



Good Practice Briefing

Working with Women Trafficked into Sexual Exploitation: Lessons in Resilience

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The Sharing Our Strengths Project

WRC and Women and Girls' Network (WGN) have been funded by London Councils to deliver a four-year project, Sharing Our Strengths, aimed at providing second tier support to London's violence against women and children sector through the sharing of knowledge, skills and good practice and the facilitation of networking and partnerships. The project will run from February 2009 to March 2013.

This support is primarily available free of charge to organisations funded under the London Councils specifications which cover violence against women and children (38, 42, 43, 59, 60, the combined 61 and 63, 62, 65, 69, 70 and 72).

What support does the project provide?

The support comes in a number of forms:

1. Accredited training for frontline workers
2. Professional exchange seminars
3. Good practice briefings and template policies
4. Training and 1-1 support on monitoring and evaluation and infrastructure issues
5. Monthly email newsletter - email IsabelM@wrc.org.uk to subscribe
6. 6-monthly discussion and networking meetings for funded organisations
7. Membership of WRC's online women's sector network

For more information, please see www.wrc.org.uk/sharingourstrengths

Good Practice Briefings

The purpose of the good practice briefings is to provide Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) organisations with information to help them become more sustainable and contribute with making their work more effective.

Working with Women Trafficked into Sexual Exploitation:

Introduction

The purpose of this Good Practice Briefing (GPB) is to introduce ideas, generate awareness and understanding of the context of sexual exploitation of trafficked women; identify the emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual health needs of trafficked women; explore the clinical dilemmas and challenges in adapting clinical work to meet the needs of trafficked women and explore holistic responses grounded on the notion of resilience when working with women who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation.

This document will focus on the therapeutic aspects of working with trafficked women, although links will be provided in the resource section to the legal framework that has been set by international organisations to address the issue.

This Good Practice Briefing (GPB) is based on two Professional Exchange Seminars delivered as part of the Sharing Our Strengths project, run in partnership between the Women and Girls Network and the Women's Resource Centre in May and November 2012 in London. During the seminars, Women and Girls Network shared their experiences of working with women trafficked into sexual exploitation with workers from VAWG organisations across London.

The GPB will present the definition of trafficking; describe the nature and extent of the problem, its relation with other forms of violence against women and girls and its social, physical and psychological impact. Finally, it will discuss a support strategy to promote the recovery of women that have been trafficked, based on a holistic perspective grounded on the notion of resilience.

At the end of briefing, some resources are presented so those working in the area can identify sources for support and continue to further their knowledge skills in the area.

Definitions

Trafficking is a crime against humanity. It refers to the recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring or receiving a person through a use of force, coercion or other means, for the purpose of exploiting them - be it for sexual exploitation, other forms of forced labour, slavery, servitude, or for the removal of human organs. Trafficking takes place by criminal means through the threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of positions of power or abuse of positions of vulnerability.

The term trafficking relates to all stages of the trafficking process: recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons. However, its emphasis on the transaction aspect of the crime can be misleading. It can be more accurately described as enslavement: the exploitation of people, day after day, for years on end (http://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Executive_summary_english.pdf).

United Nations Definition of Trafficking

According to Article 3 of the “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime”:

“Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/protocoltraffic.htm>)

The nature of the crime of trafficking – underground and often not acknowledged—makes it difficult to determine the exact number of women that are trafficked for sexual exploitation each year. According to United Nations, an estimated 2.5 million people are in forced labour (including sexual exploitation) at any given time as a result of trafficking.

(http://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/issues_doc/labour/Forced_labour/human_trafficking_thefactsfinal.pdf).

In the 1780s, when the slave trade was at its peak, that number of Africans who were involved in the Atlantic slave trade to the US approached 80,000 a year. Nowadays, an estimated 800,000 people trafficked are across borders every year (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-18514626>).

Trafficking is a greatly unpunished crime. In 2006, there were only 5,808 prosecutions and 3,160 convictions throughout the world. This means that for every 800 people trafficked, only one person was convicted in 2006 (US State Department, Trafficking in Persons Report (2007) p.36)

Trafficking is now considered the third largest source of profits for organized crime, behind only drugs and weapons, generating billions of dollars annually (Miko & Park, 2002).

