

MIGRATIONS AND TRAFFICKING IN LAO PDR CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND VICTIMISATION

by
Dr. Didier BERTRAND
Cultural Psychologist, Vientiane (AFESIP-Laos)

Abstract:

This paper provides an extensive literature review concerning migration and trafficking in Lao PDR as well as a synopsis of interviews conducted with fifteen Laotian females in the sex sector in Lao PDR and in Thailand.

Owing to delays in programme implementation, it has not been possible to present data from interviews with victims of trafficking residing at the AFESIP centre in Lao PDR.

Although migration for work is a fact of life that in fact has become a kind of ritual in several Lao villages, for all too many migrants the experience involves being a victim of human trafficking.

While motivations and circumstances for migration itself are quite well known, the migrant's experience as a trafficked person requires further investigation particularly in regard to overlap between the two concepts. Thus, after defining the socio-economic and political context of migration in Lao PDR, we will try to understand the migrant's point of view.

With the ultimate aim of establishing mechanisms to support victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, we will present the complexity of this issue in a Lao PDR context and discuss the challenges we face in setting up a victim-centred approach that can adequately address victims' needs.

Introduction

This paper provides an extensive literature review concerning migration and trafficking in Lao PDR as well as a synopsis of interviews conducted with fifteen Laotian females in the sex sector in Lao PDR and in Thailand.

Owing to delays in programme implementation, it has not been possible to present data from interviews with victims of trafficking residing at the AFESIP centre in Lao PDR.

The social and political context of migration and trafficking in Lao PDR

Lao PDR is a country of both origin and transit for migrant people, with most instances of trafficking¹ taking place among labour migrating to Thailand, such activity grounded in

¹ The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Woman and Children (supplementing the UN Convention Against Trans-national Organized Crime), defines trafficking as follows:

- a) 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 purpose 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;

- b) The consent of the victim of trafficking to the intended exploitation set forth in the subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in sub-paragraph (a) have been used;

- c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer and harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in sub-paragraph (a) of this article;

traditional seasonal cross-border movement to and from the northeast of Thailand (*Isan* in Thai) where ethnic, linguistic and cultural similarities are many and where family and social links between the two countries remain strong. As for incentive for migration, Thailand is attractive to young people, offering both work and excitement. Considering internal migrations in Laos, similar incentives lead many females to leave the village to work in other provinces, usually in the garment industry, as service girls in restaurants or hotels, or in beer gardens.

On both sides of the border, trafficking takes place in a context of family and/or acquaintance systems (the traffickers themselves often referred to as brokers); understandably, the risks associated with trafficking are reduced when the broker is known by the trafficked person or at least by the person's family. However, when migration is organised by unknown agents, particularly in border areas to which migrants have travelled, risk rises substantially.

Trafficking remained largely a taboo topic in Lao PDR until recently highlighted in an officially released report². Victims are rarely abducted from their village. Instead they tend to go willingly with a recruiter, or friends or relatives who promise employment³. Victims' official status is often ambiguous. Most of those migrating to Thailand are considered illegal migrants rather than victims of trafficking. In November 2004, the National Assembly passed a law to protect women and children by defining the exact scope of protection that can be claimed by victims of trafficking. The recently created Lao Anti-People Trafficking (LAPTU) is getting increasingly more involved in fighting traffickers while the government through IOs and NGOs, is developing a campaign to train staff in recognising trafficking cases and to prevent illegal emigration while at the same time promoting safe migration.

Exploring how migration takes place

Because of government regulations in both Laos and Thailand, legal migration for work is a lengthy, expensive and difficult process. However, it is easy, inexpensive and legal to obtain a day pass and cross over, and then stay over. It is also not difficult to enter Thailand illegally by river in a boat or by making a land crossing. Moreover, people in remote rural areas do not know the legal migration process. The fact is, most migrants in Thailand are illegal. And with acts of abuse and exploitation not adequately by authorities in Thailand, migrants become highly vulnerable to trafficking as well as to other types of exploitation in general.

Work contracts generally range from six months to two or three years, and are usually temporary. For migrants, their stay in Thailand can be considered as an integral part of the livelihood systems in some villages. Many migrants return home for short stays during the planting or harvesting seasons, family events or festivals. Massive work migration takes place

• d) "Child" shall mean any person under 18 years of age. The Protocol states that even if fraud and deception are not used, it is a case of trafficking if the victim is under 18 years of age. While international standards recognize and attempt to distinguish between consensual acts and those involving abduction, force, fraud, deception or coercion, under international law, children cannot consent.

Furthermore, the Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 35 states that: State Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.

2 In October 2004, UNICEF reports: " *Trafficking networks were found to be well structured, with connections to organised crime networks in neighbouring countries. Victims may be bought and sold several times over with the price the trafficker receives often portrayed as an employment agent's fee.*"

3 " *Several communities along the Mekong report the existence of a local cross-border labour recruitment/trafficking network. In each of the villages, the network advertised available jobs and wages. The district authorities reported that they often saw minibuses they believed belonged to the traffickers entering the villages and then emerging carrying young girls.*" ILO IPEC.

during school holidays and during the dry season when fieldwork is completed. Migration increases when natural calamities cause crop destruction. Estimates put the number of Lao workers in Thailand at several hundred thousand, including more than 30,000 young people⁴, many under 15 years old⁵. Adult males work on heavy industry and construction while young men favour work on fishing boats or plantations. Women are found in factories or work in the service sector, primarily in restaurants, hotels and bars, and karaoke venues and massage parlours.

The possibility of abuse and exploitation exists in all these places; mandatory overtime without additional pay, deprivation of liberty, forced use of amphetamines and sexual slavery are not uncommon. All migrants likewise face the risk of being caught by authorities then fined and deported, and of being robbed of all their belongings by authorities on both sides. Stories are told of people who have gone missing. Yet bad news does not seem to significantly deter migration; in fact, “stories of successful migration far outnumber stories of exploitation or trafficking”⁶. This attitude towards trafficking is reinforced by the limited number of only known instances in which people clearly have been trafficked from the Lao side of the border⁷.

There is scant reliable evidence regarding reports of Lao women being trafficked into China and Chinese girls being trafficked into Northern Laos, this issue remaining little documented. Similarly scant evidence exists of transit through Lao PDR of Chinese or Vietnamese children and women bound for Thailand, Cambodia and other countries. Most researchers have focussed on border-district migration while the migration and subsequent trafficking from other provinces and within Lao PDR still remain much less documented.

There are complicated push and pull factors in this significant migration movement; economic migration is only one motivating factor, leaving interacting motivators in need of investigation.

The main push factors are:

1. Lack of land owing to family growth.
2. Need for money to fulfil basic needs (support a sick parent, raise many children, build house, etc).
3. No other way to generate income and free time after rice fieldwork is completed.
4. Earning potential from agriculture not attractive in a region where subsistence farming is still the norm.
5. Youths’ desire to escape a life of subsistence farming.
6. Scarcity of wage labour in Lao PDR and limited career choices.
7. Lack of access to higher education and dearth of scholarship funds; parents unable to pay for children’s education (sometimes schools demand a bribe).
8. Inadequacy of education obtained; those who complete high school find themselves with little practical knowledge and few useful skills for application in the village.
9. The issue of education itself as a rein forcer of family gaps⁸; a youth not continuing his or her education is free to move abroad.
10. Literacy level, inasmuch as “*illiteracy may provide a disincentive for migration*”⁹ and thus affect the confidence of the less educated in going to Thailand, while for the literate and

4 On 700 000 migrants, UNICEF-UNAIDS (1998).

5 UNICEF (1995).

6 Thippavong (2003, p. 10).

7 UNICEF (2004).

8 ILO-IPEC.

9 Thippavong (2003, p. 8).

educated few job prospects exist aside from low-paid government jobs and even those often require the proper connections to secure such employment.

