

# REINTEGRATION OF VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING IN CAMBODIA

October 1998

by  
Annuska Derks

IOM & Centre for Advanced Study

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# FOREWORD

With this third report in a series of studies on trafficking in women and children in Cambodia, our institutions try to raise the understanding of reintegration process of victims of trafficking in Cambodia.

The first two studies conducted by our institutions, "Trafficking of Cambodian Women and Children to Thailand" and "Trafficking of Vietnamese Women and Children to Cambodia", focused predominantly on the recruitment process in order to find viable options on how to improve the prevention of such deplorable processes. This third study tackles questions which occur when all preventive measures have failed and society is confronted with the task of assisting survivors of the trade in human beings.

It is our conviction that the phenomenon of trafficking of migrants and more specifically the trafficking of women and children can only be successfully addressed when different measures are taken to deal with the various challenges of the trafficking problem:

- further research in order to advance the understanding of the complex factors involved;
- prevention and awareness-raising measures;
- capacity-building activities for government workers and colleagues from NGOs and other support organizations;
- cooperation on a policy level leading to formulation of consistent policies and increased international cooperation;
- economic support for the poor in order to alleviate poverty, which was identified as one of the root causes of trafficking (though not the only cause); and lastly
- voluntary repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of trafficking.

Only when all of these measures are addressed can one hope for an improvement from which both concerned individuals and societies will benefit. The mostly repressive measures to deal with the criminal aspects of the trafficking problem are important tools, yet alone will not change the situation or reduce the risks involved.

The study was financed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), World Vision International (W.V.) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS). It was implemented by the Center for Advanced Study (CAS) and coordinated by Ms. Annuska Derks, an anthropologist and United Nations Volunteer seconded to the CAS.

It is planned to discuss the findings of this study at a seminar in Phnom Penh in early 1999, in an effort to further improve the support services for survivors of trafficking in Cambodia.

Phnom Penh, October 15, 1998

Dr. Maria Nenette Motus  
Chief of Mission, IOM Phnom Penh

Dr. William Collins  
Acting President, CAS



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

In past years, increasing attention has been paid to issues related to the phenomenon of trafficking in Cambodia. Several reports have been written in order to describe the different purposes of trafficking, the recruitment processes, and the working and living conditions of victims of trafficking. Our two former studies<sup>1[1]</sup> tried to gain more insight into the in-country and cross-border trafficking processes in Cambodia, as this country is a sending as well as receiving country. However, so far not much attention has been paid to what happens after victims leave their trafficked situation.

In this study, the focus is on issues related to the returning and reintegration of victims of trafficking. This study strives to contribute to a better understanding of the consequences of reintegration for women and children who have been trafficked. Furthermore, it tries to give some insight into the trafficking issue from the point of view of the social environment from which the trafficked person came and/or into which the person was reintegrated. Attention is paid to different factors that contribute to a successful return for victims of trafficking, as well as to factors that lead some of them back to the situation they had escaped.

Not much information is available about reintegration processes of victims of trafficking in general, nor of reintegration processes in Cambodia in particular. Some information about the processes and consequences of reintegration could be obtained through counsellors and supervisors of reintegration working in the different organisations in Cambodia. In order to gain first-hand insight into reintegration processes, interviews were conducted with victims of trafficking who were reintegrated, as well as with members of their social environment, i.e. family, neighbours, village chiefs, religious authorities and others. Although the research tried to pay attention to reintegration of women and children who had been trafficked for different purposes, a majority of the cases had been trafficked for the purpose of commercial sex work. Reintegration efforts for women and girls who have been trafficked into commercial sex work are viewed as most problematic by most of the organisations which have focused on this problem.

The research team consisted of Mrs Lim Sidedine, Ms Chan Kanha and was led by Ms Annuska Derks. Through the former studies, the researchers were well-experienced in the field of research on trafficking, which made it possible to establish the kind of rapport necessary to elicit the sometimes sensitive information on reintegration of victims of trafficking from the different informants. The fieldwork for this study started in May and continued through August, while in the month of July (during the country's national elections) time was spend in Phnom Penh, processing and analysing data.

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<sup>1[1]</sup> Derks, *Trafficking of Cambodian Women and Children to Thailand* (October 1997) and *Trafficking of Vietnamese Women and Children to Thailand* (March 1998).



The fieldwork was conducted in and around Phnom Penh, and in different villages in Prey Veng, Svay Rieng, Kampong Cham and Battambang. We followed up on cases with which we had become acquainted in former studies, as well as a lot of other cases of victims of trafficking that reintegrated with or without assistance. As the study was meant to gather qualitative data on reintegration of victims of trafficking, information was gathered mainly through in-depth interviews and, where possible, participant observation of the social, spiritual and work environment of the victims of trafficking. Because of the set-up of Cambodian-style houses and village life, it was not always easy to create a private space where interviews could take place. In some cases we had to overcome this by placing ourselves out of sight, by taking an informant away for a walk around the rice fields or, if possible, through arranging an interview at another time and place, often with help of an organisation. In other cases the input of visiting neighbours or family members proved to be a very valuable source of information with regard to their perceptions on reintegration of victims of trafficking.

Many of the contacts for this study were established with the help of several organisations, especially Agir pour les Femmes en Situation Précaire (Afesip), Cambodian Center for the Protection of Children's Rights (CCPCR), Cambodia Migration and Development Committee (CMDC), Cambodian Women's Crisis Center (CWCC), Krousar Thmey and World Vision. Their willingness to share their experiences, doubts and contacts has contributed in a major way to this study. Moreover, this study could not have been conducted without the kind cooperation of the reintegrated women and children as well as members of their social environment, for which we are very grateful. In order to be able to make the data obtained through these informants available for analysis, our research team received additional assistance from Ms Kin Tep Moly and Mrs. Tean Sophorn, who worked on transcription and translation of the interviews. To conclude, the intellectual and editorial input of Dr. William Collins has been a great contribution to the finalisation of this report.

Factors, processes and consequences of reintegration that were identified in the study will be discussed in the next chapters of this report. In chapter two the different kinds of reintegration are explained. Distinctions are made between the kinds of victims of trafficking, the different reintegration environments and the various support mechanisms available. These are important to keep in mind when trying to understand the factors that are involved in reintegration of victims of trafficking. Some of these factors, such as economic situation, health and religion, are discussed in chapter three. Chapter four elaborates on the social factors, especially stigmatisation, related to reintegration of victims of trafficking. Attention is paid to the impact of these and other social factors on level of the individual, the family, the village and the broader society. After the conclusion in chapter five, recommendations are made on the basis of insights that were gained through this study.

# CHAPTER TWO

## DISTINCTIONS IN REINTEGRATION

Before going into the details of reintegration processes, it is necessary to consider what, in this study, is understood by the term "reintegration". Reintegration of victims of trafficking is more than just a geographic movement of a child or woman back home or to any other selected place. To integrate means to unify, or to put or to incorporate (parts) together in a whole<sup>2[2]</sup>; re-integration assumes that this unification or incorporation has to be renewed. In this study we will take a closer look at women and children who have been trafficked and who have been re-unified with a former life, a family, and village, or re-incorporated into a another place in society.

Victims of trafficking were forced, deceived or bonded to leave their familial and social environment in order to perform work or services for others. Most have experienced abusive working and living conditions which they were able to leave by running away, through rescue operations of police and/or non-governmental organisations (NGOs), because debts were paid off or by reason of diminishing returns of their work or service. Sheltering, counselling, training and reintegrating these victims of trafficking is a time-consuming and difficult undertaking. Several NGOs are presently working on a case-by-case basis to provide support for the reunification of women and children with their family or their incorporation within other social environments. However, considering the extent and invisibility of the trafficking problem, the capacity of NGOs and the time-consuming efforts that are necessary for individual reintegration, only a limited number of the victims of trafficking are returning through these channels of assisted reintegration.<sup>3[3]</sup> It is recognised that most victims of trafficking attempt reintegration without assistance.

A study on the reintegration of victims of trafficking has to include a broad range of factors and situations. After all, there are different kinds of victims of trafficking, different environments in which victims of trafficking are being reintegrated and different support mechanisms for reintegrating these victims. In order to be able to assess the issues related to reintegration processes it is helpful to make distinctions between these different kinds of reintegration.

### 1. Victims of Trafficking

The phenomenon of trafficking, as has been discussed in former studies<sup>4[4]</sup>, is not limited to one group, sex or ethnicity only. Children, elderly women, middle-aged men and young women are recruited for different kinds of work and services within and across

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<sup>2[2]</sup> Webster's New World College Dictionary ((1996).

<sup>3[3]</sup> Caouette, *Needs Assessment on Cross-border Trafficking in Women and Children - the Mekong Sub-region* (1998).

<sup>4[4]</sup> See Derks, (1997; 1998).

national boundaries by means of violence, abuse of authority, debt bondage, deception or other means of coercion.<sup>5[5]</sup> Although these different kinds of victims could all be defined as "victims of trafficking", there are major differences in the kind and degree of choice the individuals could express before trafficking and, for this study especially important, upon reintegration. On the one extreme end, there are women and children who were physically abducted or drugged. On the other extreme are the calculating persons who consider options of going to Thailand or working in commercial sex work as legitimate ways of earning a good income. In between are women and children who have always been considered to be intellectually weak or to behave in a deviant way and therefore were easy victims for trafficking, but also women and children who were forced by circumstances, such as poverty or family situation, and those who were tricked by recruiters with nice promises of high income. These elements of degree and kind of choice as well as the purpose of trafficking have a major impact on the processes and consequences of reintegration.

### **1. Commercial sex workers**

The victims of trafficking for the purpose of commercial sex work are predominantly young women or girls. The nature of the work they did as well as their age and gender are guiding factors within the reintegration process. There is a Khmer saying: *kom put sroleuw, kom prodeuw srey kouc*; don't bend the *sroleuw* tree<sup>6[6]</sup>, don't advise a bad woman<sup>7[7]</sup>. It refers to the uselessness of trying to convert a prostitute into a "respectable" woman. Prostitutes are as intractable as the *sroleuw* tree. In relation to this, an NGO worker distinguished three kinds of commercial sex workers. First there are women whose nature, *saa rociat*, it is to be a commercial sex worker. They have, so to say, essential characteristics that make them become a commercial sex worker. Second, there are those who are forced, against their will, to become a commercial sex worker and are therefore considered to be victims of trafficking. Third, among these trafficked commercial sex workers, there are those who stay or return into commercial sex work because they view it as a way to earn money quickly. According to this NGO-worker, only the second group is willing to change and can be educated successfully to return to her former life, while the other two groups cannot be educated to change their profession. Whatever education or counselling these women receive, they will go back into commercial sex work.

A girl who had been trafficked in commercial sex work commented on her ability to change and invoked another proverb that suggests the struggle with common opinion that she faces in attempting successful transformation and reintegration:

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<sup>5[5]</sup> Weijers and Lap-Chew, *Trafficking in Women, Forced Labour and Slavery-like Practices in Marriage, Domestic Labour and Prostitution* (1997), p.36.

<sup>6[6]</sup> A kind of large tree made out of hard dense wood.

<sup>7[7]</sup> *Srey kouc* literally means 'broken woman', but it commonly used for 'prostitute'.

"I know they say *skae kantui kwien, wie neuw tae kwien* [a dog with a curled up tail will always have a curl in its tail]<sup>8[8]</sup>. But I have changed. Before I was a bad woman, but now I have arrived home and I am not like before."

In many cases the women and girls try to keep the nature of their former work secret from the social environment into which they were reintegrated, although this is not always easy. Moreover, the fact that a young woman or girl has left her protective environment for a certain amount of time makes people suspicious that she had done "such work". This can make reintegration more complicated, although the impact of this kind of stigmatisation differs widely between cases and is related to age, social background, economic situation and personality of the victim.

## 2.

### **Beggars**

Victims of trafficking for the purpose of begging vary from (street) children and handicapped people to elderly women. A common characteristic is, however, their vulnerability and dependency. Children, handicapped or elderly people are usually not considered to bear major responsibility for the economic situation at home, although most were trafficked with the idea that they would come back with considerable funds to contribute. An elderly woman in Battambang commented:

"Now I want to forget about the bad things that happened to me. I am sorry that I begged so much money, but they didn't give me one baht<sup>9[9]</sup>. If they had given me some, my children could have bought a pair of cows. My house is small and the roof is leaking. I pity my children, but I could not help them."

As victims of trafficking children as well as elderly women were not only economically exploited, but they also were placed out of their (family) environment. Often they suffered similar experiences, but with regard to the reintegration of children another approach is used as it is related to issues of child labour, parental care and education. Their trafficking experiences might have negative consequences for the child's education, health, physical and social development. In order to attain a healthy development of the child and to prevent repeated trafficking of the child, special protection and assistance is required to assure them a protective environment.<sup>10[10]</sup>

## 3.

### **Workers**

Abusive recruitment and brokerage practices for domestic service, construction, factory or other kinds of work affects various categories of people in Cambodian society. Victims are young and old, male and female. Even though migration, including illegal and abusive forms of migration, from rural to urban areas within Cambodia and to neighbouring countries is becoming a more common feature, the reintegration of migrants does not get much attention from organisations. Nevertheless, these victims of

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<sup>8[8]</sup> In this context the saying refers to the idea that someone who has had the habit to work as a commercial sex worker will always keep on doing that, just as the tail of a dog will, after being straightened for a while, curl up again.

<sup>9[9]</sup> At the time of the research 1 dollar equaled 38 Thai baht.

<sup>10[10]</sup> UNICEF, *Towards a Better Future: An Analysis of the Situation of Children and Women in Cambodia* (1997).

trafficking face similar problems during processes of reintegration with regard to their health or economic situation as well as their social environment

#### **4. Ethnicity**

The ethnicity of victims of trafficking, for whichever purpose, should not be neglected when trying to understand reintegration processes. The ethnic background can influence the way individual victims themselves, as well as their social environment react to reintegration. Cultural factors as well as settlement patterns and economic activities are important in reintegration processes.

The research for this survey was conducted in Cambodia. Therefore, most information was collected from and about Khmer victims of trafficking. However, some attention was paid to Vietnamese living in Cambodia, although cases of Vietnamese victims of trafficking that were reintegrated back to Vietnam could not be assessed. In general it has been difficult, also for organisations, to follow up on Vietnamese victims of trafficking who have returned to Vietnam to their families or to government institutions and we are not aware of any Vietnamese studies which may have been conducted on the subject. With regard to Vietnamese victims of trafficking with family living in Cambodia, their specific social and ethnic environment appeared to play an important role in the reintegration process.

