UNIT 11 PROFILING OF VICTIMS/SURVIVORS

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11.1 INTRODUCTION

The ongoing abuses of human rights and growing social and economic inequality within and between countries has led to an environment in which many people have few choices and resources and are thus vulnerable to being lured, mislead, or forced into being trafficked. People who are vulnerable to being trafficked are mostly those aged between 10-35 and who are impoverished, uneducated or from indigenous, ethnic minority, rural or refugee groups. Such people often lack access to education and meaningful employment opportunities. Harmful cultural and customary practices also perpetuate discriminatory and violent practices that further diminish opportunities and lead to further marginalization and ‘commodification’ of human beings. Victims suffer long-lasting health problems as a result of physical abuse, poor nutrition and untreated health problems and suffer irreparable psychological damage caused by abuse and fear. In the most severe cases, victims are placed in life-threatening situations ranging from extreme violence and exposure to communicable diseases.

11.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the common characteristics of trafficked persons;
- explain psychological trauma as an important characteristic of trafficked victims; and
- discuss the dynamics of the problem.
11.3 PROFILE OF A TRAFFICKING VICTIM

Most trafficking victims will not readily provide information about their status because of fear and abuse they have suffered at the hands of their trafficker. They may also be reluctant to come forward with information from despair, discouragement, and a sense that there are no viable options to escape their situation. Even if pressed, they may not identify themselves as someone held in bondage for fear of retribution to themselves or family members. However, there are indicators that often point to a person who has been trafficked and held in slavery like condition. They include:

1) Health Characteristics of a Trafficked Person

Trafficked individuals may be treated as disposable possessions without much attention given to their mental or physical health. Accordingly, some of the health problems that may be evident in a victim include:

- Malnutrition and poor personal hygiene
- Post-traumatic stress or psychological trauma
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Signs of rape or sexual abuse
- Bruising, broken bones, or other signs of untreated medical problems
- Critical illnesses

2) Other Important Signs

In addition to some of the obvious physical and mental indicators of trafficking, there are other signs that an individual is being controlled by someone else. Red flags should go up when we notice any of the following. The individual:

- Individual claims to be “just visiting” an area but is unable to articulate where he/she is staying or cannot remember addresses; the individual does not know the city or state of his/her current location.
- Individual exhibits behaviours including “hyper-vigilance” or paranoia, fear, anxiety, depression, submission, tension and/or nervousness.
- Someone is claiming to speak for, or on behalf of a victim – victim is not allowed to speak for him/herself.
- Does not hold his/her own identity or travel documents.
- Suffers from verbal or psychological abuse designed to intimidate, degrade and frighten the individual.
- Has a trafficker or pimp who controls all the money, and has very little or no money.
- Individual exhibits a loss of sense of time or space.
- Individual avoids eye contact.
- Individual has numerous inconsistencies in his/her story.

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1 http://www.womentrafficking.eu/what-you-can-do
11.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH – AN IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC

The functioning of a victim is the product not only of whatever trauma and mistreatment he/she may have suffered in exploitative situation but also of all experiences in family and community that came before. The victim often comes from a family with a very limited set of choices. Sometimes the harsh treatment a victim experiences in sex work or any other exploitative work may seem to be a continuation of the hardships he/she has already known. Often, one of the outcomes of such histories is that these victims start believing that they deserve the abuse and violence they are subjected to. This psychological abuse is usually persistent, extreme, and frequently perpetrated in such a way as to destroy a victim’s mental and physical defense system. Negative mental health consequences are numerous and often long-term. Given the nature of the work, hours, conditions, and the menacing environment, it is not surprising that most survivors were reported to have developed symptoms of exhaustion, stress, and anxiety. This trauma is the key factor in shaping the actual behaviour of the victim and is an important indicator of trafficking.

Self Assessment Question

1) How does psychological trauma affect the behaviour of victims?

11.5 SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM HEALTH EFFECTS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The following is a list of typical physical and mental health costs associated with all forms of human trafficking:

Short term

Higher risk behaviours (i.e., drug and alcohol abuse)
Impaired judgment
Emotional exhaustion
Depersonalization
Fear, anxiety, and nervousness
Muscle tension

Long term

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
Persistent symptoms of increased arousal – i.e. difficulty falling or staying asleep, irritability or outbursts of anger, difficulty concentrating, exaggerated startle response
Intense distress/reactivity to internal/external cues that symbolize or resemble aspect of traumatic event

2 http://www.polarisproject.org/resources/resources-by-topic/
“Hyper-vigilance” or paranoia, fear, anxiety, depression, submission, tension and/or nervousness
Trauma bonding
Severe depression
Suicidal ideation
Spiritual questions
Feelings of being mentally broken
Multiple symptoms resulting from untreated STIs
Sexual dysfunction
Difficulty establishing/maintaining healthy relationships

11.6 DYNAMICS OF THE PHENOMENON OF TRAFFICKING

Poverty, naivety and a desire for a better life make people victims of the organized crime – an inhuman world where the traffickers use the cruelest means to make money by physically, emotionally and economically disposing of other people whom they turn into slaves. More than often, traffickers use extremely brutal tactics and methods to manipulate and control their victims. Victims suffer sexual abuse, beatings and threats against themselves and their families, starvation and exhaustive exploitation. Victims are isolated and deceived by false promises of money and freedom in order to make them satisfy and comply with the traffickers’ demands.

