

LIFE AFTER REINTEGRATION:

THE SITUATION OF CHILD TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS



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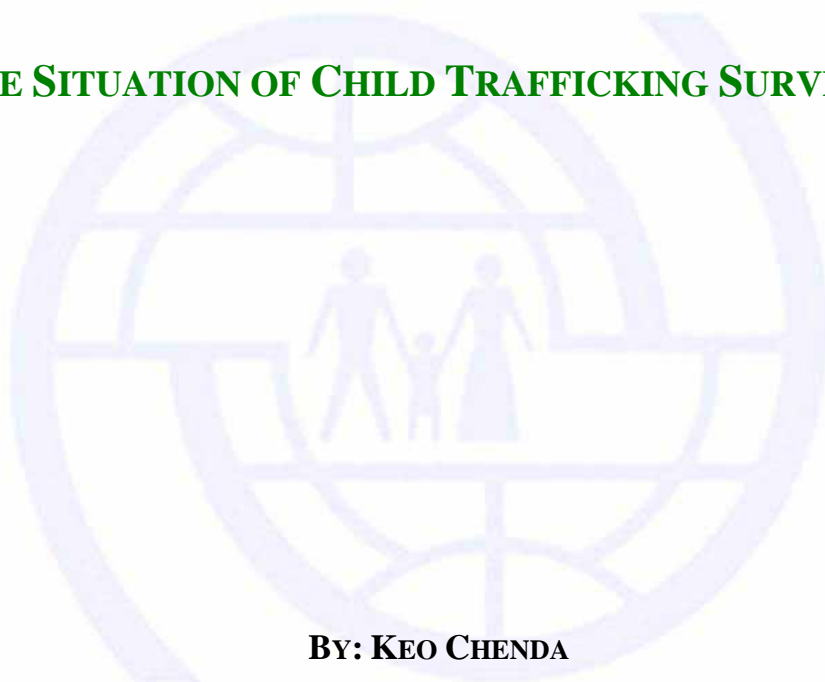
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RESEARCH REPORT

LIFE AFTER REINTEGRATION:

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ARM	American Rehabilitation Ministry
BRC	Battambang Reception Centre
COSECAM	NGO Coalition to Address Sexual Exploitation of Children in Cambodia
DNT-PP	Domnok Teuk-Poipet
DNT-PNH	Domnok Teuk-Phnom Penh
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KMR	Komar Rik Ray
KNK	Kokkyo naki Kodomotachi
MPK	Meato Phum Komar
MOSAVY	Ministry of Social Affairs, Veteran, and Youth Rehabilitation (Formerly known as Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PPS	Phare Ponleu Seilaphak
PTD-PP	Phea Teuk Dong-Poipet
SKO	Sprouting Knowledge Children
TPO	Transcultural Psychosocial Organization
UN	United Nations
UNIAP	United Nation Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking

DEFINITIONS:

On 15th November 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted the *UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementary to the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime*. The Trafficking Protocol entered into force on 25th December 2003. The Trafficking Protocol defines **trafficking** as¹:

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.

People smuggling:

Is defined in the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air as: 'The procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a state Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.'²

Facilitator:

Is a person or group that makes the necessary legal or illegal arrangements for another person or group to move within or across national borders for a one-time fee³.

Traffickers:

Are all persons involved in the recruiting of a child/woman, in the transport and facilitation of the movement of the child/woman who through violence, threat of violence, abuse of authority of actual or lawful power, of dominant position, is being taken from his/her place of living/origin⁴.

Child trafficking victim/survivor:

Refers to any person below 18 years old who had been recruited, transported, transferred, harboured or received for the purpose of exploitation even if the child has not been threatened, forced, abducted, subject to fraud, deceived, abused, sold or rent out⁵.

Reintegration:

The term reintegration in this study generally means the process of preparing for and returning the child back to his/her original family or community after s/he has lived in an NGO shelter for a period of time.

¹ UNIAP, Draft document, A Joint Program Framework for Addressing Human Trafficking in Cambodia, p 4.

² Brian Iselin and Malanie Adams, April 2003, p 2.

³ Sonia Margallo and Lath Poch, Jan 2002, p 31.

⁴ Social Development Research and Consultancy, IOM, Situation of Cambodian Victims of Trafficking in Vietnam and Their Return to Cambodia, p. 2.

⁵ Social Development Research and Consultancy, IOM, Nov 2002, p. 9.

Reintegration Assistance:

The provision of assistance including job training, health care, educational support, food, and income generation support to ensure that the reintegrated child is able to assimilate into the original family/community. Reintegration support is given before and/or during the time the child is in the process of being reintegrated. Assistance should also prevent stigmatization.

Post-Reintegration Support/Assistance:

Support which includes follow-up visits, job placements, consultations, and making necessary referral services to the reintegrated child over a particular period of time after s/he has returned to the family or community of origin.

Repatriation:

Is the orderly return of a foreign national to his or her country of origin. In this study repatriation will refer to the orderly return of Cambodians from Thailand into Cambodia⁶.

Deportation:

Is an official act of removing a foreign national (or unwanted person) to another country⁷.

⁶ Sonia Margallo and Lath Poch, Jan 2002, p 31.

⁷ Allan Beesey, IOM, Sept 2003, p. 24.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study aims to increase understanding on the current situation of children who are former victims of trafficking who have been reintegrated. The emphasis is on their situation mainly in terms of wellbeing, livelihood, challenges, feelings, future prospects, and key factors that have enabled them to remain with their families. The findings will help concerned NGOs to reflect on their current practices so that they are able to devise more effective operational strategies to ensure improved services are provided for their end beneficiaries- child trafficking survivors.

The research generated qualitative data using the following methodology: a desk study, semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and in-depth interviews. In total, 17 children (8 girls) who are former victims of trafficking aged from 13-18 living in two provinces were interviewed. These children were selected from the main lists provided by 4 NGOs working to assist trafficking survivors. An additional 7 mothers of these children were also interviewed.

