

# I HAVE A VOICE

Trafficked women – in their own words

*Angela Reed & Marietta Latonio*



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Artwork by Sr Venus Marie Pagar SFX

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## Foreword

The personal stories in this book lay bare many of the issues in our society and its institutions that need to be confronted and challenged for us to be able to achieve a society that is responsive to its most vulnerable citizens, and for all of us to become more as persons.

This book demonstrates clearly the crucial role of the family in making commonplace the situations and practices of abuse (physical, mental, emotional, sexual, economic and psychological), neglect, relinquishing of parental responsibilities, silence (in cases of incest) and breakdown of relational barriers. Victimization often begins at an early age, creating powerlessness and confusion in terms of a person's roles, functions and values. Over time these reactions become internalised. Those who leave their family circumstances may be hopeful that things will change, but as these stories show the context and perpetrators may alter but in many cases the victimisation continues.

The application of the life course perspective to the stories of these women of Cebu allows us to view the multidimensional aspects of each person's experiences, while the sequencing of the stories by stages gives us a clear understanding of how the relationships and impacts of earlier experiences impact on the world view that emerges, and the actions that are subsequently taken. The dreams and aspirations (met or unmet) and coping mechanisms developed to survive do-or-die situations, especially in childhood, are carried forward to later life.

The stories in *I Have a Voice* are both raw and sanguine. Reading them took me back 30 years to my work responding to street children and, with Sr Marcia RGS, visiting prostituted girls in Cebu City. Having grown up in a province in Mindanao, the squalor of the urban slums was quite a shock to me, but more shocking was learning that some children in the streets were unable to go home until they earned enough money to give to their parents; realising that a girl might stay the night at the park to avoid a sexually abusive father – that at least in the park, men would pay when they used her, and she would have money to hand to her mother.

As those experiences, and these stories, illustrate, both victims and perpetrators originate in families. If we wish to fight trafficking, we must start with the home. We must be prepared to undertake a massive effort to remind families, especially parents, of the value of every family member, to urge them to respect each individual's dignity (especially the children and others who are vulnerable), recognising their basic needs of survival, safety, and protection from all forms of abuse. We must fight for their rights and responsibilities to develop and participate in life as human beings, made unto the image and in the likeness of the creator.

**Teresa (Tess) Banaynal Fernandez, Filipino women's advocate**



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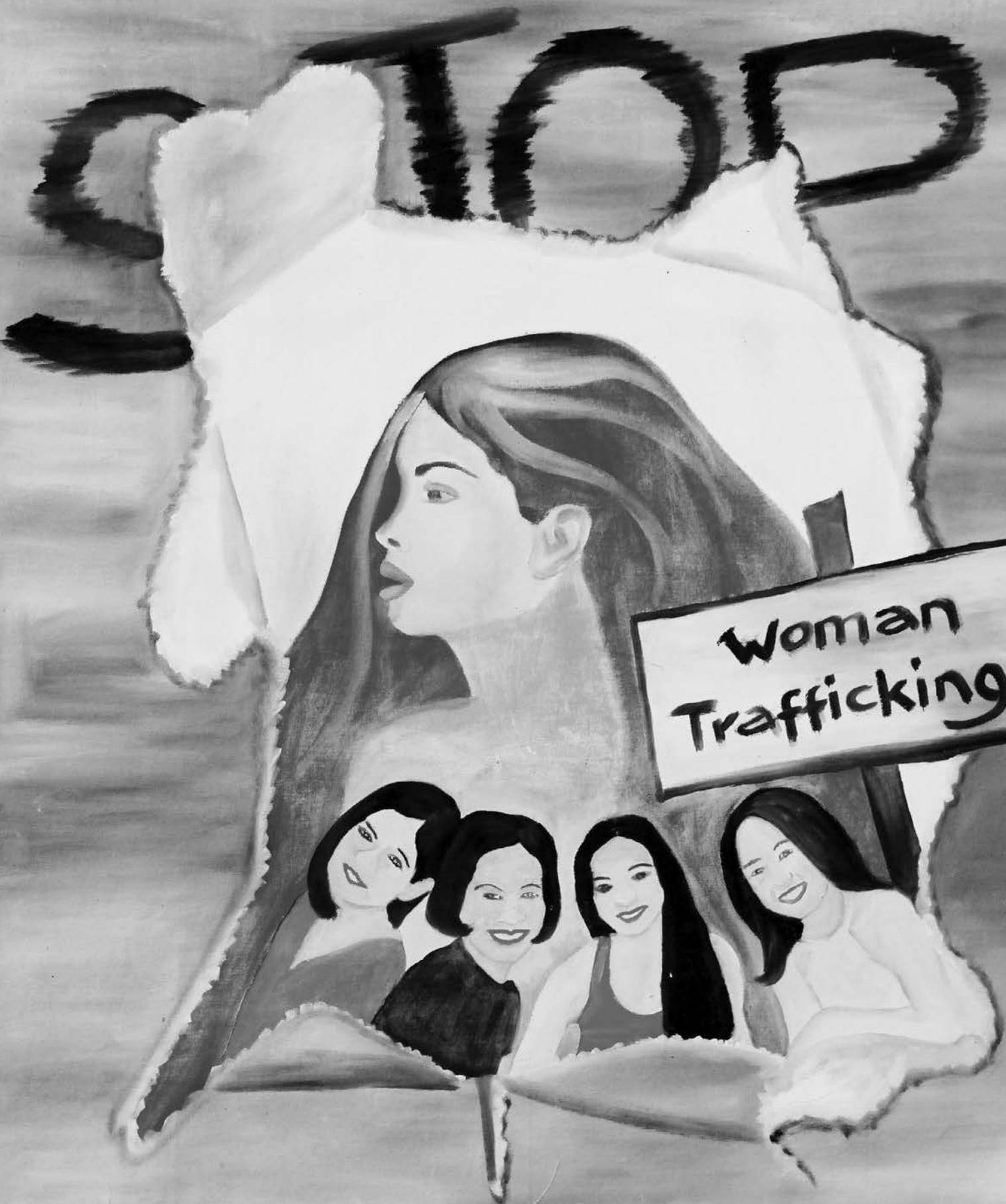
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Woman  
Trafficking

## Introduction

This collection of stories, as narrated by Filipino women themselves, describes the lived experience of being trafficked for sexual exploitation.

The stories were first shared with Australian social science researcher and Sister of Mercy Angela Reed and her research assistant and cultural advisor Marietta (Mayet) Latonio as part of Angela's PhD research conducted from 2011 to 2014. The interviews themselves took place over a six-month period during 2011.

The women featured in this collection agreed to share their stories in the hopes that others may learn from their experiences. All had been trafficked into Cebu City and eventually became clients of Good Shepherd Welcome House and Good Shepherd Recovery Centre. At the time of the interviews, the women were either still living at Good Shepherd centres or had recently moved into alternative accommodation.

Each story highlights the unique experience of one woman, providing her own recollections of her childhood, trafficking experience, and plans for the future.

This book has been compiled for the benefit of these women themselves, as well as their friends and family and anyone else (including community workers and educators), who seeks to truly understand the origins and effects of sexual exploitation. We are indebted to the 22 women who have given so generously of themselves to inform this book in the hopes that it may help others.

The framing of this book draws heavily on the concept of the 'life course perspective,' as first articulated in the 1960s by sociologist Glen Elder Jr. This perspective provides a way of understanding the relationship between a person's biography and the social, economic and political context in which they live.

As such, each story has been placed within the context of each woman's own childhood, community and family history (life span development), her ability to make choices (human agency), where and when she has been born and has lived (time and place), the things that have occurred at particular points in her life (timing), and how others have influenced her life (linked lives).

A more thorough explanation of the life course perspective and its role in understanding sex trafficking is provided in the appendix.

## About the editors

### Angela Reed RSM PhD

Angela is an Australian Sister of Mercy who completed her PhD in 2014 through the School of Global, Urban, & Social Studies at RMIT University, Melbourne. Her research was focused on giving voice to Filipino women who had been trafficked for sexual exploitation in order to hear their unique insights.

At the time of publication, Angela had just concluded a 12-month post-doctoral residency with Australian social enterprise Our Community focusing on social change and advocacy. She was about to commence a nine-month residency at the Mercy Global Action office situated at the United Nations, New York.

Angela began teaching in inner-city schools in Melbourne, Australia, and later obtained a Bachelor of Theology and a Masters in Social Work. She then spent seven years as coordinator of Mercy Care, a safe house for women escaping family violence in Victoria.

In 2008 Angela was awarded a Vincent Fairfax Fellowship



in Ethics and Leadership through the St James Ethics Centre in Sydney (now The Ethics Centre). This required her and 13 other Australians to explore ethical issues across Australia and the Asia-Pacific, which ultimately led to her doctoral work, commencing in 2011. Angela hopes her research findings will be shared widely. This book is part of that sharing.

A long-time member of ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans), Angela says, “For too long, sex trafficking has been attributed to poverty alone.” She believes sex trafficking is complicated, and while caused by demand for sex services, traffickers prey on those who have myriad vulnerabilities, which can include childhood abuse, social isolation, lack of education, and specific ‘local’ factors. Tragically for many women, sex trafficking is part of a lifelong continuum of violence, beginning almost from birth.

### **Marietta Latonio (RSW)**

Marietta (Mayet) Latonio is a social worker who lives and works in Cebu, Philippines. She worked as a bi-cultural research assistant with Angela and has been involved with the ‘I Have a Voice’ research project since 2011.

Mayet’s commitment to the marginalised spans many years, including work with the Department of Social Welfare and Development in the Philippines for more than 20 years. She has served as director of many welfare programs, including leading the implementation of community-based and centre-based programs in the southern Philippines.

In recent years, Mayet has worked for a number of non-government organisations (NGOs) focusing on the welfare of women and children. She is currently employed as the Monitoring and Evaluation officer at the Good Shepherd Welcome House in Cebu, which provides support to trafficked women.

Mayet is also employed as director of community outreach extension services for the University of the Southern Philippines Foundation, as well as lecturing in the social work faculty.

Mayet is a lifelong advocate for the rights of children to live free from harm. She dreams of the day that all children can enjoy all of their human rights. Mayet is currently completing her Masters in Social Work which is focused on the impacts of government and non-government interventions for the recovery of trafficking survivors.



### **About the artist**

Sr Venus Marie Pagar SFX is a Filipino sister of the Congregation of St Francis Xavier who ministers to the sick and elderly. In her spare time she cultivates her passion for painting, producing oil canvases mainly depicting women.

Born in Leyte, Philippines, Sr Venus came from a family of artists (her father and both of her brothers are artists). She started painting at the age of eight.

As a member of the United Women’s Artist Association of the Philippines (UWAAP), Sr Venus recently exhibited three of her pieces at the Manila International Peace Centre. The proceeds from the sale of her works go directly to the mission of her congregation.



## Dedication and acknowledgements

A work of this nature involves many people and we are indebted to the many people who contributed to it.

Special thanks must be given to the production team at Our Community, Australia, who so ably edited, designed and prepared this book for publication. Particular acknowledgement must be given to Denis Moriarty for his continual support and encouragement and also to Kathy Richardson for her meticulous editing and Amy Johannsohn for the graphic design.

Thank you to the sisters within the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea of whom Angela is a member. Many sisters of the Institute have keenly followed this project and are passionate about the social justice issues emanating from human trafficking. Special thanks to Sr Faye Kelly and Sr Berneice Loch.

Thank you to the Mercy Sisters in the Philippines who provided Angela with generous accommodation and hospitality during her time living in Cebu. These sisters also showed a keen interest and concern for the exploited women of Cebu.

Thank you also to the members of Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking (ACRATH), who supported Angela and Mayet throughout their research and have always shown a keen interest in this work. We hope that just you as you have inspired us, this book will inspire you to continue to seek justice in our world.

Sincere thanks too to the Good Shepherd Sisters in the Philippines who have been so welcoming and open to this project since its beginning in 2008. We dedicate this book to Sr Tonet Go who worked tirelessly for the rights of women trafficked for sex. In February 2015 Sr Go lost her battle with cancer. She never gave up the fight for trafficked women.

We are also grateful to Good Shepherd staff (both former and current) who were always so cooperative when we were working with the women. Thank you to Sr Deena Mananzan, Sr Minda Obnimaga, Arianne Carbese Nadela, Flor Cuyos and all the other staff.

Finally, and most importantly, we offer our heartfelt thanks to the 40 Filipino women who participated in the research project. In particular, we want to thank the 22 women who so honestly and courageously shared their stories with us. You are the authors of this book and we know that in sharing your stories your greatest desire is that it could prevent other women from similar stories of exploitation. Dear friends, you have welcomed us into your lives and left an indelible mark on us. Our hope is that through this book we can continue to pursue justice with you and for all women who find themselves vulnerable to trafficking. We continue to be inspired because of your courage, determination and great sense of hope.

*I really did not experience any joyful memories from zero to 16. I really can't recall any happy memories during those years, because when I played my mother would always beat me, anywhere on my body, sometimes on my head, so I don't have good memories. Maybe now I have, but before I had none.*

**Teresita**

# CHAPTER ONE

## Childhood – Voices from the Past





## Precede

Childhood should be one of the most cherished stages of a person's life. In listening to the women's stories of childhood we were overwhelmed by the deprivation, marginalisation and abuse they had experienced. We had anticipated that their stories of being trafficked for sex would be traumatic but nothing could have prepared us for the shock and anger we felt when we heard their childhood stories of abuse.

For Australian-born Angela, the stories highlighted her own privileged background, a childhood experienced as a time of opportunity to grow and develop within a safe, secure family, high-quality schooling, community connectedness, and financial security.

In contrast, the Filipino women whose stories are told in these pages experienced unsafe, neglected and marginalised childhoods marked by systemic abuse and deprivation, factors that ultimately led to their vulnerability to sex trafficking.

Like Angela, Mayet experienced a fulfilling childhood, complete with ups and downs, and feelings and experiences appropriate for a child. She celebrated when her mother bought her a pair of new shoes and a pink dress, and was sad when she asked her sister for some pennies and was denied.

Mayet's childhood dreams were to become as beautiful as she could be and have plenty of money in her wallet, motivations that made her excited about becoming an adult.

This contrasts sharply with the stories of horrible acts of rape, deception and extreme poverty that came from the mouths of the women interviewed for this book. Stories of hungry children taking discarded chicken bones to their mouths, and incidences of neglect and abuse perpetuated by those expected to be those children's defenders and protectors made the editors' stomachs churn.

These childhood stories are retold here not for voyeurism, but in the hopes that they can help others develop a deeper understanding of all of the factors that may lead to trafficking and in turn help others avoid this path.

## Points to Ponder

As you read these stories, please keep in mind the following points, which provide some context to the social settings the women were born into. A more detailed discussion of these factors is provided at the end of this chapter.

### **PARENTAL ABSENCE**

- Stigmatisation and marginalisation resulting from factors well outside their control (such as being born to unwed parents) was experienced from a very early age by the majority of women who formed part of this study.
- The absence of mothers was a common theme in this research. Mothers were absent for many reasons including early death, distance related to work, or beginning with a new partner.
- A number of women in this study spoke about being part of a blended family. When parents re-partner, it can have a major impact on the lives of their children.
- Many of the women in this research felt that the effects of their mother (and sometimes their father) being absent contributed to their subsequent circumstances. They often felt that the direction of their lives was influenced by the fact that they did not have mothers present in childhood. Such feelings may be heightened by widespread societal gender biases that act to influence judgements about maternal capabilities and responsibilities.
- Parental abandonment can have a huge impact on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of a child. In the case of being exchanged for money, children often question their value and human worth.
- The death of a parent at a young age can alter a child's sense of safety and general wellbeing.

- Parental abuse of alcohol and drugs was present in many of the stories shared by the women for this study.
- Grandmothers of the women in these stories featured prominently. They often became the primary carers of their grandchildren.

### **BEING BORN INTO POVERTY**

- A lack of food on the table and the struggle for income formed part of many women's narratives.
- In countries located in the Global South parents are often dependent on their children's labour to contribute to the family income.
- In the Philippines, older siblings are often expected to contribute to the family income and help educate younger siblings.

