

# WHO ETHICAL AND SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERVIEWING TRAFFICKED WOMEN



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London School  
of Hygiene and  
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# WHO ETHICAL AND SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERVIEWING TRAFFICKED WOMEN

## INTRODUCTION

The trafficking of women and girls into forced prostitution and other slavery-like or exploitative conditions is increasingly recognized as one of the world's fastest growing crimes and most significant human rights violations. *The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* defines trafficking as:

**“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 minimum, the exploitation of 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.”<sup>1</sup>**

In response to the rapid global rise in trafficking and growing demand for information on trafficking by policy-makers, donors, service providers, and the media, women who have been trafficked are increasingly being interviewed to discuss their experiences. Women are being interviewed both while they are in trafficking situations under the control of traffickers, employers, or pimps,

and after they have left the trafficking setting, such as while in shelters, under the care of service agencies, or once they have returned home or re-established their lives elsewhere.

In any of these situations, interviewing a woman who has been trafficked raises a number of ethical questions and safety concerns for the woman, others close to her, and for the interviewer. Having a sound understanding of the risks, ethical considerations, and the practical realities related to trafficking can help minimize the dangers and increase the likelihood that a woman will disclose relevant and accurate information.

These recommendations are intended primarily for use by researchers, members of the media, and service providers unfamiliar with the situation of trafficked women. They do not explicitly discuss the different risks and obligations of interviewing females who are minors, although many of the same principles will apply.

The recommendations were drafted in consultation with a group of experts on trafficking and violence against women, most of whom have worked directly with women who have been trafficked.

As a starting point, the recommendations build on the World Health Organization's *Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence Against Women*,<sup>2</sup> *International Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking*,<sup>3</sup>

*CIOMS International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Human Subjects*,<sup>4</sup> *Human Rights Standards for the Treatment of Trafficked Persons*,<sup>5</sup> codes of conduct of journalists' unions,<sup>6</sup> and procedural guidance for law enforcement agencies for interviewing women who have been trafficked or victims of other sexual offences.<sup>7</sup>

The recommendations should be used in conjunction with existing professional standards applicable to the work being conducted. These recommendations provide a set of ten basic standards for interviewing women who are in or have left a trafficking situation. The significance of each issue is explained and examples are offered of how, in practice, each can be addressed. The recommendations should not be taken as a comprehensive guide to working with women who have been trafficked.<sup>8</sup>

## THE COMPLEX CIRCUMSTANCES OF WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN TRAFFICKED

An interview with a woman who has been trafficked can take place while a woman is still in a trafficking situation, when she is in the care of a service organization, or once she has moved beyond the trafficking experience and has reintegrated into her home community or integrated into a new community. Although interviews with women who are in a trafficking situation at the time of the interview are often the most risk-laden, interviews with women who have left a trafficking situation also pose numerous risks to women's physical and psychological well-being.

### Those still in a trafficking situation often:

- feel trapped with no safe way out;
- work in an informal, often illicit or covert sector;
- are residing illegally in the country to which they were trafficked;
- have limited knowledge of their rights and legal options;
- have limited personal freedoms;
- are mobile, transient, moved from city to city, or traded from one establishment to another;
- are likely to have experienced physical, sexual or psychological abuse and threats of abuse against themselves or their family;
- are susceptible to violence, fines and penalties by employers or agents;
- do not have legal status in the country they are in, have had

their papers taken from them and worry about deportation;

- lie about their age, especially if they are minors;
- are trapped in situations of debt bondage or other stringent obligations that involve organized crime, corrupt government officials, or members of the police or military;
- face ethnic, social and gender discrimination; and
- adopt self-protective reactions or demonstrate symptoms of trauma and stress that are reflected in an impaired sense of time or space, memory loss of certain events, risk behaviours, or underestimation of risk.<sup>9</sup>

### Those who have left the trafficking situation often:

- have some of the same concerns identified with the trafficking situation (see above);
- continue to feel, and may be, watched or under surveillance of traffickers or others connected to the traffickers (many trafficked women are recruited by someone living locally, often someone in their same town or village);
- have outstanding debts or owe money to traffickers (based on traffickers' calculations);
- may remain vulnerable to retribution against themselves and/or their families;
- have only temporary residency status in a destination country and fear imminent deportation;
- feel, and often are, socially stigmatized by their experience

A woman from Eastern Europe employed as a domestic worker suffered a daily regime of vaginal and anal rape and other acts of sexual humiliation. Upon returning home, she continued to suffer both physical and psychological effects, but nonetheless never told her husband (the truth about) what had happened to her, insisting that were he to find out, he would leave her and her son.



and their work, and risk rejection by family and community members if past events are revealed;

- are vulnerable to extreme stress reactions once out of the situation and have relinquished previous psychological survival mechanisms;
- find that talking about the experience is to relive it; and
- believe that the services (or immigration status) depend on their compliance, and therefore agree to participate in an interview which they would otherwise decline.

For many of these reasons, service agencies assisting trafficked women frequently decline requests (from journalists, researchers and others) to interview women in their care.

It should not be assumed, however, that all women who have been trafficked are traumatized, consider themselves victims, detest their captors, or wish to escape or go home. Many women are in equivocal circumstances in which they may have contradictory and ambivalent feelings. For example:

- It is not uncommon for women to have an intimate relationship with someone in the trafficking network, or related to the network or to feel loyalty, gratitude or at least dependence on an individual related to her "captive" situation.
- Many women do not perceive themselves as having been "trafficked" (according to the UN or other definitions) and do not want to be treated as victims. They may regard their experience

as the consequence of a poor decision for which they are/were obliged to fulfil the terms of their contract. Some women may see it as only a temporary situation during which time they intend to earn enough money to pay off a debt, and support themselves or a family at home.

- Women may not perceive their work setting as abusive or slavery-like, and may not take exception to the work but rather object to the relationships that are exploitative.

These complexities can make it hard to approach women, establish trust, get their cooperation, acquire truthful responses, and to fully comprehend their decisions and reactions.

Adopting appropriate safety and ethical procedures benefits both the respondent and the interviewer. If approached in a sensitive and non-judgemental manner, many women benefit from having the opportunity to tell their story.

Similarly, the greater the extent to which a woman feels she is respected and that her welfare is a priority, the more likely she is to share accurate and intimate details of her experience. The factors affecting the security and well-being of a woman who has been trafficked are also the same factors that affect disclosure.

The factors affecting the security and well-being of a woman who has been trafficked are the same factors that affect disclosure.

## THERE ARE TEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO THE ETHICAL AND SAFE CONDUCT OF INTERVIEWS WITH WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN TRAFFICKED.

### 1. DO NO HARM

Treat each woman and the situation as if the potential for harm is extreme until there is evidence to the contrary. Do not undertake any interview that will make a woman's situation worse in the short term or longer term.

### 2. KNOW YOUR SUBJECT AND ASSESS THE RISKS

Learn the risks associated with trafficking and each woman's case before undertaking an interview.

