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USAID ASIA COUNTER TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

SURVIVORS' PERSPECTIVES ON SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION AFTER TRAFFICKING

Authors: Eric Kasper and Mina Chiang
December 2020



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study was carried out in Bangladesh and Cambodia to understand the experience of reintegration among trafficking survivors, what they think constitutes successful reintegration, and what they feel would best support them in their reintegration journeys. The research team conducted in-depth interviews of both male and female survivors¹ which focused on the details of survivors' personal experiences and perceptions of reintegration. All the survivors in this study ended up in trafficking after attempting to migrate for work. This study attempts to recentre the discussion of reintegration around survivors' experiences as agents in shaping their own lives rather than from the perspective of providing services.

We learned that reintegration after trafficking involves reconnecting and negotiating one's place in a social system. In response, we have taken care to present the findings from this study in the form of a holistic picture of reintegration as a system. Achieving success means managing multiple sets of interconnected issues simultaneously. Failure in one area can spill over into other areas, throwing successful reintegration off track.

Contrary to how reintegration is typically discussed in academic and grey literature, survivors tended to think about reintegration, primarily, as being able to survive, escape extreme poverty, and to achieve acceptance and connection within their families and societies. In general, they did not think about reintegration in terms of accessing specific resources, though material resources and support from service providers is indeed an important element in achieving success for most survivors. The key elements of successful reintegration, which can be seen in the system map (figure 1), are 1) financial health, 2) mental health, 3) connection with family, and 4) acceptance within society. The following paragraphs explain those elements and what we learned about supporting survivors to attain them.

¹ Combined 22 men and 18 women from Bangladesh and Cambodia



Financial Health

Financial health is the ability to earn enough money and to escape or avoid debt. It is subject to complex feedback dynamics. Many survivors are from contexts of extreme poverty, meaning they faced an urgent need to earn enough to survive, which drove them to take risks in migrating illegally, leading to trafficking and even worse financial situations for themselves and families. It also implies that it is often impossible to achieve successful reintegration by returning to the original context of extreme poverty. Debt was revealed as a major factor inhibiting financial health, and the burden of debt remained over survivors' heads keeping them from success even in situations where they had obtained decent work.

Survivors can be supported in attaining financial health by programmes that help them find work. Where employment opportunities are available, this may mean providing skills training, but training needs to be mindful of other simultaneous challenges. For example, if the area is experiencing economic decline, there may be no decent jobs available, and the survivor may need support migrating safely and legally to a place with opportunities. Additionally, survivors struggling with trauma or depression may not find it possible to attend trainings. Survivors who are not able to read may also avoid training programmes because the teaching materials may not be accessible, or they may face shame around their lack of literacy or education. Our evidence suggests that training and support programmes should be attuned to these multiple issues and seek approaches that can mitigate them. For example, while survivors struggling with mental health may avoid training programmes, it may be possible to support their mental health via skills training. We do not recommend making strong mental health a prerequisite for accessing livelihood support.



Mental Health

Mental health involves healing from the traumas of the trafficking experience. Survivors may experience low self-confidence, low levels of self-efficacy, and difficulties feeling comfortable in everyday social settings. Where survivors had experienced detention, criminal prosecution, or imprisonment, they may also experience a sense of guilt. Survivors may find psychosocial support and clinical forms of therapy helpful, but these must be done in culturally appropriate ways. Survivors may not be comfortable directly exploring mental health issues, and survivors from different countries will have their own ways of understanding and expressing their mental health issues, which are likely quite different from Western medicalised language.

Our evidence suggests that mental health can be supported by acceptance and support from family and communities. In Bangladesh, we spoke to survivors participating in mutual support groups, where survivors supported each other (especially where family and community support could not be counted on) and helped each other heal. Given the intersections between mental health and the other elements of successful reintegration, mental health may also be supported through attaining new skills, earning an income, and escaping extreme poverty.



Connection to Family

Maintaining or re-establishing a strong connection to family constitutes successful reintegration for many survivors. This may mean re-joining parents and siblings, or it may mean getting married and building one's own family. Family is important to success in several ways. Rejection by family because of the stigma associated with trafficking can be a major inhibitor of success. We observed this to be somewhat more common in Bangladesh than Cambodia, and it is a very gendered phenomenon – usually it is women who are rejected.

Survivors' economic prospects are also usually bound up with their families'. Families often take on debt to finance a person's efforts to work abroad. When the family member ends up in trafficking, this can exacerbate the hardships of the family. Where possible, interventions should attempt to support whole families, for example with livelihoods trainings or programmes to support literacy, life skills, and financial awareness.

In the effort to support survivors on their journeys of reintegration, it is important to keep the focus on their experiences and their visions of success. This report highlights the main elements of success according to the survivors interviewed in Cambodia and Bangladesh. The key insight is that each element of success is tied up with the others in a complex and systemic relationship. This creates the potential for a feedback loop, which may either keep the survivor trapped in a downward spiral or can help leverage success in one element into success in the others. Working closely with survivors and remaining attuned to those linkages may be the best way to support survivors achieve successful reintegration.



Acceptance within Society

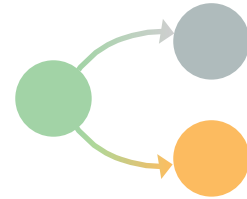
Successful reintegration also means achieving acceptance within society. Survivors typically face some forms of discrimination and stigma from others in their communities. These may not always be directly the result of their trafficking experiences, per se, but rather the ways in which their experiences prevent them from conforming to gendered social norms. To support acceptance for survivors, it may be possible to make use of helpful social or cultural values (i.e. the value of endurance and hard work) to counter unhelpful norms. Efforts to raise awareness (at any scale from communities to nation-wide campaigns) about the nature of trafficking can change perceptions and attitudes toward survivors. Finding ways to support survivors in telling their own stories – for example in small groups, to their communities, or even in a public forum or on the internet – can help build understanding, humanise survivors, and impart a sense of agency and visibility to the survivors telling their stories.



ABOUT THE SYSTEMS MAP

Throughout this report, we will come back to this systemic picture of reintegration so that each insight can be understood in context, including how it intersects with multiple issues.

The circles represent elements of the reintegration system, which are linked together by arrows that represent one element influencing another.



Direct relationships are shown as solid lines with ++ or -- along the arrows. This means that change in one direction for the impacting factor results in a change in the same direction in the impacted factor.

□ For example, increased mental health leads to increased level of success.

□ The -- suggests the “increase” is not good; for example, in the bottom left of figure 1, we would emphasise that a decrease in the likelihood to take risks leads to a decrease in the likelihood of being abused or taken advantage of.

For inverse relationships, the arrow is shown as dashed rather than solid so that they can be easily distinguished visually. They are also labelled with either + - or - +, indicating that an increase in one leads to a decrease in the other or vice versa.

□ For example, in the bottom right of figure 1, we can see that a decrease in level of debt leads to an increase in financial health, and an increase in financial health leads to a decrease in level of debt. As an aside, this is an example of a feedback loop, since the relationship exists in both directions and the changes in either direction tend to further change in that direction. Feedback loops are often great places for intervention, since nudges in one direction can “spiral” to have a bigger impact.

The light blue circle in the upper centre of the diagram represents successful reintegration after trafficking. The concept of success is given substance by the four yellow circles representing the main constituent factors as explained by the survivors in this study.

The red circle in the bottom left represents the likelihood of further abuse or exploitation.

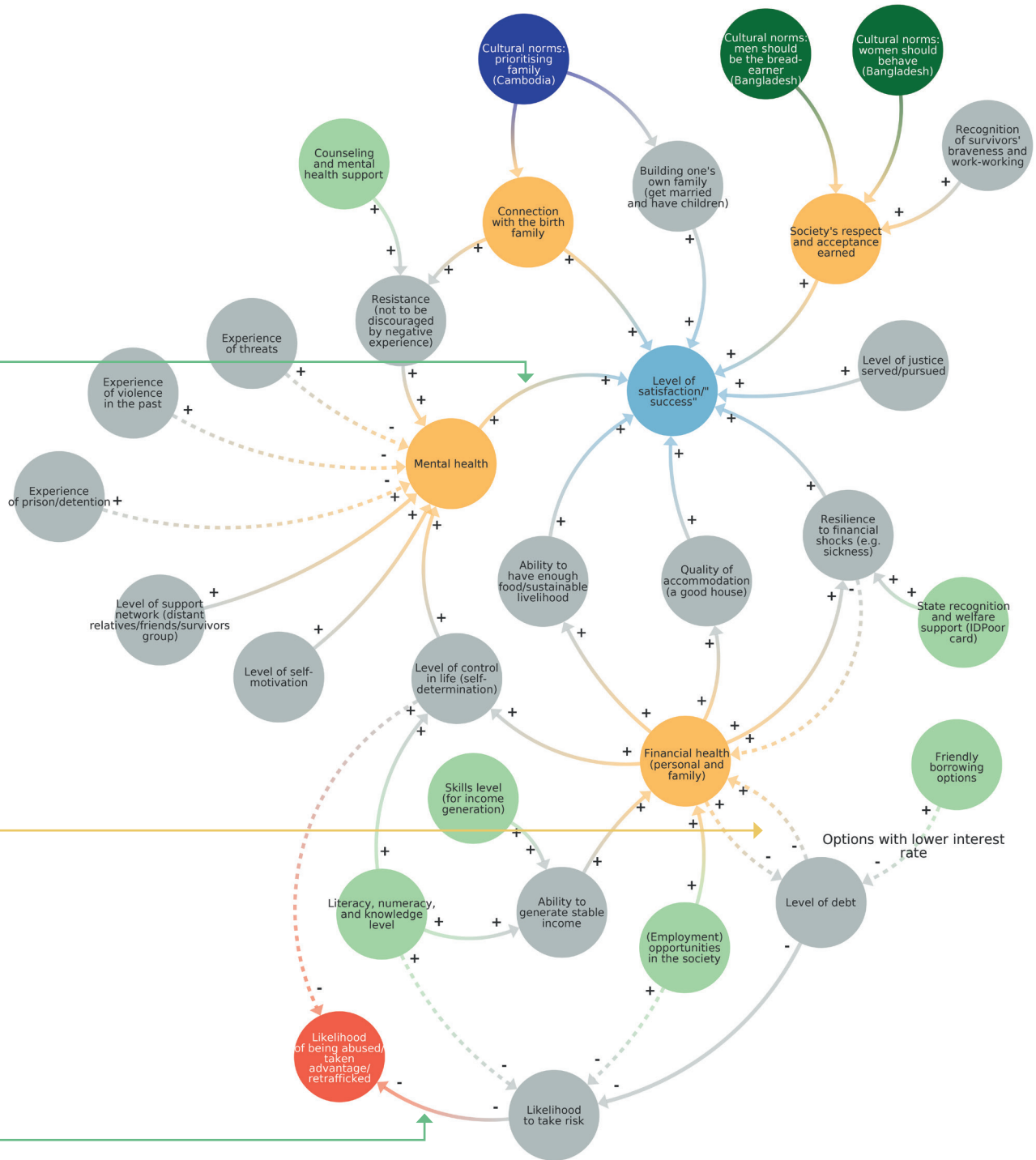
The light green circles represent factors for which we have identified opportunities to intervene to support survivors in their reintegration journeys. These are areas where the functioning of the system implies that we might gain leverage and where impact has an opportunity to ripple throughout the system.



The dark green and dark blue circles in the upper right indicate factors related to cultural norms in Bangladesh and Cambodia, respectively.

Finally, the grey circles represent other issues and factors that we identified as contributing to or impacting the main components of success.

Figure 1: Map of systemic factors impacting successful reintegration after trafficking*.



*This map is available at the following web address, where you can explore the factors and their relationships interactively and in greater detail: <https://kumu.io/BK28ZP9/successful-reintegration>

2

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this research was to explore what survivors of trafficking actually believe constitutes successful reintegration and what they think contributes to attaining that success. The picture that emerged from our work with survivors is complex – just as trafficking itself is and, inevitably, the difficult journey of healing and finding one’s place in society. As a result, we have generated a map of that system constituted by the main elements of “success” and the factors that impact them, which can be found above in figure 1 and also available on the web. The text box on this page provides key information on how to read the map.

The main strength of this type of system map is that it can go well beyond simply defining success by depicting causal pathways, including those that might not be obvious and those that manifest through reinforcing feedback loops and traps. For example, a survivor who returns to extreme poverty, where conditions have worsened since they left, will struggle to address each of the four key elements of successful reintegration (discussed in Section 2 and highlighted in yellow bubbles in the systems map), since they are related to each other and difficulties with one lead to greater difficulties with the others. This self-reinforcing dynamic can lead to a trap, pushing survivors back into situations of further vulnerability to trafficking or abuse.

