



COSECAM

# Tricked By The Trade

## Trafficked Cambodian Girls Speak Out Again

Reported by  
Diane Lawrence

May 2004dd



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Global Ministries Netherlands (KIA)  
Welfare Stamps Foundation Netherlands (SKN)

**CHILD SEX DEMAND FACTORS, A RESEARCH  
IN CAMBODIA**

**TRICKED BY THE TRADE  
TRAFFICKED CAMBODIAN GIRLS  
SPEAK OUT (II)**

**Child Participation in Planning Project**

**NGO COALITION TO ADDRESS SEXUAL  
EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN CAMBODIA  
(COSECAM)**

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## FORWARD

In March 2003 I had the privilege of helping to organise the first workshop for COSECAM which brought together 17 young Cambodian girls aged between 13 and 18 years, who had been trafficked into bars and brothels. They had been rescued and were living in childcare centres across Cambodia where they could recover and begin to make plans for their future lives. They came together to talk about what had happened to them and why.

Not surprisingly, girls who have been trafficked often feel outcasts, lacking in self-worth. As one girl said, “The girl who has been trafficked is like the moon in the sky that has no light”. So, having people interested in their views and opinions was an important experience for them. Someone valued them enough to want to hear what they had to say and to listen to them who had been through similar pain and who understood intuitively what they were saying and what they were going through.

It was to some extent also a new experience for some childcare staff who had been concerned that talking about what had happened to them could traumatise the girls again. The opposite proved to be the case: the girls felt supported and empowered by the experience, showing that, handled sensitively, this could be a helpful and therapeutic process. It also showed that these girls, many of whom were illiterate, had opinions and ideas about the management of the childcare centres and what government and others should do to help prevent trafficking.

I think back to the haunting words of one of the young women in the first workshop and from whom I took the title of the report of that workshop: “Really pity the Cambodian children, living in bad conditions, who were sold like chickens and ducks. Is this the life God provided us?”.

The second workshop described in this report shows us all again that listening to the voice of girls who have been trafficked is important: for the girls, for organizations, and for governments and the community. These girls who have survived terrible abuses are the real experts on child trafficking. They know intimately what happens inside the brothels and how girls are trapped against their will. We can learn from them and in the process, we can help them.

Sandy Hudd

## **TRICKED BY THE TRADE**

By Diane Lawrence

### **CHILD WORKSHOP, SIEM REAP, 25-28 MARCH 2004**

#### **1- INTRODUCTION**

Sexual exploitation and trafficking is an ongoing problem in Cambodia, and despite increasing national and international interest, it is apparent that more needs to be done in the area of *listening* to the *victims*.

COSECAM organised a very successful child victim consultation workshop in 2003 (Sold Like Chickens, Sandy Hudd 2003) and due to its success and the recommendations of its participants, a second workshop was organised during 2004. The aims of this second workshop were to learn more about the requirements of the victims and to gain knowledge of the offenders' methods and strategies. Previous participants would be able to share their experience and knowledge with new girls, while these participants would have an opportunity to learn and talk about their lives with other girls from similar backgrounds, within a controlled environment.

It was established during the first child victim workshop that while government agencies and civil organizations are working to stamp out the trafficking of children into brothels and prostitution, time is rarely taken to listen to the victims' opinions. Since their experiences are essential, COSECAM strives to hear their views, in order to obtain the knowledge necessary to implement a specific, tailored care and training programme.

#### **AIMS of the Workshop**

- Allow participants to share experiences and knowledge, thereby learning about others and gaining knowledge for the future.
- Discover more about the strategies of child exploitation offenders hence learning how to prevent sexual exploitation and trafficking and halt the demand for sexual exploitation.
- Learn what services victims need from NGOs.

The workshop needed very careful planning and a structured but flexible format, which would allow the participants to relax and tell their true stories and voice their real opinions.

All girls were met several times in advance by at least one member of COSECAM staff to ensure they fully understood the workshop requirements and aims before being asked if they would like to take part. All girls were interviewed in an identical manner.

An experienced moderator was recruited to moderate the workshop, who also led the 2003 workshop. Two facilitators were enlisted, one from COSECAM's staff and one caretaker from each participant's centre assured proper care for the girls. The team

members created a detailed methodology for the workshop, ensuring that serious group discussions and presentations were alternated with games, group sessions, breaks and social activities. The staff were also responsible for logistics such as the supply of nutritious meals at the girls' usual meal times and proper accommodation.

Further, the workshop required reporters who documented what the girls said and people responsible for safety; COSECAM's staff undertook tape and video recording.

Because a private and confidential environment had to be maintained at all times only women were allowed within the confines of the workshop discussions and presentations.

