

Now in a shelter for girls who have been rescued from trafficking, this Cambodian girl was trafficked internally and forced into prostitution at a young age. Since the early 1990s, Cambodia's sex industry has been growing exponentially, attracting foreign tourists who are drawn to the young age of many prostitutes. Surveys show that Cambodian men use prostitutes extensively, with up to 90 percent having their first sexual experience with a prostitute and many continuing to use them throughout their lives.

Image: Mikkel Ostergaard/Panos

sex trafficking in women and girls

When a young trafficked girl in Kosovo was asked to define “trafficking”, she replied, “It’s something to do with cars, isn’t it?”¹ For many people around the world — even its victims — human trafficking is at best an indistinct concept, yet it constitutes one of the most serious and, possibly, fastest growing global human rights violations. In the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, trafficking in persons is not only characterised as a form of enslavement but, in some circumstances, as a crime against humanity or a war crime.²

Defining trafficking

In November 2000 the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, was added to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The protocol offers the most universally acknowledged definition of trafficking:

“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to

slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”³

Involuntary servitude is the essential feature of human trafficking. For this reason, trafficking is often synonymously referred to as “modern-day slavery”. Men, women, boys and girls are bought and sold — sometimes many times over — to work in brothels and strip clubs, in sweatshops, in mines, on plantations, at construction sites, as beggars, brickmakers, domestic help, circus performers and even camel jockeys. Some of them are held in debt bondage and expected to pay off a balance due to win their freedom. Others have no debt, but as a result of threat or force live as virtual prisoners.

Closely linked to money laundering, drug trafficking, document forgery and human smuggling, trafficking in persons generates an estimated US \$9.5 billion in annual revenue, much of which goes into the coffers of

organized-crime networks.⁴ Every country in the world is implicated in this slave trade, whether as a point of origin, transit or destination.⁵

Since 2000 the United States Department of State has issued the world's most comprehensive annual report on trafficking. The latest edition calculates that 600,000 to 800,000 human beings are trafficked across

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international borders each year — and these figures do not account for those who are trafficked “internally”, from one destination to another within their own countries or communities. The report further estimates that 80 percent of transnational victims are women and girls, and most of them are trafficked into the commercial sex industry.⁶ According to the International Labour Organization, this industry “has become highly diversified and global in recent years.”⁷

Although exact numbers are difficult to obtain, available estimates give some indication of the scope of the problem. Approximately 100,000 Albanian women and girls are thought to have been sold into the sex trade in neighbouring Balkan countries and Western Europe.⁸ Between 1990 and 1997, 200,000 Bangladeshi women were believed to have been trafficked.⁹ Some 200,000 Nepali girls under the age of 14 may be working as sex slaves in India.¹⁰ An estimated 600,000 Thai children have been sold into prostitution.¹¹ Israeli police speculate that 99 percent of women working as prostitutes in Israel are victims of trafficking.¹² In Belgium, between 10 percent and 15 percent of known foreign prostitutes are thought to have been trafficked from abroad.¹³ As many as 130,000 women enter Japan on entertainer visas every year, but only about 10 percent of them actually perform in legitimate venues. The rest — many of whom are believed to have been trafficked — are most likely working in sex clubs or as prostitutes.¹⁴ The Middle East, Northern and Latin America, and Africa are also points of origin, transit and/or destination. As with other forms of trafficking, no region in the world appears to be free from the trade of women and girls for sex.

The hazardous journey

Beyond the common denominator of exploitation, every woman's or girl's trafficking experience is unique. In Albania, where 13-year-old “Alma” is living with her family in a camp for Kosovar refugees, she is

convinced by her boyfriend of two weeks to run away to Italy. After they arrive, he forces her into prostitution and beats her repeatedly whenever she refuses.¹⁵ In Nigeria, just before “Betty” is sent to Europe, her sex trafficker has a voodoo priest convince her that her soul will be held captive until she has paid back her debt to the trafficker — possibly as high as \$50,000.¹⁶ In Nepal, a familiar older woman in the community — perhaps one who was sent to an Indian brothel years earlier and has now returned as a “matchmaker” — approaches the house of “Kamala” and convinces her parents of the good life their daughter will have in Mumbai, India. As she reassures them about how much money Kamala will send home, she is liable to forego discussing the considerable dispensations to herself, the transport organizers and escorts, and the brothel owner.¹⁷