11. Demand for newly available goods and wares, for example TVs and other electronics once a village is connected to the electricity grid, or a motorbike once a road connection is completed.

12. Migration to Thailand as a kind of “*rite de passage*”, a fashionable pilgrimage for young people: “*The extent to which young people need to undertake at least one trip to Thailand in order to secure social status among their peers needs to be further studied [as does] the lure of culture (music, language) appearance (clothes, dyed hair) and attitude in teens migration*”¹⁰.

13. Peer pressure, as when migrants return to the village and encourage friends to join them for work in Thailand, and particularly when older migrants persuade younger.

14. Unawareness of both the risks in migrating—many migrants are not even aware of trafficking as a phenomenon—and of the conditions in Thailand that await.

15. Desire of many youths to become self-sufficient at an early age and thus feel independent of family and, for some, be in a position to leave the family.

16. A combination of youthful optimism, denial of risk, spirit of adventure, and the outcome of a trip to Thailand given over to luck¹¹. Moreover, memory of a bad experience does not necessarily deter one person from trying again nor do reports of bad experiences deter others from attempting the trip themselves. Given this cultural faith combined with a treasure-hunt propensity, neither proof that expectations are unrealisable nor knowledge that dangers exist have prevented migrants from crossing the border into Thailand to seek their fortune.

The main pull factors are:

1. High demand for low-skilled workers Thailand, especially for the kind of factory or domestic work that Thais are reluctant to do nowadays.

2. Good reports far outnumbering the bad, as migrants with disappointing experiences often don't relate them so as to conceal wounded pride.

3. Migrants returning to the village with an air of prosperity about them, having cash in hand and wearing better clothes, all this greatly impressing friends.

4. Thailand's reputation as a land of wealth and opportunity abounding in easy cash, the latest consumer goods, fashionable clothes, and trendy music, the impression reinforced through Thai television which is popular in Lao villages.

5. Excitement and curiosity, desire to see more of Thailand. Youths who are bilingual in Thai and Lao and who have frequently crossed the border to attend festivals or visit markets on the Thai side already have some familiarity with Thailand and many want to explore the rest of the country, feeling especially the lure of big cities.

6. Agents or friends and relatives in villages or brokers on the Thai side who facilitate finding jobs or promise good job prospects for the ones who leave.

The step from being a migrant to a trafficked person is sometimes a small one. Let us see now how the wayward path occurs.

From being a migrant to being a victim of trafficking or a prostituted person

10 Thipphavong (2003, p. 11).

11 “*Nothing, including large fines and horror stories of what has happened to others seems to have a great deterrent value, given both the fatalistic attitude and the potential for making money. Police complain that many people caught upon return have been caught more than once, not always in the same province, indicating that they have found work at different locations throughout Thailand*”.

Studies and interviews show that many trafficked persons began their journey as volunteer migrants supported by others for their travel. While several were contacted by a broker to assist illegal movement, others contacted themselves brokers to cross the borders or were seeking help in finding a job abroad. The departure from Laos is often facilitated by friends or relatives. It is difficult to know what direct or indirect profit these persons had in bringing others back with them or in helping them to find a job and how much they are informed of the outcomes of the trip in terms of exploitation. To satisfy contract terms, migrants sometimes must repay significant sums for what are said to be transport fees. At this stage, the trafficking situation is more obvious; the person might be facing debt bondage under threat of coercion or violence, this leading to an exploitative condition such as forced labour or prostitution. There are many levels of debt and exploitation that make this link between brokers and victims difficult to analyse in order to identify the trafficking process. When different figures intervene in the chain, it is not easy to determine from whom and where a flagrant intent to exploit arises and if the intent leads to immediate profit. The intent to exploit is sometimes at the very end of the process: at the time of requesting salary or permission to leave the person comes to understand that he/she is not only an illegal immigrant but also a victim of trafficking. In Laos, most initial migrations occur in groups guided by friends, relatives or neighbours, some of whom may be making a return trip. But for those migrants who have no guide, they run far more risk of being trafficked or indeed disappearing. *“From a trafficking point of view, social distance is more important than physical distance. The most severe forms of abuse were found among the villagers who lacked a social network in Thailand. But it must also be noted that lack of a social network does not discourage people from going¹².”*

Conditions of vulnerability to trafficking

The overwhelming majority of trafficking victims surveyed in Lao PDR are girls aged 12 to 18 years, young girls and women are the most vulnerable to trafficking because they face high risk of involvement in sexual exploitation or slavery, which are the main types of exploitation within trafficking. . In villages where many youths have left, about 17% of parents have received no news of their children after several years¹³, more girls than men missing; this can be interpreted as an indicator of trafficking (Thippavong¹⁴).

Most victims (35%) interviewed in the UNICEF survey ended up in forced prostitution. Other forms of employment were domestic labour (32%), factory work (17%), and fishing boats (4%). Those that worked in agricultural labour tended not to be trafficked and exploited whilst those working in domestic household situations experienced some of the most extreme cases of abuse and mistreatment. Most victims hailed from rural areas, although a few of the victims came from extremely remote areas; some came from situations of severe poverty.

The connection between ethnic background and child trafficking needs further study, since *“the majority of non-Lao trafficking victims come from villages that have been resettled or relocated”*. These victims were found to be from Lao and Tai ethnic groups, with Tibeto-Burmese language speaking groups being over-represented in trafficking data compared to the percentage of the population (10% and 2.5% respectively)¹⁵.

12 Chamberlain, (2002).

13 UNICEF (2004).

14 Thippavong (June-July 2003).

15 UNICEF (2004).

Of the victims interviewed, approximately 63% were 18 or under, 33% were between 19 and 29, and 4% were 30 and above. Males going to Thailand are on the average older than females and are less likely to be exploited or trafficked.

From the different studies consulted and our interviews, the main factors of vulnerability regarding trafficking for female can be summarised as below (we cannot provide a comparative incidence for each):

- Migrating or emigrating alone.
- Having no family links in destination.
- Being recruited by unknown person or persons, or being caught in the brokers' networks on the Thai side especially.
- Being a young, pretty girl or woman.
- Being illiterate or having had little formal instruction. Children who have left school early are not well equipped with essential life skills. Moreover, the quality and quantity of education provided at school does not sufficiently instruct them on how to make well-informed decisions and to cope with rapid changes in society.
- Not speaking Thai or the local language.
- Being impressionable, naïve or psychologically weak and thus more susceptible to recruiters .
- Enduring poor living conditions (though not necessarily extreme poverty).
- Living in a recently displaced village.
- Having faced family problems including sexual harassment or romantic and marital deception.
- Being orphaned and living with step-parents.
- Having a sister or relatives working in the service sector.
- Being consumeristic.
- Being addicted to drugs.
- Being a single mother without qualifications.

Migration, sexual exploitation and trafficking

At the global level, migrants represent a significant proportion of the persons involved in prostitution¹⁶.

The process that leads women or girls to veer from migration to prostitution and end up in a trafficked situation and perhaps in sexual servitude is complex.¹⁷ In addition to its prevalence in Thailand, sexual commerce, and by extension exploitation, is booming in Malaysia where recent investigations report alarming levels of trafficking of girls and young women from Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos.

We now will focus in the following on women and girls who have been forced into prostitution and sexual exploitation as a result of trafficking.

An idea commonly shared by anti-trafficking groups is that traffickers use deceit to get women to leave home, while in fact some migrant women engaged in prostitution did indeed know that what they were going to do might have a sexual component but knew little of the real working conditions. The migrant experience entails a complex weaving of freedoms and constraints, pros and cons. At the same time facilitators or brokers mean to take advantage of the vulnerable situation of undocumented or illegal women.

¹⁶ Agustin (2005, p. 96).

¹⁷ UNICEF (2004) reports that of victims who return to Laos, most have escaped their employer on their own or with assistance from local citizens. There were almost no cases of victims being voluntarily released by the employer, except in situations where victims had contracted HIV and were too sick to continue working.

