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## Sex Trafficking and Slavery in Southeast Asia: To Free Captives

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## Sex Trafficking and Slavery in Southeast Asia: To Free Captives

### Cover Page Footnote

The Family Connection Foundation (FCF) is a non-profit organization that encompasses 15 different projects, including LIFT International and Hug, which specifically address Human Trafficking intervention. From 2017 through 2019, FCF efforts led to the conviction of approximately one-third (1/3) of all sex traffickers prosecuted annually in Thailand. FCF also provides homes for orphaned children, opportunities for better education, and training for families to be stronger and healthier. To pray for or support this ministry to victims of sex trafficking, please visit [www.fcfthailand.org](http://www.fcfthailand.org).

## Introduction

Accounts of child sex trafficking raise disturbing questions. How could any person sink to such depths of depravity to sell or buy a child? What are the long term effects of such aberrant behavior in the life of a child? More importantly, what can I do about it? Christians living in the suburbs of the United States may feel far removed from this particular form of evil. It is tempting to think that trafficking isn't our problem, since it happens in faraway places like Thailand, Cambodia, or elsewhere. Yet the Internet brings this problem into our communities, neighborhoods, and even into our own homes. Both victims and abusers may be much closer than one would ever imagine. It is an evil creeping into every segment of society, and Christians cannot close their eyes to the problem.

Human trafficking is a general term for offenses including sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, domestic servitude, forced marriage, forced criminality, conscription as a child soldier, and organ harvesting.<sup>1</sup> The scope of this article, however, is limited to sexual exploitation and trafficking.

Millions of people derive income from the sex industry in Thailand. "Estimates - none of which can be verified - range up to 2.3 million who engage in sex work." Some claims estimate that the sex industry accounts for 10% of all tourist money spent in Thailand.<sup>2</sup> While not all sex workers are victims of human trafficking, the sex industry is deeply involved in the practice. Sex trafficking "occurs when someone is deceived, coerced, or forced to take part in sexual activity."<sup>3</sup> Sex trafficking can take various forms, sometimes by the use of force but often by deception.

Ginny Coleman, Media and Communications Manager for LIFT International in Thailand, reports that sex trafficking encompasses perhaps the smallest percentage of human trafficking, but unquestionably the most profitable area of human trafficking. Coleman also acknowledged that until recently, traffickers had little risk of prosecution.<sup>4</sup> The problem of human trafficking became a global issue in 2000 when the Palermo Protocol was implemented to quantify "trafficking in persons." Since that time, governments around the world have worked to create and strengthen laws to prosecute traffickers. But in 2018, "there were only 7,481 convictions globally for human trafficking offenses while it is estimated that there are 40 million victims of human trafficking."<sup>5</sup> Consequently, for every five thousand victims of human trafficking, only one is getting justice. Therefore, traffickers are motivated by huge profits with little risk of legal consequences or apprehension.

As those commanded to "go and make disciples," the Church is called to reach victims and those trafficking them. Jesus came to set captives free, which includes rescuing those in the grip of human trafficking as well as seeing the guilty transformed. Redemption is possible because the power of Christ which compels us to go into all the world. It is the same power that can break the chains of bondage, heal the brokenhearted, and set the captives free.<sup>6</sup>

This article provides a contextualized review of sex trafficking in Southeast Asia and the impact worldwide, a presentation of the findings and implications, and provides recommendations for proactively addressing it. Specific attention is addressed to the gap in the literature available pertaining to the process and dynamics of psychological coercion of people involved in human sex trafficking. The goal of the article is to inform and equip readers to

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<sup>1</sup> Stop the Traffik, "Types of Exploitation: Defining the most common types of exploitation and human trafficking," London, <https://www.stopthetraffik.org/about-human-trafficking/types-of-exploitation/>

<sup>2</sup> J. Mandryk, *Operation World* (Colorado Springs: Biblica Publishing, 2010), 815.

<sup>3</sup> Stop the Traffik, "Types of Exploitation."

<sup>4</sup> Coleman, interview by Langteau, Chiang Mai, Thailand, March 2020.

<sup>5</sup> LIFT, 2019, *Annual Report and Trafficking in Persons Report*, 1. <https://www.liftinternational.org/blog/2019/6/20/2019-us-tip-report>

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 61:1-2.

intentionally support those who confront trafficking, and to be empowered in the fight against human trafficking by helping and healing those who are victims. While the insight in this article is gleaned from the authors' experiences living and working in Thailand, the objective is to layout universal principles for engaging the problem strategically in a comprehensive method within any context.

### Who's Being Sold?

“Human trafficking is a multi-dimensional threat, depriving people of their human rights and freedoms, risking global health, promoting social breakdown, inhibiting development by depriving countries of their human capital, and helping fuel the growth of organized crime.”<sup>7</sup> The Bangkok Post reported in January 2020 that “Thailand is home to about 610,000 modern-day slaves - about one in 113 of its population of 69 million.”<sup>8</sup>

While some victims are physically taken captive and forcibly raped, many others are deceived and manipulated. Promises are made, a brighter future is offered, and the exact nature of what the girl or boy will have to do is often not initially revealed. Predators sometimes befriend unsuspecting youth with promises of friendship, finances, and love. A predator can create an online persona of someone young and attractive. Often they convince the child to exchange lewd photos. The photos become more obscene, then the friendship turns, and finally the trafficker begins to make threats that they will post the compromising images on social media if the child does not send more graphic pictures. This can lead to more direct forms of exploitation and sex slavery, all driven by the market for online pornography.

