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What Happens After Chelibeti Bechbikhan: A Study of the Reintegration and Rehabilitation Process for Women who Have Been Trafficked or Sexually Exploited in Nepal

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What Happens After Chelibeti Bechbikhan
A Study of the Reintegration and Rehabilitation Process for Women who have been Trafficked or Sexually Exploited in Nepal

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”We have faced the real causes of trafficking. We were the real victims of the crime. We were the persons to be rescued. We are still subordinated and our fundamental rights are violated. We are the persons who need counselling and rehabilitation We are the persons who need to be reintegrated We are human beings that can take lessons from our past incidents. We are eager to shun our dark past at the hope of a brighter future. We need environment where we can transform ourselves. If we get the environment we would be an asset for the society rather than a liability. Only we can support ourselves. And we have the motto- Let's protect ourselves!”

SAMRAKSHAK SAMUHA NEPAL
Abstract-

When it comes to the trafficking of women, I have read many articles about the tragic stories of the trafficked. The sad turn around from returning home to returning to the brothels. The obvious next addition to this literature is how do we prevent it. Again, I have read countless articles addressing just this. What I have read much less on and what is often skipped over is the reintegration and rehabilitation process for the women who are “saved” and returned to their community. In my research, I look at the challenges that survivors face upon returning to their community. The social stigma, physical health, the law, and the mental struggle are massive challenges to successful reintegration. There are, however, many community based organizations here in Kathmandu that have arisen out of a need to see change and make a difference in the lives of women who have been affected by sexual exploitation. My research analyzes six organizations and then addresses the main components used in their rehabilitation and reintegration processes. In the end, successful reintegration requires both economic independence as well as sound mental health. My research also led me to two additional conclusions. The importance of the expressive arts in providing an outlet for survivors as well as these survivors potential to make a difference not only in future trafficking issues, but also simply within society as a whole.
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ISP Advisor Bio-

Geeta Manadhar lives here in Kathmandu and is a woman of many talents. Currently she is teaching Nepali in Thamel. In addition to this work, she also sponsors girls in high-risk communities to come to University in Kathmandu in order continue their studies. She has done extensive research collecting stories of women who have been trafficked into brothels in India and in Nepal. She is strong and works to make Nepal a better place for women to live.
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Introduction-

“Someone cannot help everybody but everybody can help someone.” These are the words that Menuka Thapa spoke to me at the Raksha Nepal office. Within the last 20 years, organizations within and around the Kathmandu Valley have popped up to handle the influx in returnee trafficked women as well as the massive growth in domestic trafficking. These organizations started by people within the community aim only to help those who have been taken advantage of with the hope that they can change at least one person’s life. I have read many stories about the trafficked and even more about the root causes of such horrible actions. What I have seen much less of is what happens to the women once they are returned to their home or taken out of a sexually exploitive situation. They do not simply disappear or return to their previous lives. These women have to begin life again but this time with the stigma that society has attached to them. Where do they go and what do they do? Who is the someone that helps them? My interest took me to many different organizations working to help reintegrate and rehabilitate women who have experienced trafficking and sexual exploitation. My time with them opened my eyes to both the harsh reality of life these women face but also the hope found in their ability to move on with their lives. Even more importantly, I found these women who have experienced so much pain to be the seeds of change in a society that is male dominated and unsympathetic to the plight of women. These organizations and the women who go to them are, in my opinion, the most effective weapons in combating cultural stigmatization and by consequence the continuation of trafficking in Nepal.

Methodology-

The methods I used for this research consisted of scholastic research but mainly interviews with different organizations and people working with issues surrounding trafficking and sexual exploitation. For scholastic research, I used my school’s online library, online sources for different organizations, and published works. This provided me with a background in both the history of trafficking as well as current trafficking trends today in Nepal. In addition, I was able to gain a theoretical understanding of what happens to women upon returning from the brothels and the work done by organizations that deal specifically with reintegration and rehabilitation.

The interviews with various organizations provided me with information on the practical application of reintegration and rehabilitation techniques. I spoke with representatives from seven different organizations all working in the field of reintegration and rehabilitation. The organizations that I met with were Maiti Nepal, Beauty for Ashes, Change Nepal, Raksha Nepal, SASANE, the Alliance Against the Trafficking in Women and Children in Nepal Gramin Mahila Srijansil Samuha, and SASANE. While working with SASANE I was able to use the system of a focus group as well. This allowed me preliminary contact with women who have been trafficked. In addition to the organizations, I talked with other individuals working in this same field such as a psychologist and a law student. The interviews provided me with actual accounts from Nepali people about their opinions and views on reintegration and rehabilitation and the major challenges that they face. The
questions that I asked included- what are the major challenges that returnee trafficked women face, what techniques are used to facilitate reintegration, what is meant by rehabilitation, what are the success and failures, and what challenges do the organizations face. I also used the method of participant observation. It is amazing what one can gather simply by observing behavior and actions of individuals.

A Brief Look at Trafficking Trends in Nepal-

In order to properly discuss reintegration and rehabilitation of trafficked women there must be a preliminary understanding of trafficking in Nepal. First, is it would be important to have a working definition for trafficking so that it is easier to understand the reintegration and rehabilitation process. While I will provide the UN definition, I recognize that there are many different variations on how individuals and NGOs working in the field define trafficking. The UN definition, however, provides a basic conceptual understanding of what trafficking is.

Trafficking is “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” (Chaulagai).

It must be understood that trafficking does not have to be simply for sex slavery. Trafficking includes issues like forced labour in dance bars, circuses, and domestic work. (Gurung). The Alliance Against the Trafficking in Women and Children in Nepal also works incredibly hard to distinguish trafficking and prostitution with conceptual clarity. Their reason for this distinction is that as an organization, AATWIN works at the policy level which requires such a distinction. However, for the purpose of my study it is important to understand that most sex providers including those involved in forced or self-imposed prostitution encounter at some point similar forms of exploitation and violence (Wickham). Similarly, they all face the same social stigmas. The same can be said for those women involved in forced labor. In fact, a major problem women who are trafficked to Gulf countries face upon returning to Nepal is the citizenship of the children that they conceive abroad and then try to bring back (Gurung). The use of sex is embedded in most forms of trafficking and the result usually leads to exploitation against the women involved. I simply wish to analyze rehabilitation and reintegration of women who have been involved in sexual abuse and exploitation as most face the same types of challenges. The majority of my work will involve trafficking survivors because the greater part of the organizations that I worked with dealt specifically with this issue.