Migrant women involved in prostitution as a category comprises different profiles of migrants, ranging from ones who have been lured and sold into prostitution to ones who have left their homes knowing the risks involved, to others who wilfully prostituted themselves and subsequently found themselves caught in the net of trafficking.

A discussion on the degree of consent, obligation or force experienced by migrant women who engage in prostitution should not overshadow an in-depth description of the practical issues of survival and successful extrication that migrant women must face and negotiate.

Defining prostitution¹⁸ in the Lao context would require elaboration beyond the scope of this paper. Prostitution rarely leads to forced sexual exploitation in Laos; most women who might provide sexual services are internal migrants working in entertainment venues¹⁹, thus the sexual activity tends to be occasional rather than regular. Brothel-style establishments are both few and well hidden, and the so-called service girls employed in them have relatively high mobility, with cases of captivity, bondage and slavery rarely reported although this may change with the opening of new international roads crossing the country and the coming of mafia-style networks. The sale of virginity in Thailand through organised networks was recently reported to us as occurring on a large scale at the southern border; however, we don't know the relation of this activity to incidence of HIV/AIDS nor its relation to long-term trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Most of the authors share the idea that no woman wants to be prostituted. Prostitution can however be classified according to the way a person enters into it (e.g., autonomously, semi-voluntarily) or depending on the degree of force or coercion involved (through a bonded situation or an outright slave-like situation)²⁰.

Autonomous entry into prostitution suggests free will; it implies a choice made over other known economic alternatives by women who have decided for themselves (though the range of choices might be perceived as nearly non-existent by some women without professional skills). So-called voluntary prostitution usually doesn't fall into the definition of trafficking apart for those under 18 year old; but once controlled by pimps or brothel operators, voluntary prostitution can lead to exploitation, sexual slavery or trafficking. Most women enter because of dire economic circumstances within a specific social and family context. Single motherhood, sick parents, the need to support younger brothers and sisters in their schooling combined with a lack of professional skills and the necessary network to secure employment are some of the reasons mentioned by women for having entered into prostitution. Performing sex for money or in exchange for gifts occurs in different settings and need contexts; nevertheless, once in prostitution women become vulnerable and are a target for recruiters intending to sell them to other brothels.

Involuntary prostitution occurs when women are lured, deceived, kidnapped or in any other way brought into prostitution against their will. It seems that quite a large number of women would fall into this category even if some of them relate that they knew they were taking risks in going to Thailand. The majority of victims are lured from their homes on the assurance of employment opportunity. Girls commonly are promised a job in a restaurant or shop, which turns out to be a place of prostitution.

Bonded prostitution, whereby parents, siblings or associates are involved in selling a child or young woman to another person for promised employment in return for cash, seems to be rare in Lao PDR even though there is in Southeast Asia an historical practice of such selling

18 In using the term prostitution we keep to a general definition referring to those persons who provide sexual acts in exchange for money, gifts or favour. The term itself is, however, a conceptually loaded one so rife with Western Judeo-Christian values that it deserves a thorough deconstruction in its own right.

19 See Lyttleton (1999) for an ethnography of bar girls' interactions with clients.

20 Agustin (2005, p. 104).

new life? How were options considered, if at all, before a decision was made? Was the move discussed with friends or family? In what ways was judgement developed throughout the process? What is the range of experience undergone by the girls and women?

Phenomenological analysis of the psychological incidence of prostitution and trafficking

The psychological incidence of prostitution has been explored lately for the most part in a decidedly feminist Western intellectual tradition. Yet in the matter of prostitution—and I don't think it is male denial of gender abuse and patriarchy to say so—the way persons are affected depends on the socio-cultural context and the degree of exploitation, as well as the threat violence and amount of coercion encountered by victims. Theoreticians from all sides in the heated debate concerning prostitution (in favour of or against legalisation of so-called sex workers) tend often to silence or hush up the direct testimony of women.

The author shares the idea that “*the internal ravage of prostitution needs to be better analysed and described in psychology*”²³ mostly in the field of traumatic stress. Psychological distress as a result of physical assault, and repetition of scenes such as forced relations by johns might invade a victim's mind and impede a potential return to normal life.

We can presume that the psychological incidence of being forced into prostitution by economic circumstances is different from that of being forced through kidnapping, violence and abuse. It is important to consider that voluntary entry into prostitution might lead however to a forced situation and to slavery-like exploitation. Many other factors need to be taken into account, namely context (place and time), personality of the victim, the victim's familiarity and trust with the perpetrators, available support system, etc.

Self-identity in the experience of prostitution

Self-identity is affected in different ways by the experience of one prostituting her/himself depending also on the way that the person has been involved personally, socially, culturally and economically. Again, the case of forced prostitution as a result of trafficking requires special attention.

The image of self is affected by the look of others. While in Buddhism prostitution is not condemned²⁴ as it would be in the puritan and procreational sex-orientated Judeo-Christian world, prostitutes nevertheless may think themselves devalued in the eyes of others and endure low self-esteem, particularly those who lost their virginity before marriage which remains frowned upon in some Southeast Asian societies. Moreover, a girl or young woman with a sense of being forever spoilt and therefore of value will be more susceptible to repeated trafficking.

Being assigned a number and regarded by johns as livestock up for bidding, enduring the “*reduction of body to vagina, anus, breast and mouth*”²⁵ and thus merely a receptacle for men, these facts induce a deep inner feeling of depreciation, but in other contexts of prostitution men regress and prostitutes are more kind of care givers as clients appreciate the intellectual qualities of the geisha style courtesans.

How deception occurred is in general a key factor. After being sold by someone they knew or even loved, women might develop self-blame, as though it had been their fault to trust someone. The issue of betrayal deeply affects psychological dynamics, self-confidence and self-image.

23 Farley (2005, p. XII).

24 Lord Buddha accepted a land donation from a famous rich courtesan (Ambapali) and honoured her invitation for a meal at her home, to the great discontent of local bourgeoisie.

25 Farley (2005, p XIV).

Concealing the self with a change of name and identity (as real name is unimportant in this field and best to protect it as well) and changing one's style²⁶ induce a depersonalisation process that is further instigated by pimps in order to create a new woman, a robot suitable for prostitution. Changing biographies filled with ambiguities, uncertainties, denials, omissions and distortions are concocted for the benefit of brothel clients, the women using a new name to protect themselves and also to provide a new meaning to her life and an new understanding of the events disguised under this new identity.

Dissociation of personality and the creating of a new life story are part of the coping processes when reality is too painful. Dissociation permits psychological survival whether the trauma is war, slavery or any kind of unbearable situation; it is "*a strategy in which human cruelty results in fragmentation of the mind into different parts of the self in order to face reality and not to become mad*".

Dissociation falls on a continuum; a person can detach from self, others, time and place. The task of the clinician is to determine the extent to which identity is related to factors outside the individual. In the case of Southeast Asia, dissociation may be exaggerated/compounded by one's fragmentation from self as much as fragmentation from the geographic and animistic-based environment. When a child is involved, fantastical thinking can compound identity severance all the more in the face of intense and confusing trauma-laden contexts²⁷.

One response to this need to push away real emotions, substance abuse, represents another vital issue affecting victims of trafficking for sexual (and labour) exploitation. The use of drugs and alcohol helps one numb out unpleasant feelings and ideas and to detach from an unpleasant reality. But addiction at once reinforces the power of pimps in terms of control and likewise increases the debt owed them, as they are often the drug providers or will advance cash toward buying drugs. The sale of alcohol similarly increases profits. Furthermore, addiction reinforces low self-esteem.

Because of the above and other reasons, the trafficked person will become vexed with a terrible question: why has this happened to me?

In this regard, the cultural and spiritual contexts in which prostitution occurs are fundamental. For Theravada Buddhist followers, the ideas of karma (great suffering due to transgressions or bad actions in a former existence) or predestined fate can lead to an acceptance of suffering.