None of the children interviewed were trafficked for sexual exploitation. Most worked as flower sellers and beggars. Trafficking and smuggling of the children was precipitated by various circumstances including poverty, debt, lack of economic opportunity, optimistic accounts of other returnees, and deception by traffickers. On their return to Cambodia, they spent between 3 months to approximately 3 years living in centres. Most (13) of them were not reintegrated based on recognized procedures in which pre-reintegration assistance had been given.

Some children claimed to have suffered from physical abuse committed either by shelter staff or other children. None of the children said that they had been sexually abused whilst living in the centres. Children were found to have divided opinions with regard to their feelings about home and about the centre. About half of them are happier at home than at the centre.

Most of the children found nearly all of the services that they received in the centre useful. Distinct services received contributed differently to their lives after reintegration. There are some tangible and intangible impacts that the centres had made on the children and their families. The ability to make use of what has been provided by the centres, and to make ends meet from the acquired skills helped many of them to earn money once they were at home. The education provided by the centres seems to have had a role in protecting them from re-trafficking and re-smuggling. The children appear to be productive in the family and the community.

It does not seem that the children experienced discrimination from their families, community, or peers. They did not face major social challenges after reintegration. For many (9) of them the ability to earn money to support themselves or/and family at the beginning of the reintegration was the main challenge. A few children found it hard to re-establish bonds with peers and the community after returning.

Children were found to have received limited assistance both during and after reintegration. Common reintegration support provided to them by the respective NGOs were: food aid for a period of time, educational assistance including school registration and provision of school materials, and job placement assistance.

However, follow-up visits were generally the only assistance the children received after returning home.

Three factors that contributed to the reintegrated children remaining with the family were identified. They were: Parents' love towards them; absence of the intention of their guardians to send them back to Thailand; and their personal desire to pursue study or build their own future using the acquired skills.

Three children wanted NGOs to continue supporting them in their education. Three children requested that NGOs help them to set up new or expand existing businesses. One child would like the NGO to help his family enlarge or renovate their house. Mothers expressed the need for continued NGOs' support when children get sick at home. Whilst some do not see the value of NGOs' visits, there are at the same time some children and mothers who propose that the NGOs keep visiting them. It makes them feel that there are people who care about their livelihood and living conditions.

Several children proposed that the centres should have more sports facilities, playgrounds, toys, a garden, and enough bedding such as pillows and blankets for everyone.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Centres should raise children's awareness on trafficking issues whilst children are in the centre. This would help to prevent them from being tricked/deceived to go to Thailand or becoming victims of re-trafficking or re-smuggling.
- ✓ Centres should develop a clear policy or operational guidelines for reintegration and post-reintegration support. The guidelines should clearly define the assistance and/or processes the centre would implement during the pre-reintegration, reintegration, and post-reintegration phases.
- ✓ Centres should devise a case management plan for individual child's future plans with the child's active participation.
- ✓ The respective NGO should mobilize pertinent local and available resources provided by NGOs or other agencies to ensure better support to the children after reintegration.
- ✓ Centres should improve facilities and materials e.g. garden, playground, toys, and sport facilities which are appropriate according to children's age, sex, and conditions. Additionally, the sheltered children should be allowed to have sufficient time for doing things they wish to, especially for play.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Cambodia is seen as a source, destination, and transit country for trafficked migrants. Poverty, geographical location, poor law enforcement, lack of economic opportunity, poor infrastructure, and deeply-rooted corruption provide an ideal environment for traffickers. Cambodian women and children are trafficked within and across national borders not only for sex industry, but also for different slavery-like forms of labour exploitation such as begging, selling flowers, construction, domestic work, seasonal farming, factory work, and the fishing industry. In 2002, it was estimated that there are between 88,000-100,000 irregular Cambodian migrants working in an exploitative conditions in Thailand, and there are at least 500 Cambodian children living and working on the streets of Bangkok (IOM-Cambodia 2002).

IOM's Long-Term Recovery and Reintegration Assistance to Trafficked Women and Children Project (The Long-Term Project) works in partnership with 10 partner NGOs⁸ who are the project's implementing agencies. These partner NGOs are involved in different activities aimed at redressing and ameliorating the situation of women and children who are former victims of trafficking. Recovery, reintegration, and post-reintegration support to victims of trafficking to some extent are being provided by most of these NGOs.

Reintegration of former victims of trafficking is generally done after the latter have spent a period of time living and receiving services provided by the respective NGO. The reintegrated victims usually received various levels of post-reintegration assistance which varied from one NGO to another depending on its resources and policy. These were provided for a specific period of time and included activities such as counselling, educational support, and support for income generation activities.

The aim of reintegration is to assimilate the former victim of trafficking into his/her own family or community so that s/he can again become a part of the family and the community. Most of these NGOs have a policy to make regular follow-up visits to the reintegrated children for a period of one year before closing the case⁹. A survey by IOM in 2002 showed that 67% of reintegrations ended in success whereas 33% of reintegrations failed [the reintegrated children were re-trafficked] (Margallo, S. and Lath, P. 2002:92).

To date, there is no research which has looked specifically at the post-reintegration situation of former child victims of trafficking. A better understanding of their situation makes it possible to assess the effectiveness of the recovery and reintegration assistance provided by NGOs. Concerned NGOs may see the research findings as important feedback on their existing operation and practices, and learn from the

⁸ COSECAM, DNT-PNH, KNK, ARM, SKO, PPS, MPK, KMR, PTD-PP, and DNT-PP.

⁹ Closing Case here means stop following up the reintegrated child. Case Management Manual (CMM) which is the manual developed by IOM and is being used widely by its partner NGOs and also by The Coordination and Documentation Center of MOSVY lays out some guidelines for case closure. Generally, case closure can be made when: (a) the child continues to stay in place where s/he is reintegrated to such as family, community, or long-term shelter beyond 1 year period; (b) the child for whatever reason died; (c) the entire family moved to somewhere else, and can not be traced; (d) the child for whatever reasons ran away from the shelter or family/community.

findings to improve operational strategies and ensure an enhanced impact on their end beneficiaries- former victims of trafficking.