## **2. Reintegration Environment**

The term reintegration refers to renewed reunion or incorporation with a social unity. In many cases reintegration into the family is considered to be most desirable. This means that women or children are re-unified with the family and will go back to live in the village or town in which they used to live. As such, this is also a re-unification with friends, neighbours and other villagers. For many, it has a consoling effect to be back in the trusting environment in which they have lived before with the people they have known all their life.

There are, however, many reasons why a victim of trafficking does not want to be re-united with his or her family or village. In the case of women or girls who come out of commercial sex work, some anticipate that the stigmatisation would make their life too difficult once they returned. An NGO-worker commented:

"The stigmatisation of the society increases the problem. People back in the village judge victims of trafficking on the basis of assumptions. They cause them to become isolated from society and return to their former job. When we ask the victims, they say that if the people in the village don't accept them, they will go to another place. Their reputation is too bad to be able to go back home."

In the case where her own family member was involved in the trafficking of a victim, reintegration in the family might only increase the chances of becoming victim of trafficking again. Also, parents might not want to accept the victim back, as their daughter's experience could put shame on the whole family. Others might have no family

to go back to. Those who are old enough to take care of themselves might decide that village life is not what they want to go back to. For these women, reintegration means setting up a new life in a new environment and as such creating a new place for themselves in society. In this case reintegration means re-incorporation into respectable social pursuits.

In the case of children, similar problems can arise with reintegration into the family.<sup>11[11]</sup> In some cases, the child might not want to go back home, because of problems in the family or because the child prefers to live on the street. There are also families who do not want to accept their child back, because they feel it would cause too many problems. Reintegration is not at all possible when there is no family to go back to and no extended family willing to take care of the child or when the family of the child cannot be found. An organisation might also decide that the family situation is not suitable and therefore an alternative solution must be sought.

Most important for successful reintegration, in whichever environment, is that the child or woman has a place - physically, emotionally and economically - in which risk factors<sup>12[12]</sup> for repeated trafficking are sufficiently under control. However, considering the numbers of victims of trafficking returning into their former trafficked situation, this is not always easily achieved, be it with or without external support.

### **3. Support for Reintegration**

Although there are several organisations trying to guide reintegration processes of victims of trafficking, there remains a majority of victims who return to their village or reintegrate into a new environment without any support from outside. These cases are, of course, more difficult to investigate. In our research we relied heavily on organisations that could introduce us to cases they have helped reintegrate. However, we also have been able to follow up on cases where reintegration happened without any support. This makes it possible to draw comparisons and identify factors that may influence the success or failure of reintegration processes.

Support for the reintegration of victims of trafficking differs by the kind of victim as well as by organisation. Assistance can vary between some financial support for the trip back home for those who are left at the border after deportation by Thai authorities, to extensive counselling, skills training, guidance in seeking employment and re-establishing relations with family and village. In most cases, this assistance is part of a larger assistance scheme that provides the means, physically and mentally, to re-enter "society" after a brief stay in the relatively safe and isolated environment of the shelter in which women and children could initially "recover" from their trafficking experiences. Obviously, the purpose of this kind of assistance programme is to prevent them from becoming again victims of trafficking.

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<sup>11[11]</sup> See also 'Reintegration/Reconciliation Strategies: Program Guidelines' of Mith Samlanh/Friends and Building Homes: World Vision International - Cambodia's Experience in Foster Care (1996) by Steve Gourly.

<sup>12[12]</sup> See also Derks (1997), p.17.

As there are different kinds of victims of trafficking, support mechanisms have to be adapted to the individual case. Assistance for children is usually not limited to the children themselves, but includes the whole family in order to create an environment in which risk factors for repeated trafficking are reduced.<sup>13[13]</sup> While children are supported with the necessary means to attend school, parents of the trafficked child are provided with credit or other means that can help them earn an income for the family. Before actual reintegration several visits to the family are made in order to assess the needs and the attitudes of the family. In some cases local authorities are informed in order to assure physical and social safety of the returned child. Follow-up visits are made to make sure money is appropriately spent and children are not again falling victim to abuse.

Support for victims of trafficking who have reached an age that allows them to generate their own income is usually directed at improving their ability to contribute to family income or to become self-supporting. Therefore skills training, credit provision or sometimes just a gift of rice or medicine is provided. Preparatory visits, counselling and follow-up visits are made to assure that factors leading to repeated trafficking are sufficiently under control. However, organisations do not always have the funds or time to pay thorough attention to any particular case. Especially when the person has been integrated in remote areas, regular follow-up visits and counselling are difficult to maintain.

Support for the reintegration of trafficked men or elderly women is, at best, limited to some money for the trip home. We did not find any organisation that provides shelter, counselling or other kind of support for the reintegration of this group of adult male or elderly victims of trafficking. This shows that the impact of trafficking on this group of people or their needs regarding family survival has so far been disregarded by organisations that work on the issue of trafficking.

Probably most victims of trafficking will find their way back to their family or to a new environment by themselves. This is true for workers as well as beggars who have been trafficked to Thailand and deported by the Thai police, but also for commercial sex workers who have managed to quit the brothel on their own. Besides, there are victims of trafficking who have been offered help, but decided to reintegrate on their own, without any support.

On the other hand, reintegration efforts can also have opposite effects than intended. A young woman decided to go back into commercial sex work after she found that the organisation was reluctant to help her. She recounted:

"They insulted me and said that I was from a bad family. They said that although I was young, I was *romoah*<sup>14[14]</sup>. They said that I would never correct myself and that I would go back to my old place. I was very angry and I left... I went back to Svay Pak<sup>15[15]</sup>."

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<sup>13[13]</sup> A lot of these reintegration/reconciliation efforts are based on reintegration experiences of street children in and outside Cambodia.

<sup>14[14]</sup> Literally "itchy", but in this case used for a person who always desires to have sex.

This example shows the kind of assumptions a victim of trafficking for commercial sex faces in society, including in organisations that aim to assist with reintegration. The example also suggests the kind of psychological wisdom that must be employed when dealing with these victims of trafficking.

Other reasons for denying support are related to the unwillingness of a person to spend too much time learning skills, being counselled, and staying in the shelter, because the person does not see the value of this and wants to be with her family as soon as possible without any interference. Receiving support means also that special attention is paid to the person and often the family. Not everyone wants this special attention, as it might give rise to gossip and jealousy among neighbouring families and could therefore hinder the reintegration process.

The distinctions made between victims of trafficking, social environment and support mechanisms represent also the three distinctive perspectives on reintegration. First, there are the individual victims of trafficking who are reintegrated and have to deal with their trafficking experiences as well as with other economic, social and psychological factors. The way these individual victims of trafficking view their reintegration is often strongly related to the way the second and third dominant parties view their reintegration. The second party consists of the social environment into which a victim of trafficking is reintegrated. The different layers within the social environment, i.e. family, village and society, also represent different interests and values, which in turn have an impact on the reintegration process. Third, there is the perspective of the organisations working on reintegration of victims of trafficking. Although organisations might be working on the basis of different philosophies, they do work within a similar framework and use similar strategies to reintegrate victims of trafficking. In order to understand the various, and sometimes contradictory, approaches or opinions regarding reintegration, it will be important to keep these different aspects of reintegration in mind.

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<sup>15[15]</sup> Brothel area 11 kilometers north of Phnom Penh.



## CHAPTER THREE

### FACTORS INFLUENCING REINTEGRATION

While the trafficking problem is found to be complicated because of the many different factors involved, such as the age and gender of the victim and purposes of trafficking, the reintegration of victims of trafficking is likewise a very complex process. For, when factors leading to trafficking in the first place have not been resolved or even new factors have come up, the risk of repeated trafficking or a voluntary return to the dependent situation to which a victim had initially been trafficked is high. Even where assistance is provided to reduce certain risk factors, other factors out of the influence sphere of assistance providers might be too strong to prevent victims of trafficking becoming again involved in their old job or situation.

In this chapter special attention will be paid to factors influencing the reintegration of victims of trafficking. The focus will be on economic situation, health and religion. These factors are again related to the social situation of individual victims of trafficking, as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. All these factors are very much interrelated and the distinctions made are aimed to help create a clear picture of how these factors influence reintegration processes against the background of the different victims of trafficking, the different social environments and the different kinds and use of support mechanisms.

#### 4. Economic Situation

As poverty is an important, though not sole, factor leading to trafficking, the economic situation in which a victim of trafficking is reintegrated has a huge impact on the success or failure of the reintegration process. This is not only a question of sheer economic survival, it is also a question of accepting the fact that the living they earn will not reach a level as high as the promises made before being trafficked. For psychological as well as economic reasons, establishing some kind of economic stability plays an important role in the reintegration process.

Although almost none of the informants of our survey benefited economically from their trafficked situation, one should recognise that in a minority of cases, victims of trafficking did manage to acquire enough funds to be used for renovating the family's house, buying a motorbike or draft animals.<sup>16[16]</sup> In such cases, their economic contribution might facilitate reintegration. Still, in a majority of the cases the economic situation of the victims of trafficking and their family has, at best, remained the same, at worst, deteriorated. Organisations working in the area of reintegration have recognised the importance of economic stability for these victims of trafficking and have provided assistance to attend these needs.

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<sup>16[16]</sup> CWDA, *A Preliminary Report of A Research on Traffic in Women in Cambodia* (1998).

Economic stability in cases where children were the victims of trafficking is not so much directed at the children themselves, but at the family as a whole, and the parents in particular. According to the ideology of most organisations, children are by definition dependent on their parents. The parents are responsible for an economic situation to which children may not be main contributors. Therefore, assistance is directed at parents' ability to increase family income while children are supported to attend school. However, the reality of Cambodian life shows that for many families children are important contributors to family income as the examples of several cases of reintegrated children can also illustrate.

A handicapped boy in Battambang expressed his optimism for the future after returning from Thailand. He was taken to Thailand with the promise that he could earn money to treat his leg, but was forced to go begging. After about one year he was arrested and brought back to Cambodia, where he was reintegrated into his family with assistance from an organisation. His family receives financial support to do some small business, while he is provided with the necessary school materials to continue his study. He said:

"Life now is much easier compared to before I went [to Thailand]... The *angka*<sup>17[17]</sup> supports me with school materials. I can share some with my brothers and sisters, the rest I keep for myself. The money that they gave me is kept by my parents so that they can spend money easier than before."

Similar kind of support was provided to a mother of two children, 10 and 11 years old. The children had been trafficked to Thailand where they had to beg and sell candy. The mother used the financial reintegration support for her little house and for her travel to Poipet where she wanted to do some small business. When she fell sick, she had to use all her money for medicine. As there was no more support funds left, the two sons had to help her find money. She said:

"When the *angka* came to visit our house, they saw that I was very poor and that my children were working by helping me collect *et chai*<sup>18[18]</sup>. So they took them back to the *angka*... They want them to study. [They said] if they stay with their mother they can't study."

When children become older it is well recognised among the organisations working on reintegration that they become important contributors in household activities and family income. Promises of well-paying job opportunities in Phnom Penh or Thailand are appealing as they could relieve the financial situation of the family, and this leads often to a trafficking situation. Where these promises have proven to be false, nothing is left but to return home where their help is still badly needed. A 16-year-old girl in Svay Rieng explained why she wanted to go back home as soon as possible after she was released from a brothel with help from an organisation:

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<sup>17[17]</sup> Organisation.

<sup>18[18]</sup> Used glass and plastic.

"I stayed perhaps two months in the *angka*. Then I asked them permission to go back home, because it coincided with the rainy season. We must transplant rice... I would have liked to stay a long time with them, but I know that my parents faced difficulties at home. They are old and my brothers and sisters are young. There is no one to take care and help them, so I wanted to return."

A 17-year-old handicapped boy, who was trafficked to Thailand as a beggar, resumed his begging activities almost immediately after he left the organisation's care:

"I told the *angka* that I needed to go back to my parents. I want to stay in the *angka*, but I had to find money for my mother, because she had nothing to eat. In one day I can beg 1,000 or 2,000 riel, but on some days I don't get anything... If I don't get anything I don't come back home [a place under the trees in Phnom Penh]. I don't want to come back without anything for my mother. Then I rather stay at another place [on the street] and go back when I have some money."

When organisations focus on the reintegration of more adult victims of trafficking, they often try to make the former victims economically self-sufficient in the reintegration situation. This is done in many different ways.

Victims of trafficking who come from an organisation are often brought back home with some financial assistance that will help them buy rice for the family, raise pigs or chickens, or set up some small business that allows the former victims to earn a little money selling vegetables or spices. This is, however, not always a successful undertaking. Several informants complained how the money was lost, because the piglets or chickens died or while setting up a small business did not bring the profit they had expected. A mother in Svay Rieng explained why her daughter, who had been trafficked into commercial sex work, returned to Phnom Penh to earn money:

"She had never studied and therefore she was not clever. The organisation offered her to set up a small business in her own village. They provided her money to buy something to sell and to buy thatch to build a hut for selling. But she was not successful... She could not get benefit from her business. She sold cigarettes, *prahoc*<sup>19[19]</sup> and salt, but many people bought on credit. By the time she had finished all her goods, there were still a lot of people who owed her money, but she didn't dare to ask them for the money. So she left again to earn money in Phnom Penh. If she stayed at home, we would have nothing to eat."

In this case, the girl did not succeed in becoming self-sufficient with her small-business in the village. Although her mother and also the organisation blamed this failure on her lack of capacity, part of the problem might also be related to her perceived circumstances within the village as a reintegrated young woman. It was apparently difficult for her to ask impertinently for the money back that she extended in credit to her neighbours. As a result, the material means meant to support reintegration of the girl were lost because of her vulnerable social situation in the village.

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<sup>19[19]</sup> Fermented fish paste.

The most typical kind of support for victims of trafficking, especially those coming out of commercial sex work, is skills training. The idea that many organisations and agencies promote is that learning specific skills enables the young women to earn their own living and at the same time helps build up self-esteem. The skills which organisations have concentrated on in training young women are hairdressing, sewing and cooking. However, not all girls and women are able or persistent enough to complete the training. It takes a long time before one knows how to cut and sew clothes, especially for those who cannot read and write. Some women or girls cannot afford to stay away from home for such a long time without contributing to family income. Others are already too used to earning more money in much less time and go back into commercial sex work.