A child may feel a deep sense of duty or obligation to go along with what is being asked of them. In Thailand, ethnic minorities from rural areas or neighboring countries like Myanmar and Cambodia are at high risk for trafficking. Some are kidnapped; others are lured under the pretense of a job or marriage. Others are sold into the sex trade by family members desperate for money and unable to feed their children. “Their introduction into the trade can be brutal. Leaving can be nearly impossible due to the ‘debt’ owed to traffickers. Many others enter willingly, seeking an income higher than any other job would offer or the prospect of a rich foreign boyfriend or husband.”<sup>9</sup> In many Asian cultures, there is a powerful sense of duty toward one's parents based on the obligation that is owed a mother for giving birth. A child may consent to sell themselves for sex out of this sense of duty to their parent.

When a child who is 18 years of age or younger is sold for sex, it is always considered human trafficking. Consequently, the majority of identified sex trafficking victims in Thailand are children. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “of the 1,248 detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in the 2014-2017 period, almost 70% were underage girls.”<sup>10</sup> In 2010, according to Operation World, over 40,000 children were sold into the sex trade.<sup>11</sup>

The question of sexual exploitation becomes much more complicated when it is no longer a child who is being trafficked. It is frequently assumed that a 19-year-old can make their own decisions, but this conclusion often fails to recognize the power that a trafficker has over their victims. Victims of human trafficking are vulnerable to exploitation because of social, economic, or parental pressures so that they often feel powerless to resist. Children and

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<sup>7</sup> World Factbook, “The World Factbook: Thailand,” Washington, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/th.html>

<sup>8</sup> “Record number of trafficking victims strains resources,” *Bangkok Post*, January 7, 2020. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1830439/record-number-of-trafficking-victims-strains-resources>

<sup>9</sup> J. Mandryk, *Operation World* (Colorado Springs: Biblica Publishing, 2010), 815.

<sup>10</sup> “Thailand Still Hub of Global Sex Trafficking Rings: UN,” *Khaosodenglish*, August 16, 2019. <https://www.khaosodenglish.com/news/2019/08/16/thailand-still-hub-of-global-sex-trafficking-rings-un/>

<sup>11</sup> Mandryk, *Operation World*, 815.

adults are preyed upon by human traffickers because they have a vulnerability that can be exploited regardless of their age.

Reports of child trafficking are as prolific as they are horrific. In a deserted back alley in the heart of Bangkok, a man pays a woman 200 Baht (\$6USD) to violate her 5-year-old daughter to fulfill a twisted and depraved sexual fantasy. He takes the child and proceeds to abuse her in the back of his truck. He then returns the child to her mother with whom he has also had sexual encounters. Little does he know that the child he is abusing is his biological daughter. This may sound like some perverted excerpt from a vile erotic novel, but this report is taken from a Thai newspaper headline.<sup>12</sup> This repulsive example is not an isolated instance. According to the United States Department of State, “experts estimate sex traffickers exploit millions of people in commercial sex globally.”<sup>13</sup>

Widespread poverty in neighboring nations led to approximately four million migrants moving across the border into Thailand. Trafficking victims often endure violence, sexual abuse, harassment, threats, coercion, and even death.<sup>14</sup> “Foreign migrants, ethnic minorities, and stateless persons in Thailand are at the greatest risk of being trafficked, experiencing various abuses including the withholding of identity and work documents, debt bondage, and subject to illegal salary deductions.” These vulnerable people are marginalized by a lack of fluency in the Thai language, limited access to social safety nets, and low socioeconomic status.<sup>15</sup>

Those who are living under the burden of extreme poverty are at significant risk. The poor do not have the same access to education and opportunities to advance as the rest of society. Without a good education, extremely poor people are unable to obtain employment that provides adequate income, and so become easy targets for human-traffickers who promise a way to a better life.

### Who’s Buying?

There would be no human trafficking if there were no demand by those willing to pay. It is therefore crucial to consider those who use and abuse victims for personal gratification. Thailand is the number one destination globally for sex tourism. According to a 2019 UN report, “Thailand continues to be a major center of global sex trafficking rings that extend to countries as far-flung as Japan, Morocco and Germany.”<sup>16</sup> But, the fact remains that “while hundreds of thousands of Westerners and East Asians arrive in Thailand and engage in sex tourism, Thai men who pay for sex greatly outnumber both of these groups.”<sup>17</sup> The sex trade is profoundly embedded in Thai society. In a review of 21 studies worldwide between 1994 and 2010 of men paying for sex with prostitutes, Thai men ranked second highest in the world, at 75% of men paying for sex. In contrast, the US ranked lower, at 20%. This meta-analysis study found that boys in Thai society often begin to buy women for sex at the age of 13 and