In this regard, the research aims to increase understanding on the current situation of children who are former victims of trafficking who have been reintegrated. The study looks specifically at their situation mainly in terms of wellbeing, livelihood, challenges, feelings, future prospects, and identifies the key factors that have enabled them to remain with their families.

II. METHODOLOGY:

2.1 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of the situation of former victims of trafficking after reunification either with their families or community of origin. This research will help to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of NGOs' operation and efforts to redress the situation of trafficking survivors. The findings to some extent will enable NGOs to reflect on their current operation and practices and identify issues that need to be addressed for ensuring better impacts on the end beneficiaries. The study explores:

- a) Children's situation when in the centres,
- b) Children's feelings about their current and past situation,
- c) Children's physical and emotional wellbeing,
- d) Current living conditions in terms of education, income generation activity, and life after reintegration,
- e) Impacts of the services received on their livelihood,
- f) Challenges encountered following reintegration,
- g) Factors enabling reintegrated children to remain with the family and their future plans,
- h) Observations on the centres where they used to stay,
- i) Assistance children would like from the NGOs, and
- j) Reintegration and post reintegration support actually received.

2.2 Research Methodology

A literature review was conducted prior to commencing the research to identify gaps in current knowledge. A review of the literature also served as a point of comparison for the findings of this study.

Following the literature review, field research was conducted during December 2005 and January 2006 in order to collect primary data by the researcher accompanied by relevant NGO staff.

Semi-Structured Interviews were used to generate primary and in-depth qualitative data. A list of open-ended questions was prepared prior to the interviews (See appendix A and B). Probing questions were asked during the interviews when some interesting issues unfolded in order to elicit qualitatively better responses and gain more understanding. Interviews were conducted in Khmer- the language of both the interviewer and interviewees. Hence language was not a limitation.

A tape-recorder was used with the prior consent from the interviewees for optimizing the interviewing time, and allowed more interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. Later, the recording was transcribed and stored on a computer.

2.3 Sample selection and sample size

Initially, it was planned to interview 20 former child victims of trafficking who had been reintegrated (half being girls). Four partner NGOs namely MPK, KMR, KNK, and DNT-PP were requested to provide a list of reintegrated children who met the following criteria:

- Reintegration occurred between 2003 and 2005
- Current age of between 12 and 18 years
- Resident in Banteay Mean Chey or Battambang provinces¹⁰.

From the lists, 31 children were found to meet the selection criteria. From this group, the researcher randomly sampled 20 children. When it came to actual selection during the field research, only 17 out of all the 31 children listed could be found and interviewed (9 were boys and 8 were girls). This means that the intention to select children randomly and purposively was not feasible. Thus, the researcher decided to interview any children of the 31 identified who could be found. Therefore the sample size was limited.

The children interviewed had been trafficked or smuggled across the national border to Thailand, and later on found themselves working in servitude or exploitative situations¹¹.

It was planned to interview children's guardians preferably their parents to gain more insights into the children's situation. However, only 7 mothers of the children were

¹⁰ 78.10 percent of trafficked children returned from Thailand originate from these two provinces. Coordination and Documentation Centre, MOSVY, Database Report for the period from 01st July 2004 to 31st March 2005, p 7.

¹¹ These children were either repatriated or deported by Thai authority.

available for interview. Thus the findings in this research are based on the interview with 17 children and 7 mothers (See appendix C).

2.4 Constraints and limitations

The research encountered a number of constraints. First of all, it was very difficult to identify the whereabouts of the children as they and their families are very mobile. There were many cases (14) where the families moved to unknown places or the children themselves went away from the original family to live or work elsewhere. Even when the whereabouts of the children was known it was sometimes still difficult to meet and invite them to be interviewed because they had to go to work, to school, or somewhere else during the daytime.

The research was time consuming. Sometimes, the researcher had to travel a long distance to meet the child and family only to find upon arrival at the destination that the child and/or the family had relocated. Consequently, this affected the sample size and undermined the study's ability to generalize with confidence.

On occasions, it was difficult to conduct the interviews confidentially. Generally, the places where the children live were very crowded, small, and noisy. However, the researcher identified the most peaceful place possible to conduct the interviews to ensure confidentiality.

2.5 Lessons learnt

The time most of the children were available was during meal times and after 5pm as most of them were busy during the day time. The timing of the interview also needed to minimize the infringement on the time that interviewees usually spent earning an income.

Making appointments for interviews well in advance did not seem to work with this type of mobile population. Making appointments half a day or one day in advance seemed to work best.

Using a tape-recorder during the interview was very helpful as it optimized the interview time, allowed for more interaction between the interviewee and interviewer, and recorded everything interviewee said during the interview. However, it should only be used with consent of the interviewee, and it is crucial to explain to the interviewee the objectives of using the tape-recorder before going ahead.

The staff of respective NGOs that accompanied the researcher should be requested not to be present during the interviews. This would allow for more honest communication between interviewee and interviewer and for more reliable responses.

III. FINDINGS:

3.1 Overview of children and family situation:

Seventeen children (8 girls) aged from 13-18 with an average age of 16 years old were interviewed. These children are either former victims of trafficking or victims of cross-border smuggling. They had either been repatriated or deported by the Thai authorities before being referred to NGO shelters. In Thailand they worked as: beggars, flower sellers, construction workers, domestic workers, and factory workers. These children were either trafficked or smuggled by their own relatives, neighbours, or strangers.

Children's work in Thailand	Number
Selling flowers	7
Selling flower and chewing gum	1
Begging	3
Construction work	2
Factory work	2
Domestic work	1
Babysitting	1
Total	17 children

Most were reintegrated back into their families of origin. Ten children were reintegrated with their biological parents; 6 were reintegrated with their widowed/divorced mothers; and 1 lived independently as her parents could not be traced. The children spent between 3 months to nearly 3 years living in shelters before reintegration. Some of them lived in more than one shelter over the course of their stay in alternative care. For example, some children were transferred from short-term to long-term residential care shelters. Several children were transferred from Battambang Reception Centre¹² (BRC) to KMR or MPK. A few of these children were then transferred to KNK for long term shelter care.

