

# Journey of a Human Trafficking Victim

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**Abstract** - Human trafficking is one of the concerned issues in today's world. More than 2 million victims were trapped in this criminal activity around the world. Victims were abused and exploited from the beginning of the intake process until they escaped from the trafficking situation. The objectives of this study were to analyze the journey, which include the detail processes experienced by the victims of human trafficking. This qualitative research involved nine (9) victims, which were currently being detained at the Consulate General Office of Republic Indonesia, Penang, Malaysia. Data was collected using in-depth interviews, observation and other relevant documentations. Study findings have identified the various processes or the "journey" for which the victims were initially being trafficked, the mode of exploitation activities and the phases of psychosocial challenges experienced by the victims. Victims were trafficked through various ways including voluntarily, through persuasion, debt bondage and being deceived. Whereas some of the psychosocial dynamics experienced by the victims include exploitation, violence, and being abused, which have also lead to negative impacts both socially and psychologically. The paper will further discuss and recommend strategies in dealing with human trafficking activities.

**Keywords** - Human trafficking, exploitation, psychosocial challenges

## I. Introduction

Human trafficking is one of the concerned issues in today's world. Globally, there are more than 2 million victims were trapped in this criminal activity (Inter-Parliamentary Union & UNICEF, 2005; Schloenhardt, 1999). United Nations estimates that there are 800,000 persons trafficked every year for forced labor and for prostitution. Meanwhile, The International Organization for Migration (IOM) endorses that about 4 million people

are trafficked, whether within the country or abroad (IOM, 2005).

According to the Palermo Protocol 2000, definitions of trafficking is presented as follows.

*"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"*(point a).

*"The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used"* (point b).

*"The recruitment, transportation, transfer, 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 subparagraph (a) of this article"* (point c).

*"Child" shall mean any person under eighteen years of age"*(point d)(pp. 3).

Some experts have indentified that the root problem of human trafficking is primarily due to economic and development discrepancy in the region. A more developed country with good economic growing has created many job opportunities, while the poor country have major problem related to poverty and unemployment (Huling, 2012). This condition then is utilized by the networking of criminal with material benefit desired by trapping the victim in a form of many kinds of exploitation manifestation (Richards, 2004). The most vulnerable group are women and children especially from poor family and lack of education (Shelley, 2010) backgrounds.

Family and cultural entity also play a significance role in the human trafficking activity, especially for women. In several communities, patriarchal culture and values have somewhat placed women being the second class citizens and as a consequence, women experience limited access for better education and vocational trainings (Inter-Parliamentary Union & UNICEF, 2005; Lie & Lund, 2008;

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(Shelley, 2010). In addition, family problems such as family disorganization, divorce cases, domestic violence has become some of the triggering factors for the more vulnerable women to be easily trapped in the trafficking activities (Syamsuddin & Azman, 2013, 2014).

involved nine (9) victims, which were currently being detained at the Consulate General Office of Republic Indonesia, Penang, Malaysia. Data was collected using in-depth interviews, observation, and other relevant documentations.

### III. Findings

This study findings have indicated that victims were recruited in three ways namely by voluntarily, by persuasion, and by debt bondage. Victims that was recruited voluntarily because of being in a poor condition and unemployed. They then met with an employment agent and agreed to be send abroad in getting a job. On the other hand, by persuasion, victims were interested to go abroad after getting all promises from employment broker about the good condition of job and salary in other countries, including Malaysia. On debt bondage mode, victim was initially granted a loan by the perpetrator, which later when the victim was unable to pay off his debts, the perpetrators then forced the victim to go to work abroad for paying their debts.

Socioeconomic conditions like poverty, unemployment and family problems too has triggered or pushes women to migrate and find job abroad, by coming to see an agent or someone whom they think have knowledge or experience to help them to go abroad. There were also victims who went abroad after they were promised a good job by the agent or by the broker or friend.

*“A job broker in my village, his name is HD, offer me a job. He then took me to an agent in Sidoarjo, Jawa Timur, Indonesia. The owner of the agent is Mr. AB. HD told to me that in Malaysia I would get good job and high salary. Because of this rpomises, I was so interested, moreover my condition at that time was unstable because my husband just married another women” (Informant LA).*

All of the expenditure of the victim from the original country to destination country is fully covered by the agent. This is the initially process of the weakening of bargaining position of the victim against the agent. Self esteem of victim is low when he faced the agent because they feel that they have a moral duty to serve the agent. The victim thought that the agent had done almost everything to help them to find a job. In terms of transportation process, there were a strong collaboration of the broker and agent in Indonesia and Malaysia. Starting from the victim’s hometown, the victims was then transported by bus or car to the destination before they were flew to Medan or Batam, Indonesia, before be sent to Malaysia by either ferry or planes.

*“I set out from my village, in Bima, to Lombok, Nusa Tenggara Barat, Indonesia, then went to Jakarta by*

## II. Methodology

The objectives of this study were to analyze the journey, which include the detail processes experienced by the victims of human trafficking. This qualitative research

*flight and then from Jakarta to Medan, Indonesia by flight also. My next destination is Penang, Malaysia by Ferry. Then, when I arrived at Penang, an agent picked me up. He then took me to a Chinese home. I took a rest for two hours there, and then they brought me to Mr. LW’s house. Mr. LW forced me to massage him” (Informant NS).*

Finally, victim arrived in the destination country after passing through the long journey processes and was received by the owner of the agent in Malaysia. Because the agent thought that they had spent so much money to send the victim from her hometown to Malaysia, they felt that it is their rights to be compensated and, thus begin to exploit the victims. Here, the victims begin to experience mistreats, abuses and exploitations. This experience is of course not to the victims’ expectations as their ideas was to improve their socioeconomic status with good job and salary like what the agent or broker had promised them before leaving the country. Based on the findings, a total of eight out of nine informants had entered Malaysia legally that is using their valid passport, with 30 days social visa. Due to over stay, many of the victims then becomes undocumented workers due to agent or employers’ failure to grant them a new visa or legal work permit. Here, it can be analysed that the victims have been in a complex processes of being deceived and exploited throughout their stay abroad. Without work permit, it is really difficult for the victims to demand from their employer or agent in the court as they have no proof that they have been working for them.