## **2. WHAT THE GIRLS SAID**

First, last year's participants shared their experiences. This set a good example for the new girls to follow and encouraged them to speak more freely.

It also gave more experienced girls the chance to pass on advice; they urged the group not to trust people they did not know and sometimes not even to trust family members. They all told how they were trafficked.

### **Tricked**

Kalyarn was sold by a neighbour who had promised an enticing job in a domestic restaurant in Siem Reap. The wonders of living in such a beautiful place drew her on. Instead of experiencing wonder she was sold to a Karaoke house. There she had to work very long hours and was kept behind locked doors guarded by thugs.

Pharry was promised a job in the rice shop by a woman from her province but instead was sold to a Karaoke house.

Chanthol was promised a job as a domestic servant by a neighbour. Along with 27 other villagers she travelled to Thailand, the group included 16 girls. All girls were trapped in a small dark room with only toilet water to drink before being sold to brothels.

Sokann was tortured and forced to consume drugs and wear revealing clothes before being sold to another brothel. Escape was impossible due to high security and guards. She eventually managed to send a letter to her parents who paid a ransom to the brothel owner to free her.

Chan Thoeun was offered work as a crockery seller in Battambang, instead she was sold. She was sold four times to different brothels where escape was impossible. She was rescued by her uncle and the Police.

Phala had a job collecting scrap when a woman said she could earn a higher wage in Phnom Penh. To help support her family she went with the woman. The woman tried to sell her but the brothel owner said she was too young (only 14 years). Later she was sold to a brothel in Thailand where she was forced to wash clothes and do other domestic duties for the prostitutes.

Vutha was forced to leave her job in a garment factory when a friend who was jealous attacked her. A woman who had found jobs for other girls in Phnom Penh invited her to work in Sihanouk Ville. There she was sold to a Karaoke owner and forced to work as a beer girl and offer sex to clients. The brothel owner assaulted her by slapping, kicking and using electric shocks until she gave in.

### **Rape**

Vanny was tricked by an old lady who offered her money to sing in a Karaoke Bar. Instead she was sold to a brothel. She had no experience or understanding of sex when she was raped and abused. She was unconscious for a full day. The brothel owner allowed the girls very little to eat, one apple each day so that they would not put on weight remain attractive to the clients.

### **Prison**

Chrib was promised 3000 Baht per month to work in Malaysia but when she arrived the job was in the sex trade as a Karaoke girl. She was kept locked in the dark unable to escape and hidden to avoid rescue.

However, one night she managed to escape with a friend. Dressed only in their night clothes they ran along the streets but they were in a foreign land and no-one helped them. Her friend was re-captured and taken back to the brothel. Chrib was found by a man who helped her. Returning to Cambodia required money and she needed to do sex work to gain income. One day she was arrested by the police along with the man who had helped her. She was tortured in prison and kept in terrible conditions until she was allowed to make a phone call. Eventually, she was repatriated back to Cambodia.

### **Pregnancy**

In Sinuon's case customers refused to use condoms and she had no access to the contraceptive pill.

Sinuon was abused by her parents, who got divorced and married new partners. She was beaten and had to leave home. She was sold to a brothel. She became pregnant and the brothel owner tried to force her to have an abortion. She wanted to keep the baby and managed to escape.

Later she was found and sold to another brothel. Each time when the new owner found out that she was pregnant she was sold to a new brothel. She was told that no-one would ever want her because she was pregnant. She was made to feel worthless.

Sinuon and her child have now been accepted by a centre. She took her baby to the workshop and they both look healthy.

### **Torture**

Nearly all girls told that when they refused to service customers they were forced to take drugs or were forcibly injected to make them comply.

The majority of girls told of having electric shocks, which were inflicted as punishment when they refused to work.

Some girls had to work very long hours, with scant food and no breaks, making them very ill and finally too weak to work.

The girls feared infection as the majority of customers refused to use the necessary protection.

### **Poverty**

All girls said they believed they had been victims of sexual exploitation because of vulnerability through poverty. Many told of situations where one or both parents were ill and they considered themselves responsible for their parents and siblings with very few other means of making money to feed and house the family.

Some came from homes where the parents had divorced and they were not welcomed by their respective step parents, sometimes even abused. This made them run away from home and with no-where to go they were open targets for sex traders.

### **Bondage**

Brothels have started to pay money to the sex workers' families, imitating a salary from a legal job. They do this to ensure the girl's family does not get suspicious and go looking for their relative.

Some brothels took all the money made from massage only allowing the girls money they made from sexual activity. This money was their only means of survival.