It is important to note that what constitutes reintegration is related, yet distinct from the concept of human trafficking. We want to be clear that the main focus of the report is on reintegration and the survivors’ lived experiences after trafficking rather than how they ended up in trafficking in the first place. Even though it is beyond the scope of this study, a deeper and systematic understanding of how trafficking works is also urgent and pressing. For our purposes, when thinking about how survivors can successfully reintegrate, we should be cautious about the assumptions of how we expect them to reintegrate. The social systems that lead people – via extreme poverty and other systemic features – into trafficking are, for that very reason, unlikely to be contexts where survivors can easily reintegrate. It is our hope that, by listening to survivors sharing the realities of their journeys, emphasising their aspirations for their future, and mapping out the complex pathways to success, this report has been able to advance wider debates on trafficking, how it works, and what we can do to curb the excessive suffering it generates for people all over the world.

2.1

MOTIVATIONS OF THE STUDY AND CORE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was funded by USAID as part of the Asia Counter Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) Project, implemented by Winrock International. It was intended to complement the CTIP project – which focuses on working against the dynamics of human trafficking in the region and providing support to survivors of trafficking – by providing an evidence base around the perspectives and preferences of survivors. This is useful for practitioners and other CTIP actors in targeting their interventions, and, since we were able to work with survivors who have been supported via the Asia CTIP project, this study can, to some extent, speak to the value of that project.²

Research Question 1:

“What constitutes successful reintegration after trafficking for survivors in Cambodia and Bangladesh?”

Research Question 2:

“What contributes to successful reintegration after trafficking for survivors in Cambodia and Bangladesh?”

2.2

REINTEGRATION

We have framed this report and the research on which it is based around the concept of reintegration, since it is a common term within the counter-trafficking discourse. However, the term tends to be used exclusively within both the professional and academic settings, and with greater ubiquity, it has become more ambiguous.

Derks (1998, p. 10) gives a very basic definition, drawing on Webster’s dictionary. It has the feel of a post-hoc effort to make sense of a discourse that has already developed; people are using this word, here is what they must mean. However, key documents themselves usually avoid specifying a definition for reintegration. For example, the latest edition of the US Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons Report (2020) makes use of the term “reintegration” on 121 separate pages (often multiple times per page) without a single definition.

The most prominent definition of reintegration appears to be that of Surtees (2013, p. 38): “(Re)integration is the process of recovery, and

economic and social inclusion following a trafficking experience.” In the same report, Surtees fleshes out the usage to include key factors such as “safe and secure environment”, “reasonable standard of living”, “economic opportunities”, and “wellbeing” (Surtees, 2013). She carefully notes that reintegration is something that may occur in the home country or elsewhere. Surtees does ground the definition in the perspectives of the 252 survivors interviewed for the study, and she provides a nice summary table of the outcomes determined to constitute successful reintegration (Surtees, 2013, pp. 40–41).

This definition is unusual in that it is clear, nuanced, and derived from interviews with survivors. The fact that so few other definitions exist in the literature – especially in official documentation – reveals quite a lot about the state of the reintegration discourse. Namely, even as the term is common within counter-trafficking literature, it has become a technocratic buzzword, meaning that “the very taken-for-granted quality... leaves much of what is actually done in its name unquestioned” (Cornwall, 2010, p. 2).

² This research was not commissioned as an evaluation or assessment of the Asia CTIP project.

Another key observation of the way reintegration tends to be used is its emphasis on service provision. Even as Surtees provides one of the most complete, nuanced, and experience-grounded definitions of reintegration in the counter-trafficking literature, the entire argument of the study from which it is drawn centres on the challenges of providing adequate services to survivors. As Bearup (2016) points out, the conceptual fuzziness of reintegration and the emphasis on service provision combine to give the sense that reintegration is something done by providers to (or for) survivors as passive recipients. Going further, we suggest there is a tendency for “technocratic creep” (See, for example, Boyte, 2012; Mangcu, 2012) – the tendency towards professionalisation of services (i.e. service provision and even countertrafficking work become increasingly the domain of professionals), de-emphasising and marginalising the perspectives and experiences of survivors.

We want to be careful not to suggest that access to quality services is not an important part of successful reintegration. Survivors indeed face many challenges and need support to heal from and overcome their experiences of violence, exploitation, and trauma. However, the words we use matter, and we must be aware of the power differentials between service providers and survivors as well as the tendency for the agency of survivors to be subsumed within the professionalised, formalised provision of services.

In this study, we have attempted to re-centre the discussion of successful reintegration around the

perceptions, knowledge, and aspirations of survivors. At the same time, we want to emphasise that trafficking is a systemic phenomenon, meaning that forces beyond the control of any individual or set of stakeholders intersect to shape the experiences of people as they are trafficked and as they struggle to heal and reintegrate afterwards. More broadly, reintegration and trafficking can be considered “wicked problems”, or deep sets of issues that emerge from the everyday functioning of societies and economies, rather than simple issues to be solved at the individual level. In the long term, supporting reintegration means addressing the way trafficking works, and creating new configurations of social, economic, and political systems. This study has been designed in a way to illuminate those systemic structures and dynamics, and to provide insights into entry points for appropriate actions that can lead to systemic change.

Reintegration is about finding one’s place (again) in the human webs of relationships that make up society. As such, there are likely to be commonalities across contexts to the extent that human beings everywhere exist as both individuals and in collectives, with basic material needs as well as basic emotional and relational needs. However, there are also necessarily particular aspects to the process of reintegration based on the unique aspects of each context. We present the findings of this study and the implications for both Cambodia and Bangladesh, emphasising what is common, also highlighting key areas of uniqueness across the two countries.

2.3 SYSTEMIC THINKING

Reintegration involves reconnecting and re-establishing oneself in society; such a challenge is complex and requires an understanding of multiple, intersecting systemic issues. We attempted to synthesise the many perspectives from different survivors, their families, community members, and social workers who support them into a coherent picture of how reintegration works as a system. These kinds of “wicked problems” do not have easy

solutions. In fact, it may be helpful to abandon the notion of “solving” such issues at all, or at least recognising what a “wicked solution” (Light et al., 2020) might look like – interventions at multiple points in the system and at multiple scales to nurture new configurations of the system. Such interventions, working within the prevailing structures and dynamics and working with complexity, tend to take on a life of their own. However, both the understanding

of problems and the desirable outcomes remain contested and unfixed throughout.

The reintegration concept suggests a more linear phenomenon – from trauma to healing and the exit from trafficking to successful reintegration. However, pathways to successful reintegration exist within the same complex systems in which trafficking occurs. That means that for all the potential of success, there is also the potential that the survivor remains

in the systemic conditions that resulted in the initial trafficking experience. As a result, we have chosen to depict the connections between the factors that constitute and contribute to successful reintegration as a systems map. Even though the map that we have produced does not have many of the feedback loops one might expect, if familiar with many depictions of complex systems. Nevertheless, we believe it is a useful tool and a way of “connecting the dots” between the factors.

2.4 METHODS

This study drew on interviews with survivors of trafficking that had attained some degree of success in their reintegration journeys. The study was originally planned to deploy digital storytelling methods to help survivors develop and share their own stories in multimedia formats. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, this approach had to be abandoned as it was considered to be impractical. Instead, the research teams in Cambodia and Bangladesh carried out semi-structured interviews focusing on survivors’ life histories and experiences of reintegration.

For Cambodia, we analysed 16 interviews with survivors. These survivors had been “clients” receiving services via the Winrock USAID ASIA CTIP project, and they were split between villages in the vicinity of Battambang and Siem Reap provinces in Cambodia. Of the 16 survivors, five were men and eleven were women. In part, this was because women were more accessible (more women are identified as survivors and are willing and able to participate), suggesting some cultural challenges for men to be identified or to self-identify as a trafficking survivor. Also, the research team was mostly made up of women (reflecting the gender makeup of the CTIP sector), and female researchers tended to interview female survivors, while male researchers tended to interview male survivors. These survivors had experienced trafficking after attempting to migrate for work. Some of the women had experienced forced marriage in China, while others had experienced trafficking around work in Malaysia. The

men had experienced trafficking related to work in either Thailand or Malaysia. In addition to survivors, the research team interviewed 17 family members of survivors and 23 community members or leaders. 9 social workers were also interviewed to provide an additional perspective on survivor experiences.

For Bangladesh, we analysed 24 interviews with survivors. Of those, 17 were men and 7 were women. These were split between 4 locations, Dhaka, Jessore, Cox’s Bazaar, and Rajshahi, in which the survivor mutual support groups were already active. The survivors were recruited from these groups, which had previously been set up by the USAID Bangladesh CTIP project. In addition to survivors, the research team interviewed 19 social workers from the same regions. The men and women interviewed in Bangladesh had experienced trafficking after migrating to work in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Maldives, Malaysia, Iraq, Brunei, Singapore, Oman, India, or Sudan.

The analysis of the interviews in both countries was carried out first via group facilitated discussion within the country research teams, followed by full coding and thematic analysis by the authors of this report, followed by several iterations of refining the findings with the country research teams.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained following the institutional protocols at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). One precaution taken in the design of this study was to only interview

survivors who had attained some level of success in their reintegration. This was carefully assessed by the research team in collaboration with case workers familiar with the survivors, and risks of participation were discussed in detail with each respondent as part of obtaining informed consent. As a result, we have reasonable confidence that participating

in this study did not harm or retraumatise the respondents. At the same time, focusing on survivors who already supported some measure of success in their reintegration surely introduced some bias into this study, as less successful survivors may have systematically different definitions of success.

2.5 DOCUMENT STRUCTURE

In this section, we have explained the background and motivations of this study – to understand what survivors feel constitutes successful reintegration after trafficking and what they believe contributes to that success. We have also introduced the systems map which synthesises the answers and evidence we found. The following sections are structured in relation to the map. Section 2 focuses on elaborating the four major elements of successful reintegration as we heard from survivors (represented in the system map as yellow circles), drawing heavily on their own words. This is to answer the first research question about what *constitutes* success.

Section 3 then layers on additional insights from the research to answer the second question about what contributes to success. This includes findings about how the elements of success are related to each other through pathways of mutual influence

and how they are insinuated into the wider system of trafficking and reintegration. These are reflected in the system map's various circle colours, noting that our key opportunities for contributing to success are represented by the light green circles in the map.

Section 4 provides additional insights from interviews with other key stakeholders including social workers (in both countries) and members of survivors' families and communities (in Cambodia). Section 5 is a discussion which distils our key findings across the sections to provide a comprehensive answer to the research questions and comments on the key contributions of this study to global efforts to counter trafficking in persons and to support survivors in their healing. Section 6 provides a table of key recommendations based on our findings.

2.6 LIMITATIONS

This research has three main limitations. First, while we attempt to answer the general question of what constitutes and contributes to successful reintegration for survivors, we are limited to speaking with confidence about the target groups within the two countries of the study. This limitation extends to survivors of other types of trafficking. Namely, we have not targeted survivors of sex trafficking in this study; if we had, we would presumably have

generated different types of insights and findings. Finally, this study was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The research teams in both countries were limited in their abilities to travel for face-to-face interviews. In Bangladesh, all the interviews were done remotely. Interviews were limited by difficulty accessing respondents face-to-face meeting with the respondents.

