

# TRAFFICKING AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Women, children and men can all become victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.<sup>1</sup>

Women and girls are more commonly trafficked into the sex industry, however the trafficking of boys or men for sexual exploitation is largely under-reported. This is due to a combination of reasons including the more hidden nature of male prostitution; cultural and gendered stereotypes that do not consider it possible for men to be sexually exploited and inadequate legal systems and reporting frameworks that may not identify victims correctly.

In many cases, girls and women who think they are going to work as domestic help or in restaurants,

bars and karaoke venues, are tricked or forced into sex work. People may also choose to work in the sex industry but end up in an exploitative situation that they did not agree to.

Many people who travel to find work or to study are tricked into the industry. This is often because they are culturally isolated and are not fully aware of their rights, so they become more vulnerable to exploitation.

T\* was sexually exploited.

Photo: Jon Warren/World Vision

\*Name has been changed



DON'T TRADE LIVES FACTSHEET





A World Vision staff member checks in with a victim of sexual exploitation.

Photo: Jon Warren/ World Vision

## Where does it happen?

Sex trafficking can occur in every country in the world. People who have limited access to protection, education or opportunities to make money are more vulnerable to being exploited. Many victims are found in countries where there is a large pool of unskilled labour and the labour protection system is weak. However, victims are also found in developed countries – many of who are migrants who may have travelled to pursue work or education opportunities and have been tricked or forced into exploitative situations.

## How many people are victims of sex trafficking?

It is impossible to accurately assess how many people are victims of sex trafficking worldwide. It is a hidden crime and even if victims have the opportunity to report the abuses, in many cases, they will not do so out of fear of their traffickers or cultural shame. Frontline law enforcement authorities are also not always trained in identifying potential victims. For example, in a country where prostitution is illegal, people may be considered guilty of being sex workers, rather than as victims of trafficking.

In addition, some countries use varying definitions of trafficking so it is difficult to gather accurate data. For instance, if a country's law on trafficking only covers women and children – then male victims will not be identified.

With the introduction of the Trafficking In Persons Protocol<sup>2</sup> in 2000 and an agreed international definition, the monitoring of the issue has somewhat improved. Previously, the majority of trafficking research focused on the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation. There has not been enough research about the exploitation of men or labour exploitation because they have not been recognised as a crime in the legislation of some countries.

## What makes people vulnerable to sex trafficking?

People are vulnerable to sex trafficking for a number of reasons including a lack of education; lack of protective environments for children; lack of income opportunities for adults and families; weak legislation and law enforcement; harmful social practices; and the profitability of transnational crime and corruption. All of these factors create an environment for human trafficking to continue.

## The impact

Trafficking for sexual exploitation turns individuals into commodities which dehumanises them. It occurs partially due to the demand for prostitution and other forms of commercial sexual practices that traffickers seek to supply. In certain cultures virginity is highly prized and ignorance and myths about HIV and AIDS transmission

and cures have contributed to the demand for sex with young girls. Gender inequality contributes to high numbers of women being trafficked into the sex industry.

There are multiple long-term harmful effects that victims of sexual servitude may suffer, including physical and mental trauma; HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; unwanted pregnancies and negative

social stigma. In cultures where chastity is highly valued, women and girls are often left with the shame of lost chastity, instead of being treated as a victim of exploitation.

Often male victims of human trafficking have been denied assistance, further marginalising them and discouraging them from coming forward.

## CHANTY'S STORY

Chanty's\* mother was killed by a landmine when she was young. To survive she collected garbage and recyclable materials. When she was 12, Chanty was lured by a foreigner to an island where he raped her. Chanty did not tell her sick father who died a year later. After she lost her father, Chanty took a job as a waitress, but it

turned out to be a trick. She was forced to become a sex worker – a nightmare from which her body still bears the scars. Chanty was eventually taken to a World Vision Trauma Centre where she received counselling and training in health issues and life skills.

Chanty was trafficked for sexual exploitation when she was 12.

*Photo: Jon Warren/World Vision*



\* Name has been changed.

# COMBATING SEX TRAFFICKING

Combating sex trafficking requires grassroots, national and international efforts.

Governments need to address the contributing factors through engaging with and empowering vulnerable communities. Strategies to reduce vulnerabilities at the local community level include; supporting child protection, formal and non-formal education, micro – credit and life skills development.

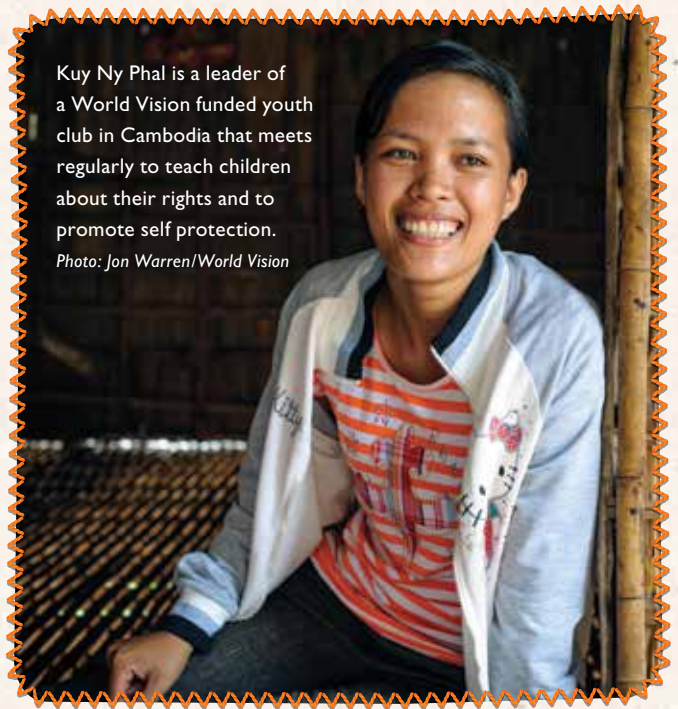
Awareness raising, empowerment and alternative, safe income opportunities for those vulnerable to sexual exploitation are also necessary to reduce this crime. In addition, biases and discrimination that impact on a woman's right to productive labour must be addressed. At the provincial and national level – policies and legislation must be put in place to create stronger child protection systems, and protection for migrants.

On the demand side, individual, societal and national perceptions and attitudes make it acceptable to discriminate against people and exploit them. The structures and systems that allow this to take place need to be examined and changed to have trafficking for sexual exploitation acknowledged as a serious crime. We need to challenge the policies and practices that make and keep people vulnerable, in particular those that maintain female subordination, including harmful cultural practices and stigma. For example, identifying and prosecuting the people who demand sex services from young children, and changing the system allows this to take place.

As sex trafficking is often a transnational crime, governments and organisations working across national boundaries, such as the United Nations and World Vision, must work together throughout the trafficking cycle. This includes collaboration to prevent potentially vulnerable individuals from becoming exploited; training law enforcement and other officials to identify

Kuy Ny Phal is a leader of a World Vision funded youth club in Cambodia that meets regularly to teach children about their rights and to promote self protection.

*Photo: Jon Warren/World Vision*



and protect victims; prosecuting traffickers and their accomplices; securing justice for victims; and playing an active part in a global movement for the promotion and protection of human rights, especially for children.

For more information go to [dontradelives.com.au](http://dontradelives.com.au)

<sup>1</sup>. 'Trafficking in Persons' shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring 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 purposes of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

<sup>2</sup>. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000).