Previously, the sex trade industry focused around sending women and girls to brothels in India. Places like Mumbai, Calcutta, and Delhi are extreme hot spots for women who are being trafficked. The open border between India and Nepal make migration extremely easy for traffickers to cross the border and extremely hard for organizations to
monitor who comes in and who leaves. It would be incorrect to say that India is not still an important hub of trafficking from Nepal. At SASANE I was shown pictures of 12 girls who had just been taken from a brothel in Calcutta and returned to Nepal. It would be incorrect, however, to state that India is still the most important hub of trafficking today. In terms of external trafficking there has been a major shift from India to the Gulf countries as well as China. This shift has taken place within the last 3 to 4 years (Dixit). Gulf Countries are one of the biggest industries in terms of trafficking in labor from Nepal (Maiti). Relations with China allow Nepali citizens single day passes to visit Lhasa. Traffickers will take the women through with fake passports and traffic them up through Beijing. It is all too easy to enter with the girls and return without them (Thapa Maya). The most impressive transition of trafficking in Nepal lies in the massive explosion of internal trafficking. One factor that has contributed to this explosion is the development of roads connecting cities with rural areas. Restaurants have popped up all along the sides of these roads and many of them house at least one woman who services men as they pass by (Dixit). Another large factor that has contributed to an increase in internal trafficking is the armed conflict between the Maoists and the Nepalese Royal Military. In a survey taken by Raksha Nepal of 200 sexually exploited women in Thamel, 57.5% of the respondents were displaced by the armed conflict. During the war, many women and children fled the rural areas due to either insecurity or the death of their parents or husband. They migrated to the major cities with the hope of finding a job. The result was that many women and children were taken advantage of when they were most vulnerable and trafficked to brothels, massage parlors, bars, or restaurants in Kathmandu (Thapa). While many people have told me that the trafficking problem in Nepal has decreased since the People’s War, it would seem that it has merely changed direction and location.

Another important trafficking trend in Nepal is the type of women who is commonly sought after. In terms of sex trafficking, India and recently China have high demands for Mongolian looking women. In the words of a trafficker himself, “if we were able to take Nepali girls aged 16-19 years with Mongolian faces, long hair, slim body, separate and proper hips, fair skinned, [and] medium height, such girls would fetch 1 lac in Indian rupees” (Daywalka). Most of these girls by default come from tibetanoid, Himalayan regions within Nepal where these traits are common. Sadly, it is also within these regions where girls are commonly illiterate and uneducated about what trafficking is. What is even more sad is that because these regions are so highly affected with trafficking, it has become almost a tradition within the communities to sell daughters. These women no longer have to be tricked into slavery but are sold by their families who are not as poor as we are led to believe (Dixit). This includes districts such as Sindupalchowk, Nuwakot, Dhading, and Makwanpur (Raksha). These women often have no where to turn and if they are able to escape the trafficking business, they are frequently not accepted easily back into society.
The Challenges Faced by Women Returning from the Brothels and Leaving the Dance Bars-

The Social Stigma-
One of the main factors that individuals face once they escape trafficking or a sexually exploitive situation is society. Reintegration into society is almost completely dependent on what that community allows. Most often, returning women are seen as “social evils in Nepal” (Chaulagai). They are viewed as being loose women who bring back global diseases such as HIV (Chaulagai). Families are often too embarrassed by community hatred or too guilty by their actions to take their daughters back (Manandhar). Even if the family is willing to accept the daughter back into the house, the community will not accept them (Thapa Maya). The community sees these women as a weight dragging down community status and dignity. This belief causes them to shun the women and the family from community activities (Chaulagai).

If the women are accepted back into the community they live in constant fear and isolation. Since the women are no longer bringing in any income to the community they are seen as worthless (Thapa Maya). Without a job and without sufficient income to the family these women are re-stigmatized within society.

Due to these horrible attachments, survivors will not speak about their experiences and they rarely keep in contact with organizations trying to help them (Pradeep). Women are teased and made fun of in their communities if they are found to be in contact with organizations working to help reintegrate them (Chaulagai). Consequently, silence is an imperative trait that all survivors must learn. Geeta Manandhar interviewed two tea shop owners who were previous victims of trafficking. Keeping their personal information confidential was incredibly important to them because people would refuse to buy products from the two women if they knew the truth (Manandhar). The organization SASANE had a massive re-stigmatization issue when a reporter used the survivor names and pictures in a newspaper. For five months the SASANE employees were continuously harassed at their jobs in the police stations. They were asked question like “Where you trafficked? Where were you trafficked? Are you a Delhi or Mumbai girl?” (Pradeep). The clear and present insensitivity that society has for these women in Nepal is shocking.

Many never even tell their families about the work they are doing or did for fear of societal repercussions. Menuka Thapa, the founder of Raksha Nepal, was often spit on walking down the street even though she was never involved in sexual activities. Her employment as a singer in Thamel, however, is often attached to sex which is just as bad as actually being involved in sex (Thapa). For this reason, many women hide the fact that they were trafficked because of the social implications for their families. In the same study done by Raksha Nepal of 200 women working in Thamel, 87.5% had never told their families about the work that they are involved in (Raksha). To describe their lives or to file reports against their perpetrators would mean that these women would consciously be re-stigmatizing themselves. Society does not encourage going to the police and unfortunately speaking out will cause these women to never attain marriage (Pradeep). After all, what respectable Nepali man would want to marry a woman who has been used before. Often times the social stigma attached to these women causes them to accept marriages with less
than reputable men. This increases their chance for both domestic violence and the potential of being re-trafficked (Gurung).

