IDENTIFICATION VS. RECOVERY

Understanding the Complexities between Identification & Recovery from Human Trafficking:

Identification and recovery are two distinct parts of a survivor's journey out of a trafficking situation. This journey may start with identification, but is only completed after a full recovery occurs. This occurs when survivors are sufficiently supported to be fully separated from the exploitative situation and often involves achieving justice for the individuals. It is important to note that every journey to recovery and each individual experience is different. In fact, there may never be a complete or 'full recovery' as for many, recovery is a long-term and non-linear process. Therefore, it is crucial to understand that identification and recovery are distinct processes.

IDENTIFICATION

Identification is the process whereby an individual or potential victim is recognised or accepted to be a victim of trafficking by the authorities, a non-government organisation, another entity or through self-identification. This identification typically occurs as part of or after disclosure. The process of identifying a victim of trafficking is often the hinge decision that impacts the survivor's ability to access support such as housing, counselling or other needs. In this way, identification is often the first step in the journey to recovery. Formal identification by the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) provides the survivor access to certain support services by the government. A21 makes decisions independent from the NRM so that a victim can qualify for assistance even without formal identification by the NRM. For more information about the NRM and UK law please see the 'Toolkit Introduction' and Resource 'Human Trafficking in the UK'.

RECOVERY

After identification, the survivor may enter a period of transition to 'recover' from the trafficking or exploitative situation. This recovery is multifaceted and can involve a multiple of entities including state, government and NGOs that provide a variety of different support and aftercare services. These aftercare services are based on the needs of the individual, including but not limited to, housing, medical support, counselling, vocational training and legal services amongst others.

Even if a survivor is identified as a victim of human trafficking, they are likely still recovering, gaining independence, and adjusting to society—especially if it's soon after the trafficking occurred.

IDENTIFICATION[1]

Victim Identification

Victim Indentification requires proactive efforts which commence before even encountering a potential victim of human trafficking through education to the general public and specialised training to certain groups of individuals. These groups include frontline professionals placed in key positions to first encounter potential victims or those responsible for the creation and enforcement of human trafficking laws and policies, such as government officials.

How are victims identified?

Identification may come about as a victim escapes from a trafficker and seeks help from the authorities or support from an NGO. The more nuanced form of identification occurs when an individual may not self-identify but the authorities or other entities suspect a potential exploitative situation. This second scenario commonly refers to situations where frontline professionals encounter a potential victim of trafficking while conducting their everyday job.

EXAMPLES

- → *Law enforcement encounters a victim of human trafficking either during the course of a criminal investigation or as a result of its proactive victim identification operations.*
- → *A nurse or a physician encounters a victim when the victim seeks medical help for injuries sustained as a result of the trafficking.*

Specialised outreach activities also serve as a vehicle to identify potential victims. Many NGOs or government agencies proactively conduct outreach activities at targeted locations with a high likelihood of encountering exploited individuals such as detention centres, refugee camps or sexual health clinics, amongst others. Outreach activities can vary in execution, but will all focus on providing information and assistance by trained individuals to those being actively exploited or at-risk of exploitation.

Victims may not realise they are being trafficked, or may not want to be recognised as a victim for reasons, such as psychological factors. This lack of recognition often enables the exploitation to continue. Such self-recognition is important however to start the recovery process. A key part of the identification process in the intersection between identification and recovery is the victim's ability to recognise and make the autonomous decision to leave the situation of exploitation. Self-identification is beneficial and some would say crucial, for all survivors while in the recovery period. Once identified, services can be offered to provide holistic support and bring justice. In the UK, a catalyst to access a number of services is to receive a formal classification as a human trafficking or modern slavery victim under the NRM, which then confers certain legal rights and privileges to the survivor.