All children are from impoverished, fragile, and dysfunctional families. Almost half of them have parents who are divorced, died, or have disappeared for unknown reasons. The children ended up living either with mothers who have second husbands or single mothers with several children to care for. One girl has not seen her parents for many years, and does not know their whereabouts.

None of the children's families seem to have regular and/or profitable income generation activities. Most of them have been making ends meet by doing day labour usually on the Thai side of border. Some children's parents returned home everyday whilst others only returned home occasionally. The families that returned home each day work in border areas in Thailand as plantation workers, cart pushers, and food sellers. The families that return home occasionally work further in Thailand, particularly Bangkok and other major Thai cities as garbage collectors, construction workers, and vegetable/fruit sellers. Some parents work in Cambodia as motor taxi drivers, casual labourers, and vegetable/fruit/food sellers at markets. Some parents

¹² A reception centre based in Battambang province under the operation and support from IOM. This centre was closed in 2004

were found to do nothing but to stay at home waiting for money remitted from their other children who are working in Thailand.

Mostly, the families were not living in decent conditions. They live in shacks or small houses which are very small and roofed with palm-tree leaves or thatch which offers minimal protection from sunlight, rain, and wind. Some houses were built directly on the ground with earthen floors, and some were built on stumps above the ground with bamboo floors. A number of families did not own land and their house were located on a rented plot of land. The houses were generally crowded and unsanitary. Most of the children's families did not have or had limited access to electricity and clean water.



A shack of an interviewed family living in Kamreang district, Battambang province. The family bought the shack with 50 U.S dollars, but the shack itself is located on rented land. The family has to pay around 5\$ a month for the rent. In the house there was only one bed where a widowed mother and all her 3 children sleep. On average she earned \$2.5 a day from carting goods across the border. The child earned another \$1.25 a day by assisting a Thai vendor. So, the family lived with a daily income of \$3.75.

3.2 Background information on trafficking:

Different types of trafficker were identified. However, generally the children had been trafficked or smuggled across the border to Thailand by people who they or their families knew or sometimes did not know at all. Traffickers and smugglers ranged from the children's family, relatives, neighbours, to strangers. Trafficking and smuggling of the children was precipitated by various circumstances including poverty¹³, debt, lack of economic opportunity, optimistic account of other returnees, and deception by traffickers. The major destinations where children were trafficked or smuggled to were Bangkok and Pattaya. Virtually all the children worked in Thailand for less than 3 months in a single trip before being arrested by the Thai police.

Not all trafficked children were abused either mentally or physically whilst working in Thailand. Indeed, some children were well treated by traffickers including having enough time to sleep and enjoy themselves before and after working hours. Whilst a few reported non-abusive situations, many did not. A majority of children suffered either physical or psychological abuse committed by their eventual traffickers or supervisors which included scolding, bullying, and beatings.

Normally children were forced to sell 50 to 1,000 flowers a day depending on the trafficker, and each flower cost 2,000 Riels (20 Thai Baht). They worked an average of 8.75 hours a day especially during night time. In order to attain the traffickers' target and avoid a beating, some children resorted to strategies to both persuade the potential customers to buy their products or to have enough money for the traffickers. In addition to working hard, some of them provided massages to prospective customers so as to increase chance of buying. One girl during the interview said she heard some children decided to have sex with foreigners in order to have enough money for their traffickers.

All children ended their work in Thailand due to being apprehended. Only 3 out of 17 children were kept in Thai centre for a period of time before being sent back to Cambodia. All children after coming back either through repatriation or deportation were referred to NGO shelter for support.

3.3 Children's situation when in the centres:

Whilst some children (6) suffered from physical abuse either by centre staff or their peers, none of them reported having suffered from sexual abuse committed either by staff or other children during their time in the shelter. This is consistent with the recent research by Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) under IOM's support¹⁴. Some children suffered both from direct and indirect physical/psychological abuse from some centre staff. A girl confided to the researcher

¹³ A research commissioned by IOM in 2002 concluded that whilst poverty was the characteristic shared by larger majority to trafficking victims' families, it was not being seen as the main factor for trafficking. For more detail see Sonia, M & Lath, P (2002:78).

¹⁴ Research on 'The Psychosocial Wellbeing of Repatriated Children who Have Been the Victims of Trafficking' conducted by TPO in September 2005 and under IOM's supported found that children generally suffered from physical abuse in centres, but none of them were sexually abused. See the report on page 22.

that she was beaten with a stick by a house parent for making a minor mistake. Beatings happened normally during weekends. Two children suffered from indirect physical abuse such as punishment. They said they were punished by centre staff by being made to clear one square meter of grass respectively. A girl angrily said that staff had insulted her.

Aside from abuse by staff, some children (4) also suffered from abuse committed by other children in the centre especially the older ones. Four children said they were beaten by older children especially after they just arrived at the centre. Sadly, it was found that most of these children later repeated the behaviour by beating the younger children who arrived in the same shelter. The reasons for beating were either because these younger children did not listen to them or made them annoyed. Despite the abuse, there did not seem to be a link between such physical abuse and children's decision to leave or runaway from the centre. Rather boredom and missing home seemed to be the main reasons leading to running away.

No children reported suffering sexual abuse or harassment from either centre staff or other children. However, having consensual sexual relationship among children living in the same centre is something that requires further exploration¹⁵. A girl who was interviewed decided to leave the centre and get married with a boy who had lived in the same centre. Whilst there is no evidence here, sexual relations between centre children is an issue that would be useful to explore in further research.

A large majority of the children (16) liked the centre where they had lived in terms of staff, facilities, and treatment. Some of them felt that the assistance provided by the centre was even better than that of their own families. Compared to their own houses, the centres' facilities namely accommodation and playground were much better. In the centre, they also had enough to eat. Despite this, a girl who ran away from the centre seemed to have a very negative view of the centre where she had stayed. She said she did not have enough to eat whilst staying in the centre. She claimed staff were very rude and sometimes said bad words towards her. She protested that sleeping area was small and inadequate, and she had to share pillow, net, and blanket with another girl.