In Brazil, “Anita” is befriended by an older man and offered a promising job in a big city, far away from the remote rural community where she lives with her impoverished family. She later discovers that her would-be employer has sold her into prostitution.¹⁸ “Karin”, a single mother of two from Sri Lanka, is transported to Singapore by a man who agrees to find her a waitressing job. Shortly after her arrival, she is taken to an open market, where she and other women — from Indonesia, Thailand, India and China — are inspected and purchased by men from Pakistan, India, China, Indonesia and Africa.¹⁹

Health risks and consequences

As each trafficking incident unfolds, the victim experiences threats to her physical and mental health. These risks have been catalogued in detail in a multicountry study of trafficking covering Albania, Italy, the Netherlands, Thailand and the United Kingdom. From the predeparture stage, to the travel, transit and destination stages, through to detention, deportation and integration or return and reintegration, women and girls may experience repeated physical, sexual and psychological abuse or torture, including forced or coerced use of drugs and alcohol, lack of adequate food, withholding of medical treatment, forced unprotected sex, threats or intimidation of their loved ones, denial of privacy, frequent relocation, public discrimination and social exclusion.²⁰

Acute and chronic physical and mental health problems are the frequent outcome. Beatings and/or rape initially may be used by traffickers to establish their authority, instil fear and discourage any attempts to

“Mary” a Nigerian prostitute, trafficked into Spain and working in the Casa de Campo in Madrid. Every year, thousands of Nigerian women are trafficked into Western Europe and forced to work in the sex industry to pay back debts of up to US \$50,000. Having entered Europe illegally, the women are pushed onto the periphery of society. Ninety-five percent of the women who are trafficked from Nigeria come from Edo State in the south, where traffickers have set up their networks. The madams control the women through the practice of *juju* (voodoo), which is carried out before they are trafficked out of Nigeria. *Juju* is a strong spiritual tradition in southern Nigeria, based on the unbreakable bedrock of faith, and the psychological fear is very real for these women. During a *juju* ceremony, an oath of loyalty is signed between a god, the trafficker and the woman. The god keeps the woman’s spirit until the debt is paid.

Image: Lorena Ros/Panos

Officers from the United Nations Mission in Kosovo and the Trafficking and Prostitution Investigation Unit question a dancer from a local nightclub. Many of the girls have been trafficked from Moldova, Romania and the Ukraine. Some say they came to Kosovo voluntarily and have not been forced to work as prostitutes.

Image: Teun Voeten/Panos

escape. Victims' failure to comply with traffickers' demands may result in further violence. Physical and sexual assault also occur in encounters with clients. Because many women and girls who are trafficked for prostitution are unlikely to be able to negotiate safer sex, they are also highly vulnerable to contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. In all forms of prostitution, the links to HIV vulnerability are high, especially when clients are violent and/or refuse to use condoms.²¹ In Nepal, HIV prevalence among prostitutes is estimated at 20 percent. In Cambodia, that figure climbs to 29 percent, and in Zambia to 31 percent. In South Africa, as many as 70 percent of prostitutes are infected with HIV.²²

Other potential consequences of the abuse and torture suffered by trafficked women and girls include forced and/or unsafe abortions, malnutrition, tuberculosis, hepatitis, depression, self-harm, addiction and, ultimately, death.²³ "Neary" and "Svetlana" are among the incalculable number of women for whom trafficking proved fatal.

"Neary" grew up in rural Cambodia. Her parents died when she was a child, and — in an effort to give her a better life — her sister married her off when she was 17. Three months into the marriage, Neary went to a fishing village with her husband, who rented a room in what she thought was a guest house. But when she woke the next morning, her

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husband was gone. The owner of the house told her that she had been sold by her husband for \$300 and that she was actually in a brothel. For five years, Neary was raped by five to seven men every day. In addition to brutal physical abuse, Neary was infected with HIV. The brothel owner threw her out when she became sick, and she eventually found her way to a local shelter. She died of HIV/AIDS at the age of 23.²⁴

