

## “He said I belonged to him and that I could not say absolutely anything because I was his property.”

– ESTER, SURVIVOR

*What brings girls and women to the US varies. What traps them in exploitation is strikingly the same.*

### An immigrant girl or woman who ends up in the Life in the US was likely vulnerable long before she got here.

From girls in Mexico who fall in love with “boyfriends” that rape and then smuggle them into the US, to girls in China hired to work for “massage parlors” in New York City, thousands of girls and women are brought to this country under false pretenses.

### Her exploiter controls her life.

To gain this control, an exploiter may take away her passport, documentation and money. She may be subjected to extreme physical and sexual violence in order to frighten and subdue her. Her exploiter doesn't have to worry about getting reported because she would have to overcome significant barriers to do so.

### She might not know her abuse is illegal, or how to report it.

Without a community, language skills or knowledge of social or legal systems in the US, immigrant girls and women have no safety nets.

### Shame and stigma may keep a woman from realizing that she could escape her situation.

Physical, emotional and mental harm from sexual exploitation are intensified by racism and sexism. These factors of control and isolation are just part of her story.

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Some women are coming here running for their lives. Some are coming here through no choice of their own. Some have been made false promises.

– ARCHI, HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE

”



41%

In one study, 41% of Latina domestic violence victims claim they did not come forward due to their fear of deportation.<sup>1</sup> If she's in the US illegally, the threat of being returned to an even more dangerous situation prevents her from accessing available services and resources.

# The Life Story

MOMENTS OF CHANGE.

*Sharing the voices of survivors of sexual exploitation. Revealing the opportunities we all have to create a better world for girls and women.*

## IMMIGRATION

### STEPS TOWARD CHANGE

How can systems serve and support the exploited immigrant women who fear them?

#### Maintain and expand federal and local protections.

Maintain current policies, such as the T visa, that protect girls and women who have been trafficked. Ensure local and federal officials recognize the precarious situation that exploited immigrant women face.

#### Support outreach to immigrant communities.

From legal aid to shelter, many organizations are working to support the needs of immigrant communities. An important component of this is ongoing outreach so that the women and children who are steadily being brought to this country understand their rights.

#### Create protocols to identify and support trafficked immigrants.

In medical settings, schools, courthouses and even neighborhoods, public vigilance is key. There is a need for more investment in training, protocols and programs to recognize and humanely respond to victims of sexual exploitation.

#### Allow immigrants to access essential public services.

Food, shelter, healthcare and safety are basic human needs for survival no matter her status. Human beings who are denied these basic needs are vulnerable to exploitation by human traffickers. Providing immigrant girls and women with these services is an essential first step.

### WHO CAN SHIFT THE SYSTEM?

After recognizing the unique obstacles facing an immigrant woman, many individuals have the potential to help.

CULTURALLY SPECIFIC  
SUPPORT NETWORKS

SHELTER STAFF

HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

IMMIGRANT RIGHTS FUNDERS

ATTORNEYS

IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS  
ENFORCEMENT (ICE)

TEACHERS

“

I thought to myself, ‘I have to plan how to escape this.’ But it’s not easy. You have no one to trust in, with no one to talk to.

– SANDRA, SURVIVOR

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1. The No Mas Study: Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault in the Latin@ Community. No Más, National Latin@ Network: Casa de Esperanza, & Avon Foundation for Women (2015).

### ABOUT THIS PROJECT

**The Life Story: Moments of Change** shines a light on the realities of women in the sex trade, elevates their voices and experiences and highlights opportunity for change. This material is meant to inform and inspire those who work across the intersections of education, housing, public health, mental health and addiction services, economic and racial justice, and many other areas. **Learn more at:**