Fifteen children and all mothers interviewed expressed satisfaction towards the assistance/service rendered to their children during the time the children were in the care of the shelter. Despite the high level of satisfaction, there were at the same time complaints from a few children. They said because the centre had so many activities that they found living there tiresome. This was simply because they did not have enough free time to play or to do thing they wanted to do personally. They said they were required to water the garden or crops grown in the centre. They did not want to do this, but they had to comply with the rules.

¹⁵ It should be noted that all the 4 NGOs involved in this research are sheltering both boys and girls.

3.4 Children's feelings about their current and past situation:

Regardless of the length of time that they lived in the shelter, the children developed certain levels of relationship and bonds with shelter residents and staff. Most children (16) said they liked all their peers living in the centres. They missed them after reintegration. Some of them expressed a desire to have a chance to visit the centre and their friends in the future. A boy said that he was striving to save some money so as to be able to visit his friends at the centre. Interestingly, it was noted that all children who used to be beaten by the older children whilst living in the centre noted that they liked only children of their own age or the younger children. They did not like the older children as they [older children] used to beat them.

Opinion was divided when asked whether they were happier when living at centre or at home. Nearly half of the children said they were happier when living at home compared with at the centre. For them, living in centre was boring whereas living at home provided them opportunities to: (1) reunite with families and community; (2) contribute something such as income, taking care of young siblings, and doing household chores for the family; (3) be in a safer environment where they are free from abuse committed by others including older children; and lastly (4) share ups and downs with all the family members.

A boy said "At home I am happier since I can be with my siblings and parents. No matter how poor we are, it is always better to stay at home."

Another girl expressed her feeling that "For me, I am very happy both at the centre and at home. Nevertheless, I need to think of my family. Whenever, I had good food whilst living in centre, I thought of my family especially my younger siblings. They do not have as good food as I do. I feel it is better to share happiness and misery with the family."

A little more than half of the children said they were happier at the centre than at home. These children preferred to live in a centre than at home. The reasons were being: (1) having good and sufficient food to eat; (2) caring only about studying and do not have to care about making ends meet; (3) having more friends; (4) having someone who takes good care of them; and lastly (5) having chances to go for a walk or visit some places during the weekends or holidays. Five of these children expressed an intention to return to the shelter if they could. A girl said:

"Living at centre and at home is much different. Whilst I was in the centre I did not have to care about anything, but going to school. Now I am at home. I have to care about many things, and among them food and earning money are the most important things."

The division of children's opinion regarding their feeling towards living at home and at centre raised a significant question vis-à-vis centre conditions. There has been a myth among people involved in providing shelter care to children that it would be very difficult to reintegrate children who used to live in the centre that has good conditions in terms of facilities, food, accommodation, and treatment. The finding in this research to a certain extent dispels this assumption. A good centre's conditions alone may not have enough influence on the children's decision to stay or to leave the

shelter. Farrington (2002:54-55) identified a number of barriers to successful reintegration which included:

1. The involvement of family members in trafficking;
2. Debts yet to be paid to traffickers/usurer;
3. Inability of family to meet the basic need of the children;
4. Community's level of support structures to assist family in difficulty;
5. Family's refusal to sign contract to protect the child and to adhere to conditions of the contract.

None of the aforementioned barriers to successful reintegration referred to good centre conditions. Yet, more than half of the children in this research who expressed satisfaction and desire to go back to centre if possible were reintegrated at least around a year by the time the interviews were conducted. This created an assumption that regardless of the centres' condition and their desire to go back to the centre, they had been reintegrated and have been living with their families. In addition to this, there were at the same time almost half of the children who for some reasons prefer to be with their families regardless of the shelter conditions. There is a need for more research on the relationship between a centre's condition and barriers to reintegration so as to validate this as a key factor.

There was, at the same time, mixed feeling among children's mothers who were interviewed regarding the time children lived at centre and at home. Nearly all the mothers interviewed said that on one hand they want their children to live in the centre because the children can study and would have someone who takes good care of them, but on the other hand they said that it is also good to have their children back home. The children could contribute to family income, do some household chores, and look after younger siblings.

A mother of a child said that "When the child returned I asked him to go back to the centre, but he did not agree. I want him to live in the centre so that he could get an education. However, he has been making some money for the family since his return. He is a great help to the family."

Similarly, another mother of a child said that "At the beginning I did not want to accept the child when the NGO sent him back. I wanted him to stay in the centre because he could study and would be much obedient than when he is at home. Now he is less obedient to me but he can help me fetch water, take care of his younger siblings, and on weekends do some work towards the family's income."

3.5 Children's physical and emotional wellbeing:

Based on observations, none of the children seemed to have serious psychological problems. All the children were able to communicate and interact with others including the researcher quite well. They did not show any signs of having psychological problem that needed attention. However, this is not to suggest that the researcher's observations are valid because the researcher is not a child psychologist. It is worth noting that TPO's research on 87 trafficked children from 6 centres found that 40.3% had emotional problems; 19.4% had conduct/behavioural problems; 12.5% had difficulties with peers; and 4.2% had hyperactivity/lack of attention (TPO, 2005:25).

Apart from psychological problems, it was noted that virtually all (14) of the children and mothers who were interviewed did not complain about serious physical health problems relating to the children¹⁶. The common health problems noticed were stunted growth, headaches, and skin diseases. Living in poverty along with poor hygienic environment may be the contributing factors to these problems. Three girls seemed to have problems which required medical attention. One girl complained of constant headaches. Another girl said she has goitre but still at a very early stage. Mother of a girl noted that her daughter seems to have urinary problem resulting in her urinating much more often than usual.

No matter how serious their health problems were, the children were not being supported by the respective NGO or other NGOs working in their community to access health care. Moreover, three girls who seemed to have rather serious physical health problems were not being referred to an appropriate health facility by their families. This meant that they were not being provided with any medical assistance for the problems they were having. Children who did not seem to have serious health problems generally received home treatment in which their guardian just provided medicines, without proper diagnosis or prescription.

