



Introduction to the tragedy of Human Trafficking

The United Nation's International Labor Organization estimates that worldwide about 2.5 million people are victims of trafficking and over half of these people are in Asia and the Pacific.¹ However, that's perhaps overly conservative as other estimates range from 4 million to 27 million²!

Sadly for some people in many places throughout the world 'human trafficking' is more than just a statistic or an abstract, third-person problem but the sad reality of the victim's daily life that erodes their health and hope. Many have been sold by someone else – often a family member, or tricked, coerced or forced into a situation where their basic human rights of freedom and self-determination are denied. Often they are then being 'used' to make money or provide services for others; this could include such activities as forced labour, sexual exploitation, begging, removal of body parts or organ harvesting, criminal activities, forced marriage, illegal adoption, enslaved into military service.

This article will share some personal stories of children rescued to help put a personal, human face on the reality of this problem, and to also communicate the positive message that local people are standing up, with the help of NGOs like Global Development Group in partnership with Destiny Rescue, to rescue and rehabilitate individuals trapped in human slavery.

¹International Labour Organization (ILO), *A Global Alliance against Forced Labour* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2005).

²e.g. 27 Million at (www.freetheslaves.net)

³ILO, *A Future Without Child Labour*, ILO, Geneva, 2002, p. 32.

Human Trafficking

The Problem of Sexual Slavery

Unfortunately every day children are being sold into prostitution and are forced to service multiple customers (sometimes over 10 a day). Pomite* was a normal little six year old until her father started tying her upside down and beating her and raping her with their neighbour. Pomite was then sold to a brothel where she was abused even further... Pomite has now been rescued from the brothel and is being cared for in an 'aftercare home.' Sadly, estimates are that 1.2 million children are trafficked every year³; many suffer similar abuse as Pomite suffered.

How does it happen?

Despite the ongoing efforts and suitably harsh penalties imposed by various governments for those who traffic children for sexual exploitation, children are still being prostituted. Traffickers employ the help of "agents" and local villagers to identify vulnerable families. Many different tactics are used to lure these "at risk" children into their brothels. Agents often deceive parents with false promises of respectable jobs in cities, guaranteeing a portion of the child's wage will be regularly sent back to the parents.

Another strategy is offering parents a loan to "help them" through the hard times, which in turn the parents give their daughters to the brothels to work off the debt. Sadly there are even times when parents simply sell their daughters, knowing full well their fate.

It is customary in many Asian countries for children to help support their parents. It is not uncommon for a young girl to leave their village hoping to find work in the city so she can make money to send back to her parents. Too often there is little scope for a young, uneducated girl to get well paid work, other than working in brothels. Tragically rather than facing the shame of not being able to help support their families, these girls will prostitute themselves to help their parents.

Western materialism has also begun to be a driving factor in many young girls choosing to prostitute themselves. The desire for a mobile phone or designer clothes has made prostitution the only way for these poor, uneducated and unskilled children to get the things they crave.

Prevention is better than cure

Steps can be taken to help in the prevention of prostitution by identifying girls and young women who are at risk of being lured or forced into a life of sexual slavery.

By providing education, training, and skills to enter the workforce they can then earn a living in freedom. Assisting poor families in the community with various community development programs including small business loans and training including such topics as pig breeding or agriculture (for example) helps them to become more self-sufficient and reduces the risk of resorting to selling their daughters in the future. Lastly, education and awareness training to parents and village leaders helps make them aware of the unscrupulous practices of traffickers and the horrendous conditions—including the risk of HIV and other diseases—which trafficked children endure daily.

Child rescued from slavery

Surseh* was about 5 years old his mother died, leaving him in the care of his older sister and non-involved father. When his sister left to get married, and his father remarried, no body cared for him so he wandered the streets to survive. When his father ran out of money for his daily drinking habit he sold Surseh to a landlord as a bonded slave.

Surseh was forced to work hard all day and into the night and to care for and clean cattle. To avoid government attention, his owner would send him to school for a few days a month.

On learning of Surseh's plight, field staff acted swiftly and were able to locate and rescue him. He is now safe in a childhood development centre where he is loved and cared for.

In Surseh's own words, "After arriving in this home, my life is now happy. I now have 3 good meals each day, I am going to school, I am healthy... I wish Destiny Rescue be blessed for helping orphans like me, thank you."

Mobilising the local community is a key to identifying and reducing the potential for human trafficking, and rescuing the victims.

For the real life examples in this article we acknowledge our project partner Destiny Rescue; to be a part of the solution visit www.destinyrescue.org

*names changed to protect identity



Photo: Young people learning sewing skills to earn income for their families and help avoid the lure of human trafficking. *image used courtesy of Destiny Rescue

■ For more details visit:

www.globaldevelopment.org.au/issue-2010-08