

“Out of the frying pan, into the fire”:
Support workers’ understanding of
trafficking returnees’ experiences in Vietnam
and their perception of two national gender
equality policies (2011-2020) that aim to
reduce human trafficking

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A thesis Submitted to Auckland University of Technology in fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

2025

School of Social Sciences and Public Policy

Abstract

Human trafficking and gender equality are interrelated issues, both covered by extensive research. In Vietnam, trafficking presents complex challenges. According to the Global Organized Crime Index (2023), Vietnam has been a source, destination, and transit country for human trafficking for over two decades. Women and children from ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged backgrounds are especially vulnerable. Vietnamese women, particularly underage girls, are significantly represented in the regional and global sex industries (Global Organized Crime Index, 2023). However, little is known about how national gender equality policies have affected trafficked women and potential trafficking targets in Vietnam in the last decade. This study seeks to address this knowledge gap. Using interview narratives gathered from 23 support workers, the research explores trafficked individuals' experiences and the impact of the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2011-2020) and the National Plan on Gender Equality (2016-2020) on human trafficking.

The research employs an emancipatory and intersectional perspective to explore the experiences of trafficked individuals in Vietnam through qualitative narrative inquiry. This research underscores the significance of an intersectional approach in studying human trafficking, revealing how multiple social identities - such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, and legal status - intersect to shape vulnerabilities, trafficking experiences, and reintegration challenges. Moving beyond a feminist-only lens, it advances scholarly discourse by highlighting structural barriers and compounding inequalities. By integrating theoretical and practical insights, this study informs more inclusive research frameworks and policies, fostering sustainable and context-specific support for trafficking survivors.

Data were collected via critical document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The data collection occurred in 2021, meaning that it was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns and travel restrictions. All interviews had to take place online which limited the data collection; with only support workers participating. The originally planned interviews with trafficked returnees had to be abandoned for ethical reasons but future research should include these voices.

The data was thematically analysed to (1) identify the main causes of human trafficking in Vietnam, (2) chart the most common trafficking experiences of Vietnamese returnees, and (3) identify obstacles to returnees' reintegration and solutions to overcome them.

The following key themes emerged from the study. In Vietnam, societal shame over unmet marriage expectations relates to becoming a victim of human trafficking, exacerbating the risk for women and girls. Women experience dual exploitation (sex work and labour) and face complex control tactics during trafficking. If they have children with their exploiters (forced marriage), motherhood may influence their

decision to stay in the trafficking situation. Remaining in a trafficking situation for a prolonged time results in the loss of both cultural identity and development opportunities, such as education. When women returnees attempt to reintegrate, stigma and insufficient resources are the main obstacles. The participant quote, “Out of the frying pan [trafficking situation], into the fire [stigmatizing by family and community]”, summarizes the dilemma women returnees find themselves in well. For women returnees, the stigma diminishes the prospects of marriage - a vital goal in Vietnamese culture. The repercussions of stigmatisation vary depending on whether returnees establish a new life away from their home community or remain within it, necessitating tailored support services based on their chosen settlement location. However, support from family and the community offers the greatest benefits for returnees if it is free of stigma. It is also a more cost-effective solution than supporting returnees away from their community of origin, making the home community the preferred location for healing.

Overall, the study emphasises that empowering trafficked women is crucial for successful reintegration and human trafficking prevention. While gender equality policies partly address the root causes of human trafficking and contribute to the successful reintegration of trafficked returnees, they fall short in one key area. This limitation revolves around the lack of community-wide awareness about returnees’ post-trafficking challenges and needs, particularly regarding stigma reduction. Creating a stigma-free environment, where returnees are supported by their families and the entire community, emerges as a promising solution to empower women and address both sets of obstacles: stigmatisation and insufficient resources.

The thesis meets AUT postgraduate protocols and required word count (60,000–80,000 words, with a 100,000-word maximum excluding bibliographies and appendices). It contains 95,261 words in total (76,916 without references and appendices).

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List of Abbreviations

ACWC	The ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AWID	Association for Women's Rights in Development
CEDAW	The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CGEP	The Country Gender Equality Profile
CTDC	The Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MOLISA	Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NPGE	National Action Program on Gender Equality
NSGE	National Strategy on Gender Equality
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SDGs	Sustainable Developments Goals
UN	United Nations
UNIAP	The United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

Date 03/04/2025

Acknowledgements

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Manaki New Zealand Scholarship for offering me the opportunity to come to Aotearoa New Zealand, stay, study, and conduct this research.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisors, Associate Professor Antje Deckert and Associate Professor Sharyn Graham Davies, who graciously accepted me as a potential PhD candidate when I first reached out. Your dedication, patience, and kindness have been invaluable throughout my journey. At times, you have been like sisters, offering advice and support during challenging moments, including personal issues. Your patience and understanding, coupled with your clear explanations and timely feedback, have been crucial to my progress. I also extend my sincere appreciation to the examiners for their thoughtful and constructive feedback. Their valuable insights have been instrumental in refining my thesis into a stronger, more polished version.

I am deeply grateful to the study participants, especially those who actively introduced me to other potential participants. Your support, experiences, and the stories of trafficked individuals have been invaluable for the completion of this study.

I also wish to thank the staff at AUT, School of Social Sciences and Public Policy, especially Kirsty Whitby, Donna Channings, and Brett Heagren, who have supported me immensely through essential administrative procedures.

My thanks also go to the Scholarship Office at AUT, particularly Sacha Pointon, Petrina Hibben, George Kimani, Prerna Taneja, Sandelyn Agnes Su Kuan Lua, and the other staff members, for their assistance with everything, from transportation and guidance on registration to course commencement and beyond. The activities you organised for AUT scholarship recipients were incredibly supportive and helped me connect with peers. Petrina, thank you for our regular chats, for listening to me, and for your warm wishes and the hand-knitted baby romper you sent when my baby was six months old.

I am also grateful to the People's Police Academy (PPA), my university in Vietnam, for allowing me to pursue this project, for supporting me in connecting with relevant organisations for data collection, and for the procedural support. Special thanks to Anh Logan Cao, Chị Vivian Nguyễn, Em Dũng Bùi, and Chị Thu Hiền for their significant assistance.

To my friends in Vietnam and Aotearoa New Zealand (chị Duyên Đặng, gia đình chị Sóc, gia đình em bé Kiwi,...) thank you for listening and sharing the difficulties and joys of being a doctoral student in a foreign country.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my extended family: my parents (Ba Trần Anh, Mẹ Hồng Tý, Ba Lê Thị, Mẹ Lê Lan), who have unwaveringly supported me; my sisters (Chị Khánh Linh, Mụ Hoài Thanh, Chị Ngọc Cẩm), my brothers (Anh Quốc Dũng, em Ngọc Luân), my nieces (Cún Mai Phương, Mèo Ngọc Linh) and nephews (Bi Gia Huy, Bun Phúc Hưng, Bon Phúc Thịnh, Thanh Sơn) for their pride in my pursuit of this degree; and my husband Lê Ngọc Trung, who has willingly shared in the experience of student life with me over the past four years in New Zealand.

Last but not least, to my beloved three-year-old daughter. You came into our lives as a precious gift. My friends often joke that your presence is my first “PhD degree,” and indeed, you are! You arrived during a challenging time of COVID-19 when feelings of uncertainty were shared by everyone. You were born one day just before I received an email about ethics approval for my data collection. You stayed with me while I conducted interviews online, despite being just three months old. You were an “easy” baby. Your bright, curious, and happy smile brought me peace and restfulness during this challenging journey. While you have undoubtedly occupied my heart and mind, you have been crucial to this study’s completion. I am so proud to have you with me on this special journey, and I look forward to our future journeys together, Lê Ngọc Minh Ân - Uxi.

Introduction

Human trafficking and gender equality are closely linked social issues that have received significant research attention (see, for example, Bump & Gozdzia, 2008; Do & Ma, 2012; Duong, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2020; Perry & McEwing, 2013; Sorensen et al., 2012). In Vietnam, human trafficking is a highly complex problem (Cao, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018; Phạm, 2018; U.S. Department of State, 2016). While research has shown that gender equality can play a crucial role in preventing trafficking, there is still a lack of comprehensive assessment of this relationship within the Vietnamese context.

This study examines the experiences of Vietnamese trafficked individuals and identifies gaps in national gender equality policies (2010–2020) aimed at addressing human trafficking. By analysing the lived experiences of trafficked individuals, particularly women, and evaluating the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2011–2020) and the National Plan on Gender Equality (2016–2020), the research investigates how these policies respond to human trafficking and gender inequality. The research incorporates insights from experts, stakeholders, and support workers to address these issues comprehensively.

The thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the literature that forms the background for the research and reveals the existing knowledge gap that this thesis seeks to address.

Chapter 2 starts with a formulation of the research questions and two sub-questions: What are the experiences of Vietnamese trafficked individuals, and, if any, what gaps in current national gender equality policies (2010-2020) that seek to address human trafficking do they reveal?

The sub-questions guiding this inquiry are:

1. What are the experiences of trafficked individuals in Vietnam, and how do they relate to gender inequality?
2. From the perspectives of relevant stakeholders (NGOs, state agencies, support workers), to what extent have Vietnam's national gender equality policies contributed to addressing human trafficking between 2011 and 2020?

Then, Chapter 2 explains how the study was designed to answer these research questions and, finally, considers the study's limitations. The research employs an emancipatory, intersectional perspective to explore the experiences of trafficked individuals in Vietnam through qualitative narrative inquiry. Data were collected using critical document analysis and semi-structured, in-depth interviews, with thematic analysis applied to interpret the data. Ethical approval from AUTECH was secured before commencing the study. The study includes rich exemplary quotes from participants to elucidate their experiences with additional

quotes provided in the endnotes. The key limitation of this study is the indirect representation of trafficked individuals' voices due to COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions at the time of the fieldwork and related ethical considerations.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 summarise and discuss the findings of this study. Chapter 3 examines the **causes** of human trafficking in Vietnam. Chapter 4 details the trafficking **experiences** of trafficked individuals who have returned to Vietnam. Chapter 5 presents the **challenges and obstacles** related to the reintegration of trafficked individuals in Vietnam and proposes **solutions** for improving the local reintegration and anti-trafficking efforts.

Each of these three chapters starts with a piece of 'Geb's Story', which aims to represent a typical example of a Vietnamese girl who was trafficked and returned to Vietnam. It is a combination of the stories that emerged from the participant interviews for this study. The name Geb was devised as an acronym for "Girls equal boys" – in the spirit of the gender equality policies. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the travel restrictions associated with it, I could not leave New Zealand to undertake my planned fieldwork in Vietnam. Hence, I was restricted to online participant recruitment and interviews. I decided to not – as originally planned – interview trafficking returnees to not risk breaching the first rule of research ethics, i.e., to "do no harm". According to ethical and safety recommendations for interviewing trafficked women, researchers must "[t]reat 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 long term." (World Health Organization et al., 2003, p. 4). I considered the possibility that trafficking returnees may be triggered during the interview. With an online interview, there would have been no opportunity for me to safeguard participants and ensure they get the support they need in such an event. Hence, I opted to only interview practitioners who have experience in supporting trafficking returnees. Unfortunately, that means that my study is unable to centre the direct voices of returnees. To mitigate this shortcoming, I created Geb's story as a case study drawn from participant interviews, which function in this respect as proxy interviews. Geb's story was created with the hope that it might at least illustrate a typical trafficking experience and the human suffering involved. While my study cannot centre returnee voices as I had hoped, Geb's story emphasizes the very personal ordeals and highlights that an individual human being stands behind each case file.

Chapter 6 examines the extent to which gender equality policies in Vietnam help prevent human trafficking by addressing its root causes and facilitating the reintegration of returnees.

Finally, Chapter 7 discusses the research findings overall, highlights the contributions this study is making to the literature, and outlines areas for future research. It finishes with the conclusion that, despite ongoing gender issues, gender equality policies have enhanced women's empowerment in Vietnam by improving

access to education and job opportunities and addressing gender stereotypes and domestic violence. However, these policies only partially address the root causes of human trafficking due to ineffective implementation. Improving policies to focus on empowering women and reducing gender stigma and bias, particularly by increasing community-wide awareness about returnees' needs to reduce stigmatisation, remains crucial for combating human trafficking in the future. The findings suggest that returnees need tailored support based on their resettlement location, i.e., in their community of origin or away from it, with resettlement in a familiar, stigma-free environment being the most effective way to reintegrate returnees and prevent returnees' re-trafficking. In this respect, the study offers a crucial novel insight, namely that positive family and community support promotes returnees' healing and reintegration prospects, which enhances resource efficiency and cost-effectiveness because it reduces the need for additional support services. Therefore, a comprehensive support network involving societal and stakeholder engagement is essential for improved reintegration outcomes. While current gender equality policies provide various essential services to trafficked individuals, they do not sufficiently address the need for community-wide awareness about stigma reduction. Improving these policies to encompass a community-wide understanding of returnees' needs would enhance their effectiveness, improve reintegration outcomes, help prevent (re-)trafficking, and reduce dependence on extensive support resources.

In summary, although current policies in Vietnam emphasise women's empowerment, they do not adequately address some of the systemic inequities. To combat human trafficking effectively, policies must adopt an intersectionally comprehensive approach that addresses entrenched structural inequalities and gender biases. Raising community awareness to eliminate gender role expectations, bias, and stigmatisation is essential for creating an equitable environment for all women and girls and facilitates the healing process for trafficked returnees.

Chapter 1 Literature Review

This chapter provides the background and reasons for conducting the current research. It is divided into five parts. The first part, "Understanding Human Trafficking" defines human trafficking as used in this study and examines the global scope of the crisis. The second part, "Human Trafficking in Vietnam: A Complex Issue," explores the regional context of Vietnam, highlighting the severity of human trafficking. It examines the socioeconomic and structural determinants of trafficking, its scope, prevalence, and various forms, as well as Vietnam's responses to combating this crime. The third part, "Human Trafficking in Vietnam: A Gender-Based Phenomenon," discusses the vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking, emphasising the gender gap as a root cause of human trafficking in Vietnam. The fourth part, "Role of Gender Equality Policy in Anti-Trafficking: A Comprehensive Assessment Needed," examines the crucial role of gender equality policies in anti-trafficking efforts and suggests the need for research on these policies to address the existing research gap in this area. Finally, the fifth part, "Research Gap", identifies limitations in the current literature and outlines the potential contributions of this study in bridging these gaps.

1.1 Understanding Human Trafficking

1.1.1 The Global Crisis of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a severe transnational crime that violates human dignity and exploits millions worldwide. This crime involves the coercion of men, women, and children into forced labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, child begging, and organ removal (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], n.d.). Women and children are disproportionately affected, with children often trafficked for forced begging, child pornography, and hazardous labour. Although men are less frequently recognised as victims, they are also subjected to forced labour and, in some cases, recruited as child soldiers (UNODC, n.d.).

Women and girls remain the primary victims of human trafficking, particularly for sexual exploitation. In 2022, they accounted for 61% of detected cases, with adult females comprising 39% and girls 22% of all victims (UNODC, 2024, p. 15). While sexual exploitation is the most common form of trafficking among female victims, many are also subjected to forced labour, particularly in domestic work, as well as forced marriages and criminal activities (UNODC, 2024, p. 15).

Human trafficking is one of the most profitable illegal industries, generating enormous illicit revenues. It ranks as the second most lucrative criminal enterprise, after drug trafficking and on par with illegal arms trading (Langhorn, 2021). Organised crime groups treat human trafficking as a business model, exploiting victims for financial gain (UNODC, n.d.). The International Labour Organization estimates that human

trafficking generates approximately \$236 billion in illicit profits each year (as cited in U.S. Department of State, 2024, p. 19). Criminal networks exploit victims in clandestine sectors, such as the sex trade, and legitimate industries, including agriculture, construction, and domestic services (Aronowitz & Veldhuizen, 2021). These operations rely on deceptive recruitment tactics, document forgery, identity confiscation, and violence to control victims and maintain profits (UNODC, n.d.).

Economic disparities and social vulnerabilities significantly increase individuals' risk of falling victim to trafficking. Poverty, social instability, corruption, and lack of economic opportunities serve as key "push" factors that drive migration and increase vulnerability to trafficking (Bales, 2007). Conversely, "pull" factors such as employment prospects, economic stability, and demographic demand incentivise migration, often leading individuals into exploitative situations. Schwarz et al. (2019) identified economic insecurity, housing instability, limited education, and migration status as primary risk factors that heighten susceptibility to both labour and sexual exploitation. These factors accumulate in a chain-of-risk model, amplifying exposure to trafficking networks. In Southeast Asia, economic disparities particularly affect women and girls, forcing them to migrate for work and increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and sexual servitude (Langhorn, 2021).

Human trafficking operates as a structured, multi-stage process within transnational criminal networks. It is not a singular event but a process that includes recruitment, transportation, and exploitation, often spanning multiple countries (Aronowitz & Veldhuizen, 2021). In 2022, victims came from at least 162 different nationalities and were trafficked to 128 destination countries, with 58% of victims exploited within their national borders (UNODC, 2024, p. 37). Instead of being an isolated phenomenon, trafficking is increasingly recognised as part of broader exploitative labour market structures (Cockbain & Bowers, 2019). While some trafficking operations involve small-scale actors, others are managed by highly organised transnational criminal groups that function like illicit businesses, using advanced logistical networks and digital technologies to evade law enforcement (Aronowitz & Veldhuizen, 2021). The use of online platforms for recruitment and exploitation has risen, a trend exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating stronger digital countermeasures from governments and anti-trafficking organisations (U.S. Department of State, 2024).

Human trafficking is deeply interconnected with other forms of organised crime, requiring a multi-faceted response. In 2022, 74% of detected traffickers were found to be operating within organised crime groups, highlighting the structural and coordinated nature of trafficking networks (UNODC, 2024, p. 37). Criminal organisations involved in human trafficking frequently engage in additional illicit activities, including drug trafficking, money laundering, cybercrime, and the production of counterfeit goods (Aronowitz & Veldhuizen, 2021; Europol, 2000; Zhang, 2008). This integration within broader criminal economies underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to combat trafficking. Traditional law enforcement

measures alone are insufficient; counter-trafficking strategies must also focus on financial tracking, international cooperation, and disrupting criminal supply chains (Vermeulen et al., 2010; Albanese, 2009). Addressing trafficking as part of organised crime is essential for developing effective and sustainable countermeasures (Aronowitz & Veldhuizen, 2021).

1.1.2 Human Trafficking Definition Adopted for This Study

The current research uses the definition of human trafficking from the UN (United Nations) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000). This protocol is the primary legal tool worldwide to combat human trafficking. For the purpose of this research, human trafficking is defined as:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person, 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 payment or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation (United Nations, 2000, Article 3).

Vietnam's legal approach to trafficking has evolved over time, progressively aligning with international standards. Initially, its legislation focused on trafficking in women and children, as reflected in the Criminal Code (1999, amended 2015), the Law on Gender Equality (2006), and the Marriage and Family Law (1986, amended 2000). In 2012, the term "human trafficking" officially replaced gender- and age-specific terminology, expanding the legal framework to encompass all victims. The country's primary domestic legislation on human trafficking is the 2011 Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat, which provides the foundation for national anti-trafficking efforts. The 2015 Penal Code, amended in 2017, further criminalises human trafficking under Articles 150 and 151, with penalties extending to life imprisonment. Implementation efforts are guided by national action plans and directives, such as Decision 2546/QĐ-TTg (2015), which outlined strategies for the period from 2016 to 2020. Additionally, various government decisions and circulars, including No. 766/TTg (1997) and Decision No. 52/2006/QĐ-TTg (2006), assign responsibilities to state agencies for victim support and reintegration (Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021).

Despite efforts to harmonise with international legal frameworks, Vietnam continues to use dual terminology in its legal and policy documents. Domestically, "human trafficking" remains the dominant term, particularly in criminal law and law enforcement responses. However, following Vietnam's accession to the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol (Palermo Protocol) in 2012, the term "trafficking in persons" has been increasingly recognised in international cooperation agreements. These include the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons (ACTIP), the Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking

(COMMIT), and bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries such as Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and China.

Although international frameworks favour "trafficking in persons," Vietnamese legal texts and enforcement mechanisms continue to prioritise "human trafficking." Given this context, this thesis uses both terms interchangeably, reflecting Vietnam's partial adoption of "trafficking in persons" while acknowledging that "human trafficking" remains the dominant term in its national legal framework. This approach ensures clarity while capturing the evolving legal and policy landscape.

1.2 Human trafficking in Vietnam: A Complex Issue and State Response

1.2.1 Regional Characteristics of Trafficking

The world is grappling with a significant increase in human trafficking, which is a grave transnational crime (Emmers, 2003; Lee, 2013; Lloyd et al., 2012; Okubo & Shelley, 2011) that violates human security and rights (Haddadin & Klimova-Alexander, 2013; Waisman, 2010). As per the message from the Secretary of State in the Trafficking in Persons Report 2023, human trafficking violates human fundamental principles of equality and inherent rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, while also harming communities, undermining the rule of law, and jeopardizing national security (U.S. Department of State, 2023). With a global increase in the number of detected trafficking victims in recent years (UNODC, 2018), with the majority being female victims, the world is facing a "significant dangerous threat of human trafficking crime" (Soesilowati, 2020, p. 1980). Globally, 72% of detected victims of human trafficking are women (49%) and girls (23% girls), compared to 21% of men and 7% of boys¹ (UNODC, 2018, p. 25). Similarly, the Global Slavery Index (2018) states that about 71% of 40.3 million known victims are female (as cited in Soesilowati, 2020). In 2020, women and girls continued to comprise a higher proportion of detected victims of human trafficking, accounting for 60% of cases—42% of women and 18% of girls—compared to 23% of men and 17% of boys (UNODC, 2022, p. xi). Women and children endure more severe violence from traffickers: Women face physical or extreme violence at a rate three times higher than men, while children experience such violence at nearly twice the rate of adults (UNODC, 2022, p. xii).

In the East Asia and Pacific region, trafficking outflows continue to have a global impact, with most regions detecting victims originating from East Asia (UNODC, 2022, p. xvi). Southeast Asia is a region where a significant portion of global human trafficking occurs (Perry & McEwing, 2013; Sweileh, 2018). According to Soesilowati (2020, p. 1981), "women and children in Southeast Asia are the dominant victims of human trafficking", with 55-60% being women, and it is estimated that "at least 200,000-225,000 women and

¹ Estimates are based on information on the age and sex of 26,750 victims detected in 110 countries, 2016 (or most recent)

children” from this area “are trafficked annually”, and that the “supply and demand sides of the human being trade are served by gendered vulnerabilities to trafficking”. Specifically, East Asia and the Pacific are the areas where female victims are mainly trafficked for sexual exploitation (UNODC, 2018, p. 25). The common forms of trafficking in this region include sexual exploitation (60%), forced labour (38%), and other purposes (2%)² in 2018 (UNODC, 2018). According to the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022 (UNODC, 2022, p. 121), in 2020, forced labour was the most detected form of exploitation in this area. The increased detection of forced labour victims, which rose from 29% to 54% between 2018 and 2020, may have been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Preventive measures such as mobility restrictions, supply chain disruptions, and diverted law enforcement efforts may have hindered the detection of victims of sexual exploitation during this period. In East Asia and the Pacific, women and girls accounted for 48% and 19% of all detected victims³ in 2018 (UNODC, 2018). In 2020, women still constituted the largest group of detected victims, comprising 58%, while girls made up 21% in East Asia and the Pacific (UNODC, 2022, p. 121). Though being detected at lower rates than other forms of human trafficking, trafficking for forced marriage is also “more commonly detected in parts of South-East Asia” (UNODC, 2018, p. 11).

Since the 1980s, Southeast Asia has consistently been recognised as a hub for human trafficking (Qiao-Franco, 2023). Being located in Southeast Asia – the region with its “critical condition” has the highest rate of trafficking in the world, in terms of destination, source and transit (Soesilowati, 2020, p. 1981), Vietnam is also suffering from this critical issue. Vietnam, a small country with an area of 331,114 square kilometres, is located in Southeast Asia's Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). Like other countries in the region, Vietnam is significantly impacted by human trafficking (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). Among the countries in Southeast Asia, Vietnam serves as both a source and destination for human trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2016, as cited in Nguyen et al., 2020). On average, there are more than 900 people who are identified as trafficked victims annually in Vietnam, from 2011 to 2017 (Phạm, 2018). According to the 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report (2024), human traffickers have been exploiting both domestic and foreign victims in Vietnam over the past five years, while also exploiting victims from Vietnam abroad.

1.2.2 Socioeconomic and Structural Determinants of Human Trafficking in Vietnam

Human trafficking in Vietnam is driven by a complex interplay of unfavourable factors related to geography, population, history, culture, and economy, which perpetuate vulnerabilities, particularly among

² Based on information on the sex and age of 3,593 victims detected in 18 countries and territories, 2016 (or most recent)

³ Based on information on the sex and age of 5,663 victims detected in 15 countries and territories, 2016 (or most recent)

disadvantaged communities (Le, 2014; (United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP), 2008, as cited in Nguyen, 2019).

Vietnam's economic reforms have spurred industrialisation and foreign investment, but persistent poverty and inequality continue to drive human trafficking. Since the introduction of Đổi Mới reforms in 1986, Vietnam has experienced significant economic growth. However, poverty remains widespread, particularly in rural and ethnic minority areas (Mallon & Arkadie, 2003, as cited in Nguyen, 2019; United Nations in Viet Nam, 2021). High unemployment rates and economic insecurity contribute to the supply of trafficked individuals (Nguyen, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these vulnerabilities, slowing GDP growth to 2.91% in 2020 and disproportionately impacting women and informal workers through job losses (United Nations in Viet Nam, 2021). Furthermore, Vietnam ranks as the sixth most climate-vulnerable country in the Global Climate Risk Index 2020, highlighting how climate-related disasters intensify socioeconomic marginalisation (United Nations in Viet Nam, 2021). Limited public investment and a fragmented social assistance system have further entrenched disparities in access to healthcare, education, and social protection, intensifying vulnerabilities to trafficking (United Nations in Viet Nam, 2021).

Internal and international migration, driven by economic disparity, creates pathways to exploitation and human trafficking. Internal migration has pushed workers—especially women—into precarious employment in agriculture, services, factories, and construction, where they are vulnerable to labour exploitation and deceptive recruitment into sex work (Rushing, 2006; Dang, 2006; Rushing, 2004; Marx & Fleischer, 2010, as cited in Nguyen, 2019). International migration is a crucial component of Vietnam's economy, significantly contributing to national revenue through remittances (Ahsan et al., 2014, as cited in Nguyen, 2019). However, undocumented migrants face heightened risks, including debt bondage (Bélanger, 2014; Nguyen, 2016, as cited in Nguyen, 2019). Economic globalisation and urbanisation have also intensified poverty, particularly as climate change reduces agricultural land, pushing individuals towards exploitative labour conditions (Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021).

Demographic pressures and geographic factors contribute to both internal and cross-border trafficking in Vietnam. Limited employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas, drive migration among undereducated individuals, increasing their vulnerability (Le, 2014; UNDATA, 2016; Tucker et al., 2010, as cited in Nguyen, 2019). Porous borders with China, Cambodia, and Laos facilitate trafficking, with China and Cambodia being key destinations for trafficked women (Cao & Mai, 2016, as cited in Nguyen, 2019). Unofficial border crossings in northern and southwestern provinces serve as major trafficking routes (United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP), 2008, as cited in Nguyen, 2019). China's one-child policy has fuelled bride trafficking, while marriage migration to South Korea and Taiwan has exposed Vietnamese women to commodification and domestic abuse (Phuc, 2019, as cited in Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). Many trafficked women, upon return, face economic hardship and become

traffickers themselves, perpetuating the cycle of exploitation (BCĐQG, 2019, as cited in Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021).

Deep-rooted gender inequalities significantly contribute to human trafficking vulnerabilities in Vietnam. Vietnam's historical context has further entrenched patriarchal norms that shape gender discrimination. Over 1,000 years of Chinese domination, followed by Japanese, French, and U.S. rule, have solidified patriarchal structures, systematically disadvantaging women (Tucker et al., 2010, as cited in Nguyen, 2019). These traditional beliefs, deeply embedded in Vietnamese society, continue to restrict women's opportunities and increase their vulnerability to trafficking. Women's socioeconomic disadvantage is reflected in lower literacy rates (94.6% for women vs. 95.8% overall among those aged 15 and above) and economic precarity among ethnic minorities (Central Population and Housing Census Steering Committee, 2019; BCĐQG, 2019, as cited in Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). Despite legislative advancements, such as the 2012 Law on Human Trafficking, early definitions of trafficking failed to account for male victims, reinforcing gender biases in policy (Duong, 2014, as cited in Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). In rural communities, boys are favoured over girls, limiting educational and economic prospects for women and increasing their susceptibility to exploitation (Nguyen & Gordon, 2020). Women and girls are disproportionately affected due to economic, social, and cultural inequalities. Young women from rural areas often migrate to labour-intensive industries, such as textiles and footwear, where they are vulnerable to exploitation (Bélanger, 2014, as cited in Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). The burden of migration debt further increases susceptibility to forced labour and trafficking (Bélanger, 2014, as cited in Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). Additionally, the unbalanced sex ratio in China has led to many Vietnamese women being trafficked into forced marriages or sexual exploitation (BCĐQG, 2019, as cited in Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021).

Structural challenges—including poverty, patriarchy, limited education, and restricted financial control—further perpetuate trafficking vulnerabilities (Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). Traffickers exploit economic hardships, lack of education, and limited access to information, leading many women into trafficking traps (Nguyen, 2013, as cited in Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021).

1.2.3 Scope, Prevalence, and Forms

Human trafficking in Vietnam is regarded as a significant social problem due to the substantial number of victims and the severe consequences it entails (Nguyen et al., 2020, p. 135). It is a complex issue involving illegal migration and increasingly sophisticated methods, which severely harm the lives, health, honour, and dignity of the victims, primarily women and children (Nhan Dan, 2018). Human trafficking is prevalent across all 63 provinces of Vietnam. The country serves as both a source and a destination for trafficking, encompassing a wide range of purposes (Nguyen et al., 2020; UN Women, 2019, p. 13).

Human trafficking in Vietnam includes both domestic and international cases, with sexual and labour exploitation being the most common forms. While trafficking for sexual exploitation remains a dominant issue, forced labour, particularly among men, is increasingly recognised (Le, 2014; United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP), 2010, as cited in Nguyen, 2019). Domestically, women and girls from rural areas are trafficked to urban centres for sexual exploitation and forced marriage, while boys are subjected to forced labour in agriculture, construction, and informal sectors (Bélanger, 2014; UNODC, 2012, as cited in Nguyen, 2019). Internationally, Vietnam is a major source country for trafficked individuals in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East (United States Department of State, 2014, as cited in Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). Four key trafficking routes lead to China for forced marriage, forced labour, sex work, and the adoption of boys (UN Women, 2019). From 2012 to 2020, 85% of human trafficking cases in Vietnam involved individuals trafficked to foreign countries (Son Ha, 2023).

Apart from an increase in cases and the dangerous nature of the crime (Hoang, 2015; Le, 2014; as cited in Tran, 2020, p.19), trafficked individuals are lured by the sophisticated tricks of traffickers (Nguyễn, 2008a; Nhan Dan, 2018; Văn Tiến, 2020) and suffer various forms of exploitation such as sexual exploitation, forced labour, and marriage exploitation (Beadle & Davison, 2019, p. 5). Organised criminal networks exploit economic vulnerabilities, social inequalities, and gaps in the legal system to carry out human trafficking. Victims, particularly from ethnic minority communities and rural areas, are lured by false job offers, fraudulent marriage proposals, and other deceptive tactics (Nguyen, 2013, as cited in Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). Additionally, fraudulent labour export agencies contribute to the exploitation of migrant workers abroad (Bélanger, 2014).

The existing statistical data on human trafficking in Vietnam is incomplete and does not fully capture the scope of the issue, which hampers efforts to combat trafficking (Dinh et al., 2019; Le et al., 2018; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). Different studies cover overlapping timeframes, leading to inconsistencies in reported victim numbers. The figures below, drawn from multiple sources, do not provide a fully consistent annual record of human trafficking cases. Between 2011 and 2015, 4,495 victims of human trafficking were detected in Vietnam (Summary Report of Vietnam National Plan on combating human trafficking between 2011 and 2015, cited in Hanoi Procuratorate University, 2018, p. 15). From November 2015 to May 2018, 2,319 victims were identified (Nhan Dan, 2018). Data from the Criminal Police Department of the Vietnam Ministry of Public Security indicates that from 2016 to June 2019, there were 1,059 cases, involving 1,432 perpetrators and 2,674 victims. Between 2018 and 2022, approximately 440 human trafficking cases were uncovered, involving over 1,200 victims, with women accounting for 58% of the victims, as reported by the Ministry of Public Security at a Judiciary Committee session (Son Ha, 2023). Among 7,500 rescued and

received victims (1,250 per year) of the 2012-2017 period, more than “90% were female”⁴ (UN Women, 2019, p. 13). Most cases are internationally trafficked, with 90% of victims trafficked to China, “80% were sexually exploited in both marriages and the sex industry” (UN Women, 2019, p. 13). This figure, however, does not completely show “the reality of the problem”, as there is still a lack of data and information on the increasing exploitation of migration flows by trafficking networks (UN Women, 2019, p. 13). The dark figure of human trafficking remains high (Nguyễn, 2008a, pp. 63-66) as many victims are unwilling to speak up about their exploitation due to the fear of stigma and discrimination in their families and communities (AAPTIP & Trường Đại học Kiểm sát Hà Nội - Hanoi Procuratorate University), 2018, p. 14).

Despite efforts to address human trafficking, significant challenges remain due to the lack of comprehensive data, limited legal frameworks, and the increasing sophistication of traffickers (Cao, 2019; Ngọc Linh, 2019). Many victims do not seek help due to fear of retaliation, social stigma, or lack of awareness of available support services (Nguyễn, 2008a; Văn Tiến, 2020). Government policies tend to focus more on trafficking for sexual exploitation rather than recognising the broader links between trafficking and migration, leaving many migrant workers vulnerable (Kneebone & Debeljak, 2012; Vijayarasa, 2013; Hoang, 2015, as cited in Nguyen, 2019).

1.2.4 Vietnam’s Response to Human Trafficking Crime

Vietnam has progressively strengthened its legal framework to combat human trafficking. The 1985 Penal Code initially criminalised trafficking in women and children, with the 1999 amendments broadening its scope to include other trafficking offences (Nguyen et al., 2020). Further revisions in 2009 introduced provisions on organ trafficking; however, legal definitions remained restrictive compared to international standards (Trinh, 2015, as cited in Nguyen et al., 2020). The enactment of the Human Trafficking Prevention and Combating Act (2011) aligned Vietnam’s legal system with global frameworks, clarifying legal responsibilities and enhancing victim protection (Nguyen et al., 2020). Despite these advancements, persistent ambiguities in legal definitions hinder effective victim identification and prosecution (Vijayarasa, 2013, as cited in Nguyen, 2019).

Vietnam has continued refining its legislative framework to align with international standards. Key legislation includes the 2015 Penal Code (revised in 2017), which criminalises human trafficking under Articles 150 and 151, with penalties extending to life imprisonment. The 2015 Criminal Procedure Code (revised in 2021) details international cooperation in criminal proceedings in Part Eight (Vietnam Law & Legal Forum, 2024). The 2011 Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat outlines provisions for prevention, prosecution, and victim protection. Additionally, the 2015 Law on the Organization of Criminal

⁴ Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country with 54 different ethnic groups, including the Viet (also known as Kinh, accounting for 87% of the country population) and other ethnic minorities (Vietnam government Portal, n.d.)

Investigation Bodies, the Law on Enforcement of Custody and Detention, and the 2019 Law on Execution of Criminal Judgments define the roles and responsibilities of law enforcement in addressing trafficking crimes.

Vietnam has actively participated in regional and international efforts to combat human trafficking. It acceded to the Palermo Protocol in 2012 (Kneebone & Debeljak, 2012) and has signed multiple agreements, including the ASEAN Declaration on Transnational Crime (1997) and the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiatives on Trafficking (COMMIT) (UNODC, 2012, as cited in Nguyen, 2019). Bilateral treaties with neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and China have enhanced law enforcement collaboration (Ninh, 2008; Tucker et al., 2010, as cited in Nguyen et al., 2020). However, enforcement remains reactive rather than proactive, and discrepancies in legal definitions continue to hinder regional cooperation (MPS, 2014b, as cited in Nguyen, 2019).

Vietnam has also ratified key treaties, including the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons. Bilateral agreements have been signed with Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, China, the United Kingdom, Myanmar, Malaysia, and Indonesia to enhance cross-border cooperation (Vietnam Law & Legal Forum, 2024). Multilateral initiatives include participation in the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons (ACTIP), the Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT), and the ASEAN-Australia Counter-Trafficking Program (ASEAN-ACT). The Ministry of Public Security (MPS) also collaborates through Interpol, Aseanapol, and UN forums to combat trafficking and protect victims (Vietnam Law & Legal Forum, 2024).

The Vietnamese government has implemented multiple National Anti-Trafficking Action Plans (NAAP) since 2004 to strengthen legal frameworks, raise public awareness, and assist victims (Vietnamese Government, 2004, 2011, 2015, as cited in Nguyen, 2019). The Vietnamese National Action Program against Trafficking in Women and Children (VNAP) (2004–2010) focused on media campaigns, targeted interventions, and coordination among state agencies (Hoang, 2008; Ministry of Public Security, 2016, as cited in Nguyen, 2020). However, early NAAPs primarily addressed the trafficking of women and children, neglecting male victims and failing to tackle labour trafficking effectively (Marx & Fleischer, 2010, as cited in Nguyen, 2019). Subsequent action plans expanded their focus, but gaps in implementation persist (Nguyen et al., 2020).

To provide strategic direction for crime prevention and human trafficking suppression, national policies such as Prime Minister Decision 623/QĐ-TTg (2016) and Decision 193/QĐ-TTg (2021) were introduced (Vietnam Law & Legal Forum, 2024). Specialised agencies, including the Ministry of Public Security and the Interpol Office, oversee enforcement and international collaboration, ensuring Vietnam's commitment to addressing human trafficking through a comprehensive legal and institutional framework.

Table 1.1 Vietnamese Legal Documents on Human Trafficking

Year	Legal document
2011	The 2011 Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat
2011	Decision 1427/QĐ-TTg Approves the Programme on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking (2011-2015)
2012	Decree No. 62/2012/ND-CP on victim identification and protection
2013	Decree No. 09/2013/ND-CP guiding the 2011 Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat
2013	Circular No. 35/2013/TT-BLĐTBXH guiding the implementation of Decree 09
2014	Joint Circular No. 01/2014/TTLT-BCA-BQP-BLĐTBXH-BNG on identification, receipt, and repatriation of victims
2015	Penal Code (revised 2017)
2015	Criminal Procedure Code (revised 2021)
2015	Decision 2545/QĐ-TTg Approves the Programme on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking (2016–2020)
2021	Decision 193/QĐ-TTg Approves the Programme to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking (2021–2025, vision to 2030)
2024	Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat (effective 1 July 2025)

1.3 Human Trafficking in Vietnam: A Gender-based Phenomenon

1.3.1 Vulnerability of Women and Girls

Human trafficking is considered a form of gender-based violence which has been confirmed by several researchers worldwide, such as Watson and Silkston (2006), Pertek (2022), Lansink & Nampewo (2022), Wylie (2023), and Burke et al. (2020). Specifically, the “lesser-value status” of women in society makes them more vulnerable to being trafficked, abused, and exploited. Trafficking is a manifestation of gender inequality, leading to increased abuse of women and children at all stages of the process (D’Cunha, 2002; as cited in Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021).

Annually, hundreds of thousands of women and girls from Southeast Asia are coerced or deceived into marrying Chinese men who exploit them for sexual exploitation and bearing children (Lhomme et al., 2021). In Vietnam, the trafficking rate of women and girls is high, comprising 90% of rescued victims (Ban chỉ đạo Quốc gia phòng chống tội phạm [BCĐQG], 2019; as cited in Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). Statistics from the past decade reveal that women and girls are trafficked for labour, domestic work, sex work, and as brides both regionally and globally; and women also make up the majority of trafficking victims subjected to forced marriages and sexual exploitation (Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). The rising demand for sex

workers has driven increased mobility and trafficking (Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). International and national reports confirm that Vietnam is a major source country for individuals trafficked for sexual exploitation (United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP), 2010; U.S. Department of State, 2013; U.S. Department of State, 2016; as cited in Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). For instance, 70% of victims trafficked for sexual services in China and about one-quarter to one-third of all sex workers in Cambodia originate from Vietnam (Derks, 2009; Derks et al., 2006; United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP), 2008). Vietnamese women are also trafficked for forced marriages, with risk factors including poverty, low education, broken families, and a deficit of women in China (Bélanger et al., 2013; Bélanger & Giang, 2011; Le et al., 2007; Grillot, 2012; Grillot, 2013; as cited in Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). The Vietnamese government views marriages of young Vietnamese women to foreign men as a serious concern but lacks comprehensive policies to address the issue, leaving these brides vulnerable to exploitation (Action Aid International Vietnam, 2008; Bélanger & Giang, 2011; as cited in Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). The number of trafficking victims has been underestimated due to inadequate policies and research on these issues (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018).

Gender prejudice is considered one of the determinants of human trafficking (Bradley & Szablewska, 2015; Jani & Anstadt, 2013; Nguyen & Gordon, 2020). With most victims being women and girls, human trafficking is considered a gender-based crime (Duong, 2012a; ILO, 2017; Jani & Felke, 2015; Kara, 2015; as cited in Nguyen & Gordon, 2020). Women are unfavoured not only in gendered characteristics (Duong, 2015) but also unfavoured from a cultural, social, economic and legal perspective (Usman, 2014). Gender bias in remote communities, especially in South Asia (Jani & Felke, 2015), makes women and girls more vulnerable to human trafficking since it keeps them from claiming fundamental rights (Cho, 2015a; Columb, 2015; Duong, 2012a; Kara, 2015).

Human trafficking in Vietnam can be attributed to various unfavourable factors related to geography, population, history, culture, and economy (Le, 2014; United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP), 2008, as cited in Nguyen, 2019). Vietnam's history reflects successive development interspersed with wars to escape domination by China, Japan, French colonial rule, and the US invasion. Having been dominated for over 1,000 years by China, Vietnam has been significantly influenced by traditional Chinese culture, including in matters of gender. Consequently, patriarchal features embedded in Vietnamese society's ideology result in discrimination against women, reflecting the oft-espoused opinion that women are inferior to men (Tucker et al., 2010, as cited in Nguyen, 2019). According to Nguyen and Gordon (2020, p. 144), "a culture of gender inequality" has a generous, pervasive impact on rural communities' lives, especially gender bias which shows a norm of favouring boys over girls. The authors also propose some adjustments to the government's policy to help support equality for girls and women in the mentioned communities. However, this research is limited to young girls who are forced to leave school

early for child labour and who live in remote communities in Central Vietnam. The bigger issue needs to be explored further to figure out how gender equality and national policies contribute to reducing trafficking in Vietnam.

Human trafficking is partly a manifestation of gender inequality, but additional intersectional factors such as poverty, lack of education, and low income also impact life chances (Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). They suffer greater harm due to social discrimination and are more likely to experience modern slavery in domestic work, the sex industry, and forced marriage of women and girls (David et al., 2019; as cited in Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). According to Le (2014; as cited in Le et al., 2018), the majority of trafficked returnees belong to ethnic minorities with low education. However, there is a lack of the victims' profiles in Vietnam, as a result of limited reports and research studies (Le, 2014). Though each region/country has its specific additional causes of human trafficking, it is driven by socio-economic and cultural factors.

Radjenovic & Voronova (2016, p. 1) state that traffickers often exploit the economic difficulties of women and their search for a life abroad, and that the recruitment by offenders often involves "coercion, force or deception". Especially in rural and mountainous areas, young women are faced with economic difficulties, underemployment and low education (Nguyễn, 2008b, 2008a). Because of their socio-economic difficulties, potential targets of traffickers often have the desire to change their lives. Therefore, one common factor is "the desire of potential victims to migrate" which is "exploited by offenders to recruit and gain control" over victims (UNODC, 2008, p. 454). As most of the victims are young women, they may lack the life experience and vigilance to be aware of offenders' tricks. According to the dataset "Human Trafficking and Traffickers in Vietnam" (Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, 2021), which includes information on traffickers who have been successfully arrested and prosecuted, 198 victims were female, and only one was male, a newborn sold to China for adoption. All reported cases involve cross-border trafficking to China, with no instances of domestic trafficking. According to the Governmental Steering Committee 138 on Crime Prevention and Control, over 90% of Vietnamese victims are trafficked across borders, predominantly to China (Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, 2021, p. 6). These cases span nine years (2012-2020), with most cases occurring from 2017 to 2020 (Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, 2021, p. 6). While this data does not provide a complete picture of trafficking in Vietnam, it offers valuable insights into this specific form of trafficking, particularly female victims trafficked to China, which remains a significant issue in Vietnam, affecting thousands annually.

1.3.2 Gender Gap as a Root Cause of Human Trafficking

Many factors contribute to the trafficking of girls, including poverty, ethnic conflicts, unemployment, gender inequality, and inadequate legislation and law enforcement (Boruah & Roy, 2021; as cited in Nguyen, 2024). Human trafficking is an issue associated with gender-based vulnerabilities (Nguyen &

McIntyre-Mills, 2021). Violations of women's and girls' human rights are both a cause and consequence of trafficking (Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021).

Despite global efforts to improve gender equality, “women and girls still face many types of inequality because of gaps in legal protection and discrimination laws in many countries” (United Nations Division for Sustainable Development Goals, 2019; Nguyen & Gordon, 2020, p. 143). In Vietnam, gender discrimination is considered one of the common push factors that drive trafficking (Do & Ma, 2012; Duong, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2020). Viện kiểm sát Nhân dân Tối cao Việt Nam (The Vietnam Supreme People’s Procuratorate) (2018, pp. 16–17) states that gender-based issues are both objective and subjective causes of trafficking. Gender inequality and difficulties in the life of women, including unemployment, low education, and a desire to seek overseas job opportunities with higher salaries, combined with legislation gaps and shortcomings in policing and state management are some causes of human trafficking. According to AAPTIP and Trường Đại học Kiểm sát Hà Nội - Hanoi Procuratorate University (2018), a person’s gender can make them vulnerable to falling victim to human traffickers. “Gender inequalities perpetuate both ‘push’ (economic necessity, son preference and sexual violence) and ‘pull’ factors (imbalance of Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB), male power, economic power) that drive human trafficking in Viet Nam” (UN Vietnam, 2015, p. 19).

Furthermore, women in Vietnam still “face patriarchal attitudes and gender inequality” (Duong, 2012; as cited in Nguyen, 2019) resulting in domestic violence (Tucker et al., 2010). Due to this, some women want to get away from their husbands, which puts them at greater risk of becoming trafficking victims (Duong, 2014). The latest National Study on Violence against Women in Vietnam 2019 confirms that complex economic and social disadvantages become more serious with women living with violence, particularly those most vulnerable such as poor women and women of ethnic minorities (MOLISA et al., 2020).

1.4 Role of Gender Equality Policy in Anti-Trafficking: A Comprehensive Assessment Needed

1.4.1 Gender Equality Policy in Vietnam

Despite facing global and regional financial crises in 1997 and 2007, Vietnam made significant progress in the period described, transitioning from an underdeveloped nation to a low-middle-income developing country (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 18). The successful implementation of the Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2011-2020 improved cultural and social affairs, enhancing people's material and spiritual lives. Economic growth and social development fostered gender equality, leading to the enactment of the Gender Equality Law in 2006 (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 18). Within ASEAN, the ASEAN Charter established the ASEAN Community, enhancing efforts to promote women's rights and gender equality (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 18–19). The ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women (ACWC),

established in 2010, has been active in this domain (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 18–19). However, Vietnam faced challenges such as unsustainable economic development, slow recovery, and economic disparities between urban and rural areas (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 19). Economic growth sometimes exacerbated gender inequalities, with women often in low-paid, informal jobs due to lacking skills and training. The gender pay gap persisted, even in female-dominated fields like healthcare and social work, underscoring the need for continued efforts to achieve gender equality (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 19).

Vietnam recognises that gender equality is crucial for the country's sustainable development (ILO & MOLISA, Vietnam, 2011). The country is strongly committed to gender equality, with comprehensive laws and policies reflecting its dedication to international conventions such as the Beijing Declaration and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (MOLISA et al., 2021), as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (Nguyen, 2019). Vietnam ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and actively engages with the CEDAW State Reporting process (UN Women, 2021, p. 44).

The country's Constitution enshrines the principle of gender equality, and various laws and policies across all sectors emphasize this commitment (The Law on Gender Equality 2006, 2006; Vietnam Constitution, 1946; Vietnam Constitution, 2013). The Constitution of Vietnam (1959; 1980; 1992) also promotes women's rights, along with other important laws such as the Civil Code, the Penal Code, the Labour Code, the Marriage and Family Law, and the Law on Combating Domestic Violence (Duong, 2014, as cited in Nguyen, 2019, p. 43; Nguyễn, 2014). In 2006, the Gender Equality Law (2006) was enacted, defining gender equality and serving as a foundation for policy and program development (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 10–11). The Gender Equality Department, established in 2008, plays a crucial role in advancing gender equality, including formulating legal documents and procedures, promoting gender equality across sectors, and participating in international gender equality initiatives (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 11).

Efforts to mainstream gender considerations into legal documents have been recognized as a significant policy approach in the National Strategy on Gender Equality (NSGE) 2011-2020 (UN Women, 2021, p. 46). On December 24, 2010, the Prime Minister approved the National Strategy on Gender Equality (NSGE) for 2011-2020, aiming to achieve substantive equality between men and women by 2020 in various domains, contributing to national development. This objective has been pursued through seven goals and twenty-two specific targets (Vietnamese Government, 2010). The Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) was tasked with leading and coordinating the implementation of the NSGE, working with various ministries, sectors, sociopolitical organizations, and provincial and city People's Committees nationwide (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 11–12). After a period of implementation, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 800/QĐ-TTg on July 2, 2018, to adjust and supplement the NSGE. According to Government Report No. 474/BC-CP dated October 6, 2020, 14 targets were achieved, 7 were not achieved, and one could not be

evaluated (Government of Vietnam, 2020). Objectives 4 and 5 had all their targets fully met (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 21).

Vietnam's National Strategy on Gender Equality (NSGE) from 2011 to 2020 marked a significant step in promoting gender equality, leading to substantial progress in various socio-economic fields (UN Women, 2021, p. 19). Over this period, Vietnam has made notable progress in gender equality across various socio-economic fields (Vietnam Social Security, 2019). Vietnam has been recognised for making “significant advancements” in terms of gender equality over the last 20 years, including legislative improvements and sustainable progress in some aspects of women’s lives (UN Women Viet Nam, 2019, p. 4). Practically, many projects and models contributing to gender equality are included in the programme, with specific activities in each province, city, and locality resulting in significant achievements (Trương, 2018). The National Strategy on Gender Equality (NSGE) for 2011-2020 and the subsequent development and approval of its 2021-2030 successor strategy represent significant policy achievements covered by the Country Gender Equality Profile (CGEP) over the past five years (2016-2020) (UN Women, 2021, p. 52). Achieving gender equality and creating opportunities for women and girls is one of Vietnam’s sustainable development goals for 2030 (National Action Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, 2017).

Despite making progress in achieving formal gender equality, Vietnam still encounters barriers and biases that impede women's empowerment, participation, and security. This is a concept known as “intersectionality” (UN Women, 2021, p. 19). Despite some improvements in women’s empowerment, the targets of the Vietnam National Strategy on Gender Equality 2011-2020 have not yet been reached (Nguyễn & Nguyễn, 2019; Nguyen, 2019). While some objectives, like gender equality in access to healthcare and cultural representation, have been fully achieved, others, such as narrowing the gender gap in political leadership and increasing the proportion of women with advanced degrees, have fallen short. The Global Gender Gap Report shows an unstable and decreasing trend in Vietnam's gender gap index from 2011 to 2020.

According to the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs However, progress towards the NSGE’s targets was mixed, with some objectives fully achieved, such as gender equality in access to healthcare and cultural representation. Still, others, like narrowing the gender gap in political leadership and increasing the proportion of women with advanced degrees, fell short. The Global Gender Gap Report, from 2011 to 2020, indicates an unstable and decreasing trend in Vietnam's gender gap index (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 24–25; UN Women, 2021, p. 52). Its ranking has fallen from 79th out of 135 countries in 2011 (Hausmann et al., 2011) to 87th out of 153 in 2020 (World Economic Forum, 2020). However, as of 2024, Vietnam has improved its rank to 72nd out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report 2024 (Pal et al., 2024).

1.4.2 The Need for Research on Gender Equality Policies

As human trafficking is an issue linked with gendered vulnerabilities, there is a need for more policy development to ensure gender mainstreaming and empower women through access to education, employment, financial independence, and control over their own bodies, granting them agency and power (Kabeer, 2015; Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). Conducting further analysis and research to “develop evidence-based gender-sensitive policies and programmes” is also the main suggestion for better dealing with challenges facing women who have experienced violence (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016; UNODC & UN Women, 2013, p. 5).

Greenbaum et al. (2018, p. 165) recommend that policies, which promote gender equality and seek to change social or cultural norms (such as gender-based discrimination and violence), are combined with other community issues that contribute to human trafficking such as child welfare, health and wellness. When comparing the different levels of gender equality and trafficking among countries, Cho et al. (2014, pp. 429, 451) also confirm that “[c]ompliance with (overall) anti-trafficking policies” is found to be higher in countries that respect women’s rights. Specifically, “a higher share of women in parliament and better women’s rights on the CIRI⁵ indicator is correlated with stricter policies against human trafficking” (Cho et al., 2014, p. 444). Nguyen (2008b) notes that poverty, limited literacy, and a lack of awareness about traffickers’ deceptive tactics often lead individuals to willingly cross borders, thereby exposing themselves to exploitation. Besides, the anti-trafficking policy will be extensively effective if the state progressively approaches gender equality and women’s empowerment (Duong, 2012b). United Nations Vietnam (2015) suggests to “scale-up and improve the quality of women’s economic empowerment initiatives” (p. 45) to address violence in the lives of women and girls. Policies on socio-economic development that aim to create jobs, universalize education, and support sustainable families, seemingly contribute to affording women in rural and remote areas to protect themselves from this crime (Electronic People’s Court Magazine, 2018).

Cho (2015) specifically examines movement restrictions as a form of gender inequality that can reduce trafficking, contrasting with broader gender inequality, which typically increases trafficking. Addressing the root causes of human trafficking requires greater efforts in promoting gender equality, reducing gender-based violence and stereotypes, and implementing policies that empower women (Council of Europe, 2018). For instance, Potrafke (2016, p. 376) argues that “mitigating gender disparities in elected office is likely to promote gender equality and stricter anti-trafficking policies”, and that “future research needs to

⁵ Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights

be done on how policies against human trafficking reduce trafficking as such”. The current study contributes more insights to such research efforts.

1.5 Research Gap

Publications on human trafficking indicate that regions with high rates of trafficking, such as Southeast Asia, have the least amount of research on the issue (Sweileh, 2018, as cited in Nguyen, 2024). The global report on trafficking in persons covers East Asia, including Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand, but excludes Vietnam (see, for example, UNODC, 2020, 2022, as cited in Nguyen, 2024). Researchers argue that the data on human trafficking in Vietnam is incomplete and lacks systematic coverage, leading to an inaccurate depiction of the issue (Le, 2017; as cited in Nguyen, 2024).

Human trafficking in Vietnam is a complex issue which still needs to be studied in many aspects. From the gender perspective, some research shows the link between feminist and human rights approaches and human trafficking (such as Burke, 2017; Purkayastha & Yousaf, 2018). Most of the research pays attention to the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation (such as Janet et al., 2006; Kempadoo et al., 2015; Orme & Ross-Sheriff, 2015) or focuses only on the services for survivors of sexual exploitation (such as Peel Institute on Violence Prevention, 2017). Other commonly studied aspects include victim rates, gender-based violence, or gender-sensitive guidelines for dealing with women victims of trafficking in persons (e.g. ASEAN Secretariat, 2016; AAPTIP & Học viện Cảnh sát Nhân dân Việt Nam – The People’s Police Academy, 2018). Victim support is also discussed in the literature but is often mentioned alongside other solutions (Hà & Hồ, 2012). Besides, no research has been conducted to explore the link between gender-based policies and their impact on female trafficking victims, survivors and targets in Vietnam.

Recently, a small number of studies concluded that gender inequality (directly and indirectly) contributes to trafficking (Gacinya 2020; Msuya, 2017; Weatherburn, 2015). In the Vietnamese context, some research (Nguyen & Gordon, 2020; Nguyen, 2019) also shows evidence for the relationship between gender inequality and trafficking. However, their research focus is very localised/rural rather than national. The authors investigated a small number of young girls in two vulnerable communities (two remote communities of Central Vietnam), who suffered gender inequality and were forced to leave school for child labour. Therefore, their findings are focused on sounding “an alarm in rural communities about a generation of child human trafficking crime and gender inequality” (Nguyen & Gordon, 2020, p. 144). So, their findings are limited in both geography and the forms of trafficking.

Generally, though a wide range of research confirms that gender inequality is considered a root cause of trafficking, how gender inequality specifically affects women involved in trafficking has not been identified clearly. Most of the studies combine gender inequality with other social/structural factors that – as a whole

– drive trafficking, rather than addressing gender issues separately. Similarly, gender empowerment is usually assessed and analysed as one of the aims for sustainable development (United Nations Division for Sustainable Development Goals, 2019) in terms of a general social issue, rather than with a focus specifically on dealing with it as the root cause of human trafficking.

The recent programme of Vietnam, the National Strategy on Gender Equality for the 2011-2020 period (2010), provides a basic foundation towards gender equality, with specific goals and targets. This strategy also mentions the reduction of domestic violence and human trafficking (goal 6), as well as other goals, reflecting a broader understanding of gender inequality – the underlying cause of gender-based violence. However, “the strategy displays some weaknesses”(UN Vietnam, 2015, p. 36). Forms of gender-based violence in Vietnam are still analysed and addressed separately, limiting “a comprehensive approach” and “the ability of policies and programmes to develop effective interventions” (UN Vietnam, 2015, p. 40). Gender-based violence closely connects with “inequitable gender norms and thus addressing gender-based violence is an integral part of realising gender equality” (UN Vietnam, 2015, p. 44). Though the role of gender equality policies is important, they have yet to be analysed and assessed in relation to their impact on female trafficking victims, survivors, and targets.

The Vietnamese Government has responded to human trafficking by establishing the National Action Program on Human Trafficking Prevention, enacting legislation to combat human trafficking, prioritizing regional and international cooperation efforts, and implementing measures to protect and assist trafficked victims (Nguyen et al., 2020). Despite essential activities such as establishing policies, laws, seminars, and training courses to raise awareness about these crimes (Nguyen et al., 2020), the Vietnamese government's responses to human trafficking have not prioritised efforts to address gender inequality as a root cause. Therefore, findings from this research can contribute to a more targeted approach to addressing gender inequality, a significant factor contributing to human trafficking. Empowering women can strengthen prevention measures and serve as a crucial component in broader initiatives aimed at preventing and combating human trafficking in Vietnam. This approach complements other strategies focusing on prosecution, prevention, and protection.

Chapter 2 Research Questions, Research Design, and Study Limitations

Chapter 2 covers the research questions, research design, and study limitations. It consists of three parts. The first part identifies the primary research question and its two sub-questions. The second part, “Research Design,” outlines the researcher’s worldview (advocacy/emancipatory), the theoretical underpinning of the study (intersectionality), the research methodology (narrative inquiry), and the research methods employed to collect the data (interviews) and analyse it (thematic analysis). The third part specifies the study limitations concerning the data sources and data collection process. It explains the reasons behind these limitations and involves some related suggestions for future research.