3

SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION DEFINED BY SURVIVORS

*Success is being able to survive,
escape extreme poverty, and to achieve acceptance
and connection within family and society.*

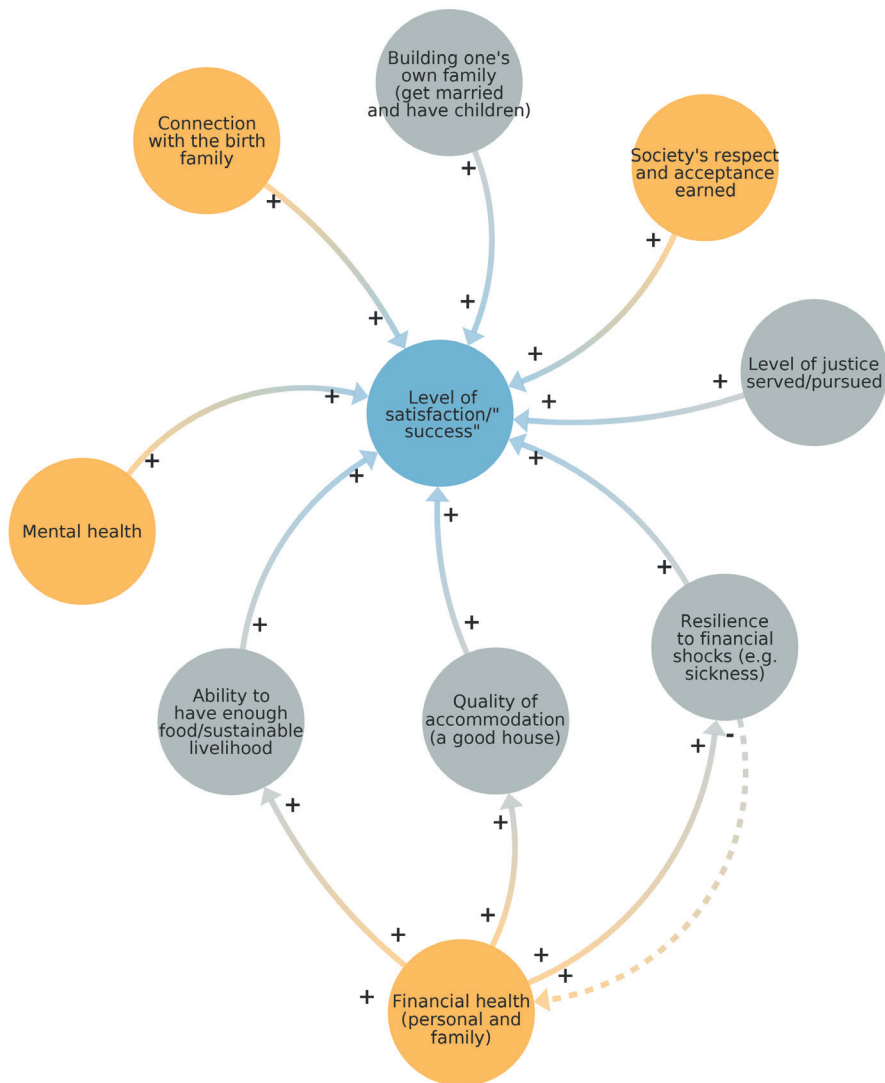
Above all else, survivors mentioned basic material survival and family as the key components of success. These key elements are emphasised in the system map (in figure 1 above and figure 2 below) as the yellow circles with additional grey circles indicating factors that further relate to or constitute them. This section presents survivors' perspectives on what constitutes successful reintegration, as much as possible in their own voices. This section contains a minimal amount of our own analysis, which we have deliberately withheld until section 3.

Material survival was variously expressed in different ways such as having enough to eat, having enough money, or having a livelihood. While each of these are distinct – for example, having enough to eat may come from successful farming or buying food in the market, it is clear to us that success is grounded in basic survival. This reflects the role of poverty in creating conditions conducive to trafficking and impacting reintegration. It is impossible for people to achieve wellbeing in conditions of extreme poverty. This drives people to take extreme risks as they strive for a better life, and, after returning to the same dire conditions after a traumatic experience, those pressing basic needs are likely to remain as the survivors' primary concern.

Most of the survivors reported having experienced trauma from their trafficking experiences, which resulted in the need to heal and recover mental health³. This was often discussed in the context of survival – for example as limiting one’s ability to pursue a livelihood or requiring a safe, secure environment with care from family.

Similarly, based on the prevailing structures of society and the economy, many people in these trafficking-affected communities meet their basic needs through family and other relationships – whether through working together on family farms or sharing housing and income. It was clear that for all the survivors, finding one’s place in society is a fundamental element of success, whether

Figure 2: Main components of "success".



³ We did not find significant information regarding physical trauma or the need for physical healing.

this is primarily through family relationships (i.e. relating to society primarily as a family) or directly through relationships with the wider community or society (i.e. having social standing with respect from peers).

This is not to say that survivors have no higher aspirations than basic survival. Many survivors spoke about hopes such as the desire to find work that is meaningful, to build their own businesses in such a way as to improve their communities, and to create societal changes so that trafficking

happens less and is less stigmatised. However, when asked explicitly what they consider to be the definition of success, they emphasised the meeting of basic needs.

In the rest of section 2, we present what we heard from survivors about each of these key factors. Subsequently, in section 3, we critically explore how the factors relate to each other – forming a complex reintegration system – and what this implies for supporting survivors on their reintegration journeys.

3.1

FINANCIAL HEALTH: OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY

Financial health is a key element of successful reintegration as defined by survivors. They did not use this particular phrase – admittedly a somewhat clumsy one – but we have developed it to capture the constellation of closely related issues survivors described, including income as well as debt, but not explicitly overall wealth. In almost every case, survivors experienced debt before and after trafficking; getting out from under the debt was an important element of success.

Further, in all cases, survivors we spoke to had been trafficked in the context of migration for work. The need for income had driven them to take risks which resulted in trafficking, and securing a regular, predictable income remained a key objective constituting success during reintegration. What we have labelled financial health is therefore intimately linked with basic needs such as having enough to eat, accessing quality accommodation, and being resilient to financial shocks – all of which help to strengthen one's sense of self-determination and autonomy over one's own life.

Poverty is known to be a systemic driver of trafficking by creating situations of vulnerability (Bales, 2007; Brysk and Maskey, 2012; Chuang,

2006; Fayomi, 2009; Kara, 2011; Logan et al., 2009; Molland, 2005; Schwarz et al., 2019), and this happens all over the world. People across income levels often migrate for opportunities, but people in poverty often end up facing challenges in migrating safely and legally, meaning they face undue risks. Migration is not the only pathway into trafficking, but it is perhaps the most common, and all of the survivors interviewed in this study ended up in trafficking after attempting to migrate for opportunities to work.

In our reading of this literature, we argue that not enough attention is paid to the particular challenges of extreme poverty and how, aside from its impact on vulnerability to trafficking, extreme poverty also impacts the potential for successful reintegration. In this study, most of the survivors we spoke to were living in conditions of extreme poverty before trafficking, and these conditions significantly constrained their abilities to achieve successful reintegration. This is a critically important point: successful reintegration cannot be synonymous with “returning” if the context to which one returns is the kind of poverty that drives vulnerability to trafficking in the first place. Success in reintegration, in these cases, means escaping extreme poverty, which may mean migrating.

The following quotes encapsulate the survivors' vision of financial health in this study, emphasizing reliably having enough money:



Interview excerpts

on how financial health contributes to successful reintegration

What is your idea of a good life



"Family is no longer in debt and has happiness."

(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 27)⁴

"I am not a successful re-integrated person and without paying the loan I don't know how much time I would need. I might take three years to be on the right path."

(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 15)

"I only need money. Money solves everything. My life is full of misery."

(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 4)



As can be seen in these quotes, financial health intersects with several other key issues, including debt (which was something experienced by nearly every survivor we spoke to), livelihoods, skills, opportunities, and social inclusiveness. In section 3 below, we consider these issues in light

of what is known about extreme poverty and intergenerational poverty as a way of integrating these intersecting issues. Here, however, we present what we heard from the survivors.



Interview excerpts

on the burden of debt

"[The trafficking experience] affected [the family] a lot. He still hasn't paid back the loan...the family condition is getting worse. Before he departed, his family wasn't this bad. Still owed but in a small amount."

(Cambodia, family member of Survivor No. 34)

"When a victim comes back to Bangladesh, it's usual to have a lot of loans over his head. Depression is a common word in such moments. I couldn't take the driving license [exam] as there was not enough budget."

(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 1)



⁴ Numbers were assigned in a semi-random way to interviewees to provide an anonymous form of transparent record-keeping. The reader may notice multiple quotes from the same respondent across the document.

3.1.1 Ability to have enough to eat and sustain livelihood

When survivors spoke about their visions for success, especially in Cambodia, the most common expressions centred around having enough food. In section 3, below, we dig deeper into the links between trafficking, reintegration,

and extreme poverty. However, here, it is important to observe the ways survivors tended to talk about their experiences of poverty. The following quotes are illustrative:



Interview excerpts

on food and sustainable livelihood

“I go to work and when I finish, I run back to look after my child. I am afraid that I might faint (due to excessive labour). Every day, we don’t have enough to eat.”

(Cambodia, female. Survivor No. 44)

“Even the food at home was scarce. And my young siblings had quit studying due to that, as well.

(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 45)

“(after returning home) we are our own slaves.”

(Cambodia, male, Survivor No. 33)

3.1.2 Accessing quality accommodation

When it comes to the material conditions in which survivors live, the precarity of basic shelter is stark. Interviews were carried out with survivors in their simple board houses, in chicken coops, and in houses with dirt floors. Some of the Cambodian women who had returned from forced marriage in China spoke about how impressed they had been with the sturdy houses of the Chinese families. Many Cambodian women also explained their desire to go abroad to earn money in the first place in terms of being able to build better quality housing for their parents or families. This Cambodian woman noted how important it was to attain sufficient housing as part of successful reintegration when she said:





Interview excerpts

on quality of accommodation (a good house)

**According to you,
what is a good life**



*"I want to have land, a house, and animals."
(Cambodia, male, Survivor No. 25)*

.....
"When I came back to Cambodia, I felt excited and happy. When I got some money, I fixed/decorated the house. I feel happy that my house is beautiful."

(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 43)

**Why do you think you
are still not successful**



"Because I still don't have a proper occupation. Still don't have my own house. No motorbike."

(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 31.)



3.1.3 Resilient to financial shocks

Additionally, it was evident in most of the interviews with survivors that financial health is not simply about having enough money; it is also about having enough money consistently. People in poverty may subsist with very little money, but even a small financial shock can send them into extreme poverty from which it becomes increasingly difficult to escape. Such shocks often

take the form of poor harvests (meaning debts can't be paid and food is in short supply) or health problems (meaning medical bills pile up while not being able to work). These shocks lead to debt and desperation, which leads to an increased willingness to take risks.

Survivors from Cambodia explained it as follows:



Interview excerpts

on resilience of financial shock

**What are the key inhibitors
to your reintegration/
healing process**



"My child has been too sick."

"My child hasn't fully healed yet. I don't have the money to take him/her to get checked up again. Don't know when I will have the money....Previously, I was staying at the hospital due to being hit by a homemade tractor. It costs 600,000Riel."

(Cambodia, female, survivor No. 45)

**What challenges do you
face after coming back**



"I'm in debt because of the hospital fee. Can't earn a lot so when I am sick, I am in debt."

(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 31)



3.2 FAMILY

Along with the need to earn enough money to survive, family was mentioned as a key component of success by nearly every survivor we spoke with in both Cambodia and Bangladesh. That is not to say family relationships were unproblematic, but even in cases where survivors reported family difficulties, they still defined their success, in part, as being able to connect with

their families. We did notice different patterns between the role of a survivor's birth family and the role of their own family (i.e. partner and potential children), though the two were discussed largely interchangeably when it came to factors that support success. The following quotes express this:



Interview excerpts

on the role of family for survivors' reintegration

"When I got back to Cambodia, I felt as if I was reborn. Happy. And when I got home, there was warmth."

(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 43)

"Family is the main inspiration to return into ones track to be successful and on the other hand their bad behaviours discourage the most."

(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 12)

"At this moment I think I am successful. I have got married. I have children as well. I bought a car for taking loans. The loan is almost paid. I have also built a house. I am leading a happy life with all these now."

(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 1)



Given the centrality of family in the ways survivors expressed their views of successful reintegration, the role of family and social relationships merits further exploration. Social relationships (or basic human connections) are the substance into which survivors "reintegrate". Different societies may prioritise different forms of connection, so survivors vary in terms of the kinds of connections they find meaningful for reintegration. In Cambodia and Bangladesh, there are prominent and distinct cultural values attached to family.

Most Cambodian survivors expressed that it had been difficult and painful to leave their families in the first place, when they entered into their

respective journeys through trafficking. Most expressed that a desperate desire to provide money for their families was behind their decision to take the risk of migrating, and the inability to communicate with family while abroad was often expressed as one of the most important violations or indignities which made the trafficking experience traumatic.

The survivors from Bangladesh also expressed that the support of family is incredibly important to successful reintegration. In Bangladesh, we saw instances where survivors had been rejected by their families because of social pressure and stigma.

For the Cambodian context, survivors still faced pressured from society, but their connection to family mediated their interactions within wider society. Meaning that their family's moral and emotional support helped them to overcome the

social pressures they faced. These differences are explored more deeply in section 3.

The following quotes are illustrative:



Interview excerpts

On how family mediate survivors' interaction within wider society

"Relatives don't affect me nor my parents. I just think about how I can raise my kid in the future."

(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 29)

"When my son was born and when I saw his face, I thought that even though I had been tricked, I had him to heal my feeling. After my son was born, I became better."

"I consider myself successful because I have my child and mother giving me encouragement. Now I am happier even though my sister is still sick, at least we are back living with each other."

(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 26)

"Even if I don't have an occupation to find money for my family, the most important thing for me is to be able to meet them again."

(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 30)

"I had no problems from the side of my family. They supported me. My husband and mother-in-law did not have any problem. But I faced some problems from society. When my husband went out on the street, he would hear a lot from society."