For those who complete the training, it is not always easy to earn a living with these skills. Marketability is a major problem. In most of the villages people are too poor to have their hair dressed so often that a hairdresser would be able to earn enough for survival. Likewise, because of poverty most villagers buy cheap second-hand clothing, as they cannot afford to have new "modern-style" clothes made at a tailor.

In a village in Battambang two women who had been trafficked in commercial sex work had received training in hairdressing. The *meephum*<sup>20[20]</sup> commented:

"The *angka* sent them home to live with their families and gave them materials for hairdressing to earn some money. But in the countryside it is not like in the city. In the countryside they can earn only 500 or 1,000 riel<sup>21[21]</sup> with hairdressing. If many people needed their hair to be cut, it is maybe possible. But now nobody needs it. Only during *Pchum Ben*<sup>22[22]</sup> or New Year they can earn some money."

In these cases, the skills in which the young women were trained were not of much use in their village and could certainly not provide them enough income to be self-sufficient.

However, there are young women who successfully put into practice the skills they learn, very often with assistance of the organisation. For girls who have learned to cook and clean, jobs are found in restaurants or individual households. More commonly, young women who got training in sewing can, through contacts of the organisation, get a job in a garment factory. The garment factories are typically found near the city, so this is a reintegration option that is quite different than attempting to provide skills to enable reintegration into a village. Within the garment industry these young women who have been victims of trafficking have found a respectable job that gave them the opportunity to be economically independent. Often they share a room or small house with other young women, which is important, as some might not be able or willing to return back to the village from which they originated.

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<sup>20[20]</sup> Village chief.

<sup>21[21]</sup> At the time of the research 1 dollar equaled 3,800 riel.

<sup>22[22]</sup> Festival for the Dead.

Working in a garment factory does not bring in a lot of money and requires having to work under unfavourable conditions.<sup>23[23]</sup> These bad working conditions and low pay induce some young women who have been provided a job in a garment factory by an organisation to go back into commercial sex work. Other women, however, do well, as in the case of a young woman who managed to be promoted after several months. She is now supervising a group of women in the factory and earns more than twice what a beginning woman earns in a garment factory. Another young woman working in a garment factory commented:

"I do not like so much to work in the factory... I have to sew pullovers from 6:30 in the morning till 3:00 in the afternoon. I earn \$40 per month. Sometimes I can save some money to send home...I hope that if I work in the factory, I can earn enough money to find another job in the future."

While some women have found a new place in the emerging industrial society that allows them to support themselves by working in a garment factory, others did so through marriage combined with skills training. For example, a young woman who was trafficked in commercial sex work found her husband in one of the bars she was working. He helped her get out and brought her to an organisation that offered skills training. She said:

" I can't earn enough with sewing. I tried to sew in the market, but it didn't work. Now I sew at home... I also depend on my husband. He and I earn the money to support our family."

As has been illustrated by the several examples discussed, the assistance provided to help victims of trafficking and/or their family become economic self-sufficient is not always successful to prevent repeated trafficking. Whereas the organisations might consider hairdressing, sewing or setting up a small business as desirable and respectable activities for former victims of trafficking, after reintegration these skills become in many cases irrelevant, as they are not adapted to the circumstances in which victims of trafficking have to live.

In addition to the problem of marketability there is also a matter of moral and practical dilemmas over income and working conditions in different work areas, such as the factory or the brothel. This is also related to the degree and kind of choice woman and girls have within the decision-making process regarding income earning activities in Cambodia's slowly modernising urban sector. Calculating women and girls might deliberately choose to go back into commercial sex work, as it is most lucrative. Those with low capacity for learning or training might not have much choice to find other ways of becoming self-sufficient. And for those forced by family members, there might be no other choice at all, regardless of the assistance provided. But for others, wage earning in the factories is an attractive alternative to the situation of commercial sex work, so the investment in reintegration efforts for this group will have the desired results.

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<sup>23[23]</sup> See also Aafjes and Athreya, *Working Women in Cambodia* (1996).

We can see that a focus on purely the economic factor in the reintegration process disregards the importance of social, psychological, health, religious and other factors that influence the reintegration process. These factors are often more difficult to control by organisations or even completely outside their influence. An example of a relatively well-off and educated family in Svay Rieng shows that economic factors are sometimes not the main cause for young women being trafficked into commercial sex work, nor would a poor economic situation be the reason for an unsuccessful reintegration. In some cases it may be the personality of the woman that has made her susceptible to becoming a victim of trafficking and, after she was reintegrated, volunteering to go back into commercial sex work. The question is whether, in such cases, it was indeed the personality or the social environment that caused the so-considered inappropriate behaviour and subsequent trafficking of the girl. In this case, the stepmother commented:

"It is not the money she needed. I gave her always lots of money. She could not even spend it all. Her father also gave her money. I gave her 500 riel every day to buy dessert or cake. She didn't need to buy food or clothes, because that we provided already. She didn't know how to use the money properly. She distributed it among the children on the street. She could not be educated, she just wanted to have pleasure."

Even though this research focussed predominantly on victims of trafficking who returned through an organisation, most victims of trafficking return on their own without any kind of assistance. Some might have been able to bring back a little money, while others have lost more than they earned. In such cases, an accumulated debt burden driven by a feeling of responsibility for one's dependents is another factor that causes repeated trafficking. A *meephum* in Battambang was complaining about the misery that was caused in his village because men who were once tricked to work in Thailand could not easily get out of a debt-trap:

"They were told they could earn a lot of money. They had to pay the *meekcol*<sup>24[24]</sup> a recruitment fee. But when they were in Thailand, they could not earn anything. They had to sell their cow, rice field, to repay their debt. Now they are poorer than before... Therefore they go back again to try to earn money. I want to prohibit them from going there. They can earn some money here. If they still go, they will lose all. They should make an effort to earn money here."

The *meephum* was referring to a vicious circle in which villagers find themselves when an accumulated debt burden was hoped to be solved by migration, but instead led to more debt, impoverishment, migration, debt, etc. A 70-year-old woman in the same village also became trapped in this vicious circle. She had been taken to Thailand for begging and had been rescued and returned to the border. But she decided to go back once more because she did not bring any money home with her when she came back the first time, and she had to support four orphaned grandchildren:

"I went to Thailand because my grandchildren cannot yet earn money. I went [the second time] with a recruiter who got the first 5,000 baht that I begged. After that we could

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<sup>24[24]</sup> In this context *meekcol* is the person who recruits workers and transports them to a place to work, often in Thailand.

divide the money in half. I begged maybe 6,000 or 7,000 baht. This I had to split with the boss and the guide who brought me back also gets 1,000... It is miserable to have to earn money like this. Some people can earn some money, others can't. I went because of poverty... From what I earned [this second time], I could buy food for my grandchildren and me... Now I don't want to go again. I am old, I'm afraid to die in Thailand."

With regard to reintegration there are several economic and social currents outside the influence of the individual or organisation which are mixed with personal factors of capability, choice and responsibility and as such create a complex context for reintegration. Only with great sensitivity to each case can success be achieved. Programmatic answers that do not take all these factors into consideration are bound to be unsuccessful.

## 5. Health

Many women and children who are reintegrated have to deal with health problems that are related to the fact that they were victims of trafficking. The kind and seriousness of the health problems vary, just as the influence these health problems have on the life of the person being reintegrated. Diseases vary from easily curable skin diseases to HIV/AIDS and mental health problems. Those who come back through organisations usually get some medical treatment before reintegration. Where treatment has to continue after reintegration, modern and/or traditional medicines are sought, involving the victims as well as their families in high expenditures. These expenses as well as the (temporary) loss of labour weigh hard on the economic situation of the family or household in which the person was reintegrated.

Skin diseases are often contracted in places that house beggars, brothels, but also IDCs<sup>25[25]</sup> in Thailand where hygiene is not adequate for the many people they have to accommodate. In most cases these are rather easy to treat. For others, the health consequences of trafficking are more serious. Children who are trafficked to Thailand for begging purposes are reported to have been injected with certain drugs that made them crippled, in order to make them more pitiable. These children are maimed for life. Many children or elderly women who were handicapped already have on purpose or due to the circumstances in which they had to live become weaker and therefore more dependent.

Girls and women who were trafficked in commercial sex work have been exposed to various sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and complications caused by abortions. Girls or women who are taken care of by an organisation usually get medical treatment in the shelter and when necessary after reintegration. For others such diseases can cause a high financial burden, as they are (temporarily) unfit to work while expenses for medicines have to be made. A young woman in Phnom Penh, who herself had been trafficked in commercial sex work, recounted how her sister became again indebted with a brothel owner because of her disease:

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<sup>25[25]</sup> Immigration Detention Centres.

"First they sold her, but she earned money to return to the brothel owner [and buy her freedom]. Afterwards she fell sick in the brothel. I brought her home to take care of her, but she did not get better so I brought her to the hospital... She had dirt in her vagina. The doctor said she had broken intestines, her uterus was scratched, because she had an abortion. The doctor could not cure her... She went to a *krou khmer*<sup>26[26]</sup> He said she fell sick because of magic. She spent \$200 to pay the *krou khmer*. When she was cured she went back to the brothel, because she had debts again."

As in this case, for treatment of diseases often a mixture of modern and traditional medicine is used. Western trained doctors and modern medicines are, however, not everywhere readily available. Besides, the costs for treatment with modern medicine can rise enormously. Therefore, where modern medicines can be used to relieve some of the symptoms, traditional medicine are used to continue treatment in order to cure the person. In Kampong Cham a mother recounted how severely ill her daughter was when she came back from Phnom Penh. She did not have enough money to buy medicine, but the *krou khmer* helped her cure her daughter:

"Her abdomen were completely swollen up, it was full of blood. Her face and eyes were blue. She had no period, but after using medicine the blood came out. The doctor gave her some injections, which helped to diminish her swelling. Afterwards she had only Khmer medicine, made from the root of trees. The *krou khmer* made one pot full of medicine, which she drank until she became better ... When she got better, there was no more food and we had debts. So she wanted to go back again, to earn some money to support us. But she is lost until now, we don't know where she went."

In this case, the treatment of the disease left the family with debts which the young woman felt responsible to repay. Such feelings of responsibility regarding financial support induced her to leave the village again. While nobody knew for sure where she went to earn money, villagers suspected she went back into commercial sex work.

## 1. HIV/AIDS

Although STDs are known and treated by western-trained doctors as well as *krou khmer*, knowledge about HIV/AIDS is often limited. For many Cambodians, especially in the countryside, AIDS is just another form of *svay krap*, or syphilis.<sup>27[27]</sup> Besides, many Cambodians do not recognise HIV as an a-symptomatic stage before AIDS. According to Eisenbruch<sup>28[28]</sup>, this reflects the cultural norms that a person is sick only when there are symptoms. As such, the reintegration of victims of trafficking who are HIV-positive can contribute to a most disturbing health problem within Cambodia.

There is still a lot of uncertainty among organisations how to deal with the reintegration of victims of trafficking with HIV/AIDS. As a result, also a lot of misunderstanding is created among the victims themselves and their families. As it might bring them in an uneasy position within the village, organisations often try to keep the disease secret from

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<sup>26[26]</sup> Traditional medicine man.

<sup>27[27]</sup> Crochet, 'Activites et ideologies de agences internationales en charge de programmes sida au Cambodge' (1998)

<sup>28[28]</sup> Eisenbruch, *Doctor Hansen and the Crouching Mango: STD and HIV-AIDS* (1997).



other villagers, or the victim herself. In Kampong Cham, a sister of a girl who was trafficked in commercial sex work was informed by an organisation about her sister's disease:

"She didn't tell me that she did such job. I just know this when her uncle [from the *angka*] came to tell me... He also told me she has AIDS... He told me she has this disease and now they are treating her. That's why they don't tell her. Uncle told me she is almost better now."

As this case shows, organisations themselves still deal with many misconceptions regarding HIV/AIDS and with defining their own responsibility regarding the reintegration of victims of trafficking with HIV/AIDS.

For victims of trafficking being HIV-positive makes life doubly hard when trying to return to the life they were leading before. In many cases the girls and women are not fully aware of the consequences of the fact that they are HIV-positive. This is especially true when the disease has not yet manifested itself. A 20-year-old woman in Prey Veng was tricked into commercial sex work when she ran off to Phnom Penh. She was sold to several places, but managed to escape. In an organisation she learned she was HIV-positive. She decided to go back home to help her family. She is the oldest of six children. Her father is often away from home, being a soldier; her mother is handicapped and is therefore not able to do all the work to support her family. For her mother, her daughter has failed in Phnom Penh "because she came back without money." Her mother is aware that her daughter is HIV-positive, but added "she is not too sick, she can still carry firewood." Awareness of the consequences of the disease is limited. More concerns are made about economic survival and about being able to live a life as other women of her age. So when a man from a neighbouring village asked the young woman to marry, the reaction of her family was "If he asks her to marry, why would we refuse?" The young woman explained:

"I want to marry him, because I hope that he can help my family. My family is very poor."

In this case, which is not an unique one, the disease had not yet really manifested itself, making considerations of social and economic nature more important in the decision process about marriage, even though it was against the advice of the organisation. However, this kind of reintegration will obviously affect the spread of HIV/AIDS in the countryside in the course of time.

When the disease has manifested itself more clearly, the realisation of the consequences of the disease is usually bigger. A young woman in Kampong Cham interrupted her sewing classes in an organisation when she fell sick. She went back to her mother, but has no physical strength to contribute much to the household economy. She knows her disease will lead to a certain end and is preparing her mother in her own way:

"I joked with my mother. I told her that the fortune-teller guessed that I'll die in two years. She told me not to say such crazy things. But I said that she would believe me once I die."

In another case, the mother and husband spent a lot of effort and money in order to cure a woman who had returned with AIDS. They were, however, not aware of the kind and consequences of the disease and hoped that the treatments would help her mentally in order to make her stay with her husband and physically in order to gain strength to work in the rice field:

"We spent a lot of money to treat her disease. We treated her with modern and traditional medicine. They said she had a nervous system illness... The doctor gives her injections two or three times a month... The *krou khmer* washed her with power water<sup>29[29]</sup> and put the waist thread around her to protect her against all, against nervous system disease and the spirits... Her disease is not completely cured. She feels better for a while, but when there is no medicine the disease comes back."