The community does not blame the traffickers for the actions against the women but instead blame the women for being trafficked (Chaulagai). As a result, many women are left with two choices. They can either return to a sexually exploitive situation or commit suicide (Manandhar).

**Physical Health**

STD’s and specifically HIV/ AIDS are massive problems that returnee trafficked women face. Pramsh Pradhan considers this to be the “most burning problem” that these girls face today (Pradhan). As previously stated, one of the biggest stigmas these women confront is that they are bringing back outside diseases to the community. Unlike other aspects of rehabilitation, dealing with this factor is an immediate need. In most cases women working in a sex related field have little control over their bodies or the way in which sex is carried out. This leaves them vulnerable to a wide array of sexually transmitted diseases. Most women who return from India whether involved in the sex business or not are regularly viewed as having HIV. Survivors with HIV or those simply perceived as having it are often humiliated within their communities. Misconceptions surrounding the disease cause even more harm as community members fear contracting HIV through “casual contact” (Jha). Many women see it as their bad luck or their fate that caused this disease.

Those who docontract the disease will hide their diagnosis as much as they can from the community for fear or rejection and humiliation (Jha). Change Nepal very strongly believes in providing health classes to women with the hope that women will be more aware of their bodies and how to keep them safe (Pradhan). Most organizations that I spoke with either had a clinic for free check ups of would direct women to free health centers that they could visit if needed. However, a disease such as HIV will be present and continuous in the lives of survivor’s until they die.

Another very big problem is forced abortion. Many women have no choice but to abort their babies because supporting a baby in a brothel or a message parlor is extremely difficult (Gurung). This has and effect on their future chances of giving birth as well as the overall well being of their bodies. Physically, these women return battered and broken and instead of help they receive blame and isolation.

**The Law**

A major obstacle sexually exploited women face is the law both at the governmental level and the local implementation level. The government of Nepal supposedly functions under the Traffic in Human Control Act of 1986. Not only does this law not effectively take into account the cultural reasons and consequences of trafficking, but it is not even implemented as it is written (Sanghera). “These are laws that are only on paper” (Gurung). They are not effective in actuality and the government has no plan whatsoever for reintegration (Gurung). Even if a woman wishes to file a complaint, the process is so complex and difficult and the successful return rate is so low that it is not worth the social stigmatization that they may face. Furthermore, most women have little to no knowledge about the legal system. 90% of the girls who wish to file a case against their attacker do not
know enough about the law to attempt filing an FIR (first information report). Within the 10% who can actually file complaints only about 2% are able to receive justice against their perpetrators. This means that around 98% of women who return from a sexually exploitive situation can do nothing in terms of justice seeking. To hire a lawyer requires large amounts of money and it is often difficult for these women to speak about their exploitive experiences to a man (Pradeep). Even the women residing in the 2% success area have to wait for an extensive amount of time for their cases to be looked at by a court.

In addition to ineffective law services for women, the police create an entirely new problem. On a local level, the police in Nepal are notoriously corrupt. It is hard to know who you can and cannot trust within the police station. On average, the majority of clients in dance bars and message parlors in Thamel are police and army officials (Thapa). Under the guise of regulating laws, the police often visit brothels and exploit the women there. Many Often the police will go to these establishments and arrest in mass all of the women who are working there. Be mindful that they rarely arrest the owners of the establishment. Under law, the police stations are only allowed to keep the women for 24 days. But on day 22 or 23 of imprisonment, the owners of the establishments where the girls work will come to the police station and pay bail for the women in front of them. This causes the women to feel again indebted to their manager and they return to sexually exploitive work. Law enforcement is run by money and this has dire consequences for women involved in sexually exploitive situations (Pradhan). The How can you possibly ask for help from the people who are exploiting you to begin with?

The mental struggle-

Mental health facilities and mental health education is highly underdeveloped in Nepal. The word for mad in Nepali is bola and it can literally mean anything (Dixit). The government has given a lot of priority to other forms of health but has continually overlooks mental health. Within Nepalese society, there is a stigma attached to psychologists and they are only used if a person “losses their mind”. Even if an individual wished to seek a mental health service they are not readily available, especially in the rural areas. Karuna Kunwar is a psychologist working at the Center for Mental Health and Counseling Nepal. Her specific area of interest is working with women who have been through sexually exploitive situations. She has found survivors to experience a wide range of trauma. Issues such as fear, loss of dignity, identity confusion, and loss of hope. Many have often experienced trauma before trafficking such as the People’s War or domestic abuse. This trauma is then compounded with their experiences of sexual exploitation in the brothels and message parlors.

Survivors also experience fear, which is only heightened by societal condemnation. They fear the repercussions of their community and fear for their ability to find a man who will take care of them. They see men as the only way to achieve security and, therefore, put great importance on their ability to find a suitable husband.

Identity confusion is also a very large issue that survivors face. Many times women, or more accurately girls, at the age of 11 to 13 are trafficked and sexually exploited. It is at this young age that girls are considered to be “charming” and in high demand. At this point in their lives they have very little understanding of their own bodies and even less about what happens between a man and a woman (Kunwar). The issue of sex is extremely taboo in Nepali culture and is not spoken of in the house. A mother will never tell her 11 year old
daughter about the differences between men and women. This is something that the girls will learn when they are married (Thapa). As a result, these girls are completely vulnerable and unaware of what is happening to them when they are essentially being raped. These girls lose their dignity at a very young age which leads to extremely warped self-perception. In one session with a survivor, Karuna was extremely surprised to find that this woman was 22 years old and considered herself to be old and unusable. In the sex trade, age 20 is when the price for a woman begins to decrease.

Society often has low opinions of survivors but this is nothing to compared to the low opinions these women have about themselves. Since they are continually told that sex is all that they will ever be good for due to their loss of virginity, sexually exploited women lose hope for their futures (Kunwar). After all, this life is their fate and their bad luck (Thapa). This loss of hope is one of the biggest hindrances to rehabilitation. In order to provide help to survivors, the survivors must have at least a little hope for their future or all attempts will be unsuccessful. Pramsh from Change Nepal says that our services are only for the women who have hope. As much as the organization may want to help, the survivors must first have faith that they can make a better life (Pradhan).