### **RURAL ISOLATION**

- Many of the women in this study who lived in rural areas experienced isolation and marginalisation.
- Those participants who remained in rural or remote areas expressed an ongoing frustration with poverty, unemployment and lack of educational opportunities. Isolation was one of the main reasons that families moved closer to the city, with a view to improving their opportunities for employment and hence food and education.
- Rural isolation often leads to relocation of individuals or entire families for work. In many countries of the Global South the relocation of rural populations to cities has resulted in a class known as the 'urban poor'.

### **DOMESTIC LABOUR**

- Many of the women involved in this study had their first job as a domestic helper.
- The demand for women's domestic labour is a global reality. Women from the Global South (including the Philippines) often need to travel abroad to earn money for their families.
- Domestic labour is often referred to as unskilled labour. Women engaged in such work are often paid poor wages, leaving them open to exploitation.

### **VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ABUSE**

- The majority of women in this study were subject to one or more forms of abuse during their childhood and adolescent years. The abuse described by the participants included physical, emotional, sexual, verbal and financial. Often weapons were involved. Such experiences clearly alter a child's sense of safety and trust.
- Childhood sexual abuse by those women we spoke to for this study often involved multiple perpetrators, usually male family members and close community members.
- Most of the women in this sex trafficking research experienced sexual abuse as a child. This, combined with other factors, made them vulnerable to further sexual exploitation as adolescents.
- Lack of a significant trustworthy figure in their life meant that young girls often remained silent about their abuse.
- Psychological effects of childhood abuse can include withdrawal and depression, guilt, shame, self-blame, eating disorders, physical concerns, anxiety, dissociative patterns, repression, denial, and sexual problems. It may also affect development and growth of healthy interpersonal relationships.

- The notion of being addicted to or having an inappropriate liking for sex has been discussed by many researchers who have studied the impacts of childhood sexual abuse on behaviours. Many suggest that ‘sexualised behaviour’ is a result of boundary violation by the perpetrator. Clinical psychologists Abu Ali and Al-Bahar offer further insights, suggesting that “for children who have been sexually exploited, the definition and value of self becomes equated with sexuality. Hence child victims attempt to re-engage in sexualised behaviours to validate their presence and the only self-worth with which they are familiar.”<sup>1</sup>
- Women with a background of childhood sexual abuse and deprivation are vulnerable to sexual exploitation later in life.

### **ACCESS TO EDUCATION**

- In countries such as the Philippines it can be a struggle to finance the education of all (or any) of the children in the family.
- Education beyond an elementary level was rare for many women in this study.
- Sometimes children have a greater desire to be educated than their parents. Many of the women in this study aspired to a secondary education, but few had achieved that goal.
- A child’s exposure to violence and abuse can have a significant impact on educational attainment and learning.

### **PEER SUPPORT**

- Peers were very important in the lives of many of the women interviewed as part of this study. These peers offered consolation and solidarity but sometimes also encouraged the use of drugs and alcohol.

# ALETA

## Not wanted at birth

My name is Aleta. From the time I was born I labelled myself as a disgrace because I was born as a result of my parent's extramarital affair. My father did not want me to be born and when I was born he denied that I was his daughter. When I first learnt of this my heart was so heavy as if a bomb had been dropped. My mother wanted to keep me but after a few months she was forced to leave me in the care of relatives. The two women who cared for me I considered my parents. They were lesbians and they loved me as if I was their own child. We lived in the rural area of Cebu.

When I was five, my parents sent me on an errand to the neighbours' house. The neighbours had two boys and when I went into their house they took off my dress and they raped me. When they were doing it I just stared at them and I didn't say anything. I was motionless and when I came home, all I can recall is I had blood in my panties. I did not tell anyone of that incident.

Soon after, we relocated to Cebu City and I attended school. My behaviour at school and home was very bad. I was very rebellious and I became a problem for my parents. During that time I got to know a distant cousin who we depended on a lot for income. She would come home at 3am and bring me lots of junk food. I never knew at that time that she was a prostitute. My parents and I lived with her and her live-in partner and their baby, who I looked after.

One time, I was putting the baby to sleep and the husband of my cousin came into the room. I was so shocked to see him there. He told me to be silent and he raped me. After, he insisted I tell no one. After that rape incident I could not look that man in the eye, I felt ashamed.

The family of that man depended on my cousin's income for their living. They quarrelled. One time I interrupted, saying, "You should be the one working, not my ate [a term used to describe a respected older woman]," so he grabbed my head and pushed it into the ground and physically abused me.

At nine years old I was being nagged at by my parents and my cousin who accused me of bad things so I just ran away, which led me to being trafficked.

If I could relive my childhood I would have a very simple wish. First I would want to get the attention of my mother and have better communication. Those times when we had no contact would be patched up with love and care between mother and daughter. The second wish would be to play. I had no time to play and I would like to have had plenty of toys. ■

### FOR REFLECTION

- What were your feelings when you read Aleta's story?
- Write about an experience in your childhood when you felt one or all of these feelings.
- Can you remember times in your childhood when you were given the space to play? What was it like to have that experience?
- If you could pick a colour to represent your childhood what would it be? Why? What do you think Aleta would choose as her colour?
- Aleta speaks of labelling herself a 'disgrace' at being born out of an extramarital affair. What do you think led Aleta to feel that way about herself?



# BELEN

## Say sorry, please

I am Belen. I grew up in the northern part of Cebu with my father and mother, together with my other siblings, two boys and two girls. I was the third-born child.

My father was a construction worker. I cannot remember well about my mother's work; however, I remember that she gambled and most of the time she was out of the house. I think she used to bake also. I observed that my parents always quarrelled but I did not know the reasons for their quarrels.

When I was young I used to help my aunty in her sari-sari store [a small convenience outlet] as well as cleaning our house and looking after my little brothers and sister.

At age eight, my mother took me to another island far from our home. This was after a big fight with my father. All I remember from that time is that my mother sold me to a bar owner in that place.

At the age of nine, I was rescued from that bar by some government workers. I stayed at the government centre for young girls for a year. After the incident when I was eight, I never saw my parents again. I only saw my older sister, who was also prostituted. She was tough and has left prostitution.

At 10, I was transferred to a non-government organisation located in Cebu City. While at the centre I finished grade three and went on to take a government examination. I was accelerated to grade six but I did not enrol for a higher level because I ran away from the centre. I was 14 at that time. I was staying in one of the main streets in the city when someone recruited me to go to the red light district.

Until now I am still very angry at my mother for what she did to me. I remember I told her when she left me at the bar that it would have been better for me if she had killed me when I was young. I did not have a good childhood experience; I just grew up without knowing it.

If I could rewrite my story, I just wish that my mother would say sorry for what she did to me when I was young and then I would also ask her to forgive me. ■

### FOR REFLECTION

- What are some of the key moments in this story?
- Belen describes herself as having been sold. What do you consider may have been the factors leading to this?
- How would you respond if you saw an eight-year-old child working in a bar?
- Belen says, "Until now I am still very angry at my mother for what she did to me". Are there experiences in your own life that have led to ongoing anger? What effect has that had on your own life?
- Imagine that you are the mother of Belen. Write her a letter.

BAR



# EMERITA

## My happiness was short-lived

My name is Emerita. I was born in 1992 in Mindanao. I am the fourth of five children. My father worked in a fishing company owned by his friend but was later fired by the owner because my father had a mistress in the office.

My mother was a dressmaker; she sold clothes and owned a sari-sari store [a small convenience outlet]. When I was seven, my whole family left for Manila, miles away from our place, to seek greener pastures but I was left in my paternal grandmother's care. My mother used to leave me with my grandmother from the age of two. My Lola [grandmother] was sometimes naughty and a nagger but she loved me.

At four, I was raped by my uncle in my grandmother's house. He was working on a ship and only came home every two years. One time, he asked my grandmother, "May I borrow Emerita for a while? She is so cute that I want to buy things for her in the mall." I said no to my grandmother, but my lola said, "You go with your uncle." I was so terrified. From then on, I hated boys.

I was only educated up to grade four because I dropped out of school. I lost interest in studying and started using marijuana and alcohol when I was nine years old with some of my friends who were a little bit older than me.

When I was 10, my father came home, together with my eldest sister, from Manila, leaving behind some of my siblings with my mother. One time, we visited my aunty in Cebu but I was very sad because it was during that time that I was raped by my aunty's two sons. They were old already. I think one of them was already 28.

During this year, we found out that my mother had another man and was pregnant. My father became a drunkard and I saw him cry a lot. He left work and he did not care for himself.

I was mad at my mother. After some time, my father recovered from what happened and came alive once more. He sang together with us and we went to mass every Sunday. He promised that he would not take another woman and we were happy at that time. He went back to work and every pay day we went to shop in big malls. But my happiness was short lived because my father had mistresses. There were four of them all in all. I was mad at him and did not like all the women he brought to the house.

At 14, I wanted to be loved and having a boyfriend seemed like a solution. I was wrong because my boyfriend wanted only sex from me. ■

### FOR REFLECTION

- Look back at the artist's image of Emerita. What do you see in it?
- Emerita tells how she was raped as a child. What thoughts and feelings do you have in response to this revelation?
- Create a family tree. Circle the most significant people in your life. Write about your relationship with each one.
- What do you think it would feel like if the person you loved most left you? Discuss this with a friend.
- Describe a time in your childhood when you were deprived of something and another time when you received something in abundance. Reflect on how each experience made you feel.



# EVA

## Longing for a mother's love

I am Eva. My earliest memory was when I was very young, and my mother died. Even though my mother was always busy with her work outside and often beat us, I really could not accept that she died because I thought I was too young to have lost a mother and wondered how I could survive. I still had my father but it's different if your Mum is already gone.

Although I am very close to my father, I long for a mother's love...

I have two brothers and an older sister. I did not have a great relationship with my sister because she got married at 14. She lived in another house and came back to live again in our house after my mother died. Our neighbours would say that she was my mother's daughter out of wedlock. I have a good relationship with my two other brothers but with my sister it was not very good. In fact, I would like to think that it was her constant nagging that prodded me to seek happiness with peers and later my working in a bar.

I remember my childhood days with my father as good. He would often buy us food and other things when he had money but if he had none we just went on credit from our neighbour's sari-sari store [a small convenience outlet].

I was educated until grade 11. I had to stop schooling when I was 17 because my father had no work at that time and he was sick.

I always hung out with my peers and my boyfriend. I often came home late and my sister would tell me that it would be better for me to prostitute myself and bring home money since I loved to get home late. I was 18 when I started to work in a bar and to share money for the family upkeep. ■

### FOR REFLECTION

- What are some of the ways that the ill health or death of a parent might affect the experiences of a child?
- Reflect on your position in your own family and what your relationship is/was like with your siblings. Does it differ from sibling to sibling?
- Eva would like to think that her sister's nagging prodded her to seek happiness. Can you recall times in your life when something 'bad' led to something good?
- Eva says that she longed for a mother's love. How would you describe a mother's love? How does this compare to your own experience of a mother's love?
- Complete the sentence: "My family would be complete if ..."



# KATRINA

## Left at the pier

My name is Katrina. When I was two, my mother and father left us in the care of our elder brother, who was 12 at that time. They went to Cebu for work, an island far away from where we lived.

My mother seldom visited us. My elder brother would get our allowance from them. I can only remember maybe twice or three times that my mother came home.

I helped my brother in taking care of my other siblings. I was the fourth child of six but I felt I was the second because of the responsibility I had. My elder sister would only tell me what to do but it was me who did the household chores.

When I was seven, my father decided that the whole family would go to Cebu City. In the city, we had no house. We just stayed in the pier area and around the market. At night time, we slept along the fish section until the fish vendors arrived at 4am. We then moved under the big vans nearby to finish our sleep. We had no permanent place and I thought it was better back in our province because we had a little hut by ourselves.

I did many odd jobs while in the market in order to survive; one job was washing carrots for the vegetable vendors. Other family members, including my elder brother, sister and aunty, also worked at the market. We had to wash carrots during the night so that by early morning they would be ready for the consumers. For every kilo of washed carrots we got one peso.

We also got some money from my father's work as a butcher, and for running errands for other vendors. It would have been sufficient to feed the whole family, but my father was hooked on drugs and alcohol and he spent all the money on this.

Although my father was not keen for me to go to school, I attended as much as I could and tried to pay for my own tuition. I am educated to grade eight.

It was very unfortunate that I didn't see my mother again until I was 10 years old. Although we lived in the city, she was always busy. When I asked my father, "Where is my mother?" he would only reply, "Just around the corner."

It was my elder sister who cared for us. She worked in a street eatery and I also helped her sometimes to get my food. I was mad at my mother and at the same time I loved her. To me, she did not act as my mother and did not even show love for me. I blamed her for all the things that I experienced in my life and even now at 19 years of age I blame her.

From seven until 13 years old, I lived in the pier and market with very little adult supervision. There was a time that I lived in the house of my paternal aunt who had a little baby. She hired a male babysitter. This babysitter abused me sexually from the age of eight until I was 12. Nobody knew about this because the babysitter threatened me in order to keep it a secret.

At this time, I thought I was already addicted to sex because I was sort of looking for it. I went with men whether they paid me or not and sometimes I paid those who were willing to have sex with me.

My mother did not know what was happening to me. But she told me that if I had sex with men, then there was a chance that I may get pregnant. To avoid this happening to me and to make sure nobody found out about my sexual activity, I went to the big city of Manila and became a domestic helper. I only stayed there for a couple of months before coming back to Cebu. This time I became more focused on my friends and had sexual activity with many more men. ■



### FOR REFLECTION

- What are some of the impacts that alcohol and drug addiction might have on a family?
- What is your response to Katrina's belief that she is addicted to sex?
- Many of Katrina's behaviours were a response to a lack of love. What might be some other ways that people may respond to inadequate care?
- Reflect on this statement: "If Katrina's body could talk, it would say ..."
- Reflect on this statement: "If my body could talk, it would say ..."

# LEAH

## Threatened and wounded

My name is Leah. I was born in 1990 somewhere in Mindanao. I was the third child in a large family. I had one older brother and an older sister. My whole family lived near my grandparents on my mother's side. I was closer to my mother than my father. My mother gave me love and protection from my father's abusive behaviour.

From birth to age five, my recollection is that we were a happy family. My mother and father often played with all of us and we enjoyed those times.

Not long after, my happiness was clouded with misery and pain. It started when my father and mother began to quarrel a lot. When I was seven, my parents had a big quarrel and my father threatened to kill me, my brother and older sister who were trapped with him on the second floor of our house while my mother was in the lower ground waiting for us to escape. I was so afraid that I leapt from the window. I broke my leg and was limping when I went back to school a month after the incident. I had not received appropriate medical attention for my broken leg but instead my mother took me to a "quack doctor", a local healer. Our neighbours told me that I would not be able to walk again but I was determined to walk so I always massaged my right leg until such time that I could walk again.

My father has always been abusive to all of us. There was even one time that he wanted to kill me with a knife but my mother grabbed it from his hand to protect me. I was so afraid that he would kill my mother at that time. I loved my mother so much that I would not let my father kill her just because of me.

Another time my mother had to take out the bullets from father's hand gun so that he could not kill us. It was raining hard but we had to stay under a tree because we were afraid to go into the house.

When I was eight, my parents had a quarrel and left me and my older brother alone in the house. He raped me. I did not want to add to my mother's problems, especially as my father had left us during that period, so I just kept that incident to myself. I thought, "Maybe I am only an adopted child so that's why my brother did it to me." He raped me four times. I was very down at that time. I also dropped out of school.

At the age of nine, my parents were reunited and I was also back in school. We were happy again. But the next year, my father stabbed himself because of poverty.

Between the ages of 11 and 12, I was raped by my father. I ran away from home and lived in the house of my classmate. I worked in their house while I stayed at school. I finished grade 5.

At 14, I worked for another family but I did not tell my family the address for fear that my older brother would force me again to steal some food and things from my employer, just as he did to me with my previous employer.

One day I had the strongest urge to visit my family. When I arrived home, I saw a coffin inside. It was my mother. My father murdered her whilst in a rage. This is the strongest memory I have as a child.

After the death of my mother I came to Cebu and I was recruited to go to Kamagayan [the red light district of Cebu City]. ■



### FOR REFLECTION

- List some of the key moments in Leah's story of her childhood.
- Were there parts of Leah's story that you found difficult to read? Why do you think this was so?
- Create a collage, painting or drawing based on your feelings about this story.
- What thoughts does Leah's story raise about the impact of family violence on a child?
- Complete this sentence: "When I'm in pain — physical or emotional — the kindest thing I can do for myself is ..."