HIV/AIDS has been recognised by many international and national organisations as well as the government as an urgent health problem that could seriously affect the country in the future. Statistics of 1997<sup>30[30]</sup> show that almost 41% of Cambodian commercial sex workers are HIV-positive. Also statistics of infection rates of military and police are disturbing. So far no statistics are available about HIV-infection rates among migrant workers in general, although this group is a potential sexual "bridge"<sup>31[31]</sup> between commercial sex workers and low-risk groups. Therefore, reintegration of not only commercial sex workers, but of migrant workers in general, when trafficked or not, can become a potential contributor to the spread of AIDS to the countryside. Organisations working on reintegration will have to face more and more the challenges of dealing with counselling of AIDS patients, their family and villagers in the villages as well as shelter of AIDS patients for those who are unable or unwilling to get back to their village.

## **2. Mental health**

Women and children who have been victims of trafficking have often suffered shocking experiences. This does not necessarily have to influence the mental health situation of a woman or child, as it is also dependent on the situation or context in their social environment, their personal vulnerability and the meaning they give to these experiences.<sup>32[32]</sup> Trauma caused by trafficking can cause many kinds of symptoms, such as difficulties with sleeping, nightmares, feelings of shame, fear, distrust, irritability, helplessness, withdrawing from society, and for those who were trafficked in commercial sex work, sexual trauma.<sup>33[33]</sup>

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<sup>29[29]</sup> More about this *sroch tik* ceremony will be explained under the section 'Religion'.

<sup>30[30]</sup> Gorbach, et al., *Bridging Between High and Low Risk Groups in Cambodia: Potential Importance in the Spread of STD/HIV* (1998).

<sup>31[31]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32[32]</sup> TPO, *Community Mental Health in Cambodia* (1997).

<sup>33[33]</sup> Ibid. and Physicians for Human Rights, *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children in Cambodia, Personal Narratives: A Psychological Perspective* (1996).

Although not all victims of trafficking are severely influenced - emotionally or mentally - by their experiences, feelings of isolation, of being not understood or disgraced, are not uncommon. The father of a handicapped boy who was trafficked noted that his son had changed since he came back from Thailand:

"Maybe he is thinking, worrying a lot. He doesn't go anywhere. I don't understand what goes on in his mind. He likes to sit and think. I try to make him forget his story."

Usually these feelings will fade after a period of time. A *meephum* said about one of the girls who was trafficked from his village in Kampong Cham:

"Now her relation with other villagers is normal. She doesn't isolate herself anymore like before. When she just had come back home, she was afraid to meet other people. Now she is friendly with all."

In Kampong Cham, a mother of a girl who was trafficked used a special treatment to cure her daughter's mental state when she came back home:

"When she arrived home she looked like she had a mental lapse. I thought that she was maybe drugged, so I hit her to wake her up. She started crying when I said to her that mother milk is very expensive, and that's why she has to meet with her mother again. I put garlic all over her body, on her hands and legs. Then she became conscious again and described all the things that happened to her."

Here, the mother made clear that she spent a lot in raising her child, as the "mother milk is very expensive", and therefore she made all efforts to find her daughter when she was lost and give her motherly protection once she came back home. The social environment does, however, not necessarily provide this kind of protection in all cases. For some victims of trafficking extreme feelings of isolation, disgrace and shame can lead to depression and thoughts of suicide, or actually committing suicide. Such feelings are easily fuelled by stigmatising behaviour and remarks in the social environment of the victim. The impact of stigmatisation on the reintegration process, as will be discussed in the next chapter, can especially be harmful to girls and women who have been trafficked in commercial sex work. Besides, the sexual trauma caused by rape or forced acceptance of sexual encounters can lead to feelings of helplessness, damage, betrayal, and fear. Moreover, the undermining of self-esteem, including the feeling of being spoiled already and therefore being of less value can make girls and women more susceptible to repeated trafficking.<sup>34[34]</sup>

Other kinds of mental health problems are not necessarily a consequence of the experience of having been trafficked. Some victims of trafficking were already psychologically weak, or as they say in Khmer *min krup dop*<sup>35[35]</sup> from birth. This made them more susceptible to becoming victims of trafficking in the first place, and after reintegration will make it more difficult to accomplish a change in behaviour through a healing ceremony. A woman in Svay Rieng told how her stepdaughter at a very young

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<sup>34[34]</sup> Physicians for Human Rights (1996).

<sup>35[35]</sup> Literally "not fully ten", a person who is intellectually or psychologically weak.

age had been intellectually weak and difficult to handle. However, this became even more obvious after she had her first sexual encounter. Her mental state of mind, according to the woman, also caused her stepdaughter to follow the ones who brought her into commercial sex work:

"I only knew this when she was five months pregnant and when her stomach became bigger than normal. She didn't tell me who deflowered her. She didn't tell anyone. I brought her to the hospital to get an abortion. After all this she changed a lot. She said that she was a bad woman. She could not control her body. She started walking everywhere. It was very difficult. She looked like a mad person. It was difficult to see her when she met a man. She is very pretty. We are very ashamed of her behaviour. Everybody knows about her. They know she is not normal, so they don't take her seriously. But men who don't know her, like soldiers, always grasp her."

A mother in Phnom Penh recounted how her daughter had been difficult to handle since she was young. Her daughter always had the tendency to disobey and run away, because she was only interested in playing. This was, according to the mother, eventually the reason why she was trafficked in commercial sex work. When her daughter was still young, she had once tried to get rid of the magic in her daughter's body that, according to her, caused this deviant behaviour:

"Since she was very young she was crazy. She didn't know anything. She couldn't even find her house. I brought her to a *krou*<sup>36[36]</sup> in my hometown of whom I heard that he is very good. They tied her on a column and hit her with *thieng kdat*<sup>37[37]</sup> to let the madness out of her body... She was better for about one year, though not normal like other people."

For many Cambodians the traditional sector is an important resource for healing physical as well as mental diseases. What is true for repatriated refugees or internally displaced people regarding physical and mental health, is certainly also true for reintegrated victims of trafficking:

In Cambodia the healers bear the cultural interpretations of illness for their people, understand the ways they signal their distress, and have the power and cultural recipes to treat them.<sup>38[38]</sup>

There are many different kind of traditional healers. Eisenbruch<sup>39[39]</sup> distinguishes seven groups of healers: male Buddhist monks, *achaa*<sup>40[40]</sup>, male or female traditional healers called *krou*, usually female mediums, Buddhist devotees, lay healers and female traditional birth attendants. The main healers are, however, the monks and the *krou*. Eisenbruch states that there is "a fuzzy boundary between the local folk beliefs with the

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<sup>36[36]</sup> Healer.

<sup>37[37]</sup> Stalk of a kind of edible plant, often used in healing ceremonies for people affected by magic.

<sup>38[38]</sup> Eisenbruch, 'Mental Health and the Cambodian Traditional Healer for Refugees who Resettled, were Repatriated or Internally Displaced, and for those who Stayed at Home' (1994), p.219.

<sup>39[39]</sup> For more detailed information on traditional healing see Eisenbruch, *Resources and Limitations in Meeting the Mental Health Needs of the Cambodian Population* (1994).

<sup>40[40]</sup> Religious teacher.

*krou*'s version of Hindu and Buddhist ideas of illness.<sup>41[41]</sup> Monks and *krou* can perform similar healing rituals, but the *krou* are usually viewed as the medical healers, the monks as the spiritual ones. The monks also play an important role in religious ceremonies organised for the general wellbeing of victims of trafficking.

It is important to be aware of the fact that Cambodians have their own techniques for managing the problems related to reintegration. A thorough understanding of these factors should improve the assessment of the objectives and achievements of reintegration.

## 6. Religion

Many informants claimed that religious ceremonies had a healing effect on their situation after reintegration. These can be small religious ceremonies, such as lighting incense and offering food in front of an altar at home, but also more elaborate ones where monks and *achaa* play an important role. These are religious ceremonies that can be held for many reasons, but for victims of trafficking they often get a special meaning in the sense that these ceremonies mark the end of their past experiences and the promise of a new beginning in the reintegrated state.

The concept of karma is important in understanding the function of religious ceremonies for victims of trafficking. In Buddhist philosophy, the doctrine of karma is based on the principle of causality or the law of cause and effect:

It is the law of morality, which asserts that an intentional action will lead to a result proportionate in nature and intensity to that intention.<sup>42[42]</sup>

Cambodian Buddhists are strong believers in *kam*, as karma is called in Khmer. As Mortland describes, the concept of *kam* is based on the belief that acts committed in previous lives affect one's situation in this life and acts committed in this life will affect one's situation in future life.<sup>43[43]</sup> For many Cambodians *kam* has merely a negative connotation. Someone who "has *kam*" has done bad things and will receive the results of these bad actions. In this respect also the term *kamphear* is used, which refers to the reciprocity of good or bad actions. Some informants blamed their bad experiences on their *kamphear*. A young woman in Battambang who was trafficked in commercial sex work and was successfully reintegrated explained the success of her reintegration in terms of having paid her debts:

"Maybe I did something bad to somebody in my past life and they had to give this back to me in this life. But now, I have already returned to them my bad deeds from the past."

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<sup>41[41]</sup> Eisenbruch (1994), p.3.

<sup>42[42]</sup> Sunthorn Plamintr, *Getting to Know Buddhism* (1994), p.109-110.

<sup>43[43]</sup> Mortland, 'Khmer Buddhists in the United States' (1994), p.79.

The daughter of an elderly lady who was trafficked to Thailand to go begging made a remark that suggests the kind of culturally plausible explanations that are important to be aware of when focussing on reintegration:

"Maybe in her past life she sold someone herself and that's why she was sold in this life."

As bad experiences are a result of bad actions in the past, good actions will result in merit. One of the many ways to gain merit is through ceremonies and offerings to the pagoda. The elderly lady just mentioned responded to her daughter's comment with the following resolution which she thought would return equanimity:

"I want to finish my *kam*. I don't want to meet something like this in my next life... I think I had sin and that made me believe them [the recruiters]. Now I don't believe them anymore, even if they try to trick me again. I want to forget all. I don't want to think back. I will offer food and respect the prayers for the rest of my life."

Such beliefs should be recognised as important factors influencing the reintegration processes of victims of trafficking. A young woman in Battambang who had been trafficked in commercial sex work explained:

"I want to celebrate a ceremony in order not to meet such experiences again, for not having more sin and for relieving all *kam*."

A most important ceremony in this respect is *sroch tik*. Literally *sroch tik* means "spray water". The ceremony can be performed in different ways, depending on the region and the person who is conducting the ceremony: monks, *achaa* or *krou*. There is, however, a general pattern that is used in all *sroch tik* ceremonies. Water, in a container or bucket, is given magical power through chanting Buddhist mantras, incense smoke and candles. This water is used to spray and/or throw over the person for whom the ceremony was organised. The ceremony can be held, depending on the person, in a pagoda or at home. It usually comes with offerings of fruit, betel nut, incense, candles, tobacco, money and, for more elaborate ceremonies, special offerings<sup>44[44]</sup> made out of banana leaves and stem, decorated with different kinds of food, leaves, betel nut, incense and candles. At the end of the ceremony, a cotton thread is tied around the wrist or waist of the person in order to protect him or her from further danger.

Cambodians will organise a *sroch tik* ceremony for many different reasons: to avert danger before a long trip, to get better from illness, to boost prosperity in business, to increase happiness in the family. *Sroch tik* ceremonies are also held during Khmer New Year, before marriage, or other transitional events in life. The more general terms for this are: *romdoh krueh*, or to free or save from danger; *creah cungrei*, or to clean misfortune or bad luck; and, *leuk riesei*, or to return prosperous times. There are different mantras for these different purposes of the ceremony. In one ceremony, the first part can be focussed on averting danger, while in the second part return of prosperous times are being asked.

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<sup>44[44]</sup> Different kinds of offerings are made, such as *slaa thoa*, *bay sey* and *sorng*.

An *achaa* who had just finished a *sroch tik* ceremony for a reintegrated girl explained his chanting:

"We pray different lessons. The prayer for cleaning misfortune comes first. After that we pray another prayer for inviting all the *tevada*<sup>45[45]</sup> to accept that this girl has had misfortune. I describe all the offerings we made and symbolise her person. When they accept all these offerings, they have to give her good luck. I first describe all the problems that happened in her body, after that I call for the prosperous times."

Although *sroch tik* ceremonies are also performed by monks and in the pagoda, some head monks make a point that these are not Buddhist ceremonies, as one head monk in Battambang noted:

"*Sroch tik* is not a ceremony that falls under the Buddhist religion. This ceremony is part of the tradition in Cambodia that comes from Brahmanism... [According to Buddhist philosophy] it is karma that is important. Action must give result. If we do bad action, we will receive bad. Good karma will release the danger, that is through following the precepts<sup>46[46]</sup>."

Even though a majority of our informants believed that *sroch tik* is an important ceremony that would help them "clean" the past experiences and return luck in their life, not all had actually performed such ceremony. The main reason is lack of money. Even though the ceremony can also be performed with minimum expenses for offerings, according to the wealth of a person, most think that more result will be gained when more offerings can be made. A culturally appropriate reintegration initiative would be to support the victim's desire for a *sroch tik* ceremony.

In some cases, family-members or the husband organise a *sroch tik* ceremony for their child or wife, as it will bring fortune to all. A father complained that his daughter had been very unfortunate in all her work after returning home from being trafficked. The piglets she raised died, and several diseases had bothered her, which hindered her work. In his view, *sroch tik* was important to get rid of all these misfortunes in her, and would eventually benefit the whole family. Also husbands bring their wives-to-be to *sroch tik* before marriage in order to release them from all bad things that happened in the past. This could be a way to "clean" the women who had several sexual partners before, but also to assure that this behaviour will change. A young woman in Battambang commented:

"My husband brought me to the pagoda to have a *sroch tik* ceremony, in order to pray I will not meet such experiences again... I prayed for good things to happen in the future, for not being sold again. If I still had bad sin, bad people would sell me again. When I first met my husband, he didn't want to marry me. He said he was too old, and I was too

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<sup>45[45]</sup> Divinity.

<sup>46[46]</sup> The five precepts to be followed by lay people are: refrain from killing living creatures, refrain from taking what is not given, refrain from sexual misconduct, refrain from false speech, and refrain from taking intoxicating drugs and liquors.

young. He thought that I would still go with clients in a hotel room, because I need the money. He didn't have confidence in me."

