

Towards formal labor market – victims’ perspective

MSc. RETA PINDERI

Faculty of Social Science, University of Tirana

PhD. ERIS DHAMO

Faculty of Social Science, University of Tirana

Abstract:

Human trafficking is one of the most tragic human rights issues of our time. It splinters families, distorts global markets, undermines the rule of law, and spurs other transnational criminal activity. It threatens public safety and national security. But worst of all, the crime robs human beings of their freedom and their dignity (TIP report, 2017). Trafficking women for sexual exploitation is the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world. This, despite the fact international law and the laws of 158 countries criminalize most forms of trafficking. 54% of trafficking victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation. Women and girls make up 96% of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation (UNODC, Tip report 2016).

Trafficking experience can be devastating and difficult to overcome, often leaving long-term emotional and physical effects on the individuals involved in it.

The research questions of the study were: What are the perceptions and experiences of victims of trafficking exploited for sexual purposes during their efforts to get involved in the formal labor market? What is the impact of stigma and discrimination?

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect primary qualitative data from 22 victims of trafficking exploited for sexual purposes. The study found out that the challenges faced by the victims of trafficking to get involved in the formal labor market were multiple ranging from: wage mismatch with working conditions / working hours; unsuitable schedules for mothers with children, high

competition for a job placement, sexual harassment incidents in the workplace etc.

Key words: Human trafficking, reintegration process, victims of trafficking, labor market

INTRODUCTION

Employment represents one of the primary components of the reintegration of victims of trafficking into the normal life. Reintegration refers to the process of recovery and social-economic involvement of the individual after a trafficking experience. Reintegration involves placement in a safe environment, access to reasonable living standards, opportunities for personal and economic development, and access to emotional and social support. In many cases, reintegration involves the return of the victim to the family of origin / community of origin. However, it may also include integration into a new country, depending on the needs and interests of the victim (Surtees, 2008).

Finding jobs for victims of trafficking remains very difficult and difficulty increases when we talk about finding formal jobs, which include social and health insurance. With limited employment opportunities, victims of trafficking accept all the working conditions offered to them (although in some cases they may be exploitative and risky). So, usually victims of trafficking are involved in the informal labor market, where security is limited, salaries are low and other benefits resulting from employment do not exist.

The battle in terms of employment becomes even bigger and more severe when it comes to victims of trafficking exploited for sexual purposes. The level of stigma and difficulties this target group of victims encounter are multiple.

METHODOLOGY

Considering the complexity and specificity of the issue, the qualitative research method was considered to be the most appropriate to use in this study. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect primary qualitative data from the study participants.

The research questions of the study were:

- What are the perceptions and experiences of victims of trafficking exploited for sexual purposes during their efforts to get involved in the formal labor market?
- What is the impact of stigma and discrimination?

The main criteria for selecting the study participants was to be victims of trafficking exploited for sexual purposes and that had been assisted in a reintegration program for at least six months. A total of 22 victims of trafficking were interviewed, assisted in the reintegration program of three organizations: "Different & Equal" / Tirana, Psycho-Social Center "Vatra" / Vlorë, Association "Another Vision" / Elbasan. The above mentioned organizations have set up for the first time and continue to provide direct reintegration services for victims of trafficking in a specialized and professional manner.

The age of the interviewed victims ranges from 18 to 40 years. The settlements of the study participants mainly include the cities of Tirana, Elbasan and Vlora (one case lived in Cërrik and another in Shkodra) - this is directly related to the fact that service providers for trafficking victims are precisely in these cities. Even when the process of receiving services has ended, victims of trafficking feel the need to stay close to service providers (the need for a secure network of support). The network of support is known differently as the extent to which the basic social needs of a person are met through interaction with others (Thoits, 1982 & Kaplan et al, 1977). This network is especially important when victims lack healthy and sustainable relationships with the family of origin.

The period of assistance in a reintegration program ranged from 6 months to 5 years, which showed again that the reintegration process is a completely individual process and influenced by a number of factors. This process aims at achieving the full social and economic involvement of the individual after the trafficking experience. This process is assessed as complex, costly and linked to a variety of personal factors, as well as to wider social, cultural and economic factors. (Surtees, 2008).

Development of research

This paper is part of a series of mini-studies that the author has conducted for the fulfillment of the doctoral degree.

The motivation for undertaking this study was to provide an updated picture of the victims of trafficking perspective in regard to their ongoing efforts to be involved in the formal labor market in Albania.

Study Limitations

The first limitation of the study is related to the fact that in the focus were mainly victims of trafficking exploited for sexual purposes.

