

RESEARCH BRIEFS

Vulnerable Runaway Children to Trafficking in Makassar, Indonesia

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Children are the most vulnerable age group to be the victim of human trafficking (Asis, 2008; Meadows, 2010; Reid & Jones, 2011). The World Human Rights Organization and UNICEF estimated that there were about 50,000 girls being trafficked for prostitution to Cambodia in 2003 (Shelley, 2010). About 40,000 to 70,000 Indonesian children are also the victims of sexual exploitation and at least 100,000 women and children were trafficked annually from, through, and to the territory of Indonesia itself (<http://www.humantrafficking.org/countries/indonesia>, 2012).

The United States Department of State (2011) clearly distinguished three forms of child trafficking, namely child labor, child soldiers, and child prostitution. Trade of sex or child prostitution has destroyed the lives of many children, leaving the children to experience long term physical and psychological trauma, contracting sexually transmitted disease, including HIV/AIDS, involved in drug addiction, exposed to unwanted pregnancy, malnutrition, social isolation, and death.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking as defined by the United Nations General Assembly (2000), which was

based from the “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children in 2000” has emphasized that:

Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (Article 3: Point a)

Point (c) further confirms that all forms of children exploitation can be categorized as human trafficking although it may not involve violence, fraud, and deceit. This is clearly stated in the following excerpt that “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this

This paper was delivered at the International Young Scholars Conference held on 17-19 May 2013, Boracay Eco Village, Aklan, Philippines.

does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article” (Article 3 Point c).

Miko and Park (2002) have highlighted several factors that can lead to human trafficking. The factors include subordination of women, lack of employment opportunities, demanding for sex workers, ineffective law enforcement, and criminalization of victims.

Subordination of women exists in economic, education, and employment opportunities. Society still sees girls as an economic burden or commodity. In some countries, very poor families used to sell their daughters to the brothel. Lack of employment opportunities and the urge to improve the socioeconomic status makes girls more vulnerable to entrapment by the traffickers. There is a high demand around the world for commercial sex workers, cheap labor, and domestic servants. The irresponsible perpetrators have always been motivated by the desire to gain high profits and free tax. In addition, inadequate law enforcement is one of the primary barriers to combat human trafficking. Many victims of trafficking were seen as criminals rather than as victims, because many countries only focus on immigration procedures.

This study aims to answer the following research questions: 1) what are the factors that make children vulnerable to trafficking? and 2) How do these children come into contact with the traffickers? This qualitative study attempts to describe and analyze the issues of child trafficking through in-depth interviews and observation. The study was conducted at a Healing and Protection House of child trafficking victims in Makassar, Indonesia. Five Informants involving in this study were girls who are under 18 years old and has been identified as victims of child trafficking.

RESULTS

Factors that Contribute to Children Being Vulnerable to be Trafficked

1. The value of “serving” (*Berbakti*) the family.

The value “serve” the family make children

vulnerable to be a victim of human trafficking. Holding the value of “devotion” to the parents has been internalized and socialized through various media in the children’s growing up process. This cause the child to establish the feeling to be responsible in helping to contribute to the family income. As experienced by DN:

My mother was sick and needed money IDR 200,000. I want to serve him and did not want to let him suffer, then I try earn money by selling myself. I finally get the money from prostitution.”

This experience reflects some correlation with the cultural context. As emphasized by Bales (2005), the vulnerability of a victim of human trafficking is not only caused by poverty. Instead, vulnerability is also connected to the local culture, including the cultural roles in allowing trafficking to take place indirectly. Women and girls are seen as a commodity that may be used to help increase or contribute to family income. They are expected to do household chores, or work elsewhere to earn money (Inter-Parliamentary Union & UNICEF, 2005; Lie & Lund, 2008).

2. **Runaway from home.** The results of this study showed that four out of five informants were trapped in prostitution activity due to running away from home. When children have more opportunity to be in and out of the home without proper control and protection from the families, this leaves them highly vulnerable to be trapped or trafficked. This finding is consistent with other research findings that children who run away from home are particularly vulnerable to entrapment tactics used by sexual traffickers. Many of the runaway cases were due to expectation of searching for a better life (Estes & Weiner, 2001).

Based on this study, it can be concluded that among the primary causes of the children running away from home are the negative home atmosphere as well as experiencing

insufficient attention and treatment from family, experiencing violence, sexually abused, feeling loneliness, negative influence from peer group and have more contacts with entertainment including visiting the clubs during night time.

- a. **Violence by parents.** IW always experience violence from her parents. She was physically beaten and scolded, insulted, and the parents even denies her status as a child. She was also not permitted to socialize, and have no opportunity to get proper education. IW also had to work for more than nine hours each day, including working in rice fields, doing cooking, washing and cleaning the house, and caring for her younger sisters.
- b. **Sexual abuse by family member.** The victim felt uncomfortable staying in her home due to being sexually abused by her brother-in-law. When this event occurs, the victim's parents did not provide a defense and protection for her, as well as other family members, instead blamed her for what had happened.

Sexual harassment had made RT become frightened and traumatized. She feared of being raped. Ultimately, she decided to run away from home, along with her friend, she then went to Makassar by bus.

As stated by RT,

"I ran away from home because I was afraid to stay at home longer, fearing that my brother-in-law would rape me when I sleep. My parents did not care of my complaint."