As in this case, *sroch tik* ceremonies are also organised in order to bring about some behavioural change. Persons who are considered to display deviant behaviour are expected to become more "normal" after undergoing a *sroch tik* ceremony. In cases of reintegrated victims of trafficking, isolating, inappropriately happy or other "abnormal" behaviour are often treated by means of a *sroch tik* ceremony. Also other villagers will notice that such ceremony will have healing effects. A neighbour of a young woman who had returned home after being trafficked in commercial sex work noted:

"When she first arrived home, she always wanted to go back [to Phnom Penh]. She said that she had forgotten some things and wanted to go back to fetch it. She didn't want to see anybody, she only wanted to go back. After her mother brought her to the pagoda for *sroch tik*, she became better."

*Sroch tik* is believed to have healing effects on physical and mental diseases, especially when these are caused by malevolent spirits. In such healing ceremonies, the *krou* pours water over the patient from head to feet, thus removing the badness from within the body and letting it drain to the earth.<sup>47[47]</sup> A young woman in Svay Rieng was feeling sick since she had stayed in a brothel. She was treated in the *angka*, but was not completely cured when she came back home. She used many kinds of medicine and was treated by a traditional healer, but only after *sroch tik* she was cured:

"I was very ill. I got weaker and weaker. I used all my money to treat my disease, but there was no result. I just got temporarily better when I took some medicine. Then I met a *krou*. He told me that I was under magic. I didn't know about this, but my relatives also told me that my eyes were not like normal eyes. I had always pain in my chest, neck and headache. I often had bad dreams. I believed that someone put magic on me, but my father told me not to believe in spirits. When the *krou* treated the magic, I prepared the offerings to the spirits such as banana, candle, incense, money, red and white tissue. I spent a lot of money. After that I was still not cured, because I had not yet done *sroch tik* at the pagoda. My adoptive father knew that, and he gave me money to do *sroch tik*, to cure my disease."

As such, *sroch tik* ceremonies can have a healing effect on the physical and mental wellbeing of women and children who have been victims of trafficking. Besides, these or other ceremonies also serve as a kind of coping strategy for individual victims of trafficking as well as their families. While accepting that certain bad things have happened in the past, organising a *sroch tik* ceremony can be seen as a way to make sure these bad things do not continue to influence life in the future. By means of a *sroch tik* ceremony, mental, physical, but also economic and social issues are dealt with in a spiritual way in order to relieve the problems of the individual and the family. As such, religious and cultural beliefs and practices, which are considered to be basic institutions of Khmer society, should be recognised as effective coping strategies of victims of trafficking and their social environment where reintegration takes place.

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<sup>47[47]</sup> Eisenbruch (1994), p.15.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### LEVELS OF REINTEGRATION

Reintegration of victims of trafficking, as was stated in chapter two, is more than just a geographic movement of a woman or child back home or to a new place. Individual victims of trafficking are reintegrating in a social environment of family, neighbours, friends, or colleagues. Therefore, reintegration has an impact on different social levels: the level of the individual, the family, the village and the larger level of Cambodian society. Economic situation, health and religion, as discussed in chapter three, play an important role in the reintegration processes on these different levels, as these factors determine partly the social acceptance or stigmatisation of individual victims of trafficking. In this chapter, the different levels at which the reintegration takes place will be explored within this context of stigmatisation and social or self-acceptance of trafficking experiences.

#### 7. Individual Level

Reintegration is not simply a re-unification or re-incorporation of an individual in a family or a society, it also requires from the individual a great deal of re-adaptation to a social situation, to certain kinds of work, to a certain life style and certain behavioural codes. A girl in Svay Rieng who had been reintegrated after having been trafficked into commercial sex work noted:

"Now my skin is much blacker than when I was staying in Phnom Penh. I always have headache and I feel dizzy, because I have to work under the sun everyday for transplanting rice."

The extent to which an individual victim of trafficking can, wants to or is allowed to re-adapt will have a major influence on the reintegration process. This is also related to the kinds and degree of choice individuals had before being trafficked, as described in chapter two. In some cases, victims of trafficking who were reintegrated with their family prefer to leave as soon as possible again, after they found life and work in the village too hard and boring while few economic benefits are to be gained. Such individual difficulties with adaptation are also influenced by problems regarding the economic, health or psychological situation, which affect the way they view themselves and are viewed by others. For some this leads to feelings of being misunderstood, like a handicapped boy who said he felt his social environment did not understand him:

"My friends don't think like friends who have lived together in the same village and have always played together. They don't understand my heart and my difficulties... Thinking is difficult, but I think a lot about my long story. I regret myself."

A condemning reaction of others to the reintegration of a victim of trafficking can lead to even stronger feelings of isolation, unworthiness or being unaccepted, dirty, or spoiled. A young woman in Battambang does not want to leave her house because her neighbours might speak badly about her:

"I think they look down on me. They say I was a beer girl, this means for them that I was a prostitute. They say that I took the husband of another woman. They don't say it directly to me, I know this. But I don't say anything."

Her example shows the power of village gossip and public opinion in affecting the perceptions and actions of a reintegrated victim of trafficking. This is not a unique example. Another girl in Battambang became very emotional when describing how others thought of her:

"They look down on me. No one wants to make friends with me. There is only one person who wants to contact me, but that is a bad person like me."

Stigmatisation is often seen as the main problem for reintegration of victims of trafficking. According to several representatives from NGOs working on reintegration, stigmatisation can be a main cause for women and children to fall back into the situation in which they were trafficked before. Especially women and girls who were trafficked as commercial sex workers are targets of gossip, condemnation and isolation. As an NGO worker expressed, "they are seen as the guilty ones, not as victims." However, the issue of stigmatisation should not only be addressed as a problem of the social environment, as it is also related to the attitude, lifestyle and self-esteem of the individual victim of trafficking.

Stigmatisation assumes a certain social environment that disapproves of the behaviour, activities, appearance or engagements of a certain individual. Within any social environment, be it the family, the village, the school or the broader society, there are certain values or norms that are expected to be respected. Deviant behaviour is often criticised or corrected, but the ways, amount and consequences of this criticism or correction varies widely between societies. Within Cambodian society a range of legal and customary codes, Buddhist precepts and teachings and traditions or norms or conduct guide various kinds of ideal, correct or customary behaviour depending on the status of individuals within their social environment. However, as Ebihara points out:

[A]t the same time there is considerable tolerance for variation in adherence to norms: some can be bent or ignored according to particular circumstances; while others, even powerful ones, are sometimes flagrantly broken.<sup>48[48]</sup>

She continues that:

[K]hmer village society [...] does seem to have less rigid controls and more tolerance for variation than some groups. Adherence to most cultural norms depends primarily on individual conscience, sensitivity to public opinion, or the desire to avoid trouble.<sup>49[49]</sup>

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<sup>48[48]</sup> Ebihara, *Svay, a Khmer Village in Cambodia* (1968), p.205.

Ebihara has based her analysis of Khmer society on fieldwork conducted in the late fifties. In the meantime, much has happened and changed especially within the social fabric of Cambodian society, although this does not necessarily mean that traditions and norms have completely disappeared. Several other scholars have also pointed out the individualistic nature of Cambodian society. Therefore, in order to assess stigmatisation of certain individuals, it is important to understand why they are considered to be deviant from the norm and by whom, how is this expressed and how the stigmatised person reacts to this. In the case of stigmatisation of victims of trafficking, the age and personality of the individual, relations within and consistency of the social environment, time frame and expectations of the social environment toward the individual and vice versa all play a role, and have an impact on the outlook for successful reintegration.

## 8. Family Level

Several scholars writing about Cambodia have pointed at the nuclear family as the most important social unit.<sup>50[50]</sup> Népote states that, besides having an economic function, the family constitutes also the primary basis for affection and social organisation.<sup>51[51]</sup> This is also the reason why, in most cases, reintegration into a family situation is usually considered the first and most desirable option for victims of trafficking.

### 1. Family ties

Victims of trafficking have been cut off from their familial ties. This is often not only difficult for the woman or child, but also for their family members. Fortune tellers are consulted to find out where the child or woman has gone and whatever means available are used to try to search the lost one, sometimes even at the cost of selling valuable rice or other necessities for family survival. Re-unification with the "lost one" is in such cases a relief to both the one who was trafficked and the family. A mother of two children who were taken to Thailand for begging remembered:

"I was so worried when I heard they were brought to Thailand, because they said that they would be thrown in the water for crocodile food. I didn't know what to do, because I didn't know that country. I was praying for my children to come back home. My mother also prayed and promised to offer the head of a pig... When my children came back home, I cried, I pitied them so much... My mother arranged to borrow money from other people to fulfil her promises and offer the head of a pig."

Since the family is besides a social also an important economic unit, re-unification of a lost member also means that a valuable contributor to household and farming activities

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<sup>49[49]</sup> Ibid., p.205-206.

<sup>50[50]</sup> See Delvert, *Le paysan cambodgien* (1961); Ebihara (1968); Ovesen, Trankell, Ojendal, *Where Every Household is an Island. Social Organisations and Power Structures in Rural Cambodia* (1996); Thion, *Watching Cambodia* (1992); Van de Put, *An Assessment of the Community in Cambodia* (1997).

<sup>51[51]</sup> Népote, *Parenté et organisation sociale dans le Cambodge moderne et contemporain* (1992).

has returned, as has been discussed in chapter three. A mother in Kampong Cham noted about the return of her trafficked daughter who had been successfully reintegrated:

"I was so happy to see her back. I am so poor, I only have enough to feed the stomach. When she came back, she immediately started working again. She was not spoiled. She transplanted rice, she did everything."

As mentioned above, regardless of what organisations think about the proper role of children, the importance of children's contributions to the household economy is well documented. Victims of trafficking who do manage to contribute considerable amounts of funds on their return may be able to play an important role in the family structure.<sup>52[52]</sup> However, in the majority of the cases, where women or children did not bring any funds back with them to support the family, disappointment and friction between family members may arise. A girl in Svay Rieng described her parents' divergent reaction to her return:

"My father said that I am his daughter, whether I did something wrong or not. He told me to cook for the pagoda, so I will get merit. My mother said that I am spoiled already, so I should continue to do that work in order to get money to buy a house. Then nobody would criticise me. She only thinks of money... Sometimes my parents quarrel a whole day because of me."

This case shows clearly how reintegration of a victim of trafficking can be differently valued by the father and the mother. Here, the mother stressed the importance of the financial contribution her daughter should make, as it would help the girl and the family economically as well as in terms of social esteem. The father, however, stressed the importance of making merit in order to deal with her past experiences and prepare for a better future. These different perspectives concern the value of a daughter to a family. In the struggle between economic benefit and moral benefit who can say what the right outlook is? This is a dilemma that is probably a key to understanding reintegration from the point of view of the family.

A handicapped boy in Battambang said he regrets that he lost one year of study while he was begging in Thailand. He has decided now to stay with his parents and finish his study, with help from the *angka*. However, problems have arisen in his family. The mother has left, leaving his father behind to take care of the children. The father said:

"She left because she was angry with me. We have a lot of conflicts. When she left, our baby still had to drink milk. Maybe when she thinks of the children and their difficulties, she will return. Despite the fact that we are angry and hit each other until we bleed, we still have our six children in common... I don't know whether she has money or not. Before, she had always stayed at home to take care of the children. She never went anywhere. But after this conflict she left. "

Even though the boy had made up his mind to stay with his family and study, this change in the family situation might make it difficult to realise his ideal. This shows that not only

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<sup>52[52]</sup> CWDA (1998), p.12.

the economic situation, but also the relations within the family are important factors that influence the reintegration of victims of trafficking no matter how much support is provided.

Not in every family is the victim of trafficking welcomed with open arms. This can be caused by the trafficking experience which, for reasons of shame or inability to contribute considerable amounts of funds, may lead to a schism in family relations. In some cases disrupted family relations already existed before departure, as in the case of the mother of a girl who was trafficked in commercial sex work. During the interview they showed a mutually hostile relationship by openly insulting each other. The mother described her daughter as someone who was "born with difficulties". She admitted that she would rather not have her daughter stay with her, as "she is like a leech that is sucking my blood and since I am skinny and almost falling down, I want to pick it off me."

The kind of family ties that exist in the reintegration situation can be an important factor in how a victim of trafficking is received. A *meephum* in Battambang stressed this when comparing two young women in his village who had both been trafficked into commercial sex work:

"For the one, she is living 100 percent like other villagers. She has a husband. Now she is pregnant and her husband has to work alone to sell vegetables to earn money for his family... But the other is different. She stays with her sisters, but they don't take care of her. Children who don't have parents only think for what they can, they don't have a clear mind. If they have parents, the parents will take care of them, even if they don't have enough food."

This *meephum* recognised the value of a family unit in which parents can form a stable and protective environment for a reintegrated girl or otherwise where such an environment is established through the married status and husband of a woman. This informant saw a disadvantage for a victim who had no trusted adult for guidance.

In reality victims of trafficking come out of and reintegrate into various kinds of family units. As has been pointed out in other studies about trafficking, the kind and degree of affection of family ties can be the cause of a woman or child becoming a victim of trafficking in the first place. Subsequently, these ties can foster or hinder reintegration back into the family. An orphaned young woman, who had been lured into commercial sex work several times, explained why she did not want or know where to go back home:

"Before I stayed with my aunt in Kampong Thom. I ran away from her, when she had a quarrel with my uncle about me. My uncle complained that my aunt only fed her nieces and not his. I didn't want them to quarrel about me, so I ran away to Phnom Penh. I stayed with my adoptive mother with whom I used to live when I was a child... Although she let me stay with her, she was not good. In her house were dancing girls living with her. I am angry with her, because she directed my sister to do bad things [i.e. go into commercial sex work]... I only once went back to see my aunt in Kampong Thom. I went when I was sick, but my aunt said that I only needed her because I was sick... I was ashamed to go back there. So I didn't want anyone to see me."

This woman, although lacking a stable family environment to get back to, was adult enough to create her own social unit. She found a husband with whom she rents a small house and who earns some money to support her. This is, however, different for children. A mother in Phnom Penh realised that her two sons who had been trafficked to Thailand preferred to stay in the *angka* once they came back because of her second husband:

"My sons don't want to sleep here. They are afraid of my husband, who is not their real father. He used to maltreat me, not my children. But they are afraid because he talks loud and is nasty."