United Nations Definition of Sexual Exploitation

The term “sexual exploitation” means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.”

(UN Secretary-General’s Bulletin on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse <http://www.un.org/en/pse/taskforce/overview.shtml>)

According to the International Labour Organisation, 43% of trafficking victims are used for commercial sexual exploitation, of which 98% are women and girls. (International Labour Organization, Forced Labour Statistics Factsheet (2007).

Women trafficked for sexual exploitation experience a wide range of severe and continuous violence. According to a report on the physical and health consequences of women and adolescents trafficked in Europe, 95% of victim’s experienced physical or sexual violence during trafficking (Zimmerman, 2006). A quantitative report identified multiple physical and mental health problems amongst those who had been subjected to trafficking; it revealed that the mental health symptoms persisted longer than most of the physical health problems (Hossain M et al., 2010).

This cumulative, profound and enduring impact of trafficking on women’s physical and emotional health demands a holistic response to support their recovery.

Understanding the Drivers

In order to understand the sexual exploitation of women, it is fundamental to adopt an ecological perspective of gender-based violence and identify the web of strands that entice and trap women and girls into sexual exploitation.

Demand

Demand is the most significant driver in the trafficking of women and girls into sexual exploitation. The ability for men to purchase the power to act out humiliating, degrading and violent acts towards women without any realistic sanctions. Key is the denial of women's subjectivity and humanity. Implicit is the acceptance of the objectification of women along with a sense of right and entitlement to sexual exploitation of women and girls as commodified bodies to be used and abused.

Gender inequality and multiple forms of discrimination

The global feminisation of poverty means that women are disenfranchised, marginalised, limited political access and power. Discrimination and lack of access to resources generates and maintains women's marginalisation which supports structures of inequality and enables the trafficking of women's and girls' bodies for profit.

Global Politics

From this perspective, it is important to understand how different forms of discrimination come together to make the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation possible. Why are women and, particularly, poor women from underdeveloped, economically / politically in transition and unstable, in conflict and war zones targeted? In addition, why are the main 'markets' countries in the developed world? It becomes obvious that trafficking of women for sexual exploitation takes advantage of economic differentials between rich and poor countries as well as of the political instabilities in developing countries.

Early Trauma

When understanding why certain women are targeted, it is important to look at the legacy from experiences of early trauma. Numerous studies have confirmed that 65%-90 of women and girls will also have experienced child sexual abuse, witnessing domestic violence, physical, emotional abuse or neglect. These factors function to lower boundaries and resistance to manipulation and create a vulnerability to further abuse.



The above diagram illustrates the external 'push' factors and events that impact and result in trauma which precipitates and secures young women's involvement in prostitution

Manipulation

Process of Entrapment

Despite the push, pull factors and matrix of vulnerability previously described as poverty, disadvantage, discrimination and early trauma; traffickers still need to employ an effective process to secure women's complete and sustained entrapment in sexual exploitation.

The sex industry is part of organised crime and therefore is highly motivated to attract and keep women locked into sexual exploitation to ensure profit. It thrives on trafficker's ability for: manipulation, misinformation, lies, deception and coercion to hook and trick women. Traffickers are incredibly focused and determined, employing various techniques and tactics which are culturally relevant to initially ensnare 'victims'.

Klueber (2003) identifies two main ways that women become victims of trafficking: either they respond to advertisements offering work or study abroad or they seek the help of smugglers to travel and enter foreign countries to seek better employment opportunities. With their countries of origin suffering from political and economic instability, there is a lack of employment opportunity, additionally sex discrimination and gender inequality, the women are especially vulnerable to the false promises of traffickers (Klueber, 2003).

The following are a selection of some of the tactics used by traffickers:

- The grooming process may involve love bombing, creating an illusion that this is a romantic relationship with the trafficker masquerading as a boyfriend.
- For other young women the manipulation will focus on her hopes, dreams and ambitions for the future, with the promise of education to escape poverty.
- For some young women the coercion will involve inciting fear of negative spiritual forces involving traditional religions and practices such as ju ju.

