

Coming home. Challenges in the re/integration of trafficked persons

Rebecca Surtees, NEXUS Institute
November 25, 2010
rsurtees@nexusinstitute.net
www.nexusinstitute.net

Some recent research projects

- *Taking stock, moving forward. Methods, ethics and approaches in trafficking research*, NEXUS/IOM project funded by U.S. Dept. of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP), 2008-2011
- *Trafficking victims re/integration programme*, funded by the King Baudouin Foundation, 2007-2011
- *The family environment of returned trafficking victims*, NEXUS/Fafo project, funded by Norwegian Research Council, 2008-2009
- *Trafficking in men*, NEXUS/IOM project, G/TIP funded, 2007-2008
- *Leaving the past behind. When trafficking victims decline assistance*, NEXUS/Fafo, Norwegian MFA funded, 2006-7

What is re/integration?

- Recovery & socio-economic inclusion after trafficking, including:
 - settlement in a safe and secure environment,
 - access to a reasonable standard of living,
 - mental and physical well-being,
 - opportunities for personal, social & economic development
 - access to social and emotional support
- May take place in different settings:
 - return to the victim's family and/or community of origin
 - integration in a new community in the country of origin
 - integration in a new country

Why is re/integration important?

- Part of protection – the right to re/integration assistance to recover from trafficking
- A healthy life for individuals, families and communities is good for society as a whole – socially and economically
- Empowers individuals, strengthens society
- Can potentially prevent re-trafficking

Why is re/integration difficult?

- The impact and trauma of trafficking
- Tensions and stressors in the family
- Community problems and discrimination
- Many different victims and experiences; many different re/integration needs
- Don't identify as a victim; don't accept that s/he was trafficked

The impact and trauma of trafficking

- **Feel shame, fear, frustration, disappointment**

“Some people laugh and say that you were a prostitute in the street. But they don’t know what it is in your heart and how many nights you didn’t sleep, with how many men you were forced to sleep or do other things...”

“When they come home they’re glad if they can bring some money. Otherwise, how to explain their absence?”
- **Stress, tension, frustration, aggressive**

“...I was furious and no matter how much the [social worker] told me to relax I was unable to control my anger. I was crying. It hurt so much. I tried suicide. I was lonely”

Tensions and stressors in the family environment

- “Bad” families
 - “We weren’t getting along. There were fights, beatings”
 - “My husband humiliates me and calls me a prostitute”.
- No family
 - “I had two brothers but they’re dead. Also my parents, first my father, then mother. When I came home, I had no one”.
- “Good” families
 - “My mother is always with me; she supports me”
- But all families face problems on return
 - E.g. debt from migration, feel abandoned, no money sent home, angry because of stressed behaviours

Tensions and stressors in the family environment

- Tension with spouse; parents; children; relatives
 - Especially difficult when trafficking is kept secret

“Victims and family members are usually angry, accusing each other of serious offences. Victims accuse parents of alcoholism and abuse and sending them from home. Families accuse victims of bad behaviour which resulted in trafficking”.

“My family said it was my fault. They didn’t understand”.

“He’ll be mocked by family. A man must manage on his own”.

“You went to earn money but you’re not providing for your child”.

“The child thinks ‘she left me’. And she yells or she behaves strangely. That’s why children do not accept their mothers”.

Community problems and discrimination

- Stigma and discrimination within community
 - b/c of prostitution, failed migration, being assisted, not coming home with money, not being “a man”

“I have heard bad rumours spread about me in the village”

“People in our community are inclined to criticise. They don’t understand and so blame instead of showing compassion”

“ In our community, men are not to complain. They must be strong and overcome their problems alone”
- Worse for marginalised group

“Neighbours say about me that woman [from an ethnic minority] was assisted but not normal people”

Community problems and discrimination

- Limits reintegration; even leads to violence

“She was not successful [in her business]... She sold [goods] but many people bought on credit... People owed her money but she didn't dare to ask them for it”

“I had many problems with my child at school. They wanted to expel him”

“Neighbours were very abusive and aggressive. And when they shouted at me, my daughter heard these things.