*“All employees under the agent I worked for do not have work permit including me. Agent should issue a permit because we have worked for a year. What for they cut my salary for 6 months if work permit has never been issued. But I think we are treated like that in order to make us powerless. But I think agent had a good relationship with police. Because if there is some problems, Mr. “KV” just go to a police station and all problem will be clear” (Informant MF).*

In the most weakest condition, the agent then forced the victims to do what the agent want including working as “a door to door cleaner” (Syamsuddin & Azman, 2014). Once again, the victims become powerless to go against the agent as they did not know how to lodge report and to whom to seek help, afraid that the employer or agents’ intimidation. As a result, they choose to stay quiet with the expectations that they will get paid eventually. However, most of the time, there are cases where victims are not being paid their salary after they have completed paying for all of their debts. The victims in other words has been

deceived by the agent to continue working as all of their salary was kept by the agent.

*“After 6 month, I worked with the agent. I told him that that period of payroll deductions had finished, but he answered that the amount of my salary would be paid after I go back to Indonesia” (Informant M).*

To extend the exploitation activities, employer or agent then made new agreements with the victims and have used reasons that as migrant worker the victims could not go back to their country, unless after the completion of serving 2 year working session. The victims were indirectly been forced to obey the new agreement if they want their salary to be paid off. The victims will then have to serve for two years contract as the first year of their services has all been used to pay off their transportation expenses of coming abroad. Once again, many victims were deceived and continue to be exploited for the second year of their work contract. Finally, due to the overwhelmed challenges, there are victims who choose to escape from the exploitation situations. Several victim had ran away despite of the unpaid salary as they no longer stand with the various physical, emotional and psychological violence like being beaten up, placed in isolation, having insufficient food, being insulted, scolded and other unacceptable treatments. The victims took the opportunity to escape from their agent or employer when they are working in the costumer’s house. Several victims have come to the authorized institutions like the Consulate General Republic Indonesia, Penang, Malaysia, as well as the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur or to the local police stations to make report in seeking help and further protection.

*“I often was beaten, kicked; even my finger had been clipped by car door. Therefore, I then decided to escape after mopping the customer’s backyard”(informant MNR)*

#### IV. Discussion

According to Shelley, (2010), human trafficking is one of the primary criminal activities, implicating a very systematic, strong and powerful international networking which is difficult to abolished. Most victims come from Asia regions, especially from the more poor countries. Many migrant workers are exploited in many places around the world, such as in the Europe, Middle East, North America and Asia itself. Socioeconomic factors has greatly pushes human trafficking due to prolonged poverty, lack of employment, low income, which have all caused many people, mainly vulnerable women and children to be trafficked including for commercial sexual exploitation, forced marriage and indirectly slavery.

Indonesia is one of the countries facing human trafficking problem. Trafficking in Persons Report United States Department of State (2011) claimed that a number of migrant workers from Indonesia become forced labour and experiencing bonded debt in several developed countries in Asia and Middle such as Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Syria and Iraq.

Raymond, Cunha and Dzuhayatin, (2002) stated that the migrant workers are often exposed with abuse and

violence, which often start from the selection or recruitment, travelling document issuance, in the transit home when waiting for departure, and during the phases of working in the destination country. In addition, Lynda & Celia, (2006), the weakness of women often is utilized by agent or its networking by forcing or deceiving. In several cases, there are poor women who were sold for prostitution. After being trapped in the destination country particularly when they are unable to speak in local language, more women are forced to work with heavy workload and long working hour, in a poor and unhygienic condition of living place. In addition they will also experiencing continuous violence, isolation, debt bondage, sexual harassment and abuse, and often time did not get their salary.

Zimmerman, Hossain, Yun, Roche, Morison, and Watts (2006) in their research found that many of human trafficking victim experienced physical injury with symptoms of headache, fatigue, dizziness, pain in the buttocks, and stomach, and a lapse of memory; posttraumatic stress disorder; depression; anxiety; and hostility. Therefore, there is a strong need of intervention that refer to effort to heal or cure for the physical, mental, social and structural disorder or disturbance of the victims (Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried, & Larsen, 2010; (Hodge, 2008 ; Mullender, 1996).

#### V. Conclusion and Recommendation

In summary, the journey of trafficked victims began from the initial process of recruitment until the victims’ successful escape from the challenging situations such as being mistreated, abused and exploited violently. All of the experiences faced by the victims have caused them to inherit various forms of psychosocial disorders and economic difficulties. Thus, it is crucial for the Indonesian government and government of the receiving countries to work very closely in order to reduce the activities of human trafficking.

It is also indeed imperative for any countries dealing with victims of human trafficking to provide the relevant intervention that aims to restore the victims’ social functioning. Thus, a more holistic intervention which refers to efforts to heal or cure for the physical, mental, social and structural disorder or disturbance of the victims are strongly recommended. In addition, assisting the victims in terms of economy empowerment is also critical in order for the victims to experience better social functioning. Overall, the type of interventions for the trafficked victims may include all aspects that cover their social protection issues, healing, advocating, reintegration as well as empowerment.



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