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<sup>12</sup> “Mother says customer paying for sex with girl was her father,” *The Nation*, April 23, 2019. [https://www.nationthailand.com/around\\_thailand/30368192](https://www.nationthailand.com/around_thailand/30368192)

<sup>13</sup> United States Department of State, 2018 Annual Report: *Trafficking in Persons*, 19. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2017, *Trafficking in persons from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar to Thailand*, 7-8. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/Publications/2017/Trafficking\\_in\\_persons\\_to\\_Thailand\\_report.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/Publications/2017/Trafficking_in_persons_to_Thailand_report.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Action for Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons (UN-ACT), 2014, “Thailand Quick Facts, 2.” <http://un-act.org/thailand/>

<sup>16</sup> Khaosodenglish, “Thailand Still Hub of Global Sex Trafficking Rings: UN.”

<sup>17</sup> J. Mandryk, *Operation World*, 815.

that 50% of 16-year-old boys and 90% of university men visit brothels. Married Thai men also think it is natural and acceptable to visit brothels.<sup>18</sup>

In the United States, according to Webroot, every day 2.5 billion emails containing pornography are sent or received. Sixty-eight (68) million search queries related to pornography are generated (25% of all searches on the Internet), and 116,000 queries related to child pornography are received daily.<sup>19</sup> CovenantEyes also reports that 200,000 Americans are classified as “porn addicts” and 40 million Americans regularly visit pornography sites.<sup>20</sup>

The Church is not isolated or removed from this problem. A full 64% of Christian men and 15% of Christian women report that they watch pornography at least once a month. One in five youth pastors and one in seven senior pastors reportedly view pornography regularly. Sadly, Covenant Eyes also reports that only seven percent of Churches have any kind of ministry for those struggling with sexual addictions.<sup>21</sup> A recent study confirmed that Church members were tragically much like non-believers, in that many members from a broad cross-section of Evangelical Churches exhibited cognitive dissonance by failing to see and embrace the truth that is proclaimed from Scripture and preached every week.<sup>22</sup>

About ten percent of all people who view pornography today are ten years of age or younger. The impact of early and repeated exposure to pornography on the prefrontal cortex reshapes human brain function causing the mid-brain to interpret increased desire as a compelling need. The impact of pornography on the brain severely impairs the user’s ability to regulate impulses. Besides physical symptoms of increased blood pressure and heart rate, viewing pornography decreases sexual satisfaction, inhibits authentic relationships, diminishes the view of women, desensitizes one to cruelty, and increases the addiction for more gratification.<sup>23</sup> Desire for increased gratification produced by pornographic exposure is often a gateway to more graphic pornography and, if unimpeded, is shown to eventually lead to physically participating in acts of sexual immorality. Based on a report presented at the 2018 Coalition to End Sexual Exploitation Global Summit, pornography played a role in the perpetration of essentially every case involving juvenile sex offenders.<sup>24</sup> The Internet brings the world together, and this is never more true than in the area of online sex trafficking. Pornographic websites draw people to Thailand from all over the world with the simple click of the mouse. What is worse, the demand for pornographic content involving children is skyrocketing.

In 2019 LIFT International operating in Thailand assisted the Thai Department of Special Investigations in a case known as Operation Blackwrist. As a result of this

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<sup>18</sup> ProCon.org, “Percentage of Men (by Country) Who Paid for Sex at Least Once: The Johns Chart,” <https://prostitution.procon.org/percentage-of-men-by-country-who-paid-for-sex-at-least-once-the-johns-chart/>

<sup>19</sup> Webroot.com, “Internet Pornography by the Numbers; A significant threat to society,” <https://www.webroot.com/us/en/resources/tips-articles/internet-pornography-by-the-numbers>

<sup>20</sup> Covenanteyes.com, “Pornography Statistics,” <https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> J. Langteau, “Former Mentors’ Perceptions of the Faith-Based Approach to Reducing Recidivism Implemented by the Marinette-Menominee Jail Outreach, Inc,” <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/938/> 2014, 138.

<sup>23</sup> Canady, William Kelly, “Pornography: Social, Emotional and Mental Implications Among Adolescents,” National Youth Advocacy and Resilience Conference. 46, 2021. [https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/nyar\\_savannah/2021/2021/46](https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/nyar_savannah/2021/2021/46).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

investigation, a sex ring and website exploiting children was shut down. It is believed that as many as 100 children were being abused in this one case. To date, 50 victims were identified and removed from harm. The website had over 63,000 active users. Police in 137 different countries were contacted to track down and prosecute those using the site.<sup>25</sup> This is good news, but it barely scratches the surface of the issue.