2.1 Research Questions and Terminology

This study seeks to address the research question: What are the experiences of Vietnamese trafficked individuals, and, if any, what gaps in current national gender equality policies (2010-2020) that seek to address human trafficking do they reveal?

Accordingly, the two sub-questions guiding this inquiry are:

1. What are the experiences of trafficked individuals in Vietnam, and how do they relate to gender inequality?

The first sub-question explores how gender inequality influences human trafficking in Vietnam by examining the experiences of trafficked individuals. This investigation covers their experiences before, during, and after trafficking, including the reintegration process. By analysing these experiences, the study aims to determine if the root causes of trafficking are linked to gender inequality and how such inequality affects their experiences during trafficking and post-trafficking reintegration into the community. This exploration extends to evaluating the impact of gender equality policies and analysing relevant documents to understand the connection between gender inequality and human trafficking.

2. From the perspectives of relevant stakeholders (NGOs, state agencies, support workers), to what extent have Vietnam’s national gender equality policies contributed to addressing human trafficking between 2011 and 2020?

This sub-question seeks to understand the viewpoints of support workers on the effects, if any, of gender equality policies on trafficked individuals. It aims to explore the experiences and perspectives of trafficked individuals as conveyed by the stakeholders who have assisted them. After this exploration, the study critically analyses relevant documents to gain insight into the effects of gender equality policies on human trafficking in Vietnam. This critical analysis helps evaluate the impact of national gender equality policies,

specifically the National Plan on Gender Equality (2016-2020) and the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2011-2020), on trafficked individuals.

To answer these questions, the research focuses on the experiences of trafficked individuals, especially women, through the narratives of expert stakeholders, particularly support workers. The data comprises primary sources—stories and experiences shared by study participants—and secondary sources, including literature and reports on gender equality policies and human trafficking in Vietnam.

In this research, the common term used is “trafficked individuals”. Depending on the context, more specific terms such as “returnees”, “trafficked women”, or “trafficking victims” are used. The term “returnees” is used when describing reintegration experiences. The term “trafficked women” is used when highlighting trafficking experiences that are specific to women because of their biological sex. The term “trafficking victims” is used particularly in participant quotes and when referencing the law or government documents.

The research design will be discussed in the following section.

2.2 Research Design

Designing research means to set up a plan for a study (Flick, 2022). A research design is chosen “based on the nature of the research problem or issue being addressed, the researcher’s personal experiences, and the audiences for the study.” (Creswell, 2009, p. 3).

2.2.1 Researcher Worldview: Emancipatory/Advocacy

This research study is conducted from an emancipatory worldview (also known as the advocacy worldview) as the research seeks to contribute to “reform[s] that may change the lives of the participants, [and] the institutions in which individuals work”(Creswell, 2009, p. 9). Gender inequality is, in the context of human trafficking, an important social problem that needs to be addressed. The study seeks to identify the advantages and limitations of the national gender equality policies to determine how their content could be improved so these policies become more relevant to female returnees and potential targets of traffickers in Vietnam.

An emancipatory worldview is suitable for this research for two main reasons: it focuses on a vulnerable population and aims to bring about positive social change by using a unified voice to assess policies and laws supporting this change.

Firstly, this study seeks to centre the voices of marginalised individuals. Advocacy research often centres on participants who may be marginalised based on factors such as ethnicity, gender, and other aspects (Creswell, 2009), or those classified as a vulnerable population (Naeve et al., 2017). In this study, the focus

is on the needs of and centring the voice of the marginalised in society – women returnees who were victims of human traffickers. They are considered a vulnerable population in need of attention.

Secondly, advocacy research aims to bring about social change by influencing policy. It is believed that through policy changes, broader societal reforms can be achieved, and practices and attitudes within communities can be transformed so that social division and inequalities are reduced (Ledwith, 2007; Naeve et al., 2017). The increasing investment in advocacy and policy change initiatives underscores the importance of ongoing systems changes, with evaluations playing a crucial role in driving such transformations (Gardner & Brindis, 2017). This research focuses on how gender equality policies impact trafficked individuals, exploring how these policies contribute to systems changes by supporting trafficked individuals and reducing human trafficking. Thus, the advocacy worldview is both relevant and appropriate for this research. By involving government employees and NGO workers, this study serves as a united voice to assess the effectiveness of gender equality policies in mitigating human trafficking and to advocate for necessary reforms (Creswell, 2009), aiming to influence societal behaviours and contribute to policy change concerning women's rights and human trafficking.

To sum up, an emancipatory worldview aligns with the target population and the overall goals of this study. This research examines gender inequality as a significant social issue which affects trafficked women. It focuses on evaluating gender equality policies in Vietnam and their impact on anti-trafficking efforts and women affected by trafficking. Ultimately, the study aims to foster a more equitable world and thus advocates for “advancing an agenda for change to improve [...] lives” (Creswell, 2009, p. 9).

2.2.2 Theoretical Lens: Intersectionality

The study uses an intersectionality lens to explore the complexity of human trafficking and gender inequality.

Intersectionality theory, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), originates from Black feminist activism and emphasizes how various aspects of identity intersect and interact to influence individuals' experiences of privilege and oppression (Davis, 2014; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality is a critical methodology for scholars to address the complexities of identity and power in various social contexts (Davis, 2014).

Intersectionality is a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149)

The chosen theoretical framework is suitable for this study for two main reasons: it aids in fully understanding the gendered nature of human trafficking and its function in gendered oppression, and it helps develop effective responses to human trafficking and knowledge for positive social change to prevent

human trafficking and to improve post-trafficking reintegration processes, particularly for women returnees.

Firstly, the intersectionality lens aids in comprehensively understanding the various aspects of human trafficking as a form of gendered oppression. In the context of human trafficking in Vietnam, intersectionality suggests that vulnerability to human trafficking is not solely caused by gender or gender inequalities but by a complex interplay of factors, including gender, access to education, relative economic deprivation, and Vietnamese cultural norms. Women and girls get caught up in trafficking networks primarily due to their gender but racialised women and women at the social and economic margins of society are even more susceptible to victimization. Hence, gender alone is not sufficient to accurately describe women's differential experiences of trafficking (Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), 2004). Intersectionality recognises how different forms of oppression intersect and impact people's lives based on factors like gender, race, class, and sexuality (Davis, 2014; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989). It also acknowledges individuals' multiple identities shaped by social relations, history, and power structures (Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), 2004). Hence, the intersectionality lens allows a fuller exploration and a better understanding of the trafficking of women in Vietnam, especially regarding the impact of different identity markers on relevant experiences.

Secondly, the intersectionality lens helps in developing effective responses to trafficking issues and generating knowledge to bring about positive social change, aligning with the objectives of this study. In other words, intersectionality is a crucial tool for achieving social justice by promoting a better understanding of the various facets of inequality. Hence, Crenshaw (1989) emphasised the importance of using intersectionality both as a theoretical lens and as the basis of political discussions. Intersectionality allows for the analysis of multiple forms of discrimination and the understanding of how different identities affect access to rights and opportunities, as well as the development of effective responses (Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), 2004). Therefore, intersectionality plays a crucial role in human rights and development work (AWID, 2004). In the context of social injustice perpetuated by intersecting oppressions, it is essential to address all intersecting oppressions for women to achieve full empowerment (Collins, 2000). Analyses that do not consider intersectionality cannot fully address the specific ways in which women are marginalized (Crenshaw, 1989). By incorporating diverse perspectives, intersectionality promotes a deeper understanding of societal inequalities and supports inclusive efforts toward social justice (Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), 2004). When the experiences of trafficked women are fully understood, efforts to reduce their oppression and inequality will yield better results.

Intersectionality aligns with the emancipatory worldview because it recognizes and addresses overlapping identities that are relevant in advocacy, as such efforts seek to promote fairness, inclusivity, and justice in society (see, for example, Beaulaton, n.d.; Collins et al., 2021; Crenshaw, 1991; Hancock, 2011, 2016; Parris

et al., 2019; Roland, 2018; Roth, 2021; Spierings, 2012). In other words, advocacy informed by intersectionality aims to address the complexities of overlapping forms of discrimination and inequality.

2.2.3 Research Methodology: Narrative Inquiry

The study utilises narrative inquiry to explore and present the stories and experiences of trafficking returnees as conveyed by support workers to understand the underlying meanings of those experiences. Narrative inquiry is a prevalent approach in social science research (Creswell, 2009), a methodology for studying lived experience (Clandinin, 2006). People have always shared stories about their experiences, which help us understand our lives and connect with others to build our communities (Clandinin, 2006).

Narrative inquiry is particularly suitable for this research as it offers significant benefits by providing insights into the social phenomenon of human trafficking. This study aims to understand how gender equality policies affect trafficked individuals by exploring their lived experiences. Narrative inquiry is well-suited to addressing “how” questions, providing a deeper understanding of experiences and social phenomena beyond numerical data (Cleland, 2017; Pham, 2024). This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the complex experiences of trafficked individuals, aiming to uncover the underlying meanings of their experiences. The methodology also highlights the voices of trafficked individuals, offering a detailed understanding of the social phenomena surrounding human trafficking and gender inequality, thereby facilitating an exploration of how equality policies can support or impact these individuals.

Narrative inquiry can broadly include anything involving stories, whether as data, a way to present findings, or a method of analysis to understand the underlying meaning of human experiences (Clandinin, 2022). Thematic analysis is a valid data analysis method within narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2022). This study employs narrative inquiry as a guide for data collection (gathering stories from support workers through interviews) and data analysis (thematic analysis)

The research methods are outlined in more detail in the next two sections.

2.2.4 Research Method: Semi-structured interviews

This study employs one-on-one semi-structured interviews as the primary method to gather data. Interviews are expected to enhance the understanding of the researched topics, as they offer a more natural and less rigid approach to information gathering (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Semi-structured interviews are preferred for data collection when the researcher aims to gain a deeper understanding of the participant's unique perspective rather than seeking a generalised understanding of the phenomenon (McGrath et al., 2019, as cited in Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). These interviews are conducted conversationally with one respondent at a time, using a mix of closed- and open-ended questions, often

followed by additional “why” or “how” questions (Adams, 2015). Despite requiring significant effort, well-executed semi-structured interviews provide valuable insights and information (Adams, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews are adopted in this study for two reasons. Firstly, this method aligns with the narrative inquiry methodology. The key principles and practices of narrative inquiry include data collection methods such as in-depth, unstructured, or semi-structured interviews, as well as the use of personal documents. In accordance with narrative inquiry, collecting data involves the use of unstructured interviews and, where possible, exploring texts and field notes (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007). Since this study uses narrative inquiry as its methodology, applying semi-structured interviews aligns with the overall research paradigm. Secondly, the semi-structured interview method offers numerous advantages for this study. It allows for a comprehensive exploration of participants’ lived experiences and supports approaching intersectionality and emancipatory perspectives. Semi-structured interviewing is a valuable tool in qualitative research due to its capacity to provide detailed and focused information from participants (Mashuri et al., 2022). This method is valued for its flexibility and adaptability, allowing researchers to adjust their questions based on the flow of the conversation (Mashuri et al., 2022). It effectively captures the personal and emotional dimensions of participants’ stories, providing a deeper understanding of their lived experiences (Kvale, 1996). This method enables in-depth exploration and allows participants to share their unique perspectives in their own words, which is crucial for an emancipatory study. A key advantage is its ability to facilitate focused discussions while remaining flexible enough to explore relevant ideas that may emerge during the conversation (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Unlike unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews have a clear direction and structure, which helps maintain focus and coherence in the research (Mashuri et al., 2022). This balance between flexibility and structure contributes to achieving robust and in-depth research findings (Mashuri et al., 2022).

Building on the semi-structured interviews with support workers, this study is based on proxy interviews insofar as they inform Geb’s story or otherwise refer to the direct experiences of trafficked individuals. However, direct interviews provided insights into the causes of human trafficking and gender equality policies. This is highlighted in the thesis title, which refers explicitly to “support workers’ understanding of trafficking returnees’ experiences in Vietnam”.

The proxy approach to interviewing addresses the ethical and logistical challenges of researching trafficking survivors while ensuring their experiences are represented. Ethical guidelines emphasise that researchers should assume a high potential for harm in interviews with trafficked women and avoid interactions that could worsen their situation (World Health Organization et al., 2003). Additionally, access to survivors is restricted by gatekeepers, complicating recruitment efforts (McCauley-Elsom et al., 2009; Quinn, 2015, as cited in Gaitis, 2023).

Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, the researcher was unable to conduct fieldwork in Vietnam and relied on online recruitment and interviews. Given the lack of a safe interview environment and immediate support mechanisms, direct interviews with trafficking returnees were deemed ethically unfeasible. To mitigate these issues, this study draws on caseworkers' experiences who had established trust with survivors and gained extensive knowledge about a range of trafficking experiences through years of support and social work.

While ensuring ethical integrity, this approach has its limitations because support and social workers are relative to trafficked individuals in a privileged position and therefore have a different perspective on the trafficking experience. Interviewees could only draw on the narratives of trafficked individuals who trusted them enough to share their experiences. Hence, there is an element of sampling bias involved (Cohen, 2013; Hoffmann & Hosch, 2023). Furthermore, interviewees may not have been able to recall the narratives of all trafficked individuals who have shared their experiences with them over the years (Cohen, 2013; Hoffmann & Hosch, 2023). The interviewee's ability to recall the most frequently occurring trafficking stories would have aided in capturing an average trafficking experience in Geb's story. However, the interviewees' narratives may have also been skewed by the most horrific and the most recent cases they have dealt with as intensity and recency affect recall the same way as frequency does (Hoffmann & Hosch, 2023).

A key application of the proxy method is Geb's Story, a composite narrative that seeks to illustrate the typical experience of a trafficked Vietnamese girl who returned to Vietnam. Each findings chapter begins with a segment of Geb's Story synthesised from multiple participant interviews. While insights from practitioners informed Geb's Story, it is ensured that survivors' experiences remained central to the research despite the aforementioned methodological constraints. This approach highlights the human suffering behind each case file, reinforcing the need for ethical research practices when engaging with vulnerable populations.

2.2.5 Data Collection Process

The data collection process in this study consisted of four main steps: preparing relevant documents and gaining ethical approval, identifying and inviting initial participants, using snowballing to identify further participants, and conducting interviews.

Before commencing data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 5 July 2021 (Ethics Approval Number: 21/205) (see Appendix A). The initial plan involved a field trip to Vietnam for data collection over 3-6 months, as detailed in my research proposal (PGR9). However, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a change in this plan. By the time full ethical approval was received, the pandemic had significantly impacted travel. Both New Zealand and

Vietnam are noted for their successful COVID-19 responses, partly due to strict border closures (Kim, 2020; Vu Khanh, 2020). As an MFAT PhD Scholarship recipient, all research activities were subject to MFAT policies. In 2020/2021, MFAT determined that no research-related international travel would be permitted for the foreseeable future, coinciding with the planned data collection period for this study. Consequently, a contingency plan for data collection under COVID-19 conditions was implemented, shifting to online interviews. The original data collection plan sought to incorporate insights from trafficked individuals, particularly women who had returned to Vietnam, along with perspectives from relevant stakeholders. However, due to travel restrictions, I conducted online interviews exclusively with government and NGO workers and other related stakeholders. This decision was made considering the potential challenges trafficked individuals might encounter in participating. Establishing the necessary rapport with trafficking survivors online to ensure their protection is not suitable, as trauma could be triggered during online interviews without appropriate mental support services. Additionally, a lack of computer access and competence to use a computer or other devices for online interviews may hinder their participation.

While the data does not contain firsthand accounts from trafficked individuals, the wide range of perspectives from different support workers provides a comprehensive and representative understanding of trafficked individuals' experiences. This approach centres experience of trafficked individuals, thus ensuring that the research effectively meets its purpose and strengthens its findings. The study included 23 participants categorised into three groups: government employees, NGO workers, and "Others." Participants were required to have at least six months of work experience related to human trafficking and voluntarily participate in the interviews. Nine participants were government employees, including social workers from shelters, the local Vietnam Women's Union, Vietnam's National Hotline for Child Protection and Human Trafficking Prevention, and the local Ministry of Labour-Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) departments. Eight participants worked for NGOs, with roles such as social workers, project consultants, or project coordinators across five different organisations. The "Others" group consisted of six individuals with diverse backgrounds, including researchers, international organisation workers, project consultants, and freelancers. Many had mixed experiences in different sectors and projects, having previously worked for both NGOs and government agencies.

The diversity of the study's participants provides three key advantages, enhancing the depth and comprehensiveness of the research. Firstly, the inclusion of diverse participants with varying experiences in human trafficking ensures a wide range of perspectives and experiences. Participants were recruited from various agencies, including governmental, non-governmental, and independent researchers/workers. This diversity enhances the comprehensiveness of the data. Although 19 out of 23 participants were women, the inclusion of four men helps to provide a balanced perspective and reduce potential gender bias in the data. Most participants (19 out of 23) were older than the researcher, ensuring their views and opinions

were less likely to be influenced by age bias. Secondly, participants' extensive experience working with trafficked individuals contributes to the depth and relevance of the data. Eight of the 23 interviewees had more than ten years of experience supporting trafficked individuals. Seven had between five and ten years, and six participants had between two and five years of experience. Only two interviewees had shorter working experiences (7 months to under two years) with limited interactions with trafficked individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants shared valuable insights gained through their professional networks and relevant reports, making their contributions critical to the study. Finally, participants provided insights into both legally recognised trafficking victims and those not yet identified as victims under Vietnamese law. Given the discrepancies between Vietnamese and international definitions of trafficking victims (Nguyen, 2019), this inclusion enhances the richness and comprehensiveness of the data by incorporating a broader range of trafficking experiences. By including a diverse group of participants, this study gains a more comprehensive understanding of human trafficking from multiple perspectives, thus enriching the quality and scope of the research findings.

Before recruitment, all necessary documents were prepared. The primary supervisor drafted an Introduction Letter containing essential information about the research's purpose, participation details, and contact information for any participant inquiries (see Appendix D1). The Information Sheet provided detailed information about the study and participant rights (see Appendix D2). Additional documents included the Consent Form (see Appendix D3), Indicative Interview Questions (see Appendix B2), and a Recruitment Flyer (see Appendix D4). As the targeted participants were Vietnamese, all forms were translated into Vietnamese while retaining the English versions to ensure participants fully understood their involvement in the research.

The initial participants were identified through my professional network. Three participants, referred to as A, B, and C, were selected. The first participant, A, previously worked with me and later joined an international project focused on researching human trafficking and supporting trafficked individuals. Hence, I knew that she met the recruitment requirements. I contacted her via Zalo, a popular chat network in Vietnam. Although she could not participate due to time constraints, she referred two other potential participants, A1 and A2 to me, who, in turn, referred five further participants. The second participant, B, is a woman with extensive experience researching and working with trafficked returnees in Vietnam. I first encountered her through an internet search, as she has several publications in the field, particularly in gender and human trafficking. I initially emailed her and maintained communication through a social media messenger. She agreed to participate in the study and later referred two additional participants. The third participant, C, was contacted through her organization's website. I sent her an introduction letter via email and later communicated with her through Zalo. This participant works in a shelter and met the recruitment requirements, agreeing to participate in the study. Subsequently, she referred two more participants: a current co-worker and a former co-worker now employed by a different organization.

Potential participants were provided with the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) via email and/or Zalo messenger. Informed consent is a process that allows individuals to voluntarily decide whether to participate in research after understanding the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits (Beardsley et al., 2020, p. 1632). To ensure informed consent, I also sent the consent form along with the PIS to help potential participants fully understand their rights in this study. Once participants confirmed their willingness to participate via messenger, we scheduled suitable times for online interviews. Zoom meeting links were created and sent to participants. A reminder message was sent to participants one day before the interviews to confirm the time and date.

Each participant provided consent through signed forms or verbal agreements before the interview. At the beginning of each interview, I summarised the study information and encouraged participants to ask any questions. Participants were informed that I would take notes and record the audio for transcription and data analysis purposes. It was emphasised that participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time without any disadvantage. Upon receiving permission to record and use direct quotes, the interviews commenced.

The interviews were conducted via Zoom in Vietnamese, as all participants were Vietnamese. The first interview took place on 15 September 2021 with participant A1 (O1, woman, 35s, Others), followed by A2 (N3, woman, 35s, NGO).

A commonality among the initial participants was their willingness to refer new potential participants through their networks. They thoroughly understood the research objectives, had read and consented to join, and comprehended the interview structure. This enabled them to recommend individuals who met the recruitment criteria, illustrating the snowball sampling technique. This technique helps expand the participant pool and facilitates the online recruitment process.

Snowball sampling is widely used in qualitative research as a purposeful method of data collection and as a recruitment method to access specific populations through participants' social networks (Browne, 2005; Naderifar et al., 2017). This technique relies on networking and referrals, beginning with a few initial contacts who meet the research criteria and are invited to participate. These participants then refer others who also fit the criteria and might be interested in joining the study, creating a growing chain of referrals until the desired sample size or saturation point is achieved (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Parker et al., 2019). Snowball sampling is particularly effective for reaching hard-to-access populations, which may be small, dispersed, unrecorded, or require anonymity (Parker et al., 2019). This method challenges traditional sampling approaches but is useful for studying groups such as the deprived, socially stigmatised, and elites (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). It is also advantageous for groups that may feel embarrassed or need privacy, as participants are more likely to join the study if they are referred by someone they trust because they may

feel more comfortable and secure (Parker et al., 2019). Human trafficking and gender issues are considered “sensitive questions.” Therefore, using the snowball technique, which is suitable for “sensitive topics” and based on interpersonal relations, can help reach a desired range of participants (Browne, 2005). The recruitment process demonstrated the effectiveness of this technique, as most participants preferred to remain anonymous due to their affiliations with NGOs or government organisations. While some participants were recruited through formal introduction letters, others were referred by the initial participants.

Interviews were conducted between 15 September and 4 December 2021. Interview durations ranged from 30 to 158 minutes, with an average time of 80 minutes. The total data volume amounted to roughly 30 hours. Table 1 below presents the number of participants, their gender, affiliated organisations, interview dates, and the duration of the interviews.

This study utilised an interview guide (see Appendix B1 and B2) to facilitate a systematic approach to the interviewing process and thus increase the trustworthiness of the results (Kallio et al., 2016). A qualitative semi-structured interview guide with questions and prompts was carefully developed. Example prompts included: “What factors drove them into the hands of traffickers?”, “What enabled them to escape the trafficked situation?”, and “What prevented them from escaping?”.

Table 2.1 Research Participants Pseudonyms and Data Volume

Total	No	Sex		Age	Organisations	Pseudonyms Code	Interview date	Duration in min
		Man	Woman					
9	1		X	30s	Government agencies	(G1, woman, 30s,	5/11/2021	97
	2		X	45s		(G2, woman, 45s,	6/11/2021	102
	3		X	45s		(G3, woman, 45s,	7/11/2021	53
	4		X	30s		(G4, woman, 30s,	12/11/2021	62
	5		x	50s		(G5, woman, 50s,	13/11/2021	116
	6		x	50s		(G6, woman, 50s,	22/10/2021	32
	7		x	50s		(G7, woman, 50s,	22/10/2021	30
	8		x	45s		(G8, woman, 45s,	23/10/2021	50
	9		x	30s		(G9, woman, 30s,	24/10/2021	70
Total data volume						≈ 10 hours		
8	1		X	40s	NGOs	(N1, woman, 40s,	31/20/2021	100
	2	x		45s		(N2, man, 45s,	18/11/2021	114
	3		X	35s		(N3, woman, 35s,	18/9/2021	85
	4		X	40s		(N4, man, 40s,	27/11/2021	90
	5		x	50s		(N5, woman, 50s,	4/12/2021	70
	6		x	30s		(N6, woman, 30s,	15/10/2021	60
	7		x	35s		(N7, woman, 35s,	16/10/2021	140
	8		x	40s		(N8, woman, 40s,	14/11/2021	70
Total data volume						≈ 12 hours		
6	1		X	35s	Others	(O1, woman, 35s,	15/9/2021	158
	2		X	50s		(O2, woman, 50s,	01/11/2021	62
	3		X	50s		(O3, woman, 50s,	07/11/2021	74
	4		X	40s		(O4, woman, 40s,	21/11/2021	60
	5	X		40s		(O5, man, 40s,	30/10/2021	80
	6	X		45s		(O6, man, 45s,	14/10/2021	60
Total data volume						≈ 8 hours		

2.2.6 Data Analysis: Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data in this study. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method involving the identification, analysis, and documentation of patterns (themes) within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, it provides a detailed organisation and description of the data and often extends beyond this by interpreting various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This method was well-suited for this study because of two reasons. Firstly, this approach is in line with the narrative inquiry methodology. Narrative inquiry can encompass anything related to stories, whether using stories as data, presenting findings, or as a method of analysis to understand the deeper meaning of human experiences (Clandinin, 2022). While narrative inquiry covers various forms of analysis, including linguistic, structural, and visual analysis, thematic analysis is especially useful for identifying and interpreting patterns and themes in narrative data (Clandinin, 2022). Analysing the themes that surface from the narratives provided by stakeholders who support trafficked individuals provides valuable insights into the participants' experiences and social contexts, thereby offering rich, detailed data for the study. Secondly, this method offers valuable benefits, facilitating the understanding of data with the research worldview and the intersectionality lens. It allowed for systematically exploring participants' complex and layered experiences, highlighting their identities' intersectional nature and policies' impacts on their lives. Thematic analysis facilitated the discovery of common themes and differences in participants' narratives, offering a comprehensive understanding of the issues. Thematic analysis is recognized as "a qualitative research method that can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2), and "a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006; cited in Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2). It is flexible and can be adapted in various ways (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 58), making it valuable for examining diverse perspectives, "highlighting similarities and differences", "generating unanticipated insights", and "summarizing key features of a large data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006; as cited in Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2). Its structured approach supports the production of clear and organized final reports (King, 2004; cited in Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2).

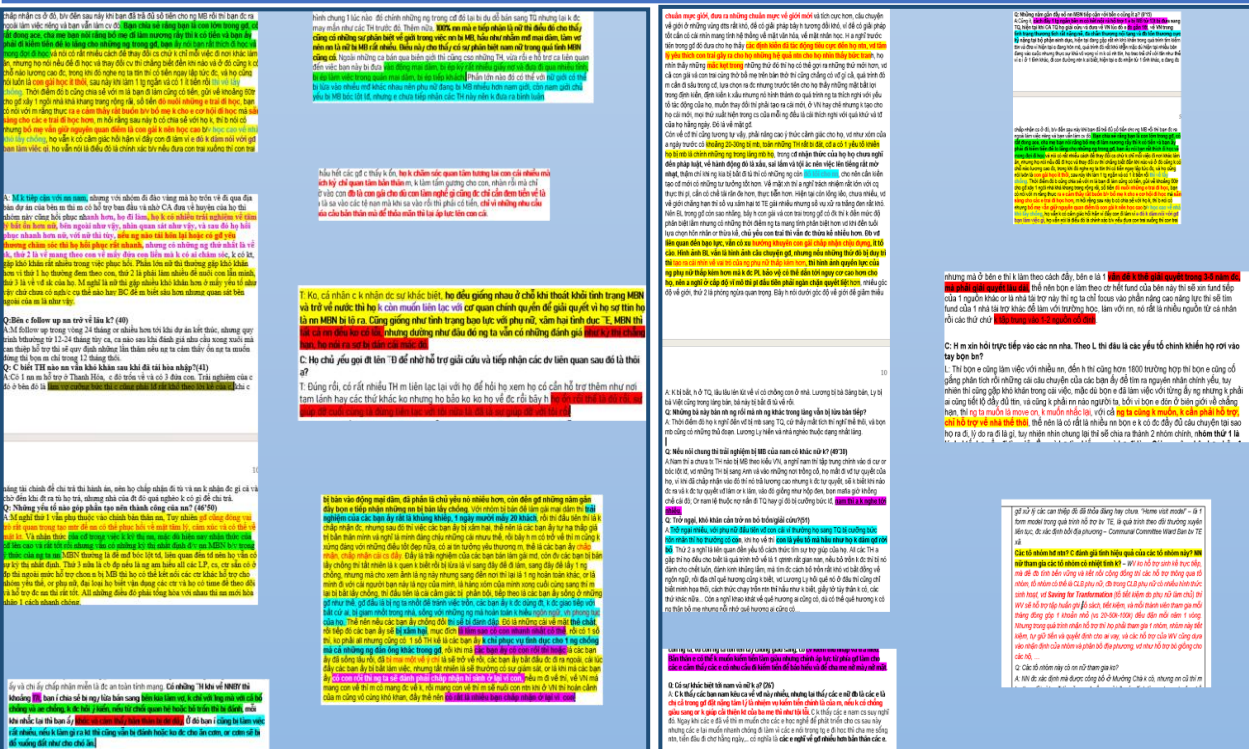
Given that "a rigorous thematic analysis can produce trustworthy and insightful findings" (Braun & Clarke, 2006; cited in Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2), this research adopted a practical and effective procedure of thematic analysis aiming "to meet the trustworthiness criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba" (1989; as cited in Nowell et al., 2017, p. 4). In conducting data analysis, I followed the six phases of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

One, Familiarisation with the data: I familiarised myself with the data by transcribing it. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the transcription process is crucial for early analysis as it allows for a deeper

understanding of the data. I carefully transcribed the recordings and then checked the transcripts against the original audio recordings for accuracy (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Since all the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, I translated the tapes to English where necessary in order to present and discuss the data with supervisors, providing both the overall meaning and examples of what participants said. The translation was done independently, with minor support from AUT’s tutoring service, including a Vietnamese tutor and a New Zealand tutor. I asked them to look at individual words, explained the meanings of the context to them, and finalised the translation to ensure accuracy. After that, I read and re-read the Vietnamese transcripts, summarised them, and compared responses among study participants. I also took notes and jotted down early impressions, as Maguire & Delahunt (2017) suggested, to gain an overview of the entire dataset.

Two, Generating initial codes: In this step, I used Vietnamese transcripts to create initial codes. I then translated these codes into English to discuss with my supervisors, ask for their feedback, and explain the context described in the Vietnamese transcripts. I generated initial codes by organising the data “in a meaningful and systematic way” (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3355). Initially, I highlighted patterns in Word document files (the photo below illustrates this). Later, I printed the transcripts, divided the initial codes into tables, and used coloured pens and markers to highlight potential patterns in the data. Following Braun and Clarke’s guidance (2006), I manually coded as many potential themes or patterns as possible, including surrounding data, to preserve context. When quoting participants later, I referred to the relevant surrounding context of their responses. I also coded individual extracts under multiple themes. For

Figure 2-1 Generating Initial Codes with Highlighting in Word Transcripts



instance, a code might address how trafficked individuals are affected by gender inequality, pushing them into trafficking situations while also fitting into the theme of how gender equality policies are implemented.

Three, Searching for themes: I searched for themes. A pattern captures significant or interesting aspects of the data or research question (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3356). Braun and Clarke (2006) noted that there are no strict rules for defining a theme; its significance is key. From the list of identified codes, I sorted them into potential themes and collated all the relevant coded data extracts within these themes. By the end of this step, I had organised the codes into broader themes relevant to the research question. I used tables and simple mind maps to organise the themes and sub-themes. I still used Vietnamese transcripts in this stage but translated the themes into English to discuss with supervisors.

Four, Reviewing themes: I refined the set of potential themes, retaining valid ones, further dividing them into a themes map, and discarding those lacking supporting data. I reviewed the coded data extracts and the entire data set (Vietnamese transcripts). By the end of this phase, I clearly understood the themes, their relationships, and the overall narrative they conveyed. I also translated the related quotes of participants to discuss with supervisors.

Five, Defining and naming themes: I finalised and refined the themes for analysis to capture each theme's essence (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I organised the collated data extracts into coherent accounts and narratives, identifying each theme's story and its relevance to the overall research question. I also determined sub-themes to structure larger and more complex themes. By the end of this phase, I had finalised concise and descriptive names for each theme. In this stage, I used the English themes and translations of participants' quotes.

Six, Producing the report: In the final phase, I aimed to ensure that the analysis was concise, coherent, logical, and engaging during the writing process. I included sufficient data extracts to illustrate the prevalence of each theme and present its essence. These extracts were incorporated into a narrative that conveyed the story told by the data. The report highlighted clear and compelling arguments related to the research question. This final phase was crucial in producing a report that effectively communicated the significance of the themes and supported the analysis with relevant evidence.

Critical document analysis served as a supplementary method to validate the primary data collected through interviews in this study. This method was instrumental in minimising biases associated with interview data by integrating documentary evidence, thereby enhancing the credibility and robustness of the research findings (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis is recognised as a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents, which involves examining and interpreting data to understand its meaning and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007, as cited in Bowen, 2009).

The main goal of using critical document analysis in this research was to place participants' stories within the larger policy framework and investigate how these policies are put into action and viewed. This method allowed the researcher to compare official statements with the real-life experiences of the participants, in order to find any differences or inconsistencies. The analysis focused on gender equality policies and human trafficking in Vietnam, with the aim of evaluating the appropriateness and practicality of these policies, as well as identifying their effects, especially on trafficked women.

The selection of relevant documents was a critical step in ensuring the comprehensiveness and validity of the analysis. The following strategies were employed to identify and select documents:

Keyword Search: An extensive keyword search was conducted using academic databases such as Google Scholar and the AUT library. Keywords related to gender equality, human trafficking, and Vietnam were employed to capture a broad range of academic literature relevant to the research topic.

Official Reports and Legislation: Documents were carefully gathered from the official websites of organisations involved in combating human trafficking and promoting gender equality. These included both international and national entities such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, and Vietnam's Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). Additional sources included UNICEF and UN Women, which are dedicated to gender issues.

Grey Literature: In addition to academic sources, grey literature, including articles from Vietnamese newspapers, was reviewed to provide additional perspectives and context that might not be captured in scholarly publications.

Government and Legal Documents: The document review encompassed government and legal documents related to improving gender inequality and reducing human trafficking in Vietnam. Key documents analysed included the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2011-2020), the National Plan on Gender Equality (2016-2020) in Vietnam, and the Review Report on the Implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2011-2020). Relevant legislation, such as the Law on Gender Equality (2007) and the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat (2011), was also critically examined.

The critical document analysis involved several key steps:

Evaluation of policy suitability and feasibility: The document was analysed to assess the suitability and feasibility of existing gender equality policies. This analysis identified any limitations or disadvantages in policy implementation and highlighted areas for potential improvement.

Comparison with lived experiences: The analysis involved comparing the official discourse within the documents with participants' lived experiences. This comparison aimed to uncover gaps or inconsistencies between policy intentions and real-world outcomes, providing insights into the effectiveness and impact of the policies on trafficked women.

Identification of impacts: The research focused on identifying the general effects of human trafficking, with particular attention to trafficked women. Documents were analysed to determine how policies addressed or failed to address the causes of trafficking and the needs and challenges faced by trafficked women, thereby informing the overall findings and conclusions of the study.

By integrating documentary evidence with primary data, the critical document analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the research question. This method enriched the analysis by situating the research findings within a broader policy context, thereby enhancing the overall validity and credibility of the study. The insights gained from this analysis were instrumental in shaping the recommendations and conclusions of the research.

2.3 Study Limitations

This study recognizes several limitations in its data collection process. These limitations include the underrepresentation of trafficked men, the exclusion of less frequently mentioned issues, the impact of COVID-19, limited data sources on certain topics, and the indirect representation of the voices of trafficked individuals.

Firstly, the study participants predominantly have experience working with female victims, leading to an underrepresentation of trafficked men. Consequently, the research primarily focuses on issues related to the trafficking of women and girls, which limits the understanding of cases involving men and boys. However, this aligns with global trafficking statistics, indicating that women and girls constitute the majority of trafficked individuals. Therefore, despite the gender imbalance, the research findings remain relevant. While this thesis does not encompass all trafficked individuals, it represents common issues experienced by the majority. Moreover, the participants come from diverse stakeholders and organisations with various experience levels in this field, ensuring the validity and diversity of the research data.

Secondly, trafficking has numerous causes and victims' experiences vary widely during the trafficking process and reintegration. Due to the limited length of this thesis, only issues mentioned by a high number of study participants (over seven out of 23) are included and analysed. Issues or experiences mentioned by fewer than seven participants are not included in this thesis but may be addressed in future academic articles or studies.

Thirdly, some participants had only 1-2 years of experience, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted their work with trafficked individuals. The pandemic's global impact and the reduction in identified trafficking cases during this period are significant data characteristics. This aligns with findings from the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022, which noted: (1) The number of detected victims falls for the first time in 20 years as the COVID-19 pandemic limits opportunities and potentially pushes trafficking further underground while constraining law enforcement capacities to target the crime; (2) Trafficking for sexual exploitation less detected during the COVID-19 pandemic; and (4) Global slowdown in convictions accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic (UNODC, 2022, p. ii). Although this may affect the richness and currency of the data, only two participants fall into this category, minimizing its overall impact on the thesis data.

Fourthly, due to limited data sources, some issues remain unclear. For instance, the specific relocation choices of trafficked returnees are not detailed in the available sources, potentially affecting the applicability of suggested solutions based on their location decisions. Future research should aim to address these gaps to better support the reintegration of trafficked individuals.

Lastly, the primary data were not collected directly from trafficked individuals, despite the research's aim to amplify their voices. COVID-19 restrictions affected the ethical considerations for this study and the latter prevented interviews with trafficked individuals and necessitated online recruitment and interviews with support workers only. Consequently, trafficked individuals' voices, especially in Geb's story, are represented indirectly through support workers' accounts, which may affect the authenticity of their stories. However, since the participants are support workers who directly interact with trafficked individuals, their accounts still provide valuable insights into the experiences of trafficked individuals.

In summary, despite these limitations, the data collected is diverse, rich, and comprehensive, offering valuable insights into the experiences of trafficked individuals in Vietnam. The identified limitations do not significantly undermine the overall findings of the research.

The following chapters will provide the research findings that answer the research questions in detail.

Chapter 3 Causes of Human Trafficking and The Efforts In Gender Equality Policies

Chapter 3 consists of four sections, which explore the root causes of human trafficking in Vietnam and assess the impact of gender equality policies on addressing this issue.

The first section, titled “Gender Inequality and Intersectionality,” introduces the multifaceted causes of human trafficking in Vietnam, emphasizing that gender inequality is a primary root cause that intersects with other contributing factors.

The second section, “The Interplay of Trafficking Market Demands and Gendered Socio-Cultural Norms,” explores the various factors that intersect, such as the targeting of women and girls in the trafficking market, societal expectations, and local customs that confine women to traditional gender roles - particularly the pressure to marry, which creates a challenging environment for women. As a result, women are subjected to immense societal pressure and shame if they are unable to fulfil these roles, potentially leading them into the hands of traffickers.

The third section, “The Effect of Gendered Socio-Cultural Norms on Educational Opportunities,” explores how gender bias and filial duties compel women to forgo educational opportunities, thereby limiting their potential and increasing their vulnerability to human trafficking.

The fourth section, “Vulnerability to Trafficking,” discusses how a lack of information about trafficking, economic motivations, and the desire to escape domestic violence, drive women into the hands of traffickers. It is also demonstrated how these vulnerabilities are closely linked to the factors discussed in the previous section(s).

Geb's Story – Part 1

Geb is a girl who lives in a village in a remote, rural, mountainous area in Vietnam. This village is still under development, and many residents experience economic difficulties. Geb's community is facing a low level of education and lacks access to information, a situation affected by the village's remote location and local practices and characteristics. For example, gender stereotypes, male chauvinism and gender norms have survived here, and gender inequality continues to be influenced by neighbouring China. These conditions make Geb's life challenging.

Being familiar with unfair treatment

When Geb was a child, she experienced the first gender inequalities, witnessing an unequal division of labour in her family. Her mother and grandmother always took care of all the chores in the household, raised the kids, and served the needs of the men in the family. Geb was told that girls do not need to pursue higher education, as girls shall get married as soon as possible, and then serve their husbands' families. Geb's brother, on the other hand, is considered the prime person who maintains the family traditions and heritage and is responsible for ancestor worship⁶. Geb grew up with the voices of girls and women in her family not being respected. In her village, some women also faced domestic violence and dealt with their husbands' alcohol, drug, or gambling addictions. Many women do not dare to speak about their situation because they are afraid of the stigma and victim blaming.

As a result of these circumstances, Geb is so used to having fewer opportunities for education and less access to services and information that she gives ease into the desire and pressure from her family. She, like many other girls in her village, is expected to sacrifice her studies, then try to find a job nearby and earn money to send back to her family as soon as she is old enough (reaching 14 or 15 years old in her village is considered old enough to get married or drop the school to work). However, Geb's lack of education and the discrimination against women in the job market makes it more difficult for her to find a well-paying job.

A going abroad trend in the village

Meanwhile, an increasing trend of going abroad expands in her community. Some people send money from overseas so their parents can build a big house and buy cars. The parents talk about the rosy life overseas and easy jobs with high salaries and then introduce the "opportunities" to other people in the village. Good-looking girls are introduced to foreign husbands. Women who do not meet contemporary beauty

⁶ In Vietnam, "ancestor worship is widely practised" throughout the country, and the need for a boy child, or preferred the eldest son, is emphasized to continue this practice (Burr, 2014, p. 156). "In the past, ancestor worship was concentrated in the patriarchal family (head of the clan, head of the family, chief of the branch, and eldest son), now, all family members worship ancestors in their own family." (Nguyen & Vu, 2020, p. 383). Today, the role of worshipping ancestors is no longer as clear-cut as before, due to the transformation of the family model (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2021).

standards or are considered too old for marriage in Vietnam⁷ may also see their chance by getting married to a foreigner after no one in their community sought to marry them. The more people take these kinds of chances, the more human trafficking networks expand in Geb's village. Some women are aware of some risks involved in living overseas, while others are not.

In the situation that many people from Geb's village gossip about the going abroad trend, Geb and her friends often imagine a rosy life there where they can earn a high amount of money, can go shopping to buy new clothes for the Tet holiday - Lunar New Year (Lunar New Year is Vietnam's traditional holiday when family members from different regions return home to reunite, visit relatives and friends, and honour their ancestors).

Feeling pressure

Geb, a 15-year-old girl, is facing the challenge of finding a good job. However, she lacks understanding, information, and life experience to navigate the complexities of life. In addition, her family is financially struggling, which means her parents can only afford to send her younger siblings to school, leaving Geb unable to finish high school. It is quite normal in her village for girls not to finish high school. Despite these challenges, Geb is eager to learn and explore new things.

However, as her family is so poor that her parents can only afford to send her little sister and brother to school, Geb must give up graduating from high school so she can earn money to contribute to the family's income. Geb accepts that with sadness. While chatting with her friends in similar situations, Geb often talks about her dream of becoming a teacher. However, when realizing the difficult reality of the family, being the eldest sister in the family means she should repay her parents for giving birth and raising her, support her parents by working on the farm/fields, and leave school to take care of her younger siblings or, if she can do better, earn as much money as possible to support her family. Some of Geb's friends suggest that going to school is not as necessary as earning money. Thoughts about life outside the village increasingly become the centre of gossip among the kids.

A fashionable woman arrives

One day, a young woman who has disappeared for several years returns to the village. Dressed in stylish fancy clothes, wearing expensive jewellery and equipped with the latest smartphone, she attracts the attention of all villagers, including Geb. It turns out, that she is, in fact, Geb's cousin. People say that she

⁷ The minimum legal age for marriage was set at 20 for men and 18 for women (Vietnam Law on Marriage and Law 2014, 2014 Article 8). However, the age of marriage varies among different areas. And child marriage is also a "persistent issue", and "while its prevalence varies across geographic areas, girls from all regions of Vietnam and all layers of society are vulnerable to becoming a child bride"(UNICEF Viet Nam & UNPFA Vietnam, 2018, p. 2)

married a foreigner and is having a rosy life. She often sends money back to her parents, who have a bigger house than others in her village.

She visits Geb's house and chats with Geb's parents about the chance for Geb to go abroad to work or marry a Chinese man. She said her husband has some friends who are still single and want to get married to a Vietnamese girl. She also talks about job opportunities with promising salaries in case Geb wants to work there. These opportunities seem fantastic for the girls in the village considering their current circumstances. The woman says that Geb would find a good job, a high salary, and have a good husband "there". Geb's parents would not need to take care of her at home anymore and would instead receive financial support from Geb as soon as she arrived "there". They quickly and happily ask her to take Geb "there". The woman gives them a bulk of money saying it is the pre-paid salary for the first couple of months. This assures Geb's parents and strengthens their belief about the rosy life that Geb will have when she arrives "there".

3.1 Gender Inequality and Intersectionality

This section discusses how the findings from this study are in line with existing research that recognizes the interconnected nature of the various factors that contribute to human trafficking in Vietnam. Overall, this research argues that gender inequality should not be seen in isolation but as intersecting with other components within a broader patriarchal system that worsens the risk of human trafficking for women. It stresses why gender inequality is a fundamental underlying cause of human trafficking that needs to be considered in any study on the topic.

First, this research confirms the intersectionality of compounding factors that contribute to human trafficking. This research underscores the intersectionality of various compounding factors contributing to human trafficking. Human trafficking arises from complex and multidimensional causes, including poverty, armed conflicts, weak governance, limited access to education and employment, inadequate law enforcement, and cultural influences, while also intersecting with broader development challenges such as social exclusion, justice, and governance failures (Nguyen, 2021). These factors are interconnected socially, economically, and politically (Nguyen, 2021). In Vietnam, poverty, ethnicity, and gender are significant vulnerabilities associated with human trafficking (Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, 2021). Furthermore, human trafficking in Vietnam is shaped by economic, political, and socio-cultural dynamics (Hoang, 2013; Tucker et al., 2010, as cited in Tran et al., 2020). Particularly, the intersection of poverty and gender-based mistreatment of women and girls in families exacerbates the risk of sex trafficking for women (Silverman et al., 2007).

Intersectionality theory underscores that individuals' identities are multidimensional. Race, class, and gender identities, in particular, shape individual experiences of oppression. Applying an intersectional lens to the phenomenon of human trafficking is crucial to understanding why certain individuals, particularly marginalised groups, are more vulnerable to trafficking (Davidtz et al., 2022). Moreover, understanding the particularities of historical and social environments can offer valuable insights into the contextual needs of survivors and thus the most effective support strategies (Davidtz et al., 2022).

In line with the existing literature, the current research confirms that human trafficking is a result of compounded factors.

"From what I have known, there are many reasons to put a person into the hands of traffickers; there are many root causes, and gender issues make trafficking worse." (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

"There are many reasons cause human trafficking, from lack of information, legal system, poverty, ..." (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

“There is not only one caused issue; that is the compound of the many problems.” (O6, man, 45s, Others)

See endnotes for additional quotes from study participants on intersectionality and gender inequality: ⁱ

While acknowledging the complex nature of human trafficking, this study focuses on the relationship between trafficking and gender issues. It delves into gender-related problems while also recognising other socioeconomic factors. Gender inequality stands as a primary root cause of violence against women, including human trafficking. This inequality intersects with various cultural, social, and economic factors across individual, family, community, and societal levels.

Gender inequality significantly contributes to trafficking, particularly affecting women and girls. Limited equal opportunities for women in disadvantaged families often lead to migration and subsequent victimization by traffickers (Tucker et al., 2010, as cited in Tran et al., 2020). Trafficking is rooted in gender inequality, compounded by poverty, lack of education, and low income. Social discrimination increases the vulnerability of women and girls, making them more susceptible to deceptive job offers and leading to higher rates of modern slavery in domestic work, the sex industry, and forced marriage (Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). Associated risk factors contributing to violence against women include lower levels of education, exposure to child maltreatment or family violence, and limited access to paid employment for women (Heise et al., 1999). Additionally, attitudes condoning violence and societal norms privileging men and marginalising women are linked to higher rates of violence against women (Vietnam Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs MOLISA et al., 2020, p. 3). Embedded sexism and masculine privileges perpetuate trafficking and prostitution, which are intertwined with deeply ingrained societal norms favouring men and objectifying women. Traditional beliefs prioritising men and treating women as commodities exacerbate these issues (F. S. Khan, 2023).

Only gender vulnerability standing alone cannot be the cause of human trafficking, it rather intersects with other factors, and each factor has influence on gender issues, and gender issues have influence on other factors. As the thesis focuses mainly on gender issues, the thesis focuses on analyzing gender issues/themes that emerged from data analysis.

Despite being influenced by and interconnected with other factors, gender inequality can be considered an underlying cause that significantly contributes to human trafficking in Vietnam. In Vietnam, gender-related issues play a significant role in human trafficking. Women face the risk of being trafficked whether they conform to gender stereotypes or attempt to escape them.

3.1.1 When Women Adhere to Traditional Gender Roles and Stereotypes

When women conform to traditional gender roles and stereotypes, they can become stuck in the position of being the primary caregiver for their family, often at the expense of their own well-being. This acceptance has two major consequences that can make women more vulnerable to being trafficked.

Firstly, gender roles are strictly defined in patriarchal societies. Men are expected to be breadwinners, while women are expected to prioritize marriage and the upbringing of children (Hoang, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2022). Women who do not marry by a certain age can face societal pressure and shame. This pressure creates risks and can push them into the hands of traffickers. Some societies or localities have norms – enforced by the community and family – which endorse underaged and forced marriages (Kakar, 2020; Le & Hoang, 2019). These customs increase women's vulnerability to trafficking, particularly when demand outweighs 'supply'.

Secondly, filial duties are respected as socio-cultural norms in Vietnam (Soucy, 2000) causing women and girls to sacrifice their personal wishes for the support of their families (Vijayarasa, 2010). Daughters are burdened with family care responsibilities. They are deprived of educational opportunities and forced to sacrifice schooling to support their families financially. The resulting lack of education restricts women's access to information beyond traditional roles, leaving them vulnerable to trafficking.

The root cause of various issues can be traced back to the confinement of women in certain roles that are dictated by gender stereotypes and expectations. In Vietnam, women often give up their own aspirations to fulfil their families' needs, as societal happiness is linked to domestic responsibilities. Overall, gender stereotypes and role expectations perpetuate human trafficking by limiting women's opportunities and promoting a culture of subordination and inequality. As a result, they are deprived of the chance to have a better future and are left vulnerable to exploitation.

3.1.2 When Women Challenge Traditional Gender Roles and Stereotypes

In cases of women and girls trying to stand up against unfair treatment, they still face the risk of trafficking and being trapped by the fake opportunities offered by traffickers. Even when women attempt to defy traditional gender roles and stereotypes, such as escaping domestic violence or seeking economic independence, they continue to be at risk of trafficking. Escaping domestic violence does not guarantee safety (Leidholdt, 2013; Kirovohrad et al., 2021). Despite their efforts to flee abusive situations, women and girls may fall into the hands of traffickers (Leidholdt, 2013). Additionally, seeking economic independence to escape economic difficulties also exposes women to trafficking risks (Cameron et al., 2023; Cho, 2015). Limited educational and job opportunities hinder their ability to secure stable employment with adequate salaries. Motivated by the desire to improve their circumstances, women may seek opportunities outside

their current limitations. However, their lack of information and experience puts them at risk of falling into the traps set by traffickers (Clawson & Dutch, 2008b; Le, 2014). Economic difficulties and the pursuit of a better life are common push factors for human trafficking, as noted by study participants and supported by existing literature.

While previous studies (such as (such as Olivius, 2018) have highlighted that poverty, lack of awareness, materialism, and high aspirations are causes of trafficking, this study finds that the root cause lies in gender issues.

When talking about awareness and education, with better education, people can enhance their understanding and preventive skills, reducing their vulnerability. In my neighbourhood, 10-15 years ago, there were many cases of trafficking, often perpetrated by individuals within the community who used promises of jobs and a better future to lure victims. If people had a slightly better awareness, they could recognize these risks more effectively. [...] The key is having resources. For example, if they have an education, they can use it to access information more effectively. They will know where to go and whom to approach. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

This study aligns with previous research, such as Houck (2003), which confirmed that social, cultural, political, and economic factors contribute to persistent gender subordination in Vietnam. This gender subordination is a fundamental root cause of trafficking (Houck, 2003). Gender stereotypes, role expectations, gender-based violence, discrimination, and limited access to education and employment opportunities all contribute to economic difficulties and diminish women's potential, putting them at risk of trafficking. In short, whether women accept their unequal circumstances or attempt to fight against them, they remain vulnerable to trafficking.

Gender inequality is very clear in human trafficking [...] The inequality is rooted in the unequal relationship between men and women; this relationship allows men to have the right to control women, control their body and their sexual relationship, leading to gender violence [...] Human trafficking deeply rooted in gender norms, gender stereotypes of the dependent relationship of women on men, which form the tendency of women being victimisation [...] Gender inequality is a cause of every trafficking case, not only one specific case. (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

Therefore, trafficked individuals cannot be blamed for being victims of trafficking. Rather, the responsibility lies with the societal structures that perpetuate gender inequality. Addressing these issues requires gender equality policies that empower women and girls. While existing policies in Vietnam focus on women's empowerment through education and employment opportunities, they may not sufficiently tackle the underlying systemic inequities. Taking into account these insights, policies aimed at combating human trafficking should take a comprehensive approach that addresses the structural inequalities and gender biases deeply rooted in society. The following sections will discuss all of these arguments in more detail.

3.2 The Interplay of Trafficking Market Demands and Gendered Socio-Cultural Norms

In this section, it is argued that the global trafficking market demand, in tandem with a socio-cultural environment in which women and girls are affected by gender role expectations contributes to human trafficking in Vietnam. The findings of this study align with previous research, which has shown that gender role expectations, influenced by local customs, play a role in human trafficking (for example, see Cameron et al., 2023; Khan, 2023). However, this study offers a new insight by emphasizing the shame associated with not meeting societal expectations of marriage, which also contributes to trafficking. These pressures and shame stem from entrenched gender role expectations and cultural norms. In Vietnam, persistent gender role expectations have led to an unequal division of labour, pressuring women to primarily focus on maintaining family happiness and managing household chores, with the ultimate goal of becoming a wife and mother. Failing to meet these norms can result in shame and blame from the community. Local customs in some areas reinforce these expectations, emphasizing that a woman's main purpose in life is to be a wife and caretaker. These factors make girls and women vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers.

In summary, this section makes the following contributions to the existing literature:

- 1) The demand in the trafficking market treats women as commodities, thus worsening the issue of trafficking, which is consistent with previous international and Vietnamese studies.
- 2) Gender role expectations create a challenging environment that heightens the risk of trafficking for women and girls. This observation aligns with international and Vietnamese literature.
- 3) Outdated local customs and practices limit women, thereby increasing their susceptibility to trafficking, aligning with previous literature.
- 4) This study introduces a new finding: the social pressure for women and girls to marry creates a vulnerability to trafficking associated with feelings of shame.

Here, multiple intersecting factors contribute to an increased risk of human trafficking victimisation. Next to gender, poverty becomes a push factor that drives poor women into the hands of traffickers more often than affluent women. The complexity of the intersectional factors becomes apparent when considering that women's relative affluence is, in turn, affected by gendered and racialised access to education and employment. Next to gender, ethnic identity becomes a key factor when customs and practices of ethnic minority groups, such as the Hmong community, affect social expectations regarding the appropriate age for women to marry. These complexities highlight the importance of adopting an intersectional lens when investigating human trafficking in the context of Vietnam and beyond.

3.2.1 Trafficking Market Demand - Women As Commodities

This section aligns with previous studies, confirming that human trafficking is a gender-related issue. It argues that women and girls are often treated as commodities, sold for various purposes, especially sexual exploitation, due to being perceived as sexual objects rather than as human beings with equal rights to men and boys. As long as the demand in the human trafficking market views them this way, women and girls remain at high risk of being trafficked.

Human trafficking is primarily a gender issue. The majority of trafficking victims are women and girls (Radjenovic & Voronova, 2016). The increasing demand for sex workers has driven the prevalence of trafficking (Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). While trafficking can affect anyone, women and girls are disproportionately impacted due to societal disadvantages and prejudices, combined with the demand in the trafficking market. Globally, women and girls comprised 60% of the total detected victims in 2020 (UNODC, 2023, p. 25).

In Vietnam, most trafficking victims are women and girls, although men and boys are also affected. According to statistics from the Ministry of Public Security, nearly 4,000 human trafficking cases were detected in the last decade, involving around 8,500 victims. Approximately 70% of all victims were trafficked to China. Cross-border trafficking between Vietnam and Cambodia predominantly involved women for prostitution and forced labour. Meanwhile, smaller-scale trafficking for prostitution or forced marriage occurred along the Vietnam–Lao Democratic Republic border. Illegal marriage brokering and false marriages to Malaysia, China, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan were more common in southern provinces. Cases of child trafficking, substitution, and appropriation were more prevalent in northern border provinces (Tran & Le, 2020, p. 1).

The exchange of women and young girls as a commodity to address an income shortage and poverty is a reflection of a broader problem of gender inequality that demands greater attention (Vijayarasa, 2010). This research highlights that the market demand for trafficking constitutes a significant social problem and a form of gender-based violence that needs to be addressed. Participants in this study noted that women and girls are more at risk because they can be trafficked for various purposes and account for a higher number of victims than men and boys. This study agrees, stating that the nature of human trafficking inherently violates women's rights: women and girls are often treated as commodities and sold for various trafficking purposes rather than being seen as real humans. While men and boys are also victims of certain forms of trafficking, such as labour exploitation, women and girls constitute the majority of victims, primarily through sexual exploitation. When women are viewed as sexual servitudes, they are not respected and face discrimination and inequality. Therefore, in the context of human trafficking, women and girls are already victims of gender violence and gender inequality.

Actually, I see that victims of trafficking are mostly women and children. My organisation mainly work to support trafficked returnees from China, and the majority of victims are women and children [...] For women, the purposes of trafficking are various. For example, they can be sold for forced marriage, ...[...] Forced into the sex trade is also very popular, and this form is considered a faster way to sell women. Of course, the “price” for trafficking these women is not as high as in forced marriage, but it is a quicker way. Just grab someone and throw them in the prostitute/brothels; it’s done. Traffickers do not need to bargain or work through any agents... I heard a story of that victim; she was sold for forced marriage, and the husband was allowed time to try on; for example, after some months of “trying on”, the “husband” can return the wife if they are not satisfied. So, trafficking victims are a commodity. Another form is trafficking for the exploitation of surrogacy. I do not remember exactly from what source, but I read news from England about the baby farm in China. There, the women are forced to there raped until they give birth, and then after giving birth, the children are sold away. All women on that farm served as tools for giving birth continuously; even the women who were pretty old were put in the same situation. The outdated women will be sold for domestic servitude or forced labour, or if they can still be exploited, they will be forced to work in the sex trade. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

Many women and children are the target victims of sexual exploitation and labour exploitation. The women are considered sexual servitudes, so they become the potential targets of trafficking, and traffickers pay more attention to women. In contrast, men are less likely to be sexually exploited as men are not considered as the targets of sexual objects as women. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

The major purpose of trafficking is sexual exploitation, which is why women are considered a commodity that can bring many benefits as they are served for many purposes. [...] Most of the purposes of human trafficking are for sexual exploitation. Women are a more profitable "commodity" because they can serve many purposes of exploitation. (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

See endnotes for additional quotes from study participants on trafficking market demand – women as commodities: ⁱⁱ

This section emphasises the commodification of women and girls for sexual purposes, highlighting the significant gender-based violence characteristic of human trafficking. The demand for trafficked individuals creates a particularly challenging environment for women. Due to societal biases such as gender role expectations and pervasive gender inequalities, women and girls are disproportionately affected and especially vulnerable. The following sections will further examine this challenging environment.

3.2.2 Gender Role Expectations

When Geb was a child, she experienced the first gender inequalities, witnessing an unequal division of labour in her family. Her mother and grandmother always took care of all the chores in the household, raised the kids, and served the needs of the men in the family.
(Geb’s Story – Part 1)

In this section, it is explained how cultural norms and expectations can create conditions that traffickers can exploit to recruit individuals. This discovery is consistent with previous research. Because cultural norms and expectations differ significantly between men and women and daughters and sons, women are

often seen as suitable only for certain types of work, mainly domestic tasks. Traffickers can exploit these gender expectations to trap women and girls.

Previous studies have shown that cultural norms have a harmful impact, leading to human trafficking (Khan, 2023). The “patriarchal structures” within families and cultures can result in increased violence against women and children (Cameron et al., 2023, p. 82). Social and familial expectations regarding gender roles and behaviours often lead to gender inequality, which in turn heightens the likelihood of women and children being trafficked (Cameron et al., 2023, p. 81). In many cases, limited equal opportunities for women in troubled families are the main reasons for women to migrate and become trafficking victims (Tucker et al., 2010, as cited in Tran et al., 2020).

In Vietnam, unequal gender norms persist due to Confucianism's conservative approach to women's roles and traditional gendered social norms (Nguyen et al., 2022). The preference for sons remains prevalent in Vietnamese society, both in urban and rural areas (Bélanger & Khuất, 2002; Khuất, 2004; Pham et al., 2021, as cited in Nguyen et al., 2022). Men are often perceived as strong and decisive, capable of handling heavy and complex tasks, holding important positions, maintaining a kinship system, and taking care of their ancestors (Nguyen et al., 2022). Women's success is typically evaluated based on their domestic performance and family management skills, regardless of their achievements in public or professional domains (Hoang, 2020; Khuất, 2004, as cited in Nguyen et al., 2022). A woman's identity is closely tied to her family, with her social standing primarily judged by her domestic role (Hoang, 2020). Despite the economic and social changes since Vietnam transitioned from a centrally planned economy to a “socialist market economy under state guidance” in the late 1980s, women are still often portrayed in public discourse as essentialist figures, primarily as mothers and caregivers, with their professional achievements frequently downplayed (Hoang, 2020). Societal expectations influence both men's and women's migration choices, shaping their mobility and strategies for improving their lives (Su, 2024).

Women victims are often deceived into taking up jobs such as housemaids or factory workers, which are typically associated with their gender roles. This is because they have been brought up believing that women are only meant to do jobs related to family, cooking, and manual labour. Traffickers take advantage of these stereotypes and offer jobs that are suitable for their needs, which victims are more likely to accept. [...] As for men, they think differently; they need to have a breadwinner in the family, they need to be a strong man (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

I think gender roles are predetermined; for example, what do men do, and what do women do? For example, men are the seafarers, women stay at home and do housework and go to market (to buy food and cook for family) [...] the characteristics of men and women are different; the differences are not natural but socially constructed, and men play the role of breadwinner in the family. (O5, man, 40s, Others)

“When it comes to gender equality, both the community and parents hold beliefs that contain elements of gender inequality. For example, girls are expected to work in fields such as sewing...” (N2, man, 45s, NGO)

Another problem is the unfair division of labour and decision-making within the household. This occurs when household chores and responsibilities are considered unpaid work and are expected to be carried out by women alone. In many cases, women end up feeling exhausted due to the overwhelming amount of housework they have to do, often without any assistance. This issue is often linked to gender norms and stereotypes. (G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

As a result, women and girls are vulnerable to the tricks of traffickers. Or, in the words of a study participant:

“Prejudiced beliefs about gender roles and rights can increase the risk of human trafficking.” (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

This vulnerability is further exacerbated by cultural customs that reinforce the domestic roles of women and girls, encouraging them to fulfil the goal of becoming a wife.

3.2.3 Local Custom/Practices Restrict Women

The societal expectation for women to marry and take on the roles of a good wife and caregiver is deeply ingrained, with the entire community reinforcing these stereotypes. In some communities, outdated customs such as child marriage perpetuate women's vulnerability, as discussed by study participants. This observation aligns with prior research indicating that the geographic and cultural context of a country significantly influences the occurrence of human trafficking (Cho, 2015).

The community's social practices tradition is also considered a risk factor for human trafficking (Makisaka, 2009). Customs and religious beliefs are contributing factors to the persistence of forced marriages (Kakar, 2020). In Vietnam, local customs such as unregistered marriages and underage marriages are prevalent in many ethnic minority areas despite being violations of marriage and family laws (Le & Hoang, 2019, p. 29). In the northwest region, the Hmong⁸ ethnic group practices “wife-kidnapping” as part of their marriage customsⁱⁱⁱ. Originally rooted in cultural traditions, wife-kidnapping has evolved over time and can lead to sexual abuse or trafficking. This practice particularly affects young Hmong girls who should be attending school (Le & Hoang, 2019).

Hmong marriage customs encompass various practices beyond wife-kidnapping, including arranged marriages, forced marriages, elopements, and parental permission for marriage (Nguyen et al., 2011, p. S202). According to Nicola et al. (2014; Sweeney, 2015), the Hmong practice of bride kidnapping, known as

⁸ One of 54 official recognized ethnic communities of Vietnam (Portal, n.d.; *Vietnam - World Directory of Minorities & Indigenous Peoples*, 2015)

'wife-snatching', perpetuates the vulnerability and lack of independence experienced by many young girls. This tradition is extensively documented in the literature on Hmong marriage customs. A Hmong boy can forcibly kidnap a girl and keep her in his home for three days. After this period, during which the girl's parents are unaware of her location, she is regarded as having joined his household permanently. Returning home thereafter risks social disgrace, isolation, and ancestral disapproval (Nicola et al., 2014; Sweeney, 2015).

The Vietnamese government imposes fines for underage marriage among the Hmong; however, due to limited resources, manpower, and ineffective policy implementation, traditions like child marriage and kidnapping persist (Sweeney, 2015). Hmong women often marry young, despite laws requiring girls to be 18 to marry. Many marry between 18 and 20, but some as young as 14 (Nicola et al., 2014, as cited in Sweeney, 2015), influenced by financial pressures and cultural beliefs. Families may encourage early marriage for bride price and fear of social shame. Bride kidnapping is a harmful tradition that exacerbates vulnerability, leading to potential domestic abuse and trafficking (Sweeney, 2015).

Based on a collection of court documents from prosecutive cases between 2012-2020, over 60% of traffickers and victims in Vietnam are from ethnic minority groups (Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, 2021, p. 4). Among these groups, H'mong people are the most vulnerable to human trafficking, accounting for over 32% of the total victims and 33% of the total traffickers in this dataset, despite only making up 1.4% of the population (Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, 2021, p. 4). While bride kidnapping persists in some areas (People's Army Newspaper, n.d.), changes influenced by modernisation and Vietnamese law have led to a decline in its prevalence (Nguyen et al., 2011). However, marriage practices continue to limit options for Hmong girls despite a shift towards love matches and a rise in the age of first marriage (Nicola et al., 2014).

This study emphasises that adhering to local customs and cultural traditions can perpetuate gender stereotypes and reinforce gender role expectations for women and girls. Additionally, traffickers can exploit these practices, making women and girls more vulnerable to trafficking.

In some high mountain areas, in the event of being abducted or coerced into relocation for marriage, some people regard it as a facet of their cultural practices akin to the custom of bride kidnapping. They do not consider it to be human trafficking but instead perceive it as being deceived and forced to travel to the other side to get married. From their perspective, they do not view it as an instance of human trafficking. (O5, man, 40s, Others)

Child marriage, which refers to girls getting married at a young age, is also a problem. For instance, the practice of wife stealing is common in specific communities, but it can be misused and is dangerous when traffickers exploit it. In Vietnam, there are few such incidents; that's not much; it's probably just a special thing. (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

Some ethnic minority areas still have the cultural tradition of getting married early, and girls don't need to study much; for example, some places still practice child marriage and girls at 13-14 years old are given away to get married. So people consider love affairs at that age normal, and they don't need to go to school. Traffickers take advantage of this problem. [...] We worked with a victim from a mountainous ethnic minority area in Dien Bien. She has an older sister and a younger brother. Her older sister had gone to work far away. In her turn, according to the customs in her community, she must get married very early. She is considered over the marriage age if she is not married at 14. Usually, at 12, she would have to go to your husband's house to eat and live there to get acquainted with the husband's family. This girl was 14 years old and had not married then; her parents told her to work if she didn't want to get married. Then she went to work and was then tricked into being sold to China as a prostitute. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

In cases where girls are deceived into trafficking through romantic relationships, the root cause is often their societal expectations to get married at a very young age. Due to this, they enter into relationships too early, when they may not yet have the essential life skills and knowledge to make informed decisions. (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

See endnotes for additional quotes from study participants on local custom/practices restrict women: ^{iv}

In summary, as long as backward practices such as child marriage persist in the community, young girls remain at a heightened risk of exploitation and abuse. Additionally, as long as the community continues to evaluate women and girls based on their ability to fulfil the role of a "wife," it creates social pressure for them to conform to these norms at all costs, thereby increasing their risk. This issue will be further discussed in the following section.

3.2.4 Ultimate Goal In Life: Wife

Geb was told that girls do not need to pursue higher education, as girls shall get married as soon as possible, and then serve their husbands' families. (**Geb's Story – Part 1**)

This section brings attention to a new finding: the social pressure for women and girls to become wives creates a vulnerability to trafficking linked with feelings of shame. In Vietnam, being a wife is seen as the primary aspiration for women, and failing to meet this expectation is often met with shame from families and communities. These cultural norms and gender roles contribute to the pressure on girls to marry, emphasising its significance as a life goal. Consequently, when women and girls do not conform to these societal expectations, they often face shame, making them more susceptible to trafficking.

Previous research indicated that environmental and relational factors—such as family dynamics, community practices, and societal values—play a pivotal role in shaping individuals' susceptibility to trafficking (Le, 2014). In Vietnam, traditional Confucian social norms perpetuate the portrayal of women as accountable for any shortcomings, fostering a culture of compliance and blame (Khuất, 2004, 2016), as cited in (Nguyen et al., 2022). In contemporary Vietnamese society, women continue to value the importance of creating a happy family (Khuất, 2016; as cited in Nguyen et al., 2022), as cited in (Nguyen et

al., 2022). Despite societal changes and Western influences, marriage remains a highly idealised social institution (Vu, 2018, 2020). Traditional values and expectations still have a significant influence, with marriage symbolizing happiness, security, and social achievement, especially for women (Vu, 2018, 2020). As a result, becoming a wife is often seen as the ultimate goal in a woman's life.

The gender factor here is that girls are expected to get married and do not need to study much. Traffickers exploit the gender stereotypes that we define about women and men in the community. [...] They also think that since they are female, they only need the things at that level, which is just getting married, having children, and helping around with the household or doing a job like domestic servitude is ok., (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

Gender inequality is a contributing factor that enables conditions that traffickers to exploit. For instance, during my work on a project, I interacted with many parents in rural areas who believed **that girls do not need to study much. This is because, according to them, even if girls study at a higher level, they still end up getting married**, and thus, it is not necessary for them to pursue higher education. (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

It is a common belief that people tend to care more about their sons than their daughters. This is because sons are usually expected to live with their parents even after marriage and care for them in their old age. **On the other hand, daughters are often expected to get married and leave their parent's house, so they are not given as much attention or concern as sons.** (O6, man, 45s, Others)

3.2.5 Shame and Blame on Women Failing to Satisfy Gender Expectations

As marriage holds great significance for women's lives (Nguyen et al., 2022), it also plays a crucial role in shaping family reputation, leading individuals to be highly concerned about maintaining a good reputation (Vu, 2018, 2020). This concern is particularly prominent in closely-knit rural communities, where a good reputation not only impacts the individual but also their family (Vu, 2018, 2020). Consequently, if women do not marry at the socially expected age, do not give birth to a son, or fail to maintain family happiness, they face significant pressure and shame from the community. To avoid this shame, women may take actions considered 'shameful,' with the stigma of being unmarried often seen as more severe than the shame of being trafficked. The research contributes a new finding to the existing knowledge, highlighting that the shame associated with failing to meet gender expectations is a key factor behind trafficking.

Wanting to get married can be risky for some women. [...] They might even let themselves be deceived, hoping for a chance at marriage, because if they stay in their community, it's tough. [...] Here, reaching 20 years old but not yet married is considered "é" (similar to leftovers/spinsters or "the jar is cold" – too old to be single/too old to be on the market). Being considered a spinster is really terrible. One girl even took her own life because she couldn't find a husband despite trying so hard and feeling so much pressure. In that area, there are many cases like that. (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

The community has some strong cultural beliefs, like the idea that daughters must sacrifice for the family, while sons are considered more valuable. When a girl reaches the age of marriage but cannot get married, she has to go somewhere to reduce the shame on her and her family. [...] In some cases, families with daughters who are past the marriage age even

pay recruitment agencies to take their daughters away, referring to them as “quả bom nổ chậm” (ticking time bombs⁹) in the house. (O2, woman, 50s, Others).

In the Mong or Ha Nhi ethnic community, it is believed that women who have a deep or loud voice like a man find it difficult to get married. If they remain unmarried for too long, they often leave their community to seek marriage opportunities in other places (crossing the border). There are cases like that... (G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

When family conflicts arise, it is often assumed that women are not fulfilling their roles as caretakers and maintainers of family happiness. (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

Because of the importance placed on family duties and traditional gender roles, women are often expected to prioritise caregiving responsibilities over pursuing personal goals. As a result, girls may have fewer opportunities for personal development, which can make them more vulnerable to various risks. The following section will explore the effects of these dynamics in more detail.

3.3 The Effect of Gendered Socio-Cultural Norms on Educational Opportunities

This section emphasises how gender bias and filial duties restrict women’s and girls’ access to education, aligning with previous international and Vietnamese literature. It explains that educational disparities are influenced by gender norms that favour boys over girls, as well as societal pressure on women to sacrifice for family obligations. This heightens the vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking because they take risks in search of alternative ways to support their families.

Economic factors further intersect with these social pressures, as some women enter organised or arranged marriages seeking financial stability or means to support their parents. This reinforces the role of broader community expectations and family influence in shaping women’s perceptions of their responsibilities. Ultimately, the intersection of gender norms, economic pressures, and filial obligations creates a structural disadvantage that heightens women’s susceptibility to trafficking.

3.3.1 Gendered Views on Education

Geb’s family is financially struggling, which means her parents can only afford to send her younger siblings to school, leaving Geb unable to finish high school. It is quite normal in her village for girls not to finish high school. **(Geb’s Story – Part 1)**

This section agrees with previous studies, which suggest that women and girls have limited educational opportunities due to sociocultural factors, especially pervasive gender bias. As long as these societal norms continue to exist, women and girls will continue to have limited access to education, making them more vulnerable to human trafficking.

⁹ This can be understood as they believe their daughters need to leave as soon as possible when they hit marriage age, or else they’ll be like ticking time bombs, causing more stress and shame if they stay unmarried.

Lack of education is one of the intersectional factors contributing to trafficking (Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). This lack of educational opportunities results from sociocultural factors, such as the oppression of women and children within a social structure that subordinates women to men. Hazel (2023) argues that these sociocultural factors, along with discriminatory attitudes and practices, inhibit women from participating in family decision-making processes, thereby heightening their susceptibility to traffickers. Girls are often seen as burdens, with far less time and resources invested in them, and in some cases, they are prevented from going to school (Hazel, 2023). Families often discourage girls from pursuing education, deeming it a waste of time, which results in a lack of educational opportunities, qualifications, and training for girls (Hazel, 2023).

Vietnamese gender role expectations also influence how parents and potential husbands value women's education. Parents often devalue their daughters' education, expecting them to marry quickly and rely on their husbands' income. Men frequently disregard highly educated women as potential wives, as it conflicts with their prejudiced view of women as inferior beings. This pervasive societal disregard for highly educated young women perpetuates the cycle of under-education among girls.

I've observed that those who become victims of human trafficking often come from backgrounds with limited educational opportunities and where men are given preference over women. [...] To address this problem, we must tackle the underlying causes, including deeply rooted customs and traditions. Despite societal progress, many people, including those in both rural and urban areas with access to good education, still hold the belief that having a son is crucial. Changing these attitudes will require a significant and sustained effort. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

In the past, male chauvinism was a prevalent issue where families prioritized having a son by any means necessary. Although I am not sure if this is a direct pushing factor, living in an unequal family dynamic can potentially lead to human trafficking. When girls or women are not valued or appreciated as much as sons and men in the family, it can create a culture where girls and women are looked down upon and mistreated. (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

From a young age, boys and girls have faced unequal opportunities when it comes to attending school. Although this issue is primarily caused by gender inequality, many people fail to recognize it as such. There is a common belief that men are more capable and perform better work, which results in them receiving more educational resources. (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

See endnotes for additional quotes from study participants on gender bias in education: ^v

The prevailing belief in the community encourages disparities in educational opportunities for women and girls, constraining their self-perceptions and leading them to believe they are only suitable for fulfilling family obligations. This belief reinforces their acceptance of educational disparity as a normal part of life. This issue will be explored in the following section.

3.3.2 Filial Duties/Piety

Geb is so used to having fewer opportunities for education and less access to services and information that she gives ease into the desire and pressure from her family. She, like many other girls in her village, is expected to sacrifice her studies, then try to find a job nearby and earn money to send back to her family as soon as she is old enough (reaching 14 or 15 years old in her village is considered old enough to get married or drop the school to work) [...] Her family is so poor that her parents can only afford to send her little sister and brother to school, Geb must give up graduating from high school so she can earn money to contribute to the family's income. Geb accepts that with sadness. While chatting with her friends in similar situations, Geb often talks about her dream of becoming a teacher. However, when realizing the difficult reality of the family, being the eldest sister in the family means she should repay her parents for giving birth and raising her, support her parents by working on the farm/fields, and leave school to take care of her younger siblings or, if she can do better, earn as much money as possible to support her family. **(Geb's Story – Part 1)**

The section discusses how family obligations, influenced by Confucian values like filial piety, significantly contribute to human trafficking in Vietnam. It highlights how societal pressure to fulfil filial duties drives women into trafficking risks, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation rooted in cultural norms. This is in line with previous international and Vietnamese literature.

Family obligations play a significant role in contributing to trafficking. Parents, relatives, friends, and neighbours often support traffickers (Trees et al., 2012). Bearing significant social pressure from a value system that promotes piety and obligation driven by economic need, families play multiple roles in the trafficking of women (Vijayarasa, 2010). However, the exchange of women and young girls as commodities to address income shortages and poverty reflects a broader problem of gender inequality that demands greater attention (Vijayarasa, 2010).

In Vietnam, parental decision-making often drives young women's internal and international migration (Busza, 2004; Lynellyn, 2004; Rushing, 2006; as cited in Vijayarasa, 2010). Families view daughters as a source of reliable remittances, and community norms support youth migration (Rushing, 2006, as cited in Vijayarasa, 2010). This includes selling daughters (Lynellyn, 2004; Rushing, 2006) and deliberately ignoring their daughters' engagement in sex work (Doussantousse & Tooke, 2002, as cited in Vijayarasa, 2010). Parents often accept coerced sex work for their children due to financial needs (Rushing, 2006). In southern Vietnam, many victims in the dataset of court cases were deceived through marriage brokerage into marrying Chinese men, with marriage migration serving as an economic development strategy for numerous families (Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, 2021, p. 5). Family needs and cultural values that impose familial obligations on girls create a desire to send remittances home, even through unsafe and irregular migration (Vijayarasa, 2010). Women are manipulated by consumerism and distorted family values to fulfil family needs and consumption under the guise of cultural traditions—duty, care, and gratitude—even if it means being sold into prostitution (Heyzer, 2002, as cited in Vijayarasa, 2010). This

partly explains why daughters feel pride in contributing to their families' livelihoods despite being ashamed of sex work (Busza, 2004, as cited in Vijayarasa, 2010).

Filial piety, a central Confucian principle in Vietnam that influences women's migration decisions, worsens their vulnerability to trafficking. The concept of "on" (moral debt) is crucial in Vietnamese women's religious and familial concerns (Soucy, 2000). Jamieson (1995, as cited in Soucy, 2000) emphasizes that filial piety ("hiếu") is central to Vietnamese culture, where children are taught to honour and obey their parents, constantly striving to meet their parents' needs and wishes. Confucianism depicts women as embodying unconditional devotion and loyalty (Pensinger, 1992, as cited in Vijayarasa, 2010). Filial piety is a long-standing presence in Vietnamese culture, with children constantly exposed to examples of filial piety in daily life and historical narratives (Soucy, 2000). The parent-child relationship is central to Vietnamese culture, overshadowing other aspects (Soucy, 2000). This concept deeply influences women's perceptions of their identity, as many women feel a strong obligation to contribute to their family's economic welfare and care for ailing parents (Le, 2017). Despite the family dynamics, women remain particularly filial toward their mothers, and family members are integral to their sense of identity (Le, 2017). One woman's reflection illustrates the conflicted emotions between "fate" and obligations (Le, 2017). As a result, Vietnamese women are often drawn into trafficking due to family obligations, and families play an increasing role in the trafficking of women and girls (Vijayarasa, 2010).

This research confirms that the pressure to fulfill filial duties significantly contributes to the prevalence of human trafficking. The obligation of filial duty serves as a catalyst, pushing women into the risk of trafficking through various mechanisms. First, women frequently find themselves compelled to sacrifice their own opportunities for education to support their younger siblings or male relatives, symbolising their commitment to fulfilling filial duties. Second, women often sacrifice their personal ambitions to adhere to filial piety by entering marriages with wealthy individuals, commonly known as foreign husbands or partners, in order to seek financial stability or gains to support their parents. Third, they may take on any available job to provide financial support to their families, often encouraged by their families regardless of the nature of the work involved.

On one hand, women are often expected to give up their educational opportunities to take care of their younger siblings or male relatives. This shows their dedication to fulfilling their family duties. They are taught to obey and respect their parents and constantly strive to meet their parents' needs and wishes, demonstrating their unwavering devotion and loyalty (Jamieson, 1995; Pensinger, 1992; Soucy, 2000; Vijayarasa, 2010). Because of the pressure to fulfil their roles as wives and mothers, many women prioritize family obligations over educational and career opportunities. This leads to a cycle of limited opportunities and reinforces the idea that women should sacrifice their dreams for the sake of their families. As a result,

these pressures perpetuate limited opportunities for women and reinforce the societal expectation that they should give up their aspirations for the benefit of their families.

“In many cases, they can only attend elementary or secondary school before marriage and assume traditional family responsibilities (staying home, taking care of children, ...) while their husbands work outside the home.” (O6, man, 45s, Others)

Many 13, 14, and 15-year-olds are considered older children in their families and are forced to drop out of school to work. There is a common belief that girls do not need to study much and should get married early to settle down. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

She shared that as the eldest child in a large family, her parents told her they couldn't make enough from farming and she needed to earn money to support the family. She expressed her desire to go to school and her belief that education could change her life in many ways, but her parents insisted that there was no time for that and that the local area didn't offer well-paying jobs. They believed that sending her away to work would provide immediate income. They also thought that girls shouldn't study too much because it might make it harder for them to get married later. At that time, she sent about 60 million dongs home, which helped her family build a nice, spacious house and supported her younger brothers' education. She told me that she felt deeply saddened that her parents didn't give her the same opportunity to study. When I asked if she ever shared these feelings with her parents, she said she did, but they still believed that higher education for girls was unnecessary and might even hinder their chances of marriage. They didn't regret sending her away to work... (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

See endnotes for additional quotes from study participants on filial duties/piety: ^{vi}

On the other hand, women often sacrifice their own aspirations to comply with filial piety. They may enter into organised/arranged marriages in pursuit of financial stability or gains to support their parents.

Parents tend to compare their children with other kids from different families and say things like, “Look at them; they grow up and marry rich husbands, and they have good jobs that allow them to pay filial piety”. The family pressure makes them feel the need to earn money to show their filial piety and make their parents happy and proud. [...] Girls, especially the oldest sisters in the family, seem to bear a lot of pressure and responsibility to earn money and support their families, believing it is their fault if they don't have a rich husband or cannot support their parents' finances. Unlike boys, I have never seen boys complain about this. Even when we offer women returnees the vocational training, they often refuse it, preferring to find work quickly and send money back home. They said, “While I am studying, I cannot earn money, so how can my parents go to markets to buy food every day? How will they live without my money?”[...] In Vietnam, especially for girls, the idea of being dutiful and taking care of their parents is deeply ingrained. Even if their parents ask them to do something they don't want to do, they still do it as a way of demonstrating their respect and care towards their parents. (G2, woman, 45s, Gov)

Many parents encourage their children to send money back home; they tell their daughters, “Okay, daughter, please go there and send money back to feed your younger brothers or to buy medicine for Mom”[...] That is inequality when they pressure their daughters to marry foreign husbands in hopes of securing better financial support for their families. Even if their daughters' needs and desires differ from that, they may feel obligated to follow their parents' wishes. (O2, woman, 50s, Others)

In some local areas, it is expected that women must marry rich husbands in order to provide financial support to their parents. [...] In some areas, young girls are not encouraged to pursue education. Instead, they are directed towards marriage brokers who arrange marriages with foreign men, often promising a better life and financial stability for their families. There are many cases like that. (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

Additionally, women may accept any available job to assist their families financially. This decision is often influenced by encouragement from their families, regardless of the nature of the work. As such, the broader community and their family members play a significant role in shaping women's perception of their familial responsibilities, placing a heavy burden of responsibility on women and girls.

Daughters are often regarded as the primary labourers in the family who earn money or take care of the household. When they reach a certain age, they might feel that they are obligated to earn money and use it to support their family or assist their younger siblings in pursuing their education. (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

"Many girls who are big sisters accept to make sacrifices by earning money and supporting their younger siblings." (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

"Maybe parents, when they see other families having children going there, sending money back to live happily, they also want their children to follow that way..." (O6, man, 45s, Others)

While it is important to uphold traditional family values in some cultures, it is equally crucial to prioritize respecting every child's personal wishes and development, regardless of gender. This recognition is essential for creating a supportive environment that protects individuals from exploitation and trafficking. However, cultural expectations that require women to fulfil filial duties and sacrifice personal aspirations to support family members often force women to abandon their education to facilitate their younger brothers' schooling, thereby reducing educational opportunities for women. This education gap negatively impacts women's access to vital life information, including awareness of trafficking risks. These interconnected factors collectively increase women's vulnerability to traffickers, a topic to be explored in the subsequent section.

3.4 Vulnerability to Trafficking

The following sub-sections emphasise the role of lack of awareness about trafficking risks, economic motivations, and domestic violence as contributing factors to trafficking, which is consistent with previous studies.

As previously discussed, the compound effects of gender norms deprive women of equal opportunities to gain knowledge and, thus, achieve independence. When girls are prevented from attending school, and their social interactions are restricted, they become more vulnerable to traffickers, lacking the knowledge and skills necessary to protect themselves. The absence of educational opportunities makes women more susceptible to trafficking in two primary ways: (1) their limited access to social issues hampers the

development of critical thinking skills, typically associated with low educational levels and restricted social interactions, and (2) they have limited job opportunities, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking risks.

The research presents a critical perspective on the underlying causes of human trafficking. It differs from analyses that only consider poverty, lack of awareness, materialism, and high aspirations as the main factors (see, for example (Olivius, 2018)). Instead, it argues that these issues are actually manifestations of deeper societal prejudices against women's roles and expectations. This research contends that poverty is not just an isolated condition, but a result of wider societal inequalities. Women, in particular, experience disproportionate economic vulnerabilities because of systemic gender discrimination. Therefore, attributing trafficking solely to poverty overlooks the structural injustices that perpetuate women's economic marginalization.

Similarly, materialism and high aspirations, often cited as reasons leading individuals into trafficking situations, fail to consider the underlying pressures and expectations imposed on women. Blaming women for their ambitions or desires reinforces harmful stereotypes and ignores the societal context that limits their opportunities. Also, the lack of awareness about trafficking cannot be solely attributed to individual ignorance but reflects a collective failure of society to educate and protect vulnerable populations effectively. Blaming trafficked women for their lack of awareness disregards the systemic failures in providing them with essential access to crucial information and resources to prevent exploitation. Thus, it is crucial to understand that these factors are not the root causes but symptoms of broader societal issues.

In summary, this section contributes to the existing knowledge as follows:

- 1) In agreement with previous studies, both internationally and in Vietnam, this section highlights that a lack of information about trafficking risks contributes to women's vulnerability. It adds that unfair treatment, limited educational opportunities, and restricted mobility further increase this risk by preventing women from acquiring the critical thinking skills and awareness needed to protect themselves.
- 2) In line with previous literature, both international and Vietnamese, it shows that women attempting to escape economic difficulties often fall prey to traffickers.
- 3) In line with existing literature, both internationally and in Vietnam, arguing that domestic violence plays a significant role in contributing to human trafficking.

Here, economic factors—particularly financial motivations—intersect with other vulnerabilities, such as limited awareness of trafficking risks and experiences of domestic violence, further increasing women's susceptibility to trafficking.

3.4.1 Lack of Information About the Risks

This section highlights how unequal access to education can leave girls without the knowledge and skills to protect themselves from human trafficking, making them more susceptible to exploitation due to a lack of awareness about trafficking risks. The research aligns with previous studies, both overseas and in Vietnam, that show how individuals become vulnerable to trafficking due to a lack of information about the risks involved. However, this research introduces a new argument, suggesting that this vulnerability is a result of unfair treatment because of gender structural bias.

The lack of education and awareness stands out as a significant cause of human trafficking (Clawson & Dutch, 2008b). Many victims remain unaware of their trafficking situation due to their limited understanding of the crime (Le, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2020) and their rights (Clawson & Dutch, 2008b). Based on a collection of court documents from prosecutive cases in Vietnam from 2012-2020, victims generally have poor educational backgrounds (Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, 2021, p. 5). While detailed information on education and profession is scarce, most victims are either illiterate or did not complete the twelve-grade education program (71 out of 76 victims with detailed information) (Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, 2021, p. 5). Therefore, disadvantage, poverty, and a lack of knowledge about the law and human trafficking are key drivers of cross-border trafficking to China (Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, 2021, p. 5).

It is argued in this research that the lack of awareness often arises from limited education, which is influenced by unfair treatment and gender role expectations. Low education levels can result from dropping out of school early and having restricted access to social knowledge and services. Higher education provides women with access to information on various social issues, including human trafficking, and enhances their critical thinking skills, reducing susceptibility to traffickers' manipulation. Conversely, limited educational opportunities restrict access to information and hinder the development of critical thinking skills, thus increasing vulnerability to trafficking. Additionally, limited educational opportunities, often linked to restricted mobility for women, contribute to their restricted access to information. This prevents them from reaching their full potential and acquiring the skills needed for independence and protection. Consequently, women may be less aware of the risks of trafficking or the tactics used by traffickers, making them more vulnerable to trafficking.

Some people have had limited educational opportunities, which has restricted their access to information. [...] I think it's not just a matter of individuals not reading newspapers or watching the news about trafficking risks or knowing protection skills, but rather stems from broader social and structural issues. [...] I think, if we look back at their personal stories, most cases are related to the fact that they have been discriminated against since they were children. For example, if they have a younger brother, usually the younger brother will be able to go to school and go out to socialise and have more priorities. Meanwhile, they are often in a situation where they only study until the end of 5th grade, or some better cases

to 7th grade¹⁰, for example, then stay home. [...] When women and girls are denied access to education and restricted from engaging with the outside world by their families, it increases the risk of human trafficking. (O5, man, 40s, Others)

Women might have less knowledge about information and awareness campaigns regarding human trafficking prevention because they often have fewer opportunities for social interaction compared to men. Consequently, they may receive less information, leading to a lower understanding of the risks and tactics involved in human trafficking compared to men. (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

See endnotes for additional quotes from study participants on lack of information about the risks: ^{vii}

In summary, limited access to information and educational opportunities hinders women and girls from acquiring essential skills and securing good jobs, thereby increasing their vulnerability to traffickers. To explain, this creates significant obstacles for women in securing well-paying jobs, leaving them with limited employment options that typically offer inadequate financial support. Consequently, women may become dependent or may be compelled to migrate, further increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. This issue will be further discussed in the next section.

3.4.2 Economic Motivations

The fashionable woman offers opportunities which seem fantastic for the girls in the village considering their current circumstances. The woman says that Geb would find a good job, a high salary, and have a good husband “there”. Geb’s parents would not need to take care of her at home anymore and would instead receive financial support from Geb as soon as she arrived “there”. They quickly and happily ask her to take Geb “there”. The woman gives them a bulk of money saying it is the pre-paid salary for the first couple of months. This assures Geb’s parents and strengthens their belief about the rosy life that Geb will have when she arrives “there”. **(Geb’s Story – Part 1)**

This section emphasises that while women and girls seek to escape their circumstances driven by economic motivations, they still fall into traffickers’ traps due to the consequences of limited educational opportunities resulting from gender bias, as discussed earlier. This aligns with existing studies.

Discrimination and inequality in any form can lead to a high demand for marginalized individuals in the trafficking industry (Cameron et al., 2023). The unequal treatment of women in education, training, and

¹⁰ In Vietnam, the primary school includes 5 grades, the secondary school includes 4 grades, and the high school includes 3 grades, which makes it a total of 12 years of schooling. “Managed by the Ministry of Education and Training, the education system in Vietnam consists of both public and private institutions. Although entering preschool or kindergarten is the first stage of education for many children, the mandatory level of schooling usually starts from the age of six to seven years and consists of twelve years of education. This is divided into five years of primary education, four years of secondary education, and three years of upper secondary level. Upon entering upper secondary schools, students have the option to enrol in gifted education institutions. The curriculum from these institutions has a stronger focus on a designated subject, such as English, Literature, or Mathematics, but getting into one requires sitting for a highly competitive additional high school entrance exam. General high schools also offer science-based, arts, and humanities specializations that are particularly relevant for students who want to pursue further education. The formal education program concludes with the National High School Graduation Examination (NHSGE), the results from which determine the entrance to universities.” (M. N. Nguyen, 2022)

employment has led to more women living in poverty, making them even more vulnerable overall (Chuang, 2006; Kligman & Limoncelli, 2005; Newman & Cameron, 2008, as cited in Cameron et al., 2023). When women have higher status in society in terms of their economic, educational, and job opportunities, there are lower rates of sexual assault. Conversely, societies with high levels of gender discrimination tend to have higher rates of sexual victimization (Hines, 2007; Martin et al., 2006; Ozaki & Otis, 2017; Vyas & Heise, 2016, as cited in Cameron et al., 2023). Because education leads to independence, and financial independence prevents women from becoming trafficking victims. Limited access to education and job opportunities has led to an increase in human trafficking and violence against women in many regions (Barner et al., 2014; Cho, 2015; Fawole, 2008; Vyas & Heise, 2016, as cited in Cameron et al., 2023).

Initially, due to limited educational opportunities, girls often marry early or work in low-skilled jobs without essential knowledge, which makes it difficult for them to become economically stable and pursue diverse career paths.

Girls have fewer opportunities to study, so when they grow up, they only involve in getting married early or going to work without essential knowledge, which is a vulnerable factor for them. It leads to the fact that they need a job, but they do not know where to apply, and they have no essential knowledge and skills, little access to information, and they are only involved in working all day, so they are more easily deceived than boys. This is a factor from the community regarding gender inequality that makes women and girls vulnerable to becoming victims. Because of the prioritised investment in boys regarding schooling, girls have less access to education, knowledge, and information, less choice, and less opportunity, and then they are more vulnerable. (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

When women are empowered, they become stronger and more proactive in their own lives. By changing their opportunities and positions in life, they gain better access to information and more choices beyond just taking whatever job someone else offers them. For example, economic changes, job opportunities, becoming a teacher, running a business, or working in various industries can all be possibilities. Previously, they might have felt their skills limited them to certain jobs, like selling goods or serving others. (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

“Ensuring women have access to education and economic development are two key factors. When women are well-educated and financially stable, they are less likely to fall victim to trafficking.” (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

“If they are given the opportunity to take control of their finances and their lives, it can help prevent the risk of human trafficking.” (N8, woman, 40s, NGO)

The lack of resources, job opportunities, and access to education can compel women to leave their home countries in search of better lives, potentially leading to human trafficking (Cameron et al., 2023; Cho, 2015). Unfortunately, the escape journey from home countries often exposes them to significant risks. Without the necessary skills to travel safely, many women and girls are deceived by traffickers who lure them with false promises of employment abroad.

Unemployment or restricted job opportunities serve as significant drivers for women's migration, thereby increasing the risk of trafficking among women and girls in Vietnam (Hoang, 2013; Houck, 2003; Le, 2014; Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021; Tran et al., 2020). Traffickers often exploit individuals who find themselves marginalized or facing challenging circumstances, particularly those in dire need of employment and consequently vulnerable to forced labour trafficking (UNODC, n.d.). Women are at a higher risk of poverty, making them vulnerable to exploitation and deception (Duong, 2014; Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). Women and girls, in particular, are targeted by traffickers who lure them with promises of job opportunities or improved living conditions (Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021).

“When they lack opportunities, they'll grasp at any "chance" presented to them. For example, if they don't have a job at home, traffickers can easily deceive them with false promises of employment.” (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

Human trafficking often happens because people are looking for better economic opportunities, healthcare, and education. If women had the same job opportunities as men, they'd earn more money and have access to the services they need. This would empower them. [...] Creating equal job opportunities for both men and women can help change the perception that women, despite their roles as mothers and wives, can still perform well in their jobs and responsibilities. [...] When women can access employment, they won't need to seek other, potentially risky, job opportunities. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

“Faced with unemployment, they are easily tempted to engage in traffickers' enticements”. (O6, man, 45s, Others)

In summary, limited opportunities in fields such as education lead to a lack of essential information and life skills for women, making them more vulnerable to trafficking. When women do not have access to adequate education and knowledge, they struggle to secure stable employment, creating conditions that traffickers exploit to recruit their victims. Gender role expectations and norms that favour boys over girls reduce educational opportunities for women and girls, increasing the risk of trafficking. Women and girls who conform to traditional gender roles and family duties imposed on them are more likely to become victims of trafficking. Notably, in contrast cases, those who refuse unfair treatment and seek to improve their circumstances also face trafficking risks, as traffickers exploit their desire for better opportunities.

Another situation involves women who want to escape from the consequences of gender inequality and social norms, such as domestic violence, but still fall into the trap of traffickers. This will be discussed in the next section.

3.4.3 Escaping Domestic Violence

In Geb's village, some women also faced domestic violence and dealt with their husbands' alcohol, drug, or gambling addictions. **(Geb's Story – Part 1)**

This section aligns with previous international and Vietnamese literature, demonstrating that domestic violence plays a significant role in contributing to human trafficking. Societal norms that promote women's

endurance of suffering for the alleged happiness of the family perpetuate this cycle of violence and vulnerability. Therefore, addressing these deeply ingrained social norms is crucial to reducing domestic violence and protecting women from the dangers of trafficking.

The low value of women and girls in families and society in Southeast Asia contributes to their vulnerability (Perry & McEwing, 2013). Traffickers often target marginalized individuals, including those from dysfunctional families, abandoned children, and those without parental care (UNODC, n.d.). In the US, familial dysfunction and a history of abuse increase the risk of trafficking (Koegler, Howland, et al., 2022). Additionally, domestic violence can push individuals into trafficking (Leidholdt, 2013). Women and girls, particularly those trying to escape intimate partner abuse, are at risk of falling under the control of traffickers (Leidholdt, 2013). Domestic violence is also a significant factor in trafficking in Ukraine and Poland (Kirovohrad et al., 2021). Societal norms play a role in the acceptability of violence (Stöckl et al., 2021). Structural gender inequality and violence against women are significantly associated with human trafficking legal cases (Cameron et al., 2023).

In Vietnam, domestic violence contributes to human trafficking because women who experience such abuse often flee their homes to escape (Nguyen et al., 2020). As the prevailing societal expectation for women is centred around their role as wives, it's believed that women should get married. However, if their marriage does not meet their expectations or, worse, involves violence that they cannot tolerate, they may escape from their abusive husbands or partners. Interestingly, even after fleeing from their violent spouses, they may still desire another, better husband. This desire aligns with their ultimate life goal of becoming a wife; even if their current situation is not ideal, they still seek another opportunity for marriage. Unfortunately, some women who escape from violent husbands in Vietnam end up experiencing a different kind of violence: human trafficking. As long as society continues to uphold these beliefs, domestic violence will persist, along with the vulnerability of women and the risk of trafficking. Addressing these deep-rooted social norms is crucial to reducing domestic violence and protecting women from trafficking.

Because of domestic violence inflicted by their husbands, many women migrate to other countries seeking new husbands there. [...] Domestic violence, where husbands beat, coerce, forbid work, or insist on childcare without granting freedom, prompts many to leave for such reasons. (O2, woman, 50s, Others)

For instance, in the southern region, the main reasons for divorce often include domestic violence, poverty, and family conflicts. If domestic violence prevention is effectively implemented, the divorce rate would decrease. As the divorce rate decreases, the number of women targeted for trafficking who seek a better husband and a better life would naturally diminish as well. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

In some cases, due to domestic violence, social ills, and dysfunctional families, women want to seek a new life [...] Living in a violent environment with husbands who are addicted to

alcohol and dealing with social issues, they want to escape. That's why they seek a way out.
(G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

Domestic violence devalues women, diminishing their image, voice, and power. This puts them at risk of being trafficked. Both wives and daughters are affected by domestic violence. Many young girls growing up in households with abusive fathers or in poverty are at risk of being trafficked, often lured by false promises of money or a caring husband (Sweeney, 2015). Women who experience this may try to leave their husbands or fathers, flee and seek opportunities to go abroad in search of a better partner. In some provinces, such as the Mekong River Delta area in southwest Vietnam, there marrying foreigners is popular among women (see, for example, (Trần et al., 2017; Phan & Dư, 2021). Meanwhile, daughters who experience domestic violence during childhood are vulnerable to falling into the hands of traffickers. Their familiarity with violence and unequal treatment in their own families makes them susceptible to the manipulative tactics of traffickers, who may lure them with gentle and kind behaviour, contrasting their experiences of violence in their own homes.

Domestic violence and gender inequality are among the factors driving human trafficking, in my view. For example, a young woman at home endured verbal abuse from her parents and felt less valued than men. But when she encounters traffickers who lure her with sweet words, she sees it as a new horizon. They seem kind to her because she's never experienced gentle words or care from her loved ones. (G8, woman, 45s, Gov)

Violence is indeed a relevant factor. That girl, living in a household where violence is prevalent, was perpetuated by the patriarchal father figure who holds all decision-making power and may resort to violence against women, especially the wife and children. Growing up in such a violent environment, this girl saw her family's unhappiness and wanted to escape. So, she befriended someone online, who convinced her that given her family's difficulties and the abuse she suffered, she should earn money to support her mother and eventually take her away from suffering. This friend deceives her. The issue is multifaceted, and while violence is just one part of it, it significantly influences her decision-making regarding finding work elsewhere. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

See endnotes for additional quotes from study participants on Escaping domestic violence
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In the context of Vietnam, violence against women remains largely concealed, with alarming statistics showing that a significant portion of women experiencing violence by their husbands choose not to disclose it. A striking 90.4% of women subjected to physical and/or sexual violence from their husbands do not seek assistance from formal service providers, as revealed by the National Study on Violence against Women in Vietnam 2019 (2020). This study highlighted the prevalence of domestic violence in Vietnam, with nearly two-thirds (62.9%) of women experiencing various forms of violence from their husbands. This National Report also underscores the wide-ranging health impacts and consequences of violence against women. Moreover, the study further reveals that the children in households where maternal abuse is present suffer emotional distress and witness violence, adversely affecting their well-being and behaviour.

The acceptance of violence is influenced by gender norms, which dictate that women should endure and obey. Confucianism portrays women embodying unconditional devotion and loyalty (Pensinger, 1992, as cited in Vijayarasa, 2010). As long as domestic violence persists and the community perceives it as an internal family matter, women remain vulnerable to trafficking. Therefore, it is crucial to raise awareness about gender violence, especially domestic violence, in order to eliminate the culture of accepting domestic violence, which often results in women suffering in silence. Women should not remain silent about domestic violence; they should speak out. However, to do so, they need support and understanding from the community. The community needs to understand that domestic violence is not just a family issue but a social concern that requires attention and action from everyone.

In Vietnamese culture, many women endure hardships to keep their families, but some find it impossible to continue. They opt for divorce and seek a new partner, hoping to find someone abroad with a better understanding, believing it will free them from abuse and oppression. (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

Concerning domestic violence, there's often a tendency to advise girls to endure and not report it. Domestic violence remains an internal family matter. If these attitudes persist, they will perpetuate a view of women's roles as inferior, and their empowerment will diminish. Without legal protection, it could pose even greater risks for them. Therefore, at a macro level, the law must take more decisive action, offering multiple perspectives on gender issues. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

In this context, it is worth noting that gender equality policies have recognised the need to address domestic violence as one of their objectives, as articulated in Objective 6, especially Target 2¹¹ (Vietnamese Government, 2010). To achieve the targets of this objective, several efforts were implemented:

Solution 1: Reinforcing the building of cultural families, with a highlight on the gender equality criterion in the family: "During 2011-2015, competent authorities have issued a large number of legal documents and policies to promote gender equality in family life and to gradually eliminate gender-based violence, in particular: the Law on the Handling of Administrative Violations; The Marriage and Family Law revised in 2014 and its guiding decree; Government Decree 09/2013/ND-CP, of January 11, 2013, detailing the implementation of a number of articles under the Law on the Prevention of and Combat against Human Trafficking; Government Decree 14/2013/ND-CP, dated February 5, 2013, amending and supplementing a number of articles under Government Decree 07/2007/ND-CP, dated January 12, 2007, detailing and guiding the implementation of a number of articles under the Law on Legal Aid; Government Decree 24/2013/ND-CP, dated March 28, 2013, detailing the implementation of a number of articles under the Marriage and Family Law regarding marriage and family relationships involving foreign elements; Government Decree

¹¹ **OBJECTIVE 6:** To ensure gender equality in family life, gradually eliminating gender-based violence

Target 1: Shorten the women's time gap in doing housework by 2 times as compared with men by 2015 and by 1.5 times lower by 2020.

Target 2: 40% by 2015 and 50% of detected domestic violence survivors by 2020 will be counselled on psychological and legal matters, get support and care at the support facilities for domestic violence survivors. Up to 75% of the detected perpetrators of domestic violence not being to criminal liability will be counselled at domestic violence counselling centers.

No. 15/2014/ND-CP, dated February 27, 2014 detailing a number of articles and measures to enforce the Law on Grassroots Conciliation; Government Decree No. 43/2014/ND-CP, dated May 15, 2014, detailing the implementation of a number of articles under the Land Law. Government Decree No. 126/2014/ND-CP, dated December 31, 2014, detailing several articles and measures to implement the Marriage and Family Law, etc. In addition, the MoCST issued Circular No. 12/2011/TT-BVHTTDL dated October 10, 2011 detailing the standards, order, procedures and dossiers for the recognition of such titles as “Cultural Family”, “Cultural Hamlet”, “Cultural Village”, “Cultural Residential Area” and equivalent, in which the criteria for recognizing the title of a cultural family is stipulated in Clause 2, Article 4 of the Circular, which are “Equal, loving couples supporting each other to make progress. There is no domestic violence in any form and gender equality must be exercised; husband and wife give birth in strict compliance with regulations and share the responsibility to raise and teach their children well” (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 67)

Solution 2: Operate club models of happy, equal, free of violence families, attracting the active participation of men¹².

Solution 3: Pilot and replicate the model of GBV prevention and response counselling and support¹³.

The current solutions have been considered suitable for achieving the targets. However, their effectiveness has not been thoroughly evaluated to guide future adjustments or scaling (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 69).

Furthermore, the issue of silence around domestic violence persists without a clear solution. Some provinces or cities striving to become cultural residential areas either do not report or under-report cases of domestic violence and other negative social issues (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 69). This reveals a significant lack of awareness-raising efforts against societal silence regarding domestic violence, which perpetuates the acceptance of domestic violence and the perceived inferiority of women. Therefore, policies should focus on amplifying women’s voices on this issue by gaining community support by changing social attitudes toward gender norms to break the silence on domestic violence.

The solution needs to address long-standing gender stereotypes in the community, which have been entrenched for a long time. Changing perceptions about gender roles and positions of women and men in the community is not simple, nor can it be achieved

¹² MoCST guided provinces and cities to operate a sustainable family-building club - a place for community activities, for communication and dissemination of advocacy, policy, and law as well as skills and knowledge of building happy families for families (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 68).

¹³ During 2011-2015, there were 78 models nationwide on the prevention and minimization of the harmful effects of gender-based violence. After more than three years of piloting, the model was evaluated as effective. Many provinces/cities have replicated the model in other communes and wards in the area. As of 2018, the country had formed 9,024 models of domestic violence prevention and control, reaching 74.85% of the total communes/wards/townships nationwide; 102 33,192 reliable addresses in the community; 26,558 groups of domestic violence prevention and control and 19,812 clubs of building sustainable families. (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 68).

overnight. That's why we are developing community outreach programs, starting with the youngest generations. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

Gender equality is heavily influenced by gender socialization, which means it is not only about the individual but also the impact of friends, family, and the community. Therefore, it's essential to raise gender awareness in schools and in society and ensure that once a person becomes aware, they spread that knowledge to others. [...] Raising awareness should be done in a way that reaches many different people, creating a ripple effect. This is especially true for communications about gender-based violence, where there are many ways to spread the message. (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

In summary, addressing domestic violence in Vietnam through gender equality policies can make a significant contribution to combating human trafficking. Enhancing community awareness about the importance of speaking out against domestic violence is a crucial step toward this goal and remains a key deficiency in current policies.

Chapter 4 Experiences of Human Trafficking

Continuing with Geb's story, this chapter is divided into five sections, highlighting the complexity and severity of exploitation and suffering experienced by trafficked women compared to men.

The first section, titled "Complexity of Exploitation," confirms the existence of labour exploitation in men but emphasises the dual exploitation faced by women, encompassing both sexual and labour exploitation. The second section, "Complex Control Tactics on Women", demonstrates the challenges faced by trafficked individuals who endure a combination of control tactics, including violence, threats, unfamiliar environments, restricted movement, and the associated psychological effects such as learned helplessness.

The third section, "Consequences 1 – Having Children with Exploiters," explores the conflict between the involuntary experiences of women being forced to bear children and the voluntary motherhood ties with children, which often prolongs women's stay in trafficking situations. The fourth section, "Consequence 2 – The Deprivation of Crucial Lifetime," explains that women are trafficked at a young age and trapped in prolonged trafficking, robbing them of essential time for crucial self-development. The last section, "Consequence 3 – Severe Biopsychosocial Health Damage," illustrates how trafficking experiences adversely impact the overall well-being of trafficked women, influencing their healing journey post-trafficking. This sets the stage for exploring challenges and reintegration requirements in the next chapter.

Geb's Story – Part 2

The stylish woman who came to Geb's village, offered her a job in China. Some of Geb's friends also accepted to go, but to other regions.

Geb followed the guidance of this stylish woman who led her across the border on a small trail in the forest. The woman kept all of Geb's documents, including her ID card, as she claimed it was safer. Upon arrival in China after a round one day of transportation, Geb was introduced to a man she assumed was to be her boss. However, since he spoke in Chinese, Geb could not understand him. The woman informed Geb that she would leave her there to work with the "boss". Geb felt scared and asked if she could work for the woman instead. However, they informed Geb that her parents had received money in advance, so she needed to work for her salary. The "boss" also said he had paid a high fee for her travel to China. Therefore, she must work for the employer to pay off the debt. If Geb cannot work, they will go to her house and force her parents to pay off the debt, which she knows they cannot afford. Thus, she felt she had no choice and had to stay and work for her new "boss".

Geb was then moved to another place. She was scared because she knew nobody else and was forced to live in a small old building with other young women. Here, they are not allowed to leave the house without the agreement of the house manager. The main gate was guarded by some ferocious men to ensure no one escaped. They patrolled the house thrice daily to ensure everything was in order. One day, Geb saw another young woman try to escape from the house but failed and was forced to go back. She was beaten severely and dragged from the gate to a small, dark room for some days. More guards came and threatened everyone that if they dare to attempt to flee, they might not stay alive. Geb was so scared that she could not say a word.

At first, Geb was made to do household chores, like washing clothes for others and cleaning. Geb felt lucky when meeting some other young Vietnamese women here. They live in different rooms and must serve the men every day. The women are forced to take "medicine". Geb saw women become dependent on that "medicine" and working harder to get more of it.

Later, Geb understood that it was a brothel, and she was there, at first, for a 'training period'. Then, after several months, she would also be forced to perform sex work like other women living there. After she realised these prospects, Geb lives in fear and finds it hard to sleep at night. She misses her family, her little siblings, and her friends. She is allowed to sleep four hours every night, and she is constantly tired from all the work. When she can get some sleep, she sees her parents in her dreams.

To be continued...

4.1 Complexity of Exploitation

This section explores the gendered exploitation of trafficked individuals. It highlights that men are typically trafficked for forced labour and less so for sexual exploitation and that this stands in direct contrast to the experiences of trafficked women, who are considered "dual victims" as they typically face both labour and sexual exploitation.

4.1.1 Exploitation of Men

This section underscores the prevalent form of trafficking for men, which is forced labour, while acknowledging the less common cases of sexual exploitation of men. These findings align with the existing studies.

Firstly, forced labour is the most commonly identified form of trafficking in men, as indicated by various sources (Pocock et al., 2016; Tien, 2013; U.S. Department of State, 2017). Study participants emphasised that the cases they are familiar with predominantly involve this form. They stated:

"We also work with male victims. In all the cases we work with, male victims are forced labourers, both in China and within Vietnam. Those men went to find jobs for economic purposes" (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

"There was a case in which a disabled boy was trafficked to Thailand for street begging. He was not allowed to keep money, and they led him to the area where he could beg for money." (G2, woman, 45s, Gov)

"Calls (hotline calls supporting victims) from male victims are not many, just a small number related to being forced to work on fishing boats." (G8, woman, 45s, Gov)

See endnotes for for additional quotes from study participants on Exploitation of Men: ^{ix}

Some trafficked men are sexually exploited. Global data indicates that male victims trafficked into sexual exploitation constitute nearly 6% of all victims in this category (International Organization for Migration, 2021). Participants in this study reflected this pattern, sharing that they had limited experiences with such cases. They noted:

"I hardly work with men [...] For men, there is not much information in the community about the situation of the sex trade in men." (N5, the 50s, NGO, women)

"We don't work with male victims [...] Usually, male victims are tricked into going abroad to work, and there aren't many cases forced into sex trade" (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

"... trafficking and sexual exploitation of men? I have never worked with a case like that." (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

However, study participants also acknowledged that the dark figure of male sexual exploitation may be much larger due to survivors not reporting their victimization.

“Several male victims may be trafficked for male prostitution, but I have not had much access to those, or the number of the statistics are not accurate, so I feel it is not much.” (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

“I think there are also cases of sexual exploitation of men, but they usually do not speak out.” (O2, women, 50s, Others)

Recent research has increasingly focused on the sexual exploitation of men (e.g., Barron & Frost, 2018; Dennis, 2008; Omole, 2016; Trounson & Pfeifer, 2020). Although participants reported no direct experience with such cases, they acknowledged that these occurrences might exist.

I know a case in which four young men were lured to be trafficked, but they were rescued while they were on their way to Cambodia. As they have not been exploited and moved to their destination yet, we do not know the purpose of trafficking those four boys. Maybe they were trafficked there to serve gay men or to be exploited for labour, but the purpose has not been clarified. (G2, woman, 45s, Gov)

Study participants directly contrasted trafficked men’s and women’s exploitation, emphasizing that sexual exploitation is much more common for trafficked women.

“But for women, the forms of being trafficked are much more diverse. For men, the trafficking purpose is not much.” (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

I think women often encounter more risk factors. They can be easily sexually abused. Of course, men also suffer, but these are less common. As one of the factors promoting human trafficking is that women are seen as sex objects, men are less likely to be abused because men are not seen as sex objects, but women are. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

“The experiences of male and female victims are very different. Most women are sexually exploited and are also exploited by labour [...]. Men are exploited mainly by labour.” (O2, women, 50s, Others)

“Men are often deceived about jobs, but female victims are not only for labour but also for forced marriage and sexual exploitation, for example, being sold to serve the entertainment industry of destination countries.” (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

Overall, consistent with the existing literature, this study affirms that trafficked men are commonly exploited for labour and few cases of sexual exploitation are known. Participants emphasized the contrasting experience of trafficked women who endure more complex forms of exploitation and consequently face more challenges than their male counterparts. The following section provides more details on this issue.

4.1.2 Dual Exploitation of Women

They live in different rooms and must serve the men every day. The women are forced to take “medicine”. Geb saw women become dependent on that “medicine” and working harder to get more of it. [...] Later, Geb understood that it was a brothel, and she was there, at first, for a ‘training period’. Then, after several months, she would also be forced to perform sex work like other women living there. After she realised these prospects, Geb lives

in fear and finds it hard to sleep at night. [...] She is allowed to sleep four hours every night, and she is constantly tired from all the work. **(Geb's Story – Part 2)**

This section sheds light on the dual and complex forms of exploitation faced by women. Those forced into the sex trade endure exploitation within the realm of sexual labour, while wives in forced marriages experience both forced labour and serve sexually within the husband's family. The current study aligns with existing literature on this issue.

In the international literature, trafficking exploitation is acknowledged as complex, involving forced labour, sexual exploitation, and various forms of abuse (see, for example, Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015; Rafferty, 2013; UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2020; UNODC, 2014). According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2022, p. xii), an analysis of court cases from 622 trafficking convictions between 2012 and 2020, involving 1,790 female victims and 327 male victims, indicates that female victims experience physical or extreme violence from traffickers at a rate three times higher than male victims. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, making them primary victims of trafficking (see, for example, Kiss, Ligia et al., 2015; UNODC, 2023; U.S Department of State, 2018, 2020). Women, especially those forced into sexual exploitation, are often treated as commodities and thus dehumanized. This perspective is supported by existing literature such as Kakar (2020) and Le (2017). Narratives shared by study participants substantiate the commodification and dehumanizing aspect:

When L. [name of 1 victim in a family having 3 trafficked daughters] went to China, she was locked up in a brothel. Many Vietnamese women in that house were forced to live in and raised like chickens, and then many men came to buy them. [...] Women are considered sexual objects, so they become a more noticeable commodity. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

Being forced into prostitution is a prevalent and fast form; of course, the price is not as high as being sold as a wife (forced marriage), but this form is fast; they just need to catch someone and put them in a brothel, and that's it. [...] I heard a story from a victim that when she was sold as a wife, the husband said they had a certain time to try out the "goods". For example, they could return "the goods" within how many months if they did not like it, etc. Therefore, the trafficking victim is bought and sold precisely like a commodity. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

In cases of forced sex trade, exploitation is often severe as women are made to work "overtime" to accommodate as many customers as possible while their "productivity level" is often facilitated through coercive tactics and forced drug administration (Baldwin et al., 2015; Bryant-Davis, 2011; Koegler, Wood, et al., 2022; Wilson & Butler, 2014). These coercive practices persists until women are exhausted, drug-dependent, and feel hopeless and entrapped. Participants in this study provided evidence for this.

"For the group sold into prostitution, their experience is terrible/harrowing; there are more than 20 customers a day." (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

They are forced into dimly lit karaoke bars called brothels or private brothels, which are not clean and pleasant places. Some told me they receive so many guests a day that they don't

have enough time to get dressed or change clothes. They just take off their clothes and lie there; once this guest leaves, another enters. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

“When receiving so many guests, most victims are forced to use stimulants/addictive substances because they won't have the strength to serve if they don't use them.” (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

“Some women are forced to use medicine to stop menstruation to serve customers at the request of the brothel's owner.” (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

For the group of people forced to work in brothels, the owners often force them to use drugs, smoke or other drugs to make them dependent on them and serve customers efficiently. Then they can't run away because if they hide, they won't have drugs to use, for example, which is one of the reasons why they don't run away. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

See endnotes for for additional quotes from study participants on Dual exploitation on Women:^x

Forced marriages present no better situation. Existing studies highlight that forced marriages are a violation of human rights (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; Kakar, 2020), entrapping women and girls in conditions of enslavement (The United States Department of State, 2010). Forced marriage forces women into serving dual purposes – facing both sexual and labour exploitation (Kakar, 2016, 2020; Shahinian Gulnara, 2010). Based on a collection of court documents from prosecutive cases in Vietnam from 2012-2020, 71% of victims were sold into forced marriages with Chinese men, with the average time in slavery being 9.8 months (Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, 2021, p. 5). This study aligns with these perspectives, confirming that women victims of forced marriages indeed endure dual forms of exploitation encompassing both sexual and labour aspects.

G5, a government worker, in her 50s, shared a story of a women who was lured into forced marriage. This woman “then forced to serve as a maid in both housework and sex for that family.” Two other participants told me similar stories:

The victims trafficked for forced marriage are usually forced to work, do housework, or serve 2-3-4 men in the same family. In some cases, girls were only 13-14 years old and have not yet had their period, but they already have to serve that group of men. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

That girl was just 17 when she was rescued and brought to the safe shelter. She shared that her lover tricked her into trafficking to the other border to become a wife, the wife of not only one person (her husband) but also her father-in-law and her husband's brothers. [...] There, she was also forced to work a lot. (G1, woman, Gov, 30s)

Kakar (2020) acknowledged that trafficking for forced marriage belongs to sex and labour trafficking, as the victims are coerced into engaging in sexual activities, performing household, giving birth, and attending to the needs of men. As highlighted by participants in this study, forced marriage is also linked with the coercion to bear children due to the biological functions of women. Thus, clearly, the exploitation of this

biological aspect is specifically targeted at women and girls. N3 (woman, 35s, NGO) told me about the cases of women who were tricked into marriage:

There, they will be abused to have children as quickly as possible. Some said that they were not only forced to sexually serve one husband but also other men in that family. When they have children or have lived a long time and have lost their will to return, they are allowed to go out. At that time, they were forced to work; of course, they would often be supervised.
(N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

As a result of their biological function being exploited, women experience pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood, which create additional hurdles for them to break free from their situation and subsequent consequences. This matter is elaborated upon in section (4.3) – Consequence 1 – Having children with exploiters.

As the next sections show, the dual exploitation of women is tied to a complex set of control tactics that trafficked men do not typically encounter.

4.2 Complex Control Tactics on Women

This section illustrates how traffickers employ complex control tactics, rendering trafficked individuals dependent and vulnerable. Trafficked individuals often endure coercion involving violence, threats, and isolation, compounded by challenges like unfamiliar environments or language barriers, hindering their escape and reintegration. These findings align with the existing literature.

Given that most participants have experience exclusively with trafficked women, it seems reasonable to conclude that this section is explicitly focused on women. Therefore, when referring to individuals who have been trafficked, the terms “trafficked individuals,” “trafficked women” and “women” can be used interchangeably in this section.

Here, intersecting factors further intensify the complexity and challenges of women's trafficking experiences. These include the use of violence, threats, and coercion, often targeting women's health and reproductive functions—such as being forced to consume stimulants or addictive substances to suppress menstruation, facilitating dual exploitation for both sexual and labour purposes. Additionally, race and ethnicity play a role, particularly in cases of cross-border trafficking, while geographical displacement exposes women to unfamiliar environments, languages, and cultures. These factors, compounded by gendered vulnerabilities, create profound risks and reinforce systemic exploitation.

4.2.1 Violence and Threats of Violence

The “boss” also said he had paid a high fee for her travel to China. Therefore, she must work for the employer to pay off the debt. If Geb cannot work, they will go to her house and force her parents to pay off the debt, which she knows they cannot afford. Thus, she felt she had

no choice and had to stay and work for her new “boss”. [...] One day, Geb saw another young woman try to escape from the house but failed and was forced to go back. She was beaten severely and dragged from the gate to a small, dark room for some days. More guards came and threatened everyone that if they dare to attempt to flee, they might not stay alive. Geb was so scared that she could not say a word. **(Geb’s Story – Part 2)**

This section aligns with previous studies and highlights the prevalence of violence and threats in human trafficking, illustrating how traffickers use various tactics frequently throughout the process. The impact on trafficked individuals includes inducing fear, preventing escape, and ensuring complete obedience. Additionally, the systematic destruction of trafficked individuals’ willpower and self-worth calls for consideration of potential mental health repercussions.

The existing literature showed that physical violence, sexual violence (including rape), verbal abuse, and threats of violence are prevalent in human trafficking (Baldwin et al., 2015; Dando et al., 2016; Greenbaum et al., 2017; Hopper, 2017a; Kiss et al., 2015; Kiss & Zimmerman, 2019; Ligia et al., 2015; Ottisova et al., 2016; Rocha Jiménez et al., 2019; Stöckl et al., 2021), which is used to demand obedience from trafficked individuals to enable their exploitation (Banovic & Bjelajac, 2012; Elsan, 2005; Iglesias-Rios et al., 2020; Rocha Jiménez et al., 2019; Zimmerman et al., 2011). While confirming previous findings, this study provides a detailed analysis of the three key functions of violence and threats used by traffickers to control trafficked individuals. The narratives shared by participants in this study (N = 23)¹⁴ illustrate the frequency, prolonged exposure, and diverse forms of violence and threats used by traffickers.

Traffickers use violence and threats to control individuals both physically and mentally, serving three main functions: 1) enforcing disciplines, 2) dissuading escape attempts by individuals and others, and 3) coercing individuals into exploitative situations.

Violence functions as physical punishment. Participants frequently described scenarios in which survivors, showing signs of planning to escape, faced intense, brutal beatings from traffickers as a punitive measure:

“If they fail to escape, they will be beaten to death, very terrible.” (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

“If they escape and get caught, they will be beaten brutally [...] It is rare for them to escape once and get away. For women, if they are caught, they will be beaten terribly, so they are terrified.” (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

Violence and threats of violence also serve as a persistent threat (psychological control). Witnessing punitive beatings acts as a psychological control tactic, instilling fear in those who have not yet

¹⁴ According to some participants, out of respect and fear of re-traumatizing survivors, they refrained from discussing survivors' experiences and thus skipped those conversations.

contemplated escape. This aligns with prior research highlighting witnessing violence as a coercive tactic used by traffickers for fear, control, and compliance (Cook, 2019; Parker & Skrmetti, 2012).

Thus, violence serves a dual function as both a disciplinary and preventative measure perpetuating fear among trafficked individuals held in the same location, discouraging any attempts to escape, as illustrated in the following story shared by (O1).

“Or maybe they witnessed the torture and even murder of people in similar situations as themselves, so they were afraid to go.” (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

For those who resist complete obedience to traffickers/exploiters, violence and threats of violence are wielded to jeopardize the safety of their loved ones, serving as a psychological control tactic. The use of threats against family members, identified as a method of control by traffickers (Hughes, 2000; Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015; Kelly, 2002), is affirmed in this study. Participants' narratives highlight that such threats effectively establish control over trafficked individuals, constituting a psychological method of control. For example, O1, a 35-year-old participant with experience supporting trafficking survivors, recounted a story of traffickers using threats of violence to deter women from escaping. O1 emphasised that many female survivors lived in constant fear, hindering their thoughts of escape. She shared the threatening words the survivor recalled from the traffickers:

“I just need to make one phone call, and your whole family will die if you run away.” (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

O1 explained that the survivors were often unsure if the traffickers possessed their family's information or address and thus grappled with a profound sense of fear, especially in cases when the traffickers were related to the survivors.

“...So, they do not dare to run away because they are terrified.” (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

In the immediate exploitation, violence and threats of violence also function as tools for compelling exploitation. Traffickers intentionally employ physical violence in ways that the labour or sexual exploitation of the women is not diminished. One of the women I talked to, N1, said that traffickers frequently resorted to violence but strategically targeted the stomach and chest to avoid visible bruises on the women's faces. This calculated approach is aimed at preserving the woman's outward appearance, as a bruised face would not make as much money for her trafficker.

They were mainly hit brutally in the stomach and the chest, but not in the face, as their face is used to “kiếm cơm” - "earn benefits" for traffickers/exploiters. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

They did not ask for her opinion; if she refused to have sex or ran away, she was beaten. Every time she mentioned it again, she cried and felt herself dirty. There, she was also forced to work a lot. If she could not help to make any money, she was still beaten or not given rice

to eat, or the rice would be dumped on the ground like feeding it to a dog. (G1, woman, Gov, 30s).

In certain instances, individuals recount harrowing experiences of being physically abused and coerced into engaging in prostitution. On certain days, they endure the distressing task of accommodating up to 20 clients, and when exhaustion sets in, the repercussions are severe—beatings and, shockingly, assaults with sticks, some even driven into their heads. (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

In summary, various expressions of physical violence and threats play a triple role: suppressing trafficked individuals' escape attempts and establishing dominance, thereby eroding their willpower and rendering them powerless and submissive to exploitation. The pervasive presence of violence throughout the trafficking experience undermines survivors' resolve, compelling them to accept dire circumstances fueled by overwhelming fear, thus keeping them trapped (Logan et al., 2009). Or, to put it in the words of a participant:

“So, they feel like they have nothing to lose, then quitting intention to escape and accept the situation.” (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

The constant, inescapable violence and threats create a perception for trafficked individuals that they have lost control over their lives. This psychological phenomenon, known in the literature as learned helplessness, will be analysed in the last section of this part (4.2.4. Learn helplessness).

Beyond the realm of violence, individuals also grapple with unfamiliar locations they have been trafficked to, making escape even more challenging. The impact of this circumstance on trafficked individuals is explored in the following section.

4.2.2 Unfamiliar Environment

Upon arrival in China after a round one day of transportation, Geb was introduced to a man she assumed was to be her boss. However, since he spoke in Chinese, Geb could not understand him. (Geb's Story – Part 2)

In general, trafficked individuals face challenges in escaping due to relocation to new environments. While some are moved within the country, this study predominantly discussed trafficking cases beyond Vietnamese borders. These findings align with those from other research.

There are many reasons trafficked individuals find it hard to escape. They are often transported to a new country (Barry, 1995; Fernandes et al., 2021; Khan, 2023; Meeteren & Hiah, 2019). Once at their destination, they are subject to frequently moved (Barry, 1995; ILO, 2009; Khan, 2023; Khan & Zubair, 2023). Additionally, language barriers further complicate escape efforts (Arhin, 2016; Hernandez & Rudolph, 2015; Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007; Zimmerman et al., 2003, Fernandes et al., 2021).

In line with this literature, the primary focus of participants in this study was also on individuals being trafficked to new countries. All 23 participants mentioned foreign destinations, while only seven discussed domestic destinations, specifically big cities. Foreign destinations mentioned often fell within Asia, with China being the most mentioned (n=14), followed by Cambodia, Taiwan, and Thailand (n=3 each), and Malaysia, Korea, and others (n=1 to 2 each). This aligns with data in the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Reports (2018, 2020), indicating Vietnam is a significant source of trafficked individuals to various destinations, particularly within Asia (Le & Wyndham, 2022; U.S. Department of State, 2018, 2020). One participant (N6, woman, 30s) emphasised this point, noting that in most cases she has worked with, survivors were trafficked to China. Additionally, eleven participants highlighted that survivors encounter obstacles to escape due to the unfamiliar environment.

“They were unaware of the location where they were staying” (N6, woman, 30s)

“They have no information about where they are, struggling with not knowing how to get out” (N5, the 50s, NGO, women)

After arriving in the new country, trafficked individuals were consistently and repeatedly relocated. This aligns with previous studies indicating that victims of trafficking are often moved from one location to another (Barry, 1995; ILO, 2009; Khan, 2023; Khan & Zubair, 2023). The disorienting, non-linear routes create challenges in re-tracing steps, leading to confusion about their surroundings. As one participant stated:

They had to wander around for hours, preventing them from learning the way back or finding an escape route [...] even if they escape, they don't know how to return to their home country [...] Regarding the terrain, if they were transported deep inland for prostitution, returning home would become even more challenging, as they would not know which border gate they were taken through and how to get back to Vietnam. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

To elaborate on the situation, the challenges associated with residing in unfamiliar places (ILO, 2009) and the lack of familiarity with the environment (Mbakogu, 2022) heighten the vulnerability of trafficked individuals. This hinders their ability to socialise and seek assistance (Mbakogu, 2022), ultimately keeping them entrapped. The absence of information about the destination can trigger a fear of the unknown, often linked to considerable distress or anxiety (Carleton, 2016). This makes it challenging for individuals to navigate uncertain situations or negative emotions (Jacoby, 2020), impacting their attention and tolerance of uncertain responses (Tanovic et al., 2018) and hindering their ability to function (Gu et al., 2020). This study confirms that trafficked individuals are compelled to relocate to unfamiliar places for exploitation, and this circumstance alone intensifies feelings of vulnerability. An example shared by N6, a woman NGO worker in her 30s, about a case of women forced into marriage in China further illustrates that trafficked

women often perceive these circumstances as insurmountable challenges. Despite the potential dangers, one woman decided to run away:

“When she ran, she didn’t know where to run or what it would be like...” (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

Even if trafficked individuals manage to get a sense of their location and reach out to others, the language barrier poses a significant hurdle to seeking help, as mentioned by thirteen participants. This aligns with existing research, indicating that language barriers amplify the vulnerability of trafficked individuals (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015; Logan et al., 2009), inhibit their ability to seek help (van der Watt & Kruger, 2020), and thus contribute to them remaining in trafficking situations (Arhin, 2016; Fernandes et al., 2021; Hernandez & Rudolph, 2015; Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007; Zimmerman et al., 2003). Participants in this study believe that the language barrier exacerbates the situation for individuals trafficked to foreign destinations, contributing to their isolation and making escape attempts more challenging. The language barrier not only hampers communication but also poses difficulties in reading instruction signs or understanding their rights, as illustrated by the following stories shared by participants:

“If bought and sold domestically^{xi}, it’s easier, but in a foreign country where the language and people are completely unfamiliar, it becomes very challenging” (N5, the 50s, NGO, women)

“They did not know the language and could not communicate with the surrounding people” (N6, woman, 30s, NGO).

They want to be rescued, but maybe they don’t know the language and don’t know the way, so they don’t run away. [...] They are stuck because they do not know the language, so they don’t know how to describe the location, read instructions, or ask questions in a foreign language to find a way to escape. [...] Regarding domestic cases, it will be easier. (G8, 45s, woman, Gov)

“Different languages, geographical locations, and a lack of understanding of the law contribute to their vulnerable position, causing significant disadvantages for them” (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

Beyond posing a hurdle during the trafficking period, the current study underscores that language barriers may persist for returnees during reintegration. This is especially true for those who were trafficked at a young age or spent a significant amount of time in a foreign country and were unable to speak their mother tongue, such as those living in forced marriages in China. The language barrier is a direct consequence of the prolonged duration of trafficking, which also gives rise to other adverse outcomes. Essentially, these individuals now feel like foreigners in their own home country. N1 (woman, 40s, NGO) told me that:

There are cases where we rescue victims who have been trafficked for more than 40 years, and they have forgotten their Vietnamese language, only remember their parents’ names and forgot the way back home, because they have been abroad for that long. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

To elaborate on this, language plays a crucial role in connecting individuals to their cultural background, enabling effective communication and fostering a strong sense of identity (Edwards, 2009; Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1983; Jackson, 2020; Khan, 2020; Noels et al., 2020). When this connection is lost, it significantly affects one's identity, resulting in a profound disconnection from one's roots and complicating communication in one's original language. This leads to a disconnection from their origin, making it challenging to reintegrate into the past lives in their home country. In section 4.4, a related consequence will be explored, i.e., 'The deprivation of crucial lifetime'.

In summary, this section focused on the environment and emphasised three key points: 1) Trafficked individuals struggle to escape due to relocation to another country; 2) they experience constant movement, leading to disorientation about their location; and 3) language barriers both during trafficking and upon return contribute to their sense of unfamiliarity. Beyond this aspect of unfamiliarity, I will now explore another challenge faced by trafficked individuals, which involves being confined to isolated spaces with limited freedom of movement and disconnection from the outside world. This obstacle will be analysed in the next section.

4.2.3 Barriers to Escape: Restricted Movement, Disconnected and Isolated

Geb was then moved to another place. She was scared because she knew nobody else and was forced to live in a small old building with other young women. Here, they are not allowed to leave the house without the agreement of the house manager. The main gate was guarded by some ferocious men to ensure no one escaped. They patrolled the house thrice daily to ensure everything was in order. **(Geb's Story – Part 2)**

Upon reaching their exploitation destination, trafficked individuals are placed in a captive environment, severing their social connection and isolating them from regular human life. This study affirms previous research findings above, and highlights that in cases of forced marriage, the geographical remoteness of the destination contributes to their sense of isolation.

The existing literature indicates that traffickers employ various methods of tight control (Khan & Zubair, 2023; Wilson & Dalton, 2007), such as restricting freedom of movement (Al-Tammemi et al., 2023; Stöckl et al., 2017) and enforcing social isolation (Baldwin et al., 2015; Hagan et al., 2021), all aimed at exerting psychological control over trafficked individuals (Baldwin et al., 2015). This leads to the deprivation of social support (Fernandes et al., 2021; Hagan et al., 2021), ultimately trapping trafficked individuals in captive environments (Baldwin et al., 2015; Hagan et al., 2021). The narratives shared by study participants align with these findings, depicting a combination of tactics used by traffickers/exploiters to curtail the freedom of trafficked individuals. Most participants (n=22) emphasised that once trafficked individuals reach the site of exploitation, they face restrictions in movement and human connection, posing challenges for them to

escape. The specific tactics involved are (1) tight control/guard/confinement, (2) confiscation of communication means, and (3) retention of identity documents.

4.2.3.1 *Tight control/guard/confinement/monitored*

“There are certain challenging cases. They are guarded so terribly that we have to rely on a large force of police to save them, as not all NGOs can go into prostitution to save them.”
(O2, women, 50s, Others)

Study participants shared the experiences of survivors, saying that, “they are confined, not as free as in Vietnam” (G6, G7), “They are controlled very tightly” (G4), or “They were guarded and detained very strictly” (G9). N5 further added that the tight control tactics restrict the movement of individuals, making it hard for them to find a way home:

“Usually, traffickers have a very dense trafficking network to control. Now, in addition to direct control, they can have many other control methods, such as location-tracking [GPS]. So, it is tough for survivors to have a chance to escape.” (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

When considering the place of confinement, it is the husband's house in forced marriage cases and the brothel in forced sex work. This, places trafficked individuals in a vulnerable position, making it difficult for them to escape or seek help.

In many cases, they are locked in the house for a long time. At first, they lived with that family, and during the day when that family went to work, they were locked at home, so they were almost completely isolated from their surroundings and available resources. (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

[...] “When they were brought there, they were captured and locked up in harsh conditions.
(O1, woman, 35s, Others)

In comparing the isolation experiences of those trafficked for sex work, forced marriages, and forced labour, Le (2014) argued that trafficked individuals of forced labour face less strict movement. The U.S. Department of State also confirmed that in labour trafficking cases, especially in factories, individuals endure challenging conditions but may experience less isolation compared to other forms of trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2005, 2009, 2013; as cited in Le, 2014, p.118). The narrative below illustrates the significant gender differences in the confinement and isolation of trafficked individuals, as observed in this study. Women, as highlighted by the participants, face more severe restrictions compared to men. The participants directly linked these gender-based disparities to the opportunities for escape. The rationale behind this discrepancy lies in the nature of the exploitation experienced by each gender. Men, as discussed in the study, are typically compelled into forced labour, often working in factories. On the contrary, women are coerced into the sex trade or forced into marriage—forms of exploitation that demand traffickers to impose stricter control due to their heightened severity. Consequently, when forced

into these forms, women endure dual or even triple exploitation, as detailed in the preceding section (4.1. Complexity of exploitation).

If women are trafficked to China, for example, they will be confined at home and not allowed to go out, living in the countryside. As for men (whom I interviewed in the DV project), their mobility is still higher, despite their incarceration. [...] When they (men) are locked in the factory, they still eat and live normally, maybe the space of mobility is limited but basically, I personally don't see them locked in a house or banned from socializing like women. I don't know what's more advantageous, but maybe it's easier for men if they escape. From the stories I know, I feel it's just a matter of whether the male victim wants to escape or not ... (O5, man, 40s, Others).

In specific cases, the remoteness of the destination serves as an additional factor impacting the sense of isolation among trafficked individuals. Previous studies focusing on forced labour have noted that trafficked individuals are often kept in remote locations, employing isolation as a coercive tactic (International Labour Organization et al., 2022). Some studies also indicate instances where women are sold into forced marriages in remote regions, such as (Shuai & Liu, 2020) and (Le, 2014). However, these studies have not explicitly explored the increased difficulties that women face in terms of isolation due to the remoteness of these locations. This current research emphasises that, especially in forced marriage cases, the remoteness of the destination significantly intensifies a sense of isolation by creating obstacles for trafficked individuals to seek assistance and determine their whereabouts. In this study, forced wives frequently end up in remote locations, such as the husband's house in a distant area. The geographic distance, or the remoteness of these locations, exacerbates their isolation by amplifying the barriers they face. Essentially, the destination's remoteness can function as a form of extensive confinement. For example:

"They live in houses scattered far apart, and there are cases where they stay there throughout the year without knowing who their neighbours are. The houses are distant from each other" (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

"They don't know the home addresses; they only know that the area consists of farmland with no distinctive identifying features." (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

Due to the geographic distance, survivors may live in a state of isolation, disconnected from their neighbours, making it challenging to build relationships, acquire knowledge about those nearby, or access available community support. The complexity of the situation is well illustrated by O1:

Often, these girls are forced to be wives in remote, isolated places in China. [...] In the case of being sold as a wife, the purchasing family typically resides in a remote area. These regions are isolated, with even more challenging languages, such as those of minority groups, treacherous terrain, and a lack of transportation options, further exacerbating the difficulties. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

4.2.3.2 *Disconnected by confiscation of communication means.*

Apart from restricted movement, trafficked individuals are also disconnected from means of communication (International Labour Organization et al., 2022) or social contact (Hagan et al., 2021; Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015; Khan & Zubair, 2023), which can be understood as social isolation (Baldwin et al., 2015; Hagan et al., 2021), further added to the tight control and so that individuals are unable to escape (Khan & Zubair, 2023; Wilson & Dalton, 2007). The study participants have confirmed that survivors were wholly isolated and deprived of any communication means, such as mobile phones, which cut them off from the outside world. This contributes to their sense of uncertainty about their situation.

“They are unable to determine their location as their devices were confiscated by traffickers, or the network is unavailable in that area” (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

“They are forced to stay home and not contact anyone [...]. Many are not allowed to use phones, so they have no means of contact.” (G1, woman, 30s, Gov) – (Study participant talked about cases of forced marriage)

4.2.3.3 *Personal Identity Document Withheld*

The woman kept all of Geb's documents, including her ID card, as she claimed it was safer.
(Geb's Story – Part 2)

To prevent trafficked individuals from escaping, traffickers often employ the tactic of confiscating their identification papers, including passports and other personal documents. This strategy is well-documented in existing literature (see, for example, Churakova & van der Westhuizen, 2020; ILO, 2009; Le, 2014; McCabe & Eglen, 2022; Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking In Persons, 2023; Surtees & Johnson, 2021; UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2009; UNODC, 2016). The current study also confirms the prevalence of this control tactic, highlighting how traffickers use the deprivation of identification papers as a means to exert dominance and hinder trafficked individuals from escaping.

Identity documents work as proof of identity; therefore, confiscating documents is a way to rob individuals of their identification and isolate them from normal humans' life. Individuals do not dare to escape from traffickers, as, to them, there is no way out without identity. There are several reasons for this phenomenon. In the context of trafficking, individuals often find themselves in vulnerable conditions, which can diminish their intention or willingness to seek help. While some manage to escape and seek assistance through host country authorities or the embassy of their origin country in foreign lands, others face threats and fear the consequences of being identified as illegal migrants or deported due to lack of documents. This section delves into the control tactics employed by traffickers to prevent trafficked individuals from escaping, exploiting these fears and threats to hinder individuals from leaving or disclosing their identity or status. Some may be unaware of the procedure for approaching the embassy or consulate when they lose their passport. Therefore, there is a crucial need to educate individuals, especially those at potential risk,

about the addresses and contact means of their respective embassies in foreign countries, enabling them to seek guidance or assistance when necessary.

The following stories shared by participants express the challenges associated with no documents:

Depending on the situation, it is rare for them to return on their own because they often lack documents, lose passports, [...] their movement is restricted, and their documents are withheld. [...] their passports are taken away, leaving them with no choice but to endure the situation. (O2, women, 50s, Others)

“Almost all victims are deprived of their personal identification documents.” (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

“Most of them don't know how to escape, don't have identification papers, and other obstacles...” (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

“All their documents are confiscated so that they can't escape [...] Men go there to work; if they escape without their identity papers, it won't solve the problem.” (O5, man 40s, Others).

In a trafficking situation, traffickers employ not just one tactic, but a combination and complexity of coercive tactics, thereby amplifying the vulnerability of trafficked individuals. This complexity is evident in the following example:

“First, they are locked up to avoid hiding; they are not allowed to use the phone to communicate with anyone, are locked in the house, and live without completely understanding the language, culture and customs of the people there” (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

In summary, study participants affirm findings present in existing human trafficking literature, indicating that trafficked individuals are tightly monitored and isolated from normal human life, and traffickers use complex control tactics for this purpose. The current study also introduces two new insights: 1) the remoteness of a destination poses additional challenges for women in forced marriages, and 2) educating people about where they can seek help in cases of going abroad and losing their identity documents can empower individuals.

While these findings align with the existing literature, recognising the multiple dimensions of suffering enhances our understanding of survivors' experiences, providing valuable insights for the broader discourse on trauma and post-trafficking interventions, which will be discussed in the following sections.

4.2.4 Learned Helplessness

This section concludes that traffickers and exploiters use complex control tactics that make it difficult for trafficked individuals to escape, leading them to stay in a state of learned helplessness. This is because their

attempts to escape often fail, and they end up staying in trafficking situations for prolonged periods. The research findings reinforce the existing understanding of the matter.

The complex control tactics used by traffickers/exploiters (Ioannou & Oostinga, 2015; Meyers, 2016; Oram et al., 2016, as cited in Fernandes et al., 2021; Ottisova et al., 2016) lead to emotional numbing and maladaptive passivity. Victims come to see any response to the trafficking situation as futile (Peterson & Seligman, 1983), which compels them to remain in the exploitative situation and give up on the idea of escaping (Le et al., 2018; Meyers, 2016; Wilson & Butler, 2014, as cited in Fernandes et al., 2021). This phenomenon can be explained as learned helplessness.

Learned helplessness, as elucidated by Balk (1983) and Maier & Seligman (2016), refers to a psychological state where individuals believe they lack control over adverse situations, leading to a pervasive sense of futility and helplessness. Maier & Seligman (1976) outlined three effects—motivation, cognition, and emotion—to illustrate learned helplessness. In the context of human trafficking, it can be explained and manifested as: 1) Motivation (stemming from uncontrollable events), 2) Cognition (the realization that behaviours and outcomes are independent, such as attempts to escape and subsequent failure), and 3) Emotion (an adaptive response—learned helplessness—such as abandoning the intention to flee and accepting the trafficking situation).

In summary, as highlighted by participants in this study, trafficked individuals exhibit learned helplessness in these situations as a result of 1) repeated escape failures and 2) enduring the trafficking situation for an extended period without rescue.

In the first situation, escape failures leave trafficked individuals in a state of helplessness and impede further efforts to seek assistance, as indicated in the study by Fernandes et al. (2021). These unsuccessful attempts may result in both physical and psychological abuse, as illustrated in the previous section (Violence and Threats of Violence). Alternatively, escape attempts may lead to falling into the hands of other traffickers, as exemplified in the following scenarios. The repeated failures cause individuals to recognize the lack of connection between their behaviour and the outcome, fostering a pervasive sense of helplessness.

Among the cases I assisted, there was one where a person was taken to China for forced marriage, gave birth to a child, and managed to escape. However, she encountered a Vietnamese person on her journey who offered to help but ultimately betrayed her. The mother and child were separated, with the child being sold to one person and the mother to another, resulting in her being sold twice in China. [...] Victims face significant mental suppression. Traffickers torture the ones who have escaped and caught back; showing the potential results of escape, making victims feel afraid and not dare to escape anymore. Another problem is that they have almost lost their trust, so they don't know who to look for or trust who can help them. (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

“Victims do not believe that they will be rescued because of many previous failed experiences.” (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

In situations involving a prolonged duration of staying in trafficking, the persistent experience of torture and abuse (uncontrollable events) contributes to a psychological state of learned helplessness. Trafficked individuals experience feelings of hopelessness, discouragement, and resignation. For example, when forced into prostitution, they may stop resisting and even convince themselves that they are suitable for the work or find enjoyment in it. In these cases, they lose the desire to escape or be rescued (N8, woman, 40s, NGO), and accept their situation (N1, woman, 40s, NGO) or self-deprecate and accept staying there (N3, woman, 35s, NGO). They may be afraid to return to their hometown due to the fear of losing the ability to live a normal life (O3, woman, 50s, Others).

“The exploiters have many ways of treating the victim depending on their tolerance level [...] It is almost impossible to escape” (N2, man, 45s, NGO)

“When they are trafficked and may be exploited more than that, they accept it.” (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

“... When they have lived there for a long time and lost their will to return, they are allowed to go out but are still under control.” (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

At first, it was unacceptable, but then they were abused, so they lowered their self-worth and thought they deserved to suffer like that. They believe even if they return, they don't deserve good things anymore, and no one believes and loves them, so they accept and accept that life. That is the experience of those sold into prostitution. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

“They think that once they've been sold into a brothel, it's like nothing else in life, so they accept it” (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

In short, the impact of learned helplessness goes beyond restricting the ability of trafficked individuals to bounce back and stay motivated while in trafficking situations. It can also cause individuals to have lower self-esteem and a decreased inclination towards recovery and reintegration. Therefore, it is crucial to empower these individuals, which is discussed in the chapter on reintegration (Chapter 5).

4.3 Consequence 1 - Having Children with Exploiters

This section of the study explores the consequences of forced marriage on women, emphasizing the previously unexplored issue of motherhood bonding that contributes to women staying in trafficking situations. The research aligns with existing literature on the coercion of childbirth in forced marriage, highlighting that having children with exploiters is not voluntary. The study also draws new attention to the challenges faced by women who have children with exploiters, as the associated motherhood responsibilities are voluntary. Seventeen out of the twenty-three participants in this study indicated that women encounter challenges related to having children with exploiters.

Generally, men may have an advantage in dealing with these situations since they typically have fewer limitations associated with children, which are directly linked to trafficking destinations [...] When women are abused and have children, it's tiring (many problems), and it is clear that women often face more adverse risks. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

4.3.1 Involuntary Experience

This section of the study affirms existing literature, emphasizing that having children with exploiters is a common and involuntary consequence of human trafficking for forced marriage. It focuses on providing illustrations for 1) Exploiters abusing and coercing women into having children and 2) Women do not want to remain in this unwilling situation.

Kakar (2020) acknowledges that victims of forced marriage are coerced into giving birth, as it aligns with one of the purposes of forced marriage. As highlighted by participants in this study, forced marriage is also linked with coercion to bear children. While childbirth is typically a significant and autonomous milestone in women's lives, the coercive tactics employed by exploiters strip trafficked women of this autonomy. Exploiters abuse and coerce women into having children, resulting in pregnancies without their consent.

In many cases, these women were trafficked for marriages where they would serve as wives for the entire family. For instance, one girl might become the wife to all the brothers within that family, with the primary goal being the prompt establishment of childbirth. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

"For those who are sold into marriage [...] they will be abused; the goal is to have children as quickly as possible." (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

"After a while, some people had children" (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

"Many returned survivors bring their kids as a result of being trafficked for forced marriage or sexually assaulted." (G4, woman, 30s, Gov)

"Women coerced into marriage in China frequently bear children as a consequence. Then they return and bring their children. Falling into a situation and having kids like that as a result is caused by traffickers." (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

As this experience is not a willingly chosen aspect of their lives, the distress associated with this forced experience prompts women to seek help and attempt to escape from these coercive situations.

"She was lured and tricked into going to China to get married, then she got pregnant, and then she called for help when she was six months pregnant." (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

"A girl was trafficked over the border when she was 15. Then, she was forced into marriage. When she was rescued, she was pregnant." (G8, woman, 45s, Gov), woman, Gov, 45s)

"Another girl has returned from China and is pregnant. [...] She wrote, "What has happened is in the past. I do not want to recall it. Repeating it will only make me sad" (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

Despite the strong desire to escape, women are compelled to consider the bond they share with their children, a relationship that will be analysed in the next section.

4.3.2 Voluntary Motherhood Bonding

This section highlights novel insight that women's decision to stick with their children is entirely voluntary, even if it results in additional challenges for them.

To explain, Vietnamese women are known for their self-sacrifice and endurance, which involves contributing to their family's well-being by managing household duties, maintaining happiness, and raising children (Hoang, 2016). These expectations are deeply ingrained in historical and societal norms, which shape their feminine identity around devotion to family (Hoang, 2016; Rydström, 2004). The current study argues that despite being in a situation like human trafficking, where women are not bound by traditional social values and are not subject to the judgment of their feminine identity, they still feel a profound responsibility towards their motherhood. However, this responsibility also presents additional difficulties for them, which have not yet been discovered in the literature.

The following insights are illustrated through the narratives of participants: 1) Women often try to escape from trafficking situations along with their children; 2) If women are unable to escape with their children, they may choose to remain in the trafficking situation in order to take care of them; 3) If women are able to escape without their children, it may cause trauma or push them back into the trafficking situation; 4) If women do manage to escape with their children, the process of reintegrating into society can be more challenging. Therefore, it is important to consider providing additional support for these women.

At first, women often attempt to escape with their children, even though this may present additional challenges for them. The participants shared that:

“One victim told me that when she decided to leave, she took her child and ran away and determined that if she died at that time, both of them would die. She didn't know where to run and what would happen when she ran.” (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

“Her experience there was being a forced wife and also having to do backbreaking labour, according to what she told me. When she returned there through the forest, she brought with her three small kids...” (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

If women cannot escape accompanying their children, they would instead stay entrapped to take care of them. In this situation, the presence of children often hinders women's motivation to escape, as they are willing to endure difficult circumstances and sacrifice their well-being to stay with their kids. Once they have kids, these mothers are driven by their sense of responsibility to dedicate significant effort to carefully think about and analyse different factors related to their children's well-being. By changing their priorities, they shift their thoughts away from personal matters and the possibility of returning to their homeland.

The maternal anxieties expressed by the following participants highlight the multifaced concerns women encounter once they become mothers in forced marriage.

If considered on a general level, men may have more advantages to overcome situations; for example, they have fewer barriers in terms of children and constraints fewer bound to the trafficking destination [...] for women; the first issue is about children [...] When it comes to thinking of returning, children are the factor that most of them do not dare to decide to leave (N4, NGO, 40s, man)

When they have children, they must accept sacrifices to stay there for them. Because they think that if they go home, will they be able to bring their child back with them? If they can do that, will they be able to raise the child while their situation in Vietnam is also challenging... That's why many of them accept to stay there for their children. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

For female victims, there are definitely numerous constraints to escape. For example, the women who are forced to become wives and have children, then they certainly want to escape, but they have children [...] The woman is usually tied to the child, and they quit and give up the idea of running away. (N1, Woman, 35s, NGO)

“The bond between a mother and a child creates a barrier for women to escape” (N5, the 50s, NGO, women).

“They are afraid that no one will take care of their children”. (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

In situations where women attempt to escape but are unable to take their children, it often results in trauma for them or may even force them back into a trafficking situation. The decision to leave children behind is emotionally challenging and generates internal struggles for women trying to escape. Consequently, even if individuals manage to escape successfully, their journeys cannot be considered truly successful. Many women feel compelled to return to the trafficking destination where their children still reside, believing that the only way to be with their children is to go back. Thus, the powerful maternal bond repeatedly leads them back into the trafficking situation.

As for the women who were trafficked to China, they find every way to go home [...]. They have to wait a long time to find an opportunity. Once they make the husband believe and prove it, especially when they have children, the husband will assume they will not run away because they love their children. There are also cases where they have to leave their children behind. And they will await the right time. When deciding to leave, they know that the child is safe and will still be taken care of when the mother is not there. When the children grow up a little, they will return. We work with cases where they have to wait up to 15 years for them to return. When their children are relatively old and can care for themselves, they return. After that, they still contact their children, for example, via WeChat... But when they decide to return home, I think they are more torn than when they are with their children... So, leaving is a huge internal struggle. (O5, man, 40s, Others)

“Some women can return to their home country, but their children cannot. This leaves them caught between two major psychological conflicts, making it difficult to stay in their home country.” (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

“There are women who return home and then go back there because they cannot bear to miss their children.” (O5, man, 40s, Others)

In L.'s case, she continuously travelled back to China due to the bond with her child in China, relying her life on her husband there. [...] She continues to reside there without proper documentation or citizenship, enduring living conditions similar to modern-day slavery. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

In certain situations, women are lucky enough to have the opportunity to return home accompanied by their children. However, reintegrating into society can be twice as tricky as it adds more responsibilities for caring for children. Apart from difficulties regarding taking care of children as normal people, trafficked women face more challenges associated with bringing their kids back to Vietnam, such as the legal complexities arising from having a child not registered as a Vietnamese citizen, as indicated in Le et al.'s study (2007). Participants stated that:

“When returning, bringing the children back without identification papers was even more challenging.” (G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

“For those who bring their children home, registering for them is very difficult. [...] It is unclear if their child has citizenship in China or if they have any documents to prove it, etc., so registering a birth certificate is difficult.” (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

“If the returnees have children, as some can bring children back, it is necessary to help their children.” (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

When they came back, they had several kids with them, but there was no one to take care of them. They had no money and were having difficulty getting back on their feet. Women have it more complicated in these situations as they have to care for their children and work hard to support themselves and their kids. I supported a woman in T. who escaped and returned with three children. (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

Support in legal matters and judicial issues is really important, especially in cases such as creating a juridical record for a child or obtaining a birth certificate to enrol in school because the women came there to be wives without an official marriage. I know a case of a young girl who returned with a child who didn't speak a lick of Vietnamese. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

Fulfilling parental responsibilities is often more challenging for trafficked women than for men. As a result, women returning to their home country with their children may need extra support to navigate the difficulties of raising children. Study participants acknowledged the unique challenges faced by these mothers and recommended additional assistance. These findings align with a related study by Stöckl et al. (2017), emphasizing the necessity of specialized support, including specialized health and legal support, for Vietnamese women and girls forced into marriage in China, particularly those who are pregnant or have children with their exploiters.

“Generally, men may have an advantage in dealing with these situations since they typically have fewer limitations regarding children [...] There are numerous challenges that women face, and a prominent obstacle revolves around the issue of children.” (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

“Survivors need a bit more sensitive support, for example, those returns with children, those being female ... Appropriate support should be set for that group.” (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

Despite the analysed situations above, it is evident that a common thread runs through them: mothers always want to stay with their children, take care of them, and keep them safe. However, this voluntary bonding inadvertently adds more burdens to their escape efforts, creating additional challenges for women.

In short, this section confirms the existing studies that: 1) women are forced to have children with exploiters, which is not a voluntary experience; 2) special assistance is needed for these mothers. Furthermore, this study presents fresh discoveries regarding the obligations that come with motherhood. When women are coerced into marriage and subsequently give birth, they face more significant challenges in deciding to escape and return home, especially after having children. Motherhood and an emotional attachment to their children often make it difficult for them to escape. A mother’s willingness to leave can be affected by her desire to be close to her children, leading to internal conflicts if she decides to leave them behind.

To sum up, women who are forced to have children with exploiters are prone to staying in trafficking situations for an extended period. Recognising the deprivation of valuable time experienced by women in trafficking situations is crucial. This will be the focus of the next section (4.4. Consequence 2 – The deprivation of crucial lifetime).

4.4 Consequence 2 - The Deprivation of Crucial Lifetime

This section affirms previous research findings and offers additional evidence on how human trafficking disrupts individuals’ lives, affecting their identity and self-development. The study reveals three key insights: Firstly, a majority were trafficked at a young age, which agrees with previous studies. Secondly, they endured prolonged periods in exploitative situations, which matches the existing literature. Thirdly, the extended trafficking experience led to the loss of their native language and cultural identity, depriving them of vital time for personal development - a new insight in the literature. Consequently, the reintegration process demands substantial time and attention to address these essential needs.

Recognizing these detrimental consequences is crucial for understanding the enduring requirements of trafficked individuals and facilitating their reintegration into society.

Intersecting factors compound, further complicating trafficking experiences. Gender and age interact in distinct ways, as women are often trafficked at a younger age and for a prolonged period, whereas men are typically trafficked at an older age group.

4.4.1 Being Trafficked at a Young Age

The age of trafficked individuals varies across trafficking types, with victims of sex trafficking generally being younger than those in labour trafficking (Cockbain & Bowers, 2019, p. 16). Women are predominantly trafficked at younger ages, while men are more commonly subjected to trafficking in higher age groups (IOM, n.d.-b, n.d.-a). Forced marriage predominantly affects young girls, often below the age of 18, particularly in some developing countries or cultures where the minimum marriage age is as low as 10, 14, 15, or even younger (Kakar, 2020, pp. 503–504). Based on a collection of court documents from prosecutive cases in Vietnam from 2012-2020, the average age of victims is 19.2 years, with the most vulnerable group being those aged 19-25 (Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, 2021, p. 5). Additionally, 42% of victims are children. This vulnerability aligns with the reasons for leaving home, as 75% of individuals travel with traffickers for work or marriage opportunities (Blue iDragon Children’s Foundation, 2021, p. 5).

The study participants support these findings, providing evidence that, in many instances, women are compelled into trafficking at an early age, especially in forced marriage or for the sex trade.

“That girl was sold to China to become a wife at 13.” (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

“In that case, in C.M., a 14-year-old girl was approached and sold to China.” (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

“A short time ago, we connected and supported a child who was trafficked from the age of 13 to China, she was rescued at 16 years old.” (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

“The girl I met yesterday was trafficked at the age of 13” (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

“She was trafficked when she was very young [...] she was only 13-14 years old when she was bought and sold to become a wife.” (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

There are 9-10 girls from K.T., all very young. In that case, three sisters in a family were all trafficked, with an age range from the age of 11-19-20 [...] There was that girl who was trafficked into prostitution by a friend when she was 16-17 years old. (O2, woman, 50s, Others)

“That girl was brought to the safe shelter when she was about 17 years old; she shared that her lover tricked and sold her into trafficking for a forced wife.” (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

“That case is in D.B.; she was tricked into being sold across the border at the age of 15 and was married off.” (G8, woman, 45s, Gov)

Trafficked at a young age, consistent exploitation leads to these women being compelled to endure extended periods, or even their entire lives, within trafficking situations.

4.4.2 Extended Period of Exploitation

According to data from The Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC), globally, male victims of trafficking, as identified by IOM, are trafficked for an average of 2.3 years, while female victims are

trafficked for an average of 1.8 years (IOM, n.d.-b). IOM also notes the most extended recorded trafficking duration for an Asian victim is 78 years (IOM, n.d.-c). From the data of public court cases in Vietnam, seventy-one per cent of victims were sold into forced marriages with Chinese men, with the average duration of slavery being 9.8 months (Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, 2021, p. 4). However, while the court case documents provide a detailed account of the traffickers, they offer less information about the victims. The Supreme Court database does not disclose all personal details about the victims to protect confidentiality (Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, 2021, p. 4). Consequently, this information may not fully capture the prolonged experiences of trafficked women. While consistent with the prolonged trafficking duration in Asia, this study contradicts the shorter trafficking duration reported by IOM when comparing women to men. The focus of this study is on forced marriage cases involving trafficked women, where women often endure extended exploitation (Ligia et al., 2015; Stöckl et al., 2017, p. 4). Participants highlight that this extended trafficking duration results from intricate control tactics and exploitation by traffickers, as detailed in previous sections.

As discussed in previous sections, individuals face complex control tactics, making escape difficult. The challenges associated with exploitation necessitate time for individuals to adapt and identify suitable opportunities to escape, leading to prolonged stays in trafficking situations. For example, the unfamiliar environment adds to the difficulties, requiring individuals to invest time in becoming familiar with the trafficking environment—its geography, language and culture, and establishing connections with exploiters to uncover escape opportunities.

I don't know the process of rescuing, but those who returned (in my opinion) would not have been able to escape on their own if they had just been trafficked. Because firstly, they don't know the language or geographical location, they probably need quite a long time to adapt to the environment to find a chance to escape. It's tough to escape right away; there are very few, and they're fortunate to be able to run right away. (O6, man, 40s, Others)

There are cases of being trafficked for a very long time, for example, cases of forced marriage. Having been there for a long time, they have built trust with the husband's family, so they are allowed to use the phone, no longer under strict guard. [...] That's an opportunity for them to call for the rescue. (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

"After a period of time, they show that they have no intention of running away anymore and obey their husband's family, and then they are allowed to use the phone." (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

"After a while, some had children there and began to know a little of the language, or when they met Vietnamese people there, they asked for help" (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

The process of adapting to the environment, coupled with relentless exploitation by traffickers/exploiters, deprives women of a significant timeframe. The prolonged trafficking duration for women is associated

with continuous and diverse forms of exploitation. In many cases, the time stolen from these women endures for decades, nearly spanning their entire lifetime.

For men, it is possible that after being exploited for a period of time, if their health is no longer guaranteed, the owner will discharge them because they cannot do anything anymore. As for women, very few people are allowed to go home by their exploiters; it's scarce/challenging, as no matter how they are, they can still be used to serve (other purposes). (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

“That girl was forced into the sex trade in about 3 years” (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

“That woman was tricked into forced marriage in China. A few years later, she returned with her child.” (G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

“Some people have to wait up to 15 years to return [...] people tell many stories in which people return after decades of going to China and when they come back, the whole family meets up and cries.” (O5, man, 40s, Others)

“There are cases where we rescue victims who have been trafficked for more than 40 years” (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

“There are cases of being trafficked for 30 years.” (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

Many were trafficked and returned after 5-10-15-20 years and brought their children back [...] The woman in H.G. was trafficked for 10 years before returning [...] There was a case of my neighbour, a family with 3 daughters who were all trafficked, [...] L. was sold at the age of 16, ... and returned after about 20 years ... (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

Remaining in a trafficking situation for an extended period, which lacks the freedom and normalcy of typical lives, deprives women of valuable opportunities they could have pursued if not robbed of that duration.

4.4.3 Lost Cultural Identity and Lack of Self-Development

According to Kakar (2020), Child/Forced/Servile Marriages strip victims of their identity and individuality, hindering their potential. While this study supports this claim, it further provides insight into Vietnamese literature, revealing that the prolonged exploitation duration in forced marriages impedes trafficked individuals' self-development, causing them to lose their identity and cultural connections, resulting in significant challenges upon their return.

Firstly, the extended trafficking duration leads returning individuals to undergo a loss of cultural identity, including their mother tongue, home address, and ties with family and community.

There was a case where both sisters were sold to two different places when they were very young, at 6. When we rescued them, they forgot our mother language. When they returned, they were 15 years old and only spoke Chinese. (G7, woman, 50s, Gov)

“In many cases, victims have been gone for so long that they don't remember exactly where their home is. They even cannot speak Vietnamese fluently after being gone for so long.” (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

“... and they have forgotten their Vietnamese language, only remember their parents' names and forgot the way back home, because they have been abroad for that long.” (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

Many women (returning migrants, not specifically about human trafficking) shared that when they return to Vietnam, they still can't talk to their parents and other people like before. When they went and came back, they also changed, and their families also changed. They are no longer connected to their families like before and are unfamiliar with their surroundings. (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

Secondly, returnees are deprived of opportunities to acquire essential skills, knowledge, and information necessary for personal growth due to disruptions caused by the extended trafficking duration. Many individuals trafficked at a young age miss out on educational opportunities, hindering their ability to mature and gain crucial knowledge. Upon return, they face challenges restarting their lives and lack the foundational knowledge acquired during their youth. Despite the support for reintegration, some may still feel lost and struggle to apply their knowledge effectively, requiring more time to reintegrate into society, with some individuals possibly never achieving full reintegration.

“They were trafficked when they were very young, so their education was interrupted, and they (survivors) will have to go back to school from the beginning, but many of them find it hard to accept that.” (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

“If they are of school age, we will try to let them continue schooling, even though it is very tough.” (N1, woman, 40s, NGO) - (Study participant talked about support after rescue)

As far as age is concerned, they lose their skills as they often migrate to do housework or farm work without expertise or training. This results in a lack of professional skills necessary to secure employment, even a job in the industrial sector, for example. (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

Many recruiting places typically demand prior work experience, yet a significant portion of trafficking victims consists of minors who lack such experience.[...] Because during trafficking, they are subjected to control and coercion, compelling to follow, so when they return to stay in the shelter, despite receiving guidance, their decision-making becomes challenging and muddled [...] They did not know what to do correctly with their work, and many times, so they just left it like that... (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

Some women were tricked into China, but when they returned, they said it was too difficult to earn money in Vietnam, and they couldn't make money. As they couldn't find a job while returning to Vietnam (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

“For young people 13-15 years old, we will try to convince them to go back to school [...] Convincing them so they understand the role of education and the future of studying is very difficult.” (N3, woman, 35s, NGO) - (Study participant talked about support for returnees)

“It is rare for them to return to high school to continue their studies, so they can only go to vocational training, but even vocational training is considered a waste of time because they want to earn money.” (G2, woman, 45s, Gov)

They see them returning, but in a way that they just exist and don't belong to a particular group [...] Time they stay at the shelter as a rest stop [...] Even though they are supported to go to vocational training for a while, they don't feel like they belong to that group. (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

In short, trafficking deprives women of a crucial period during their youth, impacting their subsequent time reintegrating into society. The reintegration process becomes even more challenging due to the severe repercussions on their overall health resulting from prolonged violence, abuse, and exploitation. This consequence will be analysed in the next section.

4.5 Consequence 3 – Severe Physical, Psychological, and Social Effects

The girl Geb met in a brothel in China died right after being rescued because of severe internal injuries. Another girl broke her leg after jumping out of a window in order to escape, and, after complications, she ended up in a wheelchair. Some mothers suffer severe depression because their kids are stuck in China. Some commit suicide. **(Geb's Story – Part 3)**

This section applies the BioPsychoSocial (BPS) Model to examine the detrimental effects of human trafficking on women's well-being. “The biopsychosocial model is a general model positing that Biological, Psychological (which includes thoughts, emotions, and behaviours), and Social (e.g., socioeconomic, socioenvironmental, and cultural) factors all play a significant role in health and disease.” (Vögele, 2015, p. 463). It illustrates the comprehensive and severe damage to the biopsychosocial health of trafficked women, encompassing issues in 1) Biological health, 2) Complex psychological well-being, and 3) Social health problems. All the study participants have reported the various health issues women face, which are often complex. The study supports previous findings that confirm the serious health issues experienced by trafficked individuals upon their return.

4.5.1 Physical Effects

This section specifically focuses on the physical health issues of trafficked women who have experienced sexual abuse, leading to significant "work-related" health problems.

Hamby and Jackson (2010) noted that physical dominance is often used to assert power over weaker individuals. Given that women are generally smaller and physically weaker than men (Caldwell et al., 2012; Hamby & Jackson, 2010), they become more susceptible to violence and abuse (Caldwell et al., 2012). Human trafficking exemplifies this dynamic, with traffickers and exploiters employing violence and coercion to control women, as described in the previous sections. Prolonged exploitation involving violence, abuse, and restricted movements (Oram et al., 2012; Ottisova et al., 2016) leads to a range of health issues, both

physical and mental, particularly affecting women and children (Perry & McEwing, 2013). Omole's (2016) study pointed out gender-specific patterns in human trafficking, highlighting that men, often subjected to labour trafficking, do not exhibit increased health risks compared to those involved in forced sex trade. Consequently, women frequently experience more health problems, highlighting the unique gender effects of sex trafficking (Omole, 2016). Sexually transmitted infections and physical injuries are common issues faced by those who are forced into sex exploitation (Preble, 2019; Preble et al., 2022; Rothman et al., 2020; Varma et al., 2015). This study aligns with and reinforces earlier findings, highlighting that women confront significant biological health consequences when subjected to extensive control and exploitation, particularly through sexual abuse and violence, as discussed previously. These experiences related to sexual exploitation potentially result in life-threatening illnesses or even death.

Women are often physically fragile; even if they are not weak at first, they will be after being exploited to exhaustion. When sold to brothels, they are forced to use stimulants and undergo abortions when they become pregnant. Their bodies will undoubtedly be severely damaged, and some will bring back sexually transmitted diseases. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

"They are sick due to violence, force, and abuse; they have several diseases that make them not healthy enough to be able to move and escape." (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

"When that girl was rescued and brought back to Vietnam, she was nearly 16. She returned to Vietnam with severe injuries, multiple internal injuries and especially highly severe injuries to her genitals." (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

They can recover quickly if they are just trafficked there for a while, beaten a few times, and then returned home. But if they are abused, it will still haunt them. [...] There are cases of people being trafficked and sexually exploited and then infected with HIV; their lives are dark and very tragic. [...] There are dead-end cases due to mental health issues, having been gang-raped, and having HIV/AIDS. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

"She returned to her locality. After a few days, unfortunately, she died from a work-related illness. She was sexually trafficked, had AIDS and died two days after we contacted her." (N2, man, 40s, NGO)

In certain instances, the less severe biological health issues can be treated, but the psychological "scars" endured by women tend to persist long-term. Beyond the physical toll, survivors of trafficking commonly contend with complex mental issues, which will be explored in the following section.

4.5.2 Psychological Effects

This section explains the complex psychological effects of trafficking, particularly on women. While not all women may recognise their issues, they all experience various mental challenges. Additionally, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a common symptom among trafficked individuals.

In addition to the physical consequences, survivors of trafficking often endure complex layers of trauma, including anxiety, panic disorder, major depression, intense shame, and Post-traumatic stress disorder

(PTSD) (Bryant-Davis, 2011; Gerassi, 2015; Gerassi & Nichols, 2017; Ottisova et al., 2016; Perry & McEwing, 2013; Stöckl et al., 2021).

Ligia et al. (2015) conducted the first comprehensive health study involving a large and diverse sample of men, women, and child survivors of trafficking for various forms of exploitation in Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam. The study confirms that violence and unsafe working conditions are widespread among trafficking individuals, with psychological morbidity linked to the severity of abuse. Individuals subjected to extreme overtime, restricted freedom, poor living conditions, threats, or severe violence were more likely to exhibit symptoms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. This study provides evidence supporting these findings.

Mental health issues vary among trafficked women; not all of them recognise they have such problems, but every woman in this context experiences mental challenges.

Usually, problems are related to psychological issues. Looking from my perspective as a social worker or a psychological therapist, I see that they have problems, at least stress, not to mention depression or anxiety disorders or emotional behaviour disorders [...] As a professional, I see emotional, behavioural, and cognitive problems in them. (G8, woman, 45s, Gov)

“She was a bit mentally unstable, sometimes happy and sometimes sad.” (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

The health factor [...]. It can be said that when women return, they are almost devastated, have lost their health, and have been exploited to the point of exhaustion for many years, both physically and mentally, and then there is nothing left. Looking at them, most of them suffer from depression, but the severity is different. They have been in crisis for a long time—mental and health instability. [...] Psychologically, even if it is overcome, the wound is still there. [...] When approaching survivors, what I fear most is exploiting their emotional wounds [...] Some of them do not dare to speak or tell anyone; there is too much hurt and pain. (G5, woman, 45s, Gov)

Among mental illnesses, PTSD is marked by symptoms such as recurrence, avoidance, and cognitive and mood issues. The following illustrative case demonstrates a combination of PTSD symptoms, where an individual experiences both Re-experiencing (*sleepless*) and Avoidance (*no longer wants to draw or think about it again*) despite engaging in a suitable treatment method (*drawing a picture*¹⁵).

There is a girl who lacks literacy skills but is very good at drawing. Every sleepless night filled with suffering; she draws pictures that can stretch like a house. Every part of the picture provides details of the trafficking process... In the picture, there's a missing part that she

¹⁵ “Exposure therapy helps people learn to manage their fear by gradually exposing them, in a safe way, to the trauma they experienced. As part of exposure therapy, people may think or write about the trauma or visit the place where it happened. This therapy can help people with PTSD reduce symptoms that cause them distress.” (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2021)

deliberately decided not to include anymore because it reminds her of something too painful, and she does not want to think about it anymore. (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

Recurrence, a key PTSD sign, indicates the reappearance of traumatic memories at any time (American Psychiatric Association, n.d.; Gerassi & Nichols, 2017; Hopper, 2017b; Okech et al., 2018; *PTSD: National Center for PTSD*, n.d.; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2021). Study participants observed this symptom in trafficked individuals at various support process stages, from their initial arrival to secure environments.

“Usually, the first 2-3 days, the returnee is still in shock, so they can't say anything” (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

“When talking about that part of the horrifying memory (recounting that terrifying memory), she was shocked and ran around the room...” (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

“She became depressed, and when she told the story, she broke down and cried.” (G5, woman, Gov, 45s)

Another PTSD sign is avoidance, where individuals steer clear of triggers related to the traumatic event, such as people, places, and activities associated with it (American Psychiatric Association, n.d.; Gerassi & Nichols, 2017; Hopper, 2017b; Okech et al., 2018; *PTSD: National Center for PTSD*, n.d.; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2021). Trafficked individuals may resist discussing or recalling the event and avoid situations that evoke distressing memories.

“Even though we have worked with so many people, not everyone disclosed all the information. [...] Not everyone wanted or needed support; they only needed help to go home because they wanted to move on and didn't want to mention (what happened) again.” (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

Those people did not clearly share how they were trafficked: personal stories, experiences abroad, etc. Either they could not remember, or they did not want to remember that story and did not share, so psychological support is tough and takes a lot of time. [...] They tend to keep their story private, to the point of not even wanting their parents to know about it. [...] (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

The cognitive and mood symptoms of PTSD are linked to negative thoughts and feelings that disrupt everyday life. Individuals might face memory challenges, grapple with emotions like anger, guilt, or shame, and have an increased presence of negative self-thoughts (American Psychiatric Association, n.d.; *PTSD: National Center for PTSD*, n.d.; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2021).

“Every time she mentioned it again, she cried and felt herself dirty.” (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

“Many give up and find themselves worthless.” (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

First is the victim's psychological barrier. Female returnees, especially those who are victims of sexual exploitation or forced marriage, often feel like they are trash and have no self-esteem [...] During their stay at the safe shelter, they receive a lot of support to improve

their self-worth so that they can increase their value and not self-blaming of becoming a victim. However, not everyone can overcome this difficult barrier. So, when they reintegrate, even without being condemned by the community or society, they blame themselves, so they often cannot integrate into the community. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

This prevailing sense of numbness can make it challenging for women to connect with others and hinder their social integration, a topic to be discussed in the next section.

4.5.3 Social Effects

This section discusses the harmful effects of trafficking on women's social health. Trauma leads to emotional distress and low self-esteem, making it difficult for women to establish connections and impact their socialisation, relationships, and overall well-being.

Trafficked women for marriage in China often endure severe symptoms of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anxiety, besides physical pain and illnesses (Stöckl et al., 2017). Returning individuals face challenges in socialising and developing relationships due to the complex nature of the trauma (Preble et al., 2022). The aftermath of trafficking experiences may lead to feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, difficulties in forming trusting relationships, and a loss of control in various life domains, resulting in lasting relational consequences (Bryant-Davis, 2011). The current study aligns with these conclusions.

Mental health issues, such as PTSD, intensify feelings of shame in women, contributing to a sense of isolation, diminished self-esteem, and fear of stigma. These challenges not only disconnect them from society, their community, and family but also hinder the formation of new relationships. The internal disconnection of women poses difficulties for them to stay connected and for related stakeholders to offer support. In summary, trauma makes it tough for women to overcome the shadows of past trafficking experiences, making reintegration into everyday life or accepting support challenging.

... they lower their self-worth (devalue themselves) and think they deserve such things. They are afraid if they come back (to their hometown), they won't deserve the good things anymore; no one believes or is in love with them. So they accept, accept that life... (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

They return, and it's challenging for them because they fear community discrimination/stigma. And they cannot overcome their barriers - feelings of self-consciousness. Plus, I think they have gone through unforgettable experiences, which makes it difficult for them. (O6, man, 45s, Others)

Many have to leave the locality to live elsewhere [...] They cannot form any opposite-sex relationships, and they don't even have faith in men...[...] In most of the cases we have supported, after leaving the shelter, they often choose to disconnect from it completely because they no longer wish to discuss their past with anyone. (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

"Many cease communication with the shelter right after they return because they do not want the information - they are a victim - to be shared widely." (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

“Almost everyone who returns comes from a zero, a complete zero, and we have to heal their wounds and erase all their guilt/inferiority feeling and pain before accompanying them to get up and integrate slowly.” (G5, woman, 45s, Gov)

In essence, a combination of factors, including the feeling of shame or fear of stigma (a cognitive and mood symptom of PTSD leading to lost self-esteem), avoidance (a symptom of PTSD causing a reluctance to form connections), and the overall impact of trauma, severely damages the psychosocial well-being of women.

In summary, survivors of trafficking not only face physical challenges but also struggle with numerous mental and social health issues. The profound impact of these complexities adds significant difficulty to the post-trafficking journey. Therefore, effective interventions should be carefully considered, requiring time and a comprehensive biopsychosocial approach for successful reintegration.

The next chapter will discuss the challenges and essential components required for successful reintegration.

Chapter 5 Reintegration Obstacles and Solutions, and The Efforts in Gender Equality Policies

While the post-trafficking life of returnees is challenging and provides *many* obstacles, Chapter 5 discusses the two most significant hurdles that trafficked individuals face during their reintegration process: stigma and insufficient resources. The chapter also offers solutions by outlining requirements, as suggested by study participants, that may contribute to removing these obstacles.

The first section, titled “Obstacle: Returnees Stigmatised by Community”, highlights the issue of stigma faced by trafficked individuals upon their return to their home country. Both societal and internal stigma pose significant barriers to the reintegration of trafficked individuals. In the second section, “Solution: Reduce Stigma in the Community”, it is argued that all returnees need a robust support foundation and that support needs to vary depending on whether returnees settle in their home community or in a new location away from their families. However, the findings suggest that reintegrating at home is the better option, given the benefits of positive support from family and community.

The third section, “Obstacle: Insufficient Resources for the Support Process”, discusses challenges arising from inadequate funding and human resources, which hinder the provision of tailored support to trafficked individuals. In the fourth section, titled “Solution: Prioritizing Community of Origin Support”, it is argued that positive family and community support may be the most effective way to increase resource efficiency.

Geb's Story – Part 3

Forced to stay in trafficking for three years, Geb, along with many others who stayed there even longer, was rescued during a police operation to combat prostitution. Once back in Vietnam, the border defence forces provide them with initial support, including food, clothes, and feminine hygiene products. However, because the border station is mountainous, it takes time for the officers to obtain these essentials. The fact that most of the officers working there are men makes Geb and her peers feel embarrassed, and they find it challenging to provide the information needed to fill out the forms for the procedures. Still shocked by the trafficking experience (she sustained a severe head injury from being beaten and exploited), Geb forgot her home address and found it hard to talk with others.

Eventually, they are moved to safe shelters, where Geb witnesses the severe mental toll that trafficking takes. Many women exhibit signs of trauma, running around, shouting and crying. Some are harming themselves. Some attempt to flee the shelter because they cannot escape their trafficking memories. They fear discrimination upon returning home and feel they have lost everything, including their right to happiness. One look or tiny whisper can make them feel uncomfortable. They thought they were not deserving or worthy anymore. Some cry all day and night because they regret being rescued from their forced marriages as they have to leave their children behind due to the custody rights of the father. One girl gets distressed as she walks across a bridge and she collapses. She was triggered because she was kidnapped on a bridge and then trafficked. Another girl, who is the same age as Geb, was rescued but suffered many vicious injuries that left her in constant, severe pain. Last night, she committed suicide because she could not stand it anymore.

During this time, Geb struggles with feelings of inferiority and shame and does not dare to connect with anyone, not even her family and friends. There is always a voice in her head saying, "You lost everything; there is nothing for you. You deserve that. You are dirty. How can your parents face their neighbours and relatives? Your friends do not want to talk or look at you anymore. You are a loser, useless...". She gets headaches. She shakes and collapses whenever she hears loud noises, like a door slamming shut. The sound haunts her because she heard it so often during her trafficking, and what followed that sound was violence. The scars and the brothel tattoo on her left hand serve as daily reminders, triggering profound inner pain. She feels that her relatives would talk behind her back, that she lost the chance to get married and have children, that her life is dirty for the village, and that no one will accept her back there. She always wonders, "Is that my fault?" and her mind struggles to answer that question.

Tam (her name means the heart/soul), the support worker who connects with Geb takes care of Geb for six months. Every day, she talks to Geb. Tam shares her own story with Geb in an attempt to open her up. As a child, Tam endured domestic violence. Her father was often drunk, and her mother was addicted to

gambling. Tam ran away from home and became a victim of human trafficking. She recovered from her ordeals, studied social work, and has dedicated her life to supporting those who have had traumatic lives like her.

Tam's salary is funded by an international organisation. Her patience slowly but surely changes Geb. Finally, Geb agrees to see a psychologist. As Geb is regaining her confidence, Tam connects with the authorities, the project manager, and the members of the women's union in Geb's village to reunite Geb with her family. Geb's mom and sister come and visit her at the shelter.

After 18 months, Geb's health is much better. The shelter offers her a job in a shoe factory, but she refuses. Geb tells Tam that she wants to continue her studies and aspires to do the same work as Tam in future. She is inspired by Tam's story as it helped her to climb out of the black, deep well. Tam connects with all available support services to optimise support for Geb. With these efforts, Geb has a safe place to stay and can register for vocational training. She also studies for a social work degree taking night classes. The available services provide her with comprehensive support throughout her studies, including health care. Geb feels much better and is nearing her graduation. She volunteers at the shelter to support recent returnees.

Tam knows that Geb has a strong will inside, and luckily, she has recovered and can access all available services. However, many other cases are not as lucky as Geb's. The girl Geb met in a brothel in China died right after being rescued because of severe internal injuries. Another girl broke her leg after jumping out of a window in order to escape, and, after complications, she ended up in a wheelchair. Some mothers suffer severe depression because their kids are stuck in China. Some commit suicide.

Tam understands that while physical scars may fade over time, psychological scars remain forever. This is why returnees need Tam, as well as their loved ones and their families, as well as the entire community, to understand their situations and help them recognize their strength to overcome their past lives.

Today, Tam is still unsure how many returnees will arrive, but she will do her best to support them.

5.1 Obstacle: Returnees Stigmatised by Community

This section focuses on how social stigma makes it hard for trafficked women to reintegrate into society, impeding their healing.

This study confirms four findings reflected in the existing literature. Firstly, social stigma – including labelling and victim-blaming – is a prevalent issue faced by trafficked women, particularly those who have experienced sexual abuse or exploitation (see section 5.1.1). Secondly, social stigma leads to these women being isolated and rejected by their communities and families (see section 5.1.2). Thirdly, the combination of trafficking and stigma causes women to feel ashamed and inferior (see section 5.1.4). Lastly, the effects of trafficking and stigma leave these women feeling like they have no real choices, or, “being caught in a vicious cycle” (see section 5.1.5). The current study unearthed an additional negative effect of stigma on trafficked women in Vietnam, that is, stigma reduces the chances of marriage for these women, compounding the challenges highlighted in prior studies (see section 5.1.3). This is a significant issue in the Vietnamese context because, as outlined in Chapter 3, becoming a wife is often considered the ultimate life goal for women (Nguyen et al., 2022). Failing to meet this expectation can lead to societal shame on them and their families (Vu, 2020, 2018). Although the minimum legal age for marriage is 20 for men and 18 for women (Vietnam Law on Marriage and Law 2014, 2014 Article 8), this varies across different regions.

Here, intersecting factors further compound the marginalisation and discrimination faced by trafficking returnees, making their reintegration particularly challenging. Women are not only stigmatised due to health-related issues—such as societal prejudice against those perceived to have experienced sexual exploitation—but also face multiple layers of stigma based on their low social status, marital status, and broader societal expectations regarding female purity. Families, communities reinforce this discrimination, and even support providers, creating a deeply entrenched cycle of rejection.

The previous chapter explained that trafficked individuals endure long-term health issues, including internal struggles like shame and low self-esteem. External factors, such as discrimination, can exacerbate these internal struggles. As Gray (2002) explains,

(f)elt stigma (internal stigma or self-stigmatization) refers to the shame and expectation of discrimination that prevents people from talking about their experiences and stops them [from] seeking help. Enacted stigma (external stigma, discrimination) refers to the experience of unfair treatment by others. Felt stigma can be as damaging as enacted stigma since it leads to withdrawal and restriction of social support. (Gray, 2002, p. 72)

5.1.1 Labelling and Victim-blaming

This section reaffirms findings from prior research and underscores that trafficked women endure not only the stigma of involvement in the sex trade but also the unjust attribution of blame for their circumstances.

Insufficient community awareness coupled with victim blaming exacerbates the labelling and stigmatisation experienced by these women.

Social stigma and discrimination are common issues that trafficked women face (Khan & Zubair, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2018), especially those who were sexually exploited (Meshkovska et al., 2021; Paasche et al., 2018; U.S. Department of State, 2018). Stigmas are negative beliefs that are held against a group of people. If these negative beliefs are held unfairly, i.e., do not match reality, they become stereotypes and prejudices. Stigma often leads to social discrimination (Crowe & Murray, 2022). Trafficked women often experience stigma by being labelled as prostitutes and thus are blamed for being victims of sex trafficking (Nguyen, 2019; Rajaram & Tidball, 2018). Moreover, they face not just one but multiple layers of stigma that simultaneously come from themselves, their family, their community, and their support providers (Fukushima et al., 2020; Marburger & Pickover, 2020; Wallace et al., 2022).

The narratives shared by 18 participants illustrate how societal and community stigmas affect these women. The prevalence of stigma within communities often stems from a lack of societal awareness, compounded by three primary factors. Firstly, there exists a pervasive stereotype that all female trafficking victims are involved in prostitution. Secondly, there's a notable lack of understanding that even if women were trafficked for sexual exploitation, they are not to blame. Thirdly, due to the misconception that all women involved in prostitution are carriers of sexually transmitted diseases, these individuals face additional stigma. These layered stigmas unjustly label and blame women, disregarding the fact that being trafficking victims was neither their choice nor their fault. Therefore, it is imperative to prioritize raising awareness and educating the community to combat these stigmas and reduce the blame placed on trafficked women.

The first obstacle when they reintegrate is the unsympathetic view of the community. [...] When thinking about female victims, they (the community) default those to being involved in prostitution or sexual exploitation [...] The community's view of men is not as stigmatised or unsympathetic as for girls [...] girls responded to me that people looked at them with their eyes like this and that (G2, woman, 45s, Gov)

Usually, the community thinks: "These girls are promiscuous, lazy, ... is nonsense like this. When they have been tricked into serving in prostitution many returnees hear things like, "Why are you so stupid? Why are you so ignorant? No one gives you anything in life?" and like this or like that. In fact, they greatly blame the victim. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

I think for women, perhaps the problem (the challenge of reintegration) has a lot to do with social prejudice [...] When a girl comes back from China, there is a high possibility that she will be rumoured to be a prostitute or something like that, or thinking that she has HIV,... everyone will assume that she was sexually exploited, so the stigma is huge. That is, there are a lot of rumours going around that make it much harder for women to integrate into society. (O5, man, 40s, Others)

See endnotes for additional quotes from study participants on labelling and victim-blaming.

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As a result of social stigma, trafficked individuals become isolated and marginalised from society, which complicates their life after trafficking.

5.1.2 Isolation and Rejection

The findings of this study confirm existing literature that describes how trafficked women experience rejection and are unwelcome in their communities, leading to enforced isolation. Nine participants shared related stories illustrating this challenge for female returnees.

Due to social stigma, trafficked individuals often find themselves socially isolated, rejected by their communities, and even estranged from their families (Dahal et al., 2015; Fukushima et al., 2020; Marburger & Pickover, 2020; Ramaj, 2023; Wallace et al., 2022). Fearing disapproval from the rest of the community, returnees' families may refuse to welcome and house them, because doing so may tarnish the reputation of the entire family and lead to social isolation (Niumai & Rajesh, 2022; Yea, 2020). In such cases, women may choose to live far from their hometowns, relocating to places where their past is unknown and they can start anew (Dahal et al., 2015). In Vietnam, there is a heavy stigma attached to sex work (Luu, 2017). The returnees who have been trafficked and suffer from associated infectious diseases experience even more stigma, leading to further isolation from their families and friends (Luu, 2017). This study confirms these findings and further adds that many trafficked individuals struggle to reintegrate into society or reconnect with their loved ones, regardless of whether they suffer from illnesses related to the sex trade. Stigmatising behaviours force these returnees to live apart from their families.

There are cases where they return, but their families do not offer sympathy. In other cases, the husband initially accepts but is later torn by jealousy or discrimination from the community. [...] In my research, I have found that while some victims can stabilize, it is uncommon for them to come back and live with a whole family, except in cases where they reunite with their elderly mother or sister. There are only a few instances when they return and are welcomed by their husbands. (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

Their own families cannot accept that their children are victims like that, so many people (victims) are not treated well in their families. So many victims had to choose to find a new way of life in Hanoi or other cities that were not their hometown, and in general, they also lived in exile. I feel sorry for them. [...] The friends, families, communities where they live, villages and hamlets like that, "bôi tro trát trầu" (meaning the act of humiliating, losing the face of a loved one by one's bad deeds) like this, so they have to go far away from their homeland. Their work, therefore, is also unstable, which is difficult... (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

Usually, they will hide their experiences or not return to their hometown [...] In fact, those who return to their locality and choose to stay in the locality to live are very rare. Usually, they will have to move to another place to continue living so that no one knows about their past. [...] Male victims mainly choose to stay in the community where they were born to do

their livelihood, while 70-80% of female victims do not want to stay in the locality but want to go and do business elsewhere. [...] Their families even do not accept them. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

See endnotes for additional quotes from study participants on isolation and rejection.^{xiii}

In short, the lack of support and empathy from family members and the community deeply hurts and affects trafficked individuals, intensifying the difficulties they face in rebuilding their lives after trafficking. This can be particularly challenging for women who are trying to start a new life and build a family, which will be discussed in the next section.

5.1.3 Lost Prospects of Marriage

“Geb feels that her relatives would talk behind her back, that she lost the chance to get married and have children, that her life is dirty for the village, and that no one will accept her back there.” (Geb’s Story – Part 3)

This section presents new research findings that shed light on the effect of social stigma on women's ability to pursue marriage and attain happiness in their family life. In societies like Vietnam, where marriage is highly valued culturally, this obstacle can result in ongoing societal criticism due to the prevalent expectation for women to get married, and to get married at a relatively young age.

The labelling and stigmatisation experienced by survivors affect their relationships with their families and their acceptance in society (Niumai & Rajesh, 2022), impacting their chances of marriage. To understand why this is a significant consequence of social stigma, it is crucial to recognise the importance of marriage in Vietnamese women's lives. In Vietnam, despite changing societal norms and exposure to Western influences, marriage remains a highly idealised social institution (Vu, 2018, 2020). Traditional values and expectations still heavily influence young individuals, making marriage a symbol of happiness, security, and social success, particularly for women (Vu, 2018, 2020). Moreover, marriage is significant for family reputation in rural areas where communities are tightly knit (Vu, 2018, 2020). Individuals in these communities are concerned about maintaining a good reputation, which affects not only themselves but also their families (Vu, 2018, 2020).

In the aftermath of trafficking, the stigma attached to survivors becomes deeply ingrained, leading to them being labelled as “dirty” and deemed unworthy of acceptance by potential spouses or forming families. Consequently, they lose opportunities to find suitable partners or make decisions about starting new families and lives.

They even face abuse, reproach, contempt, and slurs (lời dèm pha, miệt thị). [...] That girl was trafficked when she was 13 years old. When she returned and reached marriageable age, it was tough for her to get married because her community still said, "Oh, that girl was trafficked and sexually abused, so why marry her?" [...] survivors are disadvantaged if a community does not understand clearly and has such prejudices. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

I think gender stereotypes persist, making it more challenging for women compared to men. While returned men may find it relatively easy to get married again, the same cannot be said for female victims. The process for women is often much more complex and lengthier. So, I think women face significantly greater obstacles and hardships in rebuilding their lives after trafficking compared to men. (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

Men can still get married and resume their lives with relatively little discrimination. However, for women, merely being a trafficking victim already poses challenges for them to be able to get married, let alone if experiencing sexual exploitation (which further compounds the challenges they face). Usually, in the community, a prevailing perception is that these girls are promiscuous or lazy, and other nonsense like that". (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

See endnotes for additional quotes from study participants on lost prospects of marriage.^{xiv}

Lack of care from family and social isolation, including lost prospects of marriage, can further marginalise women from society, making it hard for them to reconnect with the community and heal their wounds. Therefore, it leads to further internal struggles and loss of self-esteem; this will be clarified in the next section.

5.1.4 Diminished Self-esteem

Geb struggles with feelings of inferiority and shame and does not dare to connect with anyone, not even her family and friends. There is always a voice in her head saying, "You lost everything; there is nothing for you. You deserve that. You are dirty. How can your parents face their neighbours and relatives? Your friends do not want to talk or look at you anymore. You are a loser, useless...". (**Geb's Story – Part 3**)

Confirming existing studies, this section explores the compounding effects of intersecting stigmas, highlighting how they exacerbate mental health issues and lead women to withdraw from support, complicating the healing process for survivors. The prolonged exploitation experienced by trafficked women, coupled with societal stigma, erodes their self-esteem and amplifies feelings of shame and inferiority. This internal struggle often evolves from initial shame and guilt to self-blame, ultimately causing survivors to lose trust in themselves and devalue their own worth. Consequently, they may refuse available support and interventions, hindering their healing journey.

In this section, two main findings are discussed. Firstly, an explanation is offered of how social stigma fosters internal sentiments of inferiority and self-devaluation among returnees, resulting in diminished self-esteem. Secondly, it is demonstrated how these internal struggles are linked to returnees frequently avoiding communication and rejecting available support, posing challenges for intervention and their reintegration into society.

Research confirms that social stigma generates internal feelings of rejection, inferiority and devaluation, contributing to emotional instability and severe mental health issues among trafficking survivors (Budiarto & Helmi, 2021; Fukushima et al., 2020; Niumai & Rajesh, 2022). When individuals perceive devaluation or

rejection, they experience negative emotions, particularly shame (Budiarto & Helmi, 2021), which is perceived as emotional pain breaking them (Budiarto & Helmi, 2021; Fortes & Ferreira, 2014), leading to low self-esteem and guilt (Franzoni et al., 2013). In short, feelings of shame and low self-esteem are interconnected (Fukushima et al., 2020), perpetuating a cycle of negative internal emotions. This cycle of shame increases vulnerability to mental health issues (Safdar & Khan, 2020; Wallace et al., 2022), exacerbates feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness (Fukushima et al., 2020), and diminishes resilience to face life challenges (Branden, 1995; Budiarto & Helmi, 2021; Yea, 2020). In the context of human trafficking, sex work, which is heavily stigmatised in Vietnam, exacerbates the social isolation of returnees, leading to low self-esteem (Luu, 2017). The narratives of ten study participants clearly illustrate the inferiority complex and low sense of self-esteem of trafficked women. In other words, suffering from stigmatisation and isolation from the community contribute to the low self-esteem of returnees.

They are constantly vigilant and burdened by feelings of inferiority, particularly among those who went to China for marriage, sexual exploitation or bearing children. [...] The community sometimes does not say anything, but sometimes, just a single glance can make them feel like they are being discriminated against because they're always on the defensive and feeling inferior. [...] Sometimes, with just one look or one careless word/an unintended word, they think it is discrimination/stigma, for example, so it is hard to integrate. (G6, women, Gov, 50s)

Especially women who were sexually exploited, they do not dare to hear the word "victim", and then when they have a certificate of being a victim, it is also a hefty label for them, like a judgment in the community in society, [...] They blame themselves, "Why are we so easily deceived?" [...] They have the psychological barrier of being a victim [...] They often feel like they are trash and have no self-respect (very low) [...] Not everyone can overcome this difficult barrier, so when they reintegrate into the community, even when the social community has not condemned them, they have condemned and blamed themselves, so they often cannot integrate into the community they used to live in [...] It is challenging for them to overcome their inferiority complex. [...] In the early stages of her return, that girl's inferiority complex was powerful [...] Their defence mechanism was huge. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

The negative feelings stemming from stigma significantly influence the help-seeking behaviours of trafficked individuals. Due to the convergence of societal and self-imposed stigmas (Safdar & Khan, 2020), many refrain from seeking support out of fear of recounting traumatic experiences like sexual abuse (Fukushima et al., 2020). They may also hesitate to seek help due to concerns about disbelief, judgment, and further stigmatisation (Rajaram & Tidball, 2018). These behaviours can be understood as responses to feelings of devaluation and diminished self-esteem induced by stigma. As ten study participants reported, these women opt to distance themselves from their trafficking-related past and individuals who are aware of their experiences as a means of avoiding the painful sensation of rejection.

"They feel guilty, even though they are the victims. Still, they do not dare to speak up [...] They do not want too many people to know their story; they even want to hide it from their parents." (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

When victims return, they are always afraid and suffer from both physical and mental damage, and often, they suffer double trauma, layered traumas. [...] How can they suffer the public opinion from the tongues of people in surrounding communities? [...] Would they want to declare that “I was trafficked and served at a brothel” to receive support? Surely very few people declare like that... (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

See endnotes for for additional quotes from study participants on diminished self-esteem.^{xv}

In conclusion, this section highlights how trafficked women face internal struggles due to stigma, discrimination, and isolation. These struggles can result in feelings of shame, self-blame, and low self-worth, making it difficult for them to connect with others and negatively impacting their mental health. This cycle of negative feelings, avoidance of help, and withdrawal from others create significant barriers to their recovery. Despite desiring a return to normality, women often face situations with limited options, which can be considered as a downward spiral, or being caught in a vicious cycle. This will be analysed in the next section.

5.1.5 Being Caught in a Vicious Cycle

This section confirms the findings of existing research and sheds light on the challenging experiences that women face after being trafficked. These experiences are greatly influenced by the societal stigma attached to being a trafficking victim, which can trap them in a vicious cycle with undesirable options. They may believe that they have to choose between leading a hopeless and unfulfilling life with no positive prospects, falling back into victimization, or seeking revenge by becoming traffickers themselves.

Studies (Meshkovska et al., 2021; Paasche et al., 2018) underline how social stigma and isolation exacerbate the vulnerable situation faced by trafficked individuals upon their return. These survivors often face rejection from their communities, which pushes them into further victimisation, increasing the risk of being exploited again (Dahal et al., 2015; US Department of State, 2018). In Vietnam, trafficked women who return are often stigmatized because the label “social evil”¹⁶ that is associated with prostitution, is applied to them (Hoang, 2013; Vijayarasa, 2010), which limits their reintegration and future opportunities (Tucker et al., 2010; as cited in Tran et al., 2020). The absence of effective victim protection, including

¹⁶ According to Vijayarasa (2010), the labelling of sex work as a "social evil" by the State and the role of the Department of Social Evils Prevention (DSEP) worsen the stigma faced by trafficked returnees. This negative language shapes public attitudes, leading to sex workers and trafficking victims being seen as criminals. The stigma significantly impedes their reintegration and highlights social, political, and economic inequalities. In Vietnam, this issue is exacerbated by gender inequality, with women experiencing the brunt of the stigma, especially if they are HIV-positive. This demonstrates the profound impact of harmful language and attitudes on the reintegration of trafficking victims.

identification, referral, assistance, and reintegration, may lead to further exploitation and re-trafficking (Johnson et al., 2020).

This study aligns with this literature and finds that as a result of the “domino” effects of stigmatising, ultimately, trafficked individuals feel like they have no way out of their situation. They have only two undesirable options to choose from: either accept life with no prospects of social success or return to trafficking as a means of survival. Some may even become traffickers as a form of revenge or retaliation. This creates a vicious cycle of exploitation, leaving victims feeling trapped and hopeless with no real choices to make.

Discriminating/blaming the victims leaves them with no way back, so they deceive others, creating a vicious cycle, a cycle of human trafficking [...] They do not want to be victims anymore because victims suffer, so they are forced to deceive others to take revenge for their lives [...] They have no way back because of stigma, pressure from victim-blaming and discrimination. They want revenge. [...] They want to liberate themselves... (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

When they returned, they had no job opportunities, no love and care from family, no chance to get married and no family happiness. Feeling trapped or pushed into a dead-end, they sought escape again. Despite being used to being deceived one time, they remain vulnerable to further deception due to their need for employment and love, and the trafficker approaches them through job offers, romantic deception, or other means, leading to re-trafficking. [...] This cycle perpetuates as victims, crushed and suffering by their circumstances, seek revenge on life (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

“I have heard of cases where returnees were left and dismissed, so they committed suicide. They did not want to live anymore or return to the local area to deceive others into the trafficking situation.” (G7, woman, 50s, Gov)

See endnotes for for additional quotes from study participants on Being caught in a Vicious cycle: xvi

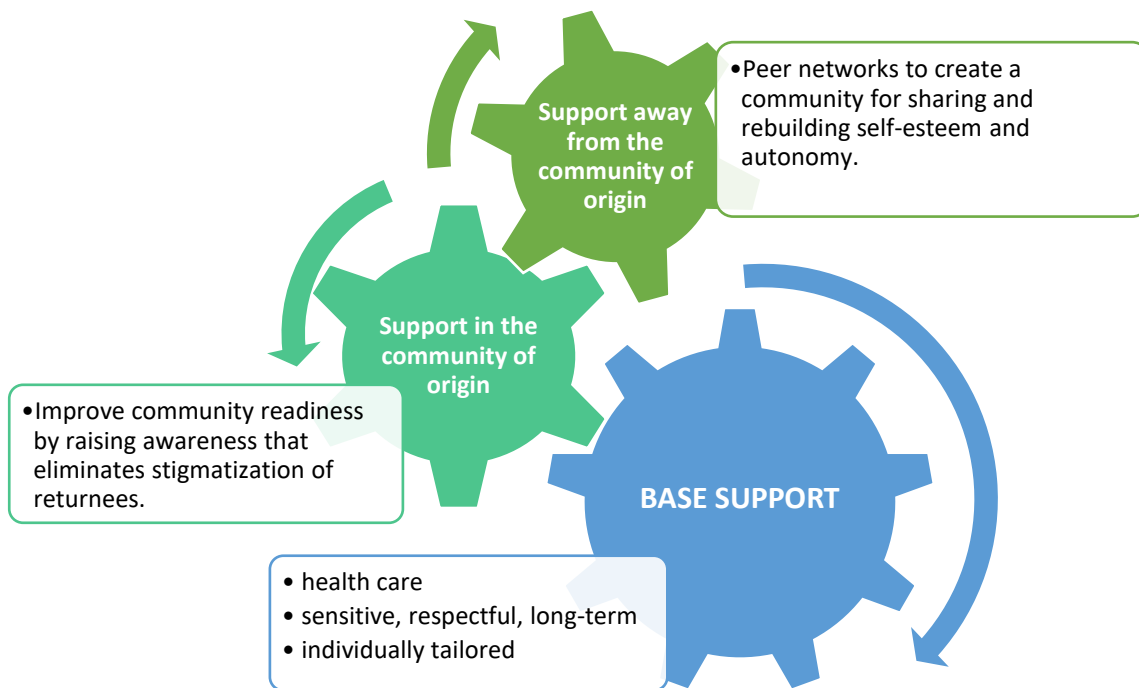
In short, social stigma significantly impacts women post-trafficking, highlighting the urgent need to eliminate this stigma to assist them in overcoming associated challenges.

To conclude, the repercussions of stigmatization vary depending on whether returnees choose to establish a new life away from their home community or remain within it. Returnees often decide to rebuild their life elsewhere if they find it impossible to reintegrate into their home community. In this case, returnees must rebuild their lives from scratch, often without adequate social support. If returnees opt to remain in their home community despite facing discrimination, they often find themselves: a) socially isolated, b) having no prospects of marriage, c) suffering ongoing low self-esteem, and d) having limited job opportunities. They are, therefore, at high risk of being re-victimized or becoming perpetrators themselves. Hence, the new findings from this study indicate that returnees require tailored support services based on their chosen settlement location. The specific requirements and solutions will be delineated in the next section.

5.2 Solution: Reduce Stigma in the Community

This study has identified two categories of returnees: returnees who resettle in their community of origin, and returnees who resettle away from their community of origin. While these two groups have some basic needs in common, their support requirements beyond the foundational level differ significantly depending on where returnees decide to settle. Hence, it is argued that there are two levels of support required: base support (for all returnees) and location-dependent support.

Figure 5-1. Two levels of reintegration Support: Base Support and Location-Dependent Support



While this discovery is new because it differentiates two types of support based on resettlement location, it aligns with previous literature emphasizing the necessity of providing fundamental support for all returnees.

Base support: includes vital necessities like physical and mental health care, which are indispensable for the well-being and recovery of all trafficked individuals. Further support includes a sensitive and respectful approach, tailored support for livelihood, and long-term support for the healing process. These support needs have been identified in the existing literature.

Support in the community of origin: When returnees opt to stay in their home community, the support and care from their community and family become paramount. Achieving this necessitates raising awareness within the community to diminish stigma and victim blaming while also fostering an environment that encourages returnees' inclusion in community life. This approach promotes empathy and

understanding and facilitates the reintegration process for returnees, enabling them to rebuild social connections and access necessary support networks within their familiar surroundings. This is the preferred location to resettle returnees.

Support away from the community of origin: This refers to returnees who decide to resettle away from their community of origin and lack familial or social networks. Substituting their family and community of origin, these returnees would benefit from being able to connect to a social support group (e.g., Returnees Anonymous) that meets regularly, welcomes them with open arms, and offers assistance with resettlement as well as companionship.

5.2.1 For All Returnees

All individuals who have been trafficked require a strong foundation to rebuild their lives after trafficking. This should include access to healthcare treatment, a sensitive approach, tailored support for livelihood, and a long-term process for healing, as suggested by previous studies.

5.2.1.1 *Access to Health Care*

As mentioned in earlier sections, individuals who have been trafficked experience a range of complex health issues, both physical and mental, which can persist beyond the trafficking period and make reintegration challenging. In this section, it is argued – in alignment with the existing literature – that receiving comprehensive healthcare, particularly psychological care, is a crucial aspect of empowering these individuals. A healthy body and mind provide a foundation for them to move forward.

Research underscores the profound and extensive impact of human trafficking on the mental and physical well-being of individuals (Baldwin et al., 2015; Hoang, 2013; Mbamba et al., 2022; Preble, 2019; Preble et al., 2022; Rajaram & Tidball, 2018; Richie-Zavaleta et al., 2021; Rothman et al., 2020; Safdar & Khan, 2020; Tucker et al., 2010; Varma et al., 2015; Vijayarasa, 2010). These scholars highlight the importance of addressing the physical, psychological, and social aspects of the trauma experienced by trafficking victims. Specifically, studies that focus on sex trafficking highlight the psychological distress and challenges in regulating emotions that are worsened by societal stigma (Mbamba et al., 2022; Rajaram & Tidball, 2018; Safdar & Khan, 2020; Tran et al., 2020; Tucker et al., 2010; Vijayarasa, 2010). Aligned with the literature, this section highlights the importance of addressing the mental and physical well-being of individuals who have been trafficked. It advocates for the adoption of a trauma-informed approach, which takes into consideration the traumatic experiences that these individuals have gone through. After being repatriated, trafficked individuals require comprehensive healthcare services to help them reintegrate into post-trafficking life. This is an essential step in facilitating a smoother reintegration process for trauma survivors. Or, in the participant's words:

We provide psychological support and medical examination for them. [...] They will need to go for medical examination at the hospital [...] The shelter can support people with normal psychology, but there are people with severe psychological problems [...] Many people are traumatised [...] Many people cannot return to normal life. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

I think the first thing is still to treat their psychological issue. [...] Mental illness is also a common human condition that requires medical treatment, as well as other sicknesses. However, talking and comforting alone cannot provide a complete solution; they only offer superficial relief. (O6, man, 45s, Others)

When victims come back from what they've been through, they must deal with the trauma before they can really move forward to start their new life. [...] When that girl first came back, she hardly said a word. Every time she had to cross the bridge, she'd just break down, as the abuse happened on a bridge, so the trauma was very terrible/awful. Even when she joined vocational training, she stood all morning because she was shy/afraid of crowded places. But H. is an organisation that specialises in deep trauma-informed care and uses a trauma-informed approach to support with step-by-step guidance. They've been guiding her step by step, giving her therapy, and helping her get back into school to learn important life skills like communication skills, setting boundaries, and self-expression. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

See endnotes for for additional quotes from study participants on Access to Health Care: ^{xvii}

The health and well-being of trafficked returnees are essential for rebuilding their lives after trafficking. As one study participant noted:

“Once they are mentally and physically stable, reintegration is not complex...” (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

In short, this section highlights the critical need for trafficked returnees to access health care, especially mental health treatment, as the foundation for rebuilding their lives post-trafficking. Considering the associated health issues, it is essential to approach all returnees with sensitivity and respect.

5.2.1.2 Sensitive and Respectful Approach

It is argued in this section that providing sensitive care and respect facilitates the reintegration process of trafficked individuals. The study participants concur with the existing literature, emphasising strategies to empower trafficked women by enhancing their autonomy and aiding in their recovery journey: 1) Adopting a sensitive approach when working with survivors to prevent trauma or re-traumatization is crucial; 2) Respecting the decisions of trafficked individuals, even if they decline offered treatments or services, should be recognised to foster their autonomy.

Trauma-focused therapy and gender-specific services play important role in empowering survivors of trafficking, facilitating their treatment and recovery by addressing the complex mental health trauma they endure (Awerbuch et al., 2020; Dell et al., 2019; Iglesias-Rios et al., 2019; Mbamba et al., 2022; Nodzinski et al., 2020; Walby et al., 2016; Whaling et al., 2020). Applying this approach can enable service providers to establish stronger connections with survivors, fostering hope and self-belief in their future (Gila, 2023).

Survivor-centered approaches, emphasising trust-building and non-judgmental support, are essential for successful reintegration into the community (Rajaram & Tidball, 2018). Frontline service providers should prioritise the voices of trafficked individuals, employing harm reduction and strengths-based approaches to support autonomy and facilitate recovery (Anasti, 2020). Recognising survivors' autonomy, even in instances of resistance to services, is essential, reframing such resistance as a valid expression of their decision-making agency (Amitay, 2017; Arrigo & Milovanovic, 2008; Gila, 2023).

First, considering gender-sensitive interventions for the support process is essential (Greenbaum et al., 2017; Kiss & Zimmerman, 2019; Stöckl et al., 2021). When working with returnees, it is crucial to have officers or support workers of the same gender (social identity) or biological sex, especially for women returnees. This is because working with primarily male officers during the administration procedure may trigger the trauma of trafficking to women returnees. Arranging female support workers for female victims can improve reintegration, as victims may be more comfortable sharing with a same-gender worker. If assigning same-gender support workers (Perry & McEwing, 2013) is not feasible, the frontline workers need to adopt professionalism, warmth, and sensitivity, as highlighted by Jordan (2002). Additionally, providing specific care for accompanying children is integral to supporting women in overcoming challenges (Rajaram & Tidball, 2018).

When receiving victims, the border guards also take into account that women need to live in separate, safer areas because they may be traumatised. The trauma will be extreme for them if they live in the same area as men. From the first steps of reception, they had to consider that. [...] Suppose a male officer asks a female returnee to tell her story. In that case, I see it as a massive trauma trigger [...] Returnees may encounter many problems while meeting the police officers for investigation or going to court, as the male officers are more than female. They often ask very administratively, and not all are sensitive about trauma [...] Men do not have the same type of experience as women, for example, being scared when meeting male officers. As the male officer and abuser are men, returnees may feel a particular trait of the officer similar to the person who abused them, for example. Or, they are terrified of going somewhere they will be wholly unfamiliar and have to stand in front of others to explain their situation, so they collapse and can't speak. (O5, man, 40s, Others)

Once the victims are rescued, authorities pay close attention to gender-related vulnerability factors. They provide friendly courts or investigation rooms that make it easy for victims to share their experiences. For instance, female officers are assigned to work with women and children instead of male officers. Or, they don't necessarily always have to wear military uniforms when working with victims but may wear regular clothes instead. They explain to victims that they aim to support safety and ensure their rights. (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

One approach that is often mentioned is the victim-centered approach. This approach emphasises the importance of caring for the victim. However, looking at it from a multi-dimensional perspective, if we focus too much on the victim without considering ethical considerations, they may end up feeling victimised, meaning they will become someone who always feels vulnerable, making it difficult for them to step forward. (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

Apart from trustworthy communication, sensitive care and care for accompanying children (Rajaram & Tidball, 2018) from the beginning of their reintegration are integral to supporting women returnees in overcoming challenges.

Supporting with judicial issues, such as obtaining birth certificates for their children to attend school, is very important because they do not have a legal marriage in China. The local authorities help solve this problem very quickly with our clients. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

Some victims are still breastfeeding. When they return with small children, there are packages for their children, such as milk [...]. Usually, we have a budget to buy milk and clothes for the children. Give the children some toys and crayons, for example, while they await the transfer. [...] They need a little more sensitive support for those with small children. There should be appropriate support for that group. [...] Women have specific needs, such as sanitary pads. [...] Our project provides an initial reception package that includes these necessary items. If I remember correctly, the government also offers a package containing necessities, sanitary pads, and daily food, which costs 400,000 VND. [...] Our project also supports initial packages that provide underwear, sanitary pads for women, and pain-relieving medicine for menstrual cramps, as many women suffer from this condition. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

Some have both health problems and other challenges associated with bringing their children home. They get some children home but lack assistance from anyone to help take care of them, and they also have financial difficulties, so they have a tough time recovering. Women often face more obstacles as they often have to support both themselves and their children while dealing with health problems. (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

Second, instead of assuming that trafficked individuals resist support and are hard to approach, refusal of services should be respected and be considered a sign of them building up autonomy through decision-making (Amitay, 2017; Arrigo & Milovanovic, 2008; Gila, 2023). The study participants also point out that whatever option individuals choose, they have their reasons. Whether they choose to pause, stop, or refuse the available support/intervention, this is an expression of individual need and should therefore be respected.

In the past, when I worked on projects for P., there were two important factors to consider. The first one was the victim's willingness to participate, and the second one was whether they met the victim's standards or not. For instance, while some organizations do not have any age restrictions, P.'s project only accepts victims who are not married and have no children. This is because P. respects the fact that mothers with children may choose to return home and take care of their children. (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

Once we have evaluated the family's situation and determined that it is safe for them to return home, we will contact their locality and arrange for them to be reunited with their community, of course, with their consent. However, if the family is not quite ready to go back home yet, they can temporarily stay at our centre, where they can receive medical and mental health support. [...]. If they feel uncomfortable returning home or to their locality, we will refer them to a shelter known as M. (G2, woman, 45s, Gov)

In many cases, I worked with, they just wanted to be rescued and returned home. We must respect their decision if they do not wish to continue the project. [...] We do not follow up

for the long run but according to their needs. If they and their families want support, we will provide it, and vice versa; we stop at the time they want. (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

See endnotes for for additional quotes from study participants on Sensitivity and Respectful in Approach: ^{xviii}

In conclusion, this section supports sensitive care as a strategy that contributes to the empowerment of trafficked individuals. This, further underscores the importance of tailored services and support for long-term livelihood, considering each individual's diverse circumstances, needs, and decisions, which will be elaborated on in the next section.

5.2.1.3 *Tailored Support for Livelihood*

Although certain types of support are common to all trafficked individuals, such as healthcare and sensitivity in approach - as identified in the previous sections, each individual has unique needs. These needs are shaped by their diverse backgrounds and personal experiences and, therefore, require tailored support to address them effectively. This finding aligns with previous research.

This section underscores the need for tailored support for each individual, including livelihood opportunities that empower them to navigate life post-trafficking successfully. Given the diversity of experiences and backgrounds among trafficked individuals, it is crucial to develop interventions and services that address the complexity of individual needs (Dell et al., 2019; Greenbaum et al., 2017; Kiss & Zimmerman, 2019; Stöckl et al., 2021). It is essential to prioritize support based on individual needs, encompassing both short-term and long-term aspects (Meshkovska et al., 2021; Richie-Zavaleta et al., 2021). Key elements such as education, employment, and housing significantly influence the reintegration process (Meshkovska et al., 2021). The study participants emphasised the need to improve the quality and comprehensiveness of services, enhance assessment procedures, and customise interventions to suit each individual's circumstances. They advocated for comprehensive, secure support programs that cover all essential requirements, from immediate aid to long-term services. An initial assessment is imperative to identify victims' requirements and strengths, enabling the provision of appropriate support tailored to their needs and capacities. Flexibility in providing support is crucial for optimal outcomes.

We also need to hear the voices of victims, what support they need, and what they feel is difficult [...] The most profound cause of human trafficking is related to the livelihoods and economic conditions of victims [...]. Providing appropriate support must be based on each person's circumstances, situations, and needs. Some people want learning support, and some people wish to support for other things, for example, many people just want to get a manual job in Hanoi, ... there are many victims with different needs [...] and of course things about livelihood, employment and study, that is very important. Still, it depends on each victim and the conditions of that locality, so we need to consider offering them appropriate solutions. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

They need various solutions, including finance. [...] If the interventions are just like fix-for-all, they could just fit with this person but not others, as they do not fit with each individual's needs and cannot solve each one's issues. [...] We need to have a detailed assessment of the problems and the needs of victims and their families to build a specific intervention plan. (G8, woman, 45s, Gov)

See endnotes for for additional quotes from study participants on Tailored Support for Livelihood: ^{xix}

While it is crucial to provide personalized support for trafficked individuals as they rebuild their lives after trafficking, it is also essential to allow them sufficient time to heal and achieve sustainable reintegration. Long-term support should be available, even if tailored support is not feasible.

5.2.1.4 *The long-term nature of the healing process*

This section highlights the long-term nature of the reintegration process, stressing the need for sufficient time for recovery and healing among trafficked individuals. This is consistent with previous research (see, for example, Meshkovska et al., 2021; Rajaram & Tidball, 2018).

Human trafficking survivors often present a spectrum of needs, spanning immediate to long-term requirements (Preble et al., 2022). Adequate support must extend beyond the immediate aftermath of leaving trafficking situations and continue over subsequent months and years (Rajaram & Tidball, 2018). Furthermore, support mechanisms should prioritise sustainability to facilitate successful reintegration, ensuring continued assistance until victims attain independence and full social integration (Richie-Zavaleta et al., 2021). Recognising that the needs of victims may evolve depending on the nature and severity of their trafficking experiences, the reintegration process may follow diverse trajectories and timelines (Meshkovska et al., 2021).

It will take some time for them to regain their balance. [...] In my opinion, reintegration requires a comprehensive roadmap. When they return, they cannot simply integrate immediately. [...] Our support focuses on providing deep assistance for 2-3 years to ensure their mental stability, and then we help orient them towards sustainable development. (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

"I feel like integrating into society later is a longer journey, even 2-3 years. Especially for women who have been traumatised, recovery takes a long time." (O5, man, 40s, Others)

Being trafficked is already a challenging experience. To overcome the trauma associated with it and other difficulties in the aftermath of trafficking, especially when starting from a precarious living situation, they typically require a considerable amount of time to stabilise. For instance, if the support process lasts only six months, it is insufficient compared to the prolonged duration of trafficking, which may extend up to approximately ten years. How can they make it through six months with so many things being thrown at them? (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

See footnotes for additional quotes from study participants on the long-term nature of the healing process. ^{xx}

In short, trafficked individuals require significant time to recover due to the long-term nature of the healing process. Even if tailored support is unavailable, long-term support is still necessary. In order to provide long-term support, involving the wider community is essential, as will be discussed in the following sections.

To conclude, there are four main support needs for all trafficked individuals to rebuild their lives post-trafficking: 1) access to healthcare, especially mental health care; 2) sensitivity and respect in approach; 3) support tailored to the individual; and 4) acknowledgement of the long-term nature of the healing process. Additional support is required depending on where returnees choose to resettle.

5.2.2 Returnees Resettling within their Community of Origin: Raising Awareness to Eliminate Stigma

This section highlights a vital novel finding: raising community awareness after trafficking is crucial for reducing prejudice and stigma against returnees. This helps in creating supportive community environments and lowers the risk of re-trafficking. Though Vietnam's gender equality policy supports trafficked individuals, it lacks awareness campaigns focusing on the community's role in eliminating stigma and integrating returnees. This underscores the need for such initiatives.

5.2.2.1 *Need to Eliminate Stigma*

When trafficked individuals return to their home community, their mental health is closely linked to how the community receives and treats them. As mentioned in section 3.1., social stigma leads to internal feelings of rejection, inferiority, and devaluation, which contribute to emotional instability and severe mental health issues among trafficking survivors (Budiarto & Helmi, 2021; Fukushima et al., 2020; Niumai & Rajesh, 2022). In other words, the support and empathy from the community can help improve mental health, while good mental health can facilitate community reintegration. These factors are interconnected. Therefore, good mental health is crucial for supporting trafficked returnees in their post-trafficking lives, including community reintegration, while community support positively affects returnees' mental health.

It's crucial to address their psychological well-being first rather than economic issues. [...] They need to feel emotionally stable and secure about their past before anything else. [...] (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

When they first return, they need to stabilise their psychology because when reintegrating into the community, many factors lead to re-traumatization [...] Their psychological problems need support. There are a lot of traumas, depression, and anxiety after being trafficked. (G4, woman, 30s, Gov)

Initial support must include psychological support and health checks, as returning victims often experience profound psychological trauma. We must assist them in stabilising their mental well-being, enabling them to rebuild trust and feel secure in their environment. This is to prevent their re-victimization, as they may be susceptible to further deception or

abandonment, causing them to commit suicide or become human traffickers. (G7, woman, 50s, Gov)

In short, community involvement is inevitably linked to returnees' reintegration. Positive support has a positive effect on returnees' mental health, which positively impacts their integration process. Therefore, community participation is essential for supporting returnees in their home communities. However, as discussed in the previous section about stigmatising and its effects on returnees, there is currently a prevalent issue of stigmatisation within returnees' communities of origin, making their reintegration challenging. Therefore, it is essential to eliminate stigma in order to enable positive support within these communities.

5.2.2.2 *Raising Awareness to Eliminate Stigma*

Existing studies recognize the effectiveness of awareness-raising as a strategy to combat human trafficking, i.e., awareness-raising as a preventative measure. However, it emerged from the data in this study that awareness-raising about post-trafficking prejudices faced by returnees is equally important to facilitate the reintegration of returnees and as a preventative measure to combat the risk of re-trafficking. This novel finding underscores the importance of raising awareness among communities to reduce prejudices against and discrimination and stigmatization of returnees, thereby facilitating successful reintegration and, in turn, preventing returnees from being re-trafficked. It is argued that when communities are well-informed about the harm discrimination and stigmatization causes, they can create supportive and empathetic environments that foster healing and lower the risk of re-victimization.

Effective awareness campaigns are vital in combating human trafficking, as noted by various studies (Konrad, (2019); Rajaram & Tidball, (2018); Savoia et al., 2023; Thainiyom, 2011). Raising awareness and education among the general public and providing adequate training for frontline professionals is crucial in dealing with trauma, with a special emphasis on trauma-informed approaches (Rajaram & Tidball, 2018; Savoia et al., 2023). Policies and research primarily focus on raising awareness as a prevention method, educating people about trafficking and how to avoid falling into the hands of traffickers. This approach places undue pressure on women, for example, essentially telling them to avoid being trafficked and to find employment on their own. As discussed earlier, the majority of obstacles faced by returnees are rooted within the community, particularly the stigma and its negative effects. However, existing gender equality policies do not adequately address these prejudices. Current policies and campaigns mainly focus on educating people to avoid falling into the hands of traffickers, but there is a need for communities to understand that placing all the responsibility on women to avoid trafficking can lead to increased discrimination and marginalization.

There is limited content in awareness campaigns about the social stigma of having been a human trafficking victim, its effects, and how to eliminate stigma and victim-blaming, especially towards women returnees. The Vietnam National Strategy on Gender Equality 2010-2020 aims to provide support and community integration services to all trafficking returnees (Target 3, Objective 6¹⁷). While this is commendable, it does not address the underlying prejudices within the community or provide specific strategies to combat discrimination against women returnees.

In Vietnam, Law No. 66/2011/QH12 on human trafficking prevention and combat explicitly prohibits stigmatizing and discriminating against victims (Article 3, Prohibited acts: 9. Stigmatizing or discriminating against victims). Additionally, it includes preventing stigmatizing and discriminating against victims as one of the seven content areas for information, communication, and education about trafficking prevention (Article 7, Information, communication, and education about human trafficking prevention and combat). Despite these regulations, practical activities do not seem to address these issues adequately. In Vietnam, there are few studies addressing awareness-raising issues. Current research emphasizes prevention methods over post-trafficking awareness, indicating a lack of emphasis on raising awareness after trafficking. For example, Le et al. (2018) and Nguyen (2019) focus on raising awareness. These studies emphasize providing information about trafficking, such as trafficking situations, trafficker tactics, policies, and prevention methods. This suggests that the current awareness campaigns primarily focus on how to avoid being trafficked rather than guiding community members on what to do when a trafficking victim returns to their community of origin. Hence, there is a crucial need for awareness campaigns aimed at the community, emphasizing the importance of community support for returning victims and encouraging people to see them as individuals who have been victimized rather than stigmatizing them as lazy or at fault.

As study participants (n=12) emphasised, raising awareness about human trafficking issues and their impact is essential for fostering sharing and understanding within the community. This should involve educating the community about human trafficking, providing support for returnees, protecting returnees from stigmatization, and reducing gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards them. It is crucial to incorporate policies that not only raise awareness about human trafficking but also educate communities on how to integrate returnees, avoid prejudices, discrimination, and blame, and foster a supportive environment for their return. This approach encourages communities to welcome returnees back and

¹⁷ Target 3: By 2015 towards 2020, 100% of human trafficking victims will return through handover and rescue, and 100% of such victims who return by themselves and are detected will be entitled to support and community integration services.

provides them with the necessary support to rebuild their lives. By spreading awareness about the issues of stigma, community members can engage in practical and effective ways to support trafficked individuals.

To bring about change in labelling victims, I think that we need to develop a community mindset. [...] It is essential to address the issues by improving family, community, and social relationships; to raise awareness and educate the community on how to care for and support victims of human trafficking; especially to eradicate the harmful misconception that victims willingly choose their circumstances and that trafficking victims are somehow flawed/unworthy or disposable. (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

Raising awareness is crucial. It is also essential to support the victim's family by providing them with information and encouragement. They should be made to understand that their child's safe return is the top priority, and they should not feel guilty or be influenced by the opinions of others around them. (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

Usually, to connect victims with their local communities and families, organisations must encourage families and people around them not to discriminate against victims and to accept victims safely. (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

There appears to be a shortage of campaigns that address the stigma faced by trafficked individuals in their lives after being trafficked. The study participants indicated that such campaigns should exist. This suggests that either no such campaigns exist or there are so few that the participants are not aware of them. If government and NGO workers in the field are not aware of such campaigns, likely, the community is also unaware of them.

"There should be awareness-raising campaigns for the community and agencies to reduce prejudice against returnees. This will help them feel more confident while reintegrating into the community." (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

The thing is how to make people understand that victims also require attention and support. [...] There is a need to raise awareness among local officials regarding how to provide support to the victims, as they are the ones who work directly with the victims. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

"There is a need for better community communication, increased sharing, and empathy towards those who have experienced human trafficking issues." (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

See endnotes for additional quotes from study participants on raising awareness to eliminate stigma.^{xxi}

The current gender equality policy in Vietnam has made various efforts to support trafficked individuals, but it has not included awareness campaigns focused on the community's responsibilities in getting rid of stigma and including returnees in the community. Therefore, there is a critical need for such campaigns that emphasize the importance of community support for returning victims and encourage people to see them as individuals who have been victimized rather than as being at fault.

In summary, raising awareness within the community to address social prejudices against returnees and to include them in community life is a promising solution to reduce social stigma towards trafficked individuals and promote caring and sympathetic environments for their reintegration into society. It is essential not only to avoid blaming women for their victimization but also to recognize the community's responsibility in welcoming them back, providing support and opportunities, and eliminating stigma.

For those relocating far from their hometown, without the support of community and family, peer networks (self-help groups) may be particularly helpful.

5.2.3 For Returnees Resettling Away from their Community of Origin: Peer Networks

The previous section has shown how vital community and family are in the healing process. Hence, returnees who do not have access to this kind of support require a substitute. This research endorses existing literature and suggests that self-help groups, such as Returnees Anonymous Support Groups, are vital in helping trafficked individuals resettle in locations away from their hometowns. The study affirms the advantages of this approach and promotes its wider implementation. These networks provide a safe space for sharing experiences and mutual assistance, enhancing prospects for successful reintegration.

Peer-to-peer support plays a crucial role in the recovery journey of human trafficking survivors, especially those who were exploited in the sex trade (Rajaram & Tidball, 2018). It provides empathy, understanding, trust, and practical guidance that professional support may not fully replicate (Rajaram & Tidball, 2018). A compassionate approach encourages stigmatized individuals to form supportive relationships outside their identity group, fostering self-esteem and a sense of belonging (Crocker & Garcia, 2010).

In Vietnam, although there are no official regulations on anonymous peer-to-peer support groups, practical models with similar functions have been effectively implemented to aid the reintegration of trafficked individuals. One notable model is the self-help group, which has been recognized as an effective support mechanism (Le, 2017). These groups were developed by the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) with funding from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2008 (Tran et al., 2020). Initially established in Bac Giang, these groups expanded to Tay Ninh in 2011 and Thua Thien Hue in 2012. Despite the lack of a legal definition¹⁸, self-help groups play a crucial role in supporting trafficked

¹⁸ There is no legal definition of 'self-help group' and its explanation in reports or training documents is quite general (Le et al., 2015). "In a 2012 report, self-help group was defined as: The self-help groups were established to provide assistance to trafficked persons who are from provinces without assessment centres (or victim support centres) and have returned to their homes without support or services. The facilitated self-help groups provide psychosocial support through monthly meetings, where women with similar experiences share what happened to them, often the first time they have talked about their experience. The women are identified by an outreach team and their involvement is voluntary. The self-help group model also includes support through a reintegration plan and financial assistance" (Le et al., 2015, p. 166; Trees et al., 2012, p. 31)

persons, especially those from provinces without victim support centres. The groups operate on voluntariness, confidentiality, respect, safety, non-injury, equality, and empowerment, fostering safe environments and enhancing community integration (National Child Helpline 111, n.d.). Since 2017, IOM has piloted various reintegration support models, helping 179 people through self-help groups in Bac Giang, Hue, and Tay Ninh and 550 people through combined models in Quang Binh, Ha Tinh, and Nghe An (IOM Vietnam, 2023).

According to Le (2017), the model has several key benefits. Firstly, it boosts victims' self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-esteem through regular group meetings addressing life skills, trafficking prevention, reproductive health, and safe sex. Members also share personal challenges and receive peer advice for overcoming difficulties. Secondly, the model offers crucial economic support. The IOM provides economic assistance to group members, offering financial support (for example, 150 USD before 2012 and 350 USD since 2012) for reintegration plans. Despite limited financial aid, this support helps members to start businesses. Discussions on business and finance in meetings assist members in developing and implementing plans, leading to additional income, debt repayment, and improved family livelihoods. Thirdly, self-help groups serve as hubs for education and information dissemination, empowering members to contribute to education networks and awareness campaigns. In short, this model offers psychosocial support, access to information, referral services, and financial assistance (Le, 2017; Trees et al., 2012). The success of these models indicates their potential for national expansion with government support. Future improvements should focus on expanding these successful models, enhancing support services, and improving inter-agency cooperation. Training and education for organizers and beneficiaries are crucial, as is involving victims in running support models (Le, 2017). In areas without self-help groups, peer support mechanisms should be implemented through unofficial gatherings of trafficking victims (Le, 2017).

This study supports existing assessments and recommends that self-help groups play a crucial role in the resettlement of trafficked individuals who choose to live away from their hometowns. The findings from the current study confirm the benefits of this model and thus advocate for its expansion.

First, participants discussed the advantages of self-help groups, which empower individuals through various supportive services. These groups encourage returnees to share personal experiences, raise community awareness about trafficking and help prevent future incidents. They also foster autonomy and self-worth among trafficking survivors, aiding in the reconstruction of self-esteem and promoting sustainable reintegration.

The projects we undertake, such as models like peer groups and support models (psychological, economic, awareness), clearly serve two main purposes: first, enhancing prevention efforts, and second, empowering them to take control of their lives. Most importantly, they enable them to take charge of their lives and reduce risks more effectively.

[...] She went to school and then pursued a degree in social sciences at university. When I asked her why she chose this profession, she explained that she wanted to go back to her hometown to support girls there, helping them avoid early marriage and the same risks she used to face. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

Between 2017 and 2019, the province implemented several programs to gather individuals who had returned and those who were potential targets. The purpose was to enable the club to organise programs where insiders could share their experiences. These individuals directly experienced what it was like to live through the trafficking situation and how they had to liberate themselves to perceive and talk about the false glory of the promised land. These programs aimed to provide a platform for the next generation to understand and view things more objectively. (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

We have peer groups, and she (a trafficked returner) also participated in the group and shared her story, which created a great encouragement and source of motivation for other girls in the group, showing them that they, too, can try. [...] Sharing their stories in these groups also helps people like her enhance their value and return to their local areas. (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

See endnotes for additional quotes from study participants on Peer Networks: ^{xxii}

Secondly, considering the benefits of this model, peer networks can be especially advantageous for women who relocate far from their hometowns. This model needs to be formally designed and implemented into policies. To maximize its effectiveness, policies should acknowledge and support the autonomy of peer networks, allowing members to operate and assist each other independently, and ensure their anonymity.

Our project has encountered several typical cases where individuals have not only progressed but also initiated developments for themselves and others in similar circumstances. This morning, I received good news that a woman in province X got a job and is now paying another woman working as a store employee for her salary. Now that they help each other like that, this is the success factor of the project up to this point. Moreover, everyone is still connected, sharing the project and continuing the activities they find interesting. [...] That is not just about being successful but also embodies compassion and sustainability. In another instance, a woman from Province X has established a successful business model and is now mentoring another woman in Province Y. The woman from Province Y has willingly travelled to Province X to study the profession, intending to implement the model in her own region. So, I also see the activities we support, including livelihood support, and as such a model is replicated in province Y, I see it as successful. Another thing is that they proactively suggested that when the project was over, they would still maintain a connection with each other and teach each other; **that was their idea**. I see it as another success. [...] Some people supported by the project have been successful and even created jobs for others. [...] There was one woman who was quite timid when she first joined the project. Still, after a period of participation, she prepared to establish a cooperative and participate in the startup competition of the business consulting centre to support startups. As they all think about creating more jobs for people in their area and have a sense of community, so I feel thrilled. (N8, woman, 40s, NGO)

Identifying their potential strengths and encouraging them to contribute to the community is crucial, as this will help strengthen the bond between them and the community. This will also help them realise their value, especially when they face discrimination from society. By participating in community activities, they will see that they are valuable to society and their

locality. There are various ways to achieve this, such as sharing their own experiences through storytelling. (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

Some groups comprise both victims and individuals at risk, while in other villages, only a few individuals are victims, some leading active lives and serving as role models. [...] These groups function similarly to peer groups. [...] Thus far, I want to maintain these interventions, such as the Women's Club, which connects the community, promotes sustainability, increases victim participation, and educates the community on supporting returning victims without discrimination or stigmatisation. (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

In short, the peer-to-peer network/self-help group has been proven to be an effective model that benefits trafficked returnees and deserves further expansion. This model is especially suitable for those who choose to resettle away from their community of origin, as anonymity helps them feel more confident in sharing their experiences and contributing to a supportive peer community. On the other hand, returnees who restart their lives in their hometowns often face more stigma due to their past being known by their neighbours and thus require support from family and the community. Efforts should be focused on reducing stigma and its effects on these returnees.

While stigma and its effects primarily impact returnees' healing process, insufficient resources affect how social workers and the government support them.

5.3 Obstacle: Insufficient Resources for the Support Process

This section outlines the obstacles that hinder support for trafficked returnees, including insufficient funding and personnel. These findings are consistent with previous studies.

5.3.1 Funding

The section emphasises the importance of adequate funding for supporting the reintegration of trafficked individuals, highlighting the challenges posed by inadequate funds for addressing reintegration issues. Insufficient funds directly impact the quality of support services, hindering the achievement of sustainable reintegration. The study participants discussed how the lack of financial resources affected their work in supporting trafficked individuals, aligning with existing literature.

Surtees (2013) concluded that improving victims' economic conditions and occupational opportunities is central to successful reintegration. Government assistance can alleviate difficulties for victims during rehabilitation (Duong, 2014; Hoang, 2013). Victims who receive assistance with essential needs can also experience a safer living environment (Hoang, 2013; Zimmerman & Borland, 2009). However, the available financial support in Vietnam often falls short of meeting victims' needs, thus failing to improve their living conditions (Duong, 2014; Tran et al., 2020). Despite anti-trafficking policies entitling trafficking victims in Vietnam to a wide range of support during their reintegration process, many of these protections exist only in principle, with some policies appearing comprehensive on paper but falling short in practice (Tran et al.,

2020). The amount of financial support provided is often small and insufficient to cover the financial difficulties faced by trafficked individuals (Duong, 2014; Tran et al., 2020). Limited government budgets, including lacking facilities, funding, and specialists, give individuals limited access to medical and psychological support (Tran et al., 2020). As a result, many trafficked individuals receive only short-term assistance and are left to rebuild their lives with little or no financial or social service support (Le, 2017). The study participants (N=13) agreed that limited resources present significant obstacles to the reintegration of trafficked individuals.

The support services offered in Vietnam cover a broad range of areas, but the level of assistance is minimal. For instance, the support for medical examination and treatment costs can range from VND 100 to 200 thousand¹⁹, which may not be worth the expense. Additionally, the other supports provided are often inadequate, with insufficient resources available to help people improve their lives. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

Although the state has shown interest and effort in its policy towards supporting victims, the funding allocated for that purpose is still insufficient. During my working time, the initial hardship allowance for supporting victims was only 1.5 million, per Circular 84. [...] It is still challenging for them to access the loan support regime for production and business. Overall, it is not very feasible. [...] After the projects from NGOs was withdrawn, the activities were limited to receiving the returnees and referring them to the Women's Union or the locality for support if they had any needs. Financial support is available according to Circular 84, but it is not enough to meet the needs. As a result, the effectiveness of support activities has decreased to some extent. (G2, woman, 45s, Gov)

Although Decree 09 defines support for victims, the budget is limited and unrealistic. [...] The assistance provided by the State to victims is insufficient. [...] Even with Decree 09, which aims to support victims, psychological support is only available when they are in the social protection centre (60 days). Which social protection centre actually has a psychologist? Therefore, the policy falls short of the actual needs of victims, and there is a significant gap between policy and reality. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

See endnotes for additional quotes from study participants on Insufficient Funding: ^{xxiii}

Apart from insufficient funding, limited human resources providing direct support to trafficked individuals also hinder the reintegration process. This issue will be discussed in the following section.

5.3.2 Personnel

The fact that most of the officers working there are men makes Geb and her peers feel embarrassed, and they find it challenging to provide the information needed to fill out the forms for the procedures. **(Geb's Story – Part 3)**

¹⁹ The exchange rate from Vietnamese Dong (VND) to New Zealand Dollar (NZD) for the amount of VND 100.000 VND minus 200.000 VND is approximately equal to NZD 6.67 to 13.35.

The arguments made in this section align with the existing literature, emphasising the obstacle of having an inadequate number of social workers with the necessary skills and capabilities for the successful reintegration of trafficked individuals.

Limited financial resources, a lack of knowledge and skills among government officers, and a shortage of highly-trained personnel are factors limiting the effectiveness of anti-trafficking strategies (Duong, 2014; Le, 2017; Tucker et al., 2010). Due to the lack of facilities, funding, and specialists, such as a shortage of skilled social workers in Vietnam, trafficked individuals receive limited access to medical and psychological support, impeding their rehabilitation and reintegration (Tran et al., 2020; Vijayarasa, 2010).

The study participants expressed concerns over the lack of staff and resources for anti-human trafficking efforts. This insufficiency includes the quantity and quality of human resources, especially case managers and psychologists. Due to the lack of such staff, local workers often have to juggle various other responsibilities besides supporting trafficking victims. This situation hampers their ability to effectively dedicate time and effort to improving their skills in this field, affecting the assistance to trafficked individuals in their healing process.

I believe that the policy is comprehensive but not practical or feasible. Although there is a department in charge of providing support to victims, the staff in that department have many other responsibilities and work with various target groups. So, there is no one available to fulfil the role of case manager, which involves conducting interviews, monitoring cases, and visiting the community. [...] Currently, we can only provide temporary support to recipients and must stop after three to six months. [...] One officer can't handle all the tasks required to support victims, including connecting relevant parties to support vocational training, providing livelihood skills, and regularly consulting and communicating with victims. (G2, woman, 45s, Gov)

There is no expertise in victim-based support [...] I think the psychological treatment process requires considerable time, but non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often lack the necessary resources and capabilities to provide adequate support. Although social workers in Vietnam have received some training in social work, they mostly rely on their experience, which may not be sufficient to help individuals dealing with psychological trauma. [...] I consider victim support services to be weak and not yet successful, even the services provided by NGOs. Victim support services are too costly and difficult. (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

See endnotes for additional quotes from study participants on Insufficient Personnel: ^{xxiv}

Insufficient funding creates several problems, one of which is the lack of qualified personnel to provide better assistance to trafficked individuals. While adequate funding is necessary to address this issue, the following section discusses potential solutions to mitigate the challenges caused by limited resources.

5.4 Solution: Prioritizing Community of Origin Support

This section presents a novel finding by arguing that positive family and community support may be the most effective way to increase resource efficiency. It is argued that with the help of family and community of origin, returnees would hardly need any additional support services, making it, long-term, the most cost-effective support option from a government and NGO perspective. Positive support from family and the community facilitates a strong network of service providers, effective utilisation of available support from various resources and sources for victims, and dedicated case managers/support workers, mitigating the obstacles associated with insufficient resources. Therefore, returnee resettlement in their community of origin is more effective than resettling elsewhere, as familiar, stigma-free surroundings provide the best recovery support.

5.4.1 Home Resettlement Without Stigma: Faster Rehabilitation and Improving Resilience

While this study aligns with previous research on the importance of community care for trafficking reintegration, the findings shed new light on the optimal location for trafficked returnees to resettle during their post-trafficking life.

It is argued in this research that reintegrating trafficked individuals into their home communities is a more effective solution than resettling them away from their hometowns. This option offers long-term sustainability and benefits through the care and supportive environments provided by family and community. Family care and community support are crucial in helping returnees overcome the obstacles and consequences of trafficking, fostering an environment essential for their recovery and sustainable reintegration.

Few studies conclude that family support does not affect the outcome of community integration for trafficked women and suggest that community stigma and family support do not influence the reintegration of trafficked women in Vietnam (see, for example, Trinh et al., 2022). However, the findings of the current study align with the majority of the literature (Counts, 2014; Crawford & Kaufman, 2008; da Silva & Sathiyaseelan, 2019; Dahal et al., 2015; Le, 2017) that emphasises the importance of family and community in the reintegration of trafficked women. These studies indicate that trafficked individuals face significant challenges in integrating into their communities of origin due to stigma and discrimination from both their family members and the wider community. The lack of support from family and societal rejection makes it hard for returnees to reintegrate. It is argued in this research that resettling away from family does not provide a sense of community belonging and may exacerbate the pain caused by trafficking, hindering reintegration. In contrast, resettling within family and community care has been shown to facilitate the healing process more quickly and positively.

A supportive community that offers a sense of belonging and opportunities for meaningful activities can significantly aid mental health recovery (Doroud et al., 2018). For victims of trafficking, this is especially crucial as the mental issue can hinder their recovery and reintegration. Belonging can be understood from psychological, sociological, physical, and spiritual perspectives (Hagerty et al., 1992). It's about feeling personally involved and valued in a system or environment (Hagerty et al., 1992). This involves two dimensions: feeling needed and accepted and perceiving that one's characteristics align with the environment (Hagerty et al., 1992). Belonging is about feeling valued, connected, and harmonious with others (Hagerty et al., 1992). Therefore, in the context of trafficking, a familiar environment where trafficked individuals have family members nearby (physical), are considered normal members of the community (sociological), feel valued and cared for (psychological), and experience a sense of connection that facilitates their integration with the whole environment (spiritual) can support their sense of belonging and aid in mental health recovery.

Support from one's community of origin is crucial for reintegration because it provides a sense of being valued and needed, which is essential for mental health recovery. Additionally, this support helps individuals feel that they fit and belong, aligning their characteristics with those of their community, thereby fostering a strong sense of identity and connection (Hagerty et al., 1992). Therefore, creating a sense of belonging must be considered when helping trafficked individuals reintegrate into their communities. Community acceptance is crucial for the recovery and reintegration of returnees. They need the community's support, encouragement, and companionship to rebuild their lives.

On the one hand, resettling away from home may be a solution for trafficked returnees who cannot bear the stigmatisation and discrimination from their community. However, the lack of care from family is still a painful experience that cannot be erased, making sustainable reintegration impossible.

She decided to rent a house that was located about 30km away from her family's residence. She wanted to leave behind her past and start afresh but still be able to meet her relatives when needed. [...] She said her life is so good now. She did not think her life would ever be that good. [...] Now, she returned to her community and married. [...] They shared that they were extremely frightened about going back to their community. Their first fear after the rescue was returning to their home. Internally, they are conflicted because they really wish to see their loved ones but are too scared to return to the community. They are unsure of how to resolve this internal conflict. (O6, man, 45s, Others)

"Many really want to live with their family back ..." (G4, woman, 30s, Gov)

"Because victims experience trauma, they feel safer when they return to their local area and stay at home." (N2, man, 45s, NGO)

On the other hand, individuals who receive sympathy and can live among their families with care have been shown to overcome the obstacles and consequences of trafficking. Addressing social prejudices and

promoting inclusivity can create a more supportive environment for returnees to rebuild their lives with dignity and resilience.

“When they return and are still protected by their family and the community, not being rejected and chased away, that is a success.” (G7, woman, 50s, Gov)

It requires external support from various factors for those to overcome an inferiority complex [...] Their time spent in a shelter is merely a temporary stop, and their later life relies on their family, community, and surroundings. It is essential to create an ideal environment for them to integrate into society. (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

“The locality supported connecting with family and the community to support her [...] 2 years later, she was fine, got a new husband, and the locality also kept in touch with her. [...] Strengthen community-based support mechanisms.” (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

“Community factors are also very important” (O2, woman, 50s, Others)

“Successful reintegration must rely on the victim’s abilities, family, and local support system.” (G8, woman, 45s, Gov)

“Family plays a crucial role” (G2, woman, 45s, Gov)

In summary, this study has uncovered that, within the Vietnamese context, it is vital to categorise returnees based on their chosen resettlement location because it determines returnees’ specific support requirements and priorities, beyond the foundational support that all returnees require. Additionally, the study revealed that settling returnees in their home area with family and community support offers better reintegration conditions and better prospects of healing.

Support from family and community is crucial for the reintegration of trafficked women. In many cases, only caring and sympathetic family and community members can help these women overcome their past and rebuild their lives with no additional financial resources, which are often in short supply and can create other obstacles to the reintegration process.

5.4.2 Positive Family and Community Support: Fewer Resources Required

This research supports previous studies by emphasizing the vital role of family and community support in reintegrating trafficked individuals. It presents a new perspective by suggesting that positive care and support from family and community are determinants for the healing process of trafficked individuals, even in the absence of additional support mechanisms. Additionally, such support can enhance the effectiveness of other forms of assistance provided to returnees.

Reintegration is a complex journey (Richie-Zavaleta et al., 2021) that requires time to address the multifaceted issues faced by trafficked individuals (Meshkovska et al., 2021; Niumai & Rajesh, 2022; Sharma, 2015). Successful reintegration necessitates full acceptance and support from society (Dahal et al.,

2015), involving community engagement and a supportive environment (Mbamba et al., 2022; Niumai & Rajesh, 2022). Sustainable reintegration depends on support networks, including connections with family members and service providers (Meshkovska et al., 2021). Family and social relationships can exert powerful influences on individuals' responses to trafficking (Le, 2014). It is argued in the following section that family support can speed up the healing process, thus reducing or eliminating the need for external funding. Study participants suggested that positive family and community support could be the most effective way to increase resource efficiency. Such support would accelerate the healing process and decrease the need for extensive funding for returnees. In the context of Vietnam, where insufficient resources make the reintegration process challenging, positive family and community support is crucial in addressing these challenges and facilitating the healing process for trafficked returnees. Therefore, settling in a hometown with family support can maximise the effectiveness of NGO and government assistance.

It is important to have a community that is affectionate, supportive, and respectful towards each other, including families who provide love, support, and encouragement. [...] Upon returning, the first step is gaining community acceptance. [...] They do not even need support from any organisations but only need care and encouragement from family. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

It can be said that, for many women, living with their family and being part of a family is a successful form of reintegration. And with positive family and community support, fewer human and financial resources are required.

That girl got a good job and got married. I think if we talk about economic success, it's probably not true in her case because, in rural areas, I don't think there are too many material needs, so I guess that's enough for her life. For recovering, she has recovered basic psychosocial functioning and is managing trauma well, although she still experiences flashbacks at times. Overall, I see that she is satisfied with her life; she has a husband and children. To determine if their stories are successful, we need to consider their personal goals and whether they feel satisfied with what they achieved or not. (O5, man, 40s, Others)

"It is easier to support individuals with family than those without. Providing initial support for those without family is not simple." (G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

People who live in a particular locality, are content with their lives, can move on, get married, have children, ... can be considered excellently successful. When they can settle down, move on, and start a family, as long as they are happy, it is a success for us. The support of one's family is a crucial factor in achieving success. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

For women, depending on the situation, if someone remarries or has a loving family to take care of them, they recover very quickly [...] That woman remarried with a good husband and recovered mentally and economically. Hers is a case that I think was a success. [...] The family also plays a very important role in creating an environment for the victim to recover mentally, emotionally and possibly economically. (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

In many cases, care from family and community is considered the best support for returnees. Even if returnees choose to stay elsewhere and receive other forms of support, without this care, their integration

and relocation may not be as successful, leading to internal conflicts that cannot be resolved solely by other means of support.

However, successful reintegration involves acceptance and support from family and the community, creating a nonjudgmental and stigma-free environment essential for empowering trafficked individuals to rebuild their lives. Consequently, the recommended priority solution is to foster empathy and care within the community and family. Raising awareness to reduce stigma and its effects is essential for achieving this goal.

“For successful reintegration, in the long term, they need to be understood, be compassionate, and be able to live in a safe environment without discrimination.” (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

“It is crucial for the community to be accepting and non-judgmental. [...] Once the community is willing to welcome the victim and not discriminate against them, then support options can be considered.” (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

“Some victims can stabilise and return to normal life, being accepted by their families [...] The critical issue is from the community; they need support and tolerance from the community.” (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

“Surrounding people, especially unions and local authorities, are reaching out and providing support, helping them stabilise their income, health, and stable jobs.” (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

Engaging in positive care from family and the community can help address both the stigmatisation and its effects, as stated in the previous section, as well as the insufficient resources that the reintegration process faces. This section reinforces the argument of the prior section that the best place for resettling post-trafficking is one’s hometown rather than relocating elsewhere, considering its positive effects. It is essential to prioritise relocating trafficked individuals into their home communities with support from loved ones and the community.

In summary, supportive care from family and the community offers the greatest benefits to trafficked individuals by reducing stigma and its effects and addressing the issue of insufficient resources. Therefore, their home community should be the preferred location for their healing process.

Furthermore, when individuals receive positive care from family support and encouragement, they will have a strong foundation for sustainable reintegration.

“If the whole community pulls them up, they will be able to get up.” (N8, woman, 40s, NGO)

So, for the best and most comprehensive support for returnees aiming at sustainable rehabilitation, a wider community, including related stakeholders and service providers, needs to be involved.

5.4.3 Mobilising Community Support: Engaging Stakeholders and Service Providers

Tam (her name means the heart/soul), the support worker who connects with Geb takes care of Geb for six months. Every day, she talks to Geb. Tam shares her own story with Geb in an attempt to open her up. [...] Tam's salary is funded by an international organisation. Her patience slowly but surely changes Geb. Finally, Geb agrees to see a psychologist. As Geb is regaining her confidence, Tam connects with the authorities, the project manager, and the members of the women's union in Geb's village to reunite Geb with her family. Geb's mom and sister come and visit her at the shelter. [...] After 18 months, Geb's health is much better. The shelter offers her a job in a shoe factory, but she refuses. Geb tells Tam that she wants to continue her studies and aspires to do the same work as Tam in future. She is inspired by Tam's story as it helped her to climb out of the black, deep well. Tam connects with all available support services to optimise support for Geb. [...] Tam knows that Geb has a strong will inside, and luckily, she has recovered and can access all available services. [...] Tam understands that while physical scars may fade over time, psychological scars remain forever. This is why returnees need Tam, as well as their loved ones and their families, as well as the entire community, to understand their situations and help them recognize their strength to overcome their past lives. **(Geb's Story – Part 3)**

This section emphasizes the importance of involving the entire society in supporting returnees, especially relevant stakeholders and service providers, to create a strong support network. Firstly, community engagement helps establish a robust network of support providers and related stakeholders, enabling trafficked individuals to access various services from different sources, thus aiding their reintegration process. Secondly, dedicated support workers who directly assist each individual and provide comprehensive support for their healing processes play a crucial role. When these workers are dedicated, empathetic, and understanding of the needs of trafficked individuals, they can collaborate to establish a strong network of support providers, access resources, and obtain necessary support services for returnees. This approach is supported by existing literature on the topic.

First, community engagement can activate effective cooperation among related stakeholders, significantly contributing to the success of providing support to trafficked individuals. Since trafficked individuals have diverse and complex needs that vary widely depending on their experiences (Preble et al., 2022), they require both immediate and long-term assistance (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2014; Hardy et al., 2013; Macy & Johns, 2011; Preble et al., 2020). Richie-Zavaleta et al. (2021) argue that cooperation and coordination among services can offer trafficked individuals legal support and access to the resources needed for societal reintegration. Inter-agency collaboration is a crucial factor in ensuring victims' access to support services (Tran et al., 2020). Study participants emphasized the significance of effective collaboration among relevant stakeholders to facilitate the reintegration process. Therefore, enhancing the networking between relevant stakeholders is necessary to provide adequate support to returnees during their reintegration process.

“With the cooperation and understanding of partners and local government agencies, the project operates smoothly, and, so that the recipients are provided with more support.” (N8, woman, 40s, NGO)

The local authorities are familiar with our work and are supportive of it, making it easier for us to rescue and aid victims in returning to their local communities. They do not create any obstacles but rather facilitate our work by providing us with the necessary assistance. As a result, working with the people in the community becomes much easier and more efficient. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

Providing support for reintegration is a comprehensive service that requires coordination among specialized and competent agencies, as well as support from different departments. Community participation is crucial in terms of reporting, making proposals, and connecting with family members, while the government's timely intervention is necessary for resolving related issues. (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

See endnotes for additional quotes from study participants on Mobilising Community Support: Engaging Stakeholders and Service Providers: ^{xxv}

Second, due to the support and engagement from stakeholders and the community, various resources can be provided to trafficked individuals, maximizing their benefits. This is consistent with previous studies. Trees et al. (2012) suggest that government regulations for supporting trafficked individuals are limited to specific forms of assistance, and some anti-trafficking measures rely on external funding. Additional funding should come from NGOs and various economic entities because external funding significantly aids in developing and implementing anti-trafficking activities (Le, 2017). Study participants stressed the importance of utilising external sources and various sponsors to better support trafficked individuals.

“When we bring victims back, we try to refer them to utilise as much support as possible, from the support policies of the State, NGOs and international organisations to reintegrate best.” (O2, woman, 50s, Others)

Our funding sources are quite diverse and mainly comprise of large organisations. While most projects have to stop after 3-5 years funded by the organisation, we take a long-term approach to problem-solving and continue to follow the program even after the initial funding ends. We believe a problem cannot be solved in just a few years and requires sustained efforts. Therefore, we always look for alternative sources of funding and other sponsors to support our work. We don't focus on just one or two sources but rather explore various funding options. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

Due to limited financial support, the support providers must have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively mobilise resources for the victim. Simply providing victims with a sum of money is not enough if they do not know how to use it effectively; or if there is no accompanying person to help them while they are facing psychological, economic, health, or legal challenges... To address these issues, a coordinator, social worker, case manager, or support staff with relevant skills and knowledge is needed to help victims access formal, informal, and personal resources. I think in this way, we can enable them to integrate fully into the community. [...] If local officials are well-informed about all the laws, policies, and programs available in their area, they can better assist victims by connecting them with other support programs. These programs may include support for disadvantaged groups, women,

and others. Essentially, if officials can mobilise these programs and have the time to follow up and support victims, it can greatly benefit those in need. (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

Supporting trafficked individuals involves engaging various stakeholders and the community, with social workers playing a crucial role as direct case managers and providers of comprehensive support. This requires support workers to be dedicated and well-informed about available resources to help trafficked individuals access the most suitable assistance. They facilitate connections between relevant parties and sponsors, establish robust networks, and optimise available resources to maximise benefits for recipients.

In line with existing studies, this research emphasises the critical role of social workers who comprehensively understand the resources from various sponsors and can establish strong cooperation networks among stakeholders, essential for maximising resource mobilisation and utilisation. A positive connection between support workers and trafficked individuals is crucial for successful reintegration outcomes (Meshkovska et al., 2021). Clawson and Dutch (2008), emphasise that case management is a vital service for victims' recovery, benefiting both the victims and other stakeholders in the fight against human trafficking. Case managers assist victims in understanding the process, learning about their rights, and accessing benefits and services. Consistent, compassionate, culturally sensitive, and dedicated case managers are essential for providing comprehensive case management services to trafficking victims, resulting in positive outcomes for clients, funding agencies, and law enforcement (Clawson & Dutch, 2008a). The study participants observed that support workers who empathise and understand the situation can access resources from various sources, such as external funds and state-level initiatives, to provide the best possible services to trafficked individuals. This dedicated support plays a crucial role in the recovery process for trafficked individuals, as it involves direct engagement with them, listening to their needs, connecting them with appropriate services, and offering tailored support. The involvement of dedicated support workers who provide genuine care and compassionate support significantly contributes to a successful reintegration process.

We provide the best possible conditions for their reintegration into the community. The presence of social workers can help them access support resources. [...] The support person must consider the needs and background of each victim to create a personalised support plan. This is where the role of a case manager or social worker comes in, as they follow up with each person. Factors such as the victim's specific needs, their family's support, the level of discrimination in their area, and whether they can continue living in their locality or need to move to Hanoi should all be considered. [...] Initially, emergency support is provided to returnees [...] Subsequently, they are assisted in their return home, with a comprehensive assessment of their long-term support. A social worker manages the case and follows through the journey. For instance, the social worker liaises with schools if education is needed and coordinates with employment agencies for job placements. They remain involved until the individual successfully reintegrates into the community, addressing any additional challenges they may face, such as bullying or psychological issues...This means that the case manager follows the victim throughout the process. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

They considers us as their brothers/sisters and often shares any news with us. [...] We work hard and treat victims like treating our own family members. We understand their problems and support their families with livelihoods. We sponsored their case and regularly visited to update about their health and employment situation. After having two breaks at the largest garment company in H province, we advised them to return to work. Now, after 4-5 years, they are very stable. The regular visits and treating them as family members contributed to this stability, as they have almost entirely placed their trust in us and confided in us about their personal lives. (N2, man, 40s, NGO)

We provide various forms of support, such as collaborating with legal aid centres and advocating for victims, even in minor issues. For instance, we work alongside teachers in schools and local communities within communes to ensure that those around them do not perceive victims as such. This is because not only is there sympathy but also curiosity within the community about them. Additionally, we continuously work to offer ways for their parents to support them. [...] Over the years, we have helped numerous victims and shared our knowledge with other support providers to aid their understanding of the psychological aspect of returning victims. We also provide ongoing motivation and support by regularly following up with those we assist after they secure a job. (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

In summary, positive family care and comprehensive community involvement, including support from social workers and related stakeholders, can help mitigate obstacles associated with insufficient resources. With the collective efforts of society and family care, trafficked returnees can benefit significantly, leading to faster healing and recovery. Living in such supportive and empathetic environments, they do not need to relocate elsewhere and can freely restart their lives within their community. Trafficked individuals should not be discriminated against and should not run away from their home community. Therefore, community care and shared responsibility are essential for the successful reintegration of trafficked returnees.

Chapter 6 Evaluating Gender Equality Policies in Preventing Trafficking and Supporting Survivor Reintegration in Vietnam

Chapter 6 is structured into two sections, addressing the research question on the extent to which gender equality policies in Vietnam contribute to both the prevention of human trafficking by reducing its root causes and the reintegration of returnees after trafficking.

The first section, “Gender Equality Efforts in Addressing Trafficking Causes,” assesses the impact of gender equality policies in Vietnam. It recognizes their role in addressing these issues while emphasizing the need for further improvements.

The second section of the chapter, “Strengths and Weaknesses of the Gender Equality Policy in Empowering Returnees”, highlights how gender equality policies contribute to the successful reintegration of trafficked individuals but it also identifies one fundamental limitation. This limitation revolves around the lack of community-wide awareness about returnees’ post-trafficking challenges and their needs, particularly with regard to stigma reduction. Creating a stigma-free environment, in which returnees are supported by their families and the entire community, emerges as a promising solution to empower women and address both sets of obstacles: stigmatising and its effects, as well as insufficient resources.

6.1 Gender Equality Policies Efforts In Addressing Trafficking Causes

This section emphasizes the impact of gender equality policies in Vietnam and their potential to prevent human trafficking in the future. It recognizes the progress made between 2010 and 2020 in addressing the underlying causes of human trafficking, such as gender norms, stereotypes, and bias. However, the current policies only partially tackle these root causes, as indicated by their ineffective implementation. Despite ongoing gender issues, gender equality policies have contributed to enhancing women's empowerment. These efforts have led to improvements in providing women and girls with better access to education and job opportunities, as well as addressing gender stereotypes and violence. Therefore, policies that focus on empowering women remain crucial for combating human trafficking.

6.1.1 Reducing Gender Bias in Education, Employment and Beyond

This section emphasises that while gender equality policies in Vietnam have made efforts to diminish gender biases, stereotypes, and role expectations placed on women, traditional gender norms persist, often constraining women to household duties and perpetuating gender inequality. Thus, it remains imperative to further advance gender equality policies to foster improved outcomes for the future.

At Objective 1²⁰, which includes three targets, was not fully achieved (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 29). This shortfall is attributed to the prevailing myths and perceptions that women's roles are primarily family-oriented, while men are seen as societal leaders with inherent qualities for leadership. Such beliefs pose a significant challenge to advancing gender equality in politics. Additionally, the successful implementation of policies depends heavily on the awareness and attitudes of men, women, and leaders in supporting women's representation in leadership positions (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 29).

Objective 1: To increase women's participation in leadership and managerial positions to gradually narrow the gender gap in the political sphere

Also, regarding Objective 3: Women still face obstacles related to marriage, childbirth, and family care responsibilities, causing wide gender gaps in high-quality human resource development, particularly for doctoral degrees.

Objective 3: To raise the quality of female human resources, gradually ensuring equal participation between men and women in the education and training domain/ To improve the quality of female human resources, gradually ensure equal participation between men and women in the sphere of education, and training.

"The gender gaps remain remarkably wide in high quality human resource development, specifically for doctoral degrees. It has been mainly attributable to the obstacles faced by women with respect to marriage, childbirth and family care responsibilities" (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 47)

At Objective 4, Target 1 aims to balance the sex ratio at birth. Although this target has been achieved, the preference for sons over daughters still heavily exists. This preference, coupled with easy access to assisted reproductive technology, has sustained the practice of fetal sex selection for many years. As a result, there is a scarcity of women, which puts additional pressure on them to marry at a younger age. This can potentially lead to increased prostitution and the development of trafficking in women (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 48–49). The mindset of preferring sons is deeply rooted in various regions, particularly the Mekong River Delta, which has the highest sex ratio at birth in the country (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 55).

Objective 4: To ensure gender equality in access to and benefit from healthcare services/ To ensure gender equality in access to and benefits from healthcare services

²⁰ Target 1: Women's proportion in all levels of Party Committees for the 2016 – 2020 tenure will be from 25% or higher; proportion of female National Assembly deputies, female members of People's Councils at all levels tenure 2011 – 2015 will be from 30% or higher and above 35% for the 2016 – 2020 tenure.

Target 2: by 2015, 80% and by 2020, more than 95% of Ministries, ministerial agencies, Government agencies, People's Committees of all levels will have key female leaders

Target 3: by 2015, 70% and by 2020, 100% of Party and State agencies, socio-political organization will have key female leaders if the proportion of female staff, civil servants, public employees and workers in those agencies or organizations is 30% or higher

Target 1: The sex ratio at birth shall not exceed 113 male infants per 100 female infants by 2015 and 115/100 by 2020. – **ACHIEVED**²¹

At Objective 6, Target 1 aimed to improve gender equality in family life, especially by reducing women's time gap in housework. However, the target was not achieved.

Objective 6: To ensure gender equality in family life, gradually eliminating gender-based violence

Target 1: Shorten the women's time gap in doing housework by 2 times as compared with men by 2015 and by 1.5 times lower by 2020.

Target 2 Result: "According to the findings of the Labor Force Survey in 2019, women's time spent on doing housework was 2.1 times higher than that of men. Specifically, on a weekly basis, women spent nearly 39 hours a week for paid labour and production and 18.9 hours for unpaid housework, while men spent 40 hours on paid labour and production and 8.9 hours in unpaid housework. Thus, this target was not met as required by NSGE 2011-2020." (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 65)

Objective 5²² and its targets are set to ensure gender equality in the cultural and information domain. Achievements under this objective contribute to raising community awareness and reducing gender stereotypes. Evidence of these achievements includes:

²¹ "According to the 2019 Population and Housing Census, the sex ratio at birth (SRB) was 111.5 live male births per 100 live female births by 2019, which exceeded the set target (115). **However, bringing the SRB back to its natural level is quite challenging.** A detailed analysis of the 2019 Population and Housing Census results shows that 48 provinces had SRBs that were higher than the natural level (105-106 live male births per 100 live female births), of which 25 provinces/cities had the SRB of more than 111.5, higher than the national SRB. In particular, there were provinces with SRB at above 120 live male births per 100 live female births such as Bac Giang (126.3), Ha Nam (125.3), Hung Yen (123.6), Son La (121.8), Hoa Binh (121.8), Ba Ria-Vung Tau (121.1). The ratio of 111.5 boys born per 100 girls remains significantly high and is associated with a shortage of 46,000 girls or equivalent to 6.2% of all girls being born each year, whereby Viet Nam is listed in the top 4 countries out of the 14 countries and territories in the world with the highest sex ratios at birth.⁷³ **The mindset of son preference over daughters coupled with the easy access to assisted reproductive technology are the main reasons why the practice of foetal sex selection has persisted for many years.** It is projected that the number of surplus men aged 15- 49 by 2034 will be likely to reach 250,000 if the sex ratio at birth does not decrease. After 2040, the proportion of redundant men will account for 8% of men aged 20- 39.⁷⁴ **The scarcity of women will put additional pressure on women to marry at a younger age, which is likely to lead to prostitution as well as the development of trafficking in women.**" (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 48–49)

²² Target 1: Strive to have at least two specialized columns communicating on gender equality per month on the grassroots information system in communes, wards, townships by 2020. - **ACHIEVED**

Target 2: By 2015, there will be 90% and by 2020, 100% of radio and television stations at national and local levels having specialized themes/columns on gender equality awareness raising. **ACHIEVED**

"Target 2: By 2015, there will be 90% and by 2020, 100% of radio and television stations at national and local levels having specialized themes/columns on gender equality awareness raising. In all provinces and cities, 100% of national and local radio and television stations had periodically broadcast specialized columns/ pages to raise awareness of gender equality in diverse and abundant forms. Gender equality has been mainstreamed creatively, suitable for many different types of audience. **The specialized editorials on gender equality have focused on their translation into a variety of ethnic languages using the most easily understood and memorable forms of communication in order to delineate examples of good people, good deeds, and criticize incorrect and misleading attitudes as well as behaviour in the family and in society.**⁸⁷" (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 66)

First, the project “Collaboration with the Mass Media to Raise Public Awareness about Gender Equality and to Reduce Gender Stereotypes in Communication Products (2011-2013)” emerged as a result of Solution 1 (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 57).

Solution 1: Raise gender awareness for media people; eliminate gender stereotyped messages and images in cultural and information products.

Second, Solution 2's impact is seen in the increasing portrayal of confident and assertive women in the mass media alongside images of men sharing housework (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 59–60).

Solution 2: Intensify communications and education about gender on mass media in diverse and flexible forms, suitable to each target group and region.

The Ministry of Information and Communications (MoIC) and related agencies promoted gender equality laws and regular grassroots communication. The Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA) annually publishes over 600,000 free bilingual leaflets on political gender equality. The national contest “Exploring Policies and Laws on Gender Equality” had up to 700,000 entries. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MoCST) raised awareness of the Gender Equality Law for provincial officers, and media now show confident women alongside men sharing housework. Since 2016, MoLISA has led the annual National Action Month for Gender Equality and gender-based violence prevention, featuring contests, forums, and survivor support. These efforts reached tens of millions of people and were highly praised by international organizations. Various ministries and local authorities have implemented innovative communication and policy dissemination practices to promote gender equality. (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 59–60)

Third, Solution 3 resulted in local authorities across various provinces discovering and destroying communication products that violated the Gender Equality Law and the Ordinance on Population between 2011 and 2015. These products included tapes, CDs, and books containing content related to domestic violence, gender stereotypes, and guidance on sex selection for babies (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 59–60).

Solution 3: Regularly inspect and supervise cultural and information activities and products from a gender perspective: “Surveillance and supervision of cultural and information activities and products from a gender perspective have been implemented by some districts and certain results were obtained. In the period of 2011-2015, local authorities in various provinces discovered and destroyed communication products such as tapes, CDs and books violating the Gender Equality Law and the Ordinance on Population, for example, those containing content of domestic violence, gender stereotypes, and guidance on how to choose the sex of babies. The Department of Information and Communications of Thai Nguyen instructed media agencies to cut down gender-stereotyped news and programs.⁹¹ The inspection of cultural, information activities and products from a gender perspective has received continual attention in the period 2016-2020.” (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 60)

Fourth, Study participants also confirm that the Law on marriage and family requires that men and women be a certain age to get married. This can help. But further attempts and efforts should be made in targeted areas where local customs are still maintained and practiced.

“In remote provinces and regions, there's more emphasis on educating children about early marriage in schools. I'm confident that the rate of early marriage has decreased as a result.” (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

I see that the Law on Marriage and Family²³ can be a potential solution to the issue of child marriage/early marriage). This issue is prevalent among certain ethnic minority groups who have a tendency to marry at a very young age. For instance, if a boy asks a 14-15-year-old girl to stop going to school and marry him, the girl may agree and drop out of school to get married. So, these girls go to visit their boyfriends and are later sold. If the Marriage and Family Law can address the problem of early marriage, it could potentially reduce the number of girls who leave school early to get married. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

However, there are still shortcomings in the implementation of Objective 5. Communications that reinforce gender stereotypes persist, hindering progress in improving the image and position of women (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 62). For instance, the preference for sons over daughters, coupled with easy access to reproductive technologies, continues to perpetuate gender biases. In online newspapers, print media, and television (including advertisements), gender stereotypes remain prevalent, depicting men as politicians, successful individuals, and economic pillars, while women are often shown in contexts of poverty, needing help, or as victims (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 62). Furthermore, the periodic inspection and evaluation of communication efforts have not received sufficient attention, with local reports focusing mainly on the number of activities rather than analyzing the impact of these communication measures on changing awareness, attitudes, and behaviours regarding gender equality (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 62).

Generally, traditional gender role expectations continue to confine women to household duties, perpetuating gender inequality. Therefore, it is crucial to advance gender equality policies to ensure a better future outcome. Specifically, gender equality policies should prioritize raising community awareness about the equal rights of children, regardless of gender. Parents need education on this issue, focusing on understanding their children's wishes and development. Children should also be educated to balance filial duties with their own personal development and aspirations. Addressing trafficking requires a deeper understanding of how social norms and traditional values contribute to inequality and the expectation that women should sacrifice for others (Vijayarasa, 2010). Meaningful change must consider these cultural and structural factors (Vijayarasa, 2010).

[...] In fact, both men and women are victims of prejudice and gender inequality. If men are assigned too many roles, they will feel pressure to meet society's expectations. Similarly, women have fewer opportunities, even though their abilities make them suitable for other roles. Therefore, women's empowerment must also change society's view of men and women. This is crucial because when men are relieved of society's burdens and expectations, they can be their true selves. Meanwhile, women are freed from prejudices and stereotypes, becoming independent and stronger, with the right to make their own decisions. Such

²³ The Vietnamese Law on Marriage and Family (Vietnam Law on Marriage and Law 2014, 2014) stipulates that both the man and the woman must meet certain age requirements in order to get married. Specifically, the man must be at least 20 years old, while the woman must be at least 18 years old.

changes bring many differences and improvements. (N5, woman, 50s, NGO) - The participant confirmed, responded to the question: “Whether women's empowerment contributes to reducing human trafficking”.

[...] From my personal perspective, gender equality has improved significantly and noticeably. Without even mentioning issues related to gender inequality in the trafficking, I see clear improvements in everyday life. For example, in the past, if I reached marriageable age but hadn't married yet, family members would gather to discuss it and assess it, considering it a significant issue. However, now I see my relatives viewing this as normal. They advise me that if I want to get married, then go ahead, but if not, it's fine too. They feel that it's okay whether I choose to marry or not. This shows that the community's mindset has progressed significantly in terms of gender equality. (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

I think women's voices have definitely improved compared to 10 years ago. While I don't have a lot of data to back this up, my observations suggest that women's voices are now stronger. For example, societal prejudices have changed. Ten years ago, an unmarried woman with a child would have faced severe stigma, but now single motherhood is more accepted and even respected. People value women's voices more today; they are not criticized or shamed as they used to be. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

We need to raise awareness and take concrete actions to reduce gender discrimination, especially in areas where there is a strong preference for boys. Policies should intervene at the family level, addressing the issue from multiple angles and involving behaviour change communication. Legal measures should be put in place to regulate sex selection practices and promote new, positive gender norms. To develop effective solutions, we need a systematic understanding of cultural and anthropological aspects. I believe that within families, it's important to help them see how these biases negatively affect their lives. For example, they should understand the consequences of the preference for sons. By showing them the bigger picture and the traps of these prejudices, they can start to adopt new perspectives. For instance, both sons and daughters can perform ancestral worship; it's perfectly normal, and there's nothing wrong with it. This process needs to be deeply embedded within the community, highlighting the disadvantages of traditional biases and encouraging new norms. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

In summary, this section highlights that gender equality policies have several objectives (objectives 1, 3, 4, 5, 6) aimed at addressing gender gaps in various aspects, thereby contributing to the partial reduction of the root causes associated with gender stereotypes and bias against women. However, they have not fully achieved the intended goals. Further implementation of gender equality policies, with an emphasis on raising awareness in the entire community to eliminate the effects of gender norms, is essential.

6.1.2 Provide Education and Employment Opportunities

This section outlines the specific goals of gender equality policies designed to increase educational and employment opportunities for women. In terms of education and employment, the implementation of Objective 3 has facilitated educational advancements, while Objective 2 has promoted employment opportunities for women. Although gender equality policies have demonstrated their potential to reduce educational and economic disparities between men and women, current shortcomings highlight the need for further policy interventions to ensure equal access to education and employment for everyone.

Objective 3: While gender equality policies have created conditions for improving education among boys and girls, especially those belonging to ethnic minority groups²⁴, and have implemented some solutions that promote the achievement of targets set²⁵, for the literacy rate (MOLISA et al., 2021), education disparity remains an issue.

Even though both targets under Objective 3 were met and there has been a change in school attendance, with ethnic minority girls now attending lower and upper secondary schools at higher rates than boys, many of the policies and solutions outlined in the National Strategy on Gender Equality (NSGE) did not achieve the expected effectiveness and efficiency. Despite reaching the literacy rate target set in the NSGE 2011-2020, survey data revealed that the lowest literacy rates were among ethnic minority women and women in poor households. Specifically, the literacy rate was 99.1% among Kinh and Hoa women but only 83.2% among ethnic minority women. Similarly, women in the poorest quintile had a literacy rate of 84.2%, compared to 100% in the richest quintile (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 29). Access to education and its quality remains a significant challenge for ethnic minority children; providing quality education for children from poor and near-poor households and children with disabilities continues to be a future challenge (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 46–47).

Objective 2: The implementation of Objective 2 has led to the creation of more employment opportunities for women, thereby contributing to the reduction of job shortages for them. Over the ten-year

²⁴ There has been a shift in access to education among ethnic minority children evident by the change from a period when ethnic minority girls had lower attendance rates than boys to the present lower rates of ethnic minority boys attending school as compared to girls in lower and upper secondary schools (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 46–47)

²⁵ **Objective 3:** To raise the quality of female human resources, gradually ensuring equal participation between men and women in the education and training domain/ To improve the quality of female human resources, gradually ensure equal participation between men and women in the sphere of education, and training

Target 1: By 2020, the literacy rate among women aged between 15 and 60 will be equal to that of men (98%). This rate will be 94% in the 14 provinces with disadvantaged economic conditions and 90% among ethnic minority areas. -

ACHIEVED

Target 2: The proportion of women with a master's degree will be 40% by 2015 and 50% by 2020. The proportion of women with a doctoral degree will be 20% by 2015 and 25% by 2020 – **UNDERACHIEVED**

Solution 1: Incorporate gender equality in the teaching curriculum in the national education system, especially at the upper secondary, lower secondary and primary education levels. Include gender content in refresher training and fostering programs on state management, advanced training on political theory in an attempt to sensitize the contingent of key leaders.

Solution 2: There were specific policies for some target groups, policies, and scholarship programs to support girls and women to participate in studies to improve their qualifications. Specifically, there were incentive policies for girls, women in rural areas and ethnic minority areas; specific policies for preschool education in remote and disadvantaged areas; as well as policies to attract male teachers to primary and preschool education.

Solution 3: Reviewing to eliminate gender-stereotyped messages and images in the current textbook system.

Solution 4: Mainstreaming gender in policies, programs and plans of the education sector; building a database disaggregated by gender and ethnicity at different educational levels.

implementation period, two targets within this objective (Targets 1 and 4) have been successfully achieved through the implementation of solutions²⁶ aimed at increasing employment opportunities for women.

OBJECTIVE 2: To reduce gender gaps in the spheres of economy, labor, and employment; to increase the access of poor rural women and ethnic minority women to economic resources and the labor market.

Target 1 Result: “Annually, ensure at least 40% for each sex (male and female) out of the total number of newly employed people. In the period of 2011-2019, the proportion of women consistently accounted for over 48% of the total number of workers in new jobs created annually. In 2019, jobs were created for about 1,508 million workers nationwide, of whom female workers accounted for about 48%,²⁶ reaching the set target.” (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 31)

Target 4 result: During this period, 100% of loan applications of women in poor rural and ethnic minority areas who were beneficiaries of social policy credit programs and were eligible for loans were approved and disbursed promptly.²⁹ Thus, this target achieved what was set out in the NSGE by 2020” (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 31–32)

While Targets 1 and 4 have shown some positive outcomes in improving educational and employment prospects for women, particularly in rural areas, persistent gender disparities persist in labour and employment, characterized by lower qualifications among female workers, especially in vocational education (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 39–40). Female workers are often concentrated in low-skilled and low-status occupations, such as unpaid household work or self-employment, which lack adequate legal protection and social insurance coverage. Despite female workers earning an average monthly salary equivalent to only 89% of that earned by male workers, women, particularly those from ethnic minorities, illiterate, and impoverished backgrounds, face multiple disadvantages. Although women employed in

²⁶ **Solution 1:** Reduce the costs of workers’ job access and time to find jobs by building a labour market information system, counselling on employment and investment opportunities. Develop a gender disaggregated database on the labour market and vocational training. There should be specific measures to encourage investment in providing low-cost information on labour markets, investment markets, financial markets, etc., ensuring integrity and up-to-date.”

Solution 2: Continue to refine policies and expand the participants of social insurance types, especially for new groups of workers; Take measures to meet the needs of women and men participating in voluntary insurance and unemployment insurance, paying attention to vulnerable groups (such as migrant and poor workers in rural areas, ethnic minority areas).

Solution 3: Ensuring necessary conditions for women to have full and equal access to economic resources (such as arable land, credit sources, market information, information on laws and policies), and equal opportunity to engage in production and business.

Solution 4: Vocational training policies and programs should focus on rural areas, ethnic minority areas; attract more women workers; improve professional and technical skills, techniques, methods of business management and the development of handicrafts, agricultural products processing, consumer goods production as well as the development of services for production and the lives of rural people. Policies should be issued to support vocational training institutions for rural workers, especially the institutions that attract an intensive number of women workers.

Solution 6: Accentuate the inspection of the implementation of policy relative to women workers to ensure efficiency and equity in vocational training, social insurance, labour protection policies and retirement regime.

industrial zones may have more stable incomes compared to agricultural workers, they still encounter difficulties accessing basic social services and participating in cultural and spiritual activities (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 39–40).

Despite the current shortcomings, the study participants acknowledged that gender equality policies have improved women's educational and occupational opportunities over the past ten years.

I've been living here for over a decade, and over the past 10 years, gender equality has improved significantly, thanks to local programs. More girls are attending school, and women are participating in various activities. Every month, the women's union often integrates programs to enhance gender equality for them. (O6, man, 45s, Others)

The image of women in Vietnam has also improved significantly. Women are seen as capable of contributing economically and excelling academically. Politically, there are more women in leadership roles. [...] Educationally, there has been progress too. Compared to ten years ago, the number of women with advanced degrees, such as professors, PhDs, and master's degrees, has increased. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

Related policies in gender equality in Vietnam have significantly improved. For example, in some provinces, there are policies encouraging women with small children to participate in labour and employment activities, the proportion of women in leadership and management positions, or the proportion of ethnic minority women or female students in higher education. These are clear manifestations of the results of implementing supportive policies. Compared to 10 years ago, from a personal perspective, I believe that gender equality policies in Vietnam have progressed significantly and achieved many results.[...] In the gender equality strategy, aspects related to vocational training, vocational education, employment support, and employment counselling are aimed at providing more opportunities for women to participate in vocational training or to have high-level skills for employment, thereby limiting the situation where they do not have high-paying jobs and have to move to other places to work, which is particularly risky for women. Previously, mainly families only provided opportunities for boys to attend school, for example, but now, the rates of girls completing high school, including young girls from ethnic minority groups have changed. Currently, there is a change in girls' participation in higher education. For example, the proportion of rural women from ethnic minorities participating in vocational training classes or training courses on technical guidance for farming and cultivation has also increased significantly. This is a difference, a change in having support systems for women to participate in job introduction programs in industrial parks in various provinces. (G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

See endnotes for for additional quotes from study participants on Gender equality policies provide education and employment opportunities: ^{xxvi}

In summary, gender equality policies have made some progress in improving women's and girls' access to education and employment opportunities. However, despite reaching certain goals, gender gaps in education and employment still persist. Therefore, considering the aim of reducing these gaps, which contribute to trafficking, it's essential to continue supporting these policies and uphold them in the future.

6.1.3 Address Domestic Violence

This section emphasises how gender equality policies contribute to addressing domestic violence. Although policies, particularly the implementation of objectives 5 and 6, aim to tackle this issue, several efforts remain unfulfilled. Moreover, there is a lack of statistics to assess the implementation and outcomes effectively.

The study participants also acknowledge the impact of policies in addressing domestic violence, which is consistent with the policies' goals.

In the past, domestic violence, where husbands would constantly drink and abuse their wives, has also changed a lot. From my personal observation, I see that this problem has decreased significantly. If we compare the past two decades, there's a stark difference, and currently, there's considerable progress. (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

[...] I've noticed improvements in how women respond to abuse as well. Ten years ago, many women would have suffered in silence, but now there is much more media coverage and support for women who speak out against abuse. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

Regarding Objective 5 (Result of solution 2): Since 2016, MoLISA has led the National Action Month for Gender Equality and prevention of gender-based violence. Activities include contests, forums, seminars, and survivor support. The initiative has achieved significant results and international recognition.

Grassroots information systems in communes, wards, and townships have allocated broadcasting time for gender equality and domestic violence issues, fulfilling Objective 5, target 1.

Since 2016, MoLISA has been leading and collaborating with central and local agencies to host the National Action Month for Gender Equality and Prevention and Response to Gender-based Violence annually from 15th November to 15th December. The Action Months are conducted simultaneously, demonstrating the strong commitment of agencies, organizations, and the community to create a safe and non-violent living environment for women and children. Various activities related to the themes of the Action Months are organized such as contests, dialogue forums, seminars, visits, and support for survivors. The Action Months have achieved encouraging results and have been highly appreciated by international organizations. Tens of thousands of voice broadcasts and millions of communication publications have been released. Tens of millions of people have been reached by the messages of the Action Months at both national and local levels (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 59–60). Overall, target 1 of Objective 5 has been fulfilled: essentially, 100% of grassroots information systems in communes, wards, and townships have allocated broadcasting time for issues related to gender equality and domestic violence caused by gender inequality (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 57).

The implementation of Objective 6²⁷ resulted in positive outcomes through the following solutions: Solution 1 focused on reinforcing the building of cultural families, with a highlight on the gender equality

²⁷ Objective 6: To ensure gender equality in family life, gradually eliminating gender-based violence

criterion in the family. Solution 2 involved establishing sustainable family-building clubs, encouraging men's active involvement in creating happy, violence-free families. Solution 3 entailed piloting and expanding gender-based violence prevention and response counselling and support models.

Solution 1: Reinforcing the building of cultural families, with a highlight on the gender equality criterion in the family: "the MoCST issued Circular No. 12/2011/TT-BVHTTDL dated October 10, 2011 detailing the standards, order, procedures and dossiers for the recognition of such titles as "Cultural Family", "Cultural Hamlet", "Cultural Village", "Cultural Residential Area" and equivalent, in which the criteria for recognizing the title of a cultural family is stipulated in Clause 2, Article 4 of the Circular, which are "Equal, loving couples supporting each other to make progress. There is no domestic violence in any form and gender equality must be exercised; husband and wife give birth in strict compliance with regulations and share the responsibility to raise and teach their children well" (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 67)

Solution 2: Operate club models of happy, equal, free of violence families, attracting the active participation of men: "MoCST guided provinces and cities to operate a sustainable family-building club - a place for community activities, for communication and dissemination of advocacy, policy, and law as well as skills and knowledge of building happy families for families"(MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 68)

Solution 3: Pilot and replicate the model of GBV prevention and response counselling and support.: "During 2011-2015, there were 78 models nationwide on the prevention and minimization of the harmful effects of genderbased violence. After more than three years of piloting, the model was evaluated as effective. Many provinces/cities have replicated the model in other communes and wards in the area.¹⁰¹ As of 2018, the country had formed 9,024 models of domestic violence prevention and control, reaching 74.85% of the total communes/wards/townships nationwide;¹⁰² 33,192 reliable addresses in the community; 26,558 groups of domestic violence prevention and control and 19,812 clubs of building sustainable families.¹⁰³" (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 68)

However, despite efforts to address it, domestic violence remains a significant concern. While there has been a decline in physical and emotional violence against women from 2010 to 2019, sexual violence is on the rise, and many women still hesitate to seek help from formal assistance/service/agency (MOLISA et al., 2020, 2021, pp. 65–66). Additionally, the cultural stigma associated with domestic violence persists, with some provinces and cities opting to underreport or conceal cases to preserve their reputation, particularly in pursuit of titles such as "cultural residential area" (MOLISA et al., 2021, p. 69). So, the issue of concealing domestic violence persists due to societal attitudes and the belief in maintaining silence about this matter. This represents a significant policy shortcoming that has yet to be addressed.

Target 2: 40% by 2015 and 50% of detected domestic violence survivors by 2020 will be counselled on psychological and legal matters, get support and care at the support facilities for domestic violence survivors. Up to 75% of the detected perpetrators of domestic violence not being to criminal liability will be counselled at domestic violence counselling centers.

Under Objective 6, there was no official statistics for Target 2.

In summary, while gender equality policies have made efforts to combat gender inequality and mitigate its associated effects on women, thereby partially contributing to the prevention of human trafficking, the underlying causes of trafficking rooted in gender bias, stereotypes, and structural beliefs persist. These challenges highlight the ongoing need for gender equality policies, with a specific focus on raising awareness in the community and challenging existing gender norms. These policies should prioritize the idea that both men and women share responsibility for family life and that women have the right to pursue their life goals. Extensive propaganda and awareness campaigns are necessary to change societal perceptions of women beyond traditional household roles. Stressing the need for shared responsibility for household tasks and childcare between men and women is crucial for promoting gender equality. Additionally, it is crucial to encourage everyone in the community to speak out and report violence while supporting and amplifying the voices of women.

6.1.4 Maintaining and improving Gender Equality Policies to Empower Women and Girls

This section highlights the importance of considering the potential impact of gender equality policies on reducing trafficking, despite their current shortcomings. Therefore, it is crucial to sustain gender equality policies and make further improvements, specifically by increasing community-wide awareness to reduce gender bias and enhance women's empowerment.

A gender responsive and rights based approach is integral to credible development and related anti-trafficking strategies (D’Cunha, 2002) as cited in (Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). In Vietnam, women empowerment is considered effective way to prevent trafficking (Nguyen et al., 2022; Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). Due to the improvement of gender equality policy and education and the proven contribution of women and their participation in all spheres of life, public attitudes to women’s role and contributions have changed positively (Khuat et al., 2015, as cited in Nguyen et al., 2022). Progress towards gender equality may have a positive impact on the current unequal status of girl children in Vietnamese families (Vijayarasa, 2010).

The study participants also indicated that initiatives aimed at empowering women and girls can help amplify their voices and inner resources. This, in turn, helps reduce their vulnerability to trafficking and aids in prevention efforts. In broad terms, gender equality policies significantly promote women's empowerment, enhancing their visibility and status in society and reducing their vulnerability to trafficking. These policies elevate women's voices and positions, empowering them from previously subordinate roles and altering the gender dynamics that marginalize women. Thus, gender equality policies are indeed beneficial for trafficking prevention, and policies aimed at empowering women and girls should be continued and strengthened. Further progress in policy implementation is essential. This should involve raising community-wide awareness to eradicate gender norms and biases and continuing to enforce

women's empowerment policies. Empowerment initiatives can also help bridge the gender gap, promote equal opportunities, and combat gender stereotypes, which are some of the significant contributors to human trafficking.

Understanding one's values is crucial because it makes them immune to being bought or sold, violated or abused. [...] If individuals respect their values, they can respect others, and others will respect them, too. In family, society, and life, there are not only material values but also other values that should not be violated. Women's rights, for example, should be the same as men's, including the right to learn, access resources, live, and be protected. Recognising one's value can help them in several ways (this is education from the root). Firstly, it can help them to understand their rights and equal opportunities. Secondly, it can help them to know their future orientation. [...] Thirdly, it enables them to speak up without fear of embarrassment. [...] Recognising values also help individuals to identify their rights and obligations and respect the values of others. (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

When we empower women and girls, they gain a voice, enabling them to combat human trafficking actively. That is very obvious. [...] The more empowered individuals are, the less likely they fall into the risk. (N2, man, 45s, NGO)

"I feel like day by day, there's more support from policies for women in Vietnam, so I see gender equality improving overall. If we compare it to 10 years ago, there's been quite a significant change." (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

I think gender inequality is closely linked to economic, political, and cultural issues. When these conditions improve, women's situations also get better. [...] Women often face more disadvantages, making them more vulnerable. So, we need to create resources for them, like education, economic opportunities, and political participation, to strengthen their voices. I believe these changes will significantly improve their lives. [...] The most important thing is for women to be in control of their own lives, which will reduce their risks. We should focus on providing resources, especially for women in high-risk and marginalized communities. [...] When women are well-educated and financially independent, they're less likely to fall victim to exploitation. If women have good education and financial stability, no one would want to leave. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

Promoting women's leadership, a crucial aspect of women's empowerment can positively impact trafficking prevention efforts by advancing gender equality.

When women participate in leadership roles, they can present to speak for women in the community. They are women, so they understand the characteristics of women, from which they promote the process and measures to prevent human trafficking in the community, which also helps minimise risks for victims of trafficking. People, [...] I think if women are participating in leadership positions, there will be more attention to women, thereby promoting awareness of women and people in general in preventing human trafficking. (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

I do not do gender research, but I know that A. province (participant's province) also does quite well in programs to improve the status of women. It could be because the Chairman and Secretary are women, so those programmes are pushed up/stepped up. (O6, man, 45s, Others)

In summary, participants in the study argue that gender inequality across various areas contributes to human trafficking. They believe that gender equality policies can address these disparities and help prevent trafficking. Furthermore, they think that such policies in Vietnam are effective in improving the visibility and status of women in society compared to previous decades.

Nevertheless, as long as stereotypes persist and the demand for women and girls as commodities in the trafficking market continues, they will remain vulnerable to trafficking. This makes them susceptible to various forms of exploitation and suffering.

6.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Gender Equality Policy in Empowering Returnees

Overall, support workers recognise that women's empowerment is key to the successful reintegration of trafficked returnees. Trafficked women suffer not only from exploitation but also from social stigma, which often leaves them feeling undervalued and voiceless. Therefore, it is crucial for them to recognise their own worth and develop inner strength to lead meaningful lives. This study supports existing research, highlighting the significance of promoting autonomy and inner resilience during rehabilitation.

Research has shown that empowering trafficked women is essential for their successful reintegration (Crocker & Garcia, 2010; Lazzarino et al., 2022). Resilience is a significant factor in their rehabilitation process (Sharma, 2015). Individuals with self-confidence, assertiveness, and self-esteem are better equipped to make autonomous decisions (Ach & Pollmann, 2022). It is argued in this section that empowering trafficked individuals to build their inner strength and realise their value and resilience can contribute to successful reintegration. Achieving this empowerment and resilience requires the support of society.

First, empowerment initiatives that focus on nurturing autonomy and willpower are crucial. They enable women to recognise and harness their internal worth. By helping them develop these qualities, women can overcome past difficulties, broaden their horizons, and embrace new opportunities for sustainable recovery.