- In some communities such as those from African countries compliance is achieved and reinforced due to the cultural value of obedience to elders.
- The pull of poverty in some developing countries means that families are forced / coerced into selling their daughters.
- For others traffickers carefully ensure she becomes addicted to drugs and alcohol and her compliance is achieved through addiction.
- For a number of young women it will be violent, involving abduction, kidnaping, threats and actual harm to her family.

Often trafficked women find themselves forever trapped in prostitution, as they are forced to remain away from their families and country, exiled due to the risk of death for bringing dishonour on the family.

Control

Traffickers will employ universally known tactics used by torturers using processes involving debilitation, dread and dependency that are effective in enslaving people. The women are subjected to psychological manipulation through witnessing and experiencing severe violence, creating fear and chaos which psychologically undermines women's ability to take effective action to escape. Seasoning describes the systematic methods of brain washing, indoctrination and physical violence to ensure the psychological surrender of women entering prostitution. Firstly, women respond to the initial shock and sense of betrayal with resistance and efforts to escape. Pimps and traffickers will use various techniques to emphasize their dominance to form an interlocking system of control, degradation and domination. The realisation for a woman that there is no escape psychologically forces resignation and submission to her fate. This process ensures that women will fully comply with all demands made of her in prostitution. The Stockholm syndrome is a psychological strategy for survival in captivity and describes the traumatic bonds established between women and their captors i.e. pimps and traffickers. Enforced alcohol and drug dependency functions to limit psychological awareness, lowers boundaries for riskier sex acts whilst the addiction ensures her compliance. Finally, the targeted process of isolation and confinement ensures her total emersion in the world of prostitution.

The trafficker's ruthlessness is repeatedly shown through violent beatings or by injury / death to family members at home, reinforcing power and control of the traffickers.

In January 2000, a group of 22 women being led across a mountain range into Greece via Bulgaria were abandoned by their traffickers when a blizzard struck. All 22 women froze to death before Greek border troops could reach them (The economist, 24/8/2000).

Psychological manipulation is rife such as punters dressed as policemen, leading women to believe that police are involved in the deception which reinforces the notion of a huge conspiracy and that escape is impossible. Traffickers also control women by closing down their world, leaving them without contact to the wider world and without networks to which they can resort for help.

Furthermore, the 'debt bond' is constantly increased, controlling women and coercing them to remain obedient to their exploiters.

Recruitment follows a familiar pattern. A young woman, say from provincial Ukraine, almost certainly under 23 and often far younger, is approached by a trafficker. She is offered employment, usually as a waitress or maid, in Central or Western Europe. Having agreed, her underground journey takes her to a squalid way-station. There, her passport and identity papers are stolen, and she is sold, more or less as chattel, to brothel owners—many of them based in Germany, the chief destination for trafficked women—for a few thousand dollars. If she resists, she is isolated, beaten, and often raped. Thus broken, she begins her brothel career, held by means of physical abuse and debt bondage in involuntary sexual servitude. (<http://www.economist.com/node/342003>)

Realities of Prostitution

International studies clearly show that women in prostitution experience high levels of violence including: rape, physical and emotional violence. Farley's (2003) study of

854 prostituted women in nine countries found that:

- 71 % of women had been physically assaulted
- 60% had been raped

The reality of prostitution is that the 'happy hooker' does not exist. Women involved in prostitution are constantly subjected to violence, brutalised for over 16 hours a day, 6 days a week and seeing between 6 to 10 punters who act out aggressive fantasies. Women have to survive in inhumane conditions, in damp environments with no natural light exposing them to multiple health risks.

Adaptations to Captivity

Women adapt to this toxic environment by developing a variety of coping mechanisms in an effort to distance from the horror of their situation. In order to tolerate multiple sex acts with strangers and endure this amount of intimate bodily invasion requires psychological or chemical dissociation in order to cope. Women report various shutting off techniques which may start out as a pathology but are essential to survive prostitution, such as; distancing, disengagement, dissociative proficiency, disembodiment, de-realisation and dissembling. This following quote from a survivor eloquently describes the process of dissociation.