In general the children were pleased with the medical assistance provided to them whilst living in the centre. They said their families could not afford to offer them as a good medical service as the centre did.

A girl said that "When I got sick whilst living in the centre, the centre sent me to a clinic or hospital for treatment. When I had just a minor problem such as a headache and dizziness, I got medicines at the centre. Now that I am at home, I do not receive what I used to receive. My mother just buys medicines from the drug store and gives to me."

Another girl has a rather different account. She said that "I live and work at the garment workshop. I earned approximately 5,000 Riels¹⁷ a day. I spent between 1,000 to 2,000 Riels per day on food. I do not have lots of savings. When I get sick for example a headache, I have to think whether I should buy medicine or endure the headache until it has gone away by itself. If I have to buy medicine then I go to pharmacy by my self."

¹⁶ It is worth noting that the researcher is not a physician. Hence, the finding is mainly based on my observation and complaints made by the children and/or their mothers.

¹⁷ Riel is Cambodian currency, and generally 4,000 Riels is equivalent to 1 U.S. dollar.



Pulling wooden carts loaded with people or/and goods back and forth across border to Thailand is one of main income sources for poor people in Poipet commune, Or Chrov district, Banteay Mean Chhey province.

3.6 Current living conditions- education, income generation activities, life after reintegration:

Whilst living in the centre, the needy children received various assistance both common and specific, based on the children's choices and conditions. Typically, children received accommodation, food, clothes, hygiene supplies, formal/informal education, and other materials for their basic needs. On top of these, there were children who had received vocational training particularly sewing, English language, vegetable growing, circus skills, drawing, and hairdressing. It was noticed that only children who were above 15 years old and had enjoyed a longer stay in the centre had been sent for vocational training. In reverse, children who had a short stay in the shelter (less than 3 months) did not receive such vocational training and even formal education at school.

A large number of the children found most of the services they received in the centre useful and the services received contributed differently to their lives after reintegration. Eight out of 17 children were pursuing study after they left the centre. Four out of 5 children who had completed vocational training (sewing and hairdressing) were working at a sewing workshop and operating hairdressing shop respectively. The ability to make use of what was provided by the centre, and to make ends meet from the training received to some extent had positive results for their livelihood status.

It was also noted that the 8 children who were pursuing studies were from families that did not really need their financial contribution. Their families to some extent were able to support their education. Thus they were not required to generate income for the family. However, some of these children (3 out of 8) also worked especially during weekends and during school vacations to make money both for themselves and

their families. These children were generally hired to do casual agricultural work and earned between 5,000 to 10,000 Riels a day.

Not all children found the services received useful after reintegration. Nine out of 17 reintegrated children interviewed were either discontinuing school or never went to school at all after reintegration. These children were particularly those who are now able to earn money for the family. Out of the 9 children who had discontinued school, 4 were children who were able to live off the skills (sewing and hairdressing) acquired during their time at the centre. The other five had completely discontinued schooling, and 4 of them were selling their labour for survival.

Among the five, one boy was working as a worker on a rubber plantation on the Thai side of the border. He travelled to work daily with his parents, earning between 8,000-10,000 Riels a day. Another boy was working as an assistant to a Thai vendor at a Thai market. He worked from 6am to around 2pm and earned 5,000 Riels a day. Though he was free after working hours, he was not able to go to school due mainly to on-going poverty and the distance to the school. The remaining two boys who had lived in centre for 3 months and more than a year respectively were doing casual labour work which included construction, pond digging, and other labour-related work, subject to demand. They were earning between 5,000-10,000 Riels a day from such work.

A girl who had lived in the shelter for around 3 consecutive years before moving out to get married was now jobless. During her time in the centre she was sent for tailoring classes. Despite having new skills, she was still not able to make money because the respective NGO had not given her a sewing machine. By the time the research was conducted it was around 2 months after having a baby. She could not do anything except nurse her baby. She was hoping that in the next few months she would find a sewing job at a nearby market. However this would only be possible if she owned a sewing machine, otherwise she would become a daily sewing worker at a market sewing shop earning much less than if she had her own machine.

Four children had undertaken English lessons whilst living in the shelter. It was quite clear that English was not being seen as any vital need in their current lives. The work that these children were doing for survival had virtually nothing to do with speaking English. During the working hours and free time, they did not have the opportunity to practice their English which resulted in forgetting most of what they had learnt. They tended to view learning English at the centre as a waste of time. This posed a big question with regard to whether offering sheltered children English lessons as an integral part of an informal education programme is something really necessary without regard to future placements and/ or local market needs.

Furthermore there were at the same time some children who had attended informal lessons and skills including circus skills, drawing, artificial flower making, and crop growing. At the time of the interview, they did not find such trainings useful either because they did not have opportunity to put the skills into practice or because for them such skills was not applicable to their home lives. For instance, even with vegetable growing one child could not grow crops either for consumption or selling simply because there is no land for cultivating at home. Such trainings did not seem to contribute anything to their current lives and livelihood strategies.

It is widely understood that such short, informal, and mostly in-house training is being provided by many centres in addition to formal education and long-term vocational training. Such trainings are normally done during free time. Despite this, it is still necessary for the centres to best utilize the children's free time whilst they are in the centre. Moreover, there is also a need pertaining to preparing life plans or having proper case management for every individual child. The centres should balance providing children with formal education, vocational training, and additional in-house training. For example, four children had been in centre from 3 months to more than a year, and were between 15 to 16 years old by the time they were in the centre, but they had not been given vocational/skills training. Instead, they had been sent to public school to study at a very low grade. These children later on either decided to leave or run away from the centre. Today, all of them have completely discontinued school, and do day labour in support of their families.

Their situation would have been much better if the centre had had a proper case management system. For example, instead of sending them to public school at a low grade, the centre should have systematically assessed and referred them to suitable vocational/skill training. Literacy classes could have been provided during their free time especially evenings. In so doing the children would both become more literate and would have more potential skills necessary for their future, development, and improved capacity to generate income.