### 3. PREPARE REFERRAL INFORMATION - DO NOT MAKE PROMISES THAT YOU CANNOT FULFILL

Be prepared to provide information in a woman's native language and the local language (if different) about appropriate legal, health, shelter, social support and security services, and to help with referral, if requested.

### 4. ADEQUATELY SELECT AND PREPARE INTERPRETERS, AND CO-WORKERS

Weigh the risks and benefits associated with employing interpreters, co-workers or others, and develop adequate methods for screening and training.

### 5. ENSURE ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Protect a respondent's identity and confidentiality throughout the entire interview process – from the moment she is contacted through the time that details of her case are made public.

### 6. GET INFORMED CONSENT

Make certain that each respondent clearly understands the content and purpose of the interview, the intended use of the information, her right not to answer questions, her right to terminate the interview at any time, and her right to put restrictions on how the information is used.

### 7. LISTEN TO AND RESPECT EACH WOMAN'S ASSESSMENT OF HER SITUATION AND RISKS TO HER SAFETY

Recognize that each woman will have different concerns, and that the way she views her concerns may be different from how others might assess them.

### 8. DO NOT RE-TRAUMATIZE A WOMAN

Do not ask questions intended to provoke an emotionally charged response. Be prepared to respond to a woman's distress and highlight her strengths.

### 9. BE PREPARED FOR EMERGENCY INTERVENTION

Be prepared to respond if a woman says she is in imminent danger.

### 10. PUT INFORMATION COLLECTED TO GOOD USE

Use information in a way that benefits an individual woman or that advances the development of good policies and interventions for trafficked women generally.

## 1. DO NO HARM

Treat each woman and the situation as if the potential for harm is extreme until there is evidence to the contrary. Do not undertake any interview that will make a woman's situation worse in the short term or longer term.

### 1.1 DECIDING TO CONDUCT AN INTERVIEW

The first principle in most ethical guidance is the principle of "do no harm". Given the extreme risks associated with trafficking, the significance of this basic rule cannot be overstated.

#### Risks

Women who are currently in trafficking situations, in the process of leaving or who have already escaped from trafficking situations are vulnerable to harm, as may be their family or friends. The degree and duration of the physical danger and psychological trauma to an individual is not always evident. In some cases risks may not be obvious to the interviewer. In other cases, the dangers may not be apparent to the woman.

#### Recommendations

If there is a risk that making a request for an interview or the interview itself will cause harm or compromise a woman's safety or her mental health, the interview should not be undertaken.

Prior to seeking an interview, the interviewer must first assess the risks. These include how approaching a woman will be perceived by others (traffickers, other women, family, community), whether someone who would object to the interview might hear about it, or whether the woman will feel obliged to participate. It is important to assess whether the encounter might cause violence, immigration problems, lost wages, workplace fines, or other bogus penalties that are common in these exploitative settings.

One must do the utmost to ascertain a woman's psychological state and the effects that an interview may have. Very often women, particularly those who have escaped recently, are in a state of emotional crisis. It is not appropriate to interview a woman who is in this state. It is critical that a woman is in full control of her faculties when the interview is requested, and that during the interview she has control over the interview situation.

Once contact is made, a woman's own concerns and fears must immediately be discussed in a systematic way. (i.e. not simply, "are you okay to do this interview?")

A woman's assessment of her safety is paramount, yet there are situations where

A woman in a destination country prison who spoke with an NGO and agreed to give evidence against her traffickers subsequently found a note on her prison bunk threatening her life and the lives of her children in her country of origin.

#### Sample questions that may be asked to assess security:

**Q:** "Do you have any concerns about carrying out this interview with me?"

**Q:** "Do you think that talking to me could pose any problems for you, for example, with those who trafficked you, your family, friends, or anyone who is assisting you?"

**Q:** "Have you ever spoken with someone in (*interviewer's profession*) before? How was that experience?"

**Q:** "Do you feel this is a good time and place to discuss your experience? If not, is there a better time and place?"

It is important to work with professional and experienced local organisations or individuals.

**Useful types of groups and literature to consult before interviewing trafficked women:**

- Migration, refugee, asylum-seeker centres, immigration assistance, social work or legal aid services for migrants and refugees;
- Employment and labour rights centres for migrants;
- Sex worker groups and assistance (health, rights, outreach groups, sex worker unions);
- Violence against women, women's rights groups, domestic violence and rape centres, shelters, crisis counsellors, psychologists;
- Human rights groups;
- Torture and violence experts;
- Law enforcement officials;
- Specific ethnic group or cultural centres and literature;
- International organizations (e.g. International Organization for Migration; United Nations High Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; International Labour Organization);
- Academic institutions working on migration, trafficking, labour or women's rights.

she herself may not be aware of problems that can result from agreeing to an interview. Ethical standards demand that even if a woman agrees to an interview, the interview should not take place if the interviewer foresees likely negative outcomes.

## 2. KNOW YOUR SUBJECT AND ASSESS THE RISKS

Learn the risks associated with trafficking and each woman's case before undertaking an interview.

### 2.1 UNDERSTANDING THE RANGE OF RISKS

There are risks associated with each stage of an interview process, from the initial contact with a woman to the public release of information. The most effective way to learn the risks before initiating an interview and create strategies to protect a woman's well-being throughout the interview is to study the subject, the local situation, and most importantly, to work with professional and experienced local organizations or individuals.

#### Risks

##### Reprisal against the respondent by employers, trafficking agents, pimps, law enforcement officials

Because so many aspects of trafficking are criminally punishable (e.g. immigration violations, illegal labour conditions, underage, debt bondage, violence, kidnapping), individuals involved in trafficking do not want women to speak with outsiders. Those with control over a woman may intimidate and punish her physically (beatings, rape, confinement), or may penalize her financially (fines for "disobedience" or increased debt) to discourage contact with others. They may add working hours or deprive her of "privileges", such as time off, sleep, food or amenities. Abuse and penalties not only punish the alleged transgressor, but also serve as warning to other women.

It should not be assumed that once a woman is no longer in her work situation or in the country of destination that she is free from reprisals. In most trafficking situations, agents know or can easily discover personal information about a woman, her home, family and friends. Even an "innocent" interview can put her in danger and make it impossible for her to return or stay home.

##### Reprisal against the respondent's family or children

It is extremely common for agents and employers to use threats against a woman's family, especially her children, to manipulate and control women.

##### Shame and rejection, or punishment by family members or community

Women are not only afraid for their families, but many worry about how parents, husbands or others will react if they find out, for example, that they worked as a

prostitute, or were sexually abused. It is not uncommon for parents, siblings or spouses to blame, physically punish or banish women for what has happened to them. Approaching a woman at her home to request an interview, if not done discretely, can, for example, cause irreparable damage to her family relationships. Women are also concerned that families will discover that they have not earned the anticipated income or that they have fled without repaying a debt causing anger and reprobation.

### **Identification by foreign authorities**

Many women travel illegally, have their documents confiscated by traffickers or are uncertain of their legal status. Fearing arrest or deportation, they are reluctant to speak with outsiders. For many trafficked women, experience with corrupt authorities at home fosters mistrust of police and other officials elsewhere. In many countries where prostitution is illegal, women working in sex work justifiably fear imprisonment. These fears are compounded by traffickers' warnings that authorities are complicit to, will harm them, arrest them and prevent them from ever returning home, or will send them home against their will. In some locations where officials actually are complicit with traffickers, authorities use arrest as an opportunity to cheat women of their profits and resell or re-traffick the women.