Violence, abuse and trauma

Threat and direct violence are recurrent themes in most publications related to trafficking and sexual exploitation as well as prostitution. Brothel prostitution is devastating; it should be differentiated from other forms of prostitution in bars and nightclubs not entailing captivity, bondage and debt. The violence of pimps is aimed at controlling the women, to make them worthless and powerless, to ensure their compliance and to keep them trapped in prostitution. It includes a scale of actions from verbal abuse to threats of starving, beating, burning and even killing. When women are young and have little education, it is easier for pimps to abuse them and to maintain them as prostitutes under such permanent threat of violence and abuse.

Stories of physical abuse abound, the most common involving domestic servants, the most extreme surrounding sexual exploitation. Actual violence or the threat of violence is coupled with the threat of being handed over to the police as an illegal migrant (or undocumented within Laos); this is usually enough to keep the victim trapped in her situation.

²⁶ Always smiling, the prostitute must accommodate all sexual positions and practices, including the types of verbal abuse and rough physical activity that can lead to rape and torture.

²⁷ LeVine, Morita, Therapy Congress, Osaka (2003).

Instances of rape, beating and verbal abuse are frequent; torture is exceptional in Laos but less so in neighbouring countries.²⁸ While repetitively and forcedly performing sex with customers, prostitutes experience negative feelings. Violence may become a norm for women in prostitution that is itself a form of sexual violence under the power of money.

The concept of trauma and PTSD²⁹ are obviously relevant for victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation, but the diagnosis should be used carefully as it has its own limitations.

Distress and suffering after trauma can be normal responses to abnormal situations. However, there is a danger in stigmatising people as mentally ill. What is important is the meaning of symptoms to the person who is suffering. A diagnosis of PTSD alone is poorly predictive of the capacity of the person to keep going despite hardship and is not a reliable predictor of a need for psychological treatment.

Trauma as an event is not a sufficient determinant of PTSD; there are risk factors that account for the individual's vulnerability to develop this disorder: social support attitudes of parents, prior experience of trauma, individual personality, family history, other life events at the time of trauma, exposure to subsequent reactivating stressors, among other factors. The onset of symptom development and the range of symptom patterns among victims who have undergone similar traumas are not the same.

Sexual exploitation resulting from trafficking can be multi-traumatic³⁰. Victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation relate the experience of being betrayed, degraded and helpless. They express feelings of shame, sadness, worthlessness, anger, anxiety and shame, and of not being understood. They experience grief and depression, fear and distrust, sleep difficulties or nightmares, poor appetite. They develop a sense of hopelessness, experience resignation and despair that are increased in conditions of captivity. The acknowledged risks of HIV/AIDS increase fear and anxiety. Psychological distress might result also from the dangerous and degrading circumstances of exploitation³¹.

Classical symptoms of trauma are usually described in Western models of PTSD but they should be used with caution in other cultural contexts. Shocking and violent experiences and their elaboration are dependent on the context of the social environment, the person's vulnerability and the meaning she or he gives to these experiences. Risk factors that account for the individual's vulnerability can prompt symptoms complicated by trauma. In the context of Southeast Asia, the developmental age, gender, community-based care level and other factors can exacerbate the attachment process; for example, a young woman may attach to her pimp or to a brothel owner and be more at risk for harm emotionally and psychologically by such cleaving to destructive authority figures. In addition, children in a brothel form a kind of community among themselves; thus any attempt to remove children entails depriving them of a physical and emotional support system. Victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation often go without medical treatment and suffer from long-term physical and psychological damage that must be recognised and addressed professionally.

Social incidence relation with family and reintegration in the community

The roles and perceptions of parents and family relations toward children's departure and the supposedly income generating activities they might be involved in, need to be carefully assessed, with understanding gained as to what precisely is the meaning of being a good daughter both to the family and to the daughter herself.

28 UNICEF (2004, p 43).

29 See Annex 2.

30 Farley study in 6 countries found that 68% of the prostitutes met PTSD criteria, 70 to 75% were raped in prostitution, 88% experienced verbal abuse and social contempt, 89% wanted to escape. (p. 56).

31 90% of the prostitutes interviewed by Farley reported a negative experience of having a trick.

Many girls would say that they want to help the family to survive, to alleviate the mother's hardships and suffering. In so doing they perform the expected role of respectful and dutiful child who shows the proper compassion toward the family and, by this, may acquire merit (seen as a bonus for both the parents and the daughter in terms of karma).

While it cannot be said to be a major predictor of trafficking victimisation, or of being involved in prostitution, the family situation of those who leave the village can, as several studies³² and interviews have shown, be broadly classified as dysfunctional and for any number of reasons, with the organic, social and psychological being quite frequent. Many of the children either did not live with both parents at home or suffered from home conflicts.

Concerning the position of parents toward their children's departure, reports bring balanced points of view. In some studies, communities³³ report that the majority migrate against their parents' will. Parents rarely persuaded their children to go to work in Thailand.. A recent UNICEF study states that most children went abroad with their friends and without their parents' consent. Many parents had tried to stop their children from leaving, but they left anyway.

Parents may at first be angry with a child who went without their permission, but what seems to be most important in how any returnee is received has to do with how successful he or she has been, as measured by money earned and consumer goods brought back. Some parents also expressed pride that their children could earn money to help the family³⁴. Some victims of trafficking report that parents persuaded them to go; for example, parents encouraged children to work in Thailand in order to make money for the building of a new family home.

At a young age (under 16), separation from family might induce a disruption of emotional development. The individual's reintegration in the village is not always easy as it means re-adaptation to a former way of life, working in the fields, though since having adopted new lifestyle and behavioural codes. *"Young returning migrants have typically adopted new fashions in Thailand. They may wear cosmetics, dye their hair, paint their nails, use sunglasses or wear an earring. Many come back speaking Thai. In a rural village, even one accustomed to Thai fashions and language from TV, these affectations set returnees apart, make them less part of the village. And the village may now feel too small and backward to the youngster."*³⁵

Returnees experience a feeling of being different, misunderstood, isolated and unfamiliar; victims of trafficking experience unworthiness, dirtiness, feelings of shame and being spoilt. These are all common push factors for leaving again.

Those who have not sent money home, or who come back empty handed, may be looked upon with suspicion by other villagers who assume they *"only went to Thailand to play, drink alcohol, use drugs, etc."*³⁶ And while their family will probably be sympathetic, *"other people tend to consider that if something bad happened to their neighbour's children and not to theirs, there must be a good reason for it"*³⁷.

For the victims of sexual exploitation, family ties might be weakened because of the shame felt by family and victims, but many will tend not to tell their story in order not to face social prejudice. The fact of no longer being a virgin will further mark the girl as virtueless.

32 According to various studies 55-90% of prostitutes report childhood sexual abuse.

33 MLSW-ILO (2003, p 34).

34 UNICEF (2004, p. 50).

35 UNICEF (2004).

36 Sisouda (2003, p. 11).

37 Sisouda (2003, p. 14).

Stigmatisation is another problem to be faced if one's society disapproves of certain behaviours and appearances, and makes the returning migrant even more apt to leave again.

Migrants caught upon returning to Laos are usually fined. The fine is assessed according to how long they have been gone from their village, the amount varying significantly from village to village.

Reintegration in the family and village is a sensitive issue for victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation; the family dynamic, the degree of needs, level of consumerism, expectations and actual gains made will influence decisions to leave the village again or not.