A lack of post reintegration support such as education and the absence of informal educational services available in the children's local area played a significant role in forcing children to discontinue school following reintegration. In this research, we found that there were many cases where the respective NGOs stopped supporting the children completely including providing education after reintegration. For many of the children's families, the ability to register children at school and to support them for schooling was very limited. Though some families understood the value of education, they did not have the resources necessary to support the children. Adding to this, generally no informal education was available in the area close to where the children lived. Without this, the only option left for the children who wanted to continue schooling was to attend public school which was in general located far away from their homes. Even if they could, there were numerous challenges that they have to cope with especially the fact that most of them were already mature but with low levels of education. As a result, they found themselves uncomfortable studying with classmates who were much younger than themselves.



3.7 Impacts of the services received on the children's livelihood:

The NGOs' assistance had some positive impacts directly on the children and indirectly on their families. Virtually all the children benefited from the NGOs' services in a number of ways. The ability to pursue studies or being (semi) literate after reintegration were perceived to be the main benefits for most of the children. Also, almost one third of the children (4) were making a living on the skills provided by the centres. These children were at least able to support themselves, if not their families. This also helped to relieve the family's burden so that the family could put more efforts into supporting other children. All mothers interviewed to some extent expressed their satisfaction and gratitude towards the centres for having taken care of their children, at least for a short period of time. Especially as whilst children were under NGOs' support, the families could offer more care and support to their other children.

One potential result of the NGOs' assistance is a reduction of the risk of re-trafficking or re-smuggling. It is possible that once the children are able to go to school, to generate an income at least to support themselves, and/or enjoyed increasing literacy they may lose the desire to go back to Thailand. Further to this, their parents may not want to send them back again to Thailand. Research has shown that even a basic education makes children significantly less vulnerable to becoming prey to the deception of others including traffickers (Sok, S.O. n.d.). With some education they may be in a better position to protect themselves from traffickers due to their ability to think more freely and critically. As economic factors play a key role in trafficking, the ability to make ends meet in the local area could contribute greatly to ending irregular migration, or avoid the risk of being re-trafficked.

It was observed during the interviews that all of these children seemed to be good/productive children in the family and in the community. They did demonstrate affection towards their siblings and parents, and were keen to contribute to the family's development. None of them seemed to be involved in activities such as drug abuse, gambling, and gangs. Brief interviews with the children's neighbours gave the researcher a sense that these children were regarded favourably by the community or at least had never engaged in anti-social behaviour. This could to a certain extent suggest that the advice and services provided to them whilst living in the centre may have contributed to their (re) socialization within the family and the community at large.

3.8 Challenges encountered following reintegration:

There was no evidence that the children experienced discrimination either from their families, community, or peers. They said that they did not feel that they were discriminated against by people living around them. Interestingly, most of the children proudly maintained that by going to Thailand either as a result of smuggling or trafficking they were somehow considered to be *good* children by the family and the community. This is because they were able to contribute financially to the family. Indeed, some of them seemed to see themselves as heroes/heroines in the family. When asked if they were or are being discriminated by people around them, a boy said that:

"I have never been discriminated against by anybody in the community including my family and peers. Instead, they admired me because I can help make money for my family. They considered me as a model of a good child. Many children in this area are not able to contribute to their families as I did."

It is worth remembering that none of the children interviewed had been trafficked or smuggled for sexual purposes but rather for labour exploitation. Unlike victims of sexual exploitation, this finding suggests that there was no discrimination towards children who were victims of trafficking for labour exploitation. Moreover, it was observed that the communities where the children reside in were geographically close to the border. Crossing the border to Thailand either for day labour or for a long period of time appeared to be a common livelihood strategy for most of the community. As a result, the people did not see it as unusual for children to be trafficked or smuggled to Thailand. Virtually all children and mothers who were interviewed did not seem to consider the fact that children were hired or brought to work in Thailand as child trafficking and illegal. In general, they did not appear to take this type of trafficking seriously. Therefore, about half of the children were found to have been trafficked by the same or different traffickers more than once.

Despite the fact that some children did not face serious difficulties following reintegration, a number of them did encounter various problems related to finding a job; disconnectedness with family, peers, and community; and poverty in the family. Slightly more than half (9) of the children had had difficulty finding income generation activities particularly those who did not receive any skills whilst living in centre. They said at the beginning they could not find work, but later on they managed

to find some labour-related work. Another challenge for some other children, particularly those who had been away from home for a long time was the re-establishment of bonds with peers and the community people after reintegration. After a few years away from the community, they found themselves having lost contact with friends and the community. Thus they needed to spend time after returning rebuilding relationships. However, they maintained that it was not very difficult for them to do so. A girl said that:

“I have been away from the community where I used to live for a few years. The first time I came back I felt as though I had lost my friends. I forgot some friends and was not familiar with many people in the community. I had to spend time going around the community. Before long, I got to know them as before.”

Among all the children, poverty within the family remained the biggest challenge faced. All the children’s families were living off income generated from day work in the local area or in Thailand including food/fruit selling, manual labour, remittances from other children, motor taxi driving, and agricultural work. Eight out of 17 reintegrated children who were working could not earn enough money to be of much help to their families. Their daily average income was around 5,000 Riels (USD 1.2). Mostly the families were not living in decent conditions. The shacks or cottages where the families lived were typically small and roofed with palm-tree leaf or thatch that did not give much protection from sunlight, rain, and the wind. Some were built directly on the ground with earthen floors, and some were built on stumps above the ground with bamboo or wooden floors. A large number of families did not own land, and their houses were located on a rented plot of land. Most of the houses did not have proper toilets and were crowded and unsanitary and did not have or had very limited access to electricity and clean water.