Each victim has different needs, but I think, first and foremost, the most important thing is to empower them. When they reintegrate into the community, they will have to face many challenges, such as social prejudices, traditional concepts, and excessive community behaviours. So how do they overcome it? That is very important. That is why victims often spend six months in shelters where they attend classes to improve their self-worth and recognise their needs and wants. It helps them to decide what they want, why they need it, and what can help them. The most crucial aspect of this process is empowering the victims to make decisions for themselves. [...] While they are there (shelter), they are supported to improve their self-worth, understand themselves, and don't blame themselves for being trafficked anymore. [...] They must understand what they need and determine the best

approach for themselves. Making independent decisions is the most important thing. [...] If they cannot make their own decisions, they may struggle to overcome societal prejudices and barriers. If they cannot overcome barriers, it will be tough to access support and remain trapped in a difficult situation while still trapped in their shell [...]. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

“If they do not know that they also have their value and autonomy, they will fall into trafficking again, as they do not know how to reintegrate back”. (G4, woman, 30s, Gov)

It is important to understand their abilities and skills. [...] Raising their awareness means that we should help them recognise their own strengths, know what they can do to make a living, and how to do their job. [...] We need to identify their existing resources (what they have) and find the most suitable support to help them develop themselves. Once stabilising, they can rejoin the community with a different and more positive perspective. (O6, man, 45s, Others)

Second, to help returnees regain their personal strength, autonomy, resilience, and power, the entire community needs to be involved. This is not just an individual responsibility; this is a collective responsibility shared by everyone in the community.

I once supported a girl who was sold twice in China. At first, she was very depressed and didn't really want anything, but then I found out her strengths [...] It was a successful case. Regarding the factors that contributed to that success, the first thing still depends on them themselves. [...] **To help them reach their potential, we need to make them feel safe and respected**, and we must identify their strengths. (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

Overcoming self-deprecating thoughts can be very challenging, but it's not impossible. Many people return to live in their hometowns for 1-2 years, get married, and even invite us to their wedding. Others attend school, earn university degrees, work in great environments such as hospitals or schools, or study abroad. [...] (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

That girl was trafficked and returned; she was very young, then she lived in a shelter and was supported to go to college. She was very talented and clever, and after completing her studies, she began working. It seemed like she got married last year or so [...]. Fortunately, she was able to overcome her inferiority complex and continue her education. [...] She was **very special and determined** to attend school [...] Shelter helped her with her tuition fees. When she went to university, she worked part-time and paid for her expenses **herself**. Although the shelter **did not have enough funding** to support her throughout, they reached out to **several organisations** to help her achieve her dream of going to school. After four years of college, she graduated and landed a job. [...] She is a very **determined individual**. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

In summary, study participants concur that the empowerment of trafficked women is crucial for preventing human trafficking and supporting the reintegration of trafficked individuals. Consequently, policies aimed at empowering women could potentially contribute to successful reintegration.

While gender equality policies do not address all challenges faced by trafficked individuals, they provide essential legislative support for reintegration, that enables, for example, access to healthcare, economic opportunities, and community support. These efforts align with the broader goals of women's empowerment and contribute positively to the reintegration of trafficking returnees. However, critical

factors for successful reintegration are positive care, acceptance, and support from family and the wider community. This requires community-wide engagement and awareness-raising to reduce stigmatization and create a sympathetic environment for sustainable, long-term healing.

The journey for victims of trafficking returning to normal life is long, complicated, and full of challenges, which include overcoming physical and mental health issues, lack of resources, and social stigma. While gender equality policies may not directly solve all of these problems, they do provide some support that can help with the reintegration process for trafficked individuals. These policies help in implementing key support services in two main areas: access to healthcare (such as medical assistance and psychological counselling) and tailored support for livelihoods (educational or vocational training and production loans).

6.2.1 Strength: Gender equality policies assist healthcare services to returnees

The National Strategy for Gender Equality in Vietnam, under Objective 6, Target 3, set to be achieved by 2020, sought to ensure that all trafficked victims received support and community reintegration services.

OBJECTIVE 6: To ensure gender equality in family life, gradually eliminating gender-based violence.

Target 3: By 2015 and sustaining up to 2020, 100% of the returned victims of trafficking through being returned, rescued, and self-returned will be entitled to support and community reintegration services.

Data from the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA) indicates that between 2013 and 2019, 100% of detected trafficked victims, predominantly female, received various forms of assistance, including medical and psychological support, legal aid, educational or vocational training, and loans for production²⁸ (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 66–67).

According to data consolidated by MoLISA from 2013 to 2019, the LISA sector received and supported 2,961 trafficked victims who were rescued by functional authorities and/or returned by themselves. Most of these victims were female (2,891 people) and 18% (528) of them were under the age of 18. All victims received support upon request, of whom 2,216 people received assistance for **essential needs**; 1,347 people received **medical assistance**; 2,105 people received **psychological counselling**; 1,003 obtained **legal aid**; 103 acquired **educational or vocational training support**; 817 received subsidies for initial difficult circumstances and 72 people obtained **loans for production**. Thus, 100% of the detected trafficked victims being returned, rescued or self-returning were entitled to the support and community reintegration services. This target was achieved vis a vis the target set out under the NSGE.” (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 66–67)

²⁸ Similar to start-up business (for production or other business sectors)

6.2.2 Strength: Gender equality policies create employment opportunities for women

Gender equality policies create economic opportunities by increasing the likelihood of trafficked women accessing loans for start-up businesses or employment opportunities. The Vietnam Bank for Social Policies reported a significant increase in loans to women customers in rural and ethnic minorities, demonstrating the policies' contribution to economic empowerment.

As reported by the Vietnam Bank for Social Policies (VBSP), in the period 2011-2020 (28: Vietnam Bank for Social Policies' Report on loan turnover to female customers) total loan turnover to female customers in poor rural areas and ethnic minorities hit 111,502 billion VND, with 4.9 million rounds of customers borrowing loans, accounting for 48% of total loan turnover and 49% of customers obtaining loans from VBSP in this area. As of June 30, 2020, the total number of female customers applying for loans from social policy credit programs in poor rural and ethnic minority areas was 1.47 million, accounting for 47% of total customers with outstanding loans in the area, accounting for 52,336 billion VND, representing 47% of total outstanding loans, a growth of 29,075 billion VND compared to early 2011 and an increase of 17,868 billion VND compared to the end of 2015. The average growth rate was 8.5% per year. During this period, 100% of loan applications of women in poor rural and ethnic minority areas who were beneficiaries of social policy credit programs and were eligible for loans were approved and disbursed promptly. Thus, this target achieved what was set out in the NSGE (National Strategy on Gender Equality) by 2020. (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 31–32)

6.2.3 Strength: Gender equality policies aim at resource optimisation to benefit women

Gender equality policies aim to optimise available resources by enhancing mobilisation from various sources for programme implementation. This includes supporting trafficked returnees under Objective 6 (Target 3). Although these policies may not directly address resource shortages for trafficked individuals, they indirectly support them by ensuring efficient resource use. Trafficked women may benefit from this resource optimization, improving their reintegration prospects.

“Enhance the mobilisation of resources from organisations and individuals domestically and abroad for the implementation of the Program and the efficient use of resources mobilised” is one measure of implementation of its program (Section IV: MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION, National Plan on Gender Equality 2016-2020).

6.2.4 Strength: Gender equality policies facilitate community-based support groups/models

Regarding peer networks, while gender equality policies do not establish specific peer support networks for trafficked individuals, several pilot models under these policies support gender-based violence victims and can encourage trafficked individuals to participate and connect with one another. These models include social work centres, shelters, and community-based support groups, which have been effectively

implemented across different provinces and cities in Vietnam. Although these models²⁹ do not completely solve the issues faced by trafficked returnees, they can contribute to mobilizing community support through the expansion of social centres aimed at improving gender equality and creating a safer environment for trafficked returnees. An example of this is the clubs supporting women at risk.

The model of clubs supporting women at risk of forced marriage to foreigners (in 18 provinces and cities where there is a high number of women getting married to foreigners); the model of safe, friendly, non-violent schools (at six lower secondary schools in Hanoi). These models have made certain contributions to the prevention and response to GBV, enabling community reintegration of survivors while serving as a practical experience for replication in the coming period. (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 88–90)

The Model of Community counselling groups in the form of a club on gender equality, family, and marriage to limit the negative consequences of marriages involving foreigners. During only 4 years from 2011 to 2013, there had been 50 clubs established, attracting more than 1,000 members at 14 communes, wards and townships of 13 provinces and cities. (MOLISA et al., 2021, pp. 88–90)

6.2.5 Weakness: Gender equality policies have yet to focus on creating a stigma-free environment

In summary, gender equality policies may not directly address all the challenges faced by trafficked individuals, but they do partly provide essential support for their reintegration. This support includes access to healthcare, economic opportunities, and community services. These efforts are in line with the broader goals of women's empowerment and contribute positively to the reintegration of trafficking returnees. However, the critical factors for successful reintegration are positive care, acceptance, and support from family and the wider community. Achieving this requires community-wide engagement and awareness-raising to reduce stigmatization and create a sympathetic environment for sustainable, long-term healing. This core issue has yet to be addressed by the existing policy.

Current policies address community reintegration services primarily through government efforts but lack emphasis on raising community awareness to support returnees actively. This responsibility is often left to government and non-government agencies. The research finds that the broader community plays a central role in the healing process, emphasizing the importance of returnees being welcomed with open arms by their families and the wider community rather than merely receiving services from paid workers. Policies

²⁹ Based on the Review report on the implementation of the national strategy on gender equality, 2011-2020 in Vietnam, various pilot models have been implemented in recent years using both state budgets (through the NAPGE of 2011-2015, National Action Program on GE 2016-2020 and the Social Assistance System Development Target Program for the 2016-2020 period) and international funding sources. These pilot programs include a Social Work Center model to support gender equality services in 10 provinces, a Gender-based violence response service facilities model in eight provinces/cities, a community-based Reliable address - shelters model in 63 communes and in 63 provinces and cities, a model to support women at risk of forced marriage to foreigners, a model to support women in creating jobs, starting and developing their business, a "Dormitory women workers' club" model, a Center to enhance women's vocational training model, a Community counselling group in the form of a club model, and a "Safe and friendly cities for women" and girls model. These models have been assessed as effective and providing quality services (MOLISA et al., 2021).

that provide government and non-government support services, although well-intended, fall short if returnees feel rejected by their families and communities of origin.

To improve reintegration, it is crucial to raise awareness not only about trafficking but also about the integration needs of returnees. Study participants noted that awareness about these needs is currently insufficient. Most importantly, successful reintegration acts as a protective factor against re-trafficking. By raising awareness about the needs of returnees and reducing family and community prejudice and stigma, further victimisation can be prevented, reducing the need for extensive support resources. Thus, stigma reduction is essential.

In summary, while existing policies are beneficial, expanding them to include community-wide awareness-raising about the post-trafficking needs of returnees would enhance their effectiveness. This would help the community understand its role and responsibilities in creating a safe and supportive environment for trafficked individuals, thereby improving prospects for successful reintegration, contributing to the prevention of trafficking, and reducing the need for extensive support resources.

6.3 Intersectionality in Gender Equality Policies and Their Implications for Addressing Trafficking and Reintegration

This study assesses intersectionality in Vietnamese gender equality policies, identifying gaps in addressing compounding vulnerabilities. While some policies target literacy and economic participation for marginalised women, they lack a comprehensive intersectional framework. This research suggests that future policies should explicitly incorporate intersectionality to enhance the effectiveness of interventions.

Intersectionality is reflected to some extent in Vietnam's gender equality policies, particularly in efforts to address the root causes of trafficking and support the reintegration of returnees. These policies incorporate various intersecting factors such as ethnicity, geography, gender, economic status, and social status in different domains.

In addressing the causes of trafficking, policies focus on improving literacy rates among both men and women in remote, ethnic minority, and economically disadvantaged regions, as outlined in Target 1 of Objective 3 of the National Strategy for Gender Equality (Vietnam Government, 2010). Gender equality policies also aim to increase access to economic resources and labour markets for rural poor women and ethnic minority women, as stated in Objective 2 (Vietnam Government, 2010). Additionally, efforts to reduce gender disparities in political representation highlight the intersection of gender and social status, as set out in Objective 1 (Vietnam Government, 2010). In the economic sphere, policies seek to reduce gender disparities in employment, labour, and economic participation, as indicated in Objective 2 (Vietnam Government, 2010). Furthermore, to address gender bias and ethnicity-related barriers, policies include

translating gender equality awareness materials into various ethnic minority languages to improve accessibility through radio and television programmes, as stated in Target 2 of Objective 5 (Vietnam Government, 2010).

Regarding reintegration, gender equality policies aim to enhance employment opportunities for women and promote resource optimisation to benefit them, as highlighted in Objective 6 (Target 3) (Vietnam Government, 2010).

While these policies acknowledge some intersectional factors, they do not explicitly or comprehensively address the complex, overlapping disadvantages faced by trafficked returnees. Given the partial effectiveness of current policies in tackling the root causes of trafficking and reintegration challenges, future policy development should prioritise a more intersectional approach. This would ensure a holistic response to the multifaceted vulnerabilities experienced by survivors of trafficking.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

This study examines the experiences of Vietnamese trafficked individuals and identifies gaps in national gender equality policies (2010–2020) aimed at addressing human trafficking. Specifically, it explores how trafficked individuals experience gender inequality before, during, and after trafficking and assesses the extent to which existing gender equality policies address these inequalities. Additionally, the research evaluates the role of these policies in supporting the reintegration of trafficked individuals and strengthening broader anti-trafficking efforts.

The findings of this study provide new insights and thus contribute to the existing body of literature. Moreover, they offer insights that may have practical implications for improving the support of returnees in the community reintegration phase and preventing human trafficking in Vietnam.

The first and foremost is the implications of intersectionality in this research for the field and its practical applications. This research underscores the importance of an intersectional approach in understanding the reintegration of trafficked women in Vietnam. While feminist perspectives have traditionally provided valuable insights into gendered oppression, an intersectional lens reveals how multiple social identities—such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, and legal status—intersect to shape these women's experiences. By moving beyond a feminist-only framework, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of the structural barriers and facilitators affecting reintegration outcomes.

The adoption of an intersectional framework advances scholarship in the field by demonstrating how reintegration processes are influenced by interconnected systems of oppression and privilege. This approach challenges simplistic narratives that focus solely on gender and instead highlights the compounded vulnerabilities faced by trafficked women due to overlapping forms of marginalisation. By applying intersectionality, this research contributes to theoretical advancements in gender studies, victimology, and migration research, offering a model for future studies examining complex social phenomena. This study applies intersectionality to various stages of trafficking—its causes, experiences during trafficking, and reintegration—to reveal how systemic inequalities shape women's vulnerabilities and post-trafficking realities. By analysing gender inequality as part of a broader patriarchal system, the research highlights how poverty, ethnicity, and socio-cultural norms exacerbate trafficking risks.

From a practical perspective, intersectionality provides a vital foundation for developing effective policies and interventions for trafficked women. Recognizing their diverse challenges, policymakers and service providers must tailor reintegration programs rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach. This research emphasizes the need for multi-sectoral collaboration—combining legal, psychological, economic, and social support—to facilitate sustainable reintegration. By employing an intersectional approach, service providers

can better understand how overlapping disadvantages, such as ethnic discrimination and gender-based stigma, affect reintegration outcomes. Programs should offer not only economic assistance but also support for social and cultural reintegration, including language recovery and community acceptance. Additionally, legal and policy reforms should explicitly address these intersecting vulnerabilities to ensure a comprehensive reintegration process.

Furthermore, the research makes other six significant contributions to the field:

First, while confirming that global trafficking and socio-cultural gender roles increase women's vulnerability to human trafficking, this study provides new insights into how social norms to get married and associated family and community pressures impact trafficked women before, during, and after trafficking.

Before trafficking, societal shame associated with failing to meet marriage expectations exacerbates women's vulnerability. Persistent gender norms in Vietnam create an unequal division of labour, compelling women to prioritise family and household duties, with the primary goal of becoming a wife and mother. Deviations from these norms often result in societal shame, increasing the susceptibility of girls and women to trafficking.

During trafficking, women and girls endure dual forms of exploitation, especially sexual servitude and childbearing. Many women, continue, to be affected by the role of mother and wife, being exploited as household servants and "wives" of exploiters, and being forced into motherhood. This exploitation results in women having children with their exploiters, which forces them to stay in trafficking situations due to their responsibilities as mothers. This maternal bond caught women in a difficult predicament, where trafficked women often choose to remain in trafficking situations, even for a long time, rather than escape without their children. Attempting to escape with children, if unsuccessful, can lead to further psychological trauma or a return to trafficking, while escaping without children exacerbates reintegration difficulties. The maternal bond dilemma adds significant challenges to their efforts to escape, emphasising the involuntary nature of childbirth with exploiters and highlighting the unique difficulties faced by mothers in trafficking situations. Such prolonged trafficking experiences lead to the loss of cultural identity and stunted personal development, exacerbating vulnerabilities to challenging post-trafficking lives.

In the reintegration phase, societal expectations for women to marry present further challenges. In Vietnam, stigma diminishes trafficked women's marriage prospects—a critical concern given that marriage is often viewed as a central life goal for Vietnamese women. This stigma compounds their reintegration difficulties, underscoring the societal expectation that being a wife is a significant achievement.

In summary, societal pressure on women to marry at a certain age makes them vulnerable to trafficking in two ways: they either seek to escape early and arranged marriages or accept these marriages, both increasing their trafficking risk. The ultimate goal of becoming a wife and mother further pressures trafficked women who want to escape but cannot decide to do so. Due to the prolonged enduring of trafficking associated with forced marriages, women face the loss of cultural identity and much crucial lifetime for self-development, which exacerbates their reintegration situation if they can return. The pressure on women to get married also exacerbates their challenging post-trafficking lives as they seek to marry to fulfil societal expectations, but the social stigma against trafficked returnees hinders this dream. Traffickers exploit this cycle of expectation to recruit women into trafficking situations.

Secondly, this study concludes that reducing the stigmatization of women returnees by communities is crucial for creating supportive environments and lowering the risk of re-trafficking.

The mental health of trafficked individuals is significantly influenced by how their home community receives and treats them; therefore, community support and empathy are essential for improving returnees' mental health, accelerating their healing process and facilitating reintegration. Thus, community involvement is intrinsically linked to the reintegration of returnees. The study highlights the importance of raising awareness and reducing stigma within the community to foster this supportive atmosphere.

Thirdly, this study suggests that returnees need personalised support based on their resettlement location. While all women returnees require similar base-level support, women who return to their community of origin have different additional support needs compared to women who resettle away from their community of origin.

This study concludes that it is important to distinguish two groups of returnees because each group requires different levels of support beyond the basic needs that both groups have in common. Accordingly, two levels of support are needed: base support for all returnees and location-specific support, i.e., either support in the community of origin or support away from the community of origin.

Fourthly, this study suggests that resettling women returnees in their community of origin is more cost-effective, offers better rehabilitation prospects for the women, and is more preventative with regard to re-trafficking than relocating them elsewhere.

The study concludes that returning to a familiar (community of origin) and stigma-free environment is the most effective form of resettlement for trafficked women. Strong support from family and the community can lead to better reintegration, improved healing, and increased resilience. This option also requires fewer human and financial resources, making it the most sustainable and cost-effective choice. Positive family

and community support play a crucial role in helping trafficked women overcome challenges and rebuild their lives with dignity.

Fifthly, this study concludes that current gender equality policies have contributed to reducing human trafficking by addressing its underlying causes—such as offering women education and employment opportunities, challenging gender norms, and addressing domestic violence—as well as supporting the reintegration process. These policies assist returnees by providing healthcare services, creating educational and vocational opportunities, optimising resources for women, and facilitating community-based support models.

The study acknowledges progress made between 2010 and 2020 in tackling the root causes of human trafficking, including efforts to reduce gender norms, stereotypes, and biases. While these policies have improved women's empowerment through better access to education and job opportunities, and have addressed domestic violence, they also support the reintegration of returnees by providing essential services and economic opportunities, thus helping to break the trafficking cycle. Despite some current drawbacks, the study argues that gender equality policies have the potential to further reduce trafficking. Support workers involved in the study believe that these policies have enhanced the visibility and status of women in Vietnam compared to previous decades.

Sixthly, this study concludes that gender equality policies have not yet adequately addressed the stigmatization of women returnees by communities, which is crucial for facilitating their reintegration into supportive environments.

Current policies' insufficient focus on community-wide awareness and stigma reduction is a significant limitation. Trafficked women, who face both exploitation and social stigma, require recognition and support to lead meaningful lives. To enhance these policies, it is essential to increase community awareness to reduce gender bias and bolster women's empowerment. Expanding policies to address the needs of returnees and promote community awareness would improve effectiveness, reintegration outcomes, and trafficking prevention, while also reducing the reliance on extensive support resources.

The insights this study offers suggest it has practical implications that may contribute to effectively combating human trafficking and addressing gender-based violence in Vietnam.

To break the cycle of human trafficking for women and girls in Vietnam, it is crucial to address gender role expectations and societal shame. Gender equality policies should raise community awareness to eliminate

the expectation and shame associated with women marrying and reduce the stigma against trafficked returnees, enabling women to make independent life choices and avoid trafficking risks.

Another practical implication of this study is that it is crucial to encourage returnees to choose resettlement in their home community. To achieve this, society must combat stigma against returnees in order to create a stigma-free community. Improved healing outcomes contribute to better prevention of further trafficking cycles. Additionally, targeted support for trafficked returnees and their children is essential for successful reintegration.

Finally, the government should track returnees and see where they resettle (whether in urban centres or their hometowns) to be able to assess support needs and resource distribution but also to track the progress of changes in community attitudes towards returnees (i.e., stigma reduction). Currently, the lack of data on the proportion of returnees who stay in their communities compared to those who relocate impedes understanding of their support needs. This is a practical implication that can help the government with effective resource distribution and tracking the progress of changes in community attitudes over time. The data can then certainly be used in future research.

Overall, since the trafficking of women is a form of gender-based violence, these practical implications can also be applied to other types of gender-based violence. However, such applications should be undertaken with careful assessment to ensure they address the specific contexts and needs associated with different forms of gender-based violence.

Two key areas for future research have been identified: the direct experiences of trafficked individuals to understand the dynamics of trafficking better; and pan-South-Asia research to explore the relationship between gender inequality and cross-border human trafficking and how they may be affected by gender equality policies.

First, the current research lacks direct accounts from trafficked individuals, which constrains a complete understanding of how cultural and moral values and domestic violence affect their experiences and choices. Investigating these psychological impacts more thoroughly could provide valuable insights into the dynamics of trafficking and improve strategies for prevention and support. Further research should explore the direct voices of trafficked women to delve deeper into how gender expectations of being a wife and mother affect their lives and how gender equality policies can address these issues in the future. Other areas that future research can explore are the role of filial duties and piety in the decision-making processes of individuals vulnerable to trafficking and the relationship between domestic violence and human trafficking. While existing studies have examined family involvement in trafficking situations, there is a limited understanding of how concepts such as moral debt ("ơn") and filial piety ("hiếu") (Soucy, 2000)

influence these decisions. Additionally, while Nguyen et al. (2020) briefly noted that domestic violence in Vietnam contributes to human trafficking by prompting women to flee abusive situations, their study lacks a detailed analysis of this connection.

Second, future research should explore the relationship between gender equality policies and human trafficking in countries with similar contexts or other regions. Comparative studies could facilitate broader international cooperation in combating human trafficking, allowing advocacy researchers to present a unified voice and advocate more effectively for women's autonomy globally.

On a more **personal concluding note**, I hope that the insights presented here will contribute to policy reforms and social transformations that will markedly reduce my daughter's risk of being trafficked by the time she reaches 20. I gave birth to her in July 2021, while working on this thesis. Moreover, the findings from this study have further cemented my conviction that marriage should not be regarded as the ultimate objective for women. Instead, their aspirations and decisions ought to be celebrated and respected. Whether they choose to marry, pursue higher education, advance their careers, remain single, or make any other life choices, it is their autonomy and right to decide. I deeply respect these rights and the decisions of my daughter, and I hope society as a whole will do the same.

Afterword

At the beginning of this thesis (acknowledgement section), I expressed my heartfelt gratitude to all who supported me and provided the opportunities necessary for this research, including my family. Reflecting on my academic journey, I recall the moments my brother and I faced our university entrance exams—he succeeded in college, and I gained entry to a higher-ranked university. Despite my father's unwavering love and support for both, he wished he could have changed our outcomes...

I have been fortunate to have access to higher education and resources that have enabled me to live independently. Yet, trafficked women are not so lucky. Gender role expectations, societal pressure to marry, and various other disadvantages continue to marginalise them.

As I finalise this study, the pervasive belief that a woman's ultimate goal is marriage remains troubling. Recently, my father lamented during a family dinner that my aunt's daughter, now over 30, has not shown any "signs" of marriage. This persistent societal pressure underscores the ongoing risk to women. As long as these societal expectations endure, women and young girls will stay at risk of trafficking and exploitation.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Ethics Approval



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology
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TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

13 July 2021

Antje Deckert
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Antje

Ethics Application: 21/205 Voices from Peace House and beyond: Exploring experiences of female trafficking victims in Vietnam and perceptions of two national equality policies (2011-2020) that aim to reduce human trafficking

Thank you for submitting your application for ethical review. We are pleased to advise that the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) approved your ethics application at their meeting on 5 July 2021, subject to:

1. Clarification about how any revelation of illegal behaviour will be managed and provision of advice about this in the Information Sheets;
2. Reconsideration about what participants will be asked. The questions as given are not consistent with the information given in the advertisements and Information Sheets. The current list of questions is lengthy and sensitive, and may constitute an emotional burden for participants. This is not adequately reflected in the risks nor in the likely length of time needed for the interview. AUTEC recommends revising the indicative questions and reducing the number involved;
3. Provision of an assurance that a copy of the indicative questions for the interviews will be provided to participants along with the Information Sheet;
4. Justification for and clarification about the sharing of the interview recordings with other researchers and inclusion of advice about this in the Information Sheets with an option about this in the Consent Forms;
5. Inclusion in the letters of introduction and Information Sheets of advice that the research is being funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade;
6. Provision of advice in the letters of introduction about the purpose for which the research is being undertaken;
7. Provision of an assurance that participants will not be in cafés or similar places when being interviewed online;
8. Amendment of the Information Sheets as follows:
 - a. Provision of further advice about the purpose and nature of this research;
 - b. Inclusion of advice about the level of confidentiality that can be provided and how this will be implemented;
 - c. Inclusion of advice that the interviews will be recorded and transcribed;
 - d. Inclusion of 'New Zealand' after Auckland University of Technology.

This approval is for online interviews only. Approval is not given for face to face interviews to be undertaken.

Please provide us with a response to the points raised in these conditions, indicating either how you have satisfied these points or proposing an alternative approach. AUTEK also requires copies of any altered documents, such as Information Sheets, surveys etc. You are not required to resubmit the application form again. Any changes to responses in the form required by the committee in their conditions may be included in a supporting memorandum.

Please note that the Committee is always willing to discuss with applicants the points that have been made. There may be information that has not been made available to the Committee, or aspects of the research may not have been fully understood.

Once your response is received and confirmed as satisfying the Committee's points, you will be notified of the full approval of your ethics application. Full approval is not effective until all the conditions have been met. Data collection may not commence until full approval has been confirmed. If these conditions are not met within six months, your application may be closed and a new application will be required if you wish to continue with this research.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, we ask that you use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.


We look forward to hearing from you,

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEK Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Tranchi309@gmail.com; Sharyn Graham Davies

Appendix B1. The prompts for answering research questions



Research Sub-questions	Interview questions	
<p>1. What are the experiences of trafficked individuals in Vietnam and how do they relate to gender inequality between 2011 and 2020?</p> <p><i>This question seeks to clarify the connection between gender inequality and human trafficking. This led to further questions/inquiries about gender equality policies and an analysis of related documents.</i></p>	<p>1.1. What are their experiences?</p>	<p>1.1.1. What are their trafficking situations?</p> <p>1.1.2. What are their experiences during the trafficking process?</p> <p>1.1.3. What enabled them to escape the trafficked situation?</p> <p>1.1.4. What are their needs for reintegration?</p>
	<p>1.2. What role did the geographic, social and economic context of trafficked individuals play in being trafficked?</p>	<p>1.2.1. What factors drove them into the hands of traffickers?</p> <p>1.2.2. What prevented them from being escaping?</p> <p>1.2.3. What prevented them from integrating into society?</p>
<p>2. From the perspectives of NGOs and state agencies, stories of trafficked individuals, to what extent have Vietnam's national gender equality policies contributed to addressing the social problem of human trafficking in Vietnam between 2011 and 2020?</p> <p><i>This question aims to explore the experiences and perspectives of trafficked individuals, as conveyed by the stakeholders who have assisted them. It also seeks to understand the viewpoints of support workers on the effects of gender equality policies on trafficked individuals, if any. Through this exploration, the study would critically analyse relevant documents to gain insight into the effects of gender equality policies on human trafficking in Vietnam.</i></p>	<p>2.1. From the experiences gained from the stories of trafficked individuals, have gender equality policies had a direct or indirect impact on their lives?</p>	<p>2.1.1. Have trafficked individuals received any gender-related support before, during and after being trafficked?</p>
	<p>2.2. From the viewpoint of NGOs and state agencies, do national gender equality policies contribute to addressing human trafficking in Vietnam? If so, how?</p>	<p>2.2.1. Do national gender equality policies contribute to prevent conditions that lead/facilitate human trafficking in Vietnam?</p> <p>2.2.2. Do national gender equality policies contribute to supporting trafficked returnees and potential targets of human trafficking in Vietnam? If so, how?</p>


Appendix B2. Indicative Interview Questions

Main prompts		Sub-prompts	
<p>1. What factors drive trafficked individuals into the hand of traffickers?</p>		<p>BASIC INFORMATION</p> <p>1.1. Tell me about your role in your organization in dealing with human trafficking?</p> <p>1.2. How long have you been working here? What are your experiences?</p> <p>PERSONAL FACTORS FROM VICTIMS</p> <p>1.3. In your opinion, what are the personal factors from trafficked individuals that drive them to the hand of traffickers?</p> <p>1.4. What are the differences between these factors of women, compared to men?</p> <p>1.5. How do you think are these personal factors best addressed?</p> <p>FACTORS FROM COMMUNITY</p> <p>1.6. In your opinion, what are the factors from the community that drive trafficking?</p> <p>1.7. How do those factors influence women, compared to men, in your opinion?</p> <p>1.8. Are there any factors relating to inequality on the ground of gender or ethnicity?</p> <p>1.9. Can you share your understanding/experiences about any cases, which was forced to be trafficked as a result of gender inequality that you know?</p> <p>1.10. If at all, to what extent has gender equality improved in Vietnam, compared to 10 years ago?</p> <p>FACTORS FROM SPECIFIC GENDER EQUALITY POLICY</p> <p>1.11. Are there any improvements by the government on appropriate policy in dealing with trafficking? If yes, please share any policy that you know?</p> <p>1.12. Is there any specific policy that you assess as working well?</p> <p>1.13. Is there any gender-based policy that you think it could support trafficking victims or contribute to trafficking prevention?</p> <p>1.14. What is your recommendation for a better strategy in dealing with trafficking in Vietnam nowadays?</p>	

Prompts for interviews. Members of NGOs, Vietnam Women's Union and Government agencies

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<p>2. What are the experiences of trafficked individuals during trafficking process?</p>	<p>2.1. What experiences have trafficked individuals shared with you?</p> <p>2.2. What are the differences between the experiences of trafficked women and men?</p> <p>2.3. What are the differences between working with trafficked women and men?</p>
<p>3. What enables trafficked individuals to escape the trafficked situation in Vietnam?</p>	<p>OBSTACLES</p> <p>3.1. What factors prevent men victims from escaping?</p> <p>3.2. What factors prevent women from escaping?</p> <p>3.3. What are the reasons for these differences?</p> <p>3.4. What solutions can be applied to reduce/minimize those factors?</p> <p>CONDITIONS FOR ESCAPE</p> <p>3.5. What elements encourage the men to escape?</p> <p>3.6. What elements encourage the women victim to escape?</p> <p>3.7. What are the reasons for these differences?</p> <p>RESCUE AND RETURN</p> <p>3.8. How do trafficked individuals typically connect with your organisation?</p> <p>DIFFICULTIES of rescue, receive, support</p> <p>3.9. What are the challenges during the process of rescuing, receiving, and supporting trafficked individuals?</p> <p>CONVENIENCES of rescue, receive, support</p> <p>3.10. What conditions make it easier for you/your organization to rescue, receive, and support trafficked individuals?</p>

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<p>4. What are the needs of trafficked individuals for reintegration into Vietnamese society?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ESSENTIAL SUPPORTS</p> <p>4.1. What support does your organization offer for trafficked individuals?</p> <p>4.2. What are the differences between the supports offered for women and men staying in your organization? How many women have you worked with, compared to men?</p> <p>DIFFICULTIES/CHALLENGES</p> <p>4.3. Based on your experiences and opinion, what are the challenges for men to reintegrate into society?</p> <p>4.4. Based on your experiences and opinion, what are the challenges for women to reintegrate into society?</p> <p>4.5. What do you think the women find hard/challenging in their reintegrating process, compared to the men's?</p> <p>4.6. Tell me any cases you know that the returnees are still in a challenging/difficult situation after reintegrating back into their community.</p> <p>4.7. What are the policies that enable you to do your work? What challenges do you face with this/these policy(ies)?</p> <p>CHANCES/OPPORTUNITIES</p> <p>4.8. What are the best/suitable supports for the returnees to reintegrate back into society?</p> <p>4.9. Apart from supports from your organization, do you think they need further supports from the government/community?</p> <p>4.10. Can you share any success story of any individuals who reintegrates to the community that you know?</p> <p>4.11. What factors contributed to this success story?</p> <p>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</p> <p>4.12. Can you share any cases in which the trafficked individuals become re-trafficked or even turn to the trafficking offender?</p> <p>4.13. What are the reasons for that?</p> <p>4.14. What suggestion do you recommend to the government's policy to support the reintegration of victims?</p>

Appendix C1. The National Strategy on Gender Equality (2011-2020) (Translation)

The following documents are official English translations of key Vietnamese policy texts. These translations have been sourced from the Ministry of Justice of Vietnam and other relevant government agencies.

For reference, the *National Strategy on Gender Equality for the 2011–2020 Period (Vietnam)* is available at the Ministry of Justice website:

https://www.moj.gov.vn/vbpg/en/lists/vn%20bn%20php%20lut/view_detail.aspx?itemid=10746.

NATIONAL STRATEGY ON GENDER EQUALITY FOR THE 2011-2020 PERIOD (VIET NAM)

Decision No. 2351/QĐ-TTg of December 24, 2010, approving the 2011-2020 national strategy for gender equality

THE PRIME MINISTER

Pursuant to the December 25, 2001 Law on Organization of the Government;

Pursuant to the November 29, 2006 Law on Gender Equality;

Pursuant to the Government's Decree No. 70/2008/ND-CP of June 4, 2008, detailing a number of articles of the Law on Gender Equality;

Pursuant to the Government's Decree No. 48/2009/ND-CP of May 19, 2009, prescribing measures to ensure gender equality;

Pursuant to the Political Bureau's Resolution No. 11/NQ-TW of April 27, 2007, on women-related activities in the period of accelerated national industrialization and modernization;

Pursuant to the Government's Resolution No. 57/NQ-CP of December 1, 2009, promulgating the Government's action program towards 2020 for materialization of the Political Bureau's Resolution No. 11/NQ-TW of April 27, 2007, on women-related activities in the period of accelerated national industrialization and modernization;

At the proposal of the Minister of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs,

DECIDES:

Article 1. To approve the 2011-2020 national strategy for gender equality with the following principal contents:

1. Viewpoints

a) The national strategy for gender equality is an important component of the national socio-economic development strategy and serves as a foundation of the human resource development strategy of the Party and the State. Gender equality work is a basic element for raising the quality of life of every person, every family and the entire society.

b) To enhance the leadership and direction of the Party Committees and administrations at all levels, the coordination of socio-political organizations, social organizations, socio-political-professional organizations, economic organizations and non-business units, and the participation of every individual, every family and the whole community in gender equality activities. To mobilize to the utmost resources for effective gender equality activities.

2. Objectives of the strategy

a) General objectives:

Basically by 2020, to ensure substantive equality between men and women in opportunity, participation and benefits in the political, economic, cultural and social domains, contributing to fast and sustainable national development.

b) Specific objectives:

* Objective 1: To intensify women's participation in managerial and leading positions, aiming to gradually narrow gender gap in the political domain

- Target 1: To strive for the percentage of 25% or higher of women participating in Party committees in the 2016-2020 tenure; the percentage of 30% or higher of female deputies to the National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels in the 2011-2015 term and over 35% in the 2016-2020 term.

- Target 2: To strive for the targets that by 2015, 80% and by 2020, over 95% of ministries, ministerial-level agencies, government-attached agencies and People's Committees at all levels will have female leaders.

- Target 3: To strive for the targets that by 2015, 70% and by 2020, 100% of Party and State agencies and socio-political organizations with the number of female cadres, civil servants and public employees making up 30% or higher will have women holding key leading positions.

* Objective 2: To narrow gender gap in the economic, labour and employment domains; to increase access of rural poor women and ethnic minority women to economic resources and labour market

- Target 1: Annually, at least 40% of the total number of people given new jobs will be assured for each sex (male and female).

- Target 2: The rate of female entrepreneurs will reach 30% by 2015 and 35% or higher by 2020.

- Target 3: The rate of female rural labourers who are aged under 45 and vocationally trained will reach 25% by 2015 and 50% by 2020.

- Target 4: The rate of poor female labourers in rural areas or ethnic minority regions who wish to borrow preferential capital from employment or poverty reduction programs and official credit sources will reach 80% by 2015 and 100% by 2020.

* Objective 3: To raise the quality of female human resources, gradually ensuring equal participation between men and women in the education and training domain

- Target 1: The rate of literate men and women aged between 15 and 40 in deep-lying, remote, ethnic minority and extreme difficulty-hit regions will reach 90% by 2015 and 95% by 2020.

- Target 2: The rate of women holding master degree will reach 40% by 2015 and 50% by 2020. The rate of women holding doctorate degree will reach 20% by 2015 and 25% by 2020.
- * Objective 4: To ensure gender equality in access to and benefit from healthcare services
- Target 1: The ratio of infants will not exceed 113 male infants/100 female infants by 2015 and 115/100 by 2020.
- Target 2: To reduce the maternal mortality rate to 58.3/100,000 live births by 2015 and below 52/100,000 live births by 2020.
- Target 3: To raise the percentage of pregnant women having access to services of medical care and prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission to 40% by 2015 and 50% by 2020 as compared to 2010.
- Target 4: To reduce the abortion rate to 27/100 live births by 2015 and below 25/100 by 2020.
- * Objective 5: To ensure gender equality in the cultural and information domain
- Target 1: Cultural and information products bearing gender prejudice will drop by 60% by 2015 and 80% by 2020. To increase the broadcasting time volume of specialized programs and sections and the volume of products on gender equality propaganda and education.
- Target 2: 90% by 2015 and 100% by 2020 of central and local radio and television stations will have specialized programs and sections to raise public awareness about gender equality.
- * Objective 6: To ensure gender equality in family life, incrementally eliminating gender-based violence
- Target 1: To shorten women's time of involvement in household duties by two times by 2015 and 1.5 times by 2020 as compared to men's.
- Target 2: The rate of detected domestic violence victims rendered with legal and health counselling, support and care at domestic violence victim-assisting establishments will reach 40% by 2015 and 50% by 2020. The rate of detected domestic violence perpetrator counselling at domestic violence counselling establishments will reach 70% by 2015 and 85% by 2020.
- Target 3: By 2015 towards 2020, 100% of human trafficking victims will return through handover and rescue, and 100% of such victims who return by themselves and are detected will be entitled to support and community integration services.
- * Objective 7: To enhance capacity of gender equality state management
- Target 1: 80% by 2015 and 100% by 2020 of legal drafts will be determined as having contents related to gender equality or gender inequality or discrimination.
- Target 2: By 2015 and towards 2020, 100% of members of the committees for drafting or teams for editing legal documents with contents related to gender equality or gender inequality or discrimination will be trained in gender knowledge, analysis and incorporation.
- Target 3: By 2015 and towards 2020, provinces and centrally run cities will have adequate gender equality cadres; and establish a contingent of collaborators and volunteers participating in gender-equality and women's advancement activities.

- Target 4: By 2015 and towards 2020, 100% of gender equality and women's advancement cadres at all levels and in all sectors will be professionally trained at least once.

3. Major solutions to the strategy implementation

a) General solutions:

- To enhance the leadership, direction and inspection of gender equality activities by Party committees and administrations at all levels. To raise capacity of gender equality state management. To complete the system of policies and laws on gender equality. To incorporate gender equality into legal drafts with contents related to gender equality or gender inequality or discrimination. To include gender equality in the formulation and implementation of action programs or plans of ministries or sectors as well as socio-economic development strategies, planning and plans of localities. To increase the inspection and evaluation of the implementation of the law on gender equality. To build an inter-sector coordination mechanism for the effective realization of gender equality.
- To strongly step up information, propaganda, popularization and education in order to raise the awareness of cadres, civil servants, public employees, labourers and people about gender equality.
- To formulate and implement the national program on gender equality in the 2011-2015 and 2016-2020 periods with a view to assisting ministries, sectors and localities in dealing with key matters of gender equality.
- To develop systems of quality services aiming to support women-men equality in opportunity, participation and benefits in various aspects of the social life. To intensify the socialization and inter-sector coordination in organizing gender equality-related activities.
- To mobilize and efficiently use financial resources for gender equality activities; to spend state budget funds for gender equality activities according to current state budget decentralization; to prioritize resources for sectors, regions and areas where exists gender inequality or high risk of gender inequality, rural areas, poor regions and mountainous areas in which still exist backward customs and practices, as well as ethnic minority regions.
- To promote research into gender equality in various domains. To create a database of gender equality to serve gender equality research and policy-making. To formulate a set of indicators to supervise and evaluate the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality.
- To step up multilateral and bilateral international cooperation on gender equality.

b) Specific solutions:

* Group of solutions for achieving Objective 1:

- To scrutinize the Party's and the State's regulations on training, retraining, promotion, appointment and retirement age ranges. To determine irrationalities and disadvantages against women upon the implementation of these regulations for amendment and supplementation in line with the Law on Gender Equality.

- To work out long-term plans on female managers and leaders with specific criteria and implementation solutions.
- To enhance propaganda on gender equality in the mass media in order to raise the awareness about women-related work, contributing to eliminating prejudices and improper perceptions of the roles of men and women in family and society. To diversify images of women with different roles and occupations and professions.
- To intensify the inspection and examination of the implementation of legal provisions on gender equality, primarily those on training, retraining, promotion and appointment age ranges.
- Ministries, sectors and localities will continue experimenting examinations for recruitment of leading titles, drawing experiences and initiatives related to raising the rate of female leaders and managers.
- To support the raising of capacity for young female leaders through capacity building programs and projects.

* Group of solutions for achieving Objective 2:

- To reduce employment access expenses and job-seeking time of labourers through building a system of information on labour market, employment counselling and investment opportunities. To build gender-based databases on labour market and vocational training. To work out specific measures to promote investment in the provision at affordable charges of truthful and updated information on labour market, investment market, financial market, etc.
- To further improve policies and broaden types of social insurance beneficiaries, particularly new labourers; to apply measures to meet women's and men's aspirations to participate in voluntary insurance and unemployment insurance, paying attention to vulnerable groups (itinerant labourers, poor labourers in rural areas and ethnic minority regions).
- To ensure conditions for women to have full and equal access to economic resources (such as cultivation land, credit sources, market information, law and policy information) and enjoy equality in opportunity to participate in production and business.
- Vocational training policies and programs should focus on rural areas and ethnic minority regions; attract more female labourers; raise job skills, ways of managing and developing handicraft and cottage industries, agricultural product processing, consumer goods production as well as developing production and daily-life services for rural population. To adopt policies to support establishments providing vocational training for rural labour, especially those attracting many female labourers.
- To ensure that state-funded agricultural, fishery and forestry extension activities attract many female trainees. To determine and achieve the targets on females in training for people in rural and outlying areas, ethnic minority regions, assisting them in technical applications in order to raise the quality and competitiveness of their agricultural and processed products.

- To intensify the implementation of policies towards female labourers with a view to ensuring efficiency and fairness in policies of vocational training, social insurance, labour protection and retirement regimes.

* Group of solutions for achieving Objective 3:

- To include gender equality contents in the curricula of the national education system, especially at upper secondary, lower secondary and primary education levels. To include gender contents in programs on state management training and advanced political theory training, aiming to raise the awareness of key leaders.
- To adopt peculiar policies towards a number of target groups: Policies and programs on scholarships for girls and women pursuing study to heighten their qualifications, especially policies to encourage girls and women in rural areas as well as ethnic minority regions; peculiar policies on preschool education in deep-lying, remote and difficulty-hit regions; policies to attract male preschool and primary school teachers.
- To scrutinize for elimination messages and images bearing gender bias in the current system of textbooks.
- To incorporate gender matters in policies, programs and plans of the education sector; to establish gender- and nationality-based databases at all educational levels and grades.

* Group of solutions for achieving Objective 4:

- To further provide reproductive and sexual healthcare services for women and men. Especially to provide flexible, accessible and free-of-charge reproductive healthcare services for women and men in ethnic minority regions.
- To expand networks of reproductive healthcare counselling for men. To intensify the training of specialized andrology physicians at provincial-level general hospitals.
- To intensify communications activities, aiming to raise the awareness of reproductive health and sexual health for women and men. To intensify men's participation in the implementation of family planning measures. To expand communication activities for minors about sexual health and safe contraception.
- To incorporate gender issues in policies, programs and plans of the health sector.

* Group of solutions for achieving Objective 5:

- To raise the gender awareness of manufacturers of cultural and information products. To delete gender bias messages and images in cultural and information products.
- To intensify gender propaganda and education in the mass media in diverse and flexible forms suitable to each target group and each region.
- To regularly monitor and inspect cultural and information activities and products from the gender perspective.

* Group of solutions for achieving Objective 6:

- To step up the building of cultured families, laying stress on criteria of gender equality in families.
- To attach importance to building models of clubs of happy, equal and violence-free families, attracting men's active participation in such activities.

- To build and experiment gender-based violence and human trafficking prevention and control counselling and support models; to widely develop successful models.

* Group of solutions for achieving Objective 7:

- To arrange sufficient gender equality cadres at all levels; to form a contingent of collaborators and volunteers participating in gender equality and women's advancement activities, especially in villages, hamlets and street quarters. To build up networks of gender specialists in all domains of the social life.
- To train gender analysis, assessment and incorporation skills for cadres and civil servants participating in making socio-economic development policies and plans. To organize training in gender, gender analysis and incorporation for members of committees and teams drafting legal documents related to gender equality or gender inequality or gender discrimination.

4. Strategy implementation stages:

a) Stage I (2011-2015):

- To increase the efficiency of state management of gender equality.
- To intensify propaganda and education activities in order to raise awareness about gender equality.
- To organize activities of supporting and promoting the incorporation of gender issues in the formulation and implementation of policies, laws, programs and projects of ministries, sectors and localities.
- To organize activities in support of gender equality in a number of domains and regions where exist big gaps in gender equality.
- To build a number of pilot gender equality models. To establish databases of gender equality; to formulate sets of indicators on supervision and evaluation of the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality.
- To organize preliminary review and mid-term evaluation of the strategy implementation.

b) Stage II (2016-2020):

- On the basis of preliminary review and mid-term evaluation of the strategy implementation at Stage I (2011-2015), to adjust policies and apply comprehensive measures to successfully achieve the objectives of the strategy. To concentrate human resources on activities determined as facing numerous difficulties in the strategy implementation process at Stage I.
- To widely develop good models and continue building new models of gender equality.
- To efficiently tap and use databases on gender equality in service of policy making.
- To intensify the sharing of information, experiences, interesting innovations and effective models on gender equality.
- To conduct final review and evaluation of the strategy implementation.

5. Projects under the strategy:

- Project on communication to raise gender equality awareness and change of gender equality behaviours.
- Project on raising capacity and effectiveness of state management of gender equality.

- Project on raising capacity for female deputies to the National Assembly and People's Councils at various levels, managers and leaders at various levels; female candidates to the National Assembly or People's Councils at all levels in the 2016-2020 term, and planned potential female cadres.
- Project to support the realization of gender equality in various domains, sectors, regions and localities where exists gender inequality or high risk of gender inequality.
- Project to support the formulation and development of gender equality counselling and assistance services.

Article 2. Organization of the strategy implementation

1. The Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs shall assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Ministry of Finance, concerned ministries and sectors, the Women's Union Central Committee and socio-political organizations and provincial-level People's Committees in, organizing the strategy implementation nationwide, ensuring close association with relevant strategies implemented by other ministries or sectors; formulate and submit to the Prime Minister for approval the national program on gender equality in the 2011-2015 and 2016-2020 periods; formulate and organize the implementation of annual plans on gender equality in line with this strategy and the 2011-2020 strategy on socio-economic development; review for amendment or supplementation according to competence or proposal on amendment or supplementation to competent agencies laws and policies in accordance with the gender equality principles; guide, inspect and review the strategy implementation and periodically report it to the Prime Minister; conduct a preliminary review at the end of 2015 and the final review of the strategy implementation at the end of 2020.
2. The Ministry of Planning and Investment shall assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs and concerned ministries and sectors in, mobilizing official development assistance (ODA) sources for gender equality programs and projects; incorporate gender equality objectives and targets into annual and five-year socio-economic development plans at the national level; guide the inclusion of gender equality objectives and targets in the formulation and assessment of results of achievement of objectives and targets in socio-economic development strategies, planning and plans of sectors or localities.
3. The Ministry of Finance shall assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with the Ministry of Planning and Investment in, allocating budget funds, based on the state budget capacity, for implementation of gender equality programs and projects after they are approved; guide, inspect and examine the use of funds for the implementation of the approved gender equality programs and projects according to the Law on the State Budget and relevant laws.
4. The Ministry of Justice shall assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs as well as concerned ministries and sectors in, assessing the

inclusion of gender equality issues in the drafting of legal documents related to gender equality or gender inequality or discrimination within the scope of regulation of such documents.

5. The Ministry of Home Affairs shall assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, Vietnam Women's Union Central Committee and concerned bodies in, formulating and submitting to the Government for promulgation, guidance and implementation organization regulations on planning and creation of female cadre sources and female percentages for appointment to positions in state agencies; scrutinize and propose competent bodies to amend, supplement, guide, and organize the implementation of, regulations on age ranges for appointment, training and retraining of female cadres, civil servants and public employees; guide ministries, sectors, provinces and centrally run cities in formulating annual plans on the payroll of civil servants for gender equality activities; assign the gender equality civil servant payroll after it is approved by the Prime Minister; and incorporate gender and gender equality knowledge into the training of cadres, civil servants and public employees.

6. The Ministry of Health shall assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, concerned ministries and sectors, Vietnam Women's Union Central Committee and provincial-level People's Committees in, organizing the implementation of the 2011-2020 strategy on population and reproductive health after it is approved; and step up propaganda on warning and active control and removal of profound causes of gender imbalance among infants.

7. The Ministry of Education and Training shall assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with concerned ministries and branches in, organizing the implementation of the 2011-2020 educational development strategy after it is approved; implement the contents of gender, sex, reproductive health and gender equality education for pupils and students; train teachers and lecturers in gender, sex, reproductive health and gender equality; and include gender equality issues in sectoral development planning and plans.

8. The Ministry of Information and Communications shall assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs in, further guiding and directing mass media agencies in boosting and renewing activities of communication and education in the Party's guideline and the State's laws on gender equality; intensify inspections and examinations of activities of information, press and publication (including publishing, printing, distribution of publications), Internet information on gender equality and related to gender equality; and strictly handle acts of publishing publications and information products with gender bias contents.

9. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism shall assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, concerned ministries and sectors, Vietnam Women's Union Central Committee and provincial-level People's Committees in, organizing the implementation of the 2011-2020 strategy on Vietnamese family development after it is approved; map out and conduct intervention activities to prevent and control domestic violence; incorporate gender

equality contents into cultural institutions towards abundant, equal, progressive, happy and sustainable families with few children.

10. The Ministry of Public Security shall assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with concerned ministries and sectors in, mapping out and conducting activities to prevent and control human trafficking.

11. The Ministry of Science and Technology shall assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs in, mapping out and directing scientific research into gender equality.

12. The Nationality Committee shall assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs and concerned ministries and sectors in, organizing the propagation, dissemination, education and mobilization for the implementation of gender equality policy and law for ethnic minority people; formulate and submit to competent agencies for promulgation, guidance and implementation peculiar policies in support of gender equality activities in deep-lying, remote, ethnic minority regions and areas meeting with exceptional socio-economic difficulties; and mobilize ethnic minority people to promote their fine traditions, customs and practices for achieving the gender equality objectives.

13. Vietnam News Agency, the Voice of Vietnam, Vietnam Television and other mass media agencies shall increase the broadcasting time volumes or number of articles on, and raise the quality of propaganda on gender equality in their programs, special pages or columns.

14. Ministries, ministerial-level agencies and government-attached agencies shall, within the scope of their respective functions and assigned tasks, participate in the strategy implementation; formulate and organize the implementation of annual and five-year action plans for the strategy implementation; step up inter-sector coordination, especially in the incorporation of gender equality issues into planning and policymaking work; and inspect and evaluate the strategy implementation in their ministries or agencies.

15. Provincial-level People's Committees shall organize the strategy implementation in their localities under the guidance of the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs as well as functional ministries and sectors; formulate and realize annual and five-year action plans on gender equality in line with the 2011-2020 national strategy on gender equality and local socio-economic development plans in the same period; promote the creativeness and activeness in mobilizing resources for the strategy implementation; incorporate the effective implementation of this strategy into other relevant strategies in localities; arrange adequate gender equality cadres, civil servants and public employees in localities; step up inter-sector coordination, especially in the incorporation of gender equality issues into the formulation of local socio-economic development policies; regularly inspect the strategy implementation in localities; implement the regime of annual reporting on the strategy implementation in localities according to current regulations.

16. The Vietnam Fatherland Front Central Committee, Vietnam Women's Union Central Committee and their respective member organizations shall organize the strategy implementation within the scope of their

respective functions and tasks; to step up propaganda and education in order to raise the awareness about gender equality in their respective organizations; to participate in the formulation of policies and laws on, and in the state management of, gender equality; to participate in supervising the implementation of law on gender equality; to study and arrange Women's Union members to work as gender equality collaborators and propagators at the grassroots level.

Article 3. This Decision takes effect on the date of its signing.

Article 4. Ministers, heads of ministerial-level agencies, heads of government-attached agencies, heads of concerned agencies or organizations and chairpersons of provincial-level People's Committees shall implement this Decision.

Appendix C2. The National Plan on Gender Equality (2016-2020) (Unofficial Translation)

The following document is an unofficial English translation of the *National Action Plan on Gender Equality for the 2016–2020 Period (Vietnam)*. It has been sourced from the International Labour Organization (ILO) NATLEX database. The original translation is available at:

https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3_isn=100411.

This translation is included in this appendix for reference purposes. Readers are advised to consult the original Vietnamese version for official use.

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON GENDER EQUALITY FOR THE PERIOD 2016-2020 (VIET NAM)

DECISION 1696/QĐ-TTg, October 02, 2015: APPROVING THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON GENDER EQUALITY FOR THE PERIOD OF 2016 - 2020

THE PRIME MINISTER

Pursuant to the Law on Government organization dated December 25, 2001; Pursuant to the Law on Gender Equality dated 29 November 2006; Pursuant to Decree No. 48/2009 / ND-CP of the Government dated May 19, 2009 on measures to ensure gender equality; Pursuant to Decision No. 2351 /QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister dated December 24, 2010, approving the national strategy on gender equality for the period of 2011-2020; At the proposal of the Minister of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs,

DECIDES:

Article 1. To approve the national program of action on gender equality for the period of 2016-2020 (hereafter referred to as the Program) with the following major contents:

I. PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

1. Overall objective:

Narrowing the gaps regarding gender and enhancing the status of women in some sectors, industries, regions and localities where gender inequalities exist or there is high risk of gender inequalities, contributing to the successful implementation of the National Strategy on Gender equality for the period of 2011-2020.

2. Specific objectives:

- 70% of cadres, civil servants, officers, labourers, non-commissioned officers, soldiers, people in armed forces and students at all levels; 50% of citizen in the residential clusters are communicated to raise awareness about gender equality;
- 100% staff working on gender equality and advancement of women, policy makers at all levels and collaborators on gender equality are trained to update their knowledge on gender equality;

- Targeting for 100% female elected representatives, female managers, female leaders at all levels and female cadres who are planned to take management role (from division-level upwards) equipped with knowledge on gender equality and management and leadership skills;
- Targeting to have 100% people in need of support on gender equality to have access to at least one counselling service or support on gender equality.

II. SUBJECTS

Government agencies, political organizations, socio-political organizations, socio-political professional organizations, social organizations, socio-professional organizations, economic organizations, the people's armed forces, families and all people nationwide.

III. MAJOR ACTIVITIES OF THE PROGRAMME

1. Communication to improve the awareness and change the behaviour regarding gender equality

- To improve communication capacity on gender equality for the media, reporters, journalists, editors, collaborators and communications officers at grassroots level; develop a pilot model for the implementation of the Gender Indicators in Communication in a number of press agencies.
- To broaden the implementation of different forms of communication on raising the awareness of gender equality appropriate with the characteristics of different groups and residential areas in the form of culture, art and other forms; Piloting the integration of gender equality into the activities of clubs at the commune and ward level and in schools, enterprises and industrial zones in some localities; to initiate, maintain and develop a variety of communication programs and products on gender equality in all fields of social life, focusing on information programs at grassroots level; To organize media campaigns to engage men and boys in promoting gender equality, sharing family responsibilities, and eliminating gender inequalities in the community and society.
- To implement the "Month of Action for Gender Equality and Gender-based Violence Prevention and Control" from 15 November to 15 December annually with the following main activities: Communication for the month of action; promote and reward individuals and collectives with outstanding achievements in gender equality, for the advancement of women and the prevention of gender-based violence.
- To conduct studies and surveys on social awareness of gender equality.

2. Strengthen the capacity and effectiveness of state management on gender equality

- Capacity building for staff, collaborators working on gender equality and for the advancement of women at all levels and policymakers: developing training programs and training materials for enhancing professional knowledge on gender equality and gender mainstreaming; organize short-term and long-term training; regular training; and experience-sharing session.
- Improve the effectiveness of statistical work and reporting on gender disaggregated data in different areas: review and revise the National gender development indicators; organize training on data collection, synthesis, analysis skills and use of gender disaggregated data in all areas.

3. Capacity building for female elected representatives at all levels, female managers, female leaders at all levels, female cadres who are planned to take management role

- Periodically conduct survey and assessment of the situation of female managers and leaders from central to local levels; timely propose measures and policies related to the mobilization of resources, planning, training and appointment of female cadres, including National Assembly parliamentarians and People's Council representatives at all levels.

- To strengthen capacity of advisory bodies in planning and organizing the implementation of policies directly affecting the work of female cadres.

- To extend the scope and content of capacity building activities for managers, leaders at all levels and capacities of cadres who are planned to be in management positions or leaders in State management agencies and non-business units as a basis for their participation in Party committees, elected bodies and socio-political organizations.

- To support the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the election activities for the members of the Election Councils at all levels.

- To develop training materials and organize training to update knowledge on gender equality appropriate with specific target groups.

- To organize seminars, conferences and dialogues on mainstreaming gender equality in management and leadership.

- To regularly review and study the regulations and policies applicable to female cadres and propose areas that need to be amended and supplemented to meet the requirements of socioeconomic development in each period.

4. Develop the Target Program on supporting the development of social assistance system for the period of 2016-2020, including the support to the implementation of national gender equality targets.

5. Encourage ministries, sectors, localities and organizations to develop and implement models for increasing the participation of women and promoting gender equality in areas with high risk of gender inequality such as revision of local norms to ensure the principles of gender equality are met, the model "Club of female workers living in the inns" in industrial parks and export processing zones; the model "Applying the principles of empowering women in gender equality" in enterprises; Social centers provide services on gender equality and other models in accordance with the actual situation and the trend of international integration.

IV. MEASURES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

1. Strengthen the leadership of the Party committees and the government regarding issues on gender equality and for the advancement of women. Put gender equality targets into 5-year and annual socio-economic development plans at central and local levels. Maintain effective implementation of reporting mechanisms and regular communication to leaders at all levels on gender equality.

2. Promote information dissemination, communication, and education to change the awareness, action and responsibility for the implementation of gender equality among cadres, civil servants, officials, labourers, non-commissioned officers, soldiers, people in armed forces, students at all levels and the citizen. Regularly monitor, inspect and timely handle activities and products of culture and information bearing gender bias.
3. Enhance the mobilization of resources from organizations and individuals domestically and abroad for the implementation of the Program and the efficient use of resources mobilized.
4. Enhance specialized and inter-agency examination and inspection on the implementation of gender equality activities and detection of violation of the law on gender equality. Improve the capacity of specialized inspectors on gender equality from central to local levels.
5. Promote scientific research and expand international cooperation on gender equality.

V. FINANCING THE PROGRAM

The financial allocation for the implementation of the Program is from below sources:

- The state budget (development investment and non-business budget) shall be included in the annual budget estimates of the ministries, branches, central agencies and localities; Target Program on supporting the development of social assistance system for the period 2016 - 2020 in accordance with the law on state budget;
- Funding, aid, mobilization from society and community;
- Other legal sources.

Article 2. Organize the program implementation

1. The Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs shall take the leading role in coordinating with concerned agencies in organizing the implementation of the program nationwide with the following responsibilities:
 - a) To guide the ministries, agencies, organizations and provincial People's Committees in developing plans for the implementation of the Program.
 - b) Assume prime responsibility for implementing the "Month of Action for Gender Equality and Gender-based Violence Prevention and Control".
 - c) Study, propose and apply policies and programs to enhance the role and participation of women in all aspects of social life.
 - d) Examine, inspect and compile the status of implementation and periodically report to the Prime Minister.
 - dd) To assume the prime responsibility for formulating the Target Program on supporting the development of social assistance system for the period of 2016-2020 to be submitted to the Government for consideration and approval.
2. The Ministry of Justice shall integrate gender equality issues into legal documents; stipulate the mainstreaming of gender equality in legal communication, propaganda and education.

3. The Ministry of Home Affairs shall assume the prime responsibility for promulgating, guiding and organizing the implementation of regulations on human resource planning of female cadres, the percentage of women to be appointed in positions in state agencies; implement the mainstreaming of knowledge on gender and gender equality in training and capacity building for cadres, civil servants and officials.
4. The Ministry of Planning and Investment shall assume the prime responsibility for coordinating with other concerned ministries and sectors in mobilizing official development assistance sources for the implementation of the Program. Direct the General Statistics Office to review and revise the National Gender Development Statistics Indicators.
5. The Ministry of Finance shall allocate funding for the implementation of the program in the annual budget estimates of the central and local agencies according to the provisions of law on the state budget; inspect and supervise the management and use of funds for the implementation of the Program.
6. The Ministry of Information and Communications shall assume the prime responsibility for coordinating with the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs and concerned ministries, agencies, organizations and localities in guiding and directing the media to promote and renew communication and education activities on policies and laws on gender equality; enhance the inspection, examination and strictly handle information, press and publishing activities with gender stereotypes.
7. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism shall enhance the inspection, examination and strict management of cultural products and entertainment activities so as to ensure gender-free activities; conduct research and make proposal to enhance the role of families in implementing gender equality. Coordinate with the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs and other ministries, agencies, organizations and localities in organizing the implementation of the “Month of action for gender equality and gender-based violence prevention and control”.
8. The Ministry of Science and Technology, the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences and concerned agencies shall enhance conducting scientific researches on gender equality.
9. The Committee of Ethnic Minority Affairs shall assume the prime responsibility for organizing the propagation, dissemination, education and promotion of the implementation of policies and legislation on gender equality to ethnic minority people; organize the implementation of specific policies to support gender equality activities in remote and ethnic minority areas and areas with exceptional socio-economic difficulties; mobilize ethnic minorities to promote good practices and traditions appropriate with the objective of gender equality.
10. Vietnam News Agency, Voice of Vietnam, Vietnam Television, People's Newspaper and other mass media agencies to increase the broadcasting time, number of news and articles and improve the quality of communication on gender equality.

11. Agencies and organizations at central level participating in the implementation of the Program shall have to develop and organize the implementation of the annual plans of assigned tasks; guide the localities to integrate local activities with the implementation of the Program objectives; periodically report to the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs on the results of the program implementation for compiling and reporting to the Prime Minister.

12. The provincial and municipal People's committees shall be responsible for directing the development and implementation of annual work plans on gender equality in accordance with this Program and other guidelines of relevant ministries and sectors; allocate local budgets to implement and integrate the effective implementation of this Program into the local socioeconomic development plan of the same period; promote inter-agency coordination in the implementation of gender equality; regularly and ad-hoc inspecting and examining the implementation of the Program to report to the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs for compiling and reporting to the Prime Minister.

13. Request the Vietnam Fatherland Front, the Vietnam Women's Union, the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour, the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry and other member organizations, within their functions and duties, to participate in organizing the implementation of the Program's activities; promote communication and education on gender equality and participate in monitoring the implementation of the Program.

Article 3. This Decision takes effect from the date of its signing.

Article 4. The Ministers, the heads of the ministerial-level agencies, the heads of the agencies attached to the Government, the presidents of the provincial People's Committees, the heads of the concerned agencies and organizations are responsible to implement this Decision.

Appendix C3. The Review Report on the Implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2011-2020) in Vietnam (Extract)

3.1. SUMMARY OF NSGE IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS

This is the first National Strategy on Gender Equality formulated and performed in Viet Nam. Out of a total of 22 set targets, 14 targets have been achieved or expected to be achieved as set out, seven targets were not met, and one target lacked sufficient grounds for a complete assessment.¹²²

Targets	Achieved	Under-achieved	Insufficient data for evaluation
Objective 1: To increase women's participation in managerial and leadership positions in order to gradually narrow gender gap in the political sphere			
Target 1: Strive to attain women's proportion in all levels of Party Committees for the 2016 - 2020 tenure to be from 25% or higher; proportion of female National Assembly deputies, female members of People's Councils at all levels tenure 2011 - 2015 to be from 30% or higher and above 35% for the 2016 - 2020 tenure		x	
Target 2: Strive to attain 80% by 2015, and more than 95% by 2020, of Ministries, ministerial agencies, Government agencies, People's Committees of all levels that will have key female leaders		x	

¹²² Government Report No. 474/BC-CP dated October 6, 2020 on the implementation of the national objectives on gender equality in 2019 and for the period 2011-2020.

Targets	Achieved	Under-achieved	Insufficient data for evaluation
<p>Target 3: Strive to attain 70% by 2015, and 100% by 2020 of Party and State agencies, socio-political organization that will have key female leaders if the proportion of female staff, civil servants, public employees and workers in those agencies or organizations is 30% or higher</p>		x	
<p>Objective 2. To reduce gender gaps in the spheres of economy, labour, and employment; To increase access of poor rural women and ethnic minority women to economic resources and the labour market</p>			
<p>Target 1: Annually, ensure at least 40% for each sex (male and female) out of the total number of newly employed people</p>	x		
<p>Target 2: The proportion of businesswomen owners will reach 30% by 2015 and from 35% upwards by 2020.</p>		x	
<p>Target 3: The proportion of rural women workers under 45 years old who undergo professional and technical training will reach 25% by 2015 and 50% by 2020.</p>		x	

Targets	Achieved	Under-achieved	Insufficient data for evaluation
<p>Target 4: The proportion of women in poor rural areas and ethnic minorities in need of preferential loans from employment programs, poverty reduction programs and official credit sources will reach 80% by 2015 and 100% by 2020</p>	x		
<p>Objective 3: To improve the quality of female human resources, gradually ensure equal participation between men and women in the sphere of education, and training</p>			
<p>Target 1: By 2020, the literacy rate among women aged between 15 and 60 will be equal to that of men (98%). This rate will be 94% in the 14 provinces with disadvantaged economic conditions and 90% among ethnic minority areas</p>	x		
<p>Target 2: The proportion of women with a master's degree will be 40% by 2015 and 50% by 2020. The proportion of women with a doctoral degree will be 20% by 2015 and 25% by 2020</p>		x	

Targets	Achieved	Under-achieved	Insufficient data for evaluation
Objective 4: To ensure gender equality in access to and benefits from healthcare services			
Target 1: The sex ratio at birth shall not exceed 113 male infants per 100 female infants by 2015 and 115/100 by 2020	x		
Target 2: Reduce maternal mortality related to childbirth to 58.3 per 100,000 live births by 2015 and to below 52 per 100,000 by 2020	x		
Target 3: Increase the proportion of pregnant women having access to care and prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV services to 40% by 2015 and 50% by 2020 compared to 2010	x		
Target 4: Reduce the abortion rate to 27 per 100 live births by 2015 and to below 25 per 100 by 2020	x		

Targets	Achieved	Under-achieved	Insufficient data for evaluation
Objective 5: To ensure gender equality in the spheres of culture and information	x		
Target 1: Strive to have at least two specialized columns on gender equality per month on the grassroots information system in communes, wards, townships by 2020	x		
Target 2: By 2015, there will be 90% and by 2020, 100% of radio and television stations at national and local levels having specialized themes/columns on gender equality awareness raising.	x		
Objective 6: To ensure gender equality in family life, gradually eliminating gender-based violence			
Target 1: Shorten the women's time gap in doing housework by 2 times as compared with men by 2015 and by 1.5 times lower by 2020		x	

Targets	Achieved	Under-achieved	Insufficient data for evaluation
<p>Target 2: 40% by 2015 and 50% of detected domestic violence survivors by 2020 will be counselled on psychological and legal matters, get support and care at the support facilities for domestic violence survivors. Up to 75% of the detected perpetrators of domestic violence not being to criminal liability will be counselled at domestic violence counselling centers</p>			x
<p>Target 3: By 2015 and sustaining up to 2020, 100% of the returned victims of trafficking through being returned, rescued and self-returned will be entitled to the support and community reintegration services</p>	x		
<p>Objective 7: To enhance state management capacity of gender equality</p>			
<p>Target 1: By 2015, 80% and by 2020, 100% of draft legal normative documents that are identified to have content related to gender equality or to contain gender inequality, gender discrimination issues will be mainstreamed with gender equality issues</p>	x		

Targets	Achieved	Under-achieved	Insufficient data for evaluation
<p>Target 2: By 2015 and sustaining up to 2020, 100% of the members of Drafting Committees and Editorial Teams that draft the legal normative documents were identified as having gender equality related issues or to contain gender inequalities, gender discrimination will be provided with training on gender, gender analysis and gender mainstreaming</p>	x		
<p>Target 3: By 2015 and sustaining up to 2020, the provinces/cities under central control will appoint a sufficient number of staff working on gender equality; form a pool/team of collaborators, volunteers to participate in gender equality and the advancement of women activities</p>	x		
<p>Target 4: By 2015 and sustaining up to 2020, 100% of staff, civil servants and public employees working on gender equality and the advancement of women at all levels and sectors will receive professional/specialized training at least once</p>	x		
Overall calculation	14	7	1

Appendix D1. Introduction Letter to Interview



School of Social Sciences & Public [Policy]
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June 2021

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Sir/Madam

This letter is to introduce Ms Tran Le Khanh Chi, who is a PhD student at School of Social Sciences & Public Policy, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. She will produce her student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

She is conducting a research leading to the production of a thesis on the subject of “Voices from Peace House and beyond: Exploring experiences of female trafficking victims in Vietnam and perception of two national equality policies (2011-2020) that aim to reduce human trafficking”. The research is being funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade – New Zealand.

The research is being undertaken with the purposes of: exploring how gender inequality affects human trafficking in Vietnam (focusing on three specific geographic areas of both human trafficking and gender inequality, through the stories of survivors, experts and stakeholders), and analysing the impact of two national gender equality policies on female trafficking victims, survivors and targets. These gender-based policies are the National Plan on Gender Equality (2016-2020) and the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2011-2020). Overall, the research seeks to provide a novel analysis of gender-based aspects of human trafficking. The goal is to help to improve policies that protect targets of human trafficking from risks of exploitation and trafficking. The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations. –

She would like to invite you to assist with this project by agreeing to be involved in an interview which covers certain aspects of this topic. It would take 1 – 2 hours to complete this interview.

Any information you provide will be treated confidential and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the thesis findings, reports or other publications. You are entirely free to withdraw from the interview at any time or to decline to answer any particular questions.

She will seek your consent (on the attached form), to audio-record and transcribe the interview, to use the recording or transcript in the thesis, reports or other publications, on condition that your name or identity is respected and not revealed, and to make the recording available to other researchers on the same conditions.

Any queries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on +64 9 9219999 ext. 6852, or email (antje.deckert@aut.ac.nz).

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Your sincerely

Dr. Antje Deckert

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 12/8/2021 AUTEK Reference number 21/205



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June 2021

THƯ GIỚI THIỆU

Thưa quý ông / quý bà!

Bức thư này là để giới thiệu Thạc sĩ Trần Lê Khánh Chi, đang là nghiên cứu sinh tại Trường Khoa học Xã hội & Chính sách Công, Đại học Công nghệ Auckland. Cô ấy sẽ xuất trình thẻ sinh viên có ảnh của mình như là bằng chứng để xác nhận là sinh viên của trường.

Hiện nay, cô Chi đang làm luận án tiến sĩ với đề tài “Tiếng nói từ Ngôi nhà Bình yên và các bên liên quan: Tìm hiểu trải nghiệm của các nạn nhân mua bán phụ nữ ở Việt Nam và nhận thức về hai chính sách quốc gia về bình đẳng giới (2011-2020) nhằm giảm mua bán người”. Nghiên cứu này được tài trợ bởi Bộ Ngoại giao và Thương mại New Zealand.

Nghiên cứu được thực hiện với mục đích: tìm hiểu mức độ ảnh hưởng của bất bình đẳng giới đối với mua bán người ở Việt Nam (tập trung vào ba khu vực địa lý cụ thể của cả mua bán người và bất bình đẳng giới, thông qua những câu chuyện của những người sống sót trở về, các chuyên gia và các bên liên quan), phân tích tác động của hai chính sách bình đẳng giới quốc gia đối với nạn nhân và những mục tiêu của mua bán phụ nữ. Các chính sách dựa trên giới này là Kế hoạch quốc gia về bình đẳng giới (2016-2020) và Chiến lược quốc gia về bình đẳng giới (2011-2020). Nhìn chung, nghiên cứu tìm cách cung cấp một phân tích mới về các khía cạnh dựa trên giới của mua bán người. Mục tiêu là giúp cải thiện các chính sách nhằm bảo vệ các mục tiêu mua bán người khỏi các nguy cơ bị bóc lột và bị mua bán. Các kết quả của nghiên cứu này có thể được sử dụng cho các ấn phẩm và bài thuyết trình học thuật.

Cô ấy rất vui lòng muốn mời quý bà/quý ông hỗ trợ dự án này bằng cách đồng ý tham gia vào một cuộc phỏng vấn trực tuyến về một số vấn đề liên quan đến đề tài này. Cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ kéo dài khoảng 1-2 tiếng đồng hồ.

Chắc chắn rằng bất kỳ thông tin được cung cấp sẽ được đối xử với sự tôn trọng cao nhất và không ai trong số những người tham gia sẽ bị nhận ra trong các kết quả của luận án. Quý bà/quý ông hoàn toàn tự do chấm dứt cuộc phỏng vấn bất kỳ lúc nào hoặc từ chối trả lời bất kỳ câu hỏi cụ thể nào.

Cô ấy sẽ cần sự đồng ý của quý bà/quý ông (được nêu trong mẫu đi kèm thư này) để được ghi âm cuộc phỏng vấn. Mục đích của việc ghi âm là giúp cô ấy sao chép lại những nội dung của cuộc phỏng vấn để chuẩn bị cho luận án. Tên và thông tin mà quý bà/quý ông cung cấp sẽ được tôn trọng và đảm bảo bí mật.

Nếu có bất cứ câu hỏi liên quan đến nghiên cứu này, hãy liên lạc với tôi theo địa chỉ ghi trên thư này hoặc qua điện thoại số +64 9 9219999 máy lẻ 6852, hoặc qua email antje.deckert@aut.ac.nz.


Chân thành cảm ơn sự quan tâm và giúp đỡ của quý bà/quý ông!

Kính thư

Tiến sĩ Antje Deckert

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 12/8/2021 AUTEK Reference number 21/205

Appendix D2. Information Sheet



TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

Participant Information Sheet

For NGOs and state agencies workers in Interview

Date Information Sheet Produced:
08 June 2021

Project Title
Voices from Peace House and beyond: Exploring experiences of female trafficking victims in Vietnam and perceptions of two national equality policies (2011-2020) that aim to reduce human trafficking.

An Invitation
Dear Mr/Ms ..., I am Chi (Le Khanh) Tran, a doctoral student of School of Social Science & Public Policy, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. This research explores the experiences of female trafficking victims/survivors and related stakeholders in Vietnam and the perception of two national gender equality policies (2011-2020). A qualitative method strategy will be adopted in this research, including semi-structured in-depth interviews and document analysis. This project is supported by School of Social Science & Public Policy, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand, and being funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade – New Zealand.

You are invited to participate in an online interview which explores your experiences in working with female survivors of trafficking, and your views about related national gender equality policies. Your participation in this research is voluntary and you are free to withdraw the project at any time, or not answer any question that you do not want. Your help would be highly appreciated.

What is the nature and purpose of this research?
Human trafficking and gender equality are two social issues that have been widely researched, and they are shown to be linked. Human trafficking is also a complex issue in Vietnam. Gender inequality is one factor driving human trafficking both indirectly and directly. However, this driving factor has not been investigated in the context of Vietnam despite the fact that human trafficking is considered a major social problem in Vietnam.

Firstly, this study will explore how gender inequality affects human trafficking in Vietnam, focusing on three specific geographic areas of both human trafficking and gender inequality, through the stories of survivors, experts and stakeholders. Secondly, this study will analyse the impact of two national gender equality policies on female trafficking victims, survivors and targets. These gender-based policies are the National Plan on Gender Equality (2016-2020) and the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2011-2020). Overall, the research seeks to provide a novel analysis of gender-based aspects of human trafficking.

Through the experiences and opinion of related experts and stakeholders, this research seeks to advocate for survivor's legal support, safety and protection; psychological, physiological and financial support; and education. The goal is to help to improve policies that protect targets of human trafficking from risks of exploitation and trafficking.

Critical document analysis and semi-structured, in-depth interviews will be conducted for data collection in three locations in Vietnam (Hanoi, Laocal, Cantho) as these three locations are representative of different characteristics of human trafficking in Vietnam. Thematic analysis will be used to analyse the data.

The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?
The interview seeks to explore your opinion about human trafficking in Vietnam, your perception of national equality policies and how they may impact on trafficking victims' experiences and human trafficking in Vietnam. In order to ensure that the research is conducted in an ethical manner and to obtain reliable data, some general recruitment requirements are included for this research.

You are identified and invited to this research based on your voluntary participation, your sufficient working experiences related to human trafficking (at least 6 months experiences).

10 October 2021

page 1 of 6

This version was edited in June 2021



TE WĀMANGĀ ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

How do I agree to participate in this research?

The participant information sheet and Consent form will be delivered to you through email or other social networks. If you agree to take part in the research, please let the researcher know via email, phone, private chat/message, social network site or direct confirmation.

Please read and sign the enclosed Consent Form and send it back to the researcher via email: tranchi309@gmail.com or lekhanhchi.tran@autuni.ac.nz

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice). You are able to withdraw from the study at any time.

What will happen in this research?

One of the major aims of this research is to explore how gender inequality may affect human trafficking in Vietnam (if any) and the impact of the two national equality policies on addressing human trafficking in Vietnam (if any) through the experiences, opinion and perception of NGOs, other human trafficking-related experts/stakeholders, and member of Vietnam Women's Union.

You are invited to participate in an interview with a set of indicative questions. A copy of the indicative questions for the interviews will be provided to you along with this Information sheet.

The interview aims to understand your experiences related to dealing with human trafficking in Vietnam (especially in working with survivors), and your perception/opinion about the two national equality policies in Vietnam (2011-2020). The online interview will be expected to last about 1 – 2 hours at your workplace, or any private place whichever is suitable, comfortable, convenient for and chosen by you.

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed for the purposes of data analysis.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Because interviews will be conducted in a safe and comfortable place, basically your participant will ensure safety. The only issue of participating in this research is time-consuming that you may take during the interview (1-2 hours). If you have any concerns regarding expected risks or discomfort, please inform the researcher. All the information you provide will be treated as confidential.

Are there any risks for illegal behaviours?

The research will not involve collection of information about illegal behaviour(s) which could place you at current or future risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to your financial standing, employability, professional or personal relationships.

What are the benefits?


The expected long-term outcome of this research is to positively affect gender-based governmental policies in Vietnam related to human trafficking, especially its female survivors. The research may help the government generate appropriate policies to eliminate or minimize gender inequality and improve women's empowerment to reduce human trafficking. Besides, it may also help the government to improve the relevant legislative framework. Furthermore, as this is a transnational issue, the research outcomes will contribute to the common battle against human trafficking, especially in the countries in the region or countries with a similar context. Besides, this will also aim at strengthening the international networks to improve human rights and support the battle against trafficking.

As a participant, you will have the opportunity to express your opinion and from that, contributing to the improvement of related policies which may support your working experience in the future.

As a researcher, the researcher will use the information you provide to write the thesis. The thesis will contribute towards the achievement of her doctoral degree.

How will my privacy be protected?

All the information you provide will be treated confidentially. Your privacy and confidentiality will be observed by using pseudonyms and by withholding the names of the specific NGOs/State agency in the thesis writing. You also have the option to review the transcript of the interview. You may indicate your interest to get a copy of the transcript in the enclosed Consent Form.



Only the researchers listed in this Information sheet have access to the data during data collection, analysis stages and after findings have been produced. The data will be securely stored at the researcher's office and will be destroyed after a required time according to the AUT protocol.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There are no costs for you to take part in this research, apart from your time for the interview and reviewing its transcript. The interview should take from 1 to 2 hours.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

It would be grateful for the researcher to receive your confirmation of participation within three weeks of receiving this invitation. If you agree to take part in the research, please let the researcher know via email, phone, private chat/message, social network site or directly.

- By email at lekhanhchi.tran@autuni.ac.nz / tranchi309@gmail.com;
- Or by phone (+64 27 347 5588);
- Or social network sites (Skype, Facebook message, Zalo message, ...)
- Or direct confirmation.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

A one-or-two pages summary of the findings/a link to a podcast or YouTube video (with short summary) will be made available after data analysis is completed, and shared with you by the researcher if you would like to see them, via email. Please be aware that it may take several months from the time you complete the interview until the findings reached. Thank you in advance for your patience.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Antje Deckert, antje.deckert@aut.ac.nz, + 64 9 9219999 ext. 6852 or Associate Professor, Dr Sharyn Graham Davies, Sharyn.davies@aut.ac.nz

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Tran Le Khanh Chi, lekhanhchi.tran@autuni.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Antje Deckert, antje.deckert@aut.ac.nz, + 64 9 9219999 ext. 6852

Associate Professor, Dr Sharyn Graham Davies, Sharyn.davies@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 12/8/2021 AUTECH Reference number 21/205

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TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

Phiếu thông tin đề tài nghiên cứu

Cho những người tham gia phỏng vấn từ NGOs và các cơ quan chính phủ khác

Ngày hình thành phiếu:

08/6/2021

Tên dự án:

Tiếng nói từ Ngôi nhà Bình yên và các bên liên quan: Tìm hiểu trải nghiệm của các nạn nhân mua bán phụ nữ ở Việt Nam và nhận thức về hai chính sách quốc gia về bình đẳng giới (2011-2020) nhằm giảm mua bán người.

Lời mời:

Chào Anh/Chị!

Tôi là Trần Lê Khánh Chi, hiện là sinh viên nghiên cứu sinh của trường Khoa học xã hội và chính sách công, Đại học Công nghệ Auckland.

Nghiên cứu này tìm hiểu trải nghiệm của nạn nhân mua bán người (nạn nhân nữ) và các bên liên quan ở Việt Nam, và cũng tìm hiểu nhận thức về hai chính sách bình đẳng giới quốc gia (2011-2020). Một phương pháp định tính sẽ được áp dụng trong nghiên cứu này, bao gồm phỏng vấn sâu bán cấu trúc và phân tích tài liệu. Dự án này được hỗ trợ bởi Trường Khoa học Xã hội & Chính sách Công, Đại học Công nghệ Auckland, và được tài trợ bởi Bộ Ngoại giao và Thương mại New Zealand.

Anh/Chị sẽ được mời tham gia một cuộc phỏng vấn với câu hỏi liên quan nhằm tìm hiểu kinh nghiệm của Anh/Chị khi làm việc với những phụ nữ sống sót sau mua bán người và quan điểm của Anh/Chị về các chính sách bình đẳng giới quốc gia có liên quan. Việc Anh/Chị tham gia vào nghiên cứu này là hoàn toàn tự nguyện và Anh/Chị có thể tự do dừng phỏng vấn bất kỳ lúc nào, hoặc từ chối trả lời câu hỏi nào mà Anh/Chị không muốn. Chúng tôi rất trân trọng sự giúp đỡ của Anh/Chị.

Mục đích của nghiên cứu

Mua bán người và bình đẳng giới là hai vấn đề xã hội đã được nghiên cứu rộng rãi và có mối liên hệ với nhau. Mua bán người cũng là một vấn đề phức tạp ở Việt Nam. Bất bình đẳng giới là một trong những yếu tố thúc đẩy mua bán người cả gián tiếp và trực tiếp. Tuy nhiên, yếu tố này vẫn chưa được nghiên cứu sâu trong bối cảnh của Việt Nam mặc dù thực tế mua bán người được coi là một vấn đề xã hội lớn ở Việt Nam.

Đầu tiên, nghiên cứu này sẽ tìm hiểu mức độ ảnh hưởng của bất bình đẳng giới đối với mua bán người ở Việt Nam, tập trung vào ba khu vực địa lý cụ thể của cả mua bán người và bất bình đẳng giới, thông qua những câu chuyện của những người sống sót trở về, các chuyên gia và các bên liên quan. Tiếp theo, nghiên cứu này sẽ phân tích tác động của hai chính sách bình đẳng giới quốc gia đối với nạn nhân và những mục tiêu của mua bán phụ nữ. Các chính sách dựa trên giới này là Kế hoạch quốc gia về bình đẳng giới (2016-2020) và Chiến lược quốc gia về bình đẳng giới (2011-2020). Nhìn chung, nghiên cứu tìm cách cung cấp một phân tích mới về các khía cạnh dựa trên giới của mua bán người.

Thông qua kinh nghiệm và ý kiến của các chuyên gia và các bên liên quan, nghiên cứu này tìm cách vận động để hỗ trợ pháp lý, an toàn và bảo vệ nạn nhân; hỗ trợ tâm lý, sinh lý và tài chính; và giáo dục. Mục tiêu là giúp cải thiện các chính sách nhằm bảo vệ các mục tiêu mua bán người khỏi các nguy cơ bị bóc lột và bị mua bán.

Phân tích tài liệu và phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc (online) sẽ được thực hiện để thu thập dữ liệu tại ba địa điểm ở Việt Nam (Hà Nội, Lào Cai, Cần Thơ) vì ba địa điểm này có những đặc điểm khác nhau của tội phạm mua bán người ở Việt Nam. Phân tích chuyên đề sẽ được sử dụng để phân tích dữ liệu.

Các kết quả của nghiên cứu này có thể được sử dụng cho các ấn phẩm và bài thuyết trình học thuật.

Tôi đã được xác định như thế nào và tại sao tôi được mời tham gia nghiên cứu này?

Cuộc phỏng vấn nhằm tìm hiểu ý kiến của Anh/Chị về nạn nhân mua bán người ở Việt Nam, nhận thức của Anh/Chị về các chính sách bình đẳng quốc gia và chúng có thể tác động như thế nào đến trải nghiệm của nạn nhân cũng như tình hình mua bán người ở Việt Nam. Để đảm bảo rằng nghiên cứu được thực hiện một cách có đạo đức và thu được dữ liệu đáng tin cậy, một số yêu cầu tuyển dụng chung được đưa vào cho nghiên cứu này.



TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
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Anh/Chị được xác định và được mời tham gia nghiên cứu này dựa trên sự tham gia tự nguyện của Anh/Chị, kinh nghiệm làm việc của Anh/Chị liên quan đến hỗ trợ nạn nhân/phòng ngừa mua bán người (ít nhất 6 tháng kinh nghiệm).

Tôi đồng ý tham gia như thế nào?

Phiếu thông tin đề tài và mẫu đồng ý sẽ được gửi đến Anh/Chị qua email hoặc mạng xã hội khác. Nếu Anh/Chị đồng ý tham gia nghiên cứu, vui lòng cho người nghiên cứu biết qua email, điện thoại, trò chuyện / tin nhắn, hoặc qua mạng xã hội.

Vui lòng đọc và ký vào Mẫu đồng ý kèm theo và gửi lại cho người nghiên cứu qua địa chỉ email sau: tranchi309@gmail.com hoặc lekhanhchi.tran@autuni.ac.nz

Việc Anh/Chị tham gia vào nghiên cứu này là tự nguyện (hoàn toàn là sự lựa chọn của Anh/Chị). Anh/Chị có thể rút khỏi nghiên cứu bất kỳ lúc nào.

Điều gì sẽ xảy ra trong nghiên cứu này?

Một trong những mục tiêu chính của nghiên cứu này là tìm hiểu xem bất bình đẳng giới có thể ảnh hưởng như thế nào đến tình hình mua bán người ở Việt Nam (nếu có) và tác động của hai chính sách bình đẳng quốc gia đối với việc phòng chống mua bán người ở Việt Nam (nếu có) thông qua kinh nghiệm, quan điểm và nhận thức của các tổ chức phi chính phủ, các chuyên gia / bên liên quan khác liên quan đến mua bán người và thành viên của Hội Liên hiệp Phụ nữ Việt Nam.

Anh/Chị được mời tham gia một cuộc phỏng vấn với một bộ câu hỏi được đính kèm trong tờ Thông tin này. Cuộc phỏng vấn nhằm mục đích tìm hiểu kinh nghiệm của Anh/Chị liên quan đến đối phó với nạn mua bán người ở Việt Nam (đặc biệt là trong làm việc với nạn nhân đã trở về), và nhận thức / quan điểm của Anh/Chị về hai chính sách bình đẳng quốc gia ở Việt Nam (2011-2020). Cuộc phỏng vấn trực tuyến dự kiến sẽ kéo dài khoảng 1 - 2 giờ tại nơi làm việc của Anh/Chị, hoặc bất kỳ địa điểm riêng tư nào phù hợp, thoải mái, thuận tiện và do Anh/Chị lựa chọn.

Cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được ghi âm và chép lại cho mục đích phân tích dữ liệu.

Có nguy hiểm hay sự không thoải mái khi tham gia nghiên cứu?

Bởi vì cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được tiến hành trực tuyến ở một nơi an toàn và thoải mái, do đó sẽ không có sự nguy hiểm hay không thoải mái cho Anh/Chị. Tuy nhiên việc tham gia có thể ảnh hưởng đến thời gian quý báu của Anh/Chị khi anh chị đồng ý tham gia phỏng vấn (kéo dài 1-2 giờ). Nếu Anh/Chị có bất cứ vấn đề gì về những mối nguy cơ hoặc không thoải mái theo dự đoán hoặc thực tế, xin vui lòng cho người nghiên cứu biết. Tất cả thông tin Anh/Chị cung cấp sẽ được tôn trọng và đảm bảo an toàn.

Có rủi ro nào cho các hành vi bất hợp pháp không?

Nghiên cứu sẽ không liên quan đến việc thu thập thông tin về (các) hành vi bất hợp pháp có thể đặt Anh/Chị vào nguy cơ ở hiện tại hoặc trong tương lai phải chịu trách nhiệm hình sự hoặc dân sự hoặc gây tổn hại đến vị thế tài chính, khả năng làm việc, các mối quan hệ nghề nghiệp hoặc cá nhân của Anh/Chị.

Những lợi ích nào sẽ thu được từ nghiên cứu?

Tác động lâu dài mong muốn của nghiên cứu này là đóng góp tích cực đến các chính sách dựa trên giới của chính phủ ở Việt Nam liên quan đến nạn mua bán người, đặc biệt là nạn nhân là phụ nữ. Nghiên cứu này có thể giúp chính phủ đưa ra các chính sách phù hợp để xóa bỏ hoặc giảm thiểu bất bình đẳng giới và nâng cao năng lực cho phụ nữ để giảm nạn mua bán người. Bên cạnh đó, nó cũng có thể giúp chính phủ cải thiện khuôn khổ lập pháp liên quan. Hơn nữa, vì đây là một vấn đề xuyên quốc gia nên kết quả nghiên cứu sẽ đóng góp vào cuộc chiến chung chống nạn mua bán người, đặc biệt là ở các nước trong khu vực hoặc các nước có bối cảnh tương tự. Bên cạnh đó, việc này cũng sẽ nhằm tăng cường mạng lưới quốc tế nhằm cải thiện nhân quyền và hỗ trợ cuộc chiến chống mua bán người.

Với tư cách là một người tham gia, Anh/Chị sẽ có cơ hội chia sẻ ý kiến của mình và từ đó, đóng góp vào việc cải thiện các chính sách liên quan có thể hỗ trợ các hoạt động công tác của cơ quan/tổ chức Anh/Chị trong tương lai.

Là một nhà nghiên cứu, cô ấy sẽ sử dụng thông tin Anh/Chị cung cấp để viết luận án của mình. Luận án sẽ đóng góp vào việc đạt được bằng tiến sĩ của người nghiên cứu.

AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU**Quyền riêng tư của tôi được bảo vệ như thế nào?**

Tất cả các thông tin Anh/Chị cung cấp sẽ được tôn trọng theo chế độ bảo mật. Quyền riêng tư và bảo mật của Anh/Chị sẽ được đảm bảo bằng cách mã hóa và giấu tên của các tổ chức phi chính phủ / cơ quan nhà nước cụ thể trong luận án. Anh/Chị cũng có tùy chọn để xem lại hoặc nhận một bản sao nội dung được ghi chép lại của cuộc phỏng vấn nếu Anh/Chị đánh dấu vào mục này trong Mẫu đồng ý kèm theo.

Chỉ những người nghiên cứu được liệt kê trong phiếu thông tin này mới có quyền truy cập vào dữ liệu trong giai đoạn thu thập dữ liệu, phân tích và sau khi có kết quả. Dữ liệu sẽ được lưu trữ an toàn tại văn phòng của người nghiên cứu và sẽ bị hủy sau một thời gian cần thiết theo quy định bảo mật của trường.

Chi phí tham gia vào nghiên cứu?

Anh/Chị không phải trả bất kỳ chi phí nào để tham gia vào nghiên cứu này, ngoài thời gian phỏng vấn và xem xét nội dung được ghi lại của cuộc phỏng vấn (nếu Anh/Chị muốn). Cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ kéo dài từ 1 đến 2 giờ.

Tôi có thời gian/cơ hội để xem xét lời mời này?

Người nghiên cứu sẽ rất biết ơn nếu nhận được xác nhận tham gia của Anh/Chị trong vòng ba tuần kể từ khi nhận được lời mời này. Nếu Anh/Chị đồng ý tham gia nghiên cứu, vui lòng cho cô ấy biết qua email, điện thoại, trò chuyện / tin nhắn riêng tư, trang mạng xã hội hoặc trực tiếp.

- Qua email tại lekhanhchi.tran@autuni.ac.nz / tranchi309@gmail.com;
- Hoặc qua điện thoại (+64 27347 5588);
- Hoặc các trang mạng xã hội (Skype, tin nhắn Facebook, tin nhắn Zalo,...)
- Hoặc xác nhận trực tiếp.

Tôi sẽ nhận được phản hồi về kết quả của nghiên cứu này chứ?

Bản tóm tắt một hoặc hai trang về các phát hiện / liên kết đến podcast hoặc video YouTube (với bản tóm tắt ngắn) sẽ được cung cấp sau khi hoàn thành phân tích dữ liệu và người nghiên cứu sẽ chia sẻ qua email với Anh/Chị nếu Anh/Chị muốn xem. Xin lưu ý rằng có thể mất vài tháng kể từ khi Anh/Chị hoàn thành cuộc phỏng vấn cho đến khi có được kết quả. Rất cảm ơn vì sự kiên nhẫn của Anh/Chị.

Nếu tôi vẫn còn những quan tâm khác về nghiên cứu này?

Bất kỳ mối quan tâm nào về bản chất của dự án này Anh/Chị có thể liên hệ với Giám sát dự án, Tiến sĩ Antje Deckert, antje.deckert@aut.ac.nz, + 64 9 9219999 ext. 6852 hoặc Phó Giáo sư, Tiến sĩ Sharyn Graham Davies, Sharyn.davies@aut.ac.nz

Các mối quan tâm nào khác có liên quan, Anh/Chị vui lòng liên hệ hoặc thông báo cho Thư ký điều hành của AUTEK, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Tôi cần liên hệ với ai để biết thêm thông tin về nghiên cứu?

Xin Anh/Chị vui lòng giữ phiếu thông tin này và một bản sao của mẫu đồng ý tham gia cho bất cứ vấn đề tham khảo nào trong thời gian tới. Anh/Chị cũng có thể liên hệ trực tiếp với những người nghiên cứu dưới đây:

Liên hệ với người nghiên cứu:


Trần Lê Khánh Chi, lekhanhchi.tran@autuni.ac.nz

Liên hệ với người hướng dẫn nghiên cứu:

Tiến sĩ Antje Deckert, antje.deckert@aut.ac.nz, + 64 9 9219999 ext. 6852

Phó giáo sư, Tiến sĩ Sharyn Graham Davies, Sharyn.davies@aut.ac.nz

Appendix D3. Consent Form



TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

Consent Form – members of NGOs & state agency

For use when interviews are involved.

Project title: *Voices from Peace House and beyond: Exploring experiences of female trafficking victims in Vietnam and perceptions of two national equality policies (2011-2020) that aim to reduce human trafficking.*

Project Supervisor: *Dr Antje Deckert & Associate Professor, Dr Sharyn Graham Davies*

Researcher: *Tran Le Khanh Chi*

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated dd mmmm yyyy.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I grant permission for the researcher to use direct, attributed quotations from my interview
- I agree that only the researchers listed in the Information sheet have access to the data during data collection, analysis stages and after findings have been produced. I understand that the data will be securely stored at the researcher's office and will be destroyed after a required time according to the AUT protocol. (Amendment 4 - Justification for and clarification about the sharing of the interview recordings with other researchers and inclusion of advice about this in the Information Sheets with an option about this in the Consent Forms)
- I wish to receive a transcript of my interview (please tick one): Yes No
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings through email once the data analysis is complete (please tick one): Yes No

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 12/8/2021 AUTEK Reference number 21/205

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

June 2021

page 1 of 2

This version was last edited in June 2021

AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MĀKAU RAU

Phiếu đồng ý tham gia phỏng vấn

Tên đề tài: **Tiếng nói từ Ngôi nhà Bình Yên và các bên liên quan: Tìm hiểu trải nghiệm của nạn nhân mua bán phụ nữ ở Việt Nam và nhận thức về hai chính sách quốc gia về bình đẳng giới (2011-2020) nhằm giảm mua bán người.**

Người hướng dẫn: **Tiến sĩ Antje Deckert & Phó giáo sư, Tiến sĩ Sharyn Graham Davies**

Người nghiên cứu: **Trần Lê Khánh Chi**

- Tôi đã đọc và hiểu thông tin được cung cấp về dự án nghiên cứu này trong Tờ thông tin ngày dd mmm yyyy.
- Tôi đã có cơ hội đặt câu hỏi và được trả lời.
- Tôi hiểu rằng cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được thực hiện ghi âm và ghi chú.
- Tôi hiểu rằng việc tham gia nghiên cứu này là tự nguyện (lựa chọn của tôi) và tôi có thể rút khỏi nghiên cứu bất cứ lúc nào mà không bị bất lợi về bất kỳ hình thức nào.
- Tôi đồng ý tham gia vào nghiên cứu này.
- Tôi cho phép nhà nghiên cứu sử dụng các trích dẫn trực tiếp từ cuộc phỏng vấn của tôi
- Tôi đồng ý rằng chỉ những người nghiên cứu được liệt kê trong Phiếu thông tin mới có quyền truy cập vào dữ liệu trong giai đoạn thu thập dữ liệu, phân tích và sau khi có kết quả. Tôi hiểu rằng dữ liệu sẽ được lưu trữ an toàn tại văn phòng của người nghiên cứu và sẽ bị hủy sau một thời gian cần thiết theo quy định bảo mật của AUT.
- Tôi muốn nhận bản ghi chú lại cuộc phỏng vấn của mình: Có Không
- Tôi muốn nhận được bản tóm tắt các kết quả nghiên cứu qua email sau khi phân tích dữ liệu hoàn tất: Có Không

Chữ ký của người tham gia:

Tên của người tham gia:

Phương thức liên lạc của người tham gia (Nếu có thể):

.....

Ngày:

Được phê duyệt bởi Ủy ban Đạo đức Đại học Công nghệ Auckland vào ngày 12/8/2021 Số tham chiếu AUTEC 12/8/2021

Lưu ý: Người tham gia nên giữ lại một bản sao của biểu mẫu này.

Appendix D4. Recruitment Flyer

Appendix

PARTICIPANT NEEDED

“If you have been working for supporting trafficking victims for over 6 months, you may be eligible to participate in this research”

Are you interested in exploring Human trafficking and National Gender Equality Policies?

This study seeks to raise the voices of related stakeholders, explore the experiences of female trafficking victims in Vietnam, explore the perception of two national equality policies (2011-2020) that aim to reduce human trafficking.

You are invited to take part in an online interview. Your participation is really appreciated!

Location & Time

- Online
- Time for interview is based on your preferred schedule, but could last from 1-2 hours

Are you eligible?

- You are from NGOs/ Vietnam Women' Union/ other related governmental agencies (MOLISA, Police force, border army, ...)
- Have at least 6 months experience working with trafficking victims
- You are based in Vietnam



STOP
HUMAN
TRAFFICKING

If you're unsure if you meet the requirements, please contact the researcher:

Tran Le Khanh Chi
(PhD candidate)
Auckland University of Technology

Tranchi309@gmail.com
Lekhanhchi.tran@autuni.ac.nz

Facebook: Tran Le Khanh Chi
Skype: tranchi309
Zalo: +64 27 347 5588

TÌM KIẾM NGƯỜI THAM GIA

“Nếu bạn có kinh nghiệm làm việc về hỗ trợ nạn nhân mua bán người được từ 6 tháng trở lên, bạn có thể đủ điều kiện tham gia vào nghiên cứu này”

Bạn có hứng thú tìm hiểu về mua bán người và các chính sách bình đẳng giới quốc gia không?

Nghiên cứu này nhằm nâng cao tiếng nói của các bên liên quan, tìm hiểu trải nghiệm của các nạn nhân mua bán phụ nữ ở Việt Nam, tìm hiểu nhận thức về hai chính sách bình đẳng quốc gia (2011-2020) để nhằm giảm nạn mua bán người.

Bạn được mời tham gia một cuộc phỏng vấn trực tuyến. Tôi rất biết ơn và trân trọng sự tham gia của bạn!

Địa điểm & Thời gian

- Trực tuyến
- Thời gian phỏng vấn dựa trên lịch trình bạn muốn, và cuộc phỏng vấn dự kiến có thể kéo dài từ 1-2 giờ

Bạn có phù hợp tham gia?

- Bạn có thể đến từ các tổ chức phi chính phủ / Hội Liên hiệp Phụ nữ Việt Nam / các cơ quan chính phủ liên quan khác (Bộ LĐTBXH, Công an, Bộ đội biên phòng, ...)
- Có ít nhất 6 tháng kinh nghiệm làm việc với nạn nhân buôn người
- Bạn ở Việt Nam



STOP
HUMAN
TRAFFICKING

Nếu bạn không chắc mình có đáp ứng các yêu cầu phù hợp hay không, vui lòng liên hệ với nhà nghiên cứu:

Trần Lê Khánh Chi
(Nghiên cứu sinh bậc tiến sĩ)
Đại học công nghệ Auckland

Tranchi309@gmail.com
Lekhanhchi.tran@autuni.ac.nz

Facebook: Tran Le Khanh Chi
Skype: tranchi309
Zalo: +64 27 347 5588

Appendix E. Research participants Pseudonym Codes



Research participants Pseudonym Codes

No	Sex		Age	Organisations	Pseudonyms Code
	Man	Woman			
1		X	30s	Government agencies	(G1, woman, 30s, Gov)
2		X	45s		(G2, woman, 45s, Gov)
3		X	45s		(G3, woman, 45s, Gov)
4		X	30s		(G4, woman, 30s, Gov)
5		x	50s		(G5, woman, 50s, Gov)
6		x	50s		(G6, woman, 50s, Gov)
7		x	50s		(G7, woman, 50s, Gov)
8		x	45s		(G8, woman, 45s, Gov)
9		x	30s		(G9, woman, 30s, Gov)
1		X	40s	NGOs	(N1, woman, 40s, NGO)
2	x		45s		(N2, man, 45s, NGO)
3		X	35s		(N3, woman, 35s, NGO)
4		X	40s		(N4, man, 40s, NGO)
5		x	50s		(N5, woman, 50s, NGO)
6		x	30s		(N6, woman, 30s, NGO)
7		x	35s		(N7, woman, 35s, NGO)
8		x	40s		(N8, woman, 40s, NGO)
1		X	35s	Others	(O1, woman, 35s, Others)
2		X	50s		(O2, woman, 50s, Others)
3		X	50s		(O3, woman, 50s, Others)
4		X	40s		(O4, woman, 40s, Others)
5	X		40s		(O5, man, 40s, Others)
6	X		45s		(O6, man, 45s, Others)

|

ⁱ Additional quotes for 3.1. Intersectionality and gender inequality:

“Actually, I think there are many factors that cause human trafficking.” (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

In general, women are still vulnerable to being trafficked to China due to gender inequality that still exists in China and other neighbouring countries like Taiwan, Korea and Singapore. The issue is not limited to Vietnam alone. As long as women are viewed as commodities that can be bought and sold in the region, Vietnamese women will continue to face the risk of human trafficking. (O5, man, 40s, Others)

“Trafficking in the northern mountainous area has a history that precedes trafficking elsewhere (within Vietnam) and is closely related to China's one-child policy with its tradition of male chauvinism (valuing men over women).” (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

ii Additional quotes from study participants on 3.2.1. trafficking market demand – women as commodities:

As women can be lured to be sold for many purposes (sex trade, forced marriage, forced labour, ...), they are the main victims. Men are mainly trafficked for labour exploitation, but I have had no experience in working with these cases, so I have no comment about that. [...] 100% of trafficked victims I know and have worked with are women, which means there is a gender disparity in human trafficking issue. (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

“I see that the situation of women forced to prostitute is more common, and the customers often find women as servitudes, so women are the majority of victims.” (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

“I think the purpose of trafficking is the decision factor in choosing the target; for example, women are certainly the targets for prostitutes.” (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

I think if we look at the angle/aspect of trafficking on women, it is very different because women are almost the commodity, something that someone can assess/own, while the cases of men, for example, migrants to Russia or other countries for labour or modern slavery, these cases are so different. (O5, man, 40s, Others)

“In the cases of trafficking to foreign destinations, women are the majority, in the form of sexual slaves.” (N2, man, 45s, NGO)

“Of course, in the cases of trafficked women, they are mostly victims for the purposes of sexual exploitation or forced marriage.” (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

“Women victims are often forced into sexually exploited or forced marriage” (N8, woman, 40s, NGO)

“Although men are also victims of trafficking in some cases for the forms of labour exploitation or organ removal, women are the majority victims, with the most serious and common form of sexual exploitation, or trafficking for the exploitation of surrogacy” (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

iii According to Le and Hoang (2019): "Wife-kidnapping" is a cultural aspect of Hmong marriage. When a Hmong couple consents to marriage but faces financial or parental obstacles, they may plan for the boy to "kidnap" the girl, who pretends to resist. If a boy unilaterally kidnaps a girl he loves, she may escape, and his family must compensate for hers. Originally a custom with profound human values, it has increasingly become a pretext for sexual abuse or trafficking, adversely impacting many Hmong girls of school age.

“The process of "wife-kidnapping" is considered a cultural characteristic of the Hmong marriage. When the Hmong boys and girls have consented to each other, the boy will find a way to kidnap the girl to make her his wife. If the couple loves each other but due to poverty, they cannot afford the bride price or because the girl's parents do not agree, then the two will discuss a plan for the boy to "kidnap" her as a wife. The girl has agreed but still pretends to cry and react. If a boy loves a girl unilaterally and kidnap the person he loves, the girl will find a way to escape, or the boy will let her escape. At that time, the boy's family will have to bring the offerings to the girl's house to compensate for her honour. From a custom of profound humanity, it is now gradually transformed into kidnapping for sexually abuse or woman trafficking, affecting the lives of many Hmong girls who are at the age of attending school.” (Le & Hoang, 2019, p. 30).

According to Nguyen et al (2011): The Hmong are known for various marriage customs, including early marriages and a controversial practice known as 'wife snatching.' In this practice, women are abducted for marriage without their or their parents' consent. However, this is just one of several premarital customs among the Hmong. Other practices include consensual and prearranged bride capture, arranged marriages organized by families, marriages initiated by couples seeking parental permission, elopements, and forced marriages due to pregnancy. Traditional marriage is viewed as a union between families as well as individuals.

“Hmong have a reputation for early marriage and Hmong men have acquired some notoriety for a practice of ‘**wifesnatching**’, whereby women are reportedly abducted for marriage, a phenomenon that is generally understood (by outsiders) to occur without the consent of either the woman in question or her parents. **Wife snatching** (txhom poj niam yuav) or ‘**bride capture**’, when a man, usually with the assistance of male relatives or friends, abducts the woman he desires and takes her to his house, is, indeed, widely reported in the literature (Culhane.Pera et al. [2003](#)). Yet this is only one among several premarital procedures. **Bride capture** (zij poj niam) can also be consenting and prearranged with playacting elements (Norgren and Nanda [1996](#); Cooper [1998](#)). **A third variant is arranged marriage** (nqis tsev hais poj niam). This union is organised by two sets of parents or relatives for the benefit of both families (CulhanePera et al. [2003](#)). Hence, similar to amongst the Kinh, a traditional significance of marriage is as a union between families as well as between individuals (Huu Ngoc and Borton 2006). **Fourthly, marriages can also be initiated by couples** (xav sib yuav) who request their parents' permission to marry. In the **fifth case, a couple can elope to the man's house** (caum txiv). **Lastly, there are forced marriages** (yuam sib yuav), whereby families make a pregnant woman and the father of her baby wed (Cu Hoa Van and Hoang Nam [1994](#); Yia Lee [1995](#); Cooper [1998](#))” (Nguyen et al., 2011, p. S202)

^{iv} **Additional quotes from study participants on 3.2.3. local custom/practices restrict women:**

“Customs and traditions are also a related factor.” (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

The issue of early marriage/child marriage is prevalent among certain ethnic minority groups who have a tendency to marry at a very young age. For instance, if a boy asks a 14-15-year-old girl to stop going to school and marry him, the girl may agree and drop out of school to get married. So, these girls go to visit their boyfriends and are later sold. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

For example, in Ha Giang, this girl was about 14-15 years old when she was forced to drop out of school to get married. That area is an ethnic minority area, and girls at that age often need to get married. This girl didn't want to get married and have her thinking. So, she followed her friends to avoid getting married, and then she met a group of traffickers who brought her to China for sexual service. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

The current logic of most people when it comes to issues related to human trafficking is that one reason is the lack of awareness/information about human trafficking (HT), and the other is the economic factor. However, factors related to family or values, for example, I think they are not necessarily linked to economics or awareness but rather to the norms that are sustained and reinforced because the family environment and community nurture those values. (O5, man, 40s, Others)

^v **Additional quotes from study participants on 3.3.1. gender bias in education:**

Women and children are trafficked to China in part because they receive fewer opportunities for personal development, education, and care. This lack of attention makes them more vulnerable to trafficking. [...] If women were given more attention, better educational opportunities, and greater investment in their development, the incidence of human trafficking could decrease. [...] In the at-risk areas, there is a high tendency to favour boys over girls. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

“Some parents believe that having a daughter is pointless. They think their daughters will only get married and that if they can find a wealthy husband, they can return to support their parents. I’ve heard many girls express this.” (G2, woman, 45s, Gov)

“Male chauvinism, or valuing men above women, still exists in many remote mountainous areas where many families are still archaic/outdated/old-conventional/old-fashioned. For example, girls have no value and voice and may not do something or go somewhere.” (O2, woman, 50s, Others)

Gender inequality is a root cause that leads to various issues exploited by human traffickers. For example, in rural areas I've surveyed, parents often believe that girls don't need much education. First, they think the family's financial situation doesn't allow for it, and second, they believe that even if a girl is well-educated, she'll eventually get married, so she does not need to study much. (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

“Many families think that girls do not need to study much, or do not need to study” (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

In some regions, there's a prevailing belief that girls don't need much education. Instead, as they grow up, they are encouraged to participate in arranged marriages abroad as a means to secure a better life and provide financial support to their families. This practice is quite common. While each case needs specific investigation to determine if it constitutes human trafficking, this community mindset significantly influences and drives trafficking activities, especially through marriage brokering and labour migration. (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

^{vi} **Additional quotes from study participants on 3.3.2. filial duties/piety:**

I think the education gap is a big factor. In most cases I've seen and worked with, boys tend to receive more education than girls. While many boys might not finish high school, they often get to at least the 9th or 10th grade. On the other hand, girls tend to drop out of school earlier and stay home. Looking at why girls leave school so early, gender inequality seems to be a significant factor. There's a common belief that girls don't need as much education, or in large families, there's often a choice about who gets to go to school. Limited financial resources and the need for help at home mean that girls are more likely to be the ones to stay home, while boys are prioritized for education. These are the issues we can infer, although there's not enough concrete evidence to prove them fully. Still, these seem to be the possible reasons. [...] When addressing the reasons why these girls leave home, such as poverty, lack of jobs, and low educational levels, we see that their opportunities for stable employment are very limited. This makes them more susceptible to falling for promises of work elsewhere, leading them to become victims of human trafficking. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

"In communities where people still have beliefs/customs, such as preferring men over women, for example, in families with many children, boys will be prioritised to go to school." (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

In some provinces like Vinh Long, Can Tho, Soc Trang, etc., many girls get married to foreign nationals, mostly Taiwanese or Korean husbands, and then send money back to their parents to support their families. This raises the question, why are there no cases of sons doing the same? It is likely because girls are more willing to accept marriage than boys. As long as the husband is good, takes care of them, and supports their parents financially, they are willing to marry them. Even the parents in these areas also encourage their daughters to marry foreigners, as long as they can support them financially. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

"These gender stereotypes have been ingrained in people's minds for a long time. Women are often not given an equal voice in the family, and their opinions are not valued as much as those of men. They are taught how to be children, how the daughters should get married... This cultural bias cannot be changed easily." (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

"When they get an offer that if they get married, they will get this much money to pay off debts, to send for the family... and they accept this offer as a way, to support their family." (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

"...The family even try to ask for help to build the relationship/bridge with broker/agent, to let their children go..." (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

"When they receive an offer promising that marrying someone will earn them a certain amount of money to pay off debts or send back to their families, it often boils down to economic reasons, explaining why they decide to leave." (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

For some young women who run away from home, the community condemns and considers them as naughty children without finding out if it is because the family and the community put pressure on them [...] Someone shared with me the stories that there are girls who were encouraged by their own father or brother to return to work in prostitution to support their family, that is also a gender inequality factor representing that women and girls are under respected - (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

Faced with unemployment, they are easily tempted to engage in traffickers' enticements (O6, man, 45s, Others), such as, "Go to the city or cross the border; there are very high-paying jobs, and I will find work for your daughter. You just let her go with us, and then she will make much money for the family." (O6, man, 45s, Others)

I worked with a case where a girl was trafficked when she was 13 years old. She's the oldest in the family and has other younger siblings. It was summer, and her neighbour first talked to her and asked her if she was going to work, but she refused. After that, the neighbours came to talk to her parents and told them to send her to China to look after/babysit her relatives' children. Then her parents agreed, and she had to go to China, but there she was trafficked to be a wife. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

^{vii} **Additional quotes from study participants on 3.4.1. lack of information about the risks:**

“When they have skills, knowledge, and abilities, if someone tries to lure them or if their parents pressure them, they also have the ability to escape from that environment and can report to the relevant authorities to protect themselves. That's really important.” (N2, man, 45s, NGO)

When talking about awareness and education, with better education, people can enhance their understanding and preventive skills, reducing their vulnerability. In my neighbourhood, 10-15 years ago, there were many cases of trafficking, often perpetrated by individuals within the community who used promises of jobs and a better future to lure victims. If people had a slightly better awareness, they could recognize these risks more effectively. [...] The key is having resources. For example, if they have an education, they can use it to access information more effectively. They will know where to go and whom to approach. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

“In my opinion, there are some reasons related to the victims' awareness, meaning they lack sufficient information about human trafficking, which puts them at risk of being trafficked.” (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

In understanding the world around them, for example, if they hear traffickers promising them 10, 30, or 50 million VND or a monthly salary of 10-20 million VND, if they have an understanding of the world, they would know the usual wage rates or would research whether the company or the promises made are real. [...] In the northern mountainous region, factors such as gender inequality, poverty, and lack of knowledge and skills contribute to human trafficking. [...] In that village, S - illiterate, often subjected to domestic violence (witnessing their mother being beaten as well), restricted from socializing outside for fear of encountering unsavoury men. S became hesitant to interact with strangers. So, when C (C1) heard a man online inviting her to go, C shared this with S, feeling like she was living like a corner ghost (restricted indoors, unaware of the outside world); S decided to follow C. (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

“I see that trafficked individuals often have limited awareness of the issue due to their lower levels of education and living in environments with customs that favour men over women. [...] When I approached many localities, they said they do not understand what human trafficking is...” (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

While working with them, I noticed that they mostly lack information. [...] I see many cases of human trafficking where girls leave their homes because their parents sacrificed their education to pay for their son's school fees. [...] Some people have fewer opportunities to go to school and grow up in environments with limited education, so they have very little access to information. [...] Some people receive limited education, and as they grow up, they find themselves in environments where they have very little information to protect themselves. They might not even be aware of the risks of being trafficked, for instance. Both their families and themselves lack awareness, so they're unable to prevent it. (O2, woman, 50s, Others)

“Most of them decide to go because they have limited awareness and a low level of education.” (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

They don't know what human trafficking entails or its impact, and they don't recognise the issue or its consequences. They only think that if they have a job opportunity, it's great, and they're willing to do anything. As a result, they don't foresee the consequences because they lack awareness about trafficking and migration risks. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

“Victims are often unaware that they are being deceived into being sold for forced marriage, sexual exploitation, or labour exploitation. They are promised a better life on the other