The recovery process: working with a victim-centred approach

Once the person is physically out of danger a process of recovery begins, encompassing a stabilisation process during which the survivor develops the means (physical and emotional) to face a new life situation. Depending on the person and the trauma experienced, this process can take weeks, months or years. The recovery can be facilitated by the assistance of an individual (social worker, counsellor or legal representative) or through an institution (public or NGO-managed home). However, in most cases the survivors find their own way without the help of others. The recovery can also take place in a shelter, with the family, or within a community. The aims of the recovery process are to provide comfort and support and to encourage self-sufficiency after an assessment of the problem and the establishment of case management³⁸. An effective assessment should lead to the providing of a healthy, restorative and safe environment encompassing housing as well as legal, physical and psychological support. A good assessment should also, though, acknowledge the victim's strength. Having a safe place for expression and exploration of the traumatic event through different phases (fact phase, feeling phase, meaning phase), conduces to a lengthy healing process addressing multiple layers of trauma with the aim of reconnecting aspects of the self and rebuilding the battered self-esteem of the survivor, enabling "*the different parts of the self to see the past, the present and the future from a whole-person perspective rather than from the perspective of isolated separated identities*"³⁹. Once victims have expressed facts and their feelings on them and have made sense of the events in a way that relates to their current or new attitudes and beliefs, then they are ready to decide on appropriate action. They have a right and a need to fully participate in decision making with regard to their future. Yet it should be noted that women often need available to them further information about resources and options as well as help in choosing the appropriate assistance.

Psychosocial Recovery (or *Rehabilitation*, PSR)⁴⁰ is understood as the reduction of harm and as enabling the person to be as free as possible of the negative physical, psychological and social repercussions of the abuse and exploitation that she/he has experienced⁴¹. Recovery or rehabilitation strategies may be implemented through a range of approaches and in a number of different settings, such as residential care, street outreach, psychotherapy, and family and community services. Macro activities including advocacy, awareness raising, community mobilization, promotion of national policy and legislation, use of legal system,

38 See annex.

39 Farley (2005, p. 209).

40 PSR has three components: 1) Preventive interventions or remedial activities; 2) Physical safety interventions or remedial activities; 3) Psychological interventions or remedial activities.

41 The Ideal Course of Recovery (UNESCAP). Horowitz (1976) writes about the "ideal course" of recovery in a crisis and proposes a number of tasks that must be completed in order to move through a crisis to recovery. These tasks are: 1) To perceive the event correctly; 2) To translate the perceptions into a clear meaning; 3) To relate this meaning to a current belief, attitude, or meaning; 4) To revise memories, attitudes, and/or belief systems to fit the new developmental line made necessary by the experience; 5) To decide on appropriate action.

networking, professional collaboration, and community development could be organised at the same time.

Building a professional relationship with victims of sexual exploitation as social worker or counsellor is challenging, for victims are apt to take on a double defensive identity that makes difficult their developing stable and rewarding relationships after repeated betrayals by close relations, pimps or police. They suffer from moral degradation that has induced shame, resentment and mistrust. Setting up a warm and non-judgemental context based on honesty, fairness and respect provides the way forward. New relations must be clearly established and respected in order to encourage the victim to speak openly of what she endured as to dishonest, unfair and disrespectful behaviours. The task becomes especially complex and difficult when women are still engaged in prostituting themselves⁴².

Legal support

Matters of law comprise a first step toward re-establishing a trafficking victim's legal identity and securing basic rights. It is important for a victim to know that she is not the guilty one and that she may even be entitled to compensation. The situation may become much more complicated if relatives were involved in the trafficking or if parents themselves had sold their children. Nonetheless, legal intervention is an important part of the healing process.

Coping, resilience and healing

Coping is a systemic, dynamic and culturally derived way for people to overcome difficulties and involves physical and mental processes to mobilise personal, familial and environmental resources. Coping involves creating, reinstating or reinforcing meaning in the midst of stress. In fashioning a therapeutic response, it is important to consider persons as active survivors not as passive victims; they are able to work on their own environment and are not mere recipients of experience. While the issue of vulnerability is sufficiently considered in most therapies, coping tends to be neglected. Yet looking at coping helps us to understand better the victims' psychosocial dynamics and the way they mobilise their resources. While coping suggests some improvement, passing over and strategies, resilience implies that the person is not altered and can return at least to a previous functioning level. In this field, there is a need to extend the concept of resilience in girls or women to include environmental and co-dependant village relations in the Lao context. Resilience is natural and expected but it is not an automatic process. It is linked to whether or not the person can trust others. A person can't become resilient without the support of the ones charged with taking care of him/her. Family and community members are the ones who help victims to find meaning in life and to instil hope for the future.

In terms of resilience, a paradigm shift ensues from risk-adversity-pathology terminology to protection-resourcefulness-creativity-hope values. Without one's being too positivistic, it is interesting to think of challenges more than damage, not demoting or overlooking the deleterious effect of hardship but instead considering that hardship has paradoxical effects causing strengths and weaknesses simultaneously. Resilience implies the promotion of an evolutionary dynamic.

Resilience: the role of culturally embedded rituals and spirituality

Cultural norms shape interactions between parents and children that in turn increase or decrease protection and resilience. Individual manifestations of culture—traditions,

⁴² Several testimonies make plain the difficulties in avoiding prostitution, for reasons such as slavery and having no other economic perspectives, among others.

ceremonies, language—can be a source of support and an instiller self-esteem and pride that help people face adversity. For example, several traditions and practices are followed with an eye toward protecting and safeguarding the health of children such as wearing amulets or the burial of placenta.

Values, language, tradition, maintaining good relation with the spiritual world, all reinforce self-esteem and identity and are part of the healing process, referring to what Eisenbruch⁴³ called “cultural bereavement”.

“Traditional societies are prone to support resilience as they try to maintain equilibrium between physical, emotional and spiritual elements... There are ten distinct values or principal believed associated with the promotion of resilience in autochthon situations: spirituality, importance of education and enlarged family, respect of elders, wisdom in tradition, respect of nature, generosity and sharing, collaboration and group harmony, autonomy and respect of others, quietness, patience, relativity of time, and group harmony.⁴⁴”

In the context of Lao PDR, the role of indigenous ethnic cultures in promoting resilience is rather limited, as ethnic minorities’ values are often considered backward and superstition ridden, their culture and traditions seen as an obstacle to development. Some provinces do have radio education and propaganda programmes in the main ethnic languages, but such teachings do not occur in schools. Ethnic minority cultures wane in the face of the dominant group’s values.

Traditional healing ceremonies might be performed such as temple or spirit offerings⁴⁵. *Bassi* and *suk khuan* (soul calling ceremonies widely used in Laos) chase bad influences and call for good souls to enter the body and remain there. These collective celebrations have also a reintegration effect as this ceremony is usually performed among invited relatives and neighbours as well as local authorities in some cases. Purification rituals with holy water (*lot nam*) are thought to have magical powers that cleanse the soul and restore energy, affecting not only mental dynamics but also physical pains. Amulets and tattoos (the latter rarely though on women) protect from dangers.

Diviners (*mo do*) or monks might provide explanations that help in understanding why events happened to a person, scrutinising horoscopes for fate, delimiting periods in different previous lives and referring to the rules of karma (in terms of results of past actions) yet with the aim of gaining merit for a future life.

Traditional and religious beliefs play an important role both in the healing and in the reintegration processes, for they are sources of information about the causes of and how to deal with problems as well as potential help for the victims in terms of reinforcement of ego.

Socio-economic answer: support for income-generation opportunities for the family

This activity is the cornerstone of the whole rehabilitation/reintegration process. The focus regarding reintegration of the victims (to family whenever possible) is on income and financial support. This involves liaison with local resources for income generation schemes, taking into account market opportunities and other environmental factors. If land is scarce, irrigation could be one answer to expand the cultivation area but if youths don’t want to be farmers any more other skills need to be provided to them. If they are attracted to an urban style of life then the skills provided should match the interests.