The salient point is this: when vulnerable people cross paths with an industry that has millions of users spending billions of dollars, the stage is set for large scale, global human trafficking. Traffickers can be either male or female. They can be organized in sophisticated networks able to produce fake documents, or lone individuals seeking to profit by deceiving vulnerable persons into exploited situations. Most trafficking is conducted by individuals operating with friends, family members, and former victims, and often target voluntary migration. While a wide range of interconnected causes contributes to modern-day sex trafficking, two underlying variables are always present — the traffickers themselves and the demand that motivates them.<sup>26</sup>

### **Problem: Significant Obstacles that Must be Overcome**

According to data from the Thai Office of the Attorney General, between 2015 and 2016 Thailand prosecuted only 36 cases involving child victims of sex trafficking, even though the report found that minors comprised the majority of all victims of sex trafficking. The report indicated that there were 1,248 detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, of which almost 70% were underage girls.<sup>27</sup> How is it possible that 1,248 victims of human trafficking were identified, 70% being underage girls, but only 36 cases were successfully prosecuted over two years? This illustrates the challenges in bringing an end to the problem of human trafficking. There are considerable obstacles that stand in the way of any real change.

The first obstacle is identifying trafficking victims. As a result of the coercion and manipulation that traffickers hold over their victims, victims are often reluctant to identify themselves. The United Nations reports, “The identification of trafficked persons in vulnerable sectors remains limited, preventing an accurate picture of the trafficking situation among migrants in the country. The low rate of trafficking prosecutions and convictions also indicates a need for further attention to improving success rates.”<sup>28</sup>

A second obstacle is corruption. Those involved in human trafficking may do so with the protection of local law enforcement. It is a small matter to pay local authorities to look the other direction. Media reports and investigative research has exposed corruption by people in positions of power, which has been a frequent catalyst in both domestic and international human trafficking.<sup>29</sup> Officially, the Thai government opposes sex tourism but has historically been slow to take decisive action against the multi-billion dollar sex trade. Corruption allows unscrupulous men - in business, politics, the military, and police – to enrich themselves while oppressing others. “The moral blights of the sex trade, drug networks, crime syndicates, and ecological degradations will remain as long as they are profitable and tolerated.”<sup>30</sup> Improving the criminal justice response requires a more significant capacity within law enforcement and better bilateral cooperation with bordering nations. “The government [of Thailand] has

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<sup>25</sup> “Fifty children saved as international pedophile ring busted,” BBC, May 23, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-48379983>

<sup>26</sup> LIFT, 2019, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Khaosodenglish, “Thailand still hub of global sex trafficking rings.”

<sup>28</sup> UN-ACT, 2014, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> J. Mandryk, *Operation World*, 814-815.

identified the need to create a systematic and integrated trafficking case database nationwide to strengthen both law enforcement and victim protection efforts.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Solutions: Multifaceted Approaches**

The Family Connection Foundation (FCF) is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) operating in Thailand and impacting the nations of Southeast Asia. Fighting human trafficking became an intentional focus when the staff noticed a dramatic change in one of the children with whom they worked. It was discovered that Lek and his two brothers had fallen into the hands of a man running a prostitution ring of young boys. Their mother is the one who brokered the deal. The uncle had promised to pay the mother well if the boys cooperated. The community center staff were able to intervene and rescue the boys, and with the testimony of the foundation staff, the uncle was successfully prosecuted. This highlights how easily a child’s sense of duty can be exploited.

Wirawan ‘Boom’ Mosby, Director of the HUG Project under FCF, has been in the trenches fighting for victims of human trafficking in Thailand for more than a decade. In 2018 she was awarded the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Hero award by the US State Department for her significant contributions to anti-human trafficking, and she is the first Thai woman to receive that distinction. Mosby was haunted by the low number of cases successfully prosecuted. While working with children who were being trafficked and seeking to bring their perpetrators to justice, she made an incredible discovery. She observed that when child victims were identified, they were brought to the local police station and interrogated in a large room full of people, by uniformed officers who were at best intimidating, and at worst, were terrifying. The children thought they were in trouble and were going to go to jail. After all, in their minds, they were sure they had done something wrong! Without their key testimony, it was impossible to build a case leading to a successful conviction. Mosby saw the problem and started a program that brought these children together with police on friendly outings. She also established the first Children’s Advocacy Center in all of Southeast Asia. By building a bridge between the police and the victims, the children soon began to trust the police and understood that the police were there to help. The immediate result was that these children began testifying against their perpetrators. The cooperation of one child alone resulted in the arrest of “an American, several Thai people, a German, and a Thai tuk-tuk driver.”<sup>32</sup> This simple innovation opened the door to many more successful convictions. In 2017, 255 of the total 302 human trafficking cases in Thailand were specifically cases of sexual exploitation, representing 84% of all human trafficking crimes.<sup>33</sup> The Family Connection Foundation (including both LIFT and HUG Projects) was involved in 74 cases that led to convictions in 2017, representing about one-third of all sex trafficking convictions in Thailand that year.<sup>34</sup> As a result of her effectiveness in assisting victims and providing support to the police, Mosby now serves as an advisor to the Royal Thai Police Child Protection and Anti-human trafficking Unit at the national level. Also serving with the Family Connection Foundation is a Thai attorney, Wiliyasinee “Pik” Rinya, who provides invaluable assistance in intervention to assist the Royal Thai Police.