### **Reprisal by home country authorities**

Officials from a woman's home country, even her home village, may be complicit in the trafficking process. Corrupt officials may reside in the women's home country or may work in the embassies and consulates of destination countries.

### **Betrayal by co-workers, co-residents or community members**

It is not safe to assume that women in the same situation or from the same community trust one another. Although women working or living together can form strong friendships, there are also cases where women harbour resentment, benefit financially, earn respect or extra privileges from employers, traffickers or others by disclosing damaging information about another woman. Similarly, women residing in a shelter may feel ill-will, have vendettas against one another and may use information in harmful ways. There are also cases where women remain connected to traffickers to whom they can pass vital information about another woman. Even women who have returned home risk being seen talking to outsiders by individuals connected to the trafficking network.

### **Lies about age**

It is not unusual for females who are minors to lie about their age, often on the instruction of the trafficker. Interviewing minors brings up additional ethical considerations and, in some places, legal obligations on the part of the interviewer. Interviewers should familiarize themselves with the local legal requirements on the reporting of abuse of minors. They may also wish to identify resources and services experienced in assisting minors.

Trafficked women commonly report seeing their traffickers bribe local officials. One victim explained how she and her trafficker were transported through a border crossing by police in a police vehicle.

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When trafficked women were returned to authorities in an African country, it used to be common practice to show their faces on television and in news media as a prevention strategy to warn the public about trafficking. Consequently, many of the portrayed victims were shamed and rejected by their families and their communities.

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In a Middle Eastern country, three Eastern European women escaped from a club and went to the authorities for help. The police told the women that they were unable to assist them and sent the women to the bus station to leave town. When the women arrived at the bus station, they were met by their original traffickers.

A fifteen-year-old Romanian girl was trafficked from an Albanian prison where she was held for possessing false Italian documents. After a period of time working for her pimp-boyfriend, she ran away and began working in a sauna in another part of the city. A “price was put on her head.” To win points with her Albanian boyfriend, a female co-worker in the new venue revealed her whereabouts. The Romanian girl was subsequently kidnapped in broad daylight in front of her co-workers.

### **Loyalty to and dependence on agents, employers, pimp-boyfriends or others in the network**

Some women have loyal relationships with agents or employers who may also be boyfriends, husbands or family members. To an outsider, these feelings may appear inexplicable unless one understands the systematic isolation and dependency that are key components of the coercion used by perpetrators. In many cases violent or cruel acts alternate with gestures of kindness and mercy. These relationships can be confusing. A woman may feel taken care of, and the power imbalance may persuade her that her best hope for the future – for her survival – lies in the hands of those who are also abusing or exploiting her.

## **2.2 STAGES OF THE INTERVIEW PROCESS: RISKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Each phase of the interview process can pose risks to a respondent. These should be recognised, assessed and appropriate security measures should be undertaken.

### **Stage one: making the initial contact**

#### **Risks**

Simply approaching a woman in a trafficking situation, enquiring about, or asking to speak to a specific woman may put her at risk by raising suspicions about her loyalty or her intentions. Women are rarely unsupervised. Even those who appear to be alone are commonly being watched (e.g. pimp or employer within observation or listening distance, hidden camera).

Similarly, entering a village and singling out a woman, or visiting a woman or the family of a woman who has migrated or is suspected (or known) of having been trafficked can also create problems for the woman and her family.

#### **Recommendations**

- The safest way to make contact with a woman who has been trafficked is to speak to her once she is clearly out of the trafficking situation. Often the most effective and secure means of communication is through a local organization known to her and that she trusts, such as social service groups, shelters or refuges.
- The longer the time between her contact with the traffickers and the interview, the more likely she will be, and feel safe to disclose details of her experience.
- If it is necessary to contact a woman while she has clear attachments to agents or employers, it is best to try to identify local organizations she trusts (e.g. health outreach or social services). If contact through a trusted local group is impossible, then it is essential to undertake an extended period of



observation of the woman's patterns to assess the risks of making contact (e.g. who accompanies her, who watches her).

It is worth noting that in some countries where the sex trade is ignored or tolerated – or where the police, public officials or others are systematically paid off – brothel owners, pimps and other persons with control may have no objections to an interview. This is particularly common when those in control perceive that there may be some benefit to the women that in turn profits them, such as the provision of free condoms, health information, pharmaceuticals, free clinic services, etc. Interviews with trafficked or bonded women in some countries have become routine and safe. Alternatively, "employers" may permit an interview simply because they are confident that women will not dare to speak openly. It is crucial to understand how the presence of outsiders asking questions will be perceived before feeling overly sanguine about conducting interviews in these settings.

To avoid putting a woman at risk of exposure, an interviewer may wish to say that the interview is on a more neutral subject, such as "health", to anyone who may ask. This enables the woman to safely explain the conversation to others. Once the respondent and interviewer are alone, detailed information on the true nature of the interview subject must be provided as part of the consent procedure (see 6. *Get Informed Consent*).

In requesting an interview with a woman in detention, it cannot be assumed that she is safe from reprisals from authorities, prison mates or traffickers. Even if interviews can be arranged in a private and secluded situation, the downsides of this type of setting are that women often feel ill at ease and may subsequently be harassed, or forced to reveal what was said.

## Stage two: Identifying a time and a place for conducting the interview

### Risks

Particularly when a woman in a trafficking setting is meeting with an outsider she may be watched, followed, or overheard. In some cases, video cameras are installed in women's workplaces and residences. Even women who are not observed regularly are often reluctant to tell the truth, fearing that what they say could become known and used against them or family members.

Similarly, a woman in a shelter or in her home may have valid concerns that co-residents, family members, neighbours, or others may overhear sensitive or stigmatizing information.

### Recommendations

Interviews should be conducted in a secure and completely private setting, and

An interviewer went to a club and met with the owner who explained that all the women in his club worked voluntarily and earned good wages. He selected the women who were to be interviewed, and sat within earshot during the interview. Not surprisingly, the women confirmed his claims.

A young woman who had recently arrived at a club in Western Europe was terrified and miserable and asked the police to rescue her. The police raided the brothel and arrested all the women working in the club. In the van *en route* to the police station the other trafficked women working in the club, irate that this young woman had ruined their chances to repay their debts, beat and scratched her.

carried out in total privacy. Non-governmental organizations or social support services are often among the safest options. Interviews should not be held in a location where persons pass by or may “drop in” or where random interruptions may occur making the respondent ill at ease. Interviews in the presence of children may cause distress and trauma and may result in a woman's words being repeated to others.

Before and throughout the interview, the woman should be free to reschedule (or relocate) the interview to a time (or place) that may be safer or more convenient for her.