Traffickers do not randomly choose their victims. Purchase, sale and exploitation of humans is a profitable business, where traffickers have carefully developed methods and channels to recruit, transport and exploit victims. A minimal analysis of the dynamics of the phenomenon allows outlining the victim “profile” or “description” that groups together the most frequently used economic, psychological and social characteristics of people falling into the traffickers’ traps.

Victims’ background and experiences

Victims are found to share certain common backgrounds and experiences and by understanding the backgrounds, behaviours and circumstances of victims of trafficking, social services and rehabilitation techniques can be tailored to provide the necessary support and assistance required for either their reintegration into the community or alternative support.

Poverty: According to the socio economic profile provided by the traffickers in the study, majority of the victims belonged to the lower strata of society (31% from lower strata, 54% from middle class and 15% from the upper strata.) Poverty becomes a trigger for trafficking along with other factors and while it is the poor who are predominantly vulnerable, no one is safe from trafficking.

Age-Group: The statistics reflecting the age group of trafficked persons also reveals an important dimension. Around a quarter are reported to be children below 16 years of age and 65% are below 20 years of age.

Male Female ratio: There is a significantly high number of females and children trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation but a high number of both males and females as well as children are trafficked for forced labour and other forms of exploitation.

3 Trafficking in Women and children in India, Sen Shankar and Nair PM, Orient Longman 2005
4 Trafficking in Women and children in India, Sen Shankar and Nair PM, Orient Longman 2005
Rural/Urban: The area of origin is also a vulnerability factor as the rural areas are seen to be the main source for recruiting victims. Studies show that rural people are more naïve, which means they tend to be more trusting of people and consequently, get deceived more easily. It can be suggested that urban people would be more suspicious, and more likely to be aware of issues like trafficking.

Education: There seems to be an important correlation between education and victimization as studies worldwide reveal that low level of education is also an important vulnerability factor for both male and female victims of trafficking. Most victims are found to have elementary or no formal education.

Overall, the most vulnerable categories include: low income families, individuals with a no or minimum level of education, migrant families, child victims of domestic violence, neglected children, runaways or abandoned children and other stressors in the family environment like alcoholism, domestic violence, debts etc.

11.7 CHECKLIST FOR PROFILING VICTIMS

A typical victim profile would show signs where:

- The trafficked individual is not free to leave his/her work situation.
- The trafficked individual experiences violence, deception, or threats which make it difficult or impossible to leave the work situation.
- The trafficked individual believes that he/she would experience serious harm if he/she tries to leave the work situation.
- The trafficked individual has suffered physical and/or emotional abuse.

One should seek answers to the following questions that may be helpful in identifying a trafficked victim:

1) Is the person free to leave the work site?
2) Is the person physically, sexually or psychologically abused?
3) Does the person have a valid identification card and is he/she in possession of such documents?
4) What is the pay and conditions of employment?
5) Does the person live at home or at/near the work site?
6) How did the individual arrive to this destination?
7) Has the person or a family member of this person been threatened?
8) Does the person fear that something bad will happen to him or her, or to a family member, if he/she leaves the job?

Self Assessment Question
2) Write a note on victims’ profile.

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11.8 SUMMARY

All trafficking victims share common characteristics that make them vulnerable to traffickers. They often come from communities or countries with high rates of crime, poverty, and corruption; lack opportunities for education; lack family support (e.g., orphaned, runaway/thrown-away, homeless, family members collaborating with traffickers); and/or have a history of physical and/or sexual abuse. Trafficking victims are kept in bondage through a combination of fear, intimidation, abuse, and psychological controls. While each victim will have a different experience, they share common threads that may signify a life of indentured servitude.

11.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1) What are the typical characteristics of a trafficked victim?
2) Write a brief note on victim's background and experiences.

11.10 ANSWERS AND HINTS

Self Assessment Questions
1) Refer to Section 11.4
2) Refer to Section 11.7

Terminal Questions
1) Refer to Section 11.3
2) Refer to Section 11.6

11.11 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS