

Deconstructing Reintegration Services for Survivors of Human Trafficking: A Feminist Analysis of Australian and Thai Government and Non-Government Responses

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Abstract : Awareness of the tragedy that is human trafficking has increased exponentially over the past two decades. The four pillars widely recognised as global solutions to the problem are prevention, prosecution, protection, and partnership between government and non-government organisations. While 'sex-trafficking' initially received major attention, this focus has shifted to other industries that conceal broader experiences of exploitation. However, within the regions of focus for this study, namely Australia and Thailand, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation remains the commonly uncovered narrative of criminal justice investigations. In these regions anti-trafficking action is characterised by government-led prevention and prosecution efforts; whereas protection and reintegration practices have received criticism. Typically, non-government organisations straddle the critical chasm between policy and practice; therefore, they are perfectly positioned to contribute valuable experiential knowledge toward understanding how both sectors can support survivors in the post-trafficking experience. The aim of this research is to inform improved partnerships throughout government and non-government post-trafficking services by illuminating gaps in protection and reintegration initiatives. This research will explore government and non-government responses to human trafficking in Thailand and Australia, in order to understand how meaning is constructed in this context and how the construction of meaning effects survivors in the post-trafficking experience. A qualitative, three-stage methodology was adopted for this study. The initial stage of enquiry consisted of a discursive analysis, in order to deconstruct the broader discourses surrounding human trafficking. The data included empirical papers, grey literature such as publicly available government and non-government reports, and anti-trafficking policy documents. The second and third stages of enquiry will attempt to further explore the findings of the discourse analysis and will focus more specifically on protection and reintegration in Australia and Thailand. Stages two and three will incorporate process observations in government and non-government survivor support services, and semi-structured interviews with employees and volunteers within these settings. Two key findings emerged from the discursive analysis. The first exposed conflicting feminist arguments embedded throughout anti-trafficking discourse. Informed by conflicting feminist discourses on sex-work, a discursive relationship has been constructed between sex-industry policy and anti-trafficking policy. In response to this finding, data emerging from the process observations and semi-structured interviews will be interpreted using a feminist theoretical framework. The second finding progresses from the construction in the first. The discursive construction of sex-trafficking appears to have had influence over perceptions of the legitimacy of survivors, and therefore the support they receive in the post-trafficking experience. For example; women who willingly migrate for employment in the sex-industry, and on arrival are faced with exploitative conditions, are not perceived to be deserving of the same support as a woman who is not coerced, but rather physically forced, into such circumstances, yet both meet the criteria for a victim of human trafficking. The forthcoming study is intended to contribute toward building knowledge and understanding around the implications of the construction of legitimacy; and contextualise this in reference to government led protection and reintegration support services for survivors in the post-trafficking experience.

Keywords : Australia, government, human trafficking, non-government, reintegration, Thailand

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