# RAQUEL

## Papa's girl

My name is Raquel. I was five when my father died. My father's death came as a shock to us since he was our only provider. He worked as a cook on a local ship and also, as a sideline, he did trading of scrap iron.

I was very sad at my father's death because I considered myself a 'papa's girl'. But having no one else to cling to, I became closer to my mother and even under the heat of the sun I accompanied her as she sold native delicacies around the community. It was our main source of food after the death of my father.

I have good memories of my father. He would often come home with some gifts for all of us. I was the fourth of seven siblings. He played with us and knew some fun games. We slept together and we were happy when he was around. My mother took care of us well.

When I was six my mother found another boyfriend and married him later. At first I did not like the idea of my mother having another man in her life but I could not do anything about it. They had three children of their own.

When I was growing up we did not have much food on the table. Sometimes my mother would come home from selling delicacies with money to buy food but other times we just ate the delicacies which had not been sold.

I remember my sister contributing some money out of her earnings from the bar where she worked through the introduction of our maternal grandmother. My aunty in Japan also used to send us money but that stopped after my mother had a quarrel with her.

From ages six to 11, I used to collect left-over bones from the dumpsite for our food. Our house was near the dumpsite so it was easy for me to see when trucks arrived. I would segregate flesh from the bones. The bones went to dogs while I heated the flesh and would serve it as our food.

I had to drop my schooling when I was in grade two.

At 15, I had my first baby. My baby's father was much older than me and worked on a ship. We did not have a formal relationship, we did not live together, but every time he would visit me he brought food and other things I needed. He'd come to visit and leave without any definite schedule. He did not give regular support to the child. My mother provided food for the baby and me whenever he was not around.

At 16, I met a younger guy and I fell in love with him. My mother resented my relationship with this guy and so I was ashamed to ask for money for the baby's milk and other needs. I decided at this point to earn money. I chased taxis and did "blow job" work for the drivers while they were resting inside their taxis. I had another baby when I was 17.

Life continued to be harsh for me which made me decide to give up my two children for adoption when I was 18. ■



### FOR REFLECTION

- Was there anything in Raquel's story that surprised or shocked you?
- Are there any connections between this story and your own life?
- Complete this sentence: "If I could talk to my teenage self I would say..." Is this the same or different to what you would say to Raquel as a teenager?
- What thoughts does reading about Raquel's experience give you about issues in your local community? The nation? The world?
- Write a letter to the editor of a local news publication expressing your views on one thing that happened in Raquel's life that you think the community should treat differently.

# RIZA

## Lured to the shrubs

My name is Riza. I grew up in a good family together with my younger brother in the south-west part of the mainland of Cebu. It was a rural community where most of our neighbours were from my father's family, while my mother's family were living an hour's walk away from our house.

One of the happiest moments in my life was when I celebrated my birthday. I cannot remember at what age this was, however it was memorable to me because my whole family and some relatives were having a beach party.

I also remember that whenever my mama and papa quarrelled, my mama would run away to stay with my aunty in the city. She would stay there for more than two months. Every time she went away, I felt so sad and wished that when I came back from school, she would be in our home again. I was angry at my father. I always remember him as scolding and beating me up until I was 14.

I was five when I first experienced life's harshness. One day, I was doing an errand for my grandmother, fetching water. The source was far from our home and I had to pass through many fields. All of sudden my three cousins met me on the path, lured me to the shrubs and one of them raped me. I was devastated, but went home pretending that nothing happened. I did not know what to do. Not long after my father found out and he physically battered me. I had bruises all over my body. I cried and cried, most especially because he beat me in front of our neighbours.

At six, I went to school. Everyone in school knew that I had been raped. They teased and bullied me and called me names. Despite the humiliations, I continued my studies until I finished grade six, which made my mother and me happy. My mother told me that despite all of the negative experiences in school, I am a survivor. Even though it was difficult, I managed to continue my studies.

When I was around nine or 10, I tried to commit suicide by holding a knife against my neck but my brother saw and prevented me from doing it. I considered it unfortunate for me to be stopped from killing myself. I asked God why he allowed such agony in my life. During these times, I often talked back to my mother and quarrelled with my brother to the point that I threatened his life.

When I was in grade nine, I dropped out of school due to negative peer influence. I drank alcohol and went to community dances, which made me lose interest in school. I left our house and went to live with my aunty in another city, a little farther from my birthplace, and helped her in doing household work. I was 15. In my aunty's house, I again experienced sexual abuse, this time from my uncle. He fondled my private body parts and attempted to rape me. I was traumatised again by his behaviour and went back home due to my aunty's advice to look for a job.

Later I went again to the city and worked as a domestic helper. My employer helped me get back to school and paid my tuition fees but again I dropped out of school and left my domestic employer due to peer influence and having a boyfriend at 16. It was at this time that I worked at a karaoke bar and was trapped into human trafficking. I was later rescued and went to the Good Shepherd Recovery Centre.

I am thankful to the Recovery Centre staff who assisted me in obtaining an educational acceleration given by the government. I am now considered a secondary level graduate. ■



### FOR REFLECTION

- What is your response to Riza's story?
- Riza was victimised and bullied as a result of being raped. Can you think of other situations in which the victim is blamed?
- Riza's mother told her that she was a 'survivor'. What does the term 'survivor' mean to you?
- If your life had a soundtrack, like a movie, what songs would you include? Why?
- Complete this sentence: "I wish all children could experience ..."

# ROSE

## No longer peaceful

I am Rose. I was born in Cebu City, an only child. When I was young my parents cared for me but as I grew up they became drunkards. My parents were always quarrelling when I was a child and the only way to forget all my troubles was to play with my cousins who lived near me. My lola [grandmother] was also nearby and she loved and cared for me.

My father died when I was just 12 years old and in the early years of high school. I worried about how I would complete my schooling, but I am happy to say I graduated from high school. I am proud of this achievement because my life was so chaotic after my father died. My mother was a drunkard and she and her live-in partner would come home late at night and quarrel and yell and my house was no longer peaceful. I argued with my mother and asked her why she behaved this way and I was even angrier when she married that drunkard live-in partner. ■

### FOR REFLECTION

- Rose played with her cousins to escape from disruptions at home. What did you do as a child to distract you from things you didn't like? What about as an adult?
- How can a parent's choice of a new partner affect a child? Do you think a child has a right to an opinion on their parent's new partner?
- Complete this sentence: "When I was a child I learned that ..."
- Which relationships in your family are the most important to you? Why?
- What are you most proud of in your life? Why?



## Contextualising childhood experiences

In seeking to understand the trafficking story in the lives of women it is very important that abuse be seen as a process rather than a one-off incident. For the women in this study, trafficking was not their first experience of abuse, mistreatment and exploitation; rather, they were subject to a continuum of abuse that began at a very young age.

### CHILDHOOD ABUSE

In the Philippines, the prevalence of child abuse is considered a serious social problem. While accurate numbers are difficult to ascertain due to under-reporting and the illegal nature of abuse, Department of Social Welfare and Development figures suggest that in the year 2000 (reflecting the time at which the majority of the women we spoke to experienced childhood) there were 7864 reported cases of childhood abuse. Of these cases, 57% were cases of sexual abuse, 26% were classified as cases of neglect, and 17% were considered physical abuse cases, indicating that sexual abuse is the most prevalent type of abuse.

The majority of women we interviewed were subject to one or more forms of abuse during their childhood and adolescent years. The participants described physical, emotional, sexual, verbal and financial abuse. Their narratives forcibly declare that abuse was a significant experience in their childhood, altering their sense of safety and trust. When asked to recall memorable childhood events and transitions, many women chose to highlight their abuse as a critical part of those stories.

Most participants experienced multiple abuses in childhood. Where one type of abuse was present, more often than not other forms of abuse were also perpetrated – i.e. if the women were sexually abused it is likely that they were also physically and emotionally abused. For some children, abuse was repetitive and not just perpetrated by one person. This suggests that a systemic pattern of abuse existed in families and the broader community.

A significant response to sexual abuse is to engage in sexualised behaviour. Many of the participants felt confused about their sexual feelings and behaviours. The notion of being ‘addicted to’ or having an inappropriate liking for sex has been discussed by authors and researchers studying impacts on behaviours of sexually abused children. They suggest ‘sexualised behaviour’ is a result of boundary violation by the perpetrator.<sup>2</sup> Clinical psychologists Abu Ali and Al-Bahar offer further insights, claiming that “for children who have been sexually exploited, the definition and value of self becomes equated with sexuality. Hence child victims attempt to re-engage in sexualised behaviours to validate their presence and the only self-worth with which they are familiar”.<sup>3</sup>

It is evident in the women’s narratives that the abuse they experienced in childhood left them feeling unsafe and unprotected in the world. This made them more vulnerable to abuse as adolescents and adults. The ongoing nature of the abuse meant that for many it was an accepted part of the reality of life.

### STIGMATISATION

Stigmatisation also had a huge impact on the women’s self-image. Many felt that they were worthless and wished that they had not been born. Some felt that they were destined to remain marginalised throughout their lives. The effects of stigmatisation by others in their everyday environment is discussed by childhood psychologist David Finkelhor, who argues that, “Children may be additionally stigmatised by people in the environment who now impute other negative characteristics to the victim, for example, loose morals or spoiled goods.”<sup>4</sup>

These projected, negative characteristics, combined with low self-esteem, meant that some women felt the trafficking experience was something they deserved. Their experiences of stigmatisation resulted in them moving towards further marginalisation. Finkelhor explains that a possible response by a stigmatised child is to “gravitate to various stigmatised levels of society. Thus, they may get involved in drug or alcohol abuse, in criminal activity or in prostitution”. This was, indeed, the experience of many of the participants, who described themselves as rebellious or seeking out those who also felt marginalised, and thus their vulnerability to being trafficked was increased.

## **THE RURAL POOR**

In Asian developing countries, nearly three-quarters of poor people are found in rural areas. Writing about the Philippines economy and the rural sector, Filipino academic Arseneo Balisacan highlights the vulnerability of Filipinos residing in rural areas, calling for agricultural growth and rural development as a means of reducing poverty.<sup>5</sup> In other writings on Philippines poverty, Balisacan emphasises the neglect of rural infrastructure and social services, particularly in the southern part of the Philippines. He asserts that the lowest level of poverty is in metropolitan Manila, while rural regions, including Mindanao and the Visayas, have the highest levels of poverty.<sup>6</sup> It is perhaps not surprising, then, that a large proportion of the research cohort were born and grew up in the central or southern parts of the Philippines, which includes the Visayas and Mindanao.

Those women who remained in rural or remote areas expressed an ongoing frustration with poverty, unemployment and lack of educational opportunities. Isolation was one of the main reasons that families moved closer to the city, with a view to improving employment opportunities and hence access to food and education. However, this has not been the reality. Instead we have seen the emergence of the 'urban poor', the ranks of which are typically made up of migrants from rural areas who have been living in poverty.<sup>7</sup>

## **PRIMARY RELATIONSHIPS**

A key principle of the life course perspective is that of 'linked lives', which highlights the interdependent nature of relationships, particularly within families, and suggests patterns of mutual advantage and disadvantage.<sup>8</sup> During childhood, primary relationships are integral to the development of other relationships over the lifespan.

The narratives of the women in this study indicate that the relationships they experienced in childhood were many and varied. On the whole, primary parental roles were not fulfilled, with the participants giving a strong indication that many parents were absent during their childhood. In the absence of parents, family members, particularly grandmothers, were the primary carers. Extended family members such as aunts and uncles often became significant in the lives of these children, and in some instances step-parents were involved. Others were in the care of adoptive parents or extended family. All of these arrangements, whether formal or informal, impacted on the family life trajectory of these women, creating a yearning for a stable family environment.

Many participants found themselves in living environments where they were not emotionally connected to anyone. Often carers resented their presence because of the financial burdens they carried. Many participants grieved the absence of their mothers, whom they felt should have been there to protect them and care for them in their early years.

## **VULNERABILITY**

Harsh living environments, coupled with chronic abuse and a series of strained relationships within the family exacerbated the vulnerability the young women faced in childhood. Many found solace amongst peers who had experienced similar conditions. Some became rebellious in school and became abusive towards family members and others.

Many of the women found themselves, as children on the run, engaging in risk-taking behaviour that was sometimes sexualised. Some used drugs and alcohol as a way of easing their pain. Some experienced confusion about their sexuality due to childhood abuse and cultural taboos and oftentimes felt that they were to blame for things that happened to them. A lack of trust in others and a low self-esteem accompanied these feelings.

It appears that in many instances the women took steps to seek an alternative, safer environment, only to experience further abuse. They began to accumulate a life of disadvantage and despair. In effect, the women became highly vulnerable to recruiters and traffickers who were seeking to source them for sexual exploitation.

The circumstances, memories and events that women recalled in the course of our interviews created a picture of childhoods largely marred by deprivation, stigmatisation and abuse. Emerging from these narratives is a developing life trajectory of vulnerability, which indicates intergenerational and systemic deprivation.

*“Another time when I ran away because of my brothers I went to a beach area and there was a man there who stalked me and touched my body. I found a place where there were plenty of people but I was still fearful.”*

**Jovie**

# CHAPTER TWO

## Trafficked – The Voices of the Vulnerable





## Precede

In the course of our research, as we listened to stories detailing rocky childhoods through troubled adolescence and into early adulthood, we began to see that these women's life journeys often resembled a roller coaster, lurching from one crisis to another.

Childhood circumstances provide great insight into the individual trafficking trajectory. For most participants, the experience of being sexually trafficked was just one more experience of exploitation and abuse. In other words, trafficking was not so much a discrete event but another abusive experience in a series of such experiences.

The women we interviewed described lives of systemic abuse in which they were marginalised, objectified and stigmatised, beginning in early childhood. That some participants felt suicidal and questioned their own place in the world highlights just how oppressive their environment was. They were clearly overwhelmed by their deprivation and abuse and could no longer see the value of life.

It is no accident that such a child is then exploited for profit in their later years. With low self-esteem, feelings of shame and a belief that one is somehow deserving of the abuse inflicted, children and young adolescents become the easy prey of traffickers.

## Points to Ponder

As you read these stories, please keep in mind the following points, which provide some background to the realities of life for many trafficked Filipino women. A more detailed discussion of these factors is provided at the end of this chapter.

### **VULNERABILITY**

- Women in this research often experienced stigmatisation and marginalisation on account of their family or parental circumstances.
- As girls, many of the women in this study experienced childhood rape more than once.
- Sexual abuse was usually accompanied by other types of abuse such as physical abuse, verbal abuse and emotional abuse. A number of stories indicated intergenerational abuse had occurred within families.
- Many of the women in this study lived in a family environment in which they felt unsafe.
- Running away from home and the local community was a common means through which young women in this study tried to improve their lives (in most instances there is more work in the city than in the rural areas and the pay is generally better). Such women often found themselves floundering in an unknown environment, easily deceived about their future prospects and hence were easy prey to traffickers.
- Risk-taking formed part of many women's narratives. Examples of this sort of behaviour include running away or accepting a job offer when in doubt.
- Some young women used drugs and alcohol from a very young age as a form of rebellion or as a way of numbing pain.
- Some young women felt destined to be prostituted in later life as a result of their earlier life experiences.

### **SEEKING AN INCOME**

- Many women felt they had constrained choices when seeking income.
- Legal recruitment agencies can provide legitimate employment opportunities for those seeking work. Illegal recruitment practises also operate in the same environment, making young women vulnerable to exploitation.
- Girl children are often expected to undertake domestic tasks within the family and as house helpers in the community.

- Many of the women in this study who worked as house helpers experienced different forms of abuse and exploitation.
- Many sexually exploitative practises are packaged under the guise of 'waitressing' or as a 'Guest Relations Officer' (GRO) or a 'karaoke bar worker'.
- In this study female minors were often knowingly employed in bar work and subjected to sexual exploitation.

### **THE ILLICIT SEX INDUSTRY**

- The use of women for sexual exploitation is dependent on the demand for sexual services.
- Cities like Cebu that have easy port access and international links provide easy avenues for traffickers.
- Not all trafficking operations are made up of organised crime syndicates. Some are small family operated illicit businesses.
- Prostituted women are stigmatised and marginalised, while those who use them are mostly unidentified.