43 Eisenbruch (1992).

44 Dion (2003, p. 25-26).

45 Half of the Lao PDR population is animistic and Buddhists do also perform animistic rituals.

Resettlement independently in the community is the solution favoured by 60% of AFESIP victims in Cambodia. Resettlement of young women is possible once they show sufficient self-confidence, technical competency and capacity to live independently. Sometimes family reunification is impossible for various reasons; in this case staff will determine, in close collaboration with the person herself, the future orientation. Place of resettlement is in accordance with the best interests and wishes of the concerned person within the bounds of available resources for support including micro-credits. Where no local employment is available, AFESIP considers the possibility of income-generation schemes in the form of small businesses. Follow-up and monitoring activities are part of the full reintegration process. These are performed once or twice a month during the first three months and can last up to two years. Emphasis is made on economic, medical and psychosocial aspects. The aims are:

- To check the current circumstances of girls and young women among families and communities and make sure that they are well treated.
- To check job or business status.
- To provide counselling to the family.

In order to facilitate reintegration, AFESIP provides each young woman with a business starting kit either in kind (stock for micro-business) or in cash (through micro-credit). Providing good-quality follow-up of former residents is a key to success. Top priority is given to avoiding a return to trafficking situations.

Perspectives of parents on a child's return might vary; the victims are not always welcome. It is important to make in-depth evaluations of family links, including the family's possible involvement in trafficking itself which, although rare in Lao PDR, has to be considered.

Women share a concern over returning to the village empty handed. Given that many girls or women left for economic reasons, it is important that reunification present them as a valuable member still contributing to the family economy, making crucial any thoughts as to a project that might bring benefits to the family or assistance to the community. Preventive measures must be introduced quickly to stimulate moral development, revitalise rural areas, and stimulate the local economy through cooperation. Building a model for generating sufficient income in the community and guiding local people in conducting vocational training in and out of school⁴⁶ are two of the best options toward preventing migration that might end in trafficking.

Conclusion

The migration of young people from the villages along the Mekong River has left some families and communities without their strongest, most productive members. The reasons given by both migrant labourers and trafficking victims for leaving their villages, often without their parents' consent, are mostly economic ones, in particular the desire to earn more money for the family, although this is not necessarily a reaction to poverty for materialism and consumerism appear to be significant factors as well⁴⁷.

While some migrants are truly happy to have left a village way of life they considered boring and unpromising, others find their dreams far from realised. Complaints in terms of working hours, conditions and payment are frequent. Illegal migrants also live in fear being

⁴⁶ Something akin to this is already established, whereby children work for a few hours in local brick factories after school to earn money for study materials.

⁴⁷ Some officials would suggest that migration to Thailand is a problem of morality and ideology among youth and not only one of absence of jobs and education.

caught, detained and sent back without any money. Brokers and international traffickers, playing on their ignorance and naivety, lure some into slavery-like situations; deception, abuse and exploitation are quite common if not the norm, mostly for young women who choose to take jobs in sectors favoured by trafficking networks, namely the nightclub, entertainment and restaurant industries. Living conditions are varied, the worst being slavery-like conditions and bonded-labour situations. Even if involved in prostitution by choice, women and young girls become significantly more vulnerable to being trafficked once taking part.

How a migrant shifts from one status to another is the result of a complex combination of factors. At the departure point, it is not always easy to make a clear distinction between those who voluntarily leave Laos illegally (at the behest of a recruiter or on their own initiative), and those who fall into trafficked situations without being fully aware of the deception and without knowing of the coercion, detention and exploitation that will follow. If a young woman voluntarily leaves her village and illegally exits her home country, knowing that she might end up in the sex trade but once at the intended destination abroad decides that this was not what she wanted, yet cannot leave out of fear of reprisals, she has to be considered a victim of trafficking, and so should not be punished because “she got what she deserved” while taking risks.

While we want to put emphasis on the recognition of victims of trafficking in the sub-Mekong region, we underline that the use of the term “victim” might provide a poor description of the women’s’ experience and unduly influence what the women themselves say about that experience. The word “victim” should be used as a legal instrument to defend their rights and make a case for compensation, but it should not obscure the fact that some of the women made choices and were not always unaware of what they were entering. *“One problem is that the person designated as a victim tends to assume the identity of one reduced to being a passive object of others’ actions. According to this logic, the subject of the discourse becomes irrelevant and the helper takes centre stage and is encouraged to propose strategies which are reminiscent of imperial interventions in the lives of the native subject”*⁴⁸.

Furthermore, *“The intent of the human trafficking paradigm is to help all who find themselves in a situation where they lose their freedom to control what they want to do because they fall under the influence of debt bondage, coercion, force or threats”*⁴⁹. However, the question of voluntary involvement often remains confused as several factors might determine or constrain the individual’s putative freedom of choice.

Though a person-centred approach, the paradigm is meant to consider comparatively the choices and intentions expressed by the person within the set of limitations that he or she is facing in the family or community, in order to restore dignity in the context of his or her life and environment.

The ideal situation for facilitated recovery is a safe⁵⁰ location that covers the basic needs (food, shelter and medical support), has a limited number of people (between five and ten) in a family-like setting, includes trained counselling staff and a playground for children, and allows freedom of movement. The goal is to help stabilize the survivor through a structured short-stay programme in order to get her back into a safe, protective family or community environment as soon as possible. The services must be adapted to the needs of each trafficked individual since each case has to be understood as unique and requiring different types of support.

48 Agustin (2005, p. 107).

49 Idem (p. 109).

50 UNESCAPE (2003). The physical safety interventions include activities such as: 1) Medical services; 2) Nutrition services and education; 3) Health education; 4) Sex education; 5) Housing/place to live; 5) Legal services; 6) Core person/reliable adult; 7) Outreach; 7) Creating safe community environments.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AGUSTIN, Laura

2005 "Migrants in the Mistress's house: other voices in the 'trafficking' debate", *Social Politics*, 12, Spring, pp. 96-117.

BOENLHEIN

1987 "Culture and society in posttraumatic stress disorder", *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, Oct., 41 (4), pp. 519-530.

1988 "Commentary DSM diagnosis of PTSD and cultural sensitivity response", *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, t 176, n°5, pp. 257-263.

BROWN, Louise

2001 *Sex Slaves, the Trafficking of Women in Asia*, London, Virago Press.

CAMERON, Jennifer M.

2001 *Child labour in the Lao PDR, factories, agriculture and the entertainment industry*, s.l., ILO IPEC.

DION, STOUT M.

2003 *Peuples autochtones, résilience et séquelles du régime des pensionnats*, Québec, Fondation autochtone de guérison.

EISENBRUCH M.

1992 "Toward a culturally sensitive DSM: cultural bereavement in Cambodian refugees and the traditional healers", *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 180 (1): 8-10.

FAIRLEY, Melissa

2003 *Prostitution, Trafficking and Traumatic Stress*, Haworth, Maltreatment and Trauma Press.

GINZBURG, OREN

2002 *Building project on assumptions, trip report from Laos*, June 10-20, s.l.; 12 p.

IOM

1999 Paths of exploitation, studies on the trafficking of women and children between Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam, Phnom Penh, CAS.

2004 From Laos to Thailand and home again, the repatriation of trafficking victims and other exploited women and girls workers, a study of 124 cases. August 2004, Bangkok.

KHAMDAVONG, Phouvanh

2005 *Etude exploratoire sur la prostitution des jeunes femmes dans deux villes du Laos (Vientiane et Paksé)*, *Rapport d'étude de terrain*, Geneva/Hanoi/Phnom Penh, University of Geneva, IUED/Asian Institute of Technology/AFESIP International, 90 pages.

KLEINMAN, A.

1997 *Social Suffering*, Berkeley, University of California Press.

LYTTLETON, Chris

1999 "Any port in a storm: coming to terms with HIV in Lao PDR", *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 1 (2), pp. 115-130.

MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL WELFARE

2001 *Trafficking in women and children in Lao PDR, Initial Observations*, Vientiane, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Division of Trafficking in Women and Children, United Nations Interagency Project.

MINISTRY OF LABOUR and SOCIAL WELFARE and UNICEF

2002 *How I got there? Commercial sexual exploitation of children in Lao PDR*, Vientiane, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and UNICEF.