Escape was futile, because the exploitation instilled a deep fear in the girls that without re-payment of their "debt" their families and their own lives would be in danger. They also had strict security and guards to prevent workers from running away.

## **3. CURRENT SITUATION**

All of the girls are now in much safer environments; some are in the care of centres where they are provided with accommodation, education and vocational training while others have already been re-integrated back into the community and have salaried jobs.

The girls understood the acronym NGO and believed their work should include:

- Security and Protection
- Food and Accommodation
- Investigation into victims of trafficking
- Rescuing victims of trafficking
- Providing training and education for example:
  - Basic education including English
  - Vocation Training in farming and horticulture, garment production, beauty, cooking and computer skills
  - Human Rights education

- Training in social and moral values
- Teaching about hygiene, health and exercise
- Teaching and discussing how to stop trafficking and how to avoid returning to a trafficking situation.

#### 4. WHAT THE GIRLS WANTED

Ostensibly the girls were very happy with their care situation and some expressed a desire to live at their shelter for the rest of their lives. However they did think the following improvements could be made:

- **Freedom**

Avoid authoritarian management styles, high fences or being locked up like a prison. They would like the opportunity to go out for a walk or visit their families.

- **Increased Training**

A larger variety of subjects in different areas of Vocational Training.

- **Job Opportunities**

Help in finding and securing employment upon leaving the shelter.

#### 5. WHY IS THERE A DEMAND FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?

A difficult question for anyone to discuss, the main reasons given by the girls were as follows:

- Availability of pornographic videos
- Sexually explicit advertising on bill boards and television
- Increase in the drug culture
- Decline in morality in society
- Girls dressing in a provocative manner and making themselves unsafe by walking alone at night.

#### **Why did they get trafficked?**

We asked the girls why they ended up in the sex establishment. This was a long and heated discussion

In order of importance they say:

1. Poverty
2. Illiteracy
3. Domestic Violence
4. Sick Relatives

5. Corruption within the police and law enforcers
6. High availability of drugs within the country

## 6. HOW CAN WE STOP THE TRAFFICKING?

Another difficult question that the girls responded to was what society, government and families can do to avoid children being exploited. The girls said:

- Higher levels of education
- Opening more schools and sending teachers to remote provinces
- Increase the awareness of society, making girls and their families more assertive
- Monitor and place restrictions on explicit advertising
- Increase opportunities for alternative employment
- Reduce domestic violence.
- Increase the investigation into brothels and karaoke bars and arrest offenders
- Reduce corruption within the legal system and law enforcers
- Stop the flow of drugs
- Create better laws

## 7. WHAT SERVICES WOULD THEY LIKE FROM NGOs?

Another topic for debate was what services the girls would like to see available from centres and NGOs. After much discussion they gave the following answers:

- Supply of materials and a loan to enable them to open their own businesses.
- An increase in the scope of victims accepted by centres to include those suffering domestic violence from siblings as well as parents
- The opportunity to return to shelters if their situation goes into decline after re-integration.

## 8. EVALUATION OF THE WORKSHOP

Anonymous evaluations took place at the end of each day. They were asked to comment on food, accommodation and facilitation. The results showed that the girls were incredibly happy with the workshop as a whole. All the girls thought the facilitation were excellent and only a handful found the food was not to their liking.

They said they felt secure, safe and relaxed at all times in their surroundings and with the female adults involved in the workshop. They felt unashamed to tell their stories and speak out.

They enjoyed the workshop topics, feeling they had gained a lot of knowledge through discussion and meeting other girls from similar situations.

All enjoyed the visits to Angkor Wat and the Khmer Culture Village. One girl said that she never imagined she would get the chance to visit such places in her life. They felt that safety and organization during these visits was good.

## **9. CONCLUSIONS**

### **Staying at the Shelter**

The majority of girls are happy to live in their shelter. However they have a very real fear of being re-integrated too early. Some would like to be able to live at the shelter for longer than 6 months.

### **Opportunities to express their views**

They would like to get the opportunity to lobby government and people in authority about their experiences and views.

They would like the opportunity to meet with girls from other shelters again for discussions and workshops.

Clearly, trafficked girls will talk and want to talk, they possess “inside knowledge” into the world of sexual exploitation and trafficking which could help us reduce trafficking if we only take the time to listen.

### **Support during reintegration**

The girls are worried that when they return to their communities they will be forced into returning to the brothel or get raped again. They would like the NGO to continue care and investigation after re-integration plus the NGO should help them with legal problems such as arresting offenders. They need assistance with practical problems, when their family is ill and there is no food or housing.

Some girls would like the chance to earn money for themselves. For that they need a small loan and materials to start their own business.