### **EXPERIENCING SEX TRAFFICKING**

- The women interviewed revealed that many of the men who availed of sexual services were often intoxicated and sometimes violent.
- Some women in this study felt that they were treated as objects and toys whilst being prostituted.
- Pack rape was experienced by more than one woman. All spoke of this experience as dehumanising.
- Many women 'opted' to take drugs (often shabu [methamphetamine]) whilst being prostituted. They described its use as a way of reducing inhibitions and numbing them from reality.
- The narratives of some of the women in this study indicated that they experienced being held captive by guards, 'watchers' or others.
- Women in this study spoke of some pimps as being abusive and powerful. Many regarded the pimps as making the most money.
- Debt bondage was the reality for most of the women interviewed for this study.
- Some women were used as escorts for foreign tourists and felt that they were treated reasonably during this time.
- Many women found it difficult to exit their situation because of their addiction to drugs.
- One woman in the study sought help from police and immigration whilst in the trafficking situation. In both instances she was denied any assistance.
- Women in this study who were 'rescued' experienced it more like a raid – a negative rather than positive experience. Many described their experience of being rescued as traumatic and exposing.
- Most women in this study indicated that they exited their situation when they were given the opportunity, though some women felt tied to their employer for reasons of loyalty, debt or a sense of duty.
- Although tricked, exploited and deceived by their traffickers, some women did not want their traffickers to be punished by the law.
- Some women in this study were fearful of meeting their traffickers in the future.

### **RESPONSES TO BEING TRAFFICKED**

- For many women, the experience of being trafficked for sexual exploitation replicated their childhood experience of abuse.
- Women trafficked for sexual exploitation often suffer from low self-esteem. Self-blame and self-retribution were other common responses women in this study had to being trafficked.
- The experience of deception left some women questioning the trustworthiness of all.

- Some women in this study had contemplated suicide in response to their circumstances.
- Most women in this study experienced stigmatisation as a result of being trafficked.
- Some women felt that once trafficked for sexual exploitation they were destined to be prostituted for the rest of their lives.

### **PREGNANCY AND MOTHERHOOD**

- Teenage pregnancy is considered to have significant health risks.
- Some women in this study had children who were adopted out. This caused them further emotional turbulence.



# CATHY

## No one can treat me like a dog

I am Cathy. I am 20 years of age and was born in the north of the Philippines. I lived with my paternal grandmother as a young child and was told that my mother had been a prostitute and had met my father in a bar. She became pregnant with twin girls and we were adopted out to separate places.

Luckily for me I was adopted in the local area so I was able to be reunited with my grandmother and father. I heard years later that my twin sister had died. I met my mother only once before she died. I was 10 at that time and she was selling vegetables in the market and a neighbour pointed her out to me.

My father was worried that my mother would make my life a mess if we stayed together and so I stayed living with my lola [grandmother].

When I was 13 I attended my mother's funeral. I was told that she was pregnant at the time and had been beaten up by her live-in partner. She had many bruises all over her body. It was very scary to see her that way. I was not really distressed at the actual time of her death because I did not really know her. However, I regretted that I did not have much time to be with her.

Although I was loved by my grandmother, it's not the same as the love of a mother that I really wanted. If I could turn back time, I would love to have my mother, even for one month, so that I could feel her love.

I attended school up until my second year of high school. My grandmother was the one who bore the cost of my schooling, though sometimes my father would give her money.

My aunts really resented me because of the care my grandmother gave me. They were cruel to me and teased me and told me I was going to end up a prostitute like my mother. This made me sad, but I loved school and I was especially proud when I won Miss Filipina in my school. My aunts didn't believe that I could do it, but I joined the parade and I won because of a poem I wrote. I couldn't imagine that I would ever win. It was a very happy moment for me.

When I was a teenager, I left school because I had told my grandma that I would help earn money. I started work as a waitress. It was during this time that I had an affair with a married man. His wife was out to get me so I needed to leave that place. An acquaintance of mine asked me if I wanted to work in Cebu. I told him that it was so far away and that I was only 16, but he arranged for two other friends of mine who were also minors to come to Cebu with me. He told us we would earn good money as waitresses but when we arrived in Cebu we were transported in a van to a club.

When we entered the club it was big and dark but I knew it was a club because there were lights flickering and plenty of girls with heavy make-up. I was nervous at that moment because I knew that this is what they wanted me to do also. I didn't feel good about it. I had to wear heavy make-up and put on shorts which were very transparent, my underwear could be seen, and I also had to wear boots. We were given numbers to wear so that we could be identified by the customers. We were called one after the other to dance on the stage. My heart was pumping very fast and I was perspiring and I really didn't know what was happening.

For three weeks I was just dancing on the stage and then one night I was told that somebody had 'bar fined' me. I did not know what this meant. A more experienced woman explained that a man had bought me. She loaned me her cell phone and told me to call her when I got to the hotel. When I got there I rang her and she told me to take a bath and then to lie down on the bed and so I followed her instructions. Later she text me and told me if I was done I should take a bath and return to the club.

I was so ashamed but I could not escape my situation. I had more customers after that. Some gave me big tips and some guys were nice to me. I was cautious though because some of the ▶

more experienced women told me that foreigners were more inclined to beat their customers. I was always on guard. My customers were generally Korean, Japanese and American. I never went with a Filipino because I was too ashamed.

I gave all my earnings to the two women who were my managers; this included any tips that were given to me. They said that I had plenty of debts. My debts included payment for living in the apartment, my food, clothing and make up. I could not escape because there were people who watched what we were doing – we called them ‘watchers’.

I think I was in that bar for two years. A few days before I turned 18 the bar was raided. Our casa, our apartment, was raided early in the morning. We were so shocked because we slept in our bras and undies and when we opened our eyes there were lights from the cameras shining in our eyes. We were told to get dressed. They raided three casas simultaneously. All the casas were operated by the same managers. There were 90 of us but not all were minors. During the raid I was shocked and afraid. I even hid behind the door because there were plenty of cameras and we were soon on television and in the news.

Although I had had problems earlier in life I did not know that another problem awaited me in Cebu. I pitied myself for what happened to me. I felt that I was alone and nobody would support me, that I would just have this lonely life. I interacted with my co-workers but my own true feelings, I did not share. I did not trust anyone. I did not know, if I told them my real feelings, whether they would not tell my managers, and that could have caused conflict. And I was angry with myself. I wondered how I could let all this happen to me.

There were times when I was a victim of trafficking that I just went with the flow, like I just accepted it. But I still had hopes and I fought for my future. No one can treat me like a dog. I had a limit to what could be done. ■

### FOR REFLECTION

- Are there any connections between this story and your own life?
- Complete this sentence: “I wish I could forget the time I ...”
- Can you recall a time in which you felt exposed or humiliated?
- Complete this sentence: “As a child I missed the chance to ...”
- Describe an environment in which you do feel safe.

# ESTER

## My life is not yet beautiful

I am Ester. My life is not yet beautiful; I still have plenty of problems.

The place where I lived as a child was mountainous and cold. I lived with my lola [grandmother] as a young baby and then I was brought by my mother to stay in Cebu with my paternal lola.

I have three half-sisters and two half-brothers. As a child I felt sadness because my mother and father quarrelled and I was moved around a lot. We were very poor and I was always told that I was such a burden to care for. When I was six years old I was raped by my step-brothers when I was staying with my father and stepmother. No one knew about this. Later I was raped by my paternal uncle and when I went to my aunty's her husband sexually harassed me.

When I was nine I went and lived with my aunty as a house helper. At first, I thought that she was good. She treated me nicely and I said to myself, "I hope this is not only plastic." But I was wrong. Within a month she showed her true colours. She mistreated me. She treated me like an animal. I did all the housework and she shouted at me and every time she wanted to do something she yelled and physically abused me.

If I could live my childhood again I would have many toys, many playmates, food, and my parents would be loving towards me. They would take care of me and I would have plenty of friends to play with.

At the age of 15 I fell pregnant. The father of my baby was 50 years old and I was sold by my aunty to that man because they were friends. We started living together when I was 14 and I gave birth at 15. I was really forced to go with that old man because I wanted to get away from my aunty. It was like clinging to a blade – I had to just to get away from my aunty, and I thought it would be good to go with this man but I was wrong.

At first he seemed good, he promised to buy me a house and to provide everything but these promises were not fulfilled. He didn't even buy a container for our plates. And after I gave birth he did not have anything for the baby. He had lots of fun with his friends but he neglected me.

At 16 I separated from this man because I could not endure his behaviour. He was jealous and controlling and possessive. I ran away from him but he found me and physically abused me. Eventually I went to Cebu City where I worked as a dancer in a disco bar. I had a pimp there under the arrangement of my mother; he would pick up customers for me. That pimp really treated me like a pig. I had to obey him just to get the money.

The first customer I had took me to a hotel. I really had no idea. I was bothered and I started crying and the customer said, "What, you don't know what your job is?" and I told him, "This is my first time, so I really don't have an idea" and I cried a lot and I appealed to the customer. So he said to me, "OK, you want the pimp to be arrested? I can help you," but I said, "No, just take me home" and the customer gave me money but he did not have sex with me. He just took me home.

I was very angry at my mum but I could not show it to her, so I just said to myself, "What kind of a mother is she, to pimp her own daughter?" I was so angry but I had no power to show it to her because she was also under the power of her husband and they didn't want me to stay in their house.

That first customer explained to me that the pimp and my mother could be charged with trafficking and he told me to call him if I needed help. I was happy that this man understood me and offered to help me so I just stayed in my house for two weeks. However, I was concerned about how I could feed my baby, how I could have money, so I decided to go into prostitution because that's the only way I knew I could get some money. ▶

I became a 'pick-up girl'. I arranged with another pimp to collect well-to-do customers. He would text me when a customer was available and I would give him some of the profits. After a while I maintained my own regular customers. I no longer needed the pimp; I received all the profits.

There were also instances when I got customers who were foreigners. They would organise a tour. Me and sometimes two or three of us would accompany them on a tour and I would make big money. I was there only as a guide, there was no sex involved. I enjoyed this touring because there was plenty of food and it was very expensive and extravagant. Even though we were prostitutes, they treated us very well. We three girls had one room and we could sleep and wake up when we liked. It was really a good experience.

Pick-up girls stay on the streets not because they want sex. In my case, I did not become a pick-up girl because of sex. The reason I was pushed to become a pick-up girl was because of money. I needed money. The other girls, they needed money. That is why they stayed pick-up girls. If we had money then we wouldn't be standing on the streets looking for customers. If there was an opportunity where there would be money and no sex, we would appreciate that very much.

The incident that really made me give up being a call girl was when I was abused by my last customer. It was 3am and I was in a disco bar and about to go home when I was called by a pimp to take a customer. I was not feeling well, I think I was sick, so I refused, but the pimp insisted because he said the customer would pay very well. So I was really forced to come. The customer was in his forties and he was very fat and he was very drunk. He was staying in a nearby hotel. He asked me to get in a bathtub full of water and it made me feel even sicker because I was shivering and being dipped in the water. That was very bad for me but I had to do it. I was a little bit drowned for some seconds and then he pulled me up and made me have sex in several positions. There was a moment after the bathtub incident that we were bathing under the shower and he bumped his head against the wall because he was so drunk. He then bumped my head against the wall, saying "I was hurt, you also must be hurt". I was abused physically and sexually by this man. He demanded to have sex many times. I said, "If you take juice first you will have more energy." I came up with this strategy to save myself because I saw on the table plenty of pills, including sleeping pills. So when he got his phone, his butt was on me, I got the sleeping pills and put them in the juice. I forced him to drink the juice, explaining to him that he would have more energy for sex. So he took the juice and after some seconds he was asleep and I dressed and ran away.

Once I got outside of the hotel I didn't have any energy anymore. I just stood against the wall and dropped. I was so sad because I thought at that time that I had no hope, I had no future, and people would sneer at me. I could feel it; they did not respect me anymore. I even said to myself at that time that I could die anytime, it would not matter.

The last word I have about trafficking is that I hope people will understand why we are prostituted. I hope that they will understand that we are there not because we want sex but because we need money to support ourselves and other people who depend on us. I hope people will understand, and respect us, and not put us down. When I see someone who is trafficked now, I really pity the girl because I know how difficult it is to be trafficked. ■

## FOR REFLECTION

- Look at the image of Ester. How does the painting capture the story of her life?
- Ester was sexually abused by family members from the age of six. How do you think this would affect her growth and development?
- What might have been Ester's fears, hopes and dreams during her pregnancy at 15 years of age?
- Ester experienced betrayal from many people. Have you ever been betrayed? What was your experience?
- Write a letter to Ester in response to what she hopes for.



# CRISTY

## I met a woman who had the same name as me

My name is Cristy and I am 26 years old. I grew up in the southern part of the Philippines and I was the only girl in a family of seven children. I had a very strong relationship with my father and I was devastated when he died. I was just 12 years old. When he died I really couldn't accept it. I wished that it had been my mama who had died. My father had always given me whatever I wanted but my mama was not like that. Soon after my father died my mother remarried and I was not happy. The worst thing she did was to allow my younger brother to be adopted by my aunty. They are in a different country now. I still cannot forgive her for this.

After completing elementary school I attended high school for only one year. Then I ran away to Cebu. I was 14 years old. At that time I met a German guy who became my boyfriend. I lived with him for a few years until I found out that he had another woman. I was so angry and upset and was always asking myself why he fell in love with another woman.

After this I met a woman who had the same name as me. She knew that I needed money and introduced me to Kamagayan [the red light district of Cebu City]. She had a rental property where girls like me also lived. While I was there this woman sold me to a foreigner. She told me I only had to massage him, but I did not know that the foreigner had paid plenty of money to her and that she had promised I would have sex with him. This man was physically abusive to me and forced me to take drugs. I can say that he was a sadist. He enjoyed looking at a woman being in pain before having sex.

After that experience I continued to stay in Kamagayan. I was raped and subjected to many violent acts. I was so drugged up that sometimes I would go without sleep for 24 hours. When I took drugs, I lost my appetite and I couldn't sleep. When the effect of the drugs wore off I wanted another shot. If I am on drugs, I can entertain men because I am not ashamed. But if I am not on drugs I don't like customers.

I did not receive even five pesos the whole time I was there, because my employer would just give me dresses and drugs and then she would tell me I owed a lot of debts to her.

I can now say that I was a victim of trafficking. After four months of living in Kamagayan, the place was raided by police and an NGO here in Cebu. I was happy because I could escape. What kept me going was the thought that I could make money and bring my little brother home.

If you are a girl and new to the city you should be careful and you should not go to disco bars. You should choose your friends because there are plenty who are snatchers and who are sweet talkers who will take you to a place that is not good. I think if I had not run away from home I would have finished my schooling and then finished a degree and worked. However, on the other hand, because I ran away from place to place, I found out that I can be alone and independent. ■

### FOR REFLECTION

- What was it like for you to read this story?
- Cristy trusted the woman with the same name as her. In what way was she betrayed?
- Draw a life events timeline for Cristy. Mark the point of significance in her story.
- Reflect on your own life timeline. Mark the places that were significant to you.
- Cristy reflects on both the positive and negative effects of her decision to run away from home. What life-changing decisions have you made? What were the positive/negative affects?



# DULCE

## Just a kid

My name is Dulce. I grew up with my grandmother and have good memories of our beautiful relationship. When she died, things became difficult for me. Eventually I ran away from home, which was located in the northern part of Cebu. I went to Cebu City and having no relatives or anybody to live with I just roamed around, especially in Colon Street, one of the busiest streets of the city.

I made friends with people in the street and one woman, who later I found out was a prostitute, told me that I could find money if I entertained customers, which I did to survive. With the money I made, I got a room in a lodging house, with rent paid daily. I was with other prostituted women in that lodging house. It served as my space for sleeping, having a bath and washing my clothes. It was the way most of the street-based freelance prostitutes operated to get shelter so I followed their lead.

I entertained my customers inside my room and made them pay my room fee for that day. By the way, in my entire work as a prostitute I only had anal and oral sex. I would not allow customers to have deep penetration. I was worried and afraid to do vaginal sex because I was afraid that I would be hurt. I had local and foreign customers and if they would not go for oral or anal, I would not entertain them. Actually, most of my customers were drunk so would not notice if it was the vagina or the anus. The customers used condoms so I think they could not feel the difference.