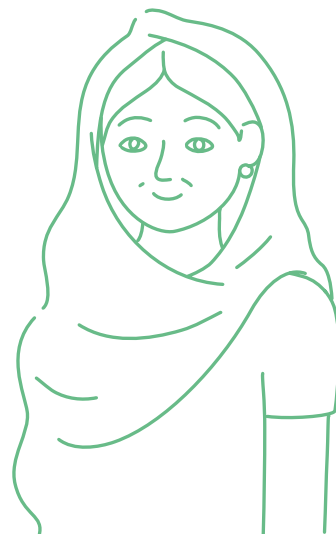
(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 6)



3.3 MENTAL HEALTH

In interviews across both countries, there were many signs that mental health is an important aspect of success. The survivors in Bangladesh, most of whom had been supported with information about mental health and had been provided counselling, mentioned this explicitly.

Survivors from Bangladesh explained, in general, what a survivor needs to successfully integrate:





Interview excerpts

On mental health explained by Bangladesh survivors

“Their financial condition was horrible. Not only but also I experienced this, we became mental patients.”

*(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 5
(the survivor is also a social worker))*

“I had a mental trauma when I returned. And the neighbour was pouring oil on the fire.”

(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 16)

“After reached in Bangladesh, my condition was so bad. I was home isolated long 4 months. I was not [able to] get out from my home.”

(Bangladesh, male, survivor No. 35)



It was striking that the survivors we spoke to in Bangladesh were quite aware of and articulate about mental health issues. This is likely because of the particular awareness-raising that had taken place via the support groups through which the respondents were recruited. We do not expect all or most survivors in Bangladesh to be so aware of mental health issues and able to discuss them to this degree. Nevertheless, the substance of the mental health issues raised is valid and insightful.

In Cambodia, the respondents revealed the importance of mental health more indirectly. The interviewers noticed many of the Cambodian survivors being reluctant to speak about their experiences, expressing the fact that even years later, it is difficult to talk about the process of reintegration. Across both men and women, survivors appeared to still have some level of trauma related to their experiences. The enduring trauma of trafficking and the likely impact on survivors’ mental health was corroborated by interviews with social workers in both countries. While healing is possible, trafficking experiences will always continue to impact the survivor.

One survivor in Cambodia faced taunting and bullying from some members of the community. In his understanding, this was a result of jealousy at his being given resources to begin a livelihood repairing motorcycles as part of his reintegration process. Interviewers observed several female survivors to be scared and emotional in telling their stories – for example having little confidence and being worried about providing the “wrong” answers in the interview or having difficulties remembering key details of their trafficking experiences. For example, in some cases, survivors could not recall what year they had left or when they had returned. We understood these behaviours as likely indications of psychological traumas, but we note that there could be other explanations, as some survivors do not remember other important events in their life (e.g. the year of their father’s death) and their age.



Interview excerpts

On jealousy and loss of memory

"I was afraid of people being envious of me, trying to defeat me....when I started to get a lot of work, there would be some mocking and insulting towards me."

Cambodia, male, Survivor No. 24.)

Did you remember when did you get home



I didn't remember at all because I made a commitment not to remember. It was too hard for me."

"I made a commitment to forget it. I saw many who were in prison. They thought about it too much until it became a mental disorder, and had to be sent to a psychological centre."

(Cambodia, male, Survivor No. 46)



These observations may have further implications for interventions designed to support survivors. Based on interviews with social workers, provoking further discrimination or jealousy from community members is a common unintended consequence of reintegration support. Survivors' experiences with this kind of discrimination must be a priority when weighing the risks and benefits of the intervention.

The loss of memory, either around the event of trafficking and reintegration or around other personal details, can also explain some misunderstandings between social workers and survivors. Social workers assume survivors are 'lying' when, in fact, survivors may just be subconsciously or actively suppressing memories of certain events.

3.4

FINDING ONE'S PLACE IN SOCIETY

Survivors often face some form of stigma on their reintegration journeys. Most of the survivors interviewed for this research reported facing judgement, discrimination, shame, or at least misunderstanding from those around them. However, we observed stigma operating quite differently across the two countries. For example, in Bangladesh, survivors would often frame their definitions of success in terms of earning the

respect and dignity of their communities – to the point of some even saying that it is better to suffer in poverty with dignity than to be seen negatively for having failed to successfully migrate.

The following quotes are representative of what we heard from survivors in Bangladesh:



Interview excerpts

On the dignity of Bangladesh survivors

“My identity as a returnee, or a failed returnee, has created a huge problem at the earliest time. I have to listen to bad words from my neighbour and people from where I look for work. The identity did not allow me to get work, even working as day labour at the construction site becomes difficult.”

(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 11)

“The main challenge towards reintegration is discouraging attitude from relatives and society.”

(Bangladesh, male Survivor No. 13)



In Cambodia, on the other hand, very few survivors of forced labour and forced marriage in this study mentioned feeling extreme judgement from their community members, and where there was negativity, it seemed to be much more easily disregarded. Based on some conversations with social workers, we had expected more differences in reported experience by gender, but in general,

both female and male survivors in Cambodia tended to report either positive or neutral receptions from their communities.

For example, the following female and male survivors explained their feelings of returning:



Interview excerpts

On positive reception from communities for Cambodia survivors

“The villagers were all happy to see me coming back to Cambodia. It was like I was dead and coming back to life.”

(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 43)

“[The society] think of me as a success for everyone said that I am brave and dare to run away. They see as a role model that I am hard-working and I take care of my family.”

(Cambodia, male, Survivor No. 38)



In this way, there is something particular about each society that conditions the ways survivors feel about their trafficking experiences and how they feel they must engage, relationally, with

those around them. A deeper understanding about how stigma works in a particular context is crucial for crafting effective support for survivors.

4

WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION

Having presented the picture of what constitutes successful reintegration that emerged from interviews with survivors, this section explores the wider factors that impact success and the pathways by which they constrain or enable success. This section takes up the second research question about what contributes to successful reintegration. It also corresponds to the parts of the system map (figure 1) beyond the yellow circles. That is, we explore the interconnections between the different factors that impact success to identify pathways by which the system can be changed to support successful reintegration.

4.1

ENABLERS FOR FINANCIAL HEALTH

In the current literature, the issue of poverty is discussed primarily as a risk factor for getting drawn into trafficking, but it is not clearly articulated in relation to reintegration (See, for example, Bales, 2007; Brysk and Maskey, 2012; Schwarz et al., 2019). For example, getting a skill and finding a livelihood for survivors are described as complimentary elements – something good to do. But this does not quite do justice to the position from which many survivors are coming. Our analysis suggests that it is more important to think about extreme poverty and intergenerational poverty as a systemic phenomenon rather than the more specific component issues such as earnings and skills, especially in the context of the selected countries of this study. In our observations, for many survivors, reintegration associated with the continuing struggle to escape the poverty trap. Without recognising the full extent of extreme poverty and the daily struggle of having enough food, the idea of reintegration will only be discussed in a vacuum. People living in extreme poverty are willing to take extreme risks, and even after having horrific experiences with trafficking, the idea of “going back” to a situation of extreme poverty cannot be considered as any kind of success. Such people require alternative routes of escaping the ravages of extreme poverty, and no level of support will provide a direct path to success if it fails to acknowledge and address that basic “floor”.

If survivors are already in a desperate situation, leading to them taking a chance with migration, leading to them getting trafficked, when they

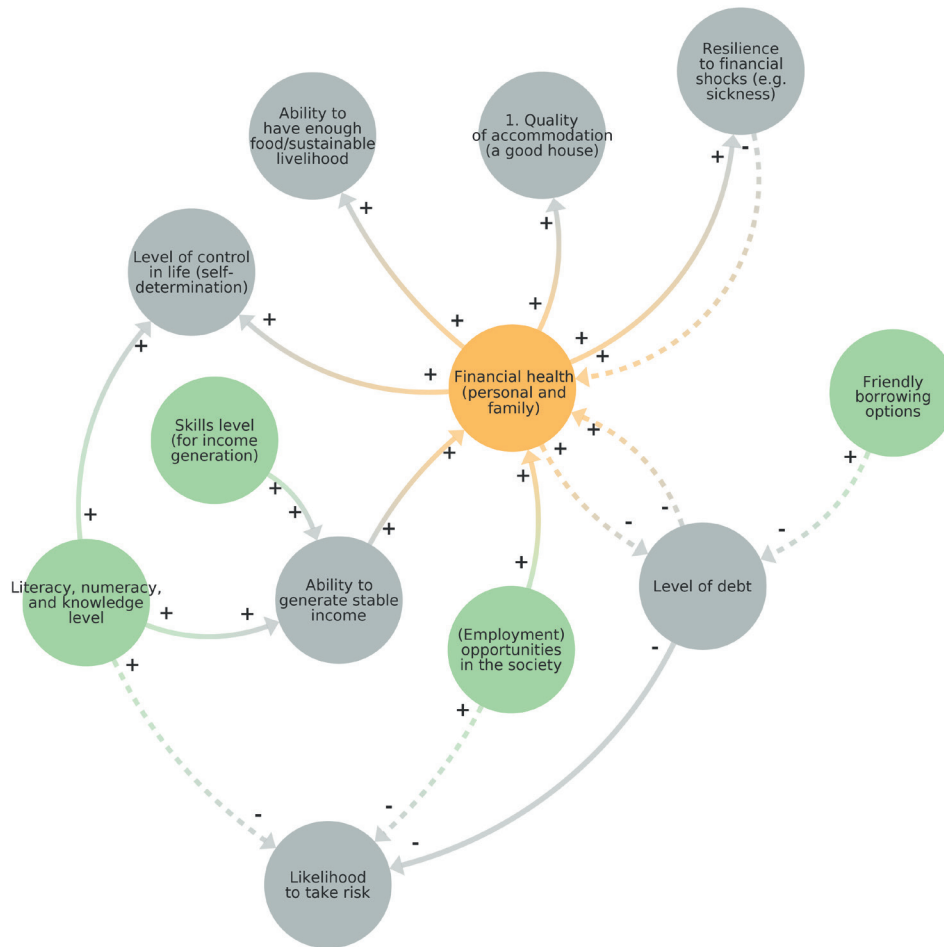
return, they are typically financially worse off than before. They may have accrued debt to finance their original migration, they may have had debt for which they went abroad to attempt to pay off that has continued to grow, or they may have accrued debt to a broker to smuggle them back home. Or they may simply return to a situation of extreme poverty where, in addition to having few livelihood options in the economy, they now have additional physical and mental and mental needs, further disadvantaging them.

That is not to say efforts to provide financial assistance and livelihood trainings are misguided. Rather, these interventions must be designed in such a way that they account for the reality – survivors are not likely to be in need of a simple nudge in the right direction. They are likely to be in need of breaking a cycle of systemic poverty in which they are trapped.

In part, this means seeing survivors as both individuals and members of society. Interventions that treat survivors as individuals – i.e. providing them skills without considering the nature of the marketplace in which those skills might be useful – may be useless or harmful.

Figure 2 and the discussion in section 2 described how financial health is a constitutive part of successful reintegration, impacting the level of success via having enough food, sufficient housing, and resilience to shocks. Figure 3 focuses on the factors that we found to impact financial health: debt, skills, employment, and literacy.

Figure 3: Factors related to financial health.



4.1.1 Debt and predatory micro finance

Nearly every one of the survivors we spoke with were in debt. In some rare cases, the survivors mentioned that they had been able to pay off their debts, a key component of a successful reintegration. Nearly everyone included in the study mentioned that the ability to pay off their debts was a key component of successful integration.

Debt was not only a factor that determines success in reintegration; it is a major factor that drives trafficking and afflicts communities across both countries. The research teams and the

social workers we spoke to understood debt to be an influential factor, but in compiling the evidence, we were shocked at just how powerfully debt both drives trafficking and hinders the reintegration process.

Most of the survivors in Cambodia explained that high levels of family debt had driven them to take the risk of illegally migrating for work, which had resulted in them being trafficked. In some cases, family debt had been incurred because of failed crops, which meant farm loans could not be paid off. Others had taken loans

to pay for medical expenses during a health emergency. In many cases, the survivors or their families were members of microfinance schemes. These schemes are based on the assumption that access to finance will help people escape poverty (Roy, 2010); however, they often lead to increase poverty through unsustainable debt burdens. The schemes themselves can be predatory – intentionally offering loans to people too poor to be able to pay them off in order to trap them in debt and make a profit for the microfinance institution (See, for example, Collett, 2015; Gueyié et al., 2013; Raccanello, 2013). In fact, brokers often push these loans and earn a part of the loan disbursement as commission for each loan that is given, creating perverse incentives (Schicks, 2010, p. 9).

Desperate people tend to discount the risks associated with their poor options (Wohl et al., 2014), in part related to well-documented pathways by which stress interferes with cognitive function (See, for example, Mishra, 2014; Mishra et al., 2015; Tauson and Stannard, 2018, p. 17;

Tauson, 2017, sec. 2.4.2.). Rather than drowning in debt and starving at home, many families make the decision to gather whatever they can together to send one family member abroad to work. This may mean selling land, which as the family's erstwhile economic base had been providing housing and income. It may mean taking additional loans. Given the high cost of migrating legally, many families opt to go illegally via a broker. When things go wrong, the migrant is left vulnerable and isolated. Then, upon returning from trafficking, survivors often face even higher levels of debt, which becomes a major roadblock for achieving successful reintegration.