Meet the Organizations-

Maiti Nepal-

Maiti Nepal is one of the oldest and largest organizations that I spoke with. Its facilities provide for 100 women, which is the largest holding capacity out of all the organizations I interviewed. It is also the most well known anti-trafficking organization in Nepal. Every person I spoke with about my topic asked if I had been to Maiti Nepal. Interestingly, it was also the shortest interview that I conducted as the Maiti Nepal representative that I spoke with named Aadesh provided me with very brief, succinct responses. The mission of Maiti Nepal is to both prevent trafficking by spreading awareness as well as provide a rehabilitation center for women who have returned from the brothels. The services are provided to the women free of charge and include vocational training, education, empowerment programs, paralegal support, and counseling. The vocational skills include beauty parlor training, computer skills, and mobile phone repair in addition to more rural vocations such as stitching, candle making, and farming. Aadesh’s overall assessment of the success of the vocational training was that it has “successful.” In terms of education, Maiti Nepal partners with the Teresa Academy to provide education specifically for at risk youth. Education specific to elder women is provided in the form of empowerment programs. When asked to define what an empowerment program was, the response was that they consisted of programs based on “social empowerment, economic empowerment, legal empowerment, and political empowerment.” Aadesh’s overall assessment of the success of “empowerment” training was that is has “proven to be successful”. Maiti Nepal also
Ashes uses an extremely foreign way of addressing reintegration and rehabilitation in a through God, but instead assurance employees of SASANE spoke very well when he said that these girls don’t need faith through God, but instead assurance, shelter, and safety in this life (Pradeep). Beauty for Ashes uses an extremely foreign way of addressing reintegration and rehabilitation in a

Beauty For Ashes-

Beauty for Ashes is a store located in Chapagaun Kathmandu. It was founded five years ago by a Christian woman who saw survivors put into rehabilitation homes with no occupation for after they left. She wanted to create a place where she could provide these women with jobs and skills training. Now, Beauty for Ashes creates and sells jewelry as well as other items made out of recycled materials. Each woman who works there has a specific job be it sewing or beading that provides her with a usable skill and an income. Currently, there are 10 trafficked women working in Beauty for Ashes, most of which are Tamang, who came to the store through various organizations like Tiny Hands International or individuals who recommended the store to women working in Thamel. In the future, Beauty for Ashes hopes to further their services by extending their market to incorporate women working in rural villages. On an entirely different note, by working with Beauty for Ashes, these Tamang women have to participate in devotional prayer time. Each day these women are taught a biblical value in order to help them heal and give them strength. Mary, who is one of the store directors, said “you can only truly heal through Jesus. People can’t take away the hurt of other people, only Jesus can.” This mindset is an extremely foreign one which is, although I was repeatedly told that converting was optional, imposed and forced upon the women who work there. Pradeep who is one of the employees of SASANE spoke very well when he said that these girls don’t need faith through God, but instead assurance, shelter, and safety in this life (Pradeep). Beauty for Ashes uses an extremely foreign way of addressing reintegration and rehabilitation in a

My overall assessment of Maiti Nepal was that is was unsatisfying and disappointing.
manner that overlooks the culture, community, and lifestyle of Nepali women. Such work is unsuccessful in achieving its goals because it discounts and overlooks many of the issues that these returnee women face.

Change Nepal-

Change Nepal is an organization located in Thamel which has the largest number of dance bars, cabin restaurants, and massage parlors in Kathmandu. In 2002 Pramsh Pradhan, one of the founders of Change Nepal, and his friends noticed an enormous influx of women in Thamel. For a place that had always been his home, he felt overrun by the sheer quantity of women and more importantly the shady business that they brought. He and his friends made an initiative to run the girls out of Thamel to preserve their community. However, upon talking with the girls Pramsh came to realize that these women were “sold, illiterate and helpless”. They could not return to their community even if they wanted to. Upon realizing this truth, Pramsh changed his goal from running the girls out of town to providing them with a voluntary literacy program. If the women could read then they had a better chance of not only picking up ideas about women’s rights but it also made them less vulnerable to people who would take advantage of them. Education was the only issue addressed by Change Nepal for the first year. But, as Pramsh continued to work with these women he realized that he needed a more holistic plan in order to address the problems that these women face. Change Nepal began to provide vocational training. This includes helping women start businesses as street vendors as well as microfinance opportunities for those who want to return to their communities. Again Pramsh felt like this was not enough to address all of the issues that the women face. The next step was to address the psychological problems that the women deal with. As mentioned before, these problems range from trauma to low self esteem. The next step was immediate health problems. Many of the women who enter Change Nepal have had contact with STDs and most have very little understanding about safe sex practices. By providing them with free health classes and referring them to free health care clinics, these women are able to deal with the immediate effects of forced sex. Again Pramsh saw another challenge faced by women working in Thamel. No matter how many women Change Nepal helped, the traffickers continued to bring in more women. The cycle of incoming women was not broken. Therefore, the final initiative in the Change Nepal program was to provide women with human rights and legal education. Change Nepal continues to pressure the women to prosecute in order to break the cycle of incoming girls. The education that they provide is based solely on the wishes of the women who come to the classes. The women choose a topic that they want to learn about such as how to file an FIR and the teachers prepare practical presentations based around this need. Pramsh was very candid in telling me that there are very few success stories with women who enter Change Nepal. Many women
Raksha Nepal –