Before I started entertaining customers myself, I first did pimping for older women. It was easy for me to bring customers for them but there were some men who would prefer me. So I thought, "OK, I will serve them." That allowed me to get more money because when I was a pimp I was only given a portion of the negotiated money; for example, when the service was charged at PHP300, I got only PHP100, and PHP50 for a PHP200 service. I was 12 when I started this work. Sometimes I got customers for older women or at times I served the men myself. My life on the street was like being part of a big family, helping one another get customers for ourselves and for our friends. Sometimes older women would pimp me or I pimped them.

When I had sex with men, I would take drugs (shabu [methamphetamine]) and once I had it, I felt quieter. Usually I had customers between 12am and 4am, at least two to three. I felt tired but I was happy also because I had money to buy some food, drugs and anything else I needed.

When I was 14, I met nuns in Colon. I was one of the girls who got a rosary which they distributed. We had a brief talk and they invited me to stay in their home. The following day, I came to their place because I thought that maybe food was abundant there. I liked and stayed in the centre for about two years. I ran away when I was about 17 because the nuns forced me to continue my studies which I did not like. I came back to Colon St and went back to pimping and prostituting.

After eight or nine months in Colon I felt bored and asked for the help of the social worker at the Good Shepherd Welcome House who was doing regular night outreach work in the area. I asked the social worker to contact the nuns at the centre where I was before because I wanted to go back to the centre. I was happy that the nuns took me back inside the centre. ■



### FOR REFLECTION

- Dulce was prostituted at 12 years of age. What was life like for you when you were 12?
- At 12, Dulce struggled to have her basic needs met. What compromises did she make in order to have food and shelter?
- Dulce was treated as an object by those who bought her for sex. What might be the impact of such an experience?
- Can you describe Dulce's vulnerabilities?
- Can you describe Dulce's strength?



### FOR REFLECTION

- Jovie says, “I think trafficking happens because of the many problems that the women have, family problems that they do not want to go home and so they just decide to stay there like I did.” Why do you think trafficking happens?
- Jovie states that whenever she has a problem she tends to run away. What do you do when you have a problem?
- Describe a time when you felt like an “outsider” or that you didn’t belong? What was it like? How did you feel?
- Have you ever felt trapped? Have you ever felt caught in a situation you couldn’t get out of? What was the experience? How did you feel?
- Drugs and alcohol often numb feelings. This can be a form of escape. Can you think of a time that you have used or been dependant on drugs or alcohol to numb your feelings?

# JOVIE

## Looking for peace

My name is Jovie and I grew up in a mountainous area of the Philippines with very few neighbours. I am the only girl in my family and I was adopted. I have three brothers in my adoptive family and they were very abusive towards me. When I was young I can remember that sometimes my brother would spank me and then I was not very happy, especially when my adoptive mother transferred out of the house for work.

When I first learned that I was adopted I was very sad and I realised why I was not close with my brothers. I asked myself, "Why did my real mother give me to another person?" I thought that maybe there were plenty of brothers and sisters and there was no money to buy milk for all of us and that is why I was placed in a banana plantation for other people to find me.

My adoptive father worked in the sugar cane industry and this provided for our food and some education. I only attended school until the end of elementary. My father and I and my three brothers mostly lived together as my mother was relocated due to her work. When I would return home from school there was only my brothers and me and they would get mad at me and beat me up. So I used to run away and my father would come looking for me and bring me home.

I can remember an event at night when I was a child. I was home alone with my brother, who tended to be mentally challenged, maybe because of drugs. This night he came into the room I was sleeping in and he turned off the kerosene lamp and then he tried to rape me. I was shocked and fearful and eventually I told my adoptive parents and my cousin and they explained that he is mentally challenged. From then on I did not want to be close to him and I always locked my room and I was so fearful. Many times I saw him peeping at me.

Another time when I ran away because of my brothers I went to a beach area and there was a man there who stalked me and touched my body. I found a place where there were plenty of people but I was still fearful.

At 12 years old I started drinking alcohol. My friends and I mixed Coke and other soft drinks and gin. Once I ran away and got drunk and nearly drowned. It was good that my mother found me. I was punished badly for that. My older brother slapped me so hard I had a nose bleed. After that time I found a boyfriend and we always drank and had sex.

When I was 16 I ran away from home. I went to a small hut along the sea shore and I didn't know that there were gangs of young boys. There were two gangs of boys and one of them came to the hut where I stayed, and I was nearly raped by them. But the other gang helped me so that I was not raped.

When I was 17 I ran away to Cebu City where I just wandered around the streets. A woman told me that I couldn't stay in one place like a bystander because there were plenty of people with bad intentions who would take advantage of me. Later that woman told me that if I really wanted to work she could take me to Kamagayan [the red light district of Cebu City]. She found me a customer and we were accommodated in one of the hotels there. It was the first time I had been with a customer and I was very apprehensive and of course I didn't like it but I just gave in.

In Kamagayan I was given a pimp. I didn't like the place at first as I was not very accustomed to it but later, as days passed, I started to like the place. I really thought I liked Kamagayan. I had nowhere to go, no one to feed me, no one to give me money – it's for those reasons that I liked Kamagayan.

The arrangement with the one who recruited me was that if I had a customer, my share would be 50 per cent. The procedure was that the customer would pay the manager and the manager would give me 50 per cent. I lived in the manager's house and I was given food. Within a month of living there I started to use shabu [methamphetamine] because some relatives of the manager showed me how to use it. ▶

They told me that the customers preferred women who knew how to use shabu and who drank alcohol and they told me that I would not be shy anymore.

My attitude was that I was there already and I had to accept it, whatever happened to me with the boys or with drugs. I considered myself strong. I didn't have any relatives there and so I had to be strong to face the problems because it was my work and I could not work in settings other than in Kamagayan. I just had to cling to the day-to-day reality.

I was in Kamagayan for three months and then I was recruited to go to Manila. I was really forced to go to Manila because I didn't want the friends of my older brother to see me and I didn't want my family to know that I was in Kamagayan. So I took the chance to go to Manila and I worked in a bar.

I had a couple as my managers, whom I lived with. At night time, I would go into the bar and dress up. Sometimes I danced and sometimes I would just entertain customers. I was paid each Sunday, 50 per cent was for me and 50 per cent was for my managers. From my 50 per cent, they deducted money for my food, my dresses and my cosmetics. Most of the time this left me in debt to my managers. In the house we were living in there was always a guard who kept watch over us. There was an instance where one of the women there eloped with a boyfriend; that made our manager even stricter. We were forced to take our meals up inside the house and we could not go outside. The only time the house was opened was at 6pm to allow us to enter the bar, otherwise it was always locked.

After five months in the bar, a friend and I escaped. We tricked our guard, pretending that we were going to buy juice. Instead we rode on a tricycle and then transferred into a jeepney [a common form of public transport] until we came to another place in Manila. We pawned a necklace for PHP2000, rented a house and then continued to take customers. We did not have bosses there. We had money but we just spent it on drugs and alcohol. Then we had boyfriends who became our live-in partners.

I think trafficking happens because of the many problems that the women have, family problems that mean they do not want to go home so they just decide to stay there like I did. I think one of the factors that contributed to my being trafficked was that I was not very close to my family and also those things that happened to me like nearly being raped and having sex with others.

I don't think I will go back to my hometown because of the many problems with my family. I can't be at peace with my brother and my father has died and my mother is so sick. So, I think I will just stay here in Cebu forever.

In the future I can see myself having a partner, a man who can accept my past, and I will not be engaged in prostitution. I will stop. I plan to stop when I can find a man who loves me and accepts me but right now, I don't have any plan. I am not very confident yet to recover. I don't know what causes me to go out but I do know that every time I have a problem I run away. So when I have conflicts inside, I go out just as I did when I was very young. Every time I have a problem I run away. I am looking for peace. I want a family who can care for me, and I can care for; a small family. If I can establish a family of my own I will be happy.

If I had the opportunity, I would tell those women and girls who have not been in this situation, please refrain from being trafficked because it's not good to be in this situation. If you are prostituted you will drink alcohol and use drugs and it's very hard to get out. To be trafficked is a very difficult situation.

I would also like to tell the people, the general public, that they should not go to Kamagayan, especially the males. That way there would be no demand. Parents should guide their children so that these children will not go to Kamagayan.

Right now, I cannot understand my life. I want to surrender, I want to stop. These days I go out Friday, Saturday and Sunday and make money, but the money I get is spent on drugs and alcohol, so I really don't have money. I want to change, maybe there are things that I cannot change, but I really want to change my life. I need to have a family, a peaceful family, and to find meaning in my life. ■

# ROSANNA

## This life – it's my destiny

My father died even before I was born and seven months after my birth my mother also died. I was cared for then by my father's daughter, whom I fondly called Mamay.

My mother was a mistress. Due to circumstances, my Mamay went to Manila and I was left under the care of my father's first wife. She treated me badly, and she would often introduce me to her friends as the daughter of a sinful woman. When I was growing up, I felt shame and bad about myself.

I was 18 when I ran away from home and stayed with my friend who introduced me to an old woman who was responsible for buying my boat ticket to Cebu City. This woman told me that I would be working in a sari-sari store [a small convenience outlet]. I met her in the morning and that night she and I boarded a big boat bound for Cebu City. Before we left she gave me PHP500 which I used to buy things for me.

I was a little bit puzzled that my acceptance as a store keeper had been so easy and I thought maybe the store owner was not good and other negative thoughts came into my mind. On the other hand, I told myself that it was a good opportunity for me. During the boat trip, the old woman told me some of the names of girls who came from my town whom she had also brought to Cebu City. I knew some of the girls and I thought their work must be good because when they came home, they were transformed into beautiful women and looked wealthy.

Upon arriving at the seaport, I was bought breakfast and after, we boarded a taxi and went to the place where I would have to work. The place was congested with many houses. We came up into a big house which I noticed had plenty of small rooms but no store. Inside the house were plenty of women who were sleeping like the dead. I made friends with some of the girls in that house and they explained to me that later in the evening I had to take a shower and change to new clothes. I wondered why. However, in one of the corners of the house I saw a small space where bottles of beers were sold. I thought that must be the store.

That evening, I observed that the girls had their showers and were in good form already. They wore skimpy dresses and make-up. A few moments later I saw the girls were engaged in small talk with men who came to the house. They would go inside the room and after a while they came out again.

I said to myself, "I don't understand what is going on." Then some of my friends asked whether I was not told that I was in Kamagayan [the red light district of Cebu City]. I did not know the place. So they told me that it was a place where paid sex was done and pimps would come to bring customers. Every customer would do business with the pimp, and the pimp would give us PHP50 for every customer we served.

I was shocked. I discovered later that the old woman was the owner of the house and her children were her assistants. They took turns watching over us because they were the ones who collected the money from the patrons whom the girls had served.

That first night, I was assigned to a customer. I cried a lot. When I was entertaining the customer I asked myself, "Is this really my fate, my destiny, to be like this?" When I came out of the room, I was still crying and the gay son of the old woman scolded me and sent me upstairs to sleep. The next day was again the same, we slept and in the afternoon entertained customers. My friend told me that she was able to entertain 20 customers on the previous night. I said, "What kind of life is this? But since I am already here, I have to embrace it because this is my destiny."

Every night plenty of customers came, one after the other without rest. Each time, I went inside the comfort room and washed and served again a new customer. It was tiresome, so all the time I used shabu [methamphetamine] to ease my emotional pain. It was not the physical aspects that caused me so much pain but the emotional. Sometimes I would make jokes with the customers ▶

just to ease the pain. I could entertain at least 15 in one night. Sometimes, customers would demand that I do good service because they paid extra money or gave a 'tip' to the watchers. The watchers got the 'tip', not me.

The agreement with the owner was that for every customer I would get PHP50. However, this amount was not paid to me immediately. It would come to me at the end of the week after calculation of my food, drugs and other things they had given me. Sometimes I ended up with no money collected and I even incurred a debt – practically, I got no cash pay for one week's work. The shabu was charged at PHP300 per pack and they made us take at least two packs of it every night.

Because I would get no money at the end of the week, the owner would at times offer me a cash advance. These cash advances piled up and I ended up with heaps of debt.

I often times got penalties because of some actions that I made. These included not doing good service for PHP500; if I quarrelled with customers that would be another PHP500; if I did not display myself very well, another PHP500; and so on and so forth. All of these penalties compounded my debts to the employer.

One day, I thought that I would need to be clever in order to get money. From then on, when a customer demanded to play with my breast, I charged him PHP50 for each so I could get extra money. I told my customers that they paid for sex, not for playing with my breasts. That strategy made me laugh. Another clever trick that I did with my customers, especially those I sensed were first timers or students, was I would tell them I would have sex with them with my shirt on because they had paid only for my vagina. If they wanted to play with the upper parts of my body, I charged them PHP500, and an additional PHP500 if I led. My customers varied from office workers to labourers to butchers, to men from the rural areas to students, but I didn't like foreigners.

As time went by, I made many regular customers. They would line up until I was done serving the person who had come in earlier. Often these customers would say, "I'm next." I just laughed at them. To me it was not good but I accepted my destiny. Sometimes I used shabu [methamphetamine] even if I was serving a customer. I cried a lot.

Usually I served one customer at a time but there was one instance that six of them came into the room. Only one had sex with me but my hands were grabbed to hold another one's penis and others were touching me. It was horrible. I did not know who I was that time. I really pitied and felt very sorry for myself but I could not do anything.

I should say that those regular customers came for sex, not because they wanted to see me or cared for me. There was even one time when my dress was stained with blood because the customer just came from his job as a butcher – his body still had pig's blood on it – while others dropped by before going to the Carbon Market [Cebu's largest farmers' market] with baskets in their hands.

One time I felt so abused that I quarrelled with my customer but instead of protecting me, the owner scolded me. I said to her, "How come you favour the customer when I am the one who makes you live, I am your source of money? You get half of my earnings and yet you are not the one who is prostituted, it's me who provides the service, if I do not work, you cannot eat." I said, "If I have some responsibilities towards you, you have also some responsibilities towards me, because you said when you recruited me that I would work in a decent place but you deceived me and brought me here."

I was also penalised when I served a customer for more than 10 minutes. If the customer still had money he would be charged for the extension, but if he had none, then it would be charged against my pay at the end of the week. I told the owner, "You are good only at collecting the money. You did not care what happened to me inside the room, I was treated like a pig." After our quarrel, the owner's blood pressure got high. "Good for her," I said.

I was in the red light district for a year and a half. It is not true that prostituted women like sex and that that is why they do that work. I was in that place because I felt no one loved me and I had nowhere to go, and because I was so addicted to shabu [methamphetamine]. ■



### FOR REFLECTION

- Looking at the image of Rosanna, what can you see? What do you think? What do you feel?
- Rosanna says, “When I was growing up, I felt shame and bad about myself.” Have you ever felt shame? How did this affect you?
- When you were a child was there someone you admired or wanted to be like? Describe this person.
- Rosanna was deceived by a woman who made empty promises. Write down all the feelings you associate with being deceived.
- Rosanna says, “Sometimes I would just make jokes with the customers to ease the pain.” When you’re distressed how do you ease your pain?



### FOR REFLECTION

- What feelings or emotions did you experience after reading Sar's story?
- What ideas does this story give you about the issues of trafficking in our world?
- Write a letter to the editor explaining the problems encountered by trafficked women.
- What feelings does the picture of Sar evoke in you?
- Trusting others can be very challenging. The experience of being deceived left some women questioning the trustworthiness of all. What does it feel like to put your trust in others?

# SAR

## An offer too good to refuse

All that I can remember of my early childhood is that I was happy because I was with my lola [grandmother]. Although I loved my lola, I missed my mother. I have regrets about my mother having left me because she chose a second family over me. She is a mother in name only.

I was left in the care of my lola and lived with my uncles and aunties. However, I was very loved by them and they were my only family. My lola was very loving, caring and patient. Even when she had no food for herself she prioritised me. I have more respect for my family than I do my mother and father. My lola paid for my education in elementary school and my aunties and uncles paid for my secondary schooling.

I have a fond memory of undertaking scout activities as a child. Once we had a family campaign and my lola and I bonded. It was so memorable because we had fun and joined in the games.

In high school I was influenced by the bad habits of my peers but I was happy because at the closing of each year I was included in the top students in the class – my lola would pin a ribbon on me. My lola would describe me as spoiled but not a brat. I am someone who likes to catch attention in a beautiful way, always showing love and affection, I am the one who always wants to be cuddled. But also I am so shy; little by little I am getting over the shyness.