The second limitation is related to the fact that only female victims of trafficking were interviewed, while male victims are also affected by this form of trafficking. This restriction is related to the difficulties of identifying this category of victims as well as the mentality of the Albanian society or the victims themselves who categorically refuse to accept what has happened to them because of the fear of being stigmatized or discriminated, refusing sometime even the necessary assistance and services.

The third limitation stems from the fact that the survey population is victims of trafficking that have already been identified as such by police or other institutions and are included in an reintegration program. Meanwhile, it is thought that there are a significant number of victims who for various

reasons have not been identified and have never been involved in a reintegration program. Contacting this category of individuals is almost impossible to accomplish.

DATA ANALYSES AND FINDINGS

Data collected via in-depth interviews with victims of trafficking was transcribed, coded and then analyzed according to these domains of interest: professional training, finding a job placement, job relationships, stigma and discrimination, challenges toward sustainable employment.

Professional training

The victims of trafficking interviewed shared their personal experiences regarding various aspects of vocational training, focusing mainly on the reasons for selecting a particular course, available courses alternatives and the freedom to choose between them, the quality of the courses offered, their usefulness in terms of increasing employment opportunities, etc.

Selection of the professional training

The majority of respondents show that they have been able to attend a professional course based on their personal skills and the desire to have a life-loving profession. Most respondents indicate that they have attended courses such as hairdressing, kitchen, tailoring etc.

"I attended a kitchen course. It seemed to me appropriate, as a profession that I could do with pleasure every day of my life" (VoT, Vlorë, 1)

"I followed the hairdressing course because I liked it and thought that after completion I could start my own business and manage it by myself." (VoT, Vlorë, 8)

"I followed a tailoring course because I think I have more skills there, but also because more employment opportunities are available in this profession." (VoT, Vlorë, 18)

Sometimes although the desire to attend a professional course was present, specific conditions and circumstances prevented some of the victims to enroll in a vocational training or to complete until the end a certain vocational started earlier.

"I didn't have the chance to attend a professional course, but I know it would have been a great help if I had attended any. I always liked a kitchen course. When I was given the opportunity I did not have time because I needed to work to keep myself and my son." (VoT, Tirana, 3)

"No. I had a couple of security related incidents that forced me to stop attending the cooking course." (VoT, Tirana, 5)

Usefulness of vocational training

When asked about the process of finding the vocational training, the interviewees expressed the support that the service providers / support organizations have given in this regard, especially through orienting them in relation to the available courses, enrolling in specific courses, etc.

"I was helped by the support organization to find the course that I liked." (VoT, Tiranë, 2)

"The staff of the center where I was receiving assistance helped me to choose, based on my skills and with their assistance I was enrolled in a tailoring course." (VoT, Vlorë, 18)

The interviewees indicated that they had the opportunity to choose between various types of vocational trainings although they expressed clear preference on the course they chose and didn't have any doubts about their decisions.

"I was clear from the beginning that I enjoyed the hairdressing course, still I was informed about other courses as well." (VoT, Vlora, 11)

"There were other courses available but this was the right one for me." (VoT, Vlorë, 18)

The experiences of the victims' interviewed in regard to the quality of vocational courses vary, it is worth noting that in their view there is a discrepancy between the theoretical

knowledge and the practical skills they receive in these courses making in this way the employment process more difficult.

"Not very good. The kitchen professor was not very helpful. The training center didn't have the basic materials for the course. We often had to buy by ourselves the food items we needed for cooking a certain recipe." (VoT, Vlora, 1)

"The course I've attended has been good for those topics we treated but I think should have been more practical and extended in time." (VoT, Vlorë, 12)

The opposite happens when vocational trainings are attended nearby non-public professional training centers. This group of victims expressed high level of self-confidence for the knowledge received.

"The course has been very good; I'm very pleased with its quality. I followed the course nearby a kitchen chief with over 18 years of experience. I could learn from him everything related to the cooking profession, including the preparation of sweets." (VoT, Shkodër, 4)

The quality of the professional courses was directly linked to the fact that the victims considered themselves ready or not to be included in the labor market.

"I felt almost ready." (VoT, Vlorë, 1)

"In my opinion I was ready because I was able to do what was required to me." (VoT, Tiranë, 20)

Finding a job placement

The process of finding a job placement is perceived as a long and difficult process for most of the participants in the study.

Difficulties related to employment

The victims indicate that the difficulties faced in terms of employment are multiple such as: finding a job placement, wage mismatches with job conditions, unsuitable schedules for mothers with children, high competition for a job placement, high exposure to sexual harassment etc.