Tight schedules are not practical or realistic and can push interviewers to take risks. Similarly, interviews should not be too long and emotionally draining. The more at ease a woman feels, the more likely she will be to share valuable information. It is a good idea to clarify at the start of the interview what time the woman needs to leave and how flexible her time is, as women who are under the control of employers or traffickers may have given alternative explanations as to their whereabouts and delays may result in problems for her.

## **Stage three: conducting the interview**

### **Come prepared to listen, leaving preconceived notions behind**

#### **Risks**

Interviewers who approach a woman with preconceived ideas or emotions regarding a woman's experience, her reactions to what has happened to her, or her personality or character, will miss important information and overlook the unique nature of each woman's experience.

#### **Recommendations**

While it is important to come prepared with questions in mind, the interviews that yield the most accurate portrayal of a woman's experience are those that are unstructured and responsive. This depends on an open mind and the listening and interpreting skills of the interviewer. For example, while interviewers should demonstrate understanding and concern, expressions of pity or sympathy may be inappropriate and unwelcome as many women do not wish to be treated as victims.

#### **Recognize when a woman feels unsafe**

#### **Risks**

Events can change suddenly during the course of an interview. These changes may pose physical or psychological risks to a woman.

A trafficked woman who had been raped by a police officer was made to give her statement in the police office with the door open and people walking past. Throughout the interview she feared that she would be recognized by the officer who had raped her.



Even if the original conditions set for an interview were acceptable, a respondent can begin to feel unsafe or ill at ease at anytime during an interview. It is important to pick up on these clues, both because the interview situation may have become dangerous and because a woman's discomfort often means that she is not willing or able to be forthright.

Occurrences or discussion topics that can change the nature of an interview include:

- someone entering the room or walking by;
- questions that make her suspicious or nervous of interviewer's intentions, such as requests for specific names or addresses or questions about her family or her age; or
- interviewer's loss of confidence or show of anxiety.

## Recommendations

It is important to watch for clues that indicate that the respondent no longer feels at ease or wishes to terminate the discussion. If there are noticeable differences in her behaviour or the way she answers questions, consider the possibility that something during the interview triggered the change in her demeanour or willingness to respond.

Be prepared to change the subject of the conversation, to carry out an emergency break or closure to a meeting if the interview conditions become unsafe, privacy is interrupted, or the woman or the interpreter signal there is a problem.

If questionnaires or interview guidelines are being used, the interviewer should have a short diversionary questionnaire on another subject – for example health, cultural practices, or gender – that can be brought out if it is needed. The subject can then be changed quickly to a non-controversial topic. The respondent should be informed of this safety tactic at the beginning of the interview, and of the subject of the diversionary questionnaire so that she is prepared to answer different questions or change the subject if she feels uneasy at any point.

## Stage four: closing the interview

### Close an interview in a positive way

#### Risks

Trafficking can cause a range of strong emotional and psychological reactions. After discussing their experience, some women will feel relieved to have talked about it, while others will feel worse about themselves, their situation, and their future. It is important not to leave a woman feeling ashamed and hopeless.

Be prepared to change the subject of the conversation, to carry out an emergency break or closure to a meeting if the interview conditions become unsafe, privacy is interrupted, or the woman or the interpreter signal there is a problem.

**Sample closing statement:**

**“Thank you very much for taking the time and having the strength to tell me about your experiences. Nobody deserves to be treated the way that you have been treated and you are clearly a strong and courageous woman to have survived these abuses.”**

**Recommendations**

Whenever possible, interviews should end in a positive manner.<sup>10</sup> The interviewer may remind the woman of how well she coped in such difficult circumstances, perhaps using specific examples from her narrative, and that the information that she provided will be used to help others.

For respondents who are not already under the care of professionals, or for those who need further assistance, interviewers should offer referral information (see 3, below) and let the respondent know that these services will be there if and when she is ready to use them.

**3. PREPARE REFERRAL INFORMATION - DO NOT MAKE PROMISES THAT YOU CANNOT FULFILL**

**Be prepared to provide information in a woman's native language and the local language (if different) about appropriate legal, health, shelter, social support and security services, and to help with referral, if requested.**

**3.1 IDENTIFYING AVAILABLE RESOURCES AND SUPPORT SERVICES****Risks**

Trafficked women rarely have the possibility to access information that can benefit their health and safety. When working with extremely disadvantaged individuals, an interviewer is responsible for providing information, as well as collecting it. An interview situation is a good opportunity for a woman to obtain information. This may be life-saving assistance and is an important responsibility of the interviewer.

**Recommendations**

Be "resource-ready." By offering referral information to support services an interviewer may provide vital sources of help, and simultaneously increase the level of trust and confidence the woman feels with the interviewer.

One can encourage a woman to seek help by assuring her that what has happened to her is not her fault and that she is not to blame.

Information should be presented in a concise and clear way. The interviewer should confirm with the woman that she has understood the information and ask whether she has any further questions. Where safe and appropriate, this information should be offered in written form.

## 3.2 MAKING CONTACT AND KNOWING THE ORGANIZATIONS ON YOUR REFERRAL LIST

### Risks

Many organizations will not be willing or able to provide appropriate information or assistance to women who have been trafficked.

### Recommendations

Before any organization is included in a referral list, the interviewer should make certain that the organization's services are legitimate and appropriate. Prior to conducting interviews, the interviewer should speak with potential service providers to identify how well they will be able to meet the needs of a trafficked woman.

The interviewer should notify the organization that their contact details may be offered to trafficked women.

In locations where there are no support services, it is necessary to be resourceful and identify a number of related or appropriate organizations that are sensitive and willing to provide different services to women in need. They may need to be briefed on the nature of the problem of trafficking and the possible range of assistance that might be required of them.

## 3.3 BEING DISCREET WHEN PROVIDING REFERRAL INFORMATION

### Risks

If referral information is found in a woman's possession they may be in danger from pimps, agents or employers or, if at home, they may have problems with family members.

### Recommendations

It is useful to have contact information for referral services written on a small card that a woman may take with her after the interview and keep hidden for future reference if and when she decides she needs it. Information should be in the woman's own language and in the local language, if different, so she may get assistance contacting the service. As much as possible, information should be provided for a range of services. The card can contain addresses and numbers without necessarily stating what it is for. Some women may not wish to accept the card or the information.

Resources that can be useful to women who have been trafficked include contact information for:

- Local organizations specializing in working with trafficked women, including hours and procedure for making contact
- Organizations specializing in working with trafficked women in relevant home countries
- Free health services (general practice, reproductive health, hospital and mental services, where available)
- Sources of advice on housing and other social services
- Legal aid/ immigration advice services
- Country embassies
- Shelter services
- Local churches/ community support organizations
- Language training centres
- Non-governmental organizations in the women's home country

#### 4. ADEQUATELY SELECT AND PREPARE INTERPRETERS AND CO-WORKERS

Weigh the risks and benefits associated with employing interpreters, co-workers or others, and develop adequate methods for screening and training.

### 4.1 CONSIDERING THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF WORKING WITH INTERPRETERS AND OTHERS

#### Risks

Involving others, such as interpreters and hired interviewers, to assist with interviews or to process confidential information poses a risk if the selected individuals are not screened carefully. It is necessary to make certain they have no involvement with any trafficking agents, and to assess whether they are fully prepared to work on such a sensitive subject.

