

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“Imagine yourself in the position of a victim of trafficking. You heard about an opportunity – a job that would pay more, a chance to go to another country, a start towards a better life. Perhaps someone you trusted – a family member, a neighbor, a friend of a friend – offered to help you get there... What would it be like to be physically, emotionally and sexually abused while being trapped in this situation? What would it be like to have no passport or other legal documents and no money, in a country where you don’t speak the language and know no one, and are too scared or don’t know where to look for help? What would it be like to be treated like a commodity, to be bought and sold?” (Brunson McKinley, Director General of the International Organization for Migration, speech, 25 September 2006)

Trafficking in human beings is a rapidly growing global crime that needs global attention. Brunson McKinley, Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM)<sup>1</sup>, stated that the most visible form of trafficking is sexual exploitation in women migrant workers (Speech, October 15, 2007). Although most of the trafficking routes go from the Global South to the Global North, it is the responsibility of both the North and the South to counter and eliminate this global crime at all levels of prevention and protection.

Thailand appears to be a trafficking hub in comparison to other countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS)<sup>2</sup>. The Thai government has recognized that the country is a source, transit and destination country for the trafficking of men, children and women from the GMS countries of Myanmar, Cambodia, the Lao

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<sup>1</sup> The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is a leading intergovernmental organization for migration working with allies to assist in meeting the growing operational challenges of migration, advance understanding of migration issues, encourage social and economic development through migration and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

<sup>2</sup> The Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) includes the Yunnan Province of People’s Republic of China, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, and the Kingdom of Thailand.

People's Democratic Republic, Viet Nam and the Yunnan Province of China. At the same time many Thai people migrate to find better economic opportunities overseas, but some of them end up in various forms of exploitation (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2007: 71). In Thailand, forms of human trafficking include sexual exploitation, begging, forced and exploited labor in factories, agriculture and fisheries, and abduction for illegal purposes, while many Thais trafficked who were rescued by the authorities overseas are sexually exploited. The Department of Consular Affairs<sup>3</sup> of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reports that in 2006, 375 Thai women were identified as official returnees<sup>4</sup> of sexual exploitation and were assisted with their return to Thailand, while from January to August 2007, there were 264 women who were officially identified and assisted (Department of Consular Affairs, 2006). Moreover, it is known that there are numbers of trafficking returnees who unofficially return to Thailand<sup>5</sup>.

The reintegration of Thai returnees<sup>6</sup> starts immediately upon their arrival. The difficulty that most returnees confront is the issue of stigmatization. Ndioro Ndiaye mentioned that "human trafficking inflicts on its victims devastating and often irreversible physical and mental health trauma" (Speech, March 5, 2007). According to Thai norms, people perceive sex work as a "sinful job" without considering whether those returnees were trafficked or not. This perception causes problems and stigma for returnees which could lead to difficulties with community and family acceptance and therefore "failed" reintegration in their communities.

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<sup>3</sup> The Department of Consular Affairs is a state agency that provides information and assistance for Thai nationals abroad. The Department also represents the Thai government in order to protect Thailand's national interest and formulates regulations and implements policies relating to the broad range of international relations and international law.

<sup>4</sup> An official returnee is defined as an individual who was officially identified by government authorities as a victim of trafficking.

<sup>5</sup> An unofficial returnee is defined as an individual who did not return to their country of origin through government channels and therefore is not identified by government authorities as a victim of trafficking.

<sup>6</sup> The term "returnee" will be used synonymously with "victim of sex trafficking" in this research. The researcher believes "returnee" is more respectful than the term "victim".

There is a lack of research on the reintegration situation of trafficked Thai women, particularly those who have been sexually trafficked. In this regard, this research aims to study and gain a better understanding of the reintegration situation of trafficked Thai women returning from abroad back into Thai society. This research investigates the reintegration process of Thai returnees. It also looks at the family relationship and the community relationship along with health (physical and mental), economic, and legal security of returnees. Interviewees were selected through the Social and Economic Empowerment and Peer Support Network for Thai Women Returning from Abroad coordinated by Foundation For Women (FFW)<sup>7</sup>. A better understanding of the reintegration consequences of Thai returnees will be useful for both government agencies and non-governmental organizations working on reintegration in order to create and provide more effective reintegration assistance and services.