MINISTRY OF LABOUR and SOCIAL WELFARE, and ILO-IPEC

2003 *Labour migration survey in Khammuane, Savanakheth and Champassak*, Vientiane, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and ILO-IPEC.

MOUREN-SIMEONI, M.-C.

1993 "Le syndrome de stress post-traumatique chez l'enfant", *Annales de pédiatrie*, 40 (8), p. 489-495.

MUECKE, Marjorie

1992 "Mother sold food, daughter sells her body: the cultural continuity of prostitution", *Social Sciences and Medicine*, 15 (7), pp. 891-901.

1984 "Make money not babies, changing status markers of Northern Thai women", *Asian Survey*, XXIV (4), April. PAGES ?

PHETSIRIENG INTHASONE

2003 *Preliminary assessment of illegal labour migration and trafficking in children and women for labour exploitation*, Vientiane, MLSW and ILO-IPEC.

SISOUDA KHAMPAH & PHOUTTHASONE XAY

2003 *Biungkham village, Saravan district, Saravan province, Laos*, Vientiane, Trace report.

THIPPHAVONG CHINDA & SOULIPHONE CHAENSAVANG

2003 *Trafficking from Community to Exploitation, Nakeng village, Outhomphone district, Savanakheth province, Laos*, Vientiane, Trace report.

UN-ESCAP

2002 *Course of psychosocial and medical services for sexually abused and sexually exploited children and youths*, New York, UN.

UNICEF & MLSW

2004 *Broken promises and shattered dreams, a profile of child trafficking in Lao PDR*, Vientiane, UNICEF & MLSW, October.

UNIFEM

2002 *Promoting gender equality to combat trafficking in women and children*, Bangkok, UNIFEM.

Wille Christina

2001 *Trafficking of children into the worst forms of child labour: a rapid assessment, Thailand-Lao PDR and Thailand-Myanmar borders areas*, Geneva, ILO.

Annexes

Annex 1 General profile of migrants

- They tend to be under 25 years old.
- They have no children and don't migrate as a couple.
- They have no land or rice fields to cultivate, or the agriculture work has not been passed from generation to generation, or they don't want to cultivate land.
- Slightly more men than women cross the border to work in Thailand; men more often work in farms or on construction sites known to them in provinces along the border, while women more likely disperse throughout the country relying on agents to find jobs for them. The average age for men is 20, only 16 for females⁵¹.
- They are not among the least educated and have had some formal education (some can speak Thai and a few can read it), but most left school early.
- They had access to Thai media in Laos.
- Those who migrate are not the poorest for to organise and make such a the trip one needs money and good clothes and shoes. Inthasone⁵² has noted that expectations are rising jointly with standards of living; for example the teenager who wants a TV after his house is connected to the electricity network, or the farmer who sold his buffaloes to buy a tractor and now wants to buy fertiliser.[RVM1]
- They are risk takers.
- They believe in fate. Despite being aware of the risks involved in migration, they leave hoping their good luck will see them through.
- Some either do not live with both parents or at least face family problems of some kind.

Profile of those who do not migrate

- They heard about bad experience from others.
- They are busy cultivating their own fields or found other income-generating activities.
- They are deterred by knowledge of possible heavy fines or jail sentences imposed by authorities on returnees.
- They want to respect the law.

51 Thippavong (2003) p8

52 Inthasone (2003) p 11

Annex 2 Trauma and PTSD

Trauma is a terrifying, sudden experience that is emotionally painful, distressful or shocking and for which persons are unprepared. It induces both physical and lasting psychic effects. A normal response to an extreme event, trauma produces both an internal and external breach that affects memory, spaces, societies; it induces a loss of faith and trust in humans. Anxiety and pain induced by the trauma are limited experiences and evolve and change over time.

Trauma affects individuals, families, groups and communities. As traumatic experience human violence generates qualitatively different answers than natural catastrophes but social support and attitude of the family and peers are very important for adjustment to both kinds of events.

Speaking to a deep and durable modification of the personality after a significantly troubling event or events, the concept of traumatism has been much used in the last twenty years, supported by the formal classification of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the Diagnostic and Statistic Manual (PTSD, DSM IV, 1984) of the American Association of Psychiatry. PTSD is a composite syndrome⁵³ that is biologically, psychologically and physiologically characterised by different psychological and physiological incidence⁵⁴. While PTSD is a kind of label widely used and easily understood by funding agencies, one has to consider that stress and trauma are different concepts: stress is a normal reaction to threat while trauma is something more deeply based in the psyche. The Francophone school of psychiatry prefers to use the term post-traumatic syndrome as a way of broadening the ways symptoms cluster across cultures.

Traumatic stress refers to three main categories of symptoms:

- Trauma re-experience during dreams
- Reminder avoidance of the trauma or associated events
- General emotional numbness in all situations, restricted range of affects, increased arousal symptoms.

Other associated symptoms can be :

Dissociation and flashback; difficulty in testing subjective experience, facing reality, and being spontaneous; denial and dissociation as ways of dealing with traumatic memories, the two perhaps associated with a depressed affect.

Psychosomatic complaints such as headaches, stomach aches and disorders including bronchitis, asthma, eczema, alopecia, diabetes, stuttering and atypical seizures.

Cognitive restriction (difficulty remembering, memory avoidance, concentration problems); learning difficulties (inattentiveness); loss of skills.

Attitude and behaviour changes toward parents or children, life and future; sense of personal weakness and vulnerability with a feeling of powerlessness; loss of self-confidence or ability to project in the future (sense of foreshortened future). Adolescents might present more antisocial risk-taking behaviours. Decreased interest for participation in significant activities, feeling detached or estranged.

A complex PTSD⁵⁵ might induce personality disorders and dissociative symptoms with a complex and confused ego state and severe forms of emotional and bodily dysfunctions.

53 Mouren Simeoni (1993) p 491

54 Main symptoms of PTSD see Annex 2.

55 Mostly considering that in many cases there are connexions between childhood sexual abuse.

Emotion is a biological, cognitive and cultural process. Boehnlein⁵⁶ calls attention to two major cross-cultural factors underlying the phenomenology of PTSD for the purpose of discouraging a researcher from foisting meaning onto a survivor's experiences.

- The accounting for cultural belief systems that are both secular and religious to avoid *category fallacy*⁵⁷.
- The accounting for traditional family and social roles and their effects on the survivor's self-identity, interpersonal adjustments and future outlook.

The main symptoms of PTSD are:

Freezing of affects as evidenced in:

- Observable behaviours or symptoms
- Specified emotional or cognitive experience
- Apparent mental processes or functions (fear responses, shame, guilt)
- Stated feeling of blighted future, changed attitude toward life and others

Repetition hallucination involving:

- Illusion of reviviscence
- Forced intrusive memories as if it traumatic event happens again and again
- Physical basic reactions when listening sounds remembering the trauma or any strong sound
- Repeated nightmares and trauma repetition in dreams

Physical distress such as:

- Body bracing up spontaneously or after a stimulus
- Asthenia, chronic fatigue linked with hypochondria and depression
- Pain, somatic disorders (eczema, hypertension, and loss of hair)

Anxiety and depression, general hopelessness

Neurotic superstructures including hysteria, phobia, avoidance behaviours, and compulsive behaviours

Personality alteration

Blocking of filtration process, hyper vigilance, always suspicious, avoidance, and phobia
Blocking of presence function, loss of interest for the world and others, everything seems far distant uninteresting
Blocking love and relation to others, dependency, regression (important as childhood response)

Hyperactivity

Sleep disturbance, nightmares
Learning disability, attention problems
Tension in relation with persons and surrounding
Nervous or aggressive behaviour toward others and oneself
Intrusive memories, reviviscence syndrome.

56 Boehnlein (1987) p 520

57 Kleinman, (1987).

Post traumatic psychosis appears when the person is not in contact with reality but trying to escape it.