### **Working Strategically: A Christian Approach**

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<sup>31</sup> UN-ACT, 2014, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Mosby, interview by Dunham, Chiang Mai, Thailand, April 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Thailand’s Country Report (1 January – 31 December 2017), 2018, *On Anti-Human Trafficking Response* 2018, 10.

<sup>34</sup> FCF representative, interview by Langteau, Chiang Mai, Thailand, May 2020.

As terrible as human trafficking is and as complicated and challenging as the issues are, there is a great deal that can be done. If something *can* be done, then God's people must take action. Scripture repeatedly teaches that giving justice to the oppressed is very near to the heart of God. The Psalmist gives a glimpse into the heart of God, "O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more."<sup>35</sup> Jesus echoes these thoughts when he declared, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."<sup>36</sup> If people are truly followers of Christ then they must have Christ's heart and passion to bring justice to the vulnerable and the oppressed.

More than a few Christians have been moved by a sincere heart of compassion to rescue victims and bring human traffickers to justice. Their passion is admirable, but all too often they have zeal without knowledge.<sup>37</sup> Several years ago, for example, such a person was working in a region of Thailand that borders Myanmar. Border towns are often a hotspot for human trafficking. This wonderful Christian lady met a twelve-year-old girl who had been sold as a household worker and sex slave. This dear Christian lady was outraged. She charged into the man's barbershop, grabbed the girl, and dragged the girl out to safety. The next day, however, the police came to this Christian woman's house, arrested and jailed her for kidnapping, and returned the twelve-year-old to her "owner." In the end, it only made things worse for the girl, and the woman was no longer in a position to provide help to anyone.<sup>38</sup>

### Three Areas of Approach

The battle against human trafficking can be broken down into three main areas: Intervention, Aftercare, and Prevention. As one considers how to work strategically, it will be helpful to examine practical ways to engage in each of these three areas.

#### 1. Intervention

Intervention involves coming to the aid of those who are already under the control and power of a human trafficker. A common approach to intervention is to engage with victims and attempt to rescue them directly. This may involve going to karaoke bars and brothels to identify victims and potentially offer some way out. Many have tried this approach, but it is rarely effective and often full of risk. Those would be 'rescuers' may end up falling into the very snare from which they are trying to free others. Daniel Walker, following this approach, recounts his downfall in the book, *God in a Brothel*. He admits that he was "routinely deployed overseas alone, with no backup or on-site supervision or assistance. I did not have a handler at any time to monitor my progress or provide me with objective feedback. I received little formal debriefings of any kind, and the services of an independent psychologist were only made available toward the end of my tenure."<sup>39</sup> Walker had many successful investigations, but eventually, he succumbed to the enormous temptations that confront a person working in that environment. "Speaking from experience, the very best of intentions held by those with the

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<sup>35</sup> Psalm 10:17-18 (English Standard Version).

<sup>36</sup> Matthew 18:5-6 (English Standard Version).

<sup>37</sup> Romans 10:2.

<sup>38</sup> Eye-witness, interview by Dunham, Mae Sot, Thailand, May 15, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> D. Walker, 2011, *God in a Brothel: An undercover journey into sex trafficking and rescue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 116.

very highest moral code does not make them immune from the insidious, deceptive environment.”<sup>40</sup>

The risk of moral failure is not the only problem for would-be rescuers. A limited approach without a comprehensive strategy fails to recognize and adequately deal with the underlying vulnerabilities that make someone a target for human trafficking in the first place. The truth is that most victims, once in the grip of their traffickers, will not leave even if they are given the chance of rescue. Boom Mosby, director of the HUG Project within FCF, reported that a large percentage of those who are “set free” later relapse or return to being trafficked.<sup>41</sup> When a victim is offered rescue, they may not see rescuing as a source of freedom, but rather a return to the previous troubles they were trying to escape in the first place. The degradation of being trafficked and the shame and humiliation that often accompanies may leave the victim feeling that they are not worth rescuing. We have witnessed that in the Buddhist context of Thailand, the victim may feel they have bad karma, and this is simply their destiny. Consequently, if a victim of human trafficking is rescued, but no effort is simultaneously made to alleviate the poverty, family pressures, and other issues that made them vulnerable in the first place, most will eventually return to those who first trafficked them. Aftercare, though not intervention, is implemented together.

In the case of Lek, who was the inspiration for FCF joining the fight against human trafficking, after he and his brothers were rescued and the uncle put in jail, FCF began working with the family to reduce the risk of trafficking by making them less vulnerable. FCF helped with the cost of education to keep the boys in school. When it was discovered that Lek’s brother had contracted AIDS while being trafficked, FCF staff made sure he was getting the right medical treatment which gave him about 5 more years of life than he would have had otherwise. FCF helped Lek attend college with the result that after graduating at the top of his class, he was able to get a good job and support his struggling family. Best of all, through the relationships that were built, Lek has come to faith in Christ and He is continuing to grow in his faith through the discipleship and mentoring of FCF staff. Because Lek was empowered to support his family, there was much less risk of the mother seeking human trafficking as means to solve their financial problems.