It is of serious concern if co-workers do not understand the dangers associated with breaches of confidentiality, have sloppy interview practices or lax security.

Interpreters and co-workers who do not appreciate the importance of posing questions and responding to a woman in sensitive ways may not elicit full and honest responses, and may cause her to feel hurt or insulted.

Interpreters and interviewers who speak the same language may make the respondent feel more at ease, and thus help to build trust. However, it can also have the opposite effect. Women may not trust, or may feel ashamed speaking in front of someone from their community or same cultural background. Some women feel more embarrassed to talk about stigmatizing subjects (e.g. sex work, sexual abuse) that are proscribed in her culture in front of someone from the same culture and instilled with the same moral codes. Moreover, less discreet interpreters or co-workers may treat a woman's responses as good local gossip. Whether interviewing in a woman's native country or in a destination country, local gossip can travel fast and furiously. Unless an interpreter's background and circle of contacts can be assessed, there is no assurance that information will not be leaked to the wrong places.

Interviews with trafficked women are often time-restricted - both for her safety and for her emotional well-being. Interviews in translation take longer, prolonging the period of time the woman may be put at risk, and the time she may re-experience distressing events.

#### Recommendations

- Work with an interpreter or individual from a local organization familiar with working with females who have experienced violence, and an individual that

#### What to know about referral services

- The forms of support each is willing and able to provide.
- The limitations related to service provision (e.g. woman's legal status, ability to pay).
- Whether they have legal reporting requirements in cases of abuse, abuse of minors, or illegal migrants.
- Whether they have a supportive attitude towards migrants, sex workers, and other relevant marginalised individuals.
- Whether they are able to meet various language or interpreting needs.
- What information or sensitisation they might need or want if they have not worked with trafficked women before.

is not from her home community, unless the respondent indicates otherwise.

- Ask the respondent privately if she has a trusted friend or colleague who she prefers to assist her during the interview. Be sure that the selected individual understands the purpose of the interview and freely consents to assist.
- Do not accept unknown volunteer interpreters, as they may be involved in the trafficking situation, or may have something to gain by participating in the interview.
- If available, “cultural mediators” or those who can bridge the gap between the backgrounds of the interviewer and the respondent are important facilitators for complex discussions.
- Assess the situation. For the variety of reasons listed above, at times it may be better not to conduct an interview if it can only be done with an interpreter or an individual that cannot be trusted.
- Don't employ an interpreter or individual who may be judgmental or shocked, or offended by the information that the woman reveals. Interpreters and co-workers should be fully briefed about the subject of trafficking and the range of physical and sexual abuse that often accompanies it.
- Schedule time for debriefing sessions with interpreters and co-workers who may be upset or adversely affected by an interview.

## 4.2 CONSIDERING THE ISSUES RELATED TO EMPLOYING A MALE INTERPRETER OR INTERVIEWER

### Risks

In some cases, such as interviewing women in sex work, male interviewers may have easier, less conspicuous access. However, in many cases involving trafficking, respondents have been betrayed, physically or sexually abused by men (i.e. family members, agents, employers, military), and may mistrust, feel ill at ease, or embarrassed to disclose personal details to a man.

### Recommendations

In circumstances where it is impossible to safely contact a woman in prostitution outside her place of work, it can sometimes be useful for a man to make the initial approach, provided the woman is quickly fully informed of his purpose for being there.

In some cases, a woman may prefer to speak to a male, believing that another woman will be more judgemental, more condemning than a man or because the trafficked woman has been abused or exploited by a woman. Whenever possible, a respondent should be asked if she has a preference.

In one case in the USA, authorities unknowingly used the trafficker as the interpreter to interview several trafficked women about an alleged suicide of a young girl. The man told the authorities that he was their uncle. Months later, after an anonymous tip, the police returned to interview the women with a neutral interpreter and were told a very different story.

### 4.3 CONSIDERING THE PHYSICAL SAFETY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF CO-WORKERS AND INTERVIEWERS

#### Risks

Conducting an interview with a trafficked woman can put an interviewer in danger from trafficking agents or others involved in a respondent's work or social network.

Interviews with trafficked women can also take an emotional toll on interviewers. Emotional exhaustion or anxiety is a common response to listening to respondents' personal histories of abuse and trauma. Interviewers may be unprepared for these feelings of distress and need support in dealing with them.

An interviewer's own personal history of abuse or discrimination can affect the way an interviewer is affected by a respondent's story. For some interviewers, hearing these stories may bring up strong memories of past abuse and emotions that are not only distressing, but may prevent the interviewer from carrying out a thorough and unbiased interview.

Interviewers may encounter feelings of helplessness, or conversely, may wish to adopt the role of "saviour." In the first instance, the interviewer may avoid offering any help, believing that the woman's problems are too enormous and the interviewer's resources too insignificant, while, in the second, the interviewer may make unrealistic promises.

#### Recommendations

- If at any time before or during the interview, the interviewer or respondent feels the selected location is unsafe, the interview should not take place or should be terminated until a safe location can be identified. If it is possible to reschedule the interview, it is often best to choose a venue different from the original one.
- If interviewers are going to conduct an interview alone in a high-risk location, an interviewer should make certain that an outside contact person knows where she/he is going, what time she/he is conducting the interview, and what time she/he expects to complete the interview. Arrangements should be made to get in touch with the outside contact person once the interviewer is safely out of the interview location.

An inexperienced interviewer, working in a foreign language through an interpreter, began to giggle during an interview. She did this not out of malice, but because of nervousness. This reaction distressed the young woman being interviewed who believed that the interviewer was laughing at her.

Where mobile phones are available, it is a good idea for interviewers to carry them.

- If the woman has information that is sensitive and may cause danger to the interviewer (e.g. details about the perpetrators, corruption of officials, police), the interviewer should, in a tactful manner, dissuade the woman from communicating it, while suggesting the appropriate individuals or office to whom this information may be given or sent.
- Interviewers and interpreters should receive special training or background information about:
  - dynamics of trafficking in women;
  - the risks and safety and emergency procedures;
  - basic introduction to issues around physical, sexual and psychological abuse, coercion and torture;
  - basic understanding of gender and ethnic discrimination and inequality;
  - issues and concepts related to the labour sector that is the subject of the interview, such as sex work and prostitution, domestic service, factory labour, agricultural labour; and
  - local terminology appropriate to the subject.
- What generally amount to "victim-blaming" attitudes are often part of the culture at large, and can affect an interviewer's ability to get full disclosure from the respondent, as well as impact the way the responses are received and interpreted.

Consequently, interviewers must confront their own biases, fears and stereotypes regarding women who are:

- migrants;
  - sexually abused;
  - sex workers, or engaged in other socially marginalized forms of labour (i.e. domestic work, factory or agricultural labour); and
  - poor or socially and economically disadvantaged.
- Interviewers must recognize their capabilities and limitations to assist women who have been trafficked.

For some interviewers, hearing these stories may bring up strong memories of past abuse and emotions that are not only distressing but may prevent the interviewer from carrying out a thorough and unbiased interview.