"Svetlana" was a young Belarusian looking for a job in Minskland when she met some Turkish men who promised her a well-paying job in Istanbul. Once Svetlana crossed the border, the men confiscated her passport, took away her money and imprisoned her. Svetlana and another foreign woman were sent to the apartment of two businessmen and forced into prostitution. In an attempt to escape, Svetlana jumped

out of a window and fell six stories to the street below. According to Turkish court documents, the customers called the traffickers instead of taking her to hospital. Svetlana died as a result of her injuries, and her body lay unclaimed in the morgue for two weeks until Turkish authorities learned her identity and sent her body to Belarus.²⁵

The supply side of the sex-trafficking equation

Some victims of sex-trafficking are simply abducted and relocated internally or transnationally. Many others, however, choose to leave their homes in search of a brighter future. Deceived by traffickers' promises of the good life, they have no idea that they will be forced into prostitution. Even the few victims who understand and accept that they will be working in the commercial sex industry cannot anticipate the extent to which they will forfeit control over their health and welfare. They may believe they are choosing the best of possible options.

The supply side of the trafficking equation is made up of the conditions that cause individual women and girls to be vulnerable to trafficking. Researchers have described a convergence of "push" and "pull" factors. Push factors for an individual woman or girl might include domestic violence, child sexual abuse, single parenthood or inducement by impoverished parents or criminal husbands.²⁶ At the broader societal level, push factors might include poverty, lack of education and employment opportunities, economic crises or war.²⁷ HIV/AIDS is another push factor, to the extent that the pandemic is leaving an increasing number of the world's children orphaned and vulnerable. Pull factors might include the hope of a higher standard of living, shifting and/or increased migratory flows and, for many women and girls, "the timing and apparent quality of the offer to depart."²⁸

According to one expert, "Traffickers are extremely clever and full of a lot of common sense."²⁹ In other words, they choose their targets carefully. The particular vulnerabilities of women and girls that make them the preferred mark of traffickers are fundamentally linked to gender-based discrimination, oppression and violence. Where women have little power, rights or opportunities, they are at greater risk of being trafficked. As such, trafficking is as much a product of violence against women and girls as it is a source. In a remote village in Nepal, for example, girls traditionally are afforded very few rights within their

families or society. Their disempowerment is a boon for those who control their fate:

“In Chautara, a Tamang village north of the Kathmandu valley, Bhim Tamang is a relatively wealthy man. His cottage is roofed with tin, and his son’s motorcycle is parked outside, next to the buffalo shed. Although he has no electricity, a television stands in the corner of the room, covered with a cloth. ‘We will have electricity here in a few months,’ he says. Bhim’s prosperity is a result of his fortune to have fathered four daughters. Three are working in the brothels in Mumbai. The fourth, age 12, will go next year. ‘Gurung and Magar families send their sons to the army. Their sons send money home. Why shouldn’t we send our daughters to help us?’”³⁰

The demand side of the sex-trafficking equation

For many individuals operating at the local level, such as Bhim Tamang, poverty alleviation is a driving force for engaging in trafficking. In countries including India, Pakistan, Burma, Nepal and Thailand, girls may be sold into prostitution to pay off money loaned to their parents.³¹ Further along the chain of exploiters, all the way up to the organized-crime networks, commercial profit is the primary incentive in the escalation of human traffic around the world. Established routes used by drugs and weapons racketeers, especially in southeastern Europe, facilitate the illegal trade in humans.³² Many of these routes pass through “transition countries”. In these countries, which often are marked by war or steep economic decline, the forced sex industry is 10 times more lucrative for exploiters than other forms of forced labour.³³

Regardless of the elements of poverty, greed and organized crime, no trafficker would be successful without market demand. The sex industry throughout the world is the most recognised source of demand for the trafficking of women and girls. In some settings, sex tourism further feeds the incentive for trafficking.³⁴

It is not just the sex industry itself, however, that promotes sex trafficking. Racial and social discrimination within the sex industry figure prominently in the commercial sexual exploitation of women and girls. According to one expert, “Research shows that historically and cross-culturally, a large percentage of clients seek prostitutes whose racial, ethnic, caste or national identities are different from their own. Thus we find that women and children in prostitution serving local demand are often

migrants, and that men’s prostitute use increases when they are abroad.”³⁵

By importing and exploiting foreign prostitutes, traffickers are better able to meet demand criteria, and at reduced cost. Hence, a sign outside of a sex club in Hong Kong reads: “Young fresh Hong Kong girls; White, clean, Malaysian girls; Beijing women; Luxurious ghost girls from Russia.”³⁶ Mitko, a pimp working in Bulgaria, promises his customers, “Ten minutes and I can get you a girl — any girl — blond, brown, black or white.”³⁷