The kind of intervention that yields results involves gathering sufficient evidence to prosecute traffickers and those who are buying their services. This must be done in cooperation with local and international law enforcement agencies, and not outside of the legal system. But what if the police are part of the problem? According to Boom Mosby, Director of the HUG project within FCF, “The problem I see is not merely the corruption, the problem is that often we do not have enough evidence for them to prosecute. We do our due diligence and type a really good report so that they can’t say no.”<sup>42</sup>

NGOs must work behind the scenes to serve and support law enforcement. The goal is to promote collaboration and cooperation with Western NGOs and local authorities to respectfully build credibility and trust, assisting - but not leading - the police in doing their job. When local forces understand that the objective is to make them more successful, they begin to trust these organizations and seek their help. Boom Mosby emphasized that “We are here to serve [the police]. We don’t need to advertise ourselves. We are here to fill in the gaps for the things that they do not have. We exist not to exist - our goal is to work ourselves out of a job and to transfer ownership to the local law enforcement.”<sup>43</sup>

The goal of intervention must be to assist the police in apprehending and successfully prosecuting those who are trafficking others. That can, however, result in focusing so much on

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 191-192.

<sup>41</sup> Mosby, interview by Dunham, Chiang Mai, Thailand, June, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

the “bad guys” and losing sight of the victims these organizations are trying to help. Intervention must, therefore, adopt a victim-centered approach. The priority of intervention is building trust and caring for the needs and concerns of the victim. Mosby explains this strategic approach:

If you focus on the bad guy, then you get one bad guy, but if you focus on the victim, especially in human trafficking, it can lead to the identification of many perpetrators because victims interact with so many traffickers. In my latest case in Payao during COVID, from one girl and the evidence on her phone, we were able to help police issue 12 arrest warrants. That’s why my theme would be the victim is the key evidence - treat them well.<sup>44</sup>

## 2. Aftercare

Intervention is vital, but there must be a dual focus on prosecuting the trafficker while simultaneously providing aftercare for the victim. Many underlying forces make victims reluctant to be rescued and vulnerable to relapse, so any significant effort to rescue trafficking victims must focus on helping them rebuild their lives. They need help dealing with the deep emotional wounds resulting from the abuse, shame, and degradation that are all part of human trafficking. The self-esteem and self-worth of victims are shattered, they find it difficult to trust anyone, and often any sense of hope has long since evaporated. “Survivors of violence became overwhelmed with fear, terror, self-loathing, and were unable to trust others as well as experience intimacy and develop relationships.”<sup>45</sup> Aftercare is a slow process to restore hope, trust, and self-worth, and most victims cannot do it alone. Trafficked victims need caring people and well-trained professionals to walk with them on the long road of healing and recovery.

As trafficked victims heal emotionally and sometimes physically, they also need to address the life circumstances that put them at risk for trafficking in the first place. These factors have likely increased as a result of being trafficked. Victims often cut short their already limited education, and being “set free” now leaves them with no income, and the prospect of returning to their former level of poverty can be very disheartening. They may now be dealing with a disease (HIV, Hepatitis B, Cephalous, HPV, etc.), pregnancy, or young children that are the direct result of being trafficked.<sup>46</sup> The victim may be free from their traffickers, but they are not yet survivors who are free from the pressure to make money and fulfill their duty to their parents. These issues need to be faced, and victims need help finding solutions that are both realistic and sustainable. Rescued people need to be equipped with better education or vocational training, and practical life skills if they are going to successfully turn from the sex trade to a healthier and safer means of supporting themselves.

Victims are sometimes young children. For children, rescue often means becoming “orphaned” if their parents are sent to prison for their crimes. These children need a safe space to heal and caring adults who can fill the role of loving caregivers. Providing this kind of aftercare is not merely a matter of helping a victim for a few weeks or months. Boom Mosby explained, “We look after rescued people long term. We want to make sure they become healthy and independent. It is at least a three-year commitment, sometimes much longer.”<sup>47</sup> A long-term and often expensive commitment to the survivor is vital for effective aftercare.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Rebecca Ann Laurento, “Psychological Coercion Among Trafficked Sex Workers: A Grounded Study Approach,” (PhD diss., Walden University, 2021), 58, <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=11238&context=dissertations>

<sup>46</sup> J. Mandryk, *Operation World*, 814-815.

<sup>47</sup> Mosby, interview by Dunham, Chiang Mai, Thailand, June 2020.

Rachel, the five-year-old victim discussed at the beginning of this article, will be well into adulthood before either of her parents are released from prison. In addition to dealing with the abuse she experienced, she also has to deal with the loss of her parents. Children who do not yet understand the evil of their parent's behavior still feel a strong bond with them despite the abuse. The limited Thai Child Welfare system is already strained to the limits with orphaned and abandoned children. It would have been one more blow to Rachel's tragic life if she had been placed in a government orphanage with hundreds of other children. FCF was able to intervene by providing a safe small group home where she is receiving loving care from professional staff who can help her heal from her traumatic past. In addition, FCF is working diligently with the Thai Adoption Board to find her an adoptive family. Rachel is now a very resilient seven-year-old who is getting her childhood back with caregivers who love God and are sharing Christ with her in both word and deed! This example demonstrates the need for those who are motivated to serve by the impact the Gospel has made in their own lives. Aftercare is successful when the passion and goal to share that same message of hope with every child, regardless of their background or the baggage they bring with them.