“She went to a village party and some men raped her. They said, ‘you did this there for money, why not do it for us free’?”

- Re/integrate when communities are broken?

Different victims and experiences; different re/integration needs

- Trafficked men and trafficked women
 - “Men think that they are stronger and must find a way out of a difficult situation by themselves; without asking for help”
 - “Men don’t like losing time visiting doctors or to be far from families. It is more difficult for them to accept assistance and when it is accepted, it should be in a short period of time”.
- Labour and sex trafficking
 - “The criminal case was tried in court and people received sentences. We now have a civil law suit, want compensation”
 - “There is no way I can change my profession, I was a sailor and I will be a sailor”.

Different victims and experiences; different re/integration needs

- Trafficked children

“I stayed at the shelter longer, after all [my mother] did to me... My stepfather abused me, I wouldn't have gone back”.

- The elderly

“I think there are many old people who don't enjoy their children's care and they don't watch TV or listen to the radio. Like me they don't know where to go to ask for help”.

“I have a good relationship with my son and his wife, they look after me. But I feel guilty... now I am a hanger-on in his flat and family. There is so little room here”.

- Also differences within these categories

Different victims and experiences; different re/integration needs

- Different contexts and settings
 - “Some trafficking victims experience their stay in shelters as a waste of time since they want to make money”.
 - “It helped a lot; I felt calmer when I came here. Outside, everything felt dark, like people were saying bad things about me. But I stopped coming because I had to work”.
- One size ***does not*** fit all; no intervention can meet all victims' needs
- Consider the needs of all victims in policies and interventions
 - Including those assisted and those never identified

Don't identify as a "trafficking victim" or a "victim"

- Don't frame their experience as "trafficked"
 - Explain it as "bad luck" or because of a "bad boss"
 - Consented to migrate so not trafficking
"He is not guilty of trafficking. I left of my own free will".
 - When exploitation is the best option
"When I was trafficked the fridge was full. We even had chicken".
 - To accept trafficking term means (negative) associations (prostitution, being deceived, etc.)
"If the community knows, you'll be seen through a different eye".

Don't identify as a "trafficking victim" or a "victim"

- Reject victim category – identities are diverse and contradictory; victimhood not only (or primary) identity
 - “Sometimes I felt that I was handicapped. Why should anyone help me if I have legs and arms? This help was brought but in the beginning I didn't feel comfortable. I was used to doing everything on my own”.
 - “Many men are ashamed of appealing for help. Our society does not approve of men who appeal for assistance. They must manage on their own”.
 - “The message should be short and convincing and you shouldn't use such words as “victim””

What can we do?

- Researchers:
 - Ensure adherence to ethical principles
 - Test and use innovative and sensitive methodologies
 - Make findings available and accessible to practitioners and policy-makers, given issues like time and access to resources
 - Findings available in local language (and different languages)
 - Share findings in creative ways – skype, video conferences
- Practitioners and policy-makers:
 - Design interventions based on the current knowledge base
 - Revise interventions when new findings come to light
 - Engage researchers and evaluators in design/implementation
 - Develop ethical protocols for engaging with researchers, including on sharing data and access to respondents

What can we do?

- Donors/funders need to:
 - Design calls for proposals/interventions based on the current knowledge base and evidence;
 - Research the situation thoroughly in designing and implementing a call for proposals
 - Fund innovative research which tests different methods and considers ethical issues/constraints
 - Fund applied research which has very real policy and practical relevance
 - Require ethical and methodological rigour
 - Make evaluations a requirement of all interventions
 - Fund re/integration efforts (!!!)

What can we do?

- Trafficked persons at the centre of discussion

“I think the idea is good, such research should be done because only by speaking to the beneficiaries will service providers know what was good and what was bad...”

“It’s important that beneficiaries can participate in such studies, that they are taken into account”

“It is important to listen to beneficiaries’ problems in order to understand how to help them. This is a normal thing”.

“This was not stressful to me. I was pleased that my opinion counted for something, I think that the information I provided will be useful”.