By considering the role of debt, it becomes clear that aspects of extreme poverty that drive trafficking in the first place also inhibit successful reintegration, keeping survivors, their families, and communities trapped in extreme poverty. When asked about how supportive the community had been in helping their child reintegrate after an experience of trafficking, a parent explained:



Interview excerpts

on the role of debt and supportive community

“When they were imprisoned, parents here also can’t work. And when our sons under bar, we need money in order to see them. Sometimes, we go twice a month so we need to earn money or borrow from others”

(Cambodia, family member of male Survivor No. 46)

How about the community, do they worry about this family



Yes, they do. Not financially but in emotional support. We are all in debt.”

(Cambodia, family member of Survivor No. 34)



4.1.2 Intersections among skills, literacy, and opportunities

Most of the survivors in this study and their communities are marked by extreme poverty. In general, they were trafficked while pursuing opportunities to earn an income in another country – primarily low-skilled manual labour. Having low levels of marketable skills is associated with low levels of education, and both of those factors are associated with increased vulnerability to trafficking. People with without skills tend to have fewer options for earning an income, meaning they sometimes must take extreme risks for the chance to earn enough to survive.

In response, it is common for service providers and social workers to support survivors in learning new skills that may lead to better livelihood opportunities. This is an important strategy for supporting survivors, and in the best cases, it can lead to breaking the reinforcing dynamics that create poverty traps. However, some of the social workers we spoke to in this study reported that it is sometimes difficult to connect with survivors – that even when they express interest in receiving support including skills training, they often drop out or fail to really benefit from the training.

Our research suggests this might happen when survivors are not able to read or write. Illiteracy can make attending a skills training very difficult and inaccessible, especially if the training requires them to read informational materials and write up assessments. Survivors may simply drop out of such a skills training rather than explain that they cannot read.

Further, survivors are likely to be coping with traumatic experiences, and they are likely to be experiencing poor mental health – such as anxiety and depression. Many of the survivors interviewed for this research across both Cambodia and Bangladesh reported not wanting to leave their homes (or even a room in the home) or speak to anyone for extended periods of time after returning.

Many support services offered to survivors do attempt to address mental health challenges.

However, as with the issue of literacy, mental health can intersect with livelihoods and interfere with the effectiveness of services. **A survivor in need of acute mental health treatment may not be able to benefit from a skills training.** At the same time, having the support of a skills training programme may also help survivors with their mental health. Survivors we spoke with reported experiencing these conflicting feelings over time – feeling too vulnerable to take advantage of support services early on, but then feeling greater acceptance and confidence after learning new skills once they were confident enough to attend trainings.

Finally, the economic context can also intersect with individual survivor attributes to interfere with the effectiveness of services. All things being equal, survivors should benefit from gaining new skills. However, having new skills does not guarantee a job. In many of the communities we visited for this study, the local economy is very limited and declining. In such cases, a new skill may help a survivor secure a livelihood, but they may need to migrate in order to find an opportunity. **Many of the survivors in this study expressed a desire to migrate again if they could – either to a bigger city in-country or across borders.**

This section has examined the factor of financial health and its contribution to successful reintegration, looking at ways other factors intersect with and interfere with those pathways. We also note that common interventions to support survivors – such as providing life skills training, livelihood skills training, and mental health support – can be mediated or undermined by these intersections. Our findings suggest that these support services are quite important to attaining successful reintegration, but they must be provided carefully with responsiveness to mitigating contextual factors. Supporting survivors to earn a regular income in order to meet their basic needs, escape the poverty trap, and heal from their trafficking experiences requires a holistic approach attuned to issues of debt, mental health, literacy, and the vibrancy of the local community and the economy.



Interview excerpts

on challenges of lack of literacy and numeracy

"The saving money (training) is a big deal. If I had saved money earlier, I would not have had to endure pain. I could have saved first as well as keeping my life and family better."
(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 7)

So it was a fake passport



It looks like a real one. Because I can't read much, so I didn't know whose name it belongs to."

(Cambodia, male, Survivor No. 46)

When did you quit studying



"Grade 3."

(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 30.)

"My parents and I were illiterate; we had no idea of what a fraud was."

(Cambodia, female, Survivor No.47.)

"I don't know how the Khmer alphabets; I don't know what job to do. I am worried for myself, too."

(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 43)

"The biggest problem is the financial problem...then the problem is lack of education. I was not educated; they would not let me go out of the house. I did not even know the roads of the village. So it was easy to deceive me."

(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 8)



4.2

FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIAL NORMS

Every society contains sets of social norms that condition people's everyday experiences, including what it means to be a family, the role of individuals within the collective of society, and what it means to be a woman or man. It is, therefore, important to understand how particular social norms condition the experiences survivors have in reintegration.

While this is of universal importance, we reiterate that the survivors we spoke to in Cambodia and Bangladesh faced particular sets of norms in their respective social and cultural contexts. We also reiterate that the survivors in this study had already attained some measure of success, and they do not represent the experiences of all survivors in their own countries.

We identified some key patterns about the family and social norms that survivors found relevant to their reintegration experiences (illustrated in figure 4). Interestingly, the influence of family and social norms on survivors' reintegration journeys diverged between the two countries more than for the other key factors. In Cambodia, almost all of the survivors reported family as essential to their successful reintegration – either their birth families or their own families if they were married. For them, they engaged with the wider society through their positions in the family. In contrast, most of the survivors in Bangladesh emphasised issues of social standing, which appeared to condition their places within their own families. We use the blue circle to represent the unique Cambodia social norms and the green circle to represent Bangladesh'.



Interview excerpts

Cambodia's emphasis on family and Bangladesh's emphasis on social standing

"I work to forget those pains until I have my own family, I forgot it all."
 (Cambodia, male, Survivor No. 38)

"I am still afraid that my son will be taken away from me. I was also afraid that my family would force me to be with the husband from China."
 (Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 27)

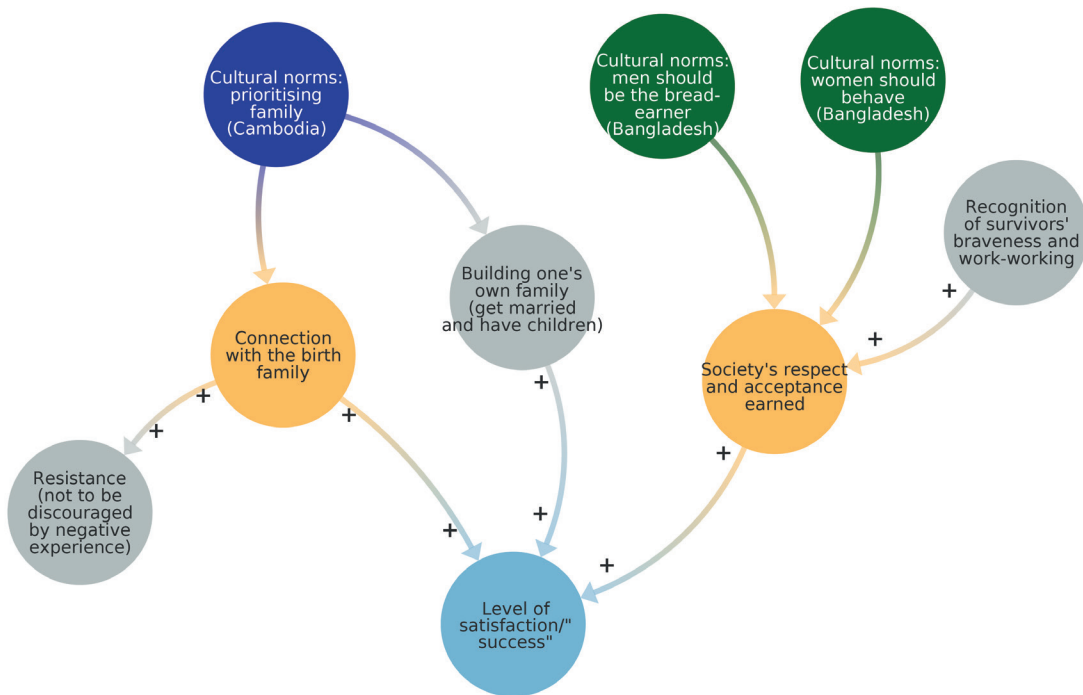
"They face challenges from the family side. Only female victims face this, they face many questions like why you did go there, where you stayed, why did you do this and you can't go there, etc. From the male survivors, the problems are less."

(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 5 (the survivor is also a social worker))

"Living with honour is one of the prerequisites for successful reintegration."
 (Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 12)



Figure 4: Factors related to family and social norms.



In Bangladesh, female survivors reported shame and stigma based on not conforming to the idea of a “good woman” in society. Male survivors also reported suffering from stigma, but for a different reason – the inability to fulfil the role of breadwinner for the family. Male survivors reported being excluded from participating in important decision-making activities in their communities as they were perceived to be less capable than others. While the pattern was not true in every case, male survivors in Bangladesh were more likely to be accepted by family after trafficking, even if the family refused to provide material support, while female survivors could not take family acceptance for granted. In both Cambodia and Bangladesh, men and women have strongly gendered life experiences, and gender is an important factor mediating how survivors reintegrate into family and society.

This suggests that stigma and social exclusion faced by survivors are often not a result of their trafficking experience, per se, but because of the ways the trafficking experience impacts their abilities to conform to gendered social norms. Failing to fulfil these ideals of ‘normal’ and ‘virtuous’ can trigger exclusions that exacerbate the trauma experienced during trafficking. It is worth separating the impacts of social norms from the direct impacts of the trafficking experiences because it makes opportunities for intervention more visible. If it is assumed that the experience of trafficking inevitably leads to social exclusion, there is little to be done save for helping the survivor come to terms with their new status. On the other hand, social norms are multifaceted. They can be challenged. Certain norms can be used to circumvent the harmful effects of other norms.

For example, several male survivors in Bangladesh described facing stigma and judgement from members of their communities, based on the perception that they had failed to earn while working abroad. The community members were not aware that migration can turn into trafficking, so they tended to judge trafficking survivors for failing to provide for their families. This also demonstrates the potential power of sharing one’s story, as shame and stigma appeared to diminish

the more community members could understand and relate to about the survivors’ experiences. Of course, this may not always be the case, and survivors should not be forced to show vulnerability or share private details if they are not happy to. Nevertheless, the experiences of the survivors in this study – especially where greater community knowledge of the survivors’ stories led to less discrimination over time - our research suggests that such pathways may sometimes be available.

In another example, the idea of committing suicide because of the pressures of social exclusion came up in 10 interviews with survivors (some of whom currently work as social workers) in Bangladesh. The subject was not mentioned in any interviews with survivors, social workers, family, or community members in Cambodia. The interviews in Bangladesh were with members of survivor mutual support groups that were meeting regularly in each of the four target locations. The fact that suicide came up so frequently points to something in the social norms faced by these women which is quite different from what women faced in the Cambodian context. However, these women also explained that the support groups had been helpful in finding social acceptance and healing. This suggests that where social norms of one kind lead to exclusion, survivors (and those who support them) can form alternative arrangements in which they can establish more supportive norms.

According to the WHO Global Health Data (World Health Organization, 2018), suicide rates overall in Bangladesh and Cambodia are relatively similar (6.1 and 5.9 per 100,000 per year, respectively, as of 2016). However, the rate amongst women is rather different, with 6.7 female deaths per 100,000 per year in Bangladesh compared to 3.2 for females in Cambodia (also as of 2016). To further substantiate this observation, Arafat (2019, 2017) has documented that more women than men die from suicide in Bangladesh, and this is attributed to factors related to trafficking, such as “patriarchal society, perceived status of females, submissive gender role, lower education

achievements, early marriage, early child, lower economic freedom, fewer role in partner choice and other socio-cultural factors” (Arafat, 2019, p. 124). We note, however, that these trends in suicides do not appear to be unique to trafficking

experiences. Rather, trafficking likely exacerbates issues of social stigma and exclusion – for example around contestations over dowries or social shaming of rape victims.



Interview excerpts

On attempts at suicide

“Sometimes, it feels like if I could commit suicide. This would have been the only solution. I am just at the middle of the sea of problems.”

(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 16)

“I broke down when I returned. I lost my self believe. None of my family members or friends supported me at those hours. It was becoming very hard to carry that mental illness. Sometimes, I thought of committing suicide and I was always thinking that it would be much better not to return and died abroad.”

(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 11)

“After the incident emotional tension grew higher in me and when I thought of those days I wondered why I did not commit suicide.”

(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 17)

“They started abusing her and one day she conceived. Somehow we got information and rescued the girl. As she became pregnant, she wanted to commit suicide. She had no further intention to live.”