The DSM IV is time limited in symptom manifestation but does not describe or include social and psychological consequences immediately or in the long term.

The DSM classifies four main criteria to diagnosis PTSD.

A Exposure to a traumatic even

B Repetition of the event

C Avoidance behaviours

D Neuro-vegetative activity symptoms (insomnia, irritability, difficulties in concentration, start reactions)

B,C,D reactions should last more than a month, the perturbations induce psychic suffering and have consequences for social or professional behaviour. PTSD can be immediate, precocious (acute) or belated (delayed) and transitory or chronic.

Annex 3 Resilience

Resilience is defined as resistance to a shock. This concept, new to human sciences, has been borrowed from the physics of metals. It means the “*ability to recoil, spring back into shape after bending, stretching, or compressing*”.⁵⁸ Resilience refers to the way a person goes forward after a shock or a trauma. It is linked with his/her approach to solve a problem. Resilience is instilled at birth but depends highly on what a person met in life, as well as a person’s beliefs and spirituality.[RVM2] Resilience is increased or lowered while meeting with others who can support, understand, listen; it is built within a socio-cultural and family context

Resilience is not a concept issuing from psychology but it is useful in terms of public health; it does not apply to suffering but merely describes from outside certain adaptive and normative processes that have been referenced in a Western context; thus this concept needs to be reconsidered when applied in other settings⁵⁹.

Resilience and ideology

Ignoring the importance of the social context, some are selling the fashionable concept of resilience and spreading the idea that it involves behaviours, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed by anyone. In Western cultures, context signs of resilience would be:

- Having a positive view of yourself and possessing confidence.
- Being able to manage strong feelings and impulses.
- Making connections or maintain connections with family friends and support groups.
- Avoiding seeing crises as insurmountable problems.
- Accepting that change is part of life.
- Having the capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out.
- Moving toward new, realistic goals and personal accomplishments and taking action.

Framed in such a way, the concept of resilience reflects very much the liberal ideology of self-struggle, individual achievement and autonomy. It does not consider dependencies of children. The concept requires further study before it can be adapted to the context of Lao ethnic minorities living in remote rural areas.

58 New Oxford English dictionary.

59 Refer to Annex N, Resilience and ideology.

Annex 4
Main findings from the IOM report on residents
of the MLSW transit centre in Vientiane (2004)

- Residents were quite young girls; the mean age was 16.5, almost half of the sample was between 15 and 17 but one-third were between 12 and 14 or less; they had never travelled out of their district before[RVM3].
- 29% were not living with both of their parents; difficult relations with step-parents were not uncommon.
- 30% had relatives in Thailand, generally sisters and brothers.
- They came from the provinces of Savanakheth, Champassak, Saravane, Sayaburi, Khamuane and Vientiane, which all share a common border with Thailand on the Mekong River. Bangkok was the destination for more than half of the sample.
- 21 families perceived themselves as more destitute than other families, 27 equally poor. Debt was not a major problem in the family (although it could be under reported).
- The victims showed a strong determination to leave with one-third of the sample not telling parents.
- While home strife was a push factor, desire to support family and follow the paths of others were often mentioned.[RVM4]
- Two-thirds of the sample paid a broker fee of from THB 500 to 30,000 (average 5,500).
- 80 of 124 questioned did not receive any income (25 did not finish one month[RVM5]) and others were arrested or escaped without being paid.
- 27 endured physical abuse, 7 sexual abuse.
- Almost half of the sample worked in domestic service, mostly in private houses. 43 of 56 sampled faced exploitation on wages or working hours, 34 experienced abuse that included restricted movement. They rarely had signed a contract.
- Parents relied on subsistence agriculture; many also hired themselves out as a temporary workers; they did not know when their daughters would return; they had nothing to give them in order to keep them from migrating again.

Annex 5

The Major Principles of PSR⁶⁰

- Increasing human capacity
- Equipping people with new skills (behaviour, thinking, feeling)
- Self-determination
- Normalization/least restrictive environment
- Individual care and needs
- Commitment of staff
- De-professionalisation of services
- Early intervention
- Micro environmental activities
- Macro environmental activities
- Centring on family, education and work
- Having no time limit on participation
- Taking a social approach, not a medical approach

The psychological interventions include micro activities such as

- Community residential living
 - _ Protection/safety
 - _ Provision of structure
 - _ Anticipation
 - _ Play
 - _ Group activities with caring adults and other children
 - _ Child to child activities
 - _ School and life skills education
 - _ Employment training
 - _ Parents programme
 - _ Successful role models
- Talking/Listening/Counselling
 - _ Correcting wrong perceptions
 - _ Giving new meaning to traumatic event(s)
 - _ Assisting with temporary discrimination
 - _ “That was then, this is now”
 - _ “That was that person, not these people”
 - _ “This is now, this can be your future”
 - _ Planning for real futures
 - _ Next week
 - _ Next month
 - _ Next year
 - _ As an adult (if working with children)
- Self-awareness/Communication
 - _ Journal writing
 - _ Art
 - _ Drama
 - _ Play (therapy)
 - _ “Circle of friends”
- Mind/Body Interventions (focusing)

60 UNESCAP (manual, 2002).

- _ Exercise
- _ Deep breathing
- _ Deep relaxation (passive, active)
- _ Meditation
- _ Mindfulness/staying in the moment
- _ Nutrition
- _ Relaxation
- _ Fun
- Traditional Medical Practices
 - _ Cultural rituals
 - _ Religious rituals, ceremonies
 - _ Traditional healing
 - _ Massage
 - _ “Coining”

Counselling Therapy

Counselling therapy or psychotherapy is a treatment for mental distress by means of communication, by using speech—often called the “talking cure”. By getting a person to talk about herself/himself, by listening, by discussing with the person how she/he feels and how her/his actions may make things worse for herself/himself, the counsellor helps the person. This is not the same as giving advice and instructions.

However, listening or counselling therapy/psychotherapy is not always fruitful. It may be beneficial when a person agrees to talk about her/his problems and has sufficient intelligence and psychological awareness. If a person does not benefit from talking, the therapist should then use other kinds of interventions, such as family or group therapy or behaviour therapy.

Alternatively, some people can express their feelings better through “expressive therapy” such as art, play, music, drawing and drama. This is especially so for many children.

Counselling can be organised for the family as well.

Case management is a structured and formal process whereby a carer/helper has a clear responsibility to help the individual, in a planned way, to achieve a specified goal. The process must deal with any need or circumstance that impedes the achievement of the goal. The individual is assisted in accessing the full range of available and relevant services through:

- A more proactive than reactive approach – identifying ways of finding out what the issues and needs are, rather than waiting for a crisis to occur and then trying to find a response to it.
- Lessening the dependency of the individual on the system or programme – trying to ensure people are getting access to services but are not becoming dependent on the case manager.
- Effective planning – not rushing into action but instead waiting for the individual to talk with the case manager, then working out a plan of action or strategy with the individual’s participation.

The case assessment is based on behaviour, thoughts and feelings (in order to help someone who is stressed or distressed, it is necessary to understand how these three parts contribute to the problem).

Trying to understand the problem by finding out what it means to the person or how it affects the person and its cause is the first step of the assessment, with consideration given to

the background of the person which includes family and personal history, socio-economic status, employment, relationships, and family living conditions.

Other questions should then be investigated:

What life preceded entry into prostitution?

Is there a long history of family violence?

What factors increase vulnerability to entry into prostitution?

What kind of violence is occurring or has occurred?

What is the emotional experience of women who prostitute themselves?

What is the importance of context and the different kinds of clients?

What are the psychological consequences and needs?

The assessment helps both the carer/helper and the client to clearly define the problem, to state and prioritise aspects of the problem that need to be worked on, and to clarify goals that the person is trying to reach.

Identifying available resources for helping and providing support is the next phase before developing a plan of action and taking different steps in the intervention, the ultimate and most important goal being to help people to help themselves.