“Gradually B. learned to switch off. She never managed to do it completely, there were always times when she came back and found herself lying under some sweating hulk. Then she wanted to cry out in horror “NO!” it isn't happening to me! But these times became less and less frequent. Soon she couldn't switch herself on again during the day. Everything seemed to be happening on the other side of a dirt glass, but it was worth it. A skin had formed over her mind, and she was free inside it”.

Barker 1984

Survival strategies frequently employed include:

- Consciously having to think of something else
- Cutting off from their feelings
- Creating a false identity – wigs, makeup, attitude
- Avoiding disclosures of personal information
- Chemical dissociation through the use of drugs and alcohol
- Psychological dissociation

Mental Health Impact

Psychologists and psychiatrists have attempted to measure the impact of prostitution and trafficking on affected women's mental health using the diagnostic category "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder" (PTSD). According to the PTSD paradigm, traumatic events generate a variety of symptoms that include: hyper-arousal, irritability, flashbacks, anxiety, hyper-vigilance and poor concentration.

Following the PTSD checklist of symptoms, Farley and colleagues carried a study investigating its prevalence amongst 475 women, men, and transgendered individuals involved in prostitution in five countries. They revealed that 67% of subjects met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD and with levels of severity higher than those found in Vietnam veterans in the United States (Farley, Baral, Kiremire, & Sezgin, 1998).

More recently, in order to account for the complex impact of repeated and overlapping traumatic events, the notion of "Complex Traumatic Stress Disorder" (CTSD) has been created. CTSD is a diagnostic category used to identify the impact of repetitive, prolonged and multiple traumas. In the case of women trafficked for sexual exploitation, captivity, entrapment, and subjected to situations that are often horrific, terrifying and life threatening.

The key symptoms associated with CTSD include:

- Alterations in emotional regulation
- Alterations in consciousness
- Changes in self-perception
- Alterations in the perception of the perpetrator
- Alterations in relationships with others
- Changes in one's system of meanings

This requires major psychological adaptations, promotes internalised contempt, and generates a profound loss of trust in humanity generally. This creates a negative and distorted view of the self, generating self-blame, shame, low self-esteem, sense of powerlessness escalating into self-destructive coping strategies.

Spiritual Impact

"Injuries that bruise the soul"

Simpson 1993

Being trafficked for sexual exploitation generates a spiritual impact in terms of a hurt that is so deep and profound that it affects women's connection with humanity, creating a spiritual

tear as a result of the continuous betrayal and humiliation from her captors. This will impact in the future on her willingness to engage with services offering help and support.

The body Keeps the Score

Living in appalling conditions and subjected to continuous violence, the impact of trafficking is also reflected on women's bodies. The following are a few examples of the ensuing physical damage caused by trafficking and sexual exploitation of women:

- Physical injuries from assaults – broken bones
- Malnourished and exhausted leading to compromised immune system and constant infections
- Vaginal injuries
- Complications from STD's – chronic pelvic pain, pelvic inflammatory disease, septic shock and infertility
- Unsafe terminations
- Lice, scabies and infections
- Gum disease
- IBS
- Culturally determined psychosomatic problems

The long term impact on women's life cycle includes some of the following conditions:

- Traumatic brain injuries
- TB, Hepatitis B & C, HIV/ AIDS
- Coronary disease, Liver / kidney damage
- Neurological problems and early onset dementia
- Cancer – effecting the following organs: uterus, ovarian, pancreas, throat, liver, bone and colon
- Murder / homisucide
- Compromised life expectancy with a mortality rate at 40 times higher than the national average

WGN's Holistic Recovery Model

WGN's holistic recovery model integrates a strength based and gender / trauma responsive approach to working with trafficked and sexually exploited women including the following principles:

- Strengths based approach from an empowerment perspective
- Clinical responses are multifocal and respond to the uniqueness of individual women.
- Collaboration and mutuality
- Focus on strengths and expanding capacities
- Reflect on the unique life experiences and recognise the influence of family, community and belonging
- Recognise the impact of oppression
- Assumption that women have intention and agency

Stage 1 – Restoring Safety

During the first stage, time is spent identifying what safety means for the woman, and establishing therapy as a space with boundaries and orientating women to the process of therapy. Women are encouraged to evaluate internal and external threats to safety.