A film director made a documentary about trafficking in women in which he used the testimonies of several trafficked women. The director initially intended only to air the film abroad. However, it was soon broadcast on national television and the women's faces were shown in full.

## 5. ENSURE ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Protect a respondent's identity and confidentiality throughout the entire interview process – from the moment she is contacted through the time that details of her case are made public.

### 5.1 ENSURING CONFIDENTIALITY

#### Risks

Protecting confidentiality is essential to ensuring both a woman's safety and the quality of the information she provides.

#### Recommendations

- Begin an interview by explaining the precautions being taken to protect a woman's identity and to keep her personal details strictly confidential. Ask her if she feels these are adequate.
- Women should be informed that they do not have to give their name (or may offer a false name), hometown or village, or their true nationality. If it is necessary to collect any of these details (i.e. law-related interview), it is best if this information is not written directly on the interview notes. Instead, codes may be used to link the notes with the respondent and kept separately from the file notes. File information should not be shown to others, (e.g. family, friends, police, immigration) without her informed and explicit permission.
- Contents of individual interviews should only be discussed with others who are bound by the same duty of confidentiality (co-workers, medical personnel), and then only when necessary and only once the woman's permission has been granted. Interview contents should never be discussed in public, particularly where they can be overheard (e.g. in the presence of taxi drivers or ticket agents, etc., as these individuals may have contacts in trafficking).
- Details from one respondent should never be discussed with any other respondents in a way that would allow the respondent to be identified. Speaking generally about others in similar circumstances is sometimes useful, but should not crossover into personal and identifying information.
- Where tapes are made, no names but identifying codes should be used. Tapes should be kept in a locked file with access restricted to identified people and erased following transcription.
- For public presentation or release of interview information, personal details should be sufficiently altered so that the respondent cannot be identified. For example, publications should not include names of a woman's hometown, workplace or names of family, friends or co-workers. Destination cities and countries may also be altered.



- Because of the significant and long-term potential consequences of appearing in photographs or film footage, a woman's full face should always be masked (e.g. not only her eyes) and other clearly identifying features may have to be excluded (e.g. scars, tattoos, etc.). In addition, photographs or film footage should only be taken if a woman is informed and it is clear that she fully understands how they will be used, where they will be distributed, and if she gives her written permission. Photographs should not be taken in ways that can identify shelters, refuges or service organizations or persons assisting trafficked women.

## 6. GET INFORMED CONSENT

Make certain that each respondent clearly understands the content and purpose of the interview, the intended use of the information, her right not to answer questions, her right to terminate the interview at any time, and her right to put restrictions on how the information is used.

### 6.1 APPROPRIATE WAYS TO REQUEST CONSENT

#### Risks

Getting truly informed consent can be a challenge because of women's well-founded suspicion of outsiders, and, in many cases, because of language, cultural and socioeconomic differences. Many women, especially those coming from more rural or less developed regions, may not readily recognize the range of potential consequences of taking part in an interview (particularly one that involves the media), and may offer consent too hurriedly.

#### Recommendations

- Because interviews can be both physically dangerous, emotionally distressing, and cannot be retracted once given, it is critical that the interviewer clearly explains:
  - the reason for the interview;
  - the subject matters to be discussed;
  - the potential risk and benefits involved in participating; and
  - the personal, and possibly upsetting, nature of questions that may be asked.

If a woman has a full understanding of the intentions of the interviewer and purpose of the questions, she is less likely to suspect that information she provides will be used against her or will cause her harm.

In a documentary film on trafficking in women the faces of the women were not sufficiently masked and left the women easily identifiable. One of the women had, until then, successfully maintained the secret of her nightmarish months abroad from her parents and from her husband.

### Example of informed consent request

We are conducting research on the health of women who have been trafficked for *[name of organization]* in order to identify better ways to provide health services. We would like to talk to you about *[state general topic to be discussed]* and to ask you questions about *[list key subjects that will be covered, including sensitive information that will be requested]*.

I won't ask your name. Everything you tell me will be kept strictly secret. No identifying personal details will be revealed. I will not use your name, the name of your hometown, your trafficker's name, or specific details about your family. There are no wrong or right answers. You may find some of the questions bring up difficult memories and you should feel free to take your time answering or to decline to answer, if you wish. Your responses about your experiences will be used to help other women who have had similar experiences and health needs.

We have discussed the potential risks and benefits, such as *[review risks and benefits mentioned during prior discussion of risks and benefits]* and ways we can limit these risks, such as *[review ideas for limiting risks mentioned during prior discussion of risks]*.

You don't have to participate if you don't wish to. If you agree to proceed, you may choose to stop the interview at anytime, or if you don't wish to answer a question or would like to ask me a question, please feel free to stop me. This interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

Do you agree to be interviewed?

Is this a good time and place to talk?

- It is best if the initial request for an interview with a respondent comes from someone she trusts, for example, a service organization or individual with whom she has developed a good relationship who can explain to her the range of potential negative and positive consequences of the interview. (This initial request is only a means of safely contacting the woman and is not a substitute for the request and full consent process that must be carried out by the interviewer herself prior to the interview). Given the dynamics of trafficking and the role of "boyfriends", they are not generally a good choice of intermediary. Requests to a club or brothel owner may put a woman in an untenable situation, arouse suspicions and are usually unlikely to yield very forthcoming responses. Similarly, contact with women through police or immigration is likely to make a woman nervous and elicit guarded, if not false, responses. (Interviews with women in detention pose other significant problems that will not be discussed here).
- Prepare a clear statement that describes the subject and purpose of the interview, and how her responses will be used. Go through the statement verbally with her allowing time to ask questions or clarify individual points.
- Discuss risks in a systematic way (see 1.1 *Deciding to conduct an interview*, Box: "Sample questions that may be asked to assess security"). Talk about potential benefits (e.g. opportunity to discuss her experience, relate her problems or needs, to help other women) and what she expects from the interview (e.g. assistance or payment.)
- In cases where the respondent's first language is not that of the interviewer, ensuring that the consent given is truly informed usually requires additional measures, such as preparing an information sheet in her first language. This should not be left with her, as it may be discovered by others.
- Decisions about paying for interviews are difficult. Fees paid for an interview can sometimes cast doubt on the veracity of the information collected, especially if the sums offered are significant. On the other hand, it is important to compensate women for time, lost earnings, and other costs incurred, such as travel or childcare. Because undeclared money (such as gratuities) found by employers, pimps or traffickers can be a cause for punishment, it is important to discuss with the woman how best to compensate her. It is useful to ask whether it is safe for her to accept a cash payment or whether she prefers compensation in material terms (e.g. items for personal hygiene, soap, shampoo, condoms, food, clothing, other), or money sent to her family or given to a trusted contact. Payments to pimps, madams, brothel owners, police, etc. for access to speak to women are ethically problematic, may cause problems for the woman, will likely arouse her doubts and concerns about the interviewer's intentions, and are therefore not recommended.
- Where possible (i.e. it is safe, desired by respondent), offer to arrange to provide feedback (e.g. newspaper article, research findings, program leaflet) to her if she feels it would be safe to meet again at a later date.