Another perceived attraction of a trafficked woman or girl is her powerlessness. She is significantly less likely to have authority in the sex transaction than a voluntary commercial sex worker who is legally or otherwise empowered to exercise some measure of control over her working conditions. If she is young, the added promise of virginity attracts men seeking to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections.³⁸ Conversely, clients who already have sexually transmitted infections may believe, according to the myth of the “virgin cure”, that sex with a virgin will heal their disease. In a study conducted in 2003 by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), three-quarters of the 185 clients surveyed expressed a preference for prostitutes under the age of 25, and 22 percent preferred those 18 years of age or under. For many of these clients, this predilection is related to the fact that younger women and girls will be more docile in the sex transaction.³⁹

Yet another source of demand for trafficking is men seeking brides, domestic workers or sex slaves. While consensually arranged marriages do not fall within the trafficking rubric, the conditions in which a young bride may find herself once she has entered the marriage may amount to trafficking. The mail-order bride industry has come under scrutiny by trafficking experts for this very reason. The largely unregulated trade of

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mail-order brides follows traditional trafficking patterns. Brides from impoverished countries within the former Soviet Union, Asia and Latin America are sent to paying clients in the United States, Canada, Europe and Japan.⁴⁰ In the most extreme scenario, according to one expert, a mail-order bride client “may go so far as to undertake serial sponsorships of immigrant women to supply new recruits for prostitution rings. In this

The body of a prostitute gunned down with her pimp in Albania. Every year, thousands of women and girls either are forced to leave their homelands or are deceived into doing so with promises of employment opportunities and a better life. Many end up working as prostitutes in virtual slavery to pimps and gangs. Stripped of passports and with minimal access to cash, they are invisible to the authorities and extremely vulnerable to violence.

Image: Francesco Cito/Panos

case, he will hold the bride in debt bondage because he paid for her to immigrate to North America, and then force her to participate in slavery-like practices in order to obtain her freedom."⁴¹

Responses to trafficking

A representative from the Protection Project, a United States-based organization that monitors global trafficking, noted in April 2005 that approximately 25 countries have implemented comprehensive antitrafficking laws, and bills are pending in another 15 countries. One hundred or so other countries do not have specific antitrafficking legislation, but nevertheless have criminal-law provisions that comply with the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. Fifty more countries, in the words of the Protection Project representative, "do not care."⁴²

Even where legislation exists, it may not protect against all forms of trafficking. According to the State Department of the United States, "Many nations misunderstand the definition of trafficking."⁴³ They may limit their focus to cross-border movement, failing to recognise internal trafficking or other forms of involuntary servitude that do not involve relocation of the victim. Nor do laws criminalising trafficking necessarily signify a just response to victims. In many settings, trafficked women and girls are at risk of being treated as illegal migrants, as in the case of "Luisa", a 17-year-old orphan from Uzbekistan:

" 'Luisa's' aunt engineered her abduction to Dubai using a cousin's passport, because she wanted to take Luisa's apartment. In Dubai, Luisa was sold to a slavery and prostitution ring. When she was no longer useable in prostitution [from the pimp's point of view], the traffickers sent her to a psychiatric centre. An Uzbek [nongovernmental organization] located her in Dubai. The [agency] arranged to move her to a shelter, and they began working on her repatriation. Because she entered the UAE [United Arab Emirates] illegally, on a false passport, the UAE immigration service said she should serve a two-year prison sentence. Government officials and the Uzbek nongovernmental organization are currently advocating on Luisa's behalf to expedite her return to Uzbekistan."⁴⁴

Unlike Luisa, many victims of trafficking never receive such assistance. Instead, they may be subject to criminal charges for engaging in

prostitution. In August 2002, for example, 10 Vietnamese girls who had been trafficked into Cambodia for prostitution were arrested by Cambodian authorities and sentenced to three months in prison, after which they were deported.⁴⁵ Summary deportation not only makes it difficult to prosecute trafficking offenders, it may further endanger trafficking victims. In fact, rapid return without sufficient reintegration planning and assistance puts women and girls at risk of being trafficked yet again. Children may be returned to parents who first sold them, and women may be sent back to abusive households.⁴⁶