This theme of the mean stepfather or stepmother can be found in folktales all over the world and has also often been used in explaining trafficking processes. A woman in Svay Rieng made a point of not being the real mother of the girl who was trafficked and who explained why the reintegration had not been successful. The father of the girl had died and her only *boang-paoun bangkaet*, blood relatives, were her brothers and sisters:

"She was kicked out by her own brothers and sisters. She was disowned. They were angry with her, because she was nasty. They couldn't educate her. Now they don't take care about her anymore... They don't look after her any more, because they are afraid of losing their honour. It is like throwing a piece of their meat in the river. They say it is her *kam*. And I am her stepmother... I see her as a child of other people... I told the *angka* to keep her forever, but they said they could not keep her."

Ovesen<sup>53[53]</sup> states that the Khmer social universe focuses on the nuclear family. Completeness of this nuclear family is so important that "a woman without a husband is in a certain sense equivalent to a person missing a limb." Even more so, not to belong to a whole nuclear family is to be socially incomplete. There are many other ways in which children become part of a nuclear family other than the one existing of their biological parents, or *euwpuk-medaay bangkaet*. As Ebihara<sup>54[54]</sup> pointed out an orphaned child, but also an illegitimate or unwanted child, may be adopted informally or formally by relatives of the parents of the children or others who have an interest in taking care of a child. Through adoption some kind of legal or social recognition that the child has assumed the status of a child belonging to a particular family or person is established. Where a child is given in guardianship to another family because of the death of their parents or in order to help a lonely or affluent relative, no such recognition is established. Furthermore, there is a so-called *thoa* relation in which individuals assume a fictive kin relationship. A *thoa* relationship can be established in order to give special meaning to a relationship between two individuals or in order to assure a place where shelter, company and protection can be found when an individual is travelling to a place where no real kin can be found. As such, these idioms of kinship are important and not so much the actuality of family units. This has, of course, implications for reintegration of victims of trafficking in that it indicates cultural resources in Cambodia that could be explored to achieve better success in reintegration efforts.

## 2. **Shame**

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<sup>53[53]</sup> Ovesen et al. (1996), p.43.

<sup>54[54]</sup> Ebihara (1968), p.136-137, 173, 177.

Even though victims of trafficking have often suffered horrifying experiences, or have been in places that might sound exciting to family members who never left the village or district, most informants did not give the impression that they talked much about the experiences with their family members. From the side of the family members, no details were asked about the whereabouts while they were away, whereas the returned woman or child might refuse to talk about it in an effort to forget. A mother of a trafficked girl in Svay Rieng said about her daughter's return:

"When she came home, I only kissed her. After I went out, because I had to cry. I was worried that she had been sold, but I didn't ask her."

Victims of trafficking who, on return, talk too much about their experiences, are sometimes even ridiculed by their family members. When an elderly woman who had been trafficked to Thailand started raving about how beautiful Pattaya was her daughter joked "oh yes, Pibah-taya", *pibah* coming from the Khmer word "difficult".

Many of the women and girls who had been trafficked in commercial sex work tried to keep their story secret, in order to avoid putting shame on themselves or their family. However, even when the woman or girl tried to keep the story secret, her family might be able to guess the story. However, for the woman or child as well as for their family members it is considered to be most important to return to a normal life. In this way feelings of shame on the side of individual who was trafficked as well as on the family as a whole are limited. A cousin of a girl who was trafficked into commercial sex work commented on the reaction of the parents of the girl:

"I asked her mother about [her daughter]. She said that her daughter lived with relatives in Phnom Penh. When I asked her mother, I already knew that her daughter was sold, but the mother didn't tell me the truth... The people know about her story. They say that she went to work as a prostitute. Her parents are shy because the people talk about her."

A woman in Kampong Cham expressed her concern how her family could be affected by the story of her younger sister who had been trafficked in commercial sex work and contracted AIDS:

"I keep the story secret, for I don't want them to criticise our family, to say that our family is bad... If they know that our lineage is bad, they will also criticise our children and no one will ask our daughters to marry. Our ancestors used to look at the lineage before they would ask to marry. They look first if the lineage is good, and whether they never did something bad. So I think it is better to keep the story secret."

She referred here to the proverb: *tweu srea aoy meul smaw, tuk dak koun cao aoy meul peuw sandaan*, which means "before planting rice look at the grass, before marrying off your child look at the lineage". She was afraid that her sister's story would affect the way others would look at their family. Since their family lineage would be considered being spoiled because of her sister's story, she feared that the possibilities for marriage of her daughters, who were still young, would be in danger. However, as another informant noted this should not be taken too seriously, because one could refer just as well refer to

another saying that says that "within one bunch of coconuts, not all are the same". So also within one family where most are good, there can be one who shows deviant behaviour.

The shame felt by the family regarding a trafficked family member is related to norms of behaviour that have not been respected and will therefore cast a bad name on the whole family. These norms are not only related to the fact that a young woman has left the village - more and more young women in the countryside do so nowadays - or the nature of the work, but also to the contribution the trafficked person has been able to make to the family. If there was no contribution, but instead only more misery through illness and stigma, the trafficked person will be blamed putting shame on the family. Therefore, a mother of a HIV-positive young woman in Prey Veng commented that for her "it seems like I threw away one child."

### **3. Family involvement in trafficking**

Reintegration back in the family becomes more complicated when a family member was involved in the trafficking process. A *meephum* in Battambang referred to the saying: *trey chdoa sii koun eing* - literally "a pike fish eats her own children" - when talking about a family next door. The youngest girl had been trafficked, but her elder sisters were involved. He said:

"Her sisters had bad ideas to sell her like that. As I said, the pike fish takes care and guides her own children to find food. But if she cannot find enough for herself, she will eat her own children... Her sisters sold her, because they were in debt... but even though they are poor, countryside people should not do things like this."

Girls who have once been trafficked by their family members are at a higher risk to be trafficked again when they are reintegrated with these family members. This is partly dependent on the economic situation, but also on relations within the family and perceptions on the economic value of children or on the moral value of certain kind of work, such as commercial sex work. Repeated trafficking has especially received a lot of attention from different assistance and human rights organisations through the case of a Vietnamese girl who was sold three times into commercial sex work by her debt-trapped mother. An NGO representative commented on this case:

"The mother just thinks that her children are her property and that she can do what she wants with her children. She had no money, so she ordered her children to find money for her. If we didn't help her daughter, she would be in serious trouble. Maybe we could not have saved her, because she was sold since she was 12 years old and was therefore seriously exposed to the transmittance of STDs and HIV."

The first time the girl was brought to a brothel, her mother took a loan of \$500 from the brothel owner. The mother came back several times to get new loans, until her daughter was arrested and brought to a shelter, where she stayed almost one year. She was reintegrated with her mother and four younger brothers and sisters with support from the *angka*. The Vietnamese girl explained:



"My mother asked me to come back home to help her work, sell something. She promised that she would not sell me again. The *angka* helped my mother. They bought a house for her and materials for her small business. The house was big and nice, but I didn't want to stay there... Then, at Khmer New Year, my mother didn't have money to buy clothes for my siblings and for buying food to offer the spirits of my grandparents... I suggested my mother to go back to the shop [brothel] to get some money for her. My mother told me not to do so, because she was afraid of the *angka*. I secretly went and borrowed \$100. I worked for three months and borrowed more money. But I told my mother that while I found clients for them, they didn't pay me money. So my mother wanted to sell me a second time to a shop in Tuol Kork<sup>55[55]</sup>. The boss gave her \$200, but I didn't want to stay there because the *meebon*<sup>56[56]</sup> was mean... They insulted me, they call me *mi som phoeng*<sup>57[57]</sup>. Later I saw someone of the *angka* passing by. So when I saw my mother again, I told her to give back the \$200, because I was afraid the *angka* would come to search for me. Then my mother brought me to a shop in Svay Pak. But the *meebon* in Tuol Kork had informed the *angka* that my mother had sold again to a *meebon* in Svay Pak. They called my mother and arranged with the *meebon* to get me out... I went back to the shelter. One day, when the door was open, I left. I thought of my mother who is so poor and I wanted to help her sell bread. At home my mother scolded me and my brother hit me, so I wanted to leave again. I called a friend to go to Kampong Som to work as an employee. But when we arrived there were no jobs, only to work as prostitute... When the *angka* found me there, they thought that my mother had sold me again. But my mother did not sell me, I went there by myself. They didn't believe me. I cried every day. I was very sad, because I made my mother be in prison."

While the mother, accused of trafficking of her own eldest daughter, is in prison, her little children are taken care of by one of the organisations. The children reproach their sister for bringing their mother in prison. Although they all want their mother to come back home soon, so that they can all live together again, the organisations have doubts whether the mother will ever improve herself and are looking for alternative solutions for the woman's children.

It is obvious that in a case like this the perspective of the girl who was trying to support her family did not entirely match the perspective of the organisations. In the view of the organisations the moral and criminal codes of behaviour were broken. They saw the risk of repeated trafficking of this girl, but also of her younger sisters if no action against the mother were taken. At the same time, the organisations are working within a broader legal framework in which governmental laws regarding child prostitution, trafficking, but also protection of vulnerable citizens set the legal standards for cases of victims of trafficking like the one described above. However important such legal standards and especially their implementation may be within the perspective of the organisations and the government, within the perspective of individual victims of trafficking these did not seem to play an important role. For them, as for the majority of the Cambodians, resolution and reconciliation efforts are preferably dealt with on the most local level<sup>58[58]</sup>,

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<sup>55[55]</sup> Area at North-Phnom Penh where many brothels are.

<sup>56[56]</sup> Brothel owner.

<sup>57[57]</sup> Derogatory way for calling someone a prostitute.

<sup>58[58]</sup> For more information on resolution and reconciliation efforts on the local level see Collins, *Dynamics of Dispute Resolution and Administration of Justice for Cambodian Villagers* (1997).

which means within the family. While the legal concepts and actions regarding trafficking on a higher judicial level are viewed by organisations and the government as important tools for dealing with cases when such family reconciliation is not possible, these tools are considered to be too alien for most victims of trafficking. Moreover, from the perspective of these young victims of trafficking the consequences of the use of such legal tools are not necessarily thought to benefit themselves or other members in their social environment.

#### **4. New family environments**

The kinds of alternative solutions for reintegration, when reintegration in the family is not possible or desirable, depend on the age, personality and social relations of the woman or child. Children can be reintegrated with other relatives than the parents, with foster parents<sup>59[59]</sup> or be placed in orphanage centers until they have reached an age at which they can take care of themselves. Victims of trafficking who are already old enough to take care of themselves can decide to find a new place on their own. This is more usual among women who have been trafficked into commercial sex work, who do not want to go back home in order not to be confronted with the shame or in order to be able to bring back some money earned in a respectable way. A young woman working in a garment factory who was reintegrated with help from an organisation expressed the hope that she could go back to her family one day:

"I am shy, I don't know what to do. I see my friends are happy, they can live with their parents and everything is good. They can find happiness, but I am disappointed in myself... If I go back home now, I can help my parents. But now I want to work in the garment factory. Maybe in the future, when I am older, I will go back to live with my parents."

This young woman, as many other victims of trafficking, has to deal with uncertainties about where her place in Khmer society should be after reintegration. From her point of view, it raises the issue of her responsibility regarding supporting her parents. From the point of view of the parents, it raises issues of their responsibility for their children as well as their expectations regarding their children.

For some women perhaps a more consoling way of reintegration is the establishment of a new family environment through marriage. Marriage might especially form a protective environment after reintegration when a woman feels herself economically and socially too vulnerable or dependent to stay alone. Marriage enables a woman to create a new nuclear family and establish the kind of completeness that is considered to be so important.<sup>60[60]</sup> In some cases organisations support financially the wedding of a trafficked woman. However, in many other cases there is only a very small ceremony, *sean*, which is common for weddings in which one of the spouses was divorced or widowed, or no ceremony at all. Through whatever ceremony, establishing a new family through marriage enables a woman to feel more protected within their status as a married woman, although the barriers to finding a marriage partner might be high.

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<sup>59[59]</sup> See also Gourly (1996).

<sup>60[60]</sup> Ovesen et al. (1996), p.43.

A young woman in Phnom Penh who had been trafficked in commercial sex work only dared to go back to visit her own family to announce that she got married:

"Before I was afraid to go back, because my face had been in a newspaper. But when I came to visit, they were happy to hear that I got married... Villagers also showed the newspaper to my mother-in-law. My husband told her that she should not believe what was written. He told her that they always exaggerate information in order to sell their newspaper... My husband knows all about my story. He loves me very much even though I was married before and I have done bad things."

However, also in a new family environment women face stigmatisation, if not from jealous husbands or female villagers who fear that the women have not left their former "habits", then from the family-in-law. A young woman in Battambang knew what her mother-in-law would think about her if she found out that she had worked as a commercial sex worker before marriage:

"One week after we got married, my husband brought me to see his mother. She doesn't know about my story, because my husband told her I was single. My mother-in-law hates prostitutes. She told my husband never to marry one. If she knew I was a prostitute before, she would hate me. My husband also hates beer girls, but he married me anyhow. It is his sin."

Whereas some women, because of their experiences, would never want to marry a man, others are concerned they will never find one who wants to marry someone who has been a commercial sex worker. A policeman in Kampong Cham, referring to a woman from his village who was trafficked in commercial sex work, explained:

"Some men think about their *ketteyoo* [honour]. They can't marry such a woman when they know her story. It would hurt their honour and they are afraid other people will talk bad about their wife."

## 9. Village Level

If reintegration into a family situation can be difficult for victims of trafficking it can be even more so for getting back into village life. In the village, public opinion can be a strong force in showing condemnation for a victim of trafficking who returned into the village, especially a woman or girl who was trafficked into commercial sex work. Upon return, changes in behaviour are immediately noticed. Some villagers in Kampong Cham remarked about a young woman who had been trafficked into commercial sex work by her former husband:

"We don't know clear about this, there are rumours we can't say. We are afraid her mother will say that we say bad things about her daughter and that she will scold us. We don't want them to have more difficulties... When [she] returned home, she was different from other people, different from the villagers. She looked like she had done something bad. Her dress was too modern. The villagers also commented on the way she walked."

They said she had worked in sexual service. She was pretty. I know it is not good that I say this, but they said she received 4, 10 or 22 men per day. Every afternoon she would dress up, put make-up on and go with cars to this place, then to that place... Her mother searched for her and brought her home. First she didn't want to come back. When she arrived home, she seemed like she had in her mind to go back. Only after a long time she changed. She reduced her different behaviour. Her mother took care of her. She is in good hands now. The villagers don't guide her to be bad. She can live with them... When she came back, we educated her so she would abandon her bad habits. Now she is changed. Now she is normal, like countryside people. She abandoned her former character. She lives with her husband in peace."

