

## Challenges for the medical and psychological care of children victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in Lao PDR



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## Migration & trafficking context in Lao PDR

### Exploring how does trafficking takes place?

Many youths mostly females leave more and more remote villages to work in Thailand (more recently China) or other provinces in Laos, (usually in the garment industry or as service girls in restaurants, hotels, guest houses, or in beer gardens) often solicited by brokers, pimps or procurers.

## Conditions having psychological incidence

- Acknowledgement of risks or not?
- Family's involvement in the departure?
- When trafficking process started?
- Who are the traffickers?
- How does personal judgment has been developed during all the process?
- What is the wide range of experiences met along the way?

## Phenomenological analysis of the psychological incidence of trafficking for sexual exploitation

Undermining of self esteem and de-personalisation process.

- Victims identity is reduced to work-force or sexual object, inducing a de-personalisation process supported by the exploiters in order to shape a kind of robot for work or prostitution.
- Exploitation is linked with a lost of the control on their own life.
- Victims suffer from moral and personal degradation (shame, mistrust) and helplessness.
- Betrayal is affecting deeply the person psychological dynamic, her self-confidence and the image of herself.

## Psychological incidence of trafficking for sexual exploitation

- Relation with body is affected some victims being neglecting their body perceived as spoiled and dissociated.
- Dissociation of the personality and creating a new life story are part of the coping processes. It permits psychological survival of unbearable situation in order to face too painful reality and not to become mad
- Substance abuse is another main issue met by victims of trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation.
- The use of drugs and alcohol helps to push away real emotions and unpleasant feelings or ideas and to detach from reality.
- Addiction reinforces the power of exploiters in terms of control and increasing debt toward them
- Being addict increases the low feeling of self-esteem.

## Violence abuse & multiple traumas

Exploitation resulting of trafficking can be multi-traumatic.

- Psychological distress results from dangerous and degrading circumstances surrounding the condition of exploitation that are physically and emotionally painful.
- Violence of trafficking is aimed at control the persons, to make them worthless, powerless, to ensure their compliance and keep them trapped. It includes, threats to bit, to kill, kick, starve, burns and all kinds of verbal abuses.

## Effects of Violence, abuse & multiple traumas

- Victims express feeling of sadness, anger, anxiety, of not being understood.
- They experience grief and depression, fear and distrust, sleep difficulties or nightmares.
- They develop a sense of hopelessness, resignation and despair that are increased in condition of captivity.
- The acknowledged risks of AIDS increase their fear and anxiety.

## Violence abuse & multiple traumas

- The PTSD diagnostic should be used carefully. It has its own limitations: distress and suffering after the trauma are normal responses to abnormal situation.
- There is a danger to call or stigmatise people as mentally ill.
- There are risk factors that account for individual's vulnerability to develop this disorder:
  - Social support, attitudes of parents.
  - Prior exposition to trauma.
  - Individual personality, family history.
  - Other life events at the time of trauma.

## Medical issues

- All beneficiaries benefit on a volunteer basis from a whole medical checking.
- High prevalence of STI/STD with all the victims rescued from bars
- Parasitosis are frequent
- Victims complain of head and stomach aches
- Feeling of being weak addressed by vitamins and food
- Pain in body attributed to end of drug taking or aphrodisiacs.
- Psycho somatic disorders
- Western and Lao medical treatments are used on shelters

## Coping and Healing

- Coping is a systemic, dynamic and cultural way for people who overcome difficulties and involves physical and mental processes to mobilise personal, familial, environment resources.
- Medication under psychiatrist supervision brings relief in some severely traumatised cases.
- Self esteem and depression and anxiety scale start to be used to evaluate the psychological dynamic of the beneficiaries.
- Art therapy has proved to be a valuable mode of intervention in a country without psychologist and where emotions are culturally contained.

## Healing

- Keeping traditions and maintaining good relation with the spiritual world might reinforce self esteem and identity.
- *Bassi* (or *su khuan*) help to chase bad influences and call for good souls to come and support the person. This collective ceremony supports reintegration.
- Purification rituals with holly water (*lot nam*) have magical power to clean and to reinforce one's energies, resulting in better mental dynamic and less physical pains.
- The legal intervention is a whole part of the healing process.

## The recovery process: working with a victim centred approach

- The recovery can take place in the shelter, in the family or within a community and can take days, months, years according to each person.
- It is important to consider persons as active survivors being able to work on their environment not passive victims.
- When the persons have expressed the facts and their feelings and they have made sense of the events in a way that relates to their current or new attitudes and beliefs, then they are empowered and ready to decide on appropriate action for their future.
- Vocational training with professional certificate and economic support to start a new life with 3 years follow up are key elements of the success of the reintegration.

## Psycho-Social incidence with family & reintegration in the community

- The perception role and expectations of family toward their children's departure need to be carefully assessed understanding what is to be a good daughter for the family and for the person herself.
- At young age (under 16), separation from family might induce a disruption of emotional and psychological development.
- For the victims of sexual exploitation, family ties might be weakened due to the shame felt by family and victims.
- Many victims will tend not to tell their story in order not to face social prejudice resulting in feeling of being non understood and isolated.
- Victims of trafficking feelings of unworthiness, dirtiness and being spoiled are common and push to leave again

## Conclusion

- Sexual Exploitation compromises the right of a child to enjoy their youth and their ability to lead a productive, rewarding and meaningful life.
- Victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation suffer long-term physical and psychological damages that need to be recognised and addressed professionally.
- Through a person centred approach, AFESIP intends to consider the choices and the intentions expressed by the person within the experienced set of limitations that she is facing in the family or community, in order to restore her dignity in the context of her life and environment.

## Thank you for your kind attention

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