## **7. LISTEN TO AND RESPECT EACH WOMAN'S ASSESSMENT OF HER SITUATION AND RISKS TO HER SAFETY**

**Recognize that each woman will have different concerns, and that the way she views her concerns may be different from how others might assess them.**

Assistance options should be described in a neutral way and the interviewer should not overstate the degree or likelihood of the assistance.

### **7.1 OFFERING ADVICE OR ASSISTANCE**

#### **Risks**

With good intentions, an interviewer may think she knows what is best for a woman and decide to make recommendations, take action, or push a woman to take action that the interviewer believes will improve her situation. Well-intentioned urgings or actions (e.g. escape traffickers, contact the authorities, discuss matters that she is not yet ready to reveal) when not preceded by a thorough discussion with a woman about her situation can result in harmful consequences.

#### **Recommendations**

Before any advice is offered or intervention put into action, a discussion must take place that includes how the woman sees her situation, what she believes her options to be, how she perceives the potential risks and benefits of various options, and what she believes to be the best time to make any proposed changes. Whenever possible, it is also useful to consult professionals experienced in dealing with trafficked women to solicit their advice. In addition, asking a woman about the coping or survival strategies she has been employing up until this moment to avert harm can help the interviewer better understand the practical realities of a woman's situation. This type of inquiry also serves to remind the woman of her strengths.

If an interviewer believes she has advice to offer a woman, assistance options should be described in a neutral way and the interviewer should not overstate the degree or likelihood of the assistance. Options should be presented in a dispassionate manner, in a way that does not make the woman feel stupid or ungrateful if she does not wish to accept them. Recommendations should highlight the risks and recognize the benefits.

It is not uncommon for interviewers who meet a woman in a trafficking situation to consider rescuing her. Unprofessional or informal rescues are a high-risk option that often prove unsatisfactory to the rescuee because she was not fully cognisant of the range of probable consequences of leaving her current situation.

### Issues to consider and discuss with a woman who is thinking about leaving a trafficking situation:

- The importance of planning ahead.
- Practical options of where she can stay, how she will support herself.
- Who will come looking for her and how serious they will be in pursuit of her or her family.
- Her psychological state and support she will need.
- Her dependency relationship with pimp, owner, etc., and who will provide this support once she is out.
- The practical consequences (immigration status, possibility of return to family, physical safety, loneliness, fear and mental health support).

These may include:

- risks of retribution to family at home;
- public recognition, possibly condemnation of what may be viewed as her choices, her actions;
- doubts over her motives, credibility and character;
- problems with immigration and deportation;
- inability to repay a debt;
- need to remain under the direction and supervision of a shelter or refuge;
- obligation to sever all ties with pimp-boyfriend;
- requirement to provide police evidence or testify in open court;
- detention, arrest, criminal conviction (e.g. immigration violations, employment violations); and
- non-voluntary or poorly counselled HIV/AIDS or other medical testing.

After any discussion of the options for action has taken place, the interviewer should convey the referral information she has prepared in a clear and precise manner and allow the woman the time and space to make her own decisions.

## 7.2 RESPECTING A WOMAN'S CHOICES REGARDING HER SITUATION

### Risks

Even women in the most abysmal circumstances may choose to refuse offers of help. Offers of medical assistance, provision of goods or gifts, or rescue operations often seem tempting to those wishing to “do something.” As noted above, a woman's consent is essential before any action is taken on her behalf.

### Recommendations

In addition to decisions about whether to agree to be interviewed, a woman's choices regarding whether to respond to a health concern, talk about her feelings, escape her situation, or other personal matters must be respected – no matter how dangerous or abusive the situation may seem to the interviewer.

Unsolicited rescues, contact with authorities, contact with family, passing of information to counsellors, etc. are not necessarily appreciated – or in the best interest of the woman. For example, in many countries contacting the police means alerting the very agents who put her in the situation in the first place. However, assistance that is provided appropriately can be life-saving. (See 9. *Be prepared for emergency intervention*).

**8. DO NOT RE-TRAUMATIZE A WOMAN**

Do not ask questions intended to provoke an emotionally charged response. Be prepared to respond to a woman's distress and highlight her strengths.

**8.1 AVOIDING RE-TRAUMATISING A WOMAN****Risks**

Asking a woman to talk about experiences that were frightening, humiliating and painful can cause extreme anxiety. Many women feel ashamed of what they have done or what has happened to them. A woman's distress from an interview may occur during an interview, but may also emerge before or after. For many women it is stressful to anticipate an interview about their experiences. Women may also review and regret what they have recounted long after an interview has ended. For some, the entire process is traumatic.

**Recommendations**

- Questions should never be designed to provoke a strong or emotional reaction.
- Questions that will evidently cause distress or force a woman to reveal traumatic details unnecessary to understanding her experience should be excluded.
- Questions that insinuate negative judgements about a woman's decision, her actions or impugn her character should not be posed, e.g. *What will your parents think of what you did? Do you think you are an immoral person? or Why did you agree to do those things?*

It is important to recognize that many women will experience some level of stress or discomfort when discussing certain issues. Yet for many it can also be therapeutic to discuss these issues and to be listened to. It is therefore important to recognize that asking a woman to share information on a sensitive subject and then interrupting her story or expressions of emotion before she has had a chance to complete her thoughts can be upsetting. However, if the woman becomes very distressed or overwhelmed (for example, displaying some of the following symptoms: trembling or shaking, crying uncontrollably, severe headache pain, dizziness, nausea, difficulty breathing or catching her breath, sudden appearance of a rash or becoming flushed), it is best to inquire whether she prefers to carry on, change the subject, or terminate the interview.

- Questions should be asked in a supportive, non-judgmental manner and responses affirmed supportively.
- The interviewer should allow the respondent to direct the pace and the direction of the interview.

Anya was working as a sex worker pimped by her boyfriend. Journalist M posed as a client. Once M gained her trust, he revealed that he was a journalist and offered to help "rescue" her. The journalist filmed the "rescue" of Anya, showing her leaving her work venue and slipping into the journalist's car. The journalist arranged a session with a counsellor, and found a room for her in a hotel miles away from the counsellor and anyone she knew. She remained there without friends, a job or legal permission to be in the country. Before the film went on air, Anya disappeared. She reportedly returned to her pimp-boyfriend. In the end, it seems that the film-makers were not able to offer Anya a viable alternative to her previous situation, perhaps making her believe that she was best off with him. When the film aired, the film-makers took pains to cover Anya's face, but continued to use her working alias, clearly identified her workplace, and directly confronted and filmed her pimp-boyfriend numerous times.

Two women who agreed to participate in a study on trafficking travelled from their home city to the capital city on an overnight train for the interview, and for the opportunity to shop and sightsee in the capital that they had never visited. By the time they arrived, having had more than twelve hours to anticipate the recounting of their experience in such a formal setting to individuals they had never met, both women exhibited signs of extreme stress and anxiety, and subsequently the interviews had to be cut short.

