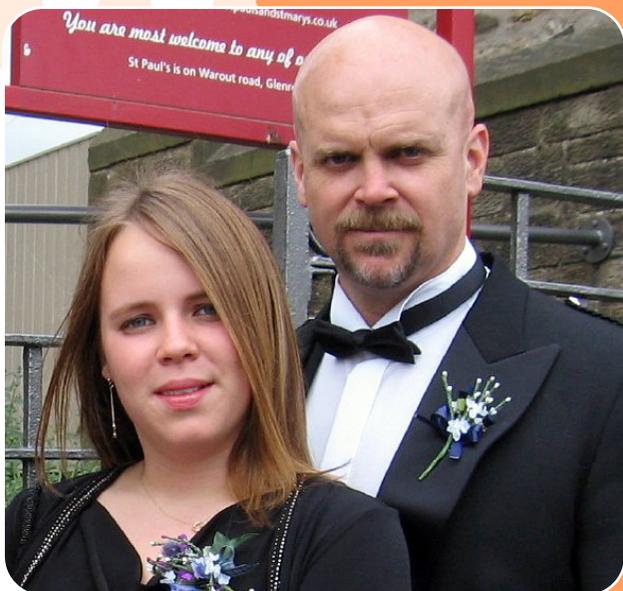


Human Trafficking from a different perspective

Contributed by Gary Lewis, Representative, UNODC Regional Office, South Asia, New Delhi, India



Gary and his daughter Phoebe

Phoebe and I have often discussed slavery. Usually, this has taken the form of looking at the problem in the context of historical episodes of slavery. However, recently, as part of her middle school course here in New Delhi, Phoebe was required to undertake a field-based assignment which needed to be related in some way to a population issue in India. This gave us the opportunity to look at one particularly virulent form of modern-day slavery: human trafficking. My wife and I thought for a long time about whether Phoebe (who was 13 years old at the time the project was undertaken) was ready to confront such a disturbing issue. But in the end we concluded that she could handle it. I then introduced Phoebe to the director of one of the trafficking organizations with whom UNODC works in India. The result was a number of products for her assignment. One of them is reproduced here. Phoebe did a lot of growing up the weekend she spent at the home for girls who have been rescued. It was (and continues to be) the hope of my wife and myself that through Phoebe's brush with this particularly evil form of human behaviour, her understanding of the need for sympathy, compassion and respect for other human beings will grow. Perhaps, in some way - not least through her interaction with others her of age - a new generation can learn to become champions in the fight against an evil we never quite seem to be able to banish from civilized living.

Independent Investigation - Transcript of an interview with Ina, a victim of human trafficking in India

Contributed by Phoebe Lewis (aged 13)

Ina is 20 years old now. She was raised as a Christian in the state of Jaharkhand, India. I chose to interview Ina about her past because it relates to my topic in that Ina was a victim of trafficking and also because Ina, like many other girls at STOP (an NGO which means Stop Trafficking Oppression and Prostitution of children and women, based in New Delhi), craves the complete eradication of human trafficking in women and girls and will tell her story in the hope that it will help terminate this inhuman practice. Also, I was told that I should probably interview a girl of around Ina's age because the younger group couldn't relate the matter as well as the older girls and the middle section of girls (between the ages 11-15 years) find it difficult to relive their past.

For the above reasons I chose to interview Ina about what it was like to be a victim of human trafficking.

What age were you when you were taken from home?

When I was 12 years old I was brought to the brothel.

How were you taken from home and by whom?

I was working, cleaning dishes in someone's house. Then I noticed a woman and man following me around. They asked me why I would want to spend the rest of my life working here if I were so pretty. They took me to a café and drugged my food, they then took me to Delhi and told me that in less than a month I would be making more than Rs. 100,000. At first I thought I was going to be a house-building assistant and agreed to do the job. I was taken to the railway station and then taken to another part of Delhi. There was a woman waiting for me at the railway station. That woman took me away. The woman's husband then raped me. I was then taken to a red light area and forced to work. I got pregnant. I was forced to take heroin, beer and other strong alcoholic drinks. The brothel owners used to beat and torture us mercilessly. One time, a new girl had come to the brothel, I told her she should leave and described what they did to us. The girl tried to leave. But when the owner found out what I had told the girl, he beat me and kept me in a box for a whole night and day. The box was so small that I couldn't even sit up properly in it. Soon after, I was arrested by the police and taken to jail for one month, but I was told by a policewoman, who was hand-in-glove with the brothel owners, that I was better off back at the brothel and should go back because I would just suffer and die in prison. I was told I would be paid all the money I have earned when I got back to the brothel. I was then sent back to the brothel by means of the policewoman who, at the time, was claiming to be my mother. For doing this, I discovered that the policewoman