When I was 24 I was trafficked to a country neighbouring the Philippines. I cannot find a reason as to why I was trafficked. It just happened. Even my family cannot understand why I was trafficked. Although we were not financially well off, we were content. What I want is only what I can get. I am not a social climber. Maybe I am just a random victim of trafficking. Maybe one big reason was that at that time my lola was hospitalised and we needed big money because our income did not suffice for the hospitalisation. So I grabbed the opportunity, the promise.

It all began when I was working as a promo girl selling beauty products in a local mall. A friend asked me if I would like to go to a neighbouring country to work and get better pay. My friend told me I could earn money there as a band member. My pay at the mall in Cebu was very small, so I thought this would be an opportunity to earn money for my lola's medication. So I arranged with this friend to attend band practice. I had a good singing voice and five of us had band practice for a month. Then it was time to depart. The manager of the band made all the arrangements, including our airfares and passports. We were told to meet at Cebu's domestic airport. I was a little confused because I thought we should be departing from the international section. Our departure time was supposed to be 11pm but we had to be at the domestic terminal at 4pm so I started to think something was not good, as if we were hiding in the domestic departure area.

When we arrived in the neighbouring country we were passed quickly through immigration and then we were taken in a van to the house that we would be staying in. After we arrived at the house we had a sleep and within three days we were told to just do our band practice.

On the third day we were brought to a bar and they said we had to observe. I was shocked by what I saw there. The bar was very dark. I expected that I would be singing in a band inside a hotel in a decent place, but the bar we went into was very dirty, the room was very dark and the only lit area was where the wines were placed in the bar.

When the customers came in the women who were there ahead of us would take drugs because these customers would just have sex in that area. People seemed to be high on drugs.

We started singing in that bar but there was no one listening. We just seemed to be singing to ourselves! I had in my mind also that there was an expectation that we would also be prostituted. We had only been there for a couple of days when we were told that we must dress up in sexy clothing. They took our cell phones and passports but we managed to hide one cell phone. I did not feel comfortable at all.

One time the brother of the owner of the bar came in and saw me and I thought he loved me ▶

but he said, "Take off your jacket, why are you ashamed?" I was not very comfortable at all because I was still a virgin and I had no experience.

One of the employers told us to take drugs so that we could make plenty of money and we would not be ashamed when we entertained customers. I didn't want to do any of this and so that's when we planned to escape.

There was a Dutch seaman, a customer at the bar, who I told my problem to. He gave me the key to his hotel so that I could escape there and he could help me. When the five of us arrived at his hotel he was angry because he did not expect me to bring companions and he was afraid that he would be caught or implicated. The Dutchman consulted his Filipina friend about us who advised that we should go directly to immigration. So we all arrived at the immigration office and told them our plight. However, they just teased us and said, "Why do you complain when you have been given food, shelter and clothes?"

The immigration people told us if we wanted to report a problem we should go to the police. Again, the police just laughed at us. They mocked us because we just carried our possessions in a plastic bag. They told us to return to the immigration department.

The immigration van transported us back to the immigration department where we discovered our employer was there. The head of immigration told us, "Your employer is very kind to you. You should go back to the bar and you should go back to your employer." We pleaded with him not to force us to go back but they insisted they were closing and locked us out of the office. We were crying and pleading for their help but the other people in immigration just laughed at us. We cried and even laid down on the floor but the head of immigration ordered us out to face our employer. We linked arms together as we were scared that we would be pulled away one by one.

Our employer tried to coerce us to go with him. He said we should just have discussed our problems with him. He tried to get us to come with him but we all ran away. We pulled up a taxi and had him drive very far away from that place to another town where we stayed in a pension house and got back in touch with the Dutchman who linked us up with a Filipino woman in that town. She offered her house for us to stay in whilst we sorted out papers to get home to the Philippines. After three weeks of staying with her she changed her attitude and demanded money. She offered to prostitute us so that we could pay her our living expenses. Some of my friends agreed to be prostituted but I did not.

We made contact with a different immigration service and they were far more supportive. They retrieved our passports from our managers but did not get any money from them. The manager told immigration that we were liars. It took six weeks of negotiations to arrive back safely in Cebu. The mayor of Cebu intervened on our behalf because some of us had contacted our families and told them of our situation. The mayor paid for our tickets home to Cebu. The Philippine embassy facilitated this process.

When I arrived home in Cebu, I just wanted to escape because people kept asking what happened. I didn't want to explain it to people so I just stayed down south for about 12 months. I think I was in shock. Even today I am still asking myself why I did that and I am shocked because I cannot imagine me doing that and having that trouble. Even my aunty asks me why I travelled to a neighbouring country when we could have managed financially. I regret my decision to take up the offer to earn money overseas. I think the first offer from a friend was part of a chain of traffickers. I don't think my friend really knew what would happen to me. She just received money for recruiting me. It's her aunty who is in jail now for trafficking offences.

The first thing I learned about trafficking is if you are in a difficult situation you should be sensible, think, and not be influenced by fear, you should focus on what to do. And also I learned that for my part, I should not be so innocent, like I am dumb, or like you just don't know what to do, because you will easily become prey to deception. But I am proud of being a fighter even if I have plenty of problems. I stand ready to face my trials and even when I had my problems I don't cry.

It's my dream now to graduate in hotel management. My studies are being supported by an international organisation. My only dream now is to have a stable income. I don't care about high wages, just a stable income to support my son. I don't even dream to get married. ■

## Contextualising trafficking experiences

Many of the women who participated in this research felt that they were no longer respected within the community. This is a phenomenon clearly stated by anti-trafficking activist Melissa Farley who claims, “Existing in a state of social death, the prostitute is an outsider who is seen as having no honour or public worth.”<sup>9</sup> Many women in this study found it very difficult to socialise in mainstream places such as shopping centres, cafes and supermarkets. Even after exiting the trafficking situation they chose to mix only with those who had previously been prostituted.

Significantly, for most of these women the experience of being stigmatised was not new. Many had been stigmatised from a very young age. Some of the women were branded as ‘whores’ or ‘rebels’ when they were younger. This was often the result of their having been sexually abused by family members or others in the community, as well as cultural and social constructs that view women as responsible for their own sexual abuse and degradation. This stigmatisation caused them to feel depressed, anxious and isolated.

It is evident that the young women who were trafficked for sex suffered a loss of identity. They were objectified by traffickers, their associates, and the buyers of sex. These women experienced degradation and humiliation and in some instances they considered that death was a better option.

Most of the women were introduced to drugs as a form of control and to stop any inhibitions they may have had in their encounters with clients. Thus most women lived in a drug-induced state, which altered their sense of reality and left them feeling depressed and often addicted.

A number of the women were identified by an alias that was given to them by their managers and were forced to wear numbers in order for the customers to identify them. Stripped of their true identity they were considered, both within the workplace and more widely, as occupying the lowest rung of society. Stigmatised by all, many considered themselves worthless and trapped in an environment into which they had been forced.

Fear of violence was a powerful way of ensuring the women were controlled and subservient. A number of women shared stories of being docile or passive for fear of being physically mistreated by their managers or customers.

Despite their experiences of horrific abuse and systemic violence along with degradation and its accompanying social stigmatisation, many of the women held onto their dignity and belief in themselves. They showed great resilience, concentrated on their survival and maintained an attitude of hope that someday they would live a life of freedom.

The women’s stories reveal that sex trafficking is not an experience that can be recounted universally. No single account captures all aspects of the complex dimensions of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. While the stories reveal some commonalities, each woman’s story has its unique features.

*We started again but for me the pain  
is still here inside my heart, just like  
a tattoo. Even if you erase it, it will  
leave a scar. We were happy, even  
if we were not complete.*

**Emerita**

# CHAPTER THREE

Women Voice a Future – Lives Making Links





## Precede

When women were narrating their life stories, they were keen to share with us their hopes and dreams. They were clear that they wanted to move on from their experiences of sex trafficking. We were challenged by this attitude which in many ways seemed to be overly optimistic. We wondered whether it was truly possible to “sink the past” as one of the women expressed. A key understanding within the life course perspective is that one does not live without reference to earlier contexts. We wondered if it was possible to truly recover from the traumatic events that the women had experienced in their lives.

Many of the women we interviewed celebrated the fact that they had survived difficult times, including their trafficking experience. They shared their dreams for their future and the hopes they had for the rest of their lives. A number of women shared hopes of having their own family, where they could nurture their children and provide a safe home. For many of the women their dream of a happy family was in direct contrast to their own childhood experiences.

Some reflected with sadness on their future. This was often related to the uncertainty they faced below the surface about the desires they had expressed. There were moments of silence as women expressed their hopes for the future. These were poignant moments because deep down we all knew that the complexity of recovering from a lifetime of victimisation and abuse would continue to present an ongoing struggle throughout life.

Yet, despite these women’s stories of deprivation, abuse and objectification they showed an incredible resilience, concentrated on their survival and maintaining an attitude of hope that someday life would be different.

## Points to Ponder

As you read these stories, please keep in mind the following contextual points. A more detailed discussion of these factors is provided at the end of this chapter.

- The desire to move on from the trafficking experience was expressed by all women in this study.
- For all the women in this study, recovery involved the building up of self-esteem and achieving an understanding that they were not to blame for their circumstances.
- A few women in this study never made contact with their families after initially leaving home.
- Women in this study were often motivated to create a better life for their children and to ensure that their girls were never prostituted.
- Many women in this study dream of a life of peace and prosperity in the future.
- Women in this study were often motivated to create a better life for their children and to ensure that their girls were never prostituted.
- Gaining financial independence is an ongoing issue for all the women in this study.
- Many women in this study attributed their survival to their faith in God.
- Many survivors of trafficking want to narrate their story in order to prevent it happening to someone else.



# EMMA

## My life is now beautiful

My name is Emma. I came from an island south of the Philippines. I was one of six children and my family was very poor. If we were able to eat three times a day then that was good. My parents were so good they would even prioritise our food over theirs.

My mother worked as a laundry woman. She was really a good mother to us, she never gave us up to other people and she cared for us when we were sick. My father was a buyer and seller of empty bottles in a cart. He was also a good father. Even if he was a drunkard and a gambler he still brought food for us.

When I was young I was very unhealthy, I always got sick and my parents were worried about my health. I was always in and out of hospital. At school I was still very sick. I had the marks from the drips. I only went to school three days a week, which is why I wasn't able to finish grade six.

When I was 13 I really pitied my parents and I wanted to help them financially so I looked for a job as a domestic helper. I worked as a domestic helper from the ages of 13 to 18. This involved cleaning, cooking and taking care of kids. I think during that time I had more than six different employers.

Later in my teen years a friend told me about work in Cebu City. She explained that the wages would be higher in Cebu and conditions would be better and so I travelled with her to find work. I found a job as a domestic worker but that family treated me badly so I ran away. Of course I still needed money and a roof over my head. I noticed on the side of the road a sign saying, "Wanted: Receptionist". I didn't know what a receptionist was then. But when I asked the owner of the bar he said that I only had to serve drinks and every bottle that I served I would get a commission of one peso. I also made money from ladies' drinks, which were 40 pesos – 20 went to me and 20 to the manager. On the first night I made a commission of 300-plus and that was good.

But then I met my boyfriend. He was much older than me and he was the brother of the manager. He rented a house for me and he insisted that I did not work. He did not want me to go to the bar and he did not want me to work there. But his brother insisted that I take customers and earn money through the ladies' drinks and so he gave in to his brother's request. My boyfriend was the cashier at the bar and I served the customers. He did not live with me but he came regularly to my place to stay with me.

I became pregnant and my manager informed me that my boyfriend was legally married and had three children. I was so shocked because he had led me to believe that he was single. The wife of my boyfriend started a conflict with me. She told me that I was nothing and that I should disappear because her husband belonged to them. She threatened me and called me many low names. There was so much conflict. My head ached a lot and so I gave in.

A male singer in the bar told me he could take me to a place where I could forget all my problems. He took me to a certain lodge in Cebu City where he introduced me to drugs. I became addicted to the drugs, I entertained customers and I had sex with plenty of men.

I really did not want people to label me as a prostitute. Really, I did not have a plan to be prostituted. I only was influenced by that guy in the bar that wanted me to come here and take drugs. All I wanted was for the father of my child to give me money because my son had already been born. My son is now in a boys' home and I want him to have a good life and not to know about my life as a drug addict. I was only prostituted because I was crazy about drugs. Any money I made was spent on my drug addiction. I bought the drugs so that I would feel happy, but I was sad, especially when the drugs wore off. The main reason why I took drugs is so I would be happy. I thought it was only drugs that would make me happy.

I do not want my son to be humiliated because of me. To this very day I have never returned home to my parents. I am too ashamed. I do not want them to know about this bad life I live here in Cebu, roaming around with no direction. ▶

If my son discovers that I am a victim of trafficking I hope he will forgive me.

I have kept plenty of things in my heart, especially having a son who has no father. I took drugs, I sold my body, I sold my flesh, I sold my soul. Before I was prostituted I came to Cebu as a domestic helper and I worked in a bar as a server. All my hopes and plans were to make money and go home to my parents. But these plans were destroyed by that man who got me pregnant and then coming here to Colon Street where my mind revolves around having drugs.

I am now in recovery and I can say that my life is now beautiful, it's comfortable. I don't have to sell my body to buy drugs and I learned that I am OK. I survived. People around me are always telling me that I am good and that I can have a bright future. I gained strength because I was united with my son in the boys' home and I decided that I have to renew my life so that I can be with my son.

I am really proud of myself. From being in the streets in Cebu, now I have a focus in my life. I feel now that I am performing as a real mother. I go and visit my son every Saturday. Before, I did not visit my son because I was high on drugs but now I feel I have an obligation to my son.

I have plans and I save every peso that I earn, unlike before where I had no plan. I am now making beads at the Welcome House and I am saving every peso for my son's future. I would like to see my son having his own family and raising his children and I will have grandchildren and they will call me Lola [grandmother], and that way I will die peacefully and happy. That is my only dream.

I think when I am old I will be living the good life. I will not be the one serving but I will be served. I will be rich and I will not be working very hard. I think I can do that when I win the lottery! If Welcome House is not here anymore I have a small dream to open my own business buying and selling clothing. Maybe I can make a small profit from it, then I will get a small room and that is where I will find shelter. If there are problems that will come, I will solve them and I will try very hard. In the future when I face problems I will not take drugs, I will just look for a solution.

Here, in this safe place I am treated well, like I am family, we get the best service to help us recover. ■

## FOR REFLECTION

- As you read Emma's story, did it stir up any feelings and memories about struggles in your own life? Share these with a friend.
- Emma says, "I really did not want people to label me as a prostitute. Really, I did not have a plan to be prostituted." What are some common images of prostituted women? How would you challenge these images?
- Having read this story, do you have any new insights about prostituted women?
- Emma says, "I took drugs, I sold my body, I sold my flesh, I sold my soul." Create a collage that captures Emma's feelings.
- Emma says, "I think when I am old I will be living the good life." What dreams and hopes do you have for the future?

# ANNABEL

## My faith in God keeps me going

I am Annabel and was born in 1991 in Bohol. I was happy as a child until my father raped me. I was six. It was my mother's birthday and he raped me in our own house.

Despite what he did to me, I still showed respect to him and did not tell anyone about it because I wanted my family to be intact. I did not want a broken family.

I graduated elementary school when I was 13 and it was sad because my mother and two sisters were late so I requested my grade four teacher to escort me up to the stage.

After graduation I worked as babysitter for one of our neighbours but left after some months because my male employer made sexual advances towards me. I went home but my father always nagged at me for not helping to put food on the table so I went working as a sales lady in one of the local convenience stores in our community. I found the work too strenuous for me because I had to lift very heavy things so I quit but again suffered from the naggings of my father.

I then decided to come to Cebu City as a nanny. I was there for nine months. At first my employer was kind but later she did not pay me so I left.

I started to look for another job. I applied for a job as a guest relations officer (GRO) in one of the local bars in the city. I was 14 years old at that time. My role was to entertain men customers but I did not experience being 'bar fined' [where money is paid to a bar to take a girl for sex – the more money paid, the more time the customer buys]. It was December 30 when I started this kind of work and the bar was raided on January 17, 2006. I was so ashamed because I was on national television and my townsfolk saw me. Luckily, my parents did not have television in our house, so they did not see me on TV.

