



Victim-Centred Approach in Fighting Human Trafficking

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Young People Against Prostitution and Human Trafficking:

The Greatest Violence Against Human Beings

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This survey is based on a theoretical and practical experience rising from direct contact with the victims' suffering, seeking solutions to avoid losing their human dignity.

The professional relationship of the team I belong, considering the human trafficking, is collateral, namely it is not the direct object of our work. In the same time, we consider it essential, important, intriguing both personally and professionally, as people we meet are most seriously vulnerable on this phenomenon.

The institution where our team operates (Cluj County Intervention Centre for Abused Children, Romania) is a government agency that acts to ensure the implementation of social assistance policies and strategies on child protection. Our mission refers explicitly to stop this phenomenon of abuse and to assist victims in all life areas challenging for them. Our interventions aim to identify and to recognize their personal hardships, sufferings, vulnerabilities, as well as those occurring in the family. Subsequently, we help them to recover as much as we can.

As trafficking is related to abuse to a certain extent, we have been repeatedly asked by the institutions involved in justice serving, to assist victims of internal or external trafficking. The Romanian legislation provides free rehabilitation services.

Our intervention in each case begins with a referral from a person or institution that has knowledge on the situation of a child exposed to abuse. The first step is an initial assessment in order to determine the risk level of the child, followed by the complex evaluation of the situation, considering to the socio-economic, the medical and the education condition. The complex evaluation is completed by the psychological assessment (mental health) aiming to identify the family resources and vulnerabilities, as well as the person subject to abuse. The intervention in each case is based on this comprehensive assessment, on resources leverage and on vulnerabilities diminution. Depending on each situation, we contact government institutions or foundations that complement our services. Families considered disadvantaged from socio-economical point of view may be referred to charities. In case the severity of the case involves legal proceedings, victims may be assisted with every step. During the investigation, we may offer support for the victim in the process of the statement he/she makes to the investigators (police officer, prosecutor). During the trial, we may help the person to cope with the whole situation and the emotional response to it. We may also assist the victim to prepare for being a witness./p>

The second part of the intervention aims the change strengthening which can complete the process of assisting, if maintained.

This working methodology, emerging from direct contact with the real world and the perception of the victimized person who allows a view in the core of the fight between human dignity and the perceived lack of value.

We believe that the idea of prevention, to a broader level than a prevention campaign, must consider the factors that create, facilitate and maintain the phenomenon. It is necessary to analyze the interaction of the "actors" involved in the phenomenon, such as victim, trafficker and consumer, the way they assume a role in the trafficking process, complementing and entertaining one another, amplifying or enhancing the phenomenon.

In order to have a complete insight, we must also consider the cultural environment (society), which responds to the existence of trafficking. The way it relates to this, environment may maintain or remove the trafficker acts, by the way it rewards or penalizes his behavior.

The society is obviously composed of individuals who adjust their personal functioning of rules imposed, facing with their own limitations, vulnerabilities and accessing their own resources.

Prevention programs at society level

The role of society in our formation as individuals is crucial. Each person lives and develops their activities within a cultural society, with well-defined rules and expectations about the good and the evil, the desirable and the undesirable. In this general environment, each person belongs to a smaller group, a family, a group of friends. The declared values of individuals are influenced by the origin environment (family) and by other groups that they belong (friends). Groups' values are influenced on their turn by the cultural environment. For example, the way we relate ourselves, to sexual behavior, to social responsibility, to behavior towards peers, is "prescribed" by what we consider "normal" or "deviant" in society. The undesirable behavior is discouraged by penalties, while the desired one, is encouraged by acceptance and reward. The phenomenon of trafficking, though sanctioned in society (by punitive measures) is maintained by a category of people, namely the consumer. Their role is often ignored, though they are the ones who "reward", in that they provide "benefits" to themselves as well as to the trafficker.

Nowadays the social responsibility is diminished by the propagation of the value of personal freedom and of the right to choose, which as a collateral consequence, also led to individualism and, ultimately, selfishness that determine the "spectator" to be indifferent to this phenomenon.

Changes are initiated in micro-groups, which propagate other ideas; if recognized by an increasing majority, these may subsequently become social norms (e.g. women's rights and equality between races).

The information campaigns are generally meant to influence the public opinion, to draw attention to a phenomenon, to inform us about their existence and to point the right attitude towards it. Still, those on trafficking issues generally address to the person, so that they can protect themselves, ignoring other "actors" that play a role in its development. This kind of campaign, though effective in providing information, may be stigmatizing, especially for the victim who feels excluded by the attitude of the other members of society.

Our proposal is these campaigns address to four directions:

To potential victims – It is important that these campaigns be documented with accurate data, based on researches, in order to capture the way it happens and to provide valid information, even self-defense methods.

To the public – to address also to consumers, and to shape the normalisation of the behaviour to benefit from these "services"; the appeal to moral conduct and to responsibility for each other. Certain members of society do not exercise any citizen responsibility, not even in case of children, who are exposed to exploitation of any kind; to form of anti-corruption attitudes.

To experts – to shape their professional attitude and outlook. Sometimes, these do not make the difference between prostitution and trafficking; by workshops, seminars, etc.

To institutions involved in social projects – to allocate funds for the development of viable prevention and rehabilitation services.

Legislative initiatives

The dictionaries define the legislation as "the principles and regulations established in a community by some authority and applicable to its people, whether in the form of legislation or of custom and policies recognized and enforced by judicial decision".

According to our definition, the legislation is a set of rules imposed to society as a result of standards already accepted by the society. For example, after admitting the effects of adult behavior (especially parents) on child development, the children rights were developed.

