

Focus on the victims: the challenge of addressing the needs of victims of internal and cross-border trafficking

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Victim Support Finland

- 30 offices around the country
- Clients: victims of different crimes – regardless of gender, age, residence status
- 50 staff members, 400 volunteers
- Coordinator, CSO platform on THB

Services:

- Individual support persons
- Legal Advice Helpline
- National Helpline
- RIKUchat – anonymous chat



Victims of THB

- 41 persons: 22 men, 18 women, 1 other:
 - 25 clients of the National Assistance System
 - 9 clients who have previously been clients of the NAS (dropped out for example due to the police using another criminal charge)
 - 4 clients who did not want to receive assistance from the authorities, usually due to fear of criminal process or consequences for residence status
 - 3 who were not accepted into the NAS



Victims of THB

- Labor trafficking 30
- Sexual exploitation 8
- Other forms of THB 3
- 39 crimes in Finland, only 2 abroad
- 17 nationalities, including Finnish nationals



Services for victims of THB

Support person

- Provides support and assists in protecting the client's interests
- Due to need for intensive assistance, usually staff
- Provides advice during the criminal process, accompanies to police and court hearings
- Practical issues according to client's needs: contacts to authorities or lawyer, filling in forms, leisure time activity planning, bank errands, etc.
- With interpreter if no common language

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False conceptions can prevent identification

- Conceptions of what trafficking or a trafficking victim looks like can be strong
- Shocking pictures in media can give visibility but prevent identification in real situations
- Persisting perception that trafficking always involves physical violence and victim's movements are physically restricted



The ideal victim

- Cries, seems weak and humble
- Didn't know the perpetrator before the exploitation and has no feelings towards them
- Thankfully accepts all provided assistance, "easy to help"
- Was kidnapped
- Ran away or at least tried
- Tells a coherent story
- Has a clean record
- No substance abuse
- Young woman
- No issues with residence



Common challenges

- Coming forward can have actual negative consequences: revenge, deportation, social stigma
- Lack of suitable lawyers
- Services don't exist
 - Lack of competent trauma therapists, especially willing to work with interpreter
 - Suitable options for housing: in some countries only shelters, in Finland lack of options for 24h assistance
- If service provision or investigation is not centralized in special units, nobody gathers experience (police, social services, etc)



Common challenges

- Assistance directly or indirectly tied to criminal process
 - In Finland, can be accepted into governmental assistance but then lose right if the police uses another criminal charge
- Reflection and recovery periods do not allow for genuine reflection if the information is eventually passed to the police regardless of the victim's decision



Common challenges

- Court proceedings: reliving trauma
 - Usually at least district court and court of appeal
 - Prosecution of buyers – what's in it for the victim?
 - Even if assigned compensation is big, getting the money out in practice is usually hard
- Forced criminality: non-punishment principle practically never applied



Cross border trafficking

- Current trend of strict immigration policies creates a larger vulnerable group and makes victims more vulnerable
 - Undocumented status strongly increases vulnerability to exploitation but is seen as a factor that decreases the credibility of the victim
 - The fear of deportation or of losing an existing residence status prevents victims from reporting crimes and seeking help
- Border control prioritized over victims' rights?





Jag trodde då att den normala regeln i Finland är att människor arbetar 16–17 timmar.



Cross border trafficking

- Particularly good example: often the police does not do previous surveillance and burden of exposing the crime falls on the victim
 - Cutting ties is not simple if relative, person in a position of power or high social status in community
 - Often belief that law enforcement will side with the more influential party
 - Fear: threats on family in country of origin where destination country police can't provide protection
 - Actual or fabricated debt



Cross border trafficking

- Needs of a foreign victim can be very broad: learning to run errands, contacts with authorities related to benefits, basic training, housing, spare time activities...
- Loneliness, isolation: often only networks in the country were exploiters, now connections only to professional helpers
- Isolation and stress often leads to mental health problems and sometimes substance abuse



Cross border trafficking

- What happens if the residence permit is not extended?
 - The victim has taken a risk in exposing the exploiter, who is usually in a position of power especially in the country of origin
 - Worst case scenario: trafficker stays, victim deported and unprotected from revenge
 - Even if no direct physical threat, victim may return with social stigma, debt and decreased ability to provide an income for their family



Internal trafficking

- Sexual exploitation, forced criminality...
- Positive: understands basics of how society functions, no problems related to residence status, no language or cultural barrier, easier to use therapy services if available
- But: in home country, victims are expected to function normally and inability due to trauma often not considered



Internal trafficking

- Misconception that raw violence and exploitation starts immediately – usually not the case, *especially* in internal trafficking
- Grooming, situation of psychological manipulation develops little by little
- Even the victim often doesn't recognize when the exploitation starts and when they can no longer control the situation



Internal trafficking

- More media attention = fear of exposure
- Social media and alternative news sites increase risk of revealing victim's identity
- Connection between victim and perpetrator usually known – revealing the name of the perpetrator can reveal the name of the victim



Internal trafficking

- Bigger social cost of being exposed as trafficking victim (“prostitute”, “criminal”)
- After exposing the crime, would have to live in the same setting
 - Exploiter often knows victim’s family, friends etc.
 - Threats, revenge
 - Victim stigma – might affect life for long time
- Environment a constant reminder of the exploitation



Internal trafficking

- Can be harder to talk to officials about issues related to the exploitation, particularly if lives in smaller municipality
- "Not a perfect victim" – might have own opinion on what kind of assistance wants to receive, ties to perpetrator known within community
- Perpetrators also part of the community – hard to believe, because they don't correspond to the image of a "mafioso"



Internal trafficking

- Often in a marginalized position already before exploitation
 - Distrust of mainstream society
 - Attitudes within mainstream society ("drug addict", "alcoholic", "criminal", "prostitute") towards a person in a marginalized position
- Victim blaming of "imperfect victims" – own fault because of involvement in bad circles
 - Negative attitudes regardless of whether for example drug abuse started before or as a result of trafficking



Internal trafficking

- Many victims have had contacts with officials before and have hoped that someone would see their situation, but have not been identified and haven't received assistance – due to these previous disappointments, don't believe they will be helped now



Thank you!

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