was paid 5,000 rupees. There was one case in the brothel where I noticed that a pregnant woman was working even though she was less than a month from term. She was forced to take a client. As a result, both she and her child died. Her body was taken off in an auto rickshaw and dumped somewhere. I was told to keep it a secret, and if anyone asked, I was told to say that the woman had been in the hospital delivering her baby. This is how despicably the brothel owners looked after such cases.

While you were at the brothel, were you given the option to use condoms?

Only some of the clients used condoms, most didn't.

Do you know how much your customers paid for you?

The customer would deposit 360 rupees (US\$8) at the counter, plus tips.

How do you feel about not receiving any of the money?

I have to buy food and clothing for my health from the money that I earn. But I didn't get any of it in my hand to spend as I chose. I feel annoyed and really bad about not getting any of the money they earned from my body.

Did you get treated by a doctor while you were working in the brothel?

No, the doctor only came to distribute condoms. And this was very rarely.

Were drugs or alcohol ever used in the brothel?

Yes, as I mentioned, I was forced to take heroin, beer and other strong alcoholic drinks.

Were there any working hours or did you have to work at all times of the day?

There were no working hours, clients would come at all

times of the day and even if we were eating we had to get up and go with the client.

How long did you stay in the brothel before you were rescued?

I was there five years and was rescued by STOP when I was 17.

How were you rescued?

I was rescued in 2002 and was then sent back to stay with parents in 2004. My immediate family accepted me, but my uncles and aunts didn't. They taunted and abused me. I was stigmatized in my own village. When I left the brothel to come to STOP and then on to my family, I didn't know that I was pregnant. In fact, I was pregnant with a baby girl and I wanted to abort it because it was a forced pregnancy, but the state didn't allow me. When I had the child I was told to put it up for adoption because it was an attractive, light-skin-coloured child. I refused because they said at first that I couldn't abort it and now they wouldn't

let me keep it. Then both my child and I fell sick and I contacted STOP to tell them that I wanted to come back. I don't feel motherly towards the child because it was a forced pregnancy and no one else at the home was obliged to look after their own children so I didn't see why I had to. But I still feel protective towards my baby.

Do you get any schooling or classes?

Yes, the girls at STOP can do science, dance, music and other classes.

How do you feel now towards men?

I don't hate them all. It is only some men who go to brothels and use women, not all.

What would you like to do in the future?

I don't know what I want to do with my future. I don't really think about my future. Mostly, I live from day to day. I am happy at the family home. Before, I used to feel suffocated, living a life of indignation. But it's so nice to be free. I am also seeing a bit of the world and can do what I like now. I am being trained in bag-making and stitching.

What is the best thing someone like me can do for you?

You can only do one thing. You can be instrumental in the punishing of the perpetrators, and force our government to punish the accused. You can - through your connections - bring our situation to light.

MY COMMENT:

After a whole weekend, I still couldn't grasp the intensity and fullness of what had happened to these girls. In this developed world, even within countries and societies which claim to be 'civilized', problems like this do still exist and high-status people still continue to involve themselves in human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of women and girls. It was overwhelming. I was really disturbed to think that people indulge in such a life. The way that these men degrade, embarrass and abuse women; my feelings about this way of life could never be put into words because it is so horrific and shocking. However, my impression of the family home and of the love given by the girls made me feel that there is still hope for humanity and for the future and happiness of these innocent girls. In the two short days I spent I grew to understand better the big picture of trafficking and felt compassion and awareness that I had never been able to feel before.



Gary, Phoebe and the STOP Family