Raksha Nepal is an organization near Thamel that started in 2004. This organization, like Change Nepal, is working to handle the massive internal trafficking problem that Nepal faces. A woman named Menuka Thapa founded this organization. Like most of the women who end up working in Thamel, Menuka was a street child. Her parents died when she was very young and her uncle kicked her out of the house. Luckily, one traveling couple sponsored Menuka to put her through school. However, to contribute to her own educational fund she began to sing at a restaurant in Thamel. While working, Menuka became very aware of the double façade most restaurants in Thamel have. The women who worked with her were being overworked and then used by customers for sex. She began to try and fight this horrible offence by brining newspaper clippings to work and reading articles to the other workers that dealt with human rights. Through this method she managed to convince 45-50 girls to stop working at the restaurants and help her create Raksha Nepal. Unlike many other organizations, Raksha does not hide the fact that they want women to leave their work in Thamel. Many places, such as Change Nepal provide two different ways of dealing with the women and their employees. They tell the employees that they are simply providing the workers with education. The women are free to enter and leave as they wish. Change Nepal tells the women a slightly different version. Once the girls come the Change Nepal they try to get the girls to stop working in brothels and pick up a vocational skill. Raksha Nepal, however, is very open about what they want for the girls and they currently have six field motivators who are previous victims of sexual exploitation who take to the streets of Thamel and attempt to get the women out. However, this straightforward method comes with many problems. Raksha Nepal has received multiple threats both mentally and physically from restaurant and massage parlor owners in Thamel who wish to get their sex slaves back. From 2004 to 2006 Raksha received the largest number of threats including having the entire building surrounded. Nonetheless, Raksha Nepal keeps working and keeps trying to provide alternatives for women working in Thamel. Right now the Raksha Nepal facilities are housing 30 children and 7 women. One very important aspect of Raksha Nepal is that they also take in the children of the sexually exploited women. Since unplanned pregnancy is a very large issue, many women working in Thamel have children to provide for as well. Most of the women currently residing at Raksha Nepal are learning embroidery as a vocation but they also offer other opportunities such as beautician training, housekeeping, computer repair and driving lessons. Along with vocational training Raksha Nepal runs two women’s schools in order to provide the women with at least preliminary reading and writing skills. Raksha Nepal also runs a radio station.
that plays in Thamel so that women who cannot read are able to learn about their rights and the help that Raksha Nepal can give. There is also a staff of one lawyer and one psychologist if any women would like to use them but nothing is compulsory. The women are told to stay in touch with Raksha Nepal once a month for a year after they leave in order to make sure that they are doing well or provide support if needed. As of 2012, 1600 women have been successfully rehabilitated and reintegrated and only seven are confirmed to be working in Thamel again (Thapa).

One of the women currently residing in Raksha Nepal named Laxmi was orphaned due to the People’s War. She travelled to Kathmandu in the hope of finding a job and found one as a maid for a couple who lived near Thamel. When she reached the age of 11 the woman of the house sold her to a message parlor. She was then raped by the owner who was of an age no less than 45 and put to work as a sex slave in the message parlor. She had heard about Raksha Nepal from another worker and came to their facilities. Now she is going to school, learning embroidery, and also hoping to go to college to get a degree in psychology. It is these types of stories that make this type of work worth it. In speaking about her work Menuka Thapa said “I am not an expert in any field related to trafficking” but her experience allows her to connect with and help these women make a change in their lives (Thapa).

SASANE

SASANE is an organization that has a very specific focus when it comes to the rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficked women. This organization began in 2008 by a group of women who had been sexually abused and were unsatisfied with the incapability of the justice system. In order to start SASANE, the founding women literally stood outside of police stations everyday in order to get their cases heard. A woman named Meena explained to me how hard this process was. She stood outside everyday in the sun with no seats for weeks. She would often cry because it was so hard to get anyone to listen to her (Meena). However, SASANE finally gained some rapport with the police stations due to the help and pressure of the Women’s Ministry in Nepal. Now, SASANE provides paralegal training for 30 women each year who have been sexually exploited. Up to date SASANE has successfully trained 130 women to become paralegals. Some of these women are then placed within 25 police stations in the Kathmandu valley solely for the purpose of dealing with cases related to exploitation against women. The staff includes 7 people in office, 30 in the police station, 5 in remote areas, and 5 working in government run schools. In addition, there are 3 monitoring officials who look out for and help the women working the police stations (Pradeep). All of these women have been through sexual exploitation and as a result have a much easier time connecting with and helping survivors who feel isolated and alone. Many survivors feel that it is easier to tell their stories to the SASANE women because they understand the circumstances that the
survivors have gone through (Punam). The title provided for this type of work is “restorative justice” and it means that in the process of searching for justice, the survivors are able to heal simply by working around and with women who understand them (Pradeep). This allows SASANE to gain a large amount of data related to sexual exploitation as well as to prosecute the traffickers and abuses in order to break the continuous cycle of female discrimination.

**Gramin Mahila Srijansil Pariwar**

This particular organization is special in the fact that it is not based in the Kathmandu Valley. One of the regions that is highly affected by trafficking is Sindupalchowk which lies to the north east of Kathmandu Valley. Due to the amount of trafficking coming out of Sindupalchowk a group of women in that region decided that something needed to be done. In 1992 these women founded GMSP in order to provide a network of people to stop the flow of trafficking and to provide a safe place for those who wish to return back to their homes. What this organization can do that most others cannot is properly monitor the reintegration of the women who return to the community. In addition, because they are the community, they are able to put pressure on the rest of the community to accept the women back. By continually telling the community that these women are their responsibility, GMSP has been able to be particularly successful in reintegrating women back with their families. Other services GMSP provides are those of immediate relief for returnee women, individual confidential counseling, group sessions focused around women rights and legal options as well as income generating opportunities such as goat raising, buffalo farming, and vegetable cultivation. Another interesting aspect of GMSP’s work is that they, to some extent, force the families of the returnee trafficked women to go through the process of rehabilitation with the girls. This means that as the women are gaining information so are their families. This is a method used in order to prevent further trafficking and potential re-trafficking of survivors. Currently there are 83 members of GMSP and all of them at the local level are women. 50% of the survivors are going to school, two are working in another organization called Shakti Samuha and one is working in the rehabilitation center of GMSP. As of this date only two survivors have returned to work in brothels in Kathmandu. This organization is very small but extremely effective because of its work at the community level (Thapa Maya). By involving the community in the reintegration and rehabilitation process of the women who return, they are essentially breaking the cycle of trafficked women from that region.

**Analysis**

**Reintegration and Rehabilitation Methods and the Challenges They Face**
While many of the organizations operate in different ways, there are two parts of the rehabilitation and reintegration process that are common and consistent throughout. These two processes are economic independence and psychological health.