### 3. Prevention

The task of assisting in prosecuting perpetrators and restoring victims is certainly something the Church must be engaged in, but it is much better to prevent people from being sold into slavery in the first place. Prevention is the work of building fences around the lives of those most at risk, to protect them from being trafficked in the first place.

The issues that make people vulnerable to human trafficking are varied and complex. Some of the most common factors among trafficked victims are poverty, lack of education, lack of citizenship or legal status, and family pressures and expectations. These are all issues that the Church and the Gospel are uniquely suited to address and change.

#### **Poverty**

The Bible makes it very clear that followers of Christ are to love and care for the poor and the needy.<sup>48</sup> Helping the poor is more than just giving handouts. Helping the poor includes coming alongside those in need to help them overcome the cycle of poverty. The goal is to empower them to become self-sustaining. Not all poor people are willing to do what is required to change their situation, but many are. What they lack are skills training, resources, and mentors who can guide and encourage them.

Bonnie was born into poverty with a crippling disability that made it hard to walk or use her right arm. She felt she had no skills and no worth, and she was convinced this was all the result of bad karma. These factors made her an easy target for sex trafficking. Eventually, she became pregnant and found her way to *Home of the Swallow*, another ministry of The Family Connection Foundation (FCF) that helps women with unwanted pregnancies. Through the love and care of the staff at *Home of the Swallow*, Bonnie came to know the great value God placed on her as one made in God's image. She received training to be a maid, she worked hard, and she overcame her disabilities. With this training and support, Bonnie found legitimate work and became fully self-supporting. This is just one testimony of overcoming poverty, but if she had received this training and help before she was trafficked into prostitution, what pain and turmoil could have been avoided!

#### **Education**

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<sup>48</sup> Deuteronomy 15:4-11; Proverbs 29:7; 31:9; Isaiah 3:15, 58:6,7; Matthew 19:21; James 2:15-16

One of the easiest ways to prevent human trafficking of all kinds is to assist children in getting a better education. In the West, people tend to take education for granted, but in many developing countries, education is viewed as a privilege of the middle and upper classes. The poor get left behind. It can cost as little as \$10 per month to keep a Thai child in school, a minimal investment to prevent a child from being trafficked.

In 2002, The Family Connection Foundation began working in an inner-city slum in Chiang Mai. It was soon observed that all of the children in that community were dropping out of school by the 8th grade. Many of the children were living with relatives because their parents had died of drug overdose or AIDS. Girls were being taken by their mothers to work in Karaoke bars - a hotbed of prostitution. These children were at risk of being trafficked. One obvious way to help was to provide scholarships to keep them in school. More than 20 children were initially sponsored by FCF to keep them in school. Every single child completed high school or a vocational school. Of those who finished High School, over 90% went on to graduate from college. Not one of them ended up being trafficked or went down the path of prostitution. Many of them came to Christ through the loving care of mentors who invested in them.

In 2019, FCF aided prevention by providing 184 at-risk students with \$26,000 in scholarships to keep them in school,<sup>49</sup> and providing training for 2,026 individuals, mostly students, in internet safety and child protection.<sup>50</sup> Every child receives scholarship support, plus a mentor who is either an FCF staff person or is part of a local Church working in partnership with FCF. Susie and her mother lived alone as Susie's father had long since abandoned the family. Her mother tried to squeeze out a living by selling flowers to tourists at Night Clubs and bars, but the income was insufficient. So, Susie's mother started dragging Susie along to sell flowers, but this was putting Susie at risk of being sexually assaulted or trafficked. Taw Saeng, an FCF project, helped Susie by giving scholarships to alleviate the financial burden. With this help, Susie no longer had to stay up late nights selling flowers. Susie is in school, and she has also come to know Christ through the staff at Taw Saeng. She is being disciplined, and now she is sharing Christ with others! Susie has been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and from being a potential victim of human trafficking to a light shining in the darkness!

### **Citizenship issues**

Many refugees and aliens arrive in Thailand because they are fleeing life-threatening situations in their home country and because they hope for a better life in a new place. The fact is that these aliens are now at high risk for human trafficking and the Church cannot turn a blind eye. God is not indifferent to immigrants and He calls His people to take special care of the "alien in their midst."<sup>51</sup> Local believers are naturally suited to come alongside this group of people and provide them with advice, guidance, and support regarding educational services, transitional opportunities, and caring advocacy. As a result of language and cultural barriers, immigrants are often unaware of their rights and of services that may be available to them. Their lack of knowledge and understanding about the ways of Thailand make them highly vulnerable to human trafficking of all kinds. A local Church can be a lifesaver for this group of people. It is not necessary to solve all of their problems or meet every need, but being a resource of information and compassion as well as a voice that will advocate for them makes them far less vulnerable to those who would prey on their ignorance.

