

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

In recent years the issue of human trafficking has received more attention because it has increased phenomenally across the globe. Trafficking is a serious and dangerous crime to all humans. It is still growing in magnitude and is manifested in various forms. In each year, there are numbers of trafficked returnees who have been assisted by government authorities and non-governmental organizations. It may seem like trafficked returnees who were rescued from trafficking are lucky and that should be the end of their stories. Unfortunately, returning home is actually a starting point for another trauma. Some trafficked returnees can cope with their reintegration difficulties while many returnees can not.

5.2 “Victims first” approach

Reintegration is a complex issue that needs to be tackled from many different angles, both individually and socially. The Thai government and NGOs are moving toward but not yet meeting the goal of successful reintegration. Organizations may have to consider factors that would make the reintegration process of trafficked returnees more effective, in particular reintegration assistance and services.

In order to provide reintegration assistance and services to trafficked returnees, it is important to look at returnees’ needs and concerns instead of providers’ thoughts and concerns. Trafficked returnees’ voices need to be especially heard, as their needs and concerns are different based on their individual circumstances. Using the “victims first” approach is a way to make reintegration assistance and programs most effective. In policymaking, including a wide range of stakeholders could assist in switching from a vertical to horizontal approach in order to make the process more inclusive. In line with the “victims first” approach, this research emphasized the

perspective of trafficked returnees by giving them the opportunity to express their needs and concerns through interviews.

5.3 Definition and indicators of reintegration as defined by returnees

Interestingly, the term “reintegration” or “*karn klub keun su sungkhom*”¹ in Thai needs to be revised. A few reintegration terms were proposed by returnees, as follows: *karn tam jai hai khem-kaeng*² (“make yourself emotionally strong) or *wan nee dee gwa mua wan duai palung jai*³ (“today can be better than yesterday due to self-determination”).

Based on the perspective of returnees, reintegration is seen as a process of increasing emotional strength in order to recover from their trafficking experiences. The importance of emotional strength is mentioned and highlighted by all returnees as a key indicator of reintegration. Although some returnees emphasized the importance of the social level of reintegration, such as a strong family relationship, others emphasized the importance of individual factors of reintegration such as mental health and economic situation. Therefore, both social and individual factors of reintegration can increase trafficked returnees’ emotional strength, eventually leading to their ability to overcome stigmatization. The ability to overcome stigmatization then can lead to the ability to make better judgments, feel more confident and have high self-esteem. For example, Meena, a returnee who has a high level of reintegration defined “reintegration” as:

“Reintegration is a process of adaptation and rebuilding self-esteem including forgetting the past, starting the new and think positively based on individual level” (Meena, personal interview, January 13, 2008).

¹ การกลับคืนสู่สังคม

² การทำใจให้เข้มแข็ง

³ วันนี้ดีกว่าเมื่อวานด้วยพลังใจ

However, some returnees mentioned that emotional strength can not stand alone in reintegration process but other factors must be involved as well.

5.4 Factors in the reintegration process

In order to gain a better understanding of the reintegration of trafficked Thai returnees and to better understand the factors that increase the likelihood of the reintegration of returnees, this study described and analyzed the reintegration process of nine returnees, looking at how they perceive their own reintegration processes. According to the conceptual framework, factors involved in returnees' reintegration process can be divided into the individual level, including health (physical and mental), economic and legal situation, and the social level, which includes family relationship and community relationship. Among these factors, the study found that mental health, particularly the ability to overcome both individual and social stigmatization, is the most significant factor that increases the likelihood of reintegration.

5.5 Stigmatization

According to Thai norms, doing sex work or being forced to do sex work is not socially accepted regardless of whether it is voluntary or involuntary. Social discrimination pushes trafficked returnees to the stage of being "re-victimized" or "re-trafficked" by society. Based on the reintegration indicators and needs and concerns expressed by trafficked returnees, stigmatization has a significantly negative impact on the reintegration of returnees. Stigmatization is also the most common and consistent concern of returnees through out the first year after they return. Some returnees might be able to overcome their stigmatization individually and/or with social support after some time has passed, while others are unable to do so. For example, in the case of Lumyai, after four years after returning, she still can not cope with both individual and social stigmatization. Most returnees mentioned that

emotional strength helps them get through other difficulties in the reintegration process. Therefore, stigmatization needs to be addressed first.

5.6 Levels of reintegration of returnees

In this research, the level of reintegration of returnees can be categorized as high, intermediate, and low based on prioritizing returnees' ability to overcome stigmatization before giving importance to other factors. High level of reintegration refers to trafficked returnees who can cope with their individual and social stigmatization and have no reintegration difficulties. Intermediate level of reintegration, refers to trafficked returnees who can cope with their individual and social stigmatization and have some reintegration difficulties. Low level of reintegration refers to trafficked returnees who can not cope with their individual and social stigmatization and have many reintegration difficulties. There are two returnees (Meena and Salee) who have a high level of reintegration, two returnees (Somjai and Yen) who are at the intermediate level and five returnees (Lumyai, Suai, Fah, Duang, Koy) at the low level.

5.7 Reintegration assistance and services

Reintegration assistance is seen by organizations as a tool to facilitate the reintegration process of trafficked returnees. In this research, most trafficked returnees who returned after the announcement of the National Agenda received financial assistance from the Bureau of Anti-trafficking in Women and Children. Other than picking up returnees at the airport and providing financial assistance, no other reintegration assistance such as reintegration information, physical check-ups, counseling, psycho-social care and legal assistance is provided by state agencies.

Financial assistance is in the form of a grant for career establishment based on each returnee's circumstances. However, providing financial assistance without any skill training programs might not be the most appropriate way to assist trafficked

returnees. For example, one trafficked returnee spent her financial assistance on setting up a noodle shop in her village but due to her lack of business skill, her business was not successful and she had to close her noodle shop after a short period of time.

Furthermore, financial assistance alone will not lead to a higher level of reintegration if a returnee faces other problems, especially stigmatization. This point brings up the question of whether it is right or wrong to provide financial assistance for trafficked returnees without looking at reintegration assistance in other areas at the same time. This research shows that money is not always the answer for successful reintegration, but other reintegration assistance needs to be considered as well.

5.8 Recommendations

The above findings reveal the perspective of trafficked Thai returnees towards their reintegration process and the factors that increase the likelihood of their reintegration. As returnees have proposed their concerns regarding the definition of reintegration and the significant factors that should be addressed, it is important for state agencies and non-governmental organizations working on the reintegration of returnees to seriously address these concerns. In order to improve the process of reintegration, recommendations are as follows.

Thai state agencies should:

- Use the multidisciplinary approach to develop effective reintegration assistance and programs for trafficked returnees.
- Create centers all over the country to provide a space where trafficked returnees can access psycho-counseling, skills training programs, and meet and share their experiences with other trafficked returnees.
- As suggested by returnees, create a health fund to cover physical and especially mental health problems for those who are not currently covered by the universal healthcare scheme.

Thai state agencies and NGOs should:

- Take into account returnees' definition of reintegration, indicators of reintegration, and needs and concerns.
- Provide reintegration information, including about reintegration assistance and services (especially psychological counseling) and other related information to returnees.
- Develop and provide effective counseling and psycho-social programs for trafficked returnees, especially upon their return.
- Create a peer support network or provide a space where returnees can get together to share their experiences. This is a way to address mental health problems such as isolation.
- Visit returnees' place of reintegration only with their permission and without displaying organizational logos or wearing organizational uniforms.