This fragment shows various facets involved in the way villagers judge reintegrated women or girls who have been trafficked in commercial sex work. What is judged is, of course, the nature of the work they did, but what is judged even more is their behaviour after return: it did not comply with "normal" villager behaviour, as opposed to what they view as city-people behaviour. However, they also recognise that she has changed her behaviour and, with the status of married woman, has found a place again in their village.

### **1. Proper behaviour and village life**

Ledgerwood<sup>61[61]</sup> states that there are many conflicting ideals regarding proper behaviour for women, some of them changing with the passage of time in a woman's life, others forced upon her by circumstances of daily life. Although daughters should ideally stay in the protected environment of the family and village, they are also expected to contribute to family income, which might force them to leave this environment. A girl working in a garment factory in Phnom Penh said:

"When the *angka* accompanied me to the village, they whispered about me. They say bad things about me. They say I am already *kouc*<sup>62[62]</sup>... They say that all girls who go to work in Phnom Penh are bad... I don't say anything, because I think I was wrong myself. I still smile to them and speak normal. But now I don't go back to the village... I am shy. I don't want to go back to my village. I want to wait for the future... Maybe in two years they have forgotten about it all, but I am afraid not."

Van de Put<sup>63[63]</sup> states that "correct behaviour was and still is very important in social life." He asserts that although there are many ideal forms for many aspects of life, moral role models have disappeared or have been replaced by images of power and wealth. The question is whether this could explain why, as is the general image presented by organisations working in the area of reintegration, the few victims of trafficking who manage to return with substantial amounts of funds are "befriended"<sup>64[64]</sup>, whereas the majority who do not are stigmatised, isolated and looked down upon in their village. Such images of village morality do not necessarily comply with the way villagers themselves view their moral standards. This research was not designed to go into detail about

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<sup>61[61]</sup> Ledgerwood, *Analysis of the Situation of Women in Cambodia* (1992).

<sup>62[62]</sup> Literally broken, in this context meaning deflowered.

<sup>63[63]</sup> Van de Put (1997), p.9.

<sup>64[64]</sup> CWDA (1998), p.12.

concepts of village life and morality, but it might be useful to take a closer look at what the concept of village actually means within the Cambodian context.

Stressing the social and economic importance of the nuclear family, several scholars view the *phum*, as village is commonly translated, as merely an administrative concept. However, as Collins<sup>65[65]</sup> points out, the *phum* is also the tamed, cleared, cultivated area, or the place where human culture and social life can be found. In the *phum* life is arranged and ordered according to certain hierarchical patterns.<sup>66[66]</sup> This is to contrast with *prei*, the wilderness around the village, the undomesticated zone, where nothing is arranged and where the unpredictable and dangerous spiritual powers can cause danger. Therefore, to leave the spatial boundaries of the village is to leave the ordered and relatively safe environment of the village and to put oneself at risk of all kinds of dangerous influences.

Of course, recent history has caused major changes in village life and structure. Van de Put<sup>67[67]</sup> distinguishes three types of *phum* in present-day Cambodia. First there are the *phum* that managed to stay together over time. The second type is the mixed *phum*, where the old core or of the *phum* have mixed with "new" people as a result of the different times of resettlements and the return of refugees of the border camps. The third type of *phum* is the new *phum*, created for the scattered landless people in the eighties or for the returnees from the border camps. The kind of *phum* also influences social relations within the *phum*, although all three kinds have been exposed to increasing differences between rich and poor and an increasing influence from outside.

Moreover, temporary or long-term migration to urban areas or Thailand is becoming a reality for many villages throughout the country. Although it is mostly men who leave the village in search for work, also women accompany them, follow recruiters or find their own way to urban centers where jobs are expected to be found. However, especially when a young woman leaves alone, without the protection of a relative, suspicion about the nature of her work is easily raised. A woman who is leaving the spatial boundary of the village is vulnerable to dangerous influences that are associated with leaving the social order of the *phum* and as she is supposed to be protected from such influences, her behaviour will be morally doubtful.<sup>68[68]</sup> A *meephum* in Battambang commented:

"There are not so many girls who leave the village to find work. If they go, they go with their parents or other relatives. Girls from the countryside are afraid to go alone. They are afraid they will be sold. If they go by themselves, for example for one day to Battambang to sell vegetables, it is considered to be normal... There are two or three girls in this village who left for a long time. Countryside people don't dare to say about this, but market people say they went to work as prostitutes."

Norms for proper behaviour might be more influential within the first kind of village described above, than within the third kind of village, where many people do not even

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<sup>65[65]</sup> Collins (1997).

<sup>66[66]</sup> Chandler, 'Songs at the Edge of the Forest: Perceptions of Order in Three Cambodian Texts' (1996).

<sup>67[67]</sup> Van de Put (1997), p.7.

<sup>68[68]</sup> See also Trankell, 'Morality and Commercial Spirits: Gender and Sex in Tai Culture' (1998).

know each other's background. On the other hand, compassion for victims of trafficking might be stronger in a village where people have known each other's families for generations. Gossiping will, however, take place in all villages, although villagers, as in the quote above, are reluctant to judge without evidence. They are usually quick to say that they do not want to create difficulties and will often be cautious not to offend someone in the face out of fear of being insulted or accused of meddling in other people's business.<sup>69[69]</sup> What villagers really are expressing in their way of thinking and talking is their uncertainty of what has happened with the returned victim of trafficking outside the village boundary. This uncertainty creates fears of the reintegrated person bringing the "bad" influences of the city into the village and setting a bad example for the younger people in the village, or transmitting diseases. Such fears led, according to a woman in Kampong Cham, to a situation in which her daughter was initially not admitted to school as a girl who has been trafficked would supposedly make the whole school bad.

## **2. Stigmatisation**

Stigmatisation does not necessarily have to play a role in the reintegration process of victims of trafficking. Those who were trafficked for begging or industrial or construction purposes face less stigmatisation than women and girls who were trafficked as commercial sex workers. But also among victims of trafficking from the latter category are major differences in how badly or strongly the stigmatisation influences their life. Stigmatisation, we found, especially plays a role for victims of trafficking who return and display behaviour which is obviously deviant from the norms of the social environment to which they return. This can be a consequence of the trafficking experience, but also of the character of the victim - who was always criticised for deviant behaviour - or of the position of the family within the village. Deviant behaviour of victims of trafficking who return to their village ranges from the use of make-up and "modern" clothing to they way they walk and interact with other people. Some are found to be inappropriately good humoured, while others are observed to be too quiet and isolated. Girls and women who return will especially be criticised for too intimate and frequent interaction with men, for such behaviour could also attract the attention of married men and could therefore create family problems in the village. In such cases, the women or girl is expected to change her behaviour and become "like normal people." The role of the mother is important in such cases, as "if the mother will educate her to be good, she will be good." In a village outside Phnom Penh, villagers were discussing the difference between two girls that were trafficked in their village:

"The nature of the mothers are different. The one mother only thinks about money, so that caused her daughter to become spoiled. If the mother is very strict, the daughter doesn't dare to do such thing... The other mother protects her daughter and therefore she has corrected herself. She has corrected herself more than the other girl."

Some villagers might feel it their task to advise the girl or woman, so that she will "abandon her bad habits" even when it takes a long time. Also a *sroch tik* ceremony is commonly believed to contribute to such change. However, efforts to help a woman or girl change her behaviour are not always successful. A *meephum* in Kampong Cham

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<sup>69[69]</sup> See also Ebihara (1968).

related the story of a girl from his village who had been trafficked into commercial sex work:

"I pity her, because it was not her idea. They tricked her. She told me that they said she could earn 30,000 riel per month cleaning a house, but they sold her. She was a brothel girl. I only knew this after she became conscious. When she came back she was very sick, she almost died. We told her to stop doing such work and to make efforts to work in the village. We advised her not to go back, because in that place there is AIDS. We blamed her for bringing this disease to the village, but she said they tricked her to do this work. The villagers don't hate her. When they meet her, they talk to her as before. She told her friends not to do like her. I don't know what to do to help... I advised her, she had this disease, but now she left again."

Villagers expressed less of an urge to help cause a change in behaviour in women and girls who have always been considered to be different from others. In such cases, deviant behaviour is thought to be caused by her own social or mental disabilities, for example because she is intellectually or psychologically weak - *min krup dop* - or when she is part of a family with a bad reputation within the village. Villagers in Svay Rieng commented on the deviant behaviour of a young woman living in their village who had been reintegrated by an organisation:

"She does not seem like normal people, as Khmer say *min krup tik* [not enough water]. Already before she got married, she liked to go out for pleasure. They whispered that she likes the drug to increase her passion. She has a husband, they organised a wedding, but later we don't know why, she left her husband. She went to Kampong Som where she worked in a brothel... The villagers know she has a mental problem. We don't allow our children to visit her, because she left her husband and her mother. She broke the tradition. We are afraid that our children will follow her."

In another village in Svay Rieng a schoolteacher commented on a girl who was trafficked into commercial sex work and was reintegrated with help from an organisation:

"She was never shy when there were strange persons. She liked to relate with boys... She doesn't like one man, she likes many men... I see that everyone in the family has the same attitude. All the children know about sex since they are very young. It is inheritance. When the mother has a certain attitude, her children will have the same attitude... I tried to educate her. One day, when she harvested rice I talked to her. She told me all about her story. But she cannot be educated. Her behaviour is like before. For example, during Khmer New Year she went with a man past my house until the river. She is not shy. That man walked with his arm around her shoulder. We could see them from our bed under the house, but she kept on walking like this... She is not afraid of people. One day she rode the motorbike with her adoptive father until [the next market place]. He is not like her own father, so maybe they slept along the road in the forest. People like us don't dare to go like that... It is her attitude. She doesn't correct her behaviour, so no one wants to contact her... The villagers have only little relationship with her family. This family is difficult to educate. If I say something, they will insult me. They are not happy with other people."

The girl herself had another explanation why the people in her village talked badly about her and her family, and not about the other family whose daughter was sold into commercial sex work:

"They always ask me if I want to go back to Tuol Kork. I reply "who doesn't want to go back to Tuol Kork. It is a paradise. It is very happy." Then they stop asking me, because I don't want to hear them. They also talk bad about the other girl [who was working as a prostitute], but not as bad as when they talk about me. That is because her relatives are high-ranking people. In addition, her family is very rich. They don't dare to say anything. But they are not afraid of me, because I am poor and my relatives are not of high rank.... But I am happy to live in this village, because it is my native land. Anyway, I must face this problem. I am not afraid. I still want to stay here. What I have done in the past is my responsibility. I should not be afraid of any people who say bad things about me."

The personality of this girl, although she was aware of the public opinion regarding her person and family, made her able to stand up to the villagers who were condemning her behaviour and past. She was aware that her low socio-economic position in the village was part of the stigmatising attitude of the villagers. In order to deal with that, she more or less played with their ignorance of places where she had been by idealising it as a paradise. Not everybody, however, will be able to react in this way to stigmatisation. When a young woman in Prey Veng was reintegrated in her village, she told her family and villagers that she had divorced her husband because he maltreated her. However, five days after her return an article in a popular magazine with her story, including that she had AIDS, appeared in the village. She recounted:

"Before the magazine appeared there was no problem, people treated me as before. But when they read the newspaper, they hated me. They talked about me, but they didn't dare to say it in front of my face... When they passed by on the bicycle, they were looking in my house. They didn't dare to come into my house, because they were afraid of transmission... Everywhere I went, I heard people talking about me... I cried when I heard about this information in the magazine. I thought "why am I different from other people?" I wanted to go back to Phnom Penh, to disappear..., to kill myself... After two or three months they stopped. Now I go to the market to sell firewood as before."

Time is indeed an important factor. Shortly after return a victim of trafficking will attract a lot of attention of the villagers, especially when an organisation is accompanying and providing assistance. In some cases the woman or child might tell family members, neighbours and friends about what has happened, in other cases the woman or child might not want to talk about it, which can for a while give rise to speculation. In most cases, however, the gossip and speculation will stop after a while. This is especially true when villagers have seen a "correction in behaviour" or when it concerns a married woman and who is assured some protection from the husband whom they do not want to "hurt in the heart" by talking about her.

Victims of trafficking who get to live in a new village environment, through marriage or through a new working place, usually try to keep their story secret in order to avoid possible stigmatisation that might make their life difficult. A young woman who started a hair-dressing shop in Phnom Penh said:



"In my village everybody is friendly with me. I think they don't know my story. I also don't want them to know. They asked me to visit their houses, but I never go. I told them I am busy, but I am also afraid that they will ask about my story."

Her sister, who rents a small house next to hers, noted:

"If they know we have been prostitutes, they don't want us to rent their house. They are afraid that we would infect their children with diseases. In this place, the people hate such girls. They don't want to sell their goods to such girls. They don't want them to sit in their house because they are afraid of transmission of diseases. They don't know about me. If they know, they will hate me."

Although not always successful, efforts to keep their story secret in their social environment might lead to a life-long psychological burden for victims of trafficking. They will have to live with a constant fear that discovery of their story might lead to stigmatising reactions from the social environment, which can be the family as well as the village or larger society.

As the social environment plays an important role for the reintegration of Khmer victims of trafficking in Cambodia, the same is true for Vietnamese victims of trafficking. Most of them will feel more at ease living in an area with other Vietnamese, because language and social relations are considered to be a problem. Therefore, a Vietnamese girl was supported by an organisation to follow sewing classes with a Vietnamese neighbour instead of in a shelter with predominantly Khmer girls. Another Vietnamese girl, for whose family an organisation provided in agreement with the mother a new house away from the brothel area Svay Pak where they used to live, explained why she wanted to return to Svay Pak:

"That house was big and nice, but it was far from the area where I used to live [in Svay Pak]. I thought it was very empty at the new place. Where I used to live it is lively and happy. Besides, the house was not near the market. It was far inside, at a Khmer village. There were no Vietnamese and I didn't want to stay in a Khmer village. I was afraid they would insult me or chase me away. I was afraid of their insults directed at the Vietnamese people."