- Visual and oral responses should be empathetic, non-judgemental, and supportive.
- The interviewer should react to distress by offering to pause or take a break.
- An interviewer should show concern and remind the woman of her strength and intelligence for having survived such difficult events.
- It is always up to the respondent whether or not to proceed. While many women who become emotional will choose to proceed, some will not. An interviewer should never push a distressed respondent to continue. Similarly, if a respondent wishes to continue speaking even after the interviewer has completed her questions, the interviewer should remain an active and interested listener.
- Be aware that for many women who are away from home talking about family, especially speaking about their children, can be upsetting. This is particularly true for those who have not seen their children for a long time and are not sure when or if they will see them again. Be particularly sensitive with questions in this area.

**9. BE PREPARED FOR EMERGENCY INTERVENTION**  
Be prepared to respond if a woman says she is in imminent danger.

## 9.1 RESPONDING TO A WOMAN WHO ASKS FOR URGENT OR IMMEDIATE HELP

### Risks

When interviewing a victim of human rights violations, such as trafficking, urgent requests for immediate assistance are not infrequent. Offering help can be life-saving and is an ethical and moral duty. But offering assistance in the wrong way or at the wrong time can backfire or those promising assistance may be unwilling or unable to follow through.

### Recommendations

- The request for help should immediately take precedence over the interview.
- The interviewer should ask questions to elicit the woman's understanding of the dangers she faces, what she perceives as her options, and what her hopes and expectations are from any assistance.

- Discussion of options must be realistic, not overstated. The interviewer should discuss the support options that may be available, making an attempt to help her consider the benefits and risks of each.
- The interviewer should make every attempt to assist the respondent to access the appropriate resource (e.g. phone the service, escort her there).

**Actions that are generally unwise or unsafe are:**

- making a “run for it” with her;
- taking the woman into the interviewer’s home;
- escorting the respondent back to her home or place of work to pick up her belongings; or
- assisting the respondent to discuss any matters with her employer, boyfriend, agent, co-worker, etc., or acting as an intermediary in any way.

## **9.2 BEING PREPARED TO FOLLOW-UP ON INTERVENTION EFFORTS**

### **Risks**

Personal intervention efforts are rarely a one-step process, but nearly always necessitate many practical follow-up activities. Particularly in the case of rescue attempts, the escape is often the easiest part and the follow-up logistics and care for the woman are complicated and essential.

### **Recommendations**

It is rare that all that a woman needs is to be “set free,” particularly when she is in a foreign country. Before considering assisting in an “escape,” all of the risks, obstacles, and numerous and complicated steps following the “rescue” must be considered so that the woman does not end up in a worse situation, or is ultimately forced to return to her captor. A woman who has been trafficked is rarely in a position to identify and access all of the services and assistance she will require to move beyond the trafficking experience. In some cases, helping a woman to leave an exploitative situation can involve a phone call to a professional organization experienced in assisting trafficked women. More often, however, it involves identifying secure housing, sources of income, medical treatment, psychological counselling, and legal representation for immigration or other matters.



Ethnic minority women trafficked to a neighbouring country were returned to soldiers from their home country who subsequently raped them.

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During a brothel raid in an Asian country, while police entered the premises through the front door, several other police officers who regularly received bribes from the brothel owner ushered the brothel owner and many of the women out the back door.

### 9.3 ISSUES RELATED TO CONTACTING AUTHORITIES

#### Risks

Most women will be reluctant to be in contact with authorities. They fear being deported, worry that officials, such as police, will be corrupt or treat them in a hostile and unhelpful manner. In many cases, their apprehension will not be unfounded. Authorities in destination countries can detain, imprison or deport women who have been living or working illegally in the country. They may also pressure them to testify against traffickers, despite the dangers the women may face as a result of cooperating. To contact an official in some countries may mean putting the woman back in the hands of the trafficking agents. In many poor countries, the police, military and immigration officials – and even embassy and consular officials – are part of the trafficking rings, collaborate with traffickers, or at least receive bribes for their cooperation.

#### Recommendations

- Before contacting any authorities, make certain that this is what the woman wants.
- Discuss the potential benefits and risks of contacting an official and what different authorities may be able to provide (e.g. escape from a workplace, prosecute employers or traffickers, extension of visa, permit to remain).
- Try to identify sympathetic officials and establish a working relationship with them.
- Before identifying the respondent to an authority, find out what the officials realistically can and will do for her. Find out her legal rights and discuss them with her (i.e. based on her immigration status, her willingness or not to testify, witness protection, her desire to remain in the country or return home).



**10. PUT INFORMATION COLLECTED TO GOOD USE**

Use information in a way that benefits an individual woman or that advances the development of good policies and interventions for trafficked women generally.

**10.1 USING INFORMATION IN AN ETHICAL WAY****Risks**

Interviewing a victim of human rights abuses is not an ethically neutral undertaking. The experiences related by a woman who has been trafficked should be gathered for a purpose. The enormous personal, social and health-related costs of trafficking in women places a moral obligation on the interviewer to make certain that the information collected is used to benefit an individual respondent or brought to the attention to policy-makers and advocates – ideally both.

**Recommendations**

- Involving women's rights advocates or direct service groups is not only a good way to ensure that interviews are safe, interview techniques and interpretation are sound, and support systems are in place, but it can also help ensure in practical ways that the information collected is relevant.
- Importantly, interviewers must be certain that any information released publicly (e.g. reports, news releases, public statements, etc.) is not misinterpreted, and does not fuel prejudices or stereotypes that inflame or incite public opinion against trafficked women.

**GOOD USE**

Research in Greece was used to draft a legal commentary on a proposed anti-trafficking law and argue for improvements to the protection provisions for trafficked women.

**GOOD USE**

Multi-country research on victim protection is being used as the basis for a series of training of officials on care and treatment of trafficked women.

**GOOD USE**

Interviews with NGO workers broadcast on television in Ukraine fostered calls from mothers looking for daughters who had been trafficked. This helped secure the release of at least one young woman trapped in a brothel in Italy.

**BAD USE**

One documentary film-maker discovered that a woman had been trafficked into sex work and was subsequently murdered. The woman had never told her family about her work, but claimed instead that she was engaged to marry a German man. After her death, the film-maker filmed the reactions of the woman's son and her mother in their home as the film-maker informed them that, in fact, the woman had been killed while working as a prostitute.

## CONCLUSION

The recommendations detailed in this document reflect current knowledge about the ethical and safety considerations to be addressed when interviewing women in a trafficking situation and women who have left such a situation. However, trafficking in women is a crime that is constantly changing in its patterns and profiles. The fluid dynamics and the special nature of trafficking and its consequences demand that individuals carrying out interviews regularly update themselves with the most recent information available so that clear plans to protect a woman's well-being are in place before, during and after an interview. In many cases this means that the interview process will take a longer time, demand more background research and preparation time, and require greater sensitivity to individuals and their situations. In addition, substantial consideration needs to be given to the appropriate release of information. By following these recommendations and always prioritising the safety of women, those requesting interview-based information and those conducting interviews can make significant contributions to the public recognition of this serious violation and to the quality of care for trafficked women.

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