Girls want the opportunity to find alternative employment. They need help with getting started and help with knowing how to source and secure job opportunities. They also want care and protecting when they leave the shelter. They are very afraid of being found by their exploiters and sold to a new brothel. They are also afraid to be forced back into the sex trade through poverty.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Counsellors and caretakers should continue to encourage trafficked girls to talk to shelter staff and to other victims. It is an essential part of their rehabilitation to make them realize that they are not to be blamed of what has happened to them.

NGO workers should be trained in “job placement” strategies and techniques of finding work. They should learn how to produce a curriculum vitae and how to apply for jobs and be a success at interviews. Contact should be made between businesses and the shelters informing the shelter of any new vacancies arising.

Conditions in shelters are appropriate as shown by the number of girls who wanted to stay longer in their shelter. However, a few shelters are still treating the girls like prisoners and this should stop.

Shelters are not prisons, thus locked door policies should be revised. Girls need to be able to go for a walk or meet family. They need the opportunity to practice their own religion and not be judged in their shelter environment.

We can only learn how to help and how to stop this trade if we listen to the victims. Organising future events similar to this workshop is of paramount importance when seeking ways to stay one step ahead of the exploiter.

Follow-up workshops and other “meeting opportunities” are also recommended to allow the girls to share knowledge and experience and express their views.



**APPENDIX 1****LIST OF CENTERS IN CAMBODIA APPROACHED TO PARTICIPATE**


Child Planning Workshop 25 – 28 March 2004, Siem Reap Province.

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Province</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Cambodia Women's Crisis Centre (CWCC)	SIEM REAP	063 963 276 012 715 146
CWCC	BANTEAY MEANCHEY	054 967 144 012 925 579
Children without Borders (KNK)	BATTAMBANG	053 952 759/49
HAGAR	PHNOM PENH	023 217 478
HEALTHCARE CENTRE FOR CHILDREN (HCC)	PHNOM PENH	023 212 133 012 877 975
Cambodian Centre For Protection Of Children Rights (CCPCR)	PHNOM PENH	023 880 802 012 967 385
The Cambodian Centre for protection of Children Rights (CCPCR) SHV	SIHANOUK VILLE	012 752 373
FRIENDS (MITH SAMLANH)	PHNOM PENH	023 426 748 012 852 406
Cambodia Children and Handicap Development Organization (CCHDO)	BANTEAY MEANCHEY	012 386 387 012 472 911

**APPENDIX 2****CHILD PLANNING WORKSHOP SCHEDULE PROGRAM**

25 – 28 March 2004, Siem Reap Province

DATE	ACTIVITIES	TIME	FACILITATOR
<b>Thursday 25<sup>th</sup></b>	Travel to Siem Reap Province		
	Visit Baray Teuk Thla	4:00- 6:00	Sokdeth & Mary
<b>Friday 26<sup>th</sup></b>			
<b>Morning</b>	Opening remark	8:00– 8:10	Diane
	<b><i>Introduction among children</i></b> Talk about their experiences, discuss what has happened to them. 10 Girls from last year's workshop can tell the new girls how they have progressed since their workshop last year.	8:10–11:30	Hor Phally
	Lunch and relaxation	11:30-2:00	Sovityea & Mary
<b>Afternoon</b>	Divide into three groups. Girls talk about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do the NGOs do?</li> <li>• What do they think of current NGO/GO work?</li> <li>• Why do they think there is the demand for exploitation?</li> </ul>	2:00 – 5:00	Hor Phally Sovityea Sokdeth Nhan Sakhen
	Visit Bak Kheng 's resort (sun sink)	5:00	Sokdeth & Mary
<b>Saturday 27<sup>th</sup></b>			
<b>Morning</b>	Briefing of yesterday's session	8:00 –8:30	Hor Phally
	3 group presentations	8:30 –10:00	Hor Phally
	Discussion	10:00-11:30	Hor Phally
	Lunch and relaxation	11:30-2:00	Sovityea & Mary
<b>Afternoon</b>	Big Group Discussion - (Brainstorming) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to stop the demand for sexual exploitation.</li> <li>• How can NGOs/GOs help those girls who are at risk.</li> <li>• What help would they like to see available for victims?</li> </ul>	2:00-4:00	Hor Phally
	Workshop Conclusion	4:00 – 4:30	Hor Phally
	<i>Workshop Evaluation</i>	4:30 – 5:30	Hor Phally
<b>Sunday 28<sup>th</sup></b>			
	Visit the Khmer Culture Centre	8:00– 10:00	Sokdeth & Mary
	Return back to Phnom Penh	10:00	Sokdeth

 **Organizing Committees:** John Vijghen, Tuon Vicheth, Um Rattana, Nget Sopheap