## 10. Society Level

Cambodian society has often been described as "loosely structured" with a weak "village solidarity" or a "low level of social interaction", in which the household is the main social unit.<sup>70[70]</sup> This was, according to several scholars, true even before the uprooting of social organisation and village life in the mid-seventies under the Khmer Rouge regime and in the eighties under the Vietnamese-backed communist regime. Van de Put states, however, that:

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<sup>70[70]</sup> See Delvert (1961); Ebihara (1968); Ovesen et al. (1996); Van de Put (1997).

What may be called a low level of social interaction, or, less negative, a loosely structured society, may also be described as individual freedom from tight social rules and regulations. In social settings the roles people are expected to play, the rules they are expected to obey, are clear and strict. But one may choose to avoid these settings. Within the known framework of roles, people are at liberty to design their own social obligations.<sup>71[71]</sup>

What does this "individual freedom from tight social rules and regulations" actually mean for victims of trafficking? They were forced or deceived, but did not choose, to avoid the rules they were expected to obey, or, as a *meephum* formulated, to "break with tradition." Still, for individuals this means that, besides having to cope with traumatic experiences and with economic and health problems, their social environment will judge them for having left the "known framework of roles." Those who come back will have to adapt again to this framework. Those who cannot or do not want to adapt to this framework will try to find a new place where the framework of roles can be newly defined, or go back into their old job or situation.

Cambodian society has in the past few years experienced major changes through the political and economic opening up of the country after three decades of struggle and dictated ideology. Rising mobility, media and influx of "modern" products create new opportunities, expectations and goals for many Cambodians. Under influence of these developments migration is increasingly chosen to fulfil certain (economic) needs and desires. Upon return, these migrants, male and female, are ideally not only contributing in economic terms, but also in terms of opening up windows to the outside world. However, the return of children, women and men who have been victims of abusive recruitment and brokerage practices and abusive working conditions is often hampered by economic, social, psychological or health conditions. Their experiences might at best contribute to an increasing awareness among villagers that leaving the village for work will not necessarily resolve their problems regarding poverty, but to the contrary can lead to other kinds of social, health and economic problems. Many of the problems related to trafficking are thought to be caused by Cambodia's history of war and subsequent massive opening up of the country for all kinds of external influences.<sup>72[72]</sup> As a consequence community and family values are said to have deteriorated while striving for economic wealth has become ever more important. Therefore, as an NGO worker put it, the society itself is also to be blamed. Once individual victims of trafficking recognise this, their reintegration in society might be facilitated:

"If they don't consider themselves as being spoiled by these experiences and if they recognise that there are also others who had similar experiences, they could view their problems in another way. If they realise it is the problem of the society, they will be strong and can change."

Although there is no doubt that decades of warfare and the massive influx of foreign influences has had an impact on Cambodian society, the question remains how much of it

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<sup>71[71]</sup> Van de Put (1997), p.12.

<sup>72[72]</sup> See Caoutte (1998); Sin and Barr, *Illegal Labor Movements: The Case of Trafficking in Women for Sexual Exploitation* (1997); UNICEF, *The Trafficking and Prostitution of Children in Cambodia* (1995).

really has led to the problems discussed in this study. Cambodian society is changing and so are values and codes of behaviour. This is, however, not something unique to Cambodian society. These issues of modernisation and social change have been studied and analysed for decades in so-called developed and developing societies.

But while elderly people might complain about the loss of values, traditional mechanisms are still very much in use to cope with problems, including those affecting victims of trafficking. Buddhist concepts and practices, as well as traditional healing practices are commonly used to wash away past experiences in order for victims to be able to find or return to their place in society. Because of their focus on economic, health and social factors, organisations providing assistance to victims of trafficking often neglect the importance of such cultural and religious aspects of life. However, it is important to realise that Cambodian society is not just condemning victims of trafficking, but has its own basic institutions, which are recognised and found useful for, amongst others, dealing with the trafficking problem on individual, family and village levels. In the case of Thailand, Muecke<sup>73[73]</sup> goes even further and, focussing especially on prostitution, notes that basic cultural and religious institutions in society can actually be conserved thanks to the fact that so many girls engage in prostitution. She states that the economic rewards of contemporary prostitution in Thailand have enabled young women, through remittances home and merit-making activities, to fulfil traditional cultural functions of daughters, conserving the institutions of family and village-level Buddhism. Although most victims of trafficking surveyed in this study did not return with similar economic rewards, it would be interesting for future research to pay more attention to such relations between the phenomenon of trafficking and basic institutions of Cambodian society.

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<sup>73[73]</sup> Muecke, 'Mother Sold Food, Daughter Sells Her Body: The Cultural Continuity of Prostitution' (1992).

# CHAPTER FIVE

## CONCLUSION

Drag a boat without leaving a trace;  
catch a fish without muddying the waters.

*Khmer proverb*

This Khmer proverb points at the value of avoiding calling unwanted attention to or leaving minimal impact with anything you do.<sup>74[74]</sup> Such unwanted attention is not so easily avoided for victims of trafficking who have been reintegrated into their old or a new social environment. Their trafficking experiences have in many cases left traces and for some muddied the water. With regard to reintegration the question is then how the impact of such trafficking experiences can be minimised.

The economic stability and sustainability of a situation is a factor that is usually considered to be most influential within the reintegration process. A poor economic situation has often contributed to trafficking in the first place and reintegration becomes more difficult when these economic risk factors are still in place. On the other hand, reintegration might be facilitated in cases where victims of trafficking bring back considerable amounts of money to support the family. The traditional support mechanisms focussing on skills training and credit providing do, however, not necessarily help improve the economic situation of a victim of trafficking and her family. Marketability is an important problem as the skills victims of trafficking have acquired in shelters may be limited and provide meagre income. Besides, economic sustainability is also dependent on other non-economic factors.

A poor health situation as a result of trafficking can lead to more urgent financial needs, or even more tragic, leave traces of trafficking that are impossible to erase. In this respect especially problems related to HIV/AIDS have a strong impact on the individual victim of trafficking, but also on the family and social environment. Victims of trafficking who return with HIV/AIDS need special care and attention. Misunderstandings regarding the disease, as well as economic needs and desires to live a life like other people can have serious psychological and epidemiological consequences.

The social environment into which a victim of trafficking is reintegrated plays a major role in their economic, health, but also psychological situations. Reintegration is to a great extent dependent on the way family relations and as well as relations in the larger social environment are able to support and cope with victims of trafficking. This is again partly dependent on individual characteristics and behaviour of the victim of trafficking, for reintegration also often requires a certain re-adaptation on the side of the person who is reintegrated. Where issues of social acceptance and individual re-adaptation are not properly addressed, stigmatisation can become a dominant force of condemnation

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<sup>74[74]</sup> Fisher-Nguyen, 'Khmer Proverbs: Images and Rules' (1994)

affecting a victim of trafficking in such negative ways that some feel pushed back into their old situation.

These different issues regarding reintegration need to be approached from different perspectives, which although different may complement each other. When considered from the point of view of the individual, reintegration is influenced by their feelings of shame and low self-esteem, dissatisfaction with life and unfulfilled responsibilities regarding economic contributions for the family. From the point of view of the family, considerations regarding family relations, family honour, but also expectations regarding economic contributions on the part of children play an important role in the reintegration process. The point of view of the larger social environment is related to concerns regarding bad or modern influences, incorrect behaviour and contagion, which can lead to gossip and social stigmatisation with regard to victims of trafficking.

Another dominant perspective is that of the organisations that are working in the area of reintegration. As has been pointed out in this study, external support for reintegration might be helpful for relieving some of the economic, health or even social problems. However, not all factors influencing the reintegration of a victim of trafficking can be controlled through external support. Most importantly, victims of trafficking themselves need to be convinced of the need for and usefulness of such support and therefore need to be able to make a choice on their own behalf, something not all were able to do in the same way or degree before being trafficked. If such choice is not taken into serious consideration and support is simply given without being adapted to the individual circumstances, chances are high that they will return to their former situation. Reintegration of those without support will require more effort and consideration by the victims as well as their family environment and therefore could become more sustainable.

Within the whole process of reintegration the spiritual side is of importance but is usually underestimated. Religious beliefs and ceremonies affect the way victims of trafficking cope with their situation. The family and larger social environment also recognise the value of these beliefs and ceremonies for the reintegration process. Certain religious ceremonies help a victim of trafficking to deal with past experiences, as the bad deeds and karma of the past are symbolically washed away in order to make future prosperity and happiness possible for the individual as well as the family or partner. Then, the traces of the trafficking experiences might slowly disappear and the reintegrated person might, after time, be able to see through the water again.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Within this study attention has been paid to several factors influencing the reintegration processes of victims of trafficking. The following recommendations are designed to deal with these different factors in order to help improve and extend existing reintegration strategies.

- In order for strategies regarding economic stability of victims of trafficking and their family to become effective, individual capacities, personalities and aspirations as well as the marketability of certain skills or initiatives have to be taken into account. Therefore, existing strategies, such as skills training and credit provision should be adapted to the individual and market situation. Thought should be given to alternative kinds of income earning activities for former victims of trafficking.
- Through existing counselling efforts, victims of trafficking, especially commercial sex workers, need to be prepared for their expected re-adaptation to family, village or other life before reintegration. Counsellors should be aware of and pay attention to differences in personality between individual victims of trafficking as well as the kind and degree of choice they had before trafficking and upon return into the society and must have great sensitivity to Cambodian cultural beliefs and practices. In order to improve counselling and social work, long-term courses could be developed at the tertiary level after successful completion of which counsellors would be rewarded with a certificate or diploma.
- The problem of reintegration of victims of trafficking with HIV/AIDS needs special attention. In order to properly inform victims of trafficking, organisations should themselves become well informed about the phases and consequences of the disease. Organisations need to identify their responsibilities regarding the reintegration of victims of trafficking with HIV/AIDS. Also support mechanisms for the sheltering and counselling of victims with HIV/AIDS and their family could be improved. Thought should be given to the unsupported reintegration of migrant workers who could be sexual bridges between high- and low-risk groups and as such can become potential contributors to the spread of HIV/AIDS to the countryside.
- With regard to reintegration in the family, the existence of different kinds of family relations influence the reintegration process and therefore notice should be taken of the idioms used by victims of trafficking.
- Traditional and religious beliefs and practices can play an important role in reintegration processes for victims of trafficking. Traditional healers, religious teachers and monks could be included more directly in these processes. They form important sources of information on how to deal with certain problems, which can be of help for organisations working on the specific problems of victims of trafficking.

- A general raising of awareness regarding the problem of trafficking, as suggested our former surveys, could also include issues regarding reintegration of victims of trafficking in order to minimise stigmatisation and optimise reintegration efforts. Such awareness-raising could be specifically addressed to people like village and commune leaders, teachers and religious authorities.
- As the reintegration field is relatively new, it will need further development and exploration. Therefore, it might be helpful for the different organisations working in this area to exchange ideas and experiences within a workshop setting or other periodic informal gatherings. Through such gatherings existing networks would be strengthened and cooperation and sharing of information could be encouraged.

## GLOSSARY

<i>achaa</i>	religious teacher
<i>angka</i>	organisation
<i>baht</i>	Thai currency; at the time of the research 1 dollar equalled 38 baht
<i>boang-paoun bangkaet</i>	blood relatives
<i>creah cungrei</i>	to clean misfortune of bad luck
<i>et chai</i>	used glass and plastic
<i>euwpuk-medaay bangkaet</i>	biological parents
<i>kam</i>	karma
<i>kamphear</i>	Khmer religious concept related to karma; reciprocity of good or bad actions
<i>kettyooh</i>	honour
<i>kouc</i>	literally broken, also used in the sense of deflowered or spoiled
<i>krou</i>	traditional healer
<i>krou khmer</i>	traditional medicine man
<i>leuk riesei</i>	to return to prosperous times
<i>meebon</i>	brothel owner
<i>meekcol</i>	recruiter, leader
<i>meephum</i>	village chief
<i>mi som phoeng</i>	derogatory way to address a prostitute
<i>min krup dop / min krup tik</i>	intellectually or psychologically weak
<i>Pchum Ben</i>	Festival of the Dead
<i>phum</i>	village
<i>pibah</i>	difficult
<i>prahoc</i>	fermented fish paste
<i>prei</i>	wilderness, forest
<i>riel</i>	Cambodian currency; at the time of the research 1 dollar equalled 3,800 riel
<i>romdoh krueh</i>	to free or save from danger
<i>romoah</i>	itchy, to desire something (for example sex)
<i>saa rociat</i>	nature, essential character
<i>sean</i>	small ceremony in which food is offered to the spirits
<i>sroch tik</i>	religious ceremony in which special water is sprayed or thrown over a person
<i>sroleuw</i>	a kind of tree made out of hard dense wood
<i>svay krap</i>	syphilis
<i>thieng kdat</i>	stalk of a kind of edible plant
<i>tevada</i>	divinity
<i>thoa</i>	fictive kin relationship





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## **IOM**

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) was established on 5 December 1951 in Brussels to deal with the migration and resettlement of displaced person in Europe, and the orderly migration of nationals to overseas countries.

While the early activities of the Organization were limited to population movements from Europe to North America, Latin America and Oceania, international developments gradually led to an extension of the Organization's activities on a world-wide basis. Likewise, its global role and mandate were reinforced.

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. IOM acts with its partners in the international community to:

- assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration:
- advance understanding of migration issues:
- encourage social and economic development through migration: and
- work towards effective respect of the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

IOM is an intergovernmental organization based in Geneva. At present, it is composed of more than 110 Member and Observer States. Since its creation in 1951, IOM has assisted more than 10 million migrants worldwide.

## **11. CAS**

The Center for Advanced Study (CAS) was founded in March 1996 as an independent non-political Cambodian institution devoted to research, education, and public debate on issues affecting the development of Cambodian society. Using an integrative, problem-oriented approach, the CAS seeks to work with Cambodian and international scholars to conduct research programs which will help clarify and shape public policy, inform education and training activities, and lead to people-centred development projects. These activities will in turn provide a focus for Cambodian graduate students.

The CAS' current activities are divided into research programs, capacity building and training programs, and services and publication, in order to:

- Carry out research with an integrative, problem-oriented approach.
- Disseminate research reports with policy recommendations, periodicals and occasional papers to the general public.
- Conduct educational and training programs and seminars, and organize forums for Cambodian academics, policy makers, business leaders, and other interested parties.

- Conduct research programs in which Cambodian researchers work together with international scholars in order to develop their knowledge and skills.

Develop relations with other academic institutions both at home and abroad.

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