The rescue operation was very traumatic for me. I felt betrayed because I found out later that the customer whom I thought was very caring towards me while I was in the bar was actually a National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) agent. During the rescue he did not even bother to talk to me. I thought he was only using me so that the raid could be executed. I was very sad.

After I was rescued I was placed in a government facility. I did not like the facility because the food was not good and the social workers were not accommodating. However, as time went by I adapted to the environment and I studied my first year at secondary level. However, my father took me out of the centre and brought me home. My neighbours were very judgemental and made me the topic of their gossip. During my stay at our place I met a married man and had an affair with him for more than a year.

In January 2008 I was taken out of my community by an NGO social worker who referred me to the Good Shepherd Recovery Centre.

Trafficking to me means using women and girls for money, exploiting the bodies of women and children. When I was working in the bar as a GRO I just allowed my customers to do whatever they wanted to do with me. I would go to the comfort room and cry after entertaining the customers. I asked myself, "Why am I into this situation? I don't like this happening in my life." I was a "stay-in" in the casa [brothel] where I worked so my time was very regulated by the house caretaker. Anywhere I went and what time I came home had to be traced/followed or else I would pay a penalty for going against the rules.

When I was in the trafficking situation, I thought I was stripped of my dignity but now I realise that my dignity is still here with me. I have to do things to raise my dignity and have to fight for my rights. My consciousness of my right over my body is important.

My faith in God keeps me going. I made God the centre of my life. Without Him I don't know where I am now. God gave me the gift of forgiveness and understanding which is manifested in my openness. I am not afraid of telling my story to people whom I trust and this lessens the pain. ▶

I have forgiven my father. I think I was born a dreamer, I have plenty of dreams and these give me hope and strength to go on.

I am proud of myself because despite the many problems that I have been through, I am still standing with dreams and hopes. I am a survivor; I survived every trial in my life. I am also proud that I have empathy for other trafficked victims and share my own life story so other girls can learn from it. By sharing, I feel I have contributed to their well-being.

Much more, I am proud that I graduated secondary level and now am in tertiary education, taking a course in social work. I chose this course because I feel that my experience can serve as a learning for other people so that they will be prevented from experiencing what I had. I want my experience not to be only an experience, I would like to use it as a testimony so that other people will be helped. I am in the best position to share my experience to others and I want it to be a positive factor for others and to inspire their lives.

If I was given 5 million pesos for human trafficking services, first I would use it to set up community advocacy to inform other people, especially in rural areas, and prevent them from being victimised by human traffickers. Second, I would establish a centre like the Recovery Centre to help more women and girls.

If I become a social worker, I will be kind-hearted and understanding. I will help other people with open arms, with no discrimination.

Because of my experience, I have become a stronger person. ■

### FOR REFLECTION

- Write one word that comes to mind when you reflect on Annabel's story. Draw an image that describes this story and choose a colour that depicts this scene for you.
- Complete the following sentence: "Sexual abuse in childhood ..."
- Annabel experienced abuse and exploitation at home, working as a house helper and later in a bar. Where do you see exploitation in your local community? Your nation? Your world?
- What is your response to Annabel's experience of being rescued?
- Annabel speaks of God's presence in her life. Do you have a sense of a higher power at work in your life?





# GINA

## I trust in myself

I am Gina and I have eight siblings. We come from the south island of the Philippines. When I was a child my life was good because my parents were both tailors and we were not struggling financially. But my life instantly changed when I was raped at the age of seven. The neighbour who raped me threatened to kill me if I told anybody. So I just kept that secret within. I began to behave badly as a result of that childhood rape and my parents could not understand why I was displaying a bad attitude.

Over the years my parents quarrelled a lot and my father gambled a lot. This is one of the reasons why the business fell down. My father ran off with a mistress and he stayed away from the home. My mother acted strong and appeared not to be affected even if she was in pain. That's why I appreciate my mother.

My mother also cared for others. When we had money she paid for other children's school tuition fees. But after the business and financial loss her attitude changed. My mother pawned our house and that resulted in further losses because it wasn't a good contract. If we had sold that house we could have had money for a new investment, but we were left with nothing.

When I was 12 we moved to Cebu and I began to spend time with friends who took drugs and alcohol. I enjoyed being with these friends and I too began to use drugs and drink alcohol. It made me forget my problems.

During this time my parents were also drinking and gambling and there was no food for my siblings and me. At 16, I applied for a job in a bar in the hope of being independent and earning money. I had known other women who worked in the bar and they had plenty of groceries from the supermarket, plenty of money and plenty of jewellery. I told them my real name and that I was 16 years old. They changed my name and said that I must say that I was 20 years old because they did not want it to be detected that I was a minor. They accepted me to work there. I don't really know if I was trafficked because no one really recruited me, I just said "Yes."

It was very difficult working in the bar at the beginning, because I was scared of the customers. I used shabu [methamphetamine] because when I am high on drugs all my shyness disappears and I can even approach the customers and make some insinuations so that I can be taken. I can survive three, four or five days without sleep or food when I am on drugs.

I lived in a dormitory downstairs in the bar with other girls. The food and accommodation was free as long as you had regular customers. Sometimes we could request for a day off, but it depended on the manager. If there were plenty of customers we were not allowed.

Those girls who had been in the bar for a long time could come and go easily. But new ones like me were heavily guarded and had to follow a process of approval. I felt sad because at this time my family disowned me and abandoned me because I was entertaining men in the bar.

After a while I adapted and I thought my life was good because the customers had money and were rich. Although I did have some violent customers, even one who slapped me so many times that my mouth bled, I dreamed that I would find a guy who would marry me and my life would be better.

A friend soon told me about bar raids and how girls were being exposed for being underage. So after five months in the bar I decided to run away. I stayed with a friend and soon I found a boyfriend and became pregnant. Once again my family rejected me and abandoned me because of that.

If only the Philippines was not poor, then there would be no people in prostitution. Because we are poor there is prostitution. And I should say that this happens because of our leaders in the government, they are very corrupt. I know the Philippines has plenty of resources, but people who are in power are not really using them for the sake of the people. ▶

That is why plenty of people are poor. But I also think that even if you are poor you do not have to be prostituted to solve a problem. You can engage in other activities, you can be a house helper, even if it has a very low salary. At least it is decent and you will not lose your family and your dignity.

I was prostituted because I wanted money but I can say that it is not a good option. I learnt that in order to lift your economic status you don't have to be prostituted, because in my experience of being trafficked I met plenty of people who crushed my dignity, who did not respect me. It was not a good experience.

I do not think that I am very strong, I am not a fighter maybe. But what I know of myself is that I trust in myself. I trust in my capability to go with life and to live life as best I can. And I trust God. Those are the things that made me stronger and survive. I think I am a positive person because I believe that if there is life, there is hope.

I am really proud of myself, that I am living in this place now. I am proud that I was able to surpass and deal with all my problems. I am proud also that I can help other people despite all my own problems. I am proud of living life the best I can.

Ten years from now I hope that I can show to the people who put me down, who despised me, that I am renewed, that I have dignity and that I am a respected person. I hope that I can have my own business so that I can prove to them all that I can rebuild my life. ■

### FOR REFLECTION

- Create a timeline for Gina, showing the significant events and transitions in her life.
- Gina questioned whether or not she had been trafficked. What choices do you believe Gina had?
- Does Gina's story challenge your understanding of trafficking?
- What is your reaction to the fact that Gina was employed in a bar even though her employer knew she was a minor?
- Write a letter to Gina, telling her how you felt after reading her story. What would you like to share with her? What would you like to ask her?

# LANIE

## Women are not objects to be sold

I am Lanie from Mindanao. My mother died when I was three months old and my father left me under the care of my lola [grandmother].

At seven, I started schooling but I remember that we were so poor that I used a plastic bag as my school bag and some used pencils and other school supplies handed down from other neighbours, and my dress was tattered. We hardly had food on the table.

I was seven when I learned that I had other siblings. They came to live with us. My eldest brother sexually abused me during this time. He told me to have sex with him. Initially I refused but eventually I gave in. He did it to me three times.

At age eight, my eldest brother got a job away from our home. One time, I invited my second eldest brother for sex but he told me it could not happen because we were siblings. He told me to instead have sex with his friend, which I did. I got so much nagging and was physically beaten by my lola when she discovered this. She called me names which were inappropriate and so I went against all her rules as a sign of rebellion. My anger towards my father and everyone devoured me. I felt I was pressed against the world.

At 12, I was made a sort of a domestic helper to my aunty who lived in the city, but with no compensation. At this age I already used marijuana, which was introduced to me by my cousins. I also drank alcohol as it was very accessible to me through the convenience store of my aunty, where I sometimes worked as the salesgirl.

At 13, I separated from my family totally and found a job as a server and cashier in a videoke bar. I befriended a gay man, who introduced me to prostitution. He would find me customers while I waited in my boarding house. He would set the place and time for me to meet the customer. I met many men. Regularly I entertained at least three to four men in a night. Some of them were brutal in doing sex with me. There was even one time that I had to run out of the hotel with no slippers.

I was prostituted for a year until the bar in which I was working was raided and I was rescued and brought to DSWD, a government facility. At first, I did not like it because I was made to sign documents and was afraid that those documents would make my manager be imprisoned. The DSWD staff explained to me that the traffickers should pay for their crimes of prostituting me. I felt sorry for my manager and 'mamasan' [female pimp/manager] and sometimes fearful because I filed a case against them – it is still active. I told myself, "Do not be fearful, it was I who was aggrieved by them." I know that they (the traffickers) need money but there are plenty of opportunities for them to get money without using girls.

I am poor but that was not really why I was being prostituted. It was because I made an incorrect decision when I was very young, in pursuit of a good life. I wanted material things quickly.

I think human trafficking happens because there are poor girls who need money. There are traffickers and there are men who need sex but I think much more than that, there is trafficking because there are people who deceive young girls for money.

As for the customers, I have ambivalent feelings about them. I hate them because they treat young girls like me as their toys and objects of their desire for sex, but I also pity them because they do not know what they are doing, they do not know where to place their money and they do not have that straight decision on what to do in life.

When I was still with my pimps, I appreciated their kindness to me but now I realise that they treated me well because they made money from me. I hate them now because it is not only I that they abused or deceived but plenty of girls still in the future. If those pimps were here now in front of me I would tell them, "Do not do that anymore because girls or women are not objects to be sold. I am a human being, not just an object to be sold to men." ▶

Currently, I fear for my life because my manager is still in prison and I have to testify against him, and my testimony will really press him down because I was a minor at that time. For sure he will get a sentence of life imprisonment and he will be mad at me. I decided to testify against my trafficker not for my sake alone but because I want to help other girls who are trafficked by them, and I want the women and girls who were trafficked to be given justice. And I want also to share with others my experiences about when I was trafficked.

How did I survive? Now that I am at the Recovery Centre I realise that I managed because I have great faith in God. God protected me by providing me with the fighting spirit, the determination to go on with my life and be strong. I am very proud that I am surviving despite the trauma and the bad experiences that I had since childhood and even until now.

I am now 18. I dream and see myself as a professional girl by the time I reach 28. I mean, I will own a big restaurant and hotel, as I plan to study hotel and restaurant management next year.

I really do not know if I will be married but if it comes, then I will love my children because that is what they need in a home. When I was a little child I needed love from my parents but I did not receive it.

I think one of the challenges that will prevent me from achieving my dreams is the thought that I cannot do it. When I was a child everyone told me that I am not intelligent, that I am dull and I cannot do anything well, and I am still fighting back that thought in my mind. I am entrusting those voices to the Lord, I do not want to carry that burden anymore.

There is a big difference to how I am now to the girl I was two and half years ago [in 2009]. Back then I was a very weak girl but now I am a strong-willed woman, I now know how to fight back.

The bible sharing conducted here in the Recovery Centre helps me a lot to boost my confidence. I said to myself, "If they can do it, why not me?" Even if I do very insignificant things in my life, I always tell God, "I am doing this in your glory."

Another great thing that happened to me at the Centre is my ability now to control my sex urges.

Currently I am enrolled in the government's Alternative Learning System (ALS) and in October this year I will take its qualifying examinations. If I pass that exam, I can proceed to the secondary level. I will then go through another ALS and go for tertiary level. There is no need for me to take the full four secondary years.

If I was given 5 million pesos, I would use it to rescue the girls who are being prostituted and make my own life as a testimony to them so that they could recover and be healed also.

I would tell the trafficked victims, "Don't lose hope, just be prayerful, raise up your life to God, just like me." I really depended on God. I know my life is precious and I should not waste it.

For the girls who have not yet been victimised by traffickers but potentially could, I would like to tell them, "Do not be deceived by anyone. Even if you are offered money or some materials, do not waste your life."

Lastly, I'd like to tell you that sharing my story has helped me realise that money is not the centre of life; rather, what is important is what I have. I have to love myself, to respect myself and gain my dignity. ■

## FOR REFLECTION

- Lanie describes herself as being treated like a toy and an object of desire. What do you feel when you read this?
- Lanie expresses a desire for justice. What would Lanie's life look like if she was treated with justice?
- Lanie testified against her trafficker, even though she felt fearful. Write about a time that you acted with courage.
- Lanie's advice to young girls is, "Do not waste your life." What do you think she means?
- Write a reflection on what it means to live with dignity.

Police S





# ROWENA

## I'm a survivor

My name is Rowena and I have nine siblings. I grew up in a farm environment and attended school up to elementary level but I wish I could have finished all my schooling.

When I was three years old I was raped by a neighbour but I did not tell anyone about it. However, when I was seven, people around me became alarmed because I would say I was fearful of playing outside in case a stranger had sex with me. Then I revealed to my mother that I had been raped when I was three and she was angry with me for not telling her earlier.

From the ages of seven to 10 I thought that I liked sex and I would describe myself as craving sex. I would have sex with friends of my papa and whoever came and wanted to have sex with me. When I was 10 I was sexually harassed by my father and again when I was 12. I wish this could have been different because I wanted my father to be good to us, gentle, because I really needed a father's love. My mother frequently stayed away from home looking for work so that she could provide food for us.

At 14, I ran away from home and I found solace with my friends. I started using drugs. I had sex with boyfriends, I had sex with taxi drivers – I gave them blow jobs and more because I needed money. There was even a time that my friend sold me in Cebu City.

At 15 years old I was rescued by an NGO. They took me to a shelter, but I ran away because I really needed money. I escaped with two other girls and they took me to Kamagayan [the red light district of Cebu City]. It was the first time I had been there. They used drugs and gave me some on credit. I did not like the environment and I said that I would not stay there, but my friends told me to stay and make plenty of money.

That night I had five customers. When I returned to find my friends they were gone. Someone advised me that my mother was looking for me and I believed them and followed them, but it was only a ploy by another recruiter to make money out of me. I stayed with that recruiter for three months and I used drugs every day as a way of protecting myself from shame.

Because I was a minor, they hid me in a boarding house and I was treated like a VIP. It cost more for customers to be entertained by me. When I was working there, even with the taxi drivers all I could think of was, "I am dirty." Even if I did sexual services with them, all I could think of is, "I am dirty." That is maybe because I was raped when I was young. When I would take a bath I stayed in the bathroom for a very long time because I wanted to scratch off all the feelings that I am dirty.

I spent a lot of time being fearful, especially when the customers seemed to be bad guys. I just submitted all the way with no complaints. I feel so very submissive to guys with bad temperaments. I do not have the power to say no.

I used drugs all the time I was there because when I take drugs it makes me high; I feel stronger and I'm not ashamed to entertain my customers. It gives me strength – even if I have many customers I will not become tired. But when I do not take the drug, I am shy, I don't want to have sex. I never made any money the whole time I was at Kamagayan. It was the managers who made all the money.

After three months I ran away and found the Welcome House and they took good care of me. What greatly motivated me to run away was I realised that I was deceived by them. They made money out of me, but I didn't have a single cent, so that was great deception and I didn't want that and I realised that this was the end.