### **1.1 Statement of the Research Problem**

The Thai government states that 1,025 returnees were officially assisted and sent back to Thailand between the years 2003 and 2006 (Department of Consular Affairs, 2006). According to Chutida Pliansri from the Protection of Thai Nationals Abroad Division of the Department of Consular Affairs<sup>8</sup>, in 2006, most Thai women were trafficked to Bahrain and European countries for sexual exploitation and most of those women were from many provinces in Northeast Thailand (Phone interview, July 19, 2007). Moreover, it was mentioned by a returnee in a FFW retreat with returnees entitled “Meet and Share with Women Friends Coping with Life” (“Pob-ba Puen Puen

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<sup>7</sup> The Foundation For Women (FFW) is one of the leading Thai non-governmental organizations working and assisting Thai trafficked returnees. FFW works on awareness-raising regarding migration, trafficking and violence; coordinates with allies to improve policies and rights of trafficked returnees; and provides services and information to women planning to go abroad by advising them about their rights and safe migration strategies.

<sup>8</sup> The Protection of Thai Nationals Abroad Division is a governmental organization working under the Department of Consular Affairs. It provides direct assistance and services to Thai nationals abroad, including Thai women who were lured into sexual or other forms of trafficking, to ensure their quick return to Thailand.

Ying Soo Cheewit”)<sup>9</sup> that around 171 Thai women were assisted from sexual exploitation in Italy and sent back to Thailand in 2006 (Field notes, July 28, 2007).

The reintegration of Thai returnees has not been dealt with adequately. Returnees often find themselves on their own when they return to Thailand. It may seem like returnees can “re-integrate” back to their place of origin and move on by themselves. But in reality, the situation is quite different. When they return, some trafficked returnees can deal with their difficulties by themselves, but many more returnees can not cope with their mental and physical problems and other reintegration obstacles, so they may find themselves falling back into the trafficking cycle again. This research aims to broaden the understanding of the reintegration process of sexually trafficked Thai returnees.

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

1. To describe the reintegration process of Thai returnees.
2. To determine the factors that increase the likelihood of the reintegration of Thai returnees.
3. To analyze how these factors increase the likelihood of the reintegration of Thai returnees.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

What factors increase the likelihood of the reintegration of Thai returnees, and how?

## **1.4 Hypothesis**

The family relationship and the community relationship, along with health (physical and mental), economic, and legal security, increase the likelihood of

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<sup>9</sup> พบปะเพื่อนผู้หญิงผู้ชีวิต

reintegration of Thai returnees. Mental health is a significant factor because the ability to overcome stigmatization enables returnees to regain their ability to make judgments, feel more confident, and understand what they have been through.

### 1.5 Methodology

The research relies on a combination of documentary research and field research by using the case study method. For documentary research, books, research reports, articles, internet sites, and other relevant documents are reviewed and analyzed in order to understand the situation of reintegration. Data and reports from organizations such as the IOM and government agencies, i.e., the Bureau of Anti-Trafficking in Women and Children (BATWC)<sup>10</sup> are also used.

Nine returnees were selected as case studies. They were selected from a database of the Foundation For Women, an organization that has built a network of Thai returnees from abroad. As returnees normally do not admit that they have been trafficked, especially in the case of sexual exploitation, using FFW's already existing network of returnees significantly facilitated the selection of interviewees. Nine interviewees were selected from almost forty members of the FFW's program of Social and Economic Empowerment and Peer Support Network for Thai Women Returning from Abroad. Because most returnees in the Network originate from Northeastern Thailand, and most were trafficked to and returned from European countries, the researcher decided to use these two trends as criteria for selection of interviewees. Selection also depended upon the availability and voluntary consent of those returnees. Lastly, the researcher's time was also limited, so in the end, nine returnees were selected.