In recent years, the importance of a victim-centred approach to trafficking — compassionate treatment focusing on "rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration" — has gained increased international attention.⁴⁷ The World Health Organization has produced ethical and safety recommendations for interviewing trafficked women.⁴⁸ The IOM, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women, La Strada and many other international and local institutions are supporting victim-response

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programming in several parts of the world, as well as spearheading international advocacy efforts to highlight the scope of the problem and to promote cross-border cooperation and collaboration among governments as well as nongovernmental organizations.

Despite these efforts, many groups providing assistance to trafficking victims "remain relatively unrecognised and seriously underresourced," with funds going to law enforcement rather than to victim support.⁴⁹ In her first report from early 2005, the recently appointed United Nations Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons noted that trafficking "continues to be treated mainly as a law and order problem."⁵⁰ One of her primary activities to redress this imbalance will involve drawing attention to victims' rights.

While increased services are critical to the care and recovery of those who have been trafficked, prevention is at the root of any efforts to protect potential victims. A number of countries where sex trafficking is prevalent have undertaken public-education campaigns to alert young women and girls to its dangers. Public education, however, does not address the core issues that make women and girls vulnerable, such as "the demand that exists virtually everywhere for children and young

women to sexually exploit, and the grinding poverty that generates the supply of children and women, desperate to survive.”⁵¹ The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women has recently adopted the first United Nations resolution to focus on eliminating the demand for trafficking. A first step in this process will involve understanding and addressing the forces of racial, ethnic and social discrimination that propel the forced exploitation of women and girls in the sex industry.


Any lasting efforts to reduce sex trafficking also will require a long-term commitment to improving the rights and welfare of women and girls. In

the words of one advocate, “Every provision to provide young girls with an education and with skills is an antitrafficking program.”⁵² Ending modern-day sexual slavery means exploiters — from the traffickers to the clients they serve — must be held criminally accountable, and women and girls must be emancipated from the enormous inequities that define their everyday existence. ■

On one of their night raids, a South African police taskforce set up to fight the commercial sexual exploitation of children discovered a traumatised three-year-old boy locked in a room. Initially, the police believed he had been left behind as collateral for a drug loan. When his mother, "Maggie", was found later that night about 80 kilometres away, she told the authorities the full story.

Maggie was a sex worker in Pretoria and had worked for herself since her early teens. One evening, a friend who also worked as a prostitute invited her to join a group of people for a drink at an apartment in Johannesburg. Maggie went for a drink, after which she fell asleep, probably because the cocktail was laced with drugs. When she woke up in the apartment, her friend had disappeared. Maggie called her friend to ask what had happened, and the woman explained that a pimp had offered her money to bring Maggie to them. Maggie was then locked in a room and forced to work day and night as a prostitute. She was expected to service clients in the middle of the night if the pimp knocked on her door and told her to do so.

After Maggie managed to escape, she immediately fell under the control of another pimp, who refused to allow her to go and see her young son, who was living with Maggie's sister in Pretoria. Instead, he offered to collect the boy and bring him to her. Maggie agreed. Once the pimp had her



son, he made a bargain with Maggie: The boy would stay with him, and if Maggie brought in enough money each week she could see him on Sundays. Maggie was given R20 (\$3) each day for food and several rocks of crack cocaine. She lived on bread and mayonnaise, and her pimp provided her with clothes. For the three months that her little boy was held hostage, Maggie worked so that she could see him and keep him safe. She would have liked to run away, but she was afraid the pimp would hurt her son. After they were rescued, the boy was put in a safe house and Maggie entered a drug-rehabilitation programme.

Doctors who examined the boy also suspected that he had been given drugs to keep quiet. After looking at his gums, they surmised that the child had been gagged almost constantly. They were unable to determine whether he had been sexually abused. Maggie did well in rehab and was determined to turn her life around. Unfortunately, because she did not have any vocational training at the facility, she had no means to support herself after she was released. Maggie is back on the streets, working for herself this time. Her son is in foster care.

Images: Mariella Furrer

"My name is 'Shaliba', and I am 15 years old. I was born into slavery and live with my master. My family members are all slaves to the master's family, and we live in the same compound. I have to work so hard, fetching water and firewood and doing domestic chores.