BARRIERS TO IDENTIFICATION:

- Victims may have been exploited by a friend or family member, and feel there is no safe place for them to turn if they were to leave.
- A victim may have experienced threats of violence against themselves, their family or loved ones and fear the repercussions of leaving.
- A victim may fear that the authorities will not believe their story or be able to help them. They may have had prior negative experiences with law enforcement in their home country or traffickers may have told them that they won't be believed.
- A victim may be dependent on their exploiter, emotionally, financially or for the provision of alcohol/drugs to feed a substance addiction.
- A victim may lack the capacity to financially support themselves if they leave.
- A victim may have developed positive feelings for their exploiter or believe that their partner, who is also their trafficker, has their best interests at heart.
- A victim may have children as a result of their exploitation and fear losing parental custody if they leave.
- A victim may be unaware or disbelieving of the protection the authorities can provide.
- A victim may fear legal repercussions due to their undocumented status.
- Especially in typical 'loverboy' scenarios where traffickers form romantic relationships with their victims with the intention to sexually exploit them, this emotional attachment to the exploiter might further delay the recovery process. As this falsified relationship perpetuates an emotional attachment to their exploiter, a victim may continue to have strong emotional feelings towards the perpetrator, despite suffering abuse or ill-treatment. This illustrates the trauma bonding element that is common in sexual exploitation cases, where traffickers use coercive control tactics to subjugate victims that make them unwilling or feel unable to leave the situation or may cause the victim to return to the situation.
- A victim may not speak the local language and therefore not be able to communicate their situation to seek help.
- A victim may be in a situation of debt-bondage and believe they are unable to leave as they have a legitimate debt to repay.
- A victim may believe that because they signed an employment contract or agreement they are unable to leave.
- A victim may fear being charged with crimes they committed while they were being trafficked.
- A victim may fear their trafficker will not be arrested or prosecuted for their crimes, which would increase the likelihood of being re-trafficked and further victimised.
- A victim may have normalised the environment they are in and feel fear of leaving and going into the 'unknown'.
- A victim may feel they have no safe option upon leaving, due to fear of how they will be received or perceived by family because of strong cultural or religious beliefs.
- A victim may be unaware of their legal rights and the availability of support for those who have been trafficked and exploited.

RECOVERY

The barriers to victim identification also provide an insight into the emotional complexity of the healing process that begins before identification and during the recovery period. Often the healing process only truly begins after individuals have been able to distance themselves from their exploitation and receive the appropriate care for their needs which they can access during the recovery period.

Recovery should be seen as a necessary secondary step following the initial identification to prevent re-trafficking. Post-identification, survivors should be provided access to holistic support services that ultimately will aid recovery from their exploitative situation towards a life of independence and fulfilment. The process of recovery in providing holistic support encompassing mental, emotional and physical support takes a multi-agency approach to aid recovery and reintegration into society. Accessing services may include a multitude of different governmental or civil society organisations, which may include but is not limited to, medical treatment, housing, financial support, employment and access to counselling services that are culturally appropriate and sensitive. Without appropriate access to necessary services for recovery, victims will be highly vulnerable to re-trafficking.

> **EXAMPLE** *A victim may be identified during a raid on a brothel, only to be re-trafficked after the trafficker manages to make contact and then subsequently re-identified during another raid. This cycle then would repeat, with the victim continuing to return to the situation. This may be due to the lack of support services available where the individual is not granted access to a relevant safehouse or aftercare support, increasing the likelihood of the victim returning to the situation.*

This example illustrates the ineffectiveness of identification by itself when aftercare or support services are inaccessible or lacking.

The recovery period can also be impacted by social perceptions of human trafficking and victimisation; for example, opinions of sex work or illegal migration might impact the services that a victim can access even after formal recognition as a victim of human trafficking. The type of support services that a victim can access during their recovery period is often dependent on the individual's gender, age, exploitation type, legal status and even possibly nationality.

Identification in and of itself will likely result in continued exploitation. Only when accompanied with access to services can identification lead to true recovery. Any attempt to assist in the identification of potential victims should always involve a partnership with entities that provide the aftercare assistance needed for recovery.

[1] 'Victim identification' as referenced throughout this report defines efforts to intervene in possible exploitative situations. 'Victims' as referenced in this phrase, include a range of individuals including not only those being actively trafficked, but also 'potential' or 'possible' victims, which encompass those in the process of being initially approached, groomed, or recruited, or certain vulnerable populations such as refugees, irregular migrants, and certain marginalised ethnic groups that have been historically targeted by traffickers.

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