**Economic Independence**

Economic independence incorporates both education opportunities as well as vocational skill training.

Many of the organizations mentioned above have either created or partnered with specific schools for the purpose of sending younger children to school. Providing survivors and their children with basic literacy is one way to enhance their marketability and open their eyes to the major problems within society. SASANE places specific importance on English classes because it broadens survivor’s opportunities for employment. Lessons are held for SASANE women every Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. I had the chance to attend an English class with the women of SASANE. The lessons are focused mainly around practical application of words and phrases. Teaching expressions that can be used within the context of these women’s lives and potential jobs is where SASANE places importance. Phrases like “how may I help you?, What else do you need?,” and quantifying words like “some, a couple, and many” were a few of the English words that they learned while I was present. After an hour of lessons, the women break up into partners and practice applying the English they learned. Unfortunately, English lessons for SASANE are completely depended on foreign volunteers. Similarly for the first year, Change Nepal was simply an initiative providing voluntary literacy programs which relied on volunteer donors and volunteer teachers. Without someone to teach the classes, the women cannot learn. Supplying education, books, and learning material is expensive and organizations need extensive funding in order to provide it. This funding often comes from international donors who require certain stipulations of the organizations. For example, Change Nepal never wanted to become an NGO but the international donor World Education was willing to offer them free books if they became one (Pradhan). In the past one donor of SASANE was Tiny Hands International. This organization required that the trafficking survivors be but through biblical training classes (Pradep). Such stipulations can be harmful because they require certain conditions that might not be in the best interest of the organizations or the culture in which they are working. Therefore, there is a big problem with funding that needs to be addressed in terms of education opportunities. One way that GMSP is attempting to handle this problem is to put pressure on the community and the survivor's families to take responsibility for issues such as education. By involving the community in these efforts, GMSP is able to address one of the fundamental problems faced by small local organizations.

The next part of economic independence can be found in vocational training. All of the organizations mentioned above provide skill-learning opportunities for survivors of sexual exploitation. The average time period within which a vocation can be taught is 6 months to a year. These include skills ranging from driving lessons, to computer repair, to beautician training, to vegetable cultivation, to paralegal training. What vocational opportunities are offered is based on the location and goals of each individual organization.
GMSP focuses more on agricultural opportunities since they are located in a rural area. SASANE focuses on paralegal training because it is in line with their policy approach. Raksha Nepal and Change Nepal both provide an array of vocational skill training for women who wish to stay in the cities as well as for those who wish to return to their communities. The reason there is such an emphasis on vocational training is because many survivors have no occupation upon returning. Without a job and without a family many women return to sexually exploited situations because they have no other options. In some cases, these women will actually start their own brothels and continue the cycle of trafficking (Manandhar). Supplying a vocation provides these women with an opportunity to change their profession. As a result, skills training increases the probability that women will not return to sexually exploitive situations and increases their chance of reintegration. If the women can make money then they are better able to assimilate back into society (Pradeep). A survivor who brings in an income to the family is more readily accepted than one who does not. Nonetheless, just as there are challenges that organizations face surrounding education there are also challenges faced involving vocational training. One problem is monetary. Training is very expensive and requires an extensive amount of energy. After the women receive the training another challenge arises. Tracking the girls after the training is complete is extremely difficult (Pradhan). While many organizations have stipulations for monitoring women once they leave the organizations, this does not mean that they are particularly effective. SASANE employees 3 women who monitor the women working in police stations but if the women decide to leave then there is really nothing to be done. These organizations do not have binding contracts with the women and it is just as easy to lie about successful employment as it is to disappear.

Another problem that these organizations face is the fact that employment opportunities in Nepal are not necessarily falling into people’s laps. These survivors can have a skill but that doesn’t guarantee them a job. In a study done by Sahara Group surrounding gainful employment only 90% of the participates were placed into their jobs (Sahara). Keep in mind that this is a group who had an extensive network of job opportunities lined up. Unemployment in Nepal is a large problem. The unemployment rate in 2008 was 46% (CIA). Employment is particularly a problem in Kathmandu which has a population size of 2 million which is incredibly unsustainable (Dixit). With so many people looking for jobs mixed with the fact that men will usually receive jobs over women, the chances for survivor employment steadily decrease. However, there is one occupation that is always in demand for women who wish to work. Unfortunately, the occupation of sex seems to be one that is always in high demand. This means that if a woman cannot utilize her new vocational skill, she can find employment elsewhere. In addition, working in a message parlor or a cabin bar provides a much larger income than any vocational skill can provide (Pradhan). Many times, women will start vocational training courses and only stay for a couple of weeks before they turn to sex as a profession (Ellen). Keeping the women in vocational training and actually providing lucrative jobs is a massive obstacle to successful rehabilitation.

It would seem that more research in the field of lucrative vocational training is needed to supply survivors with skills that are currently needed by Nepali society. Currently, SASANE does not have enough funding to support any other form of vocational training besides paralegal training. But, one of the members has many ideas about future vocational training that I found fascinating. In fact, this particular skill is one that I did not
find in any of the vocational training opportunities provided by the above organizations. Pradeep, a member of SASANE, dreams of teaching women skills in the field of tourism. Nepal is incredible rich in cultural endowments and archeological wonders. Tourists in Nepal are never in short supply and continue to contribute to Nepal’s economy (Pradeep). If these organizations provide training in Nepal’s rich history and historical sites, it is possible that survivors could access the tourism business as a source of income. Such a vocation in terms of trafficking rehabilitation and reintegration has not been tapped and it has endless possibilities if implemented correctly.

**Psychological Health**

Psychological Health is the next step used in successful reintegration and rehabilitation techniques. Psychological health includes both counseling as well working to change ingrained cultural norms that have been imbedded in survivors since they were children.