"My master's daughter is getting married in Nigeria, and she will need a slave girl, so I must go with her. At first, I refused to go and was badly beaten. My parents are not happy about my moving away. They asked the master to let me stay with them, but he said that because I am a slave I must do what I am told. I have no choice.

"In rural areas like this, teachers recruit children to go to school. A teacher came to my village and insisted that my master allow me to study. He refused, but when the teacher threatened to take him to court he relented. My master said that if I worked for him in the mornings and evenings I could go to school. I studied up to Class Five, but now he has forbidden me to continue. When my teachers in school would talk about the slave trade, they said slavery doesn't exist anymore. I was too afraid to say anything.

"My master has forced me to sleep with him so many times, starting when I was about seven years old. I used to refuse, but then he would beat me. He takes me into his room, unclothes me and rapes me. It makes me so sad. I reported it to my father, but he couldn't do anything because he, too, is a slave. I have been having problems with my periods. They have not been normal and I have had bad pains. The last time I had a period was about three or four months ago. My master raped me three months ago."

Image: Georgina Cranston/IRIN

"Saymin" is 21 years old and comes from Bangladesh. She has five sisters and one brother, and her family is very poor. Saymin's father died when she was very young, and her mother did whatever work she could find to sustain the family, from picking up rubbish and selling it to doing domestic work.

When Saymin was 10 years old, a female "recruiting agent" came to the house and said she could find a job for her in India. Saymin's mother asked where her daughter would be taken, and the agent told her that once the girl was settled she would send the address. Desperate from poverty, Saymin's mother let her go, reasoning that the child would at least earn a living.

"I was terrified and crying a lot when we left. It was night-time and I didn't know the roads. We went through the jungle in the border areas — I don't know what route we took. It took us two days to reach Kolkata in India. The woman who brought me there sold me in Khidirpur, the red-light district. She said that the madam of the house was her sister. The madam explained to me that I had to entertain people, to take my clothes off and let them do whatever they wanted. When I protested, I was beaten. They played music really loud so no one could hear my screams. Another madam, who was a neighbour, told the woman I worked for to be careful because I was so young, and warned her that if the police came there would be trouble. So she put me to work as a domestic servant.

"When I turned 12, I was forced to have sex. It was very difficult. Because I was sexually and physically immature, I couldn't entertain too many people — but even then I had to have sex with two or three men every day. If I had a fever or fell ill they would bring me medicine but never take me to a doctor — I never had a check-up. The clients would pay me between 150 and 500 rupees (\$3 and \$11), but I saw none of it. I would get five rupees a day for food. They used to beat me and abuse me and say, 'We have spent money on you. You must entertain customers!'

"I continued to protest — this was even before I had reached puberty. We were never given condoms to use. I got pregnant once. I had a daughter who survived only seven days — she had chest problems. I was forced to have sex right up to my 9th month of pregnancy. I had to entertain even when I had my period or if my genitals were swollen. I ran away once, but they caught me. They said they would always find me. Once I became so desperate I did not want to continue living. I went down to the bridge to commit suicide, and met another girl."

The girl Saymin met was also a sex worker, and she brought Saymin to "Roya Bel", a madam who cared for prostitutes and tried to protect them. When Saymin's original madam tried to get Saymin to come back, claiming she was her sister, she was unsuccessful.

"Roya Bel" said, 'I will break your legs if you come and try to harass this woman. If she wants, she can stay in her own room here and earn her own income independently. She is not going to live under anyone and go back to the slavery that you have subjected her to. I will call the police if you people don't go away from here.' "

Because she had worked as a prostitute, Saymin would not return to her family in Bangladesh — even if she could afford the transport. She worked for some time under Roya Bel's protection and married a client she met while working as a "flying sex worker", a prostitute who goes to various districts and takes a room for a couple of hours a day. When Saymin told her future husband her life story, he fell in love with her and said he wanted to save her from prostitution. They now have two children. He works in a hardware shop, and Saymin only does housework. Her husband likes her to stay at home.

"My dream is that my daughter does not have the same misfortunes that I have had and that both of my children go to school. Had I been educated, I would not have been in this state."

Image: Georgina Cranston/IRIN

