I've had two kids by my traffickers."



When survivors lose custody of their children, **paying child support is difficult and can be sabotaged by their trafficker.**

"My child support got way past due because I was being trafficked."

"I just heard someone say they have to pay child support. I remember going through that and losing my children to my traffickers. There is this big misconception with CPS about survivors. It is a horrible relationship. I think there needs to be a better relationship there and a better understanding of what happens when you're dealing with a survivor and their trafficker who's trying to get their kids, to get money off of them."

Other legal issues such as **immigration or having a criminal record** can make getting custody of children even more difficult.

"In addition to immigration issues, I've seen many girls have their children and once they're put in legal trouble - because some states prosecute not just the johns, but the girls as well - they struggle with their custody. If you're already in legal trouble, then it's super difficult to have kids and to be able to raise and have safe housing away from those bad people who took advantage of you."

Affordable childcare is a challenge and often a barrier to survivors when trying to find and maintain employment and safe housing.

"I think our needs are all intertwined. I couldn't get a job because I didn't have a house. I couldn't get a house because I didn't have a job. I couldn't go to a job interview without bringing my kid because I couldn't afford daycare. I definitely couldn't afford therapy. I was trafficked out of college, so I didn't have a degree. I think they just all kind of overlap."



What is the National Survivor Study?

The National Survivor Study (NSS) is a scientifically rigorous project that puts the lived experiences of survivors at the forefront of the anti-trafficking movement to provide insight into Polaris's strategies, policies, and evaluation frameworks. In full partnership with survivors, the NSS also aims to inform the anti-trafficking movement more broadly by filling key evidence gaps that exist in the field.

Completed Activities

- Held focus group discussions with people traditionally excluded from research on human trafficking
 - e.g., survivors living in rural areas, Native American / Native Alaskan survivors, Black / African American survivors, Latinx / Hispanic survivors, LGBTQ+ survivors, immigrant survivors, male survivors, gender-diverse survivors, and Asian American & Pacific Islander survivors
- Conducted interviews with other professionals and lived-experience experts from the anti-trafficking field
- Applied survivor feedback into survey questions
- Conducted an online survey with survivors across the United States

Current Activities

- Summarize and share key findings from focus groups, interviews, and online survey data

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