I did not really go to Kamagayan to get money, I really just wanted to get out of my house because I was afraid that my father would rape me again. People should not judge those girls who go to Kamagayan, because each girl has her own reason for doing it. It may be because of poverty, it may be because of problems, it may be because of sex. It could be because of anything, so people should not generalise that girls are just paid to do sex and they like it. That's not really true. ▶

Today I am proud of myself because I started to file a case against the man who raped me at three. He is now in prison. Once I filed a case against him, many other victims turned up. Some people think that I am brave for doing that. I am overwhelmed with happiness that he is now in prison because he sexually harassed me for many years. But I did not proceed with negotiations for him to pay damages because it would leave his family with nothing as he had so many victims.

Sometimes I still think that I am dirty and I know that this is a result of my bad experiences. My anger about those bad experiences meant that I had bad emotions, but I keep getting told that I am not a bad person and that I am not dirty by those who are helping me to recover.

I think trafficking happens because of people who want money, who want to make big money. If I had not been trafficked I would not be here in this place today. I would not be having this new kind of life now. The trafficking experience helped me to be nearer to God. Before, I did not consider it a very important activity to go to church or communicate with God but after this experience I am nearer to God. Really, this experience of being trafficked strengthened me. Before I would say in my mind, "Oh, the trafficked girls are flirts, that's why they were trafficked," but now I know they were not flirts because I was trafficked as well. Today I am more dedicated to pray for those girls who are trafficked.

I have survived many trials, even as a child I survived because I was determined to live. As I grew up with plenty of problems I cannot avoid thinking about committing suicide. There were plenty of times that I planned this but I feared that this would not be good. It would only create more problems for my family. They would have to find money to bury me. So I just survive. I found strength in God. I just hold on to God.

I am only 19 now but I am proud of myself, proud that I survived the many trials in my life. Although people will look down on trafficked women I am proud that I am a survivor. I am proud that I am here to support my younger siblings and that I can finance them through a decent job. I am proud that despite not finishing my schooling I have a decent job as a seamstress. I am proud that I mingle with my superiors, higher up people who have good positions, and that I am able to receive their occasional reprimands calmly.

In the future I would like to become a social worker. Last year I attended school but I did not finish because I cannot really manage full-time work and school because I am too sleepy. But next year maybe I will go to school and then I plan to go to college and start social work. I will then have a big house with plenty of children and I will fill my house with children who I am helping and I will have a big bakery. I will be known as a person in the community who has dignity and I will be popular and respected in the community because I am good.

Deep inside I want a child only, I'm not really sure if I want a husband, unless that man would really love me as I want.

I am very much convinced that I can reach all my goals. I will be patient in having all these dreams come true, but do you know what? I am tempted sometimes to drink and to use drugs and to gallivant around with my friends. I am only a human being, I dream of these things. Sometimes I am strong, but the temptations are there, sometimes I am tempted. I am just a human being. I am proud that I have chosen good friends now. Before my friends were drug addicts and drunkards, but now I still have friends and they are proud that I can say no. ■

## FOR REFLECTION

- Rowena says that she did not have the power to say no to her abusers. Can you recall a time in your own life when you felt you had no power to say no?
- Rowena still struggles with the feeling of 'being dirty'. What impact may this feeling have on her over the course of her life?
- Dreams are part of life. What are your dreams for the future?
- What might be some barriers to achieving your goals in life?
- What strengths, gifts and skills do you need to develop in order to follow your dreams?

# TERESITA

## I want to be a guide for others

I am Teresita, born in 1984. I started schooling at the age of six.

My mother was a gambler and whenever she had some money she spent it on gambling, leaving us with no food most of the time. She left us for another family when I was 10 years old. My father showed love to us; however, when she left, he was hooked on alcohol and became unemployed. Two months after their separation, my father was gunned down and died. From this time until I was 17 years old, I stood as the parent to my five younger siblings. I worked day and night to keep us living. I took every little job available.

At 13 years old, I was sexually abused by my cousin and then at 15, I started having sex with my boyfriend. At the age of 17, I met a friend to whom I confided all my miseries. She told me to take drugs to ease away all the pain, both physical and emotional. That started my substance abuse. Later another friend invited me to come with her to a five-star hotel and observe her to see how to get a lot of money. I saw in that hotel that plenty of women were nude, entertaining men. I said, "Oh my God, I cannot do that, I really cannot do it."

For me, trafficking happens when a girl, or the person, has a problem in the family. That person has to flee from the family to escape the problem and ends up being trafficked. Another reason is because of the behaviour of the girl, like she wants to go against the rules, does not obey, so she gets trafficked. My friends were being trafficked and prostituted and they were the ones telling me to join them.

I don't think I was a victim of human trafficking, though there were two times that I nearly got trafficked. The first instance was when my friends invited me to a hotel and the second incident was when my male friend pushed me to being trafficked. However, all these did not materialize.

There was a time when I was very troubled and even contemplated suicide. A certain nun asked me to come to the Recovery Centre to stay. She was so persistent in her invitation that eventually I joined the other girls at the Centre.

I got out of the Recovery Centre after some time and was referred to an after-care program. During this time I met another man whom I thought I loved and I got pregnant. Now I have a daughter but not a husband. We separated. I am working hard now for the future of my daughter. I love her so much that I do not want her to experience what I did when I was still a child.

I am now 27 years old, working in a little canteen and volunteering as an outreach worker with the Good Shepherd Welcome House. I find fulfilment as a volunteer, helping the girls out there on the streets to avail of the services of the Centre and hoping that eventually they will stop being prostituted. I shared my life with them in the hopes that they will be influenced by how I survived. I think I have shared my whole life already, I want it to be a model or a guide for others.

Ten years from now, I still see myself working so that I can rear my daughter well. I also dream of having my own little business in my home.

I think human trafficking will not end unless the biggest, biggest person behind it is toppled. If there is no action from the top of government, trafficking will always be here. However, what we also need is plenty of people who have the dedication and commitment to help those women out there with prevention, and help for those women who are in the situation already – I mean, ordinary people who persevere and dedicate their lives to help these women who have been victimised by traffickers. ▶

## FOR REFLECTION

- Teresita says, “I want (my life) to be a model or a guide for others.” What did you learn from reading Teresita’s story?
- Teresita states that there was a time when she contemplated suicide. What circumstances might lead someone to feel that way?
- Write a letter to Teresita expressing your feelings about her story.
- Teresita believes that dedicated people need to help prevent trafficking. How do you think trafficking could be prevented?
- What kind of assistance do you believe women who have been trafficked need?



## Contextualising the future

The trafficking experience leaves an indelible mark on the lives of those affected by it. A crucial aspect of recovery from any traumatic experience is to look for underlying explanations in order to construct meaning from the event. Meaning-making is not a static process and it can change over time.

A key understanding from the life course perspective is that the significance of an event is determined by the individual. All of the women in this study considered that the experience of being trafficked for sex had been a life-changing event, altering their life course and impacting on them physically, psychologically and emotionally.

Although many of the women experienced sex trafficking as both personal and structural oppression, their interpretations and meanings about the event differed, reflecting multiple understandings of the experience. For many it was about a young woman's vulnerability – for example, having a lack of money or a limited education or low status in life. This reflects the intersectional nature of oppression. Some women felt that the traffickers were just seeking money, while others felt their experience stemmed from childhood circumstances and lack of parental responsibility. Some made reference to poverty and others to a corrupt government. Many said that financial incentives for both the woman and the recruiter were key causes.

When sharing their experiences of recovery programs, the women in this study stressed that their greatest needs were: safe accommodation; emotional support; income generation projects; education; family reunion; community engagement; and peer support. Applying the life course perspective, we can see that many of the women felt that being part of the Good Shepherd recovery program represented a 'turning point' for them. It gave them the opportunity to reclaim their identity, undertake further education and embark in job skills training.

Psychological healing is also a very important process in the recovery from sex trafficking. For many of the women in this study, healing involved recovery not only from the trafficking situation, but also from pain associated with childhood abuse and trauma. In their final interview, many of the women shared their desire to be recognised as women of dignity and worthy of respect. The majority had experienced stigmatisation and had been put down in both childhood and later as a result of having been trafficked. After the trafficking experience and during their period of recovery, many were able to acknowledge for the first time their own value and self-worth.

## Conclusion

Sex trafficking is a global phenomenon; it is not unique to the Philippines. However, women from the global south are the predominant victims of sex trafficking, whether it occurs within their own country or internationally. We chose to research sex trafficking within the Philippines because it exemplifies a sex trafficking 'source country'. At the same time, sex trafficking in the Philippines cannot be understood in isolation from the rest of the world: it is a global human rights issue that must be addressed at global, state and local levels.

This book has, we hope, illuminated the complexity of individual circumstances that lead to being trafficked for sex, along with the multi-faceted wider circumstances of being trafficked. Without a doubt, the ongoing demand for sex through sex tourism, street prostitution, brothels, and 'girlie bars' will continue to lead to the exploitation of the vulnerable young women whose life trajectories reflect earlier exploitation and abuse.

In order to truly respond to the needs of women trafficked for sex, greater emphasis must be placed on the diverse experiences of women. Stories that sensationalise the sex trafficking experience will serve to further marginalise and relegate women who do not happen to fit the criteria of the case being publicised. Furthermore, domestic sex trafficking must be acknowledged as being as rampant, if not more so, than international sex trafficking.

Women in this research project have highlighted that being trafficked for sex is more commonplace than sensationalised accounts would have us believe. None of the women we interviewed experienced a random act of victimisation, such as being kidnapped and chained up in a brothel. Instead, the women revealed a slow process of victimisation from childhood to early adulthood, making them easy prey to traffickers, reflecting a sinister and structural oppression of young women.

This is not to deny in any way the resilience and sense of self-determination that gave strength to many of these women in their lives. However, it does paint a picture of a rather more routine and systemic violation of these women than much of the trafficking discourse in general would have us believe. The aim of this book, and the study on which it is based, is to give voice to trafficked women about their experiences. In doing so, structural and ideological barriers have been exposed. Research from this perspective becomes an instrument for improving women's daily lives and influencing public policies and opinion.

As such, we see this research as an instrument of transformation, speaking directly to oppressive structures and ideologies, be they economic or socio-political oppressions. It is fitting that we conclude this book by leaving the last words to a woman who knows best the experience of being trafficked for sex.

***“My life was so uneasy, just like a jungle. You survive. It’s very difficult, but you are there to fight, to learn every day, to stand every day. My life is amazing because not everyone has experienced what I experienced as a teenager ... I am a survivor.”***

## Appendix: The Life Course Perspective

### UNDERSTANDING SEX TRAFFICKING EXPERIENCES FROM A LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE

A useful way of making meaning from significant life events is to look at them from a life course perspective. First formulated and articulated in the 1960s by sociologist Glen Elder Jr, application of a life course perspective involves viewing a personal story alongside the world that person lives in, including the social, historical, economic and political environments. These are sometimes referred to as the micro and macro factors that impact upon a life.<sup>10</sup>

Adopting a life course perspective leads us to look at how significant events and transitions have had an impact on our lives. Some of these events we may consider to be life changing. It also allows us to see where our life choices have been constrained and where there is or was opportunity. As such, the life course perspective can provide great insight into the reasons a person may have become vulnerable to sex trafficking.

The life course perspective has five basic principles or themes: life span development; agency; time and place; timing; and linked lives. Each of these is discussed in greater detail below.

#### LIFE SPAN DEVELOPMENT

The first principle of the life course perspective is called life span development. It is based on the idea that throughout your life, you are influenced by earlier events and happenings – that you do not live your life without reference to earlier contexts.

In understanding a person's experience of being trafficked, it is important to take into consideration earlier events and contexts in life that may have impacted on or contributed to the human trafficking experience. This can be seen as the interweaving of the micro and macro factors in one person's life to gain insight into that person's life story.<sup>11</sup>

#### HUMAN AGENCY

The second principle of the life course perspective is human agency. The term 'agency' has been defined by social worker Elizabeth Hutchison as "independent action to cope with difficulties imposed by the rich and powerful".<sup>12</sup>

The experience of being trafficked is often one of brutality and power exercised by traffickers. Therefore, those who are trafficked often have constrained personal choices in relation to their lives and their environment. Despite this, many survivors of trafficking show much strength and resilience – they can be seen to be "exercising agency". Although in a system of oppression, some people are still able to make choices that help them to survive.

Benjamin Buckland, an author and researcher on trafficking, argues that public discussion tends to portray trafficked women and children as helpless and having no ambition. This, he argues, results in victim stereotyping and inadequate anti-trafficking policies that place women and children as victims and helpless. He states that the dominant focus on the victim can result in inappropriate public policy responses, with the effect of denying agency to trafficked persons, ignoring the reasons why many choose to leave their homes.<sup>13</sup>

#### TIME AND PLACE

The third principle, time and place, acknowledges that an individual is born at a certain time in history and within a specific geographical place.

The idea of contextualisation is very important to understanding how one experiences the life course. It is very relevant when exploring the human trafficking experience because there are certain factors in time and place that make one more vulnerable to human trafficking. For example, a person's economic circumstances in childhood can impact employment opportunities in later life.

## **TIMING**

The fourth principle of the life course perspective places emphasis on timing. This is significant in that it acknowledges that the timing of events or transitions in a person's life influence the ways they respond and develop over their lifespan.

In the case of human trafficking, the earlier that one is trafficked within their life, the more likely it is to impact on their future growth and development.<sup>14</sup>

## **LINKED LIVES**

Finally, the life course perspective acknowledges the principle of linked lives. This principle recognises the influence of others in one's own life course, recognising that what happens to others, particularly those closest to us, has an impact on our life also. For example, a mother may go overseas to work; this directly impacts on her life course and it also impacts on the life course of the children and spouse and others in direct relationship to her. In gaining insights into a woman's trafficking story, it is important to study interpersonal relationships.

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In applying these five principles to the life course, Elder<sup>15</sup> defines five key concepts that highlight the unique nature of the life span: cohorts; trajectories; transitions; turning points; and life events.

## **COHORTS**

A cohort has been defined as "a group of persons who were born at the same historical time and who experience particular social changes within a given culture in the same sequence and at the same age".<sup>16</sup> One's cohort can help explain or give insight into a person's life opportunities or possible disadvantages in life.

Participants in this research belong to a particular cohort, analysis of which provides insights into possible constraints within life, but also life opportunities. The sections on context at the end of each chapter describe some of these factors.

## **TRAJECTORIES**

Life trajectories is another key concept within the life course perspective. Life trajectories (stories) refer to patterns of stability and change throughout a person's life. These include work trajectory, education trajectory and health trajectory, among others.

Life trajectories can provide pointers for cumulative advantage or disadvantage. For example, when we look at the victimisation trajectory in the lives of trafficked women we can see that their childhood experiences of violence and abuse have contributed to a further accumulation of victimisation in adulthood. This is a useful insight as it can provide pointers for how intervention in early life can assist.

## **TRANSITIONS**

The concept of transitions is also pertinent in the life course perspective. This refers to changes in states that take place in short spaces throughout life.<sup>17</sup>

Within the lifespan, a woman experiences a number of transitions in roles and status; for example, the transition from being an only child to being an older sister. In the case of some of the women in this study, there were transitions from being a dependent daughter to an independent carer of siblings. Transitions are different from turning points in that they do not change the direction of one's life.

## **TURNING POINTS**

Turning points describes a concept concerning a substantial change in a person's life, whether viewed subjectively or objectively; for example, a person relocating to another household. This may have a significant impact on how they view themselves and the world from that point on.

An example of a turning point within the context of this research is when a woman has been told as a child that she was born out of wedlock. This was considered a turning point as the implication of this in Philippine society was a lowering of status in the eyes of the community, and a resultant, substantial change to the course of her life.

### **LIFE EVENTS**

Life events refers to significant occurrences that involve a relatively abrupt change in a person's life that results in a change that has long-lasting effects. For example, the sudden death of a parent, as experienced by more than one woman in this research, may result in long-term fears of abandonment or a desire for security.

It is important to note that an individual may consider some events in their lives as insignificant whereas other events may be life-changing for them. The impact of transitions and events varies from person to person. The life course perspective acknowledges different personal traits and characteristics, and argues that the narrative expressed by the participants will provide insights into their significant, life-changing events.

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Viewing sex trafficking within the context of a life course perspective provides distinct advantages. First, it applies a multi-dimensional framework for exploring the complexity of human development.

Second, it provides insight into unique issues that individuals experience within particular communities and historical periods, hence providing a context for how and why one may be vulnerable to human trafficking.

Third, it recognises life stages, not pertaining to age but to the significance of events from birth to full maturation which may not fit neatly into age-graded theories of development.

## End Notes

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