3.9 Reintegration and post reintegration support received:

Thirteen children were not reintegrated based on proper or recognized procedures where appropriate assistance was provided prior to reintegration. In four instances children had run away from the shelters with friends, and returned home by themselves after a short stay in shelters. None of the children ran away alone. Three children decided not to return to the shelter during the family visit. They made up their mind on the spot to stay with the families, and did not return to the shelter with the staff resulting in unplanned reintegration. Five others were reintegrated following requests made by the children themselves or their families to send them home. A child was reintegrated involuntary by the NGO after spending 8 months in the shelter.

The children who had long histories of living in shelters were the ones who were reintegrated based on recognized procedures¹⁸. All four children who had stayed for more than a year in the shelter were reintegrated with their families after formal and informal education/training had been provided, and family assessment had been made.

¹⁸ In Cambodia today there is no shared and universally recognized definition of reintegration. Each shelter does however have a stated procedure which articulated steps that are to be taken prior to and following reintegration. For the sake of understanding, in this document, I would prefer to use the term ‘recognized/proper reintegration’ to mean the reintegration that is based on clear plan in which necessary steps have been taken to prepare the child for successful integration.

These children were found to be able to look after themselves not long after reintegration. Three of them were working at an NGO's garment workshop, and another one operated a small hairdressing shop with support both from parents and the respective NGO in terms of providing small business start-up grant and follow-up.

Overall, the children received very limited assistance during and after reintegration. At the time of reintegration, two children reported receiving food aid for a short period of time. Such food aid included rice and soy and fish sauces. One child was assisted with school registration, and provided with some educational materials. Two other children were referred to other NGOs' services for education-related assistance. Four children who had completed vocational training had either been supported for business start-up or for job placements. Eight other children had not been provided with any type of (physical) support during their reintegration.

NGO follow-up visits were the most common support many children received after reintegration. Even so, there were some children who had never been visited either by NGO staff or the staff from the District Office of Social Affairs and Youth Rehabilitation (DoSVY). During the follow-up visit, the children and family were given nothing except advice from visiting staff. Therefore some of them did not find the staff's visit useful. For some, they did not really understand the goal of the visit, and the reasons that they were being visited. Prior to reintegration the centres may not have put sufficient effort into explaining to children and families about the purpose of the follow up visits. This caused confusion, and in some cases created false expectations among the families.

There appeared to be a relation between an NGO's post-reintegration support and the reintegration status of the children. It was found that children who had undergone proper reintegration procedures tended to receive more support including regular follow-up visits from the respective NGO compared with those who had not undergone such procedures. Most children who had not been reintegrated based on recognized procedures such as those who ran away from centre; decided not to go back to the centre during family visits; asked to be sent home as soon as possible; and whose parents requested NGOs to send them back, were receiving minimal support from the respective NGO. Worse was the finding that some of them have never been visited after reintegration.

In fact all NGOs participating in this research do have a policy to make regular follow-up visits to reintegrated children at least one year before case closure. However, the research found that some children had never been visited after reintegration. The researcher explored this issue. Staff confided to the researcher that the NGO had delegated the follow-up visit task to DoSVY staff, and it was suggested that the DoSVY staff might have failed to do their job. Therefore children have not been visited as expected. Further, the NGO staff might not met their responsibilities too because they did not make regular follow-up or checked with the D/OSVY staff to make sure children were visited as planned.

Therefore, there was a lack, if not the discontinuation, of support provided by the respective NGO. None of the reintegrated children were receiving support to access basic health services. A handful of children were receiving educational support from the respective NGO in terms of school registration, school materials, and referral services to pursue further education with other NGOs. Some children were being supported with job placements. It is noteworthy that in general virtually all the children had to stand on their own feet soon after reintegration. Having the child back in the family made some families feel that they had a greater burden in supporting them. This was especially true for children who returned to education after reintegration.

Generally, very little effort has been made so far by the respective NGOs to mobilize available and relevant local resources to assure continued support to the reintegrated children. It was found that family and a limited number of NGOs were the main supporters of the children. The poor situation was exacerbated by the fact that most of the NGOs neither have a policy for post-reintegration support nor were able to offer such support to the children. Where possible, there was little practice of referring the reintegrated children to services provided by other NGOs or agencies in the children's local areas. It is important to note that there were only two cases where the reintegrated children had been referred to schools operated by other NGOs in the vicinity of their local village.



3.10 Factors enabling the children to remain with the family and their future plans:

The research identified three factors that contributed to the reintegrated children remaining with the family following reintegration. These factors were: (1) Parents' love towards them¹⁹; (2) absence of the intentions of their parents/guardians to send them back to Thailand; (3) their personal intention to pursue study or build their own future using the skills acquired during their time in the shelters.

Among these factors, parents' love towards children turned out to be the most significant factor many children referred to. A boy said that:

“Since my return, my parents have never beaten me. They let me go to school and play with other children. They stopped sending me to Thailand no matter how much the trafficker promised to them.”

When asked why the child did not go to Thailand again or leave the family, a mother of a 17 years old child said:

“At first I did not realize that my child would be beaten whilst in Thailand. I love all my children. I never beat them. After returning, he did not go any where. He knows that I love him, and therefore he does not intend to leave me. It is just like a Khmer proverb saying that [cool water makes fish stay].”

Absence of parents/guardians' intention to send the children back to Thailand was found to be the second most important factor. Children said that after reintegration their parents for some reasons did not want to send them back to Thailand again. Many of them were very happy because they did not have to go back to Thailand and some indicated that they would rather run away from the family if they were pushed to go back to Thailand.

There appeared to be some key reasons that the parents did not want to send the child again to Thailand. Firstly, because the parents realized that they had made mistakes in sending the child to Thailand the first time as the children encountered difficulties. Many of mothers interviewed regretfully said that at the beginning they were not aware that the child would be beaten or mistreated whilst in Thailand. This may have discouraged them from sending their children again. Secondly, because the parents were now able to depend on themselves or other children generate income for the family there was no need to send them again. Lastly, it could be that because the parents were deceived by the trafficker regarding child's earnings, they did not want to be cheated again.

¹⁹ KNK's research found that domestic violence and poverty in the families have grave influence on children's decision to leave the families so that they can escape both abuse and poverty in the families.