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<sup>49</sup> The Family Connection Foundation, 2019, *Annual Report*, 9. <https://www.fcfthailand.org/annual-report>

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> Exodus 22:21.

## The Strategic Importance of the Gospel

The fight against human trafficking cannot be entirely successful if the Gospel is left behind. It is an unfortunate reality that far too many Christian agencies addressing sex trafficking have made a deliberate choice to distance themselves from the liberating message of redemption in Christ and spiritual conversations, whether addressing victims or traffickers. This is a tragic error. Their reasons are many: they don't want to offend or scare away people; their focus is on the legal problems rather than the spiritual problems; they only have limited contact with the individuals so there is minimal time for spiritual input; or the spiritual is not their focus. Yet how can anyone who has been set free by God's grace and who enjoys the benefits of God's love refuse to share that message of love and hope with those they are seeking to help?

The lapse or failure to share the Gospel message is not strategic or wise at several levels. First, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only means by which any sin can be ultimately cleansed. Human trafficking is a dirty business, and all those who come in contact with it cannot help but be tainted by its terrible and ugly stain. Perpetrators are guilty of appalling crimes against others, but most of all, against God, who created people in His image. Victims also are frequently not without guilt, as some may have made bad choices. Even when they have not, most trafficked people still feel dirty and corrupted. Those who come to the aid of victims are often exposed to events, images, and stories of horrific evil and sin. All the counseling and debriefing in the world, helpful as it may be, cannot cleanse this evil from a person's heart. The blood of Jesus is the only hope to wash away the filth of sin from the hearts and minds of all involved. "Come now, let us settle the matter," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."<sup>52</sup> Christians who possess God's amazing, one-of-a-kind cure for sin and guilt have an obligation before God to offer this gift to those who are in desperate need of its cleansing power.

The Gospel is the only power to redeem and transform a broken and ruined life. The crux of humanistic philosophy is that people can change themselves for the better. The Bible, however, states the power of humanity is only for death and destruction.<sup>53</sup> We are all, consequently, sold into bondage to sin and death. It is only the power of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus that can truly change a life for the better. Both victims and their abusers are in desperate need of life transformation. Putting traffickers in jail and rescuing victims out of an abusive situation is undoubtedly essential, but it is not addressing the core problem. Both the survivor and the trafficker need changed lives, not merely a change in location. Only the Gospel can transform lives.<sup>54</sup> To fail to offer people the hope and power of Christ is to rob them of the help they most desperately need.

Finally, the Gospel protects people from being self-serving in the work of helping others. Rescuing someone is a very gratifying experience. It can make the rescuer feel they are essential and even heroic. Heroes receive acclaim and recognition from those rescued and from those watching on the sidelines. Consequently, fighting human trafficking can be an inappropriate means of personal glory and honor. The Gospel, though, eradicates this erroneous thinking. The Gospel, in contrast, is a reminder that all are sinners and that if it were not for the grace of God, each one of us could be enslaved as a victim or perpetrator. If we are serious about Jesus and His honor, our efforts and our motivation must never be for our own glory. Instead, Christians are motivated by loving God and loving others.

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<sup>52</sup> Isaiah 1:18 (New International Version).

<sup>53</sup> Romans 3:23.

<sup>54</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17.

All people are genuinely loved by the Father, and therefore the Church must display an expression of concern in word and deed for both victims and perpetrators. Complacency allows for continuation of these crimes, yet the Bible's teachings on justice call Christians to protect and love through action. "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."<sup>55</sup>

### Conclusion

In any war, victory cannot be achieved by only fighting battles on one front without consideration for the broader conflict. Victory is achieved only as the enemy is engaged on every side. The same is true in the war against human trafficking; success requires a strategic effort that includes simultaneous engagement through prevention, intervention, and aftercare.

The results of a multifaceted approach to addressing sex trafficking through intervention, prevention, and aftercare is both effective and should be promoted. Engaging victims and survivors through this approach, a small organization with few members alone accounts for one-third of all sex trafficking convictions in Thailand. Further, those victims who are rescued have a much lower recidivism rate because they are cared for in a holistic and multifaceted way. Among many other human trafficking ministries and programs in Southeast Asia, this example is proven, is biblical, and it works. Within all three aspects of engagement, the physical, mental, social, economic, and spiritual needs of the people were addressed and met in a comprehensive manner.

Churches around the world could start sexual addiction recovery groups, either engage or sponsor vulnerable children to keep them in school or provide job training, and help provide start-up loans to victims for sustainable businesses. The battle is far from over. What is needed is more intentional leadership within this proven framework and a multifaceted approach to combat human trafficking.

"I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;  
I will take hold of your hand.  
I will keep you and will make you  
to be a covenant for the people  
and a light for the Gentiles,  
to open eyes that are blind,  
to free captives from prison  
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> 1 John 3:18 (New International Version).

<sup>56</sup> Isaiah 42:6-7 (New International Version).

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