"Finding work is a very difficult process, especially because the kitchen work in Vlora is a seasonal kind of work. Finding a trustworthy business is difficult as well (you need to know where to go), the salary offered compared to the work schedule and load." (VoT, Vlorë, 1)

"Everything seemed to me very tough, working time was paramount, as most of the available jobs were in shifts. This schedule was difficult for me because I had to take care of my little son." (VoT, Tiranë, 2)

The need to be supported and oriented is considered particularly important in this regard.

"My first job was found by the organization that helped me. I was involved in a program that gave me the opportunity to get work experience, while getting a decent salary like all the rest of the restaurant staff." (VoT, Shkodër, 4)

Personal and professional skills

In addition to the professional skills gained through the attendance of the professional trainings, the interviewees also mentioned the main personal skills that have helped to keep the job placement.

"I think besides the good skills for the job, I'm persistent, I trust my abilities and do the job with correctness." (VoT, Tiranë, 8)

"The first was communication and then dexterity - the chief kitchen liked these skills of mine. The desire to cook, I was curious to learn more." (VoT, Tirana, 20)

Support from the service providers/ Regional Employment offices

For a part of the interviewees, the job-finding process has been facilitated by the aid organization in a number of ways.

"Yes, the organization helped me. Its staff has identified the job positions appropriate for me, accompanied me to the job placements, they learned me how to conduct a job interview, how to introduce myself etc." (VoT, Tirana, 2)

Preparing for the labor market is a process that is not just related with the vocational training received, the victims interviewed express how much value had for them the gradual preparation for this moment.

"I got a lot of benefits from the center where I was sheltered. Firstly, on the personal plan because there I learned to trust in my own skills. Somehow I was encouraged to continue my dream. The staff has constantly advised me, to be correct, to be quiet, and to consider work as something of extraordinary importance. I always wanted to be independent, to find a work, to take care of my self, but they helped me to get in touch with myself, which I had forgotten long time ago." (VoT, Tirana, 8)

Referring to their personal experiences, a part of the victims of trafficking have found the role of regional employment offices not very active and helpful during the process of finding a job.

"Yes, I have been there but I never found a job through contacting them". (VoT, Vlorë, 18)

"I have been very often but I never received any kind of assistance." (VoT, Tiranë, 3)

Job relationship

The interviewees raise a lot of issues in regard to the job relationships. They feel underpaid for the work load they do and their rights as employees are in most of the cases unrespected and unconsidered.

Motivation/ satisfaction at work

Most of the victims feel dissatisfied and unmotivated in their work. The biggest problem relates to the unsatisfactory salary level, which does not match the workload and its schedules.

"In fact, the payment doesn't fit at all with the work I do, but I can't do anything for now, I need this job." (VoT, Vlorë, 11)

"I'm not happy with my salary. I work a lot more compared with it." (VoT, Tirana, 19)

A small percentage of the victims of trafficking interviewed say that they feel somehow motivated in the workplace and this motivation is mainly related to the trust of the employer or to the given opportunity to learn more.

"Yes, I feel somehow motivated. They have given me new tasks and this shows that they trust me." (VoT, Tiranë, 2)

Respecting the rights

Encouraged to tell more about how the rights are respecting in the workplace (conform to the applicable legislation), victims of trafficking indicate open violations of these rights, ranging from working over 8 hours per day as well as the absence of any day of rest per week.

"What I dislike more is the long working hours, I don't mind so much for myself but I'm very worried about leaving my child alone at home." (VoT, Tirana, 3)

"Maybe because they are private, they can fire you when they want, keep you in the job as long as they need, shout, do what they want." (VoT, Tirana, 6)

Stigma and discrimination

According to the victims interviewed it is not easy to share with the others what happened, being afraid what might happen and what can this bring next. Only a small part of the victims confess that they have shared their personal history with their work colleagues or employers. The rest respond clearly and decisively when asked about this aspect.

"No, no way." (VoT, Vlora, 12)

"No way. I would never do that." (VoT, Tirana, 21)

Confronting stigma and discrimination is not easy. Some of the main feelings vary from isolation, shyness, self closure, low self esteem etc.

"I felt bad; it seem like it wasn't me, but someone else, as I was living in someone else's place." (VoT, Tirana, 8)

Personal reaction to stigma

It is not easy to find strength within VoTs to react in situations of coping with discrimination and stigma. One of the interviewee indicated that was the encouragement of the service provider staff that pushed her to take this step.

"At first I didn't want to talk to anybody. I was just keeping an icy attitude in dealing with them. Then a staff of the organization suggested me to take the courage to face those people. It took me a while to take that step." (VoT, Tirana, 2)

While someone else just preferred to avoid these situations, seeing herself helpless to react.