Counseling is one of the most important and sorely needed skills in dealing with women who have been trafficked and sexually exploited. The two most important components of counseling include providing hope for the future and working hard to break habitual actions. As stated above, without hope there can be no rehabilitation. Rehabilitation and future success in vocational and family life is dependent upon the survivors having hope for their future. One way that this can be achieved is through counseling with other women who have experienced the same type of sexual exploitation. In SASANE, all of the paralegals have experienced some type of sexual violence be it trafficking or domestic abuse. When women come in to file a case they are able to speak with other women who have been through hardships and in spite of them have become successful individuals. The way that a SASANE paralegal phrased how they address this issue with incoming women is to say “it is like getting hit by a car and hurting your leg. It hurts very bad at first and it continues to hurt for a long time but eventually it hurts less and though there might be a scar the wound can eventually be healed” (Meena). By providing this analogy, Meena is stating that dealing with the aftermath of sexual exploitation does not happen over night. You will continually live with it, but from personal experience, it will eventually become bearable. This is a very effective way of handling counseling because it provides hope but it does not set a generic timeline that can be found in many organizations. Rehabilitation will continuously be needed throughout the survivors life but this does not mean that success in life is unreachable.

Another way of providing hope is to focus on the future. Recalling that past events in these women’s lives can cause them to re-experience their traumas (Karuna). From personal experience, counseling in the United States focuses very much on reliving your past to find solutions for the future. Such a tactic, however, can have severe repercussions for survivors. When counseling a survivor of sexual exploitation Karuna Kunwar focuses on what can be gained in the future and provides them with resources that they can practically access. Karuna calls herself a “solution activist” in that she hopes to give these women mental techniques and skills so that they can deal with and handle problems they will face upon re-entering into society. Karuna also likes to talk about the parts of the women’s lives that are beautiful. Do they like to dance, or sing? She tries to help them see the beautiful in
their own lives and get these women to see what can be beautiful for them in the future. At Change Nepal, Pramsh is constantly trying to orient the women to their future. He asks questions like “Where do you see yourself in 10 years? Do you wish to have a family? do you want to be an entrepreneur with the power to choose you own profession?” (Pradhan). These questions provide a starting point for the creation of future goals. Focusing on the hope of the future is key in providing successful counseling and rehabilitation. It is not about the past and what was, but the future and what can be.

Counseling is also needed in order to address the habitual problem that most sexually exploited women face. Many survivors will return to brothels and dance bars not only because they cannot find other jobs, but because of the habits that they are unable to break. This includes habits like drug addiction, alcohol addiction and even addiction to sex (Thapa). One drug that has becoming increasingly popular is called oxytocin. Oxytocin is a hormone, which increases the ability of women to have orgasms during intercourse (Thapa Maya). Many women wish to continue using this and working since they are able to generate a fairly large income through sex work. In fact, one of the biggest challenges that Menuka Thapa from Raksha Nepal finds with women she works with is the habitual addiction they possess. It can even be suggested that there is comfort found in what is usual and routine. This causes many women to return to sexually exploitive situations (Thapa). An even more prevalent addiction is to lifestyle. Two survivors who were being helped by GMSP left and went to Kathmandu to get jobs in dance bars. They like the attention and the fact that many slave owners provide them with certain material goods (Maya Thapa).

Lifestyle addiction can be as simple as the fact that in the brothels these women would eat meat everyday. Upon returning to their homes they are often unable to eat meat everyday and this causes them to search for gratification elsewhere (Gurung). Voluntarily entering the sex trade often after previous trafficking happens because it can provide survivors with stability and generally a stable income. Since many women see this work as their fate they can easily justify returning (Thapa). GMSP, Raksha Nepal and Change Nepal all spoke to me about the challenges of breaking through habitual barriers that survivors possess.

The second factor in procuring mental health is dealing with the cultural norms that have become ingrained in the survivors both from their youth and while they are being sexually exploited. The cultural norms in Nepal regarding women are not particularly favorable. Girls are raised to serve first their father, then their brother, and then finally their husband. This is naturally the position that girls believe they hold in life (Thapa). Such beliefs mean that these girls often take a passive stance in dealing with issues. It is not their place to speak about certain things so they remain silent. This belief is exacerbated by trafficking where women are further pushed to believe in their own insignificance and worthlessness. Women are brainwashed into submission and silence (Thapa). Many organizations push the women who come to them to file cases against their perpetrators. Without prosecution the cycle of trafficking continues and no real change has been achieved (Pradhan). To do this, however, the survivors put themselves at risk of being socially rejected and it goes against all former notion of the ideal Nepali woman. This is the most sensitive and precarious portion of rehabilitation.

In order to effectively implement this portion of rehabilitation, it has to be from within the community. Outsiders cannot simply state that women deserve equality and should speak up for themselves. This way of addressing cultural norms is virtually
ineffective because it is meaningless and has no cultural context. This is one reason that Beauty for Ashes is an ineffective organization in terms of rehabilitation. Beauty for Ashes takes a completely foreign concept and tries to apply it to a culture that it knows little about. Kunda Dixit believes that if INGO’s wish to work in Nepal they should coordinate with the government because these are issues of Nepal. They cannot be solved or dealt with by an outsider. Geeta Manandhar again finds that it is impossible as an outsider to create change in a society that does not want it. In a way, this type of pushing almost hinders change from happening because society can easily fall back on the excuse that this is their tradition (Manandhar). This is a “nepali problem and it is our responsibility” (Thapa).

Menuka Thapa believes that these transformations in thought can change simply by redefining cultural practices within Nepali society. Of course this can only be done if one understands society and the female role in it. One example is by using the Hindu goddess Durga. Out of all of the gods and goddesses in the Hindu religion, Durga is the only one who is a sheer representation of power. Every year, Durga is worshipped during a festival with the hope that she will bring power especially to men. If men worship a statue representation of a powerful goddess in order to gain power then why don’t men worship the women in their lives? Women have the power and if men wish to attain it then they must first respect their mothers, their wives, and their daughters. That is where ultimate power lies (Thapa). Taking a cultural tradition that survivors are accustomed to and using it as a way to explain the rights that women should have resonates with these women and is more effective then simply shouting about women’s rights in survivors faces. The change in cultural norms must be done from within the culture and it must use the culture.