Data collection techniques include semi-structured in-depth interview, unstructured interview, group discussion, and non-participant observation. Eight

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<sup>10</sup> The Bureau of Anti-Trafficking in Women and Children (BATWC) of the Ministry of Social Development is a state agency that responsible for p)rovision of assistance to trafficked returnees, protection and coordination with anti-trafficking networks.



semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with returnees under the aliases of Salee, Somjai, Fah, Suai, Yen, Meena, Duang, and Koy, and one unstructured interview was conducted with a returnee under the alias of Lumyai. One group discussion was also carried out with Somjai, Fah, Suai, Yen. Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected key informants, including the husband of Somjai, the sister of Suai, one Foundation For Women officer, and one International Labor Organization (ILO)<sup>11</sup> officer.

The in-depth semi-structured interviews with returnees included the following elements (See Appendix A):

1. Background information
2. Pre-reintegration period
3. Reintegration concept including the definition, factors that increased the likelihood of reintegration, and indicators of successful reintegration
4. Reintegration process of each returnee, including the return process, services accessed upon return, and each returnee's needs and concerns at different periods of time
5. Factors involved in the reintegration process, including health (physical and mental), economic, legal situation, family relationship and community relationship

The interviews with returnees' family members focused on returnees' physical and mental health, family and community relationships towards returnees, and other related information. Interviews with FFW and ILO officers concentrated on the reintegration concept, reintegration policy, and gaps in reintegration policy and assistance in Thailand. Non-participant observation took place at a United Nations

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<sup>11</sup> The International Labor Organization (ILO) is a United Nations agency that aims to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue in handling work-related issues. The ILO created the ILO-HSF Project in order to assist trafficked returnees with their reintegration process.

Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking in the Mekong Sub-region (UNIAP)<sup>12</sup> Thailand Inter-Agency Working Group Meeting held on 4 April 2007, a FFW retreat entitled “Meet and Share with Women Friends Coping with Life” (“Pob-Pa Puen Puen Ying Soo Cheewit”) in Chiang Mai during 27-29 July 2007, and at the place of resettlement during interviews with Somjai, Suai, Meena, Duang, and Koy.

Due to the sensitivity of sex trafficking, the researcher had to develop a relationship with returnees before gaining their trust to conduct interviews. Relationships with returnees were formed during the researcher’s two-month internship in July and August 2007 with the Foundation For Women’s Social and Economic Empowerment and Peer Support Network for Thai Women Returning from Abroad Program. After the internship, the researcher continued to strengthen these relationships.

Field data was collected in July 2007 and from December 2007 to January 2008. Interviews were conducted in Thai and later translated to English. A tape recorder was used in some of the interviews with the prior consent of the interviewees.

The field research provides a deeper understanding of how returnees cope with their situation and reveals factors influencing their reintegration. The returnees had the opportunity to express their opinions about their experiences beginning with their arrival at the airport in Thailand.

## **1.6 Research Scope**

The research concentrates on how the reintegration of returnees in the family relationship and the community relationship as well as health (physical and mental), economic, and legal factors influence the reintegration of returnees. The findings of

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<sup>12</sup> The United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking in the Mekong Sub-region (UNIAP) helps to facilitate a stronger and more coordinated response to human trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

the research only represent the particular experiences and situations of returnees with whom interviews were conducted.

### **1.7 Ethical Issues**

The objectives of the research were explained to all interviewees. Due to the sensitivity of the issue of trafficking and security reasons, some returnees did not want to share information. The privacy of trafficked returnees, as well as their right to self-identify, was always respected. Therefore, consent was obtained from interviewees. Their names are kept confidential and their identities remain anonymous.

### **1.8 Significance of the Research**

The research findings will contribute to a better understanding of the reintegration situation of sexually trafficked Thai returnees, including factors influencing the reintegration process, their needs for support, and means of empowerment. The findings will be useful to all stakeholders involved with the reintegration of returnees.

### **1.9 Research Limitations**

Because of the sensitive matter of trafficking, the researcher spent some time getting to know returnees in order to build up trust and confidentiality. However, some returnees did not feel comfortable sharing their experiences even though the researcher had established a relationship with the returnees. Furthermore it was difficult to identify and gain access to returnees outside the network of FFW. Therefore the diversity of returnees is limited. The interviews did not include government officials' perspectives due to their busy schedule. Lastly, interviews conducted in the villages were sometimes interrupted due to the presence of other community members.