Therefore, the campaigns of society accountability on their role played in the development of this phenomenon may lead to legislative initiatives. It is recommended to provide rehabilitation services that lasts the entire life of the victims, if necessary, and in the same time, to reduce the traffickers' benefits by punitive consequences, as well as the consumer's benefits, by penalties.

The Romanian and the international legislation focus on the rehabilitation of persons who have committed offenses, which reduces the consequences for them (e.g. in Romania a trafficker may be sentenced to two years imprisonment, sometimes suspended). In the same time, the regulatory laws of exercising the labor activity, place the responsibility to individuals, ultimately victimizing them (e.g. labor exploitation is perceived as a violation of working conditions, not as trafficking).

Prevention programs at individual level

The society is composed of individuals, each showing a high level of originality, by their behavior. The individual develops within a micro group (family), acquiring the behavioral patterns and values manifested in this framework. The way parents educate their children, the effects they are exposed to, contribute to their development. In this framework, the child develops a vision on his own person (value concept / self-esteem), on the world-the others (safe-unsafe) and on the way the interaction between the person and the society “must” take place.

Prevention programs that consider individual vulnerabilities regarding the phenomenon of trafficking might refer to group activities with the theme set. These should apply in a smaller group. Activities should operate on principles of group therapy (covering a longer period, there should be a coordinator, etc.) with the difference that there would be information on human trafficking.

Vulnerable groups

The development of certain emotional or personality disorders is major vulnerability factor to enter and maintain in trafficking process. Each of these factors affects a lot the social functioning, the perception on self.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are regarded as vulnerable on trafficking. They are sometimes stigmatized in formal educational environments, while perceiving from their family the message that they need to engage prematurely to obtain financial resources. They abandon school and in the absence of knowledge, they employ in hope of a great income, without being aware of the dangers they are exposed to.

In abusive families, where children’s emotional and safety needs are not met, they easily become victims of people who promise this thing. This is the case of institutionalized children as well.

The activities for this target group could take place in the buildings of the institutions whose beneficiaries they are.

The group activities for this children could approach the following subjects:

Self-knowledge and personal development activities – Identifying emotional needs, developing self-awareness and positive attitudes towards oneself.

Development of social responsibility and relationship skills – Identifying persuasive ways that affect them (especially those ways focusing on emotional vulnerability exploitation, on their desires, etc).

Awareness of the extent and of the seriousness of human trafficking and prostitution.

Development of functional attitudes to protect against trafficking phenomenon.

Development of an attitude of confidence in the ability to act in real-life situations.

Large group from school environment

Statistics show that many victims of human trafficking are minors derived from family backgrounds apparently unproblematic; therefore, they have never been identified as vulnerable.

In order to interfere on this kind of groups, schools could develop programs aiming two general purposes:

(1) Identification / development / strengthening of individual protective factors and information / awareness of students on this phenomenon and

(2) Consolidation/development of a close relationship between parents – children, parent – school.

As for the activities with the students, they can be organized and can focus on the main aspects that make them vulnerable to the phenomenon. The process is comprehensive until the subject of trafficking is reached, and consists in debates on important subjects of great impact for its prevention. The objectives of this approach may be operationalized to provide a longer or shorter program, depending on the responsiveness of the educational institution and of parents. Thus, starting from the causes of trafficking, the following subjects will be approached together with students: development/emotional competence, self-efficacy, assertive communication, friendship, sexual education, followed by the focus on information and awareness of the trafficking phenomenon (ways of recruitment, signs of people in such situations, where they can appeal, methods of self-defense, to be “good-Samaritan”).

In order to accomplish the purposes related to parents, their presence to workshops aiming to improve their parenting skills is expected. These activities include also meeting involving the parent with the child, aiming to guide them in communication and collaboration methods (tasks they need to perform together and that must lead to a final result, e.g. to draw together a specific topic without communicating verbally).

Boys groups

Most prevention campaigns refer to trafficked women, which is why boys do not identify with the victim role and they do not perceive themselves as vulnerable.

Secondary and tertiary preventions

Sometimes, interventions are not considered preventions, but they are also preventive activities at secondary or tertiary level, aiming the prevention of re-victimization. Generally, these rehabilitation services are provided for a limited period, ignoring the personal vulnerability of the victim.

Rehabilitation services provided lifelong if necessary.

Social economy – in our country, social economy companies are subject to the same tax revenue. This is the reason why, in the absence of legislative modifications, they will continue to survive only as long as they are financed by international organizations.

Development of mentors' network

The idea of mentoring exists in many areas, generally developed in order to be a coach, a guide, a role model, an advocate, a friend to the recipient.

For young people – there are different programs that have already developed this method to prevent many situations that may be a danger for them. The mentor of this kind of people has the role of conciliator between the individual and the social pressure experienced by them. The pressure may be in the direction of developing inappropriate behaviors, which the mentor is trying to prevent. In addition, the mentor can reshape the perceptions on their own needs that may represent a vulnerability factor for themselves. In this context, the mentor should also take into consideration the trafficking phenomenon.

For victims – in case of this people, it is important that the mentor be a role model, to teach them skills related to daily life.

The mentors' network might develop by recruiting volunteers who would benefit from a training program before coming in contact with someone to assist. Psychology and social assistance universities may develop collaboration agreements in order to provide students the opportunity to practice. Their training would be different from the other volunteers, given that they have basic knowledge of social sciences; specialists could coordinate their work.

This proposal is a strategy, more than a prevention plan, that can be structured on several steps according to their importance, complementing the elements that already exist, in order to fight against trafficking phenomenon.

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