The expressive arts-

One aspect of rehabilitation that I found fascinating was the constant use of expressive arts. I saw this both used formally by organizations as well as informally by survivors who simply wished to express themselves and have fun. Change Nepal offers a variety of expressive arts classes based on what volunteers are able to teach. Previously, they have had singing classes and art classes that are provided free of charge for women who wish to attend. The most successful class that they have has so far is a dance class. The women loved to be able to dance freely without anyone to watch. The reason that Pramsh thinks it is important to provide these classes is because he wishes to maximize the survivor’s involvement not at work but with Change Nepal. Every hour they are at the Change Nepal office is an hour that they are not being sexually exploited (Pradhan). Similarly, Raksha Nepal offers a wide variety of extra activities to keep the women and their children involved and having fun (Thapa).

GMSP provides a very specific type or art in the form of street theater. The survivors put on productions of their own creation about issues such as domestic violence. They are even sometimes preformed in native languages such as Tamang or Newar. These productions are often humorous and have successfully worked to capture the attention of
the community. While the survivors are able to create and perform their own work focused around issues that they care about they are also involving the community and further reintegrating into society.

Even informally dancing and singing are aspects of these women’s lives that are continuously present. SASANE invited me to celebrate the Nepali New Year with them and we went on a picnic in Changu Narayan. After cooking lunch and resting, we danced. All we had was an iphone but that did not stop us from dancing for hours. I have never seen a group of women laugh so much in my entire life. Afterwards, we spent time talking about musical artists that we liked and listening to my ipod. Similarly, while at Beauty for Ashes, and at the only time I was able to interact with the survivors working there, we danced.

In the case of GMSP, street theater acts as both a way for survivors to express their opinions and interact with the community while having fun. For the other organizations singing, painting, and especially dancing are ways to have fun. I think the value of fun is extremely underrepresented. The arts provide a way for these women to forget about what has happened to them and simply enjoy the moment. It would be a shame not to acknowledge how effective a little dancing and a little fun can be on the life of a person who has been repressed and subjugated.

Conclusion-

At SASANE, a paralegal named Punam said that empowerment is being able to stop violence. “I can fight and get justice and I can help save others as well.” Meena said she feels proud and strong when women ask her for help. For these women, having the ability to speak out and affect the lives of the women around them is what gives them strength. Particularly in the case of SASANE survivors are used within the community to make a difference. Not only are they addressing some of the problems surrounding corrupt police work and the law but they are also returning to communities. They encourage rural women to speak up about their experiences and because they have had these same experiences, they are able to create connections and ultimately create change. The same can be said for the survivors at GMSP. They are using humor and street theater as a way to not only press awareness for prevention but also to bring these horrible truths to the forefront of community minds.

It is my opinion that these strong women who have made a difference in their own lives are the key to bringing an end to trafficking. During effective reintegration and rehabilitation, these women are learning about how to be strong, powerful, self-sufficient women. These are the women who can make a difference and it is these women who can most effectively help other women around them. Many policies about prevention of trafficking focus on broad overarching themes like “more education and less poverty.” These mean nothing if they cannot be successfully implemented. These women and the organizations that help them can successfully implement these initiatives. Pradeep spoke of a network of organizations all working for the same goal in different ways. Instead of focusing on the “ambiguous awareness campaign” why not focus on creating a network of trafficked women that are available in the high-risk communities to provide support and
relief. This is where the inspiration for change begins- within the community, with the community, and with the women who know and have overcome the evils in this world.

**My Challenges**

I found many challenges while trying to do my research. One of the biggest issues I faced was time. With a subject as sensitive as this I should have been working on it for at least a month before the Independent study time began. Getting contacts and finding times to meet are highly dependent on this. Many organizations that I contacted via email never replied and those contacted by phone would often have me call at least three times before a meeting would be set. If I simply walked into an organization, the members would become extremely flustered and ask me to call them to set an appointment. This meant that for the first half of my research period I was waiting for people to contact me back. For the majority of these organizations this also hindered my ability to talk with any of the girls. Because my time had become so limited I was not able speak with many of the girls. In addition, these organizations are extremely protective over the girls that they are helping. For most, talking with them was out of the question because it could affect their rehabilitation. I barely scratched the surface with possible information.

Another challenge that I found was language both in communicating over the phone and in person. On the rare occasion I would be permitted to speak to a girl who had been trafficked my ability to talk with them was hindered by our lack of common language. These opportunities were so sporadic that I never knew when I needed to bring a translator and the organizations usually don’t have the time or the extra staff to provide a member solely for my work. If I were ever to continue my work, I would most definitely learn the language because it would open up so many more doors in terms of the information I could gather from the people I talk to. My recommendation is to start early so much more information can be gained!

**Suggestions for Further Research**

I believe that it would be an incredibly amazing experience and research opportunity to volunteer with one of these organizations. Specifically I would love to see someone volunteer with GMSP. The work that they are doing and the information that can be gather by the community and the survivors there could fill books. One part of my research that I regret is that I was unable to talk with more survivors. Working exclusively with a local organization could provide this opportunity.
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Interviews


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Manandhar, Geeta. Personal Interview. 8 March 2013.

Mary, Beauty From Ashes. Personal Interview. 16 April 2013.

Meena, SASANE. Personal Interview. 11 April 2013.

Parajuli, Karuna, Law Student. Personal Interview. 15 April 2013.

Pradeep, SASANE. Personal Interview. 11 April 2013.

Pradeep, SASANE. Personal Interview. 14 April 2013.


Punam, SASANE. Personal Interview. 11 April 2013.


Thapa Maya, Nani, GMSP. Personal Interview. 1 May 2013.

(7 Names were changed in the interest of maintaining ethical boundaries)
The Collective Library concerning all things related to trafficking at the AATWIN office in Bijuli Bazar, Kathmandu Nepal.
Newspaper Clipping collected by the women of Raksha Nepal
A pledge for equality hanging at Raksha Nepal signed by the Prime Minister

Nani Maya Thapa and Me after a meeting talking about the work of GMSP
A poster that will go to rural areas so illiterate women will know what to do if they suspect they might be trafficked currently hanging in the SASANE office.