After two months living in Makassar, RT ran out of money. She tried to find a job to survive. Eventually she met a woman who offered her a job. Not knowing the background of the woman, she was then

sold to a brothel with the price of three million rupiahs.

Some researchers found that most of the children who had previously been trapped into prostitution are among those who have some form of experience being sexually harassed, and some have been neglected by their families (Farley, Lynne, & Cotton, 2005; Federal Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice, 2007; Hanna, 2002). This is evident from a study that reported that almost 82% of the prostitutes have some experience of being sexually abused during childhood, with an average of four perpetrators (Farley et al., 2005).

- c. **Feeling of loneliness.** Loneliness is one of the conditions that caused children to run away from home. This is what has been experienced by GMK: *"I go out because I felt lonely living at home. My mother and my father go to work every day. My sister goes to school. I lived alone in my house."* GMK quit school at the fifth grade as she lost interest in her study. Since then she did not have any activity to do in her spare time.

Families who do not care enough for the children, particularly those families characterized by violence and sexual abuse are one of the factors that encourage children to leave home. A survey on a total of 775 runaway teenagers showed that 70% of women and 24% of men reported of being sexually abused, while 35% of both sexes reported to be experiencing some form of physical abuse (Molnar, Shade, Kral, Booth, & Watters, 1998).

- 3. **Negative peer influence and contact with nightclub.** Getting acquainted to irresponsible peer group is another factor that enables a child to be vulnerable and further trapped into becoming a victim of child trafficking. As stated by informant, GMK,

“I have a friend who always asked me to go to a nightclub. Sometimes I went out until 12 PM. I went out through the window. At a nightclub, I know about the Somad (a type of stimulant drugs). If I don’t consume it, I am not happy or enjoy. I feel ashamed. If I use it, I don’t feel ashamed. Instead I only feel happy and fun”.

This finding is in line with what has been highlighted by Wismayanti (2009) who found that a wrong choice of friendship can caused lead to a dating stage and further engage in intimate relationship.

Where and How Victims Built Contact with Traffickers

This study has identified several places where victim and trafficker or mediator built their first contact. These include meeting at boarding house (*kos-kosan*), streets, night club, liquor café, and by mobile phone.

Kos-kosan is another place where perpetrator contacts with the victim and set a trap. As experienced by IW: *“I was introduced to a man by my friend when I stayed in kos-kosan. That man escorted me to Pare-pare using a motorbike”.*

Under a weak condition, being far away from her parents or family, and not having much money to meet daily needs, RT (a victim) was forced to go out from her *kos-kosan* and live in the street. On the street she met the actors (stranger) who sold her to a pimp.

A night club is another avenue for children to fall into vulnerable situation and further provide the opportunity for children to be entangled in child trafficking. As stated by GMK (a victim), at first, she often feels lonely since her parents often left her alone. She then often went out at night and visited night clubs with her friends. At the night club she began to know and consume “Somad” (a type of drug). Finally, she became addicted. If she does not have enough money, she will sell her personal belongings, such as mobile phone, shoes, clothes, and other things. One day,

her friend asked her to leave home and took her to a brothel to get money to meet her needs.

Substance abuse can also lead to children being vulnerable and be entangled into prostitution activity. As experienced by END (a victim), initially she worked as a waitress at a cafe that provides various types of alcohol. At her workplace she began to get acquainted with a woman who offered her to work as a shop keeper with a more salary in Maumere, East Nusa Tenggara Province. She was rescued by one of her consumer by paying her debt amount IDR 3.000.000. Then, she backed to Makassar. She trapped again in prostitution because she need some money of her mother medicine.

The contact between the perpetrators through the mobile phone is the most unique case in this study. DW admitted that the first time she gets to know and contact a trafficker is by mobile-phone. She got a call from a woman via prank call. DW admitted that she is interested with the same sex. Although they had never met before, DW decided to leave home and met her lady lover in Pare-Pare. Unfortunately, the woman then sold DW to be a prostitute.

The advancement of information and communication technologies can be one of the causes that lead to trafficking. This factor is also recognized by Newman and Cameron (2008) that the development of information technology makes it easy for criminal groups to foster communication with her networks set elsewhere, including trapping victims.

CONCLUSIONS

Findings of this study reported that children who runaway are really vulnerable to get trapped in child trafficking. Other important factors are peer influence and adherence to social value, which is seen as service (*bakti*) to the family. The causes of runaways from homes can be attributed to violence, sexual abuse, and feelings of loneliness. *Kos-kosan*, streets, nightclubs, liquor café, and by mobile-phone were places or ways by which the victim usually established contact

with the perpetrators. In fact, acquaintances, friends, couples, and strangers are the usual main perpetrators. Generally, the perpetrators trapped the victims by promising them jobs with greater salary then sold them as prostitutes thereafter.

Based on this research, parents are expected to be able to create a warm and comfortable family atmosphere, where there is an abundance of love. Families need to hear any complaints and to respond to all the dangers that threaten the safety of children. The issue of child trafficking requires attention from all parties, as this phenomenon occurs every day globally. Vulnerable places like *kos-kosan*, streets, workplaces, and nightclubs need to be controlled by the relevant authorities in order to ensure and minimize the chance of children being victimized.

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