"I was drawn because I felt helpless and scared to deal with them." (VoT, Vlorë, 18)

Challenges of sustainable employment

Participants in the study also shared the desires of future employment, their view on what could facilitate the sustainable employment of girls and other women in a similar situation, having in focus the effective economic empowerment models.

Desires about the future employment range from the inherent demand for dignified employment, where labor rights are respected and the individual feels secure, up to ambitious desires and carefully planned.

"I am just asking for a job placement with a normal working time and a decent salary." (VoT, Vlora, 1)

"I want to open a small restaurant. I also thought about its name, menu." (VoT, Shkodër, 4)

"To continue university and get employed in the profession that I will choose." (VoT, Tiranë, 6)

Sustainable employment

In general, the study participants emphasize the importance of the facilities that should be available to girls and women victims of trafficking in terms of employment, starting from obtaining a qualifying professional training appropriate to everyone's desires and abilities and then the opportunity to work in the chosen profession.

"I think firstly a good vocational training and then finding a job that matches with the vocational received." (VoT, Vlora, 9)

When asked to give an evaluation for the economic empowerment models they have heard about, the interviewees were clear enough considering employment the best opportunity to gain some kind of work experience nearby a private business company or social enterprise. And only after gaining this work experience, an individual with certain skills could be ready even to manage a personal micro business.

"In my opinion, social enterprises are more valuable because they allow girls and women to get hired, gain a job experience and prepare better for the job market." (VoT, Tirana, 2)

"Initially, employment is important, then the possibility to open a personal business." (VoT, Tiranë, 20)

CONCLUSION

The public professional training provided for the victims of trafficking fails to prepare them properly for the labor market. The types of vocational courses available to girls and women victims of trafficking are unilateral, and in most cases they belong to a very low paid category of jobs.

Security problems as a result of denouncing trafficker / traffickers remain a serious issue for the victim's life, an issue that "resurfaces" constantly and in the meantime significantly limits the victim to move forward and prepare for the labor market.

The challenges faced by the victims of trafficking to get involved in the labor market were multiple ranging from: wage mismatch with working conditions / working hours; unsuitable schedules for mothers with children, high competition for a job placement, sexual harassment incidents in the workplace etc.

The victims of trafficking feel dissatisfied, unmotivated, underpaid for the work they do and their rights as employees are in most of the cases unrespected and unconsidered.

The rights of victims in the workplace are openly violated, starting from the fact that they are forced to work over 8 hours per day and the absence of day of rests during the working week.

Victims of trafficking exploited for sexual purposes face stigmatization and discrimination in the labor market due to their trafficking experience. And in the viewpoint of the victims themselves, this is often translated with fear and insecurity to build sincere relationships and to share their own experiences.

The study showed that sexual harassment was very present in the jobs placement where the victims were hired, usually this harassment comes from the business owner - the situation became even more problematic if the owner knew the story of the person, considering his claims legitimate.

REFERENCES

1. Brunovskis, A. & Surtees, R. (2007) *Leaving the past behind? When victims of trafficking decline assistance*, Fafu Institute and Nexus Institute.
2. Brunovskis, A.& Surtees, R. (2008) “*Agency or illness – Conceptualizing trafficking victims choices and behaviors*”, Gender, Technology and Development.
3. Clawson, H & N. Dutch (2008) *Addressing the needs of victims of trafficking: challenges, barriers and promising practices*. Washington: US Department of Health and Human Services.
4. Somach, S. & R. Surtees. (2005) *Anti-Trafficking Programmes in Albania – an Evaluation*. Tirana, Albania: USAID.
5. Surtees, R. & S. Somach (2008) *Methods and models for mixing services for victims of domestic violence and trafficking in Europe and Eurasia*. Washington: USAID, Creatives Associates, JBS International & NEXUS Institute.

6. Surtees, R. (2008a) *Re/integration of trafficked persons – handling “difficult” cases*. Brussels: KBF and Vienna: NEXUS Institute.
7. Surtees, Rebecca. 2008. *Re/integration of trafficked persons: how can our work be more effective*. NEXUS Institute.
8. Kaplan, E. H., J. C. Cassel, and S. Gore 1977 "Social support and health." *Medical Care*.
9. US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2017*. <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2017/>
10. UNODC *Global Trafficking in Persons Report 2016*. http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2016_Global_Report_on_Trafficking_in_Persons.pdf
11. USAID. 2008. *The State Efforts in Albania to Combat Trafficking of Persons 2007-2008*, Creative Associates International Inc. Tiranë.
12. USAID. 2008. *Best Practices in Trafficking Prevention in Europe and Eurasia*, NEXUS Institute
13. Thoits. Peggy A. 1982 "Conceptual, methodological, and theoretical problems in studying social support as a buffer against life stress." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*