Stage 2 - Stabilisation

Aimed at regulation of emotions, strategies are developed to manage stress and to legitimise and normalise the impact of their experiences on their mental and physical health. Some of the techniques include:

- Grounding exercises
- Psycho- educational
- Self-soothing
- Self-care
- Resourcing
- Affirmations
- Signature strengths

Stage 3 - Testimony

Trafficked women are kept silent as a result of the terror, dissociation, shame, intimidation and disbelief that is associated with their situation. The purpose of testimony is to create a narrative of the life events (including traumatic events) in a way that it integrates the experience into a coherent scheme that women can learn to accept. This testimony must address the issue of blame by placing responsibility with the trafficker. Essential part of the work is providing the space for women to tell their stories.

- Pre trauma – identification of life events including challenging and positive experiences
- Narrative of the most significant traumatic events
- Post trauma - survival strategies
- Post disclosure acknowledgment of emotional responses and grieving process for losses

Stage 4 – Moving On

- Care of her body and focus on lessening self-destructive patterns
- Reconnection – self forgiveness and compassion
- Reconnection to others and creating healthier relationships
- Engaging more actively with the world
- Focus on ambitions and plans for the future
- Increased sense of power and control
- Development / enhancement of self-protective factors e.g. resilience, self-esteem, confidence, focus on her skills and abilities

Triumph Over Trauma

Finally, the triumph over trauma is achieved when women are able to experience acceptance and self-forgiveness together with righteous anger for what has been done to them. This allows the woman to re-establish normality and liveliness, while understanding that the past does not determine the future.

- Resourcing enables someone to overcome crisis
- Acceptance
- Affirming actions
- Reestablishment of community
- Creating new beliefs
- Understanding the wider life picture and appreciation of ebbs and flows of life
- Restoration of normality
- Sense of hope
- Future focused
- Post Traumatic Growth and new sense of purpose

Lessons From the Butterfly Project

WGN's Butterfly Project provided counselling for women globally trafficked into sexual exploitation. There is not sufficient time to adequately explore the huge learning for us from working with trafficked women, but the following represents some of the headline themes:

- Flexibility in terms of appointment times and format of sessions
- Adaptability ensuring a primary focus on remaining client focused which in some instances meant being creative with content of sessions e.g. Introducing other activities including: developing life skills, knitting, cooking, A-Z map reading, assisting with college work and advocacy support related to practical issues such as health, immigration/ legal matters
- Understanding cultural signifiers and ensuring appropriate responses
- Working with interpreters and the challenges of three way communication with dilemmas of communication 'lost in translation'
- Recognition of women's enormous strength and fragility
- Partnership work with other agencies was essential to create a holistic approach
- Practicing English
- Support encouragement
- Positive Attention
- Development and modelling of strong supportive attachments
- Restoring faith in human kind
- Focus on recovery

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<http://www.economist.com/node/342003>

Resources

- **WHO Human Trafficking Factsheet.**
http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/77394/1/WHO_RHR_12.42_eng.pdf
- **Human Trafficking FAQs.**
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/faqs.html>
- **Global Report on Trafficking in Persons.**
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. http://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Global_Report_on_TIP.pdf
- **Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.**
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/protocoltraffic.htm>
- **Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking.**
<http://www.ungift.org/>
- **HUMAN TRAFFICKING: THE FACTS.**
UN.GIFT.
http://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/issues_doc/labour/Forced_labour/HUMAN_TRAFFICKING_-_THE_FACTS_-_final.pdf
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<http://genderviolence.lshtm.ac.uk/files/Stolen-Smiles-Summary.pdf>
- **Human trafficking: people for sale.**
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
<http://www.unodc.org/toc/en/crimes/human-trafficking.html>
- http://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/issues_doc/labour/Forced_labour/HUMAN_TRAFFICKING_-_THE_FACTS_-_final.pdf