(Bangladesh, Social worker No. 7)

“Some of the victims wanted to flee from home, some attempted suicide. We try to give them counselling but they think we are doing this for our benefit.”

(Bangladesh, Social worker No. 13)

Though less common in our interviews, difficulties from stigma were also reported in Cambodia. One common way this was explained was as “jealousy”. These survivors came from very poor communities – in which almost everyone is living in extreme poverty. From this position, they chose to take a chance to (illegally) migrate, resulting in the experience of trafficking. Upon return, these survivors were supported by local NGOs with small amounts of food and basic goods (such as cleaning and cooking supplies). They were also provided skills training and something with which to start earning – either a machine

such as a sewing machine or animals such as pigs or chickens. While these provisions are far from enough to ensure the survivors escape extreme poverty, they are well above what their neighbours have access to. It may seem to the wider community that the survivors have been rewarded for “bad behaviour” – i.e. breaking the law to migrate illegally or taking foolish risks.

This can create a kind of “moral hazard” where people who are desperately poor and vulnerable – for example women in poverty and abusive relationships – present themselves as survivors

of trafficking in order to access these basic provisions. It is not clear how often this happens, but the perception that survivors often “lie” was expressed to us by social workers (organisation 1). This potentially damaging trope of “lying survivors” cuts both ways, building scepticism about the legitimacy of survivor’s claims and also a sense that “genuine” survivors hide and downplay the severity of their experiences. This, again, is likely to be a gendered experience. Male survivors may be less likely to be considered victims, and thus others in the society may not see them as meriting the support they receive.

For the survivor attempting to reintegrate, the perception of having preferential treatment can create tensions with family and neighbours. This is quite distinct from issues of stigma (where the survivor is seen as “less than”), but interestingly, both stigma and jealousy can operate at the same time and mutually reinforce. For example, the two narratives of “that person is bad because they failed to earn in spite of the chance to go abroad because they were defiled while abroad” and “that person is getting an unfair advantage” can combine into “that bad person is getting rewarded unfairly for being bad”, presenting a daunting challenge to successful reintegration.



Interview excerpts

Society’s stigma

“In Cox’s Bazar, most of the people think that the female victims are harmful to the other girls of the society.”

(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 1)

“When I came back from abroad, I felt humiliated. The society didn’t accept me.”

*(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 10
(the survivor is also a social worker))*

No one knew that I was trafficked. I attended the training secretly.”

(Bangladesh, female. Survivor No. 8)

“People used to talk in the back and also in the front. People thought we went to Saudi Arabia and did bad things. They wondered why girls would go abroad. Girls have no work abroad. But it is not true.”

*(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 6
(the survivor is also a social worker))*

“The boy did not have any money to come home after landing at the airport. He could not go home; he did not have the condition to go home. He could not even inform his family.”

*(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 6
(the survivor is also a social worker))*



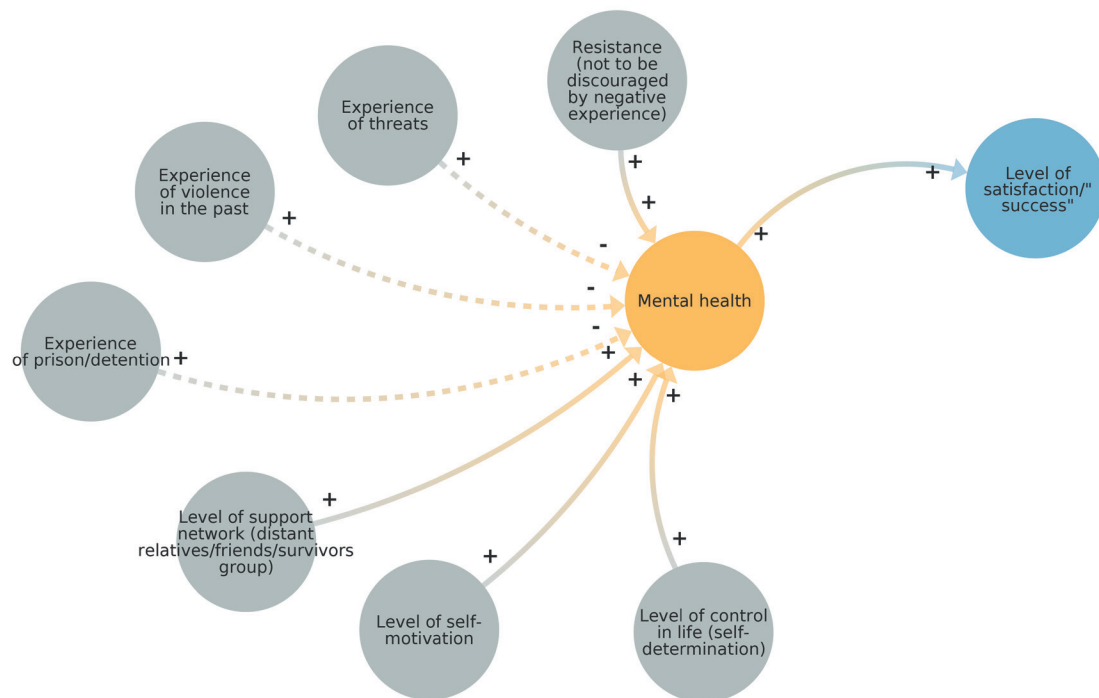
4.3

INHIBITORS AND ENABLERS FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Several factors were mentioned by survivors as related to their mental health. These are shown in figure 5, which is another sub-section of the full system map, figure 1. It is difficult to assess the relative impacts of the different factors, but survivors tended to mention these factors together when describing their trafficking experiences. Firstly, some had experienced direct threats from their traffickers – either brokers, bosses, or husbands where there was forced marriage. Some survivors still held the belief that these people from their past may show up any

day to take them away or kill them. Secondly, experiences of various forms of violence were mentioned as traumatic. In many cases, the survivors experienced beatings and other physical and verbal abuse – again from brokers, bosses, husbands, or even the husbands' family members. This includes but is not limited to things such as having one's mobility restricted to staying in the house all the time, limited or no ability to use a phone to contact family back home or even friends or contacts in the area, and having pay withheld for long periods of time.

Figure 5. Factors related to mental health.



In several instances, men from Cambodia were detained or arrested in Thailand. Rather than being accurately identified as a victim of human trafficking, they were treated as a criminal for violating migration and labour laws. They reported the experience of detention as being highly traumatic. Not only were they subject to physical abuse and violence on the same scale as other trafficking victims, they experienced

judgement – both from society and the formal legal systems – leaving them with guilt and a sense of responsibility for what happened to them which other kinds of survivors may not necessarily face. Reintegration after detention or imprisonment should be treated as sensitively as reintegration after other forms of trafficking, even when survivors were detained very early on in their migration attempts.



Interview excerpts

On the jail experience

“Sometimes, I dreamed that I’m back in that jail, then I woke up with shock.”

(Cambodia, male, Survivor No. 46)

“They said, “next time you come, do not come illegally.” They also said that I was lucky to come here. If I had been caught by the police, there would not have been any rice to eat.”

(Cambodia, male, Survivor No. 25)



In addition to directly being with one’s family, survivors reported the benefit of having support from their wider network. In some cases, in Bangladesh, survivors mentioned not being accepted within their immediate families upon return. For these people, the support received from more distant relatives – for example a cousin who took them in – was instrumental in supporting their healing, creating the conditions

for improved mental health. In Cambodia, even though immediate family was seen as key to successful reintegration, support from friends and the wider network was very helpful in dealing with ongoing struggles or disfunction in the immediate family. In spite of the importance of immediate family to survivors’ success, it is important not to assume families have no unhealthy dynamics of their own.



Interview excerpts

On supports from wider family circle

“I went back to my home and my parents didn’t accept me. I had to stay at my cousin’s home. Then I gave birth to my child.”

(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 3)

*When you returned
did anyone helped you
except Socheton*



My friend circle. They always stood beside me...they did not have a lot of money; still, they helped me financially.”

Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 9)



It was rare that a survivor did not comment on the difficulty of remembering accurately what had happened during the trafficking and reintegration experiences. They reported not remembering the date of leaving or returning (sometimes not even being able to remember what year they returned). Most reported some period of time – from weeks to over a year – after returning before which they could not bear to face social interactions (leaving the house, looking for work, or even interacting with service providers). Several reported having regular nightmares about their experiences, including the possibility that their traffickers were going to find them and harm them.

These issues were not brought up and discussed by the survivors in terms of mental health issues or even as particularly central to their successful reintegration. However, it would be irresponsible to overlook the evidence for these issues and how they appear to be impacting survivors in their current lives. It is also interesting to consider this in light of what we learnt from Bangladesh, where almost all survivors expressed mental health to be an important part of their successful reintegration.



4.4

THE THORNY PROBLEM OF PURSUING JUSTICE

In the interviews with survivors, they were asked about whether they had pursued any kind of legal case regarding their trafficking experiences. While survivors reported that justice would indeed contribute to their successful reintegration, in both Cambodia and Bangladesh, survivors did not seem keen or have high expectations of obtaining justice.

In Cambodia, there were many instances where a case was being pursued – always with the support of an organisation. In some of those cases, the survivors had won a small amount of money, which they reported to be very helpful in paying off debts or setting up their livelihoods. However, more often than not, the cases had either come to nothing or continued to drag on with no certain outcome. It was also a clear pattern that where survivors had low levels of education or were illiterate, they expressed a sense that the legal case was out of their control. It was something happening elsewhere on their behalf, which may or may not benefit them eventually. In no cases were survivors pinning their hopes for success on getting legal justice. However, we would not draw the conclusion that legal cases are not important. Rather, it appears to be the cases that access to justice is quite rare and difficult to obtain, and it requires going through an alienating bureaucratic process, meaning that these survivors did not feel it was something tangible that they could do or contribute to themselves. This (understandable) attitude of defeatism suggests that survivors would benefit greatly from better access to justice, but it is not accessible.

One aspect of this is related to the role of broker. As can also be seen in the literature (See, for example Gordon, 2016; Verité, 2012,

2010), brokerage is a complex phenomenon with different actors making up different parts of a long “supply chain”. Sometimes a broker is acting in good faith to try to help people around them. Other times, the broker is aware of their actions, but they may be in close relation to the survivor or even a local leader. Several survivors mentioned that a close relative had started them on the trafficking journey. One man in Cambodia mentioned that he preferred not to file a legal case because the broker was his sister’s husband. Others noted that, because the brokers would be unlikely to be caught, taking legal action against them would invite retaliation.

In Bangladesh, there was another level of disillusionment around pursuing legal justice. In addition to the sense that a successful outcome would be difficult to achieve, there was a sense that there were important social costs associated with pursuing a case. One woman explained: “If I file a case, there would be a lot of talk in the society about what I did, why I did it, questions would arise. That’s why I did not file any case to keep my dignity. In my opinion, justice would not have been done, only my values would have been disrespected. There is a lot to talk about when making a judgement. It is better not to file a case.”

In the end, survivors must make individual decisions about the likelihoods of various costs/risks and potential benefits of taking legal action. There is a great deal of potential for successful legal outcomes to support the survivors in achieving successful reintegration. However, both the legal and social systems involved would need to function differently for this to be a more common source of support.



Interview excerpts

On challenges to obtain justice

Would you like to file a case against the trafficker in the court



No. It's too late already. I don't know how to sue."
(Cambodia, female, Survivor No. 28.)

"It's common to be harassed by the police. Most of the court orders go to the traffickers' way. The administration harasses us."

(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 2)

"There is no law for the poor."

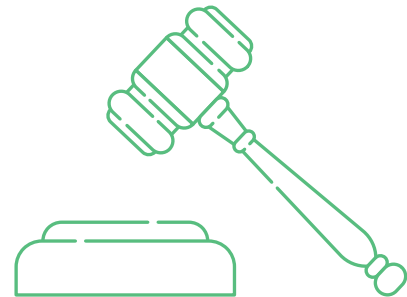
(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 4)

"Because there is no implementation of the law here. It is all theoretical. You have to bribe before you fill a case...In Bangladesh, filing a case with the police now means it will cost 40-50 thousand takas (USD 470-588)"

(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 7)

"Justice would not have been done, only my value (reputation) would have been disrespected."

(Bangladesh, female, Survivor No. 8)



5

TRIANGULATING WITH OTHER PERSPECTIVES

This research was centred on the perspectives of survivors; however, we were also able to speak to people around survivors to gain additional details about key factors and causal pathways. In this section, we report on what we learned from family, community members, and social workers to triangulate and further nuance the systemic picture of reintegration. We were only able to speak with family members, community members, and local leaders in Cambodia.

These were direct family members and neighbours of the survivors we spoke to or leaders in the communities in which the survivors were attempting to reintegrate. In contrast, we spoke to social workers in both Cambodia and Bangladesh. Reflecting on the observations and perceptions of social workers helps to deepen the understanding of the similarities and differences between the two countries as well as key areas where survivors own perspectives differ from those attempting to support them.

5.1 LESSONS FROM FAMILY MEMBERS

Family was a major theme that came up in the interviews with survivors. This was true in both Cambodia and Bangladesh, though we noted above how family and social norms operate quite differently across the two countries. We were only able to speak to family members in Cambodia, so the discussion in this section should not be extrapolated to Bangladesh.

Most of the survivors we spoke to in Cambodia had been relatively young when they began their trafficking experiences – from the mid-teens to mid-twenties. It is understandable that they still had a parent-child relationship with their birth family, rather than having more independent lives. We observed that the survivors identified as members of a core family unit, rather than as independent individuals. This is a common cultural norm in Cambodia. In this case, it is important to understand that reintegration is something not only experienced by survivors but by their entire families.

In this section we present some of the insights and patterns we observed. However, we do note one caveat. This study targeted survivors who had already attained some measure of success. All of the survivors we spoke to in Cambodia reported this foundational link with their families. This would suggest that support from and belonging to a family (however functional or dysfunctional) is essential for success. However, given the limited number of survivors we were able to speak to in a study of this size and the prevalence of family-centred social and cultural norms, we cannot say for sure what a survivors' prospects for success would be in absence of an available family. The following observations are presented with this potential blind spot in mind.

The survivors we spoke with – both men and women – had experienced trafficking in the context of migrating for work. Other forms of trafficking may have other social and economic drivers that differ when it comes to the role of

family. In this study, we observed that in many households, multiple members had migrated for work. In some cases, only one family member experienced trafficking, while the others had more positive experiences. In other cases, multiple family members were experiencing trafficking or had over time. This meant that in some cases, a survivor was attempting to reintegrate while knowing another member of their family was suffering elsewhere. In other cases, family members decided to migrate in order to support the survivor's family member – or perhaps because the need for income, which had driven the first member to take the risk to migrate was still a pressing need. In this way, trafficking and reintegration in a family can concatenate, leading to a repeating pattern of vulnerability, risk-taking, and suffering.

In spite of appearing to be profoundly important to success, families were not presented as perfect or without struggles. Families we spoke to included cases of separation, disputes, and suggestions of domestic violence or abuse. In fact, some survivors reported that family members (such as a sister's husband) had led them into trafficking in the first place. These dynamics appeared to condition how survivors reintegrated, but neither ruled out success nor led them to pursue reintegration apart from the family.

At the same time, the concept of family extended beyond immediate parents and siblings. Some survivors explained that in absence of a mother or father, they had lived with an aunt or grandparent, fitting into the same family dynamics of mutual obligations and expectations.

When the survivors were separated from their families throughout the trafficking situation, those obligations and expectations appeared to persist. Survivors explained that over the years when they were not able to be in touch with their family, they still hoped, or even believed, that somehow the money they were earning would reach their families back home. Whether or not the money

was being sent back by the trafficker, the belief provided the survivor with solace knowing they were still able to contribute and fulfil those obligations.

This also meant that sometimes families would take additional risks and fall deeper into traps of poverty and debt (even trafficking) to help the survivor. In one case, a family described finding out that their son had been imprisoned in Thailand for breaking migration laws, and they sold their land (losing their own economic base in the process) to go and be near him in Thailand. After being released, this survivor and his entire family had to start over.

Some families explained that entire villages are experiencing demographic and economic

changes. Young and capable people are migrating and following each other to opportunities where they can be identified, while older people and people with illnesses or disabilities remain. These are the areas, mentioned above, where declining vitality makes it impossible to remain and also successfully reintegrate.

Speaking to family members of survivors revealed that survivors do not undertake reintegration alone – at least in Cambodia, amongst the kinds of survivors we spoke to. Individuals' trafficking experiences are experienced by their families, and they share their reintegration journeys. Survivors' struggles exacerbate risks and vulnerabilities of the entire family, but the successes of either can also reinforce mutual benefits.

5.2 COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND LEADERS

Speaking with community members – especially survivors' neighbours – and local leaders also helped to triangulate and nuance the insights from speaking directly to survivors. Again, we were only able to speak to community members in Cambodia, and the patterns we observed may not hold everywhere.

The context for these interviews was of villages in which people appeared to know nearly everyone else in the village. Community members were generally aware of the experiences of the survivors, though it was not always clear to them that what the survivors had experienced was trafficking. While anonymity and privacy may be important in some contexts for survivors to be able to heal and avoid social stigma or discrimination, in these villages that level of privacy did not appear to be an option. At the same time, community members appeared to be remarkably understanding and empathetic about the traumas faced by the survivors. Again, this may not always be the case; in this case, however, community leaders explained that because "everyone is poor", and most members of the

community could understand what had driven the survivors to take the risks that had led to trafficking, there was little judgement.

Local leaders in some villages explained the dire circumstances. Interviews took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and people faced closed borders, lack of employment opportunities and blocked access to markets to either sell their goods/produce or buy supplies or goods for resale. These leaders explained that under even normal conditions, villagers face a great deal of pressure to migrate, and they face significant hurdles to migrating legally. These hurdles include illiteracy and low levels of education, which make it difficult to work out a legal route to migration; poverty and desperation, which make it impossible to pay fees up front for documents (i.e. passports and visas) or wait months for formal recruitment agencies to find legitimate work placements for them; and susceptibility to relational pressures meaning they tend to have little option but to trust brokers and social contacts, which end up knowingly or unknowingly sending them into trafficking. The local leaders

we spoke to appeared earnest and to be acting in good faith, but we heard from some interviews that these same kinds of local leaders can prey on vulnerable people and act as brokers to traffic them.

Some of the local leaders we spoke to were open about the challenges of trafficking in their villages. They spoke frankly and urged greater resources to address basic poverty and vulnerabilities amongst villagers and to find ways of supporting them to migrate legally. Some leaders appeared to misunderstand the nature of trafficking. In these cases, they tended to only recognise the most extreme forms of trafficking where victims are kidnapped or “sold”. They did not appear

to recognise that the more common scenarios actually constitute trafficking – for example, where a person consents to being smuggled across a border illegally for a promised work opportunity but then gets abused. These village leaders would claim that there were no cases of trafficking in their village but then describe stories using words like “migration”, “without documents”, “abused”, “terrible working conditions”, or “tricked by the broker” without recognizing that they were describing cases of human trafficking. This low level of awareness would pose serious challenges for effective identification of survivors, meaning that many survivors may not be accessing support services they are entitled to.



Interview excerpts

On awareness of human trafficking

“If a victim doesn’t understand that he was trafficked, then it is possible to be trafficked again. It is essential to give them the whole idea of human trafficking. They need to be understood clearly.”

(Bangladesh, male, Survivor No. 2)

Have you ever heard of the word human trafficking before



Heard. Seen only on television. Never seen it in real life, there is none in our district.”

(Cambodia, Village chief No. 1)

(This conversation happened when a local survivor’s parents were present)



It was not only the community leaders that displayed these ways of thinking. Most of the community members also had some confusion around the concepts of trafficking compared to other issues related to labour and migration. Where there was clarity in understanding the multifaceted nature of trafficking, it was the result of deliberate work by NGOs that had been done in the area to raise awareness. Further, while this section explicitly deals with what we learned from speaking with the community members and leaders in Cambodia, the findings are also very relevant for Bangladesh.

Overall, speaking to local leaders and community members helped reveal the extent to which neither trafficking nor reintegration happen in isolation to individuals. Vulnerabilities are widespread in these villages, and forces that pull people into trafficking also serve to impede successful reintegration because they operate throughout the society and at multiple levels. These conversations helped us elaborate the links between conditions of extreme poverty and trafficking/reintegration as well as the conditions in which many people (in Cambodia at least) are attempting to reconnect to social and economic relationships.

5.3

LESSONS FROM SOCIAL WORKERS

For the most part, social workers in Cambodia echoed the survivors' emphasis on family and income as the main components of successful reintegration. Helping survivors support themselves through an effective livelihood is something that runs through all the interviews and is connected to all the services provided by the organisations we spoke with. The social workers were also clear that in most cases, this would involve earning to support one's family, and it also must involve the family supporting and accepting the survivor.

When discussing factors that support successful reintegration, one social worker explained, "It's all concentrated on their family. If the family supports them, then the client can move forward... As for the community, it's only a small part. It's not as strong as family. Family is the strongest (support). They live with each other, so if the family doesn't support and take care of them, what community can take care of them?"

This underscores our observation that family is central to contributing to successful reintegration. The survivors in Cambodia we spoke to all had some form of support from family, and this appeared to help them avoid excess stigma or marginalisation from their communities. We do note that the lack of examples of successful reintegration in Cambodia without strong family support could either mean that without family support, success is impossible, or that rejection by family is rare. Social workers in Bangladesh also explained the importance of family support; consistent with our earlier observations that social pressures appear to influence how families support survivors more in Bangladesh than they do in Cambodia.

The social workers also tended to emphasise the specialty supports of their organisation. Some emphasise mental health, while one emphasised legal assistance. However, one clear pattern across the social worker interviews was

an appreciation of successful reintegration as an incredibly complex phenomenon. None of these respondents seemed to think that their services were all that was required to support successful reintegration, and none of them felt there was a clear end point after which, having accessed a certain amount of services, that the survivors would be clearly and obviously finished with their process of healing and reintegrating.

At the same time, it is clear that the social workers may have a different perspective from the survivors. Most of the social workers expressed confusion and a measure of frustration at the fact that survivors sometimes reject services. One social worker explained with an anecdote,

"Sometimes [we need to] assess the knowledge level [of the client], whether or not they have to learn a skill, so that the investment won't be prone to be lost. But they don't want to stay and learn with us like that. They always want stuff instantly. This is where we, mostly, according to what we've done in the past, have very little success. Very little. It means that they are fickle. For example, there was one case regarding a guy who came from Burma. His hometown is in ----. When he came, his hair was this long. He had been thrown overboard to let the fish devour him in the sea... When he met us, his need was high; wanted us to buy a rice field in order for him not to go back. He wanted farmland; wanted cows; wanted things that were sort of big. We didn't have that many packages... As a result he told us to close his case. We worked with him for 4 months... He went back, but we made it legal. We helped him with that to make him not get caught. He became a guard in Thailand, and he was living quite comfortably."

Another social worker told a similar story about the role of personal attributes: "They have little culture, so the people that we see as successful, in 12 of them, we only see that 3 want to have the skills on their own to sustain their lives and

their families so that they don't migrate again. So, in 12, 3 of them are really persisting to have an occupation. Those 3 or 4 people are really trying. Like we provided pigs, chickens, or ducks for them. Even a grass cutter. The rest of them don't really care. I don't know. They don't seem to have self-encouragement or self-help. They still have little culture, and they've abandoned the skills that they'd learnt."

In spite of articulating compassion towards survivors and a deep understanding of the complexities and difficulties they face while

reintegrating, it appears that social workers can struggle to make sense of the motivations and logic behind survivors' actions and choices. It seems likely that what social workers perceive to be a lack of "culture" or "knowledge" may actually be a lack of self-efficacy – the sense that one has the ability to effectively perform a task or that taking certain actions can actually result in achieving one's goal (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2011, p. 12; Thompson and Haley, 2018, p. 304) – which is an important psychological/behavioural factor which is often weaker in people who have suffered trauma (Hopper, 2017).



Interview excerpts

On survivors' choice or attitude

"That time, he was thrown overboard to let the fish devour him in the sea. He made it here, and the broker paid him back only 40,000 Baht of his monthly salary...but when he met us, his need was high, wanted us to buy a rice field in order for him to not go back, he wanted a farmland, wanted cows, wanted things that were sort of big. So, we didn't have that many packages...as a result, he told us to close his case...he can speak a lot of Thai cos he was living there. Finally, he got a job as a guard in Thailand."

(Cambodia, Social worker No. 20)

"Why mad? Because we are poor, they talked and we went there by ourselves. If we didn't want to go, they couldn't have convinced us at all. And when all difficulties happened, we can't be mad at them completely."

(Cambodia, male, Survivor No. 33)

Social workers we spoke to appear to hold a deep conviction that successful reintegration means not remigrating; success means gaining skills to carve out a more successful livelihood in the community of origin with their families. While very similar to the perspectives of many survivors we spoke to, there is a disconnect. Many survivors mentioned the importance of family but still explained the need to take (sometimes massive) risks to attain the kind of lives they desired.

Again, while the prevailing sense from the social workers we spoke with was of compassion,

deep understanding, and good faith efforts to help people, their explanations sometimes overemphasise their own roles in reintegration and can even be patronizing. For example, one social worker explained how long it takes for survivors to successfully reintegrate as follows: "It depends on our guidance. If we guide them correctly, it's going to be fast. For example, when we know about their favourite career, and we encourage them to do what they like, they will commit. Everything will be better – mental, doing what they like, staying motivated, that job can help their family and so on."

Another explained, “Sometimes, the feelings of the social workers can be very difficult. Because most of the women are not the same as us regular folks, it’s important that we are patient. It’s important that the people who go and work with these women have a feeling of willingness. Sometimes [they] can be impolite, which can lead to problems for the women instead. So, we have to commit and control our feelings. Sometimes, the survivors can speak rudely to us. We should understand that these women, their feelings have been affected tremendously. Sometimes, when we ask some questions, they don’t even answer; maybe even 2 or 3 words, which can be challenging. So, we have to patiently keep trying with them.”

It can undoubtedly be difficult to invest one’s personal efforts and emotions in helping another person if they fail to achieve success. Again, we want to highlight that all of the social workers we spoke with were engaged in good faith, impassioned efforts to help people who need help. We cannot speak to the prevalence of this issue, but we note that, in our observations, social workers have their own positionality, their own interests, and their own perspectives about how the process of reintegration can and should proceed. This is only natural, as every actor in a given context will have their own interests and perspectives based on their position.

We simply want to draw attention to the potential for this pattern to be a pitfall and hindrance to survivors. This research has attempted to capture and emphasise the voices and perspectives of survivors in defining what success looks like. It is simply important to note that their voices are still not the most prominent, and the voices of advocates, no matter how earnest, will never perfectly channel those of the most affected.

In the case mentioned above, the social worker helped the fisherman thrown overboard and left for dead to remigrate, but to do so legally, and thus, more safely. However, this action made little sense to the incredulous social worker. Moreover, the demands this survivor made seemed outrageous. Nevertheless, it is quite likely that this survivor knew what levels of wellbeing they might have by remigrating to Thailand, and if the support organisation could not match it by providing land and livestock, it was only rational that they should pursue this better life in Thailand, even if it meant taking a risk. As we saw from the survivors, they have a greater willingness to take risks than others might be comfortable with, given that, as outsiders, we do not feel the same urgency around these choices.



Interview excerpts

On challenges of assisting survivors to find jobs

“The biggest challenge we face is working with women. As we provide them with a different job, the main challenge we faced was with women. If we provide them with a job far from home, then their family resists. The biggest challenge comes from the family. We had one case like this, where she had to go to the town for work, the society did not accept it well.”

(Bangladesh, Social worker No.9)

“Here education plays a role, as education is needed for a good job. Sometimes the survivors expect a decent job but they don’t have a proper education.”

(Bangladesh, Social worker No.9)



6

DISCUSSION

Sections 2 and 3 above were primarily based on what we heard from survivors directly. Section 4 included insights from family and community members (for some of the survivors in Cambodia) and social workers (from both countries). In this section, we reflect on the overall story emerging from this research. We have developed and explained a map of the reintegration system, as experienced by the survivors in this study. This map represents the condensed form of the answers to the two main research questions – about what constitutes and contributes to successful reintegration. Some of these answers may be common sense amongst counter-trafficking practitioners and survivors, while some of them may be new or helpfully reformulated insights. What is clear is that recentring the discussion of reintegration around the perspectives and aspirations of survivors is helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of how reintegration works and how it is situated alongside other big systemic issues such as extreme poverty, migration, health, and gender-based discrimination.

We affirm the need for services to support survivors in healing from their traumas, to improve their mental health, to attain useful skills, and to achieve better livelihoods. More resources for these forms of support are urgently needed and would be effective – especially if services are provided in caring, relational, culturally appropriate ways. However, reintegration should not be viewed in isolation, and it should not be considered as a simple linear process.

When survivors come from conditions of extreme poverty, going back into those conditions can never be considered a successful reintegration. The structures and dynamics that keep people in poverty traps must be understood so that services can be designed to counter them. Migration and re-migration must not be ruled out as part of successful reintegration. The legal, policy, and economic incentive structures that drive people to travel in search of opportunity and to do so in risky and vulnerable ways must be better understood so that effective services and advocacy efforts can counter them.

Finally, the multiple forms of social and economic marginalisation that result in some people being vulnerable to trafficking in the first place pose significant challenges to achieving successful reintegration after trafficking. For lack of a better word, we can consider this an issue of citizenship. We must develop a better understanding of survivors' own agency – especially their deep understanding based on their experiences, their powerful stories, and their insights about what success might look like and how it can be achieved. At their best, service providers and social workers walk alongside survivors to build better lives and communities together. This means resisting the tendency to focus on services, per se, which can unfairly cast survivors as passive recipients, and which can metastasise into us-versus-them thinking where it seems survivors are never satisfied or grateful enough for what they are given. In each of these areas, our findings support recommendations for how these challenges can be overcome to more effectively support survivors.



RECOMMENDATIONS

In this report, we have developed a detailed picture of reintegration as experienced by survivors of trafficking, including key insights about how successful reintegration can be supported. Here we present a set of recommendations based on these insights.

The table is organised around key findings from this study. For each key finding, we highlight a general principle for interventions which flows from the finding, and then we present practical recommendations for the key stakeholders.

	Findings of the study	Suggestions on principal	Recommendations for specific stakeholders
1	Financial health contributes to and defines successful reintegration. Poverty traps are often caused by debt and predatory lending.	Ensure better financial services and borrowing options, especially for people in rural, vulnerable settings, who may be illiterate.	<p>For governments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reform regulatory policies to eliminate predatory microfinance service • Incentivise other financial institutes to provide friendly borrowing options to the most vulnerable <p>For NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the best borrowing options for survivors and provide clear information to support informed financial choices. • Provide numeracy training and training on money management to raise awareness of predatory lending and support better savings and spending priorities.
2	Family contributes to and, to a significant extent, defines successful reintegration.	Recognise that survivors (usually) belong to family units, and this can make interventions that treat survivors as individuals ineffective.	<p>For governments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise and support the need for survivors to stay connected with their families. For example, survivors in shelters may need extra visits and calls to stay connected with families. • Survivors should automatically, or with minimal barriers, be enrolled in social protection programmes for which they qualify (such as the IDPoor Card in Cambodia). In general, social protection programmes should be targeted at entire families. <p>For NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop case management plan including the family of the survivor. Addressing the needs of the wider family can help support the survivor, but neglecting this link can undermine the effectiveness of support. • Specific interventions targeting survivors (for example skills or literacy trainings) should also be extended to the wider family, where possible.

Findings of the study	Suggestions on principal	Recommendations for specific stakeholders
<p>3 Being accepted by society contributes to and defines successful reintegration.</p>	<p>Counter harmful social norms (e.g. survivors are failed migrants, survivors bring shame to the community) with helpful social norms rooted in society (e.g. survivors are brave overcomers, survivors are valuable member of the community).</p>	<p>For governments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work to raise awareness of trafficking issues and foster healthy perceptions towards survivors (male and female). This will help counter stigma and change attitudes from judgment or pity to empathy and support. • Make prominent statements about trafficking as a policy priority. In addition to the direct impact of such policies, they can contribute to changing perceptions and attitudes toward unhelpful norms and promote changes in behaviours to reduce stigma and discrimination. <p>For NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on SBCC with communities particularly before survivors return to the community and later to continue providing support during reintegration. • Challenge norms through cultural channels – perhaps through children’s books, movies, and short films that help people feel empathy and acceptance towards survivors.

	Findings of the study	Suggestions on principal	Recommendations for specific stakeholders
4	Healing from trauma contributes to and defines successful reintegration.	Contribute to healing by addressing trauma as part of constellations of issues.	<p>For governments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure professional psychology specialists and experts in trauma are involved in policy design when it comes to supporting the reintegration of survivors. <p>For NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support survivors to understand the factors influencing their mental health. • Ensure support networks are in place and accessible (for example, by organising survivors' groups or running support hotlines so that survivors have a way to be heard and understood). • Provide regular and ongoing training and support to social workers on psychological counselling, skills strengthening and acquiring knowledge needed to assess survivors' mental health and to effectively provide support and referrals. • Keep case loads manageable, where possible, and provide support to social workers for their own self-care as well as for recognizing biases and burnout.
5	Ability to generate income and increased control over one's life contribute to successful reintegration	As many survivors dropped out of schooling at a young age, support beyond skill training, including literacy and numeracy, is essential to help generate income and gain a sense of autonomy.	<p>For governments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide pathways for adults who seek to complete their basic education, particularly in literacy and numeracy, possibly with scholarships. <p>For NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On top of existing skill training programmes, evaluate and identify survivors who may need support in literacy and numeracy. Provide pathways to support survivors in these aspects, possibly with scholarships.

Findings of the study	Suggestions on principal	Recommendations for specific stakeholders
<p>6 In areas with pervasive poverty, livelihood options are extremely limited, which pushes people to take risks on dangerous migration journeys.</p>	<p>Reduce the push factors in areas that suffer from pervasive poverty. Foster potential employment opportunities and support safer, legal migration.</p>	<p>For governments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentivise factories and companies to operate in areas with high rates of unemployment and poverty; incentivise the employment of local people (for example, through tax benefits). As a system-level intervention, this should include survivors and non-survivors alike. <p>For NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with social enterprises or ethical companies to create employment opportunities for survivors, generally. Do not simply arrange for special hiring of survivors, as this can lead to unwanted attention, discrimination, and inappropriate working environments. • Provide counselling and conduct market research to support survivors to identify livelihood opportunities suitable for them or to start their own context-appropriate businesses. • Recognize that in areas facing population and economic decline, the best option for successful reintegration may be remigration. Support survivors in obtaining documentation and overcoming the barriers to legal migration.

Findings of the study	Suggestions on principal	Recommendations for specific stakeholders
<p>7</p> <p>Prison or detention experiences are particularly traumatic; they can decimate survivors' mental health and leave them with a sense of guilt and low self-worth.</p>	<p>Ensure survivors are identified as victims of criminal behaviour rather than as criminals themselves.</p>	<p>For governments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate and correct the potential illegal practices in the identification and detention system where survivors get arrested rather than provided support as a victim. Strengthen the collaboration between migration source countries and destination countries, particularly in regard to trauma-sensitive repatriation procedures and the identification of TIP victims detained in immigration centres and prisons. Consular services should work with advocates and NGOs to design effective procedures. <p>For NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise the trauma survivors experience specifically via interactions with law enforcement, prisons, and detention centres. Identify and evaluate survivors who have been to prison or detention centres in order to provide additional mental health support.
<p>8</p> <p>Key stakeholders, including local community leaders, still do not have a clear understanding of human trafficking. This limits their ability to support survivors' reintegration.</p>	<p>Ensure key stakeholders, particularly frontline government workers and community leaders, have a clear understanding of human trafficking.</p>	<p>For governments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise awareness of human trafficking trends and experience via mass media, publications, and policy. In particular, to help to resolve confusion over the differences between migration issues and trafficking. <p>For NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where appropriate, work with a range of stakeholders, including government officials and community leaders, on SBCC. This should help to develop understanding and empathy towards survivors as well as to combat discrimination, negative attitudes, and stereotypes that undermine identification and reintegration. Sharing anonymized stories from survivors may help build understanding in public consciousness.

Findings of the study	Suggestions on principal	Recommendations for specific stakeholders
<p>9</p> <p>There are many barriers preventing migrants from doing so safely and legally, which leads to increased incidences of trafficking. Of particular importance is the lack of basic identity documentation and the inaccessibility and expense of obtaining visas and formal placements via agencies.</p>	<p>Having proper documentation in the first place can help people see a legal way of migrating, avoiding the likelihood of getting caught and imprisoned, or taking risks going with a broker.</p>	<p>For governments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure basic documents like birth certificates, ID documents, and passports are easily accessible for all families, especially those who are particularly vulnerable. • Provide easy access to information and documents for migrating legally, safely and at low cost, especially taking into account the needs of people with low levels of literacy. • Fight corruption and coordinate with destination countries for safe employment of migrant workers. <p>For NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidance on how to migrate legally and safely. Support vulnerable people and survivors wishing to migrate with the process of obtaining the required documents and making safe arrangements. Some examples include free hotlines, social media presence, and access to networks of returned migrants who can share knowledge and advice about the process.
<p>10</p> <p>Existing social welfare programmes – including those not directly targeting survivors – can support reintegration and reduce vulnerabilities to trafficking in the first place.</p>	<p>Ensure that general social welfare support is in place and accessible to vulnerable populations in general, as well as to survivors of human trafficking.</p>	<p>For governments:</p> <p>- Resources specifically for supporting survivor reintegration may be limited by a number of factors. Even when additional resources specifically for survivors cannot be generated, work to make sure existing general social welfare and social protection resources are inclusive and accessible to all. This will help survivors as well.</p> <p>For NGOs:</p> <p>- In addition to (or as an alternative to, where such issues are contentious) advocating specifically for additional resources for survivors of trafficking, advocate for more inclusive and accessible general social protection, since survivors face intersecting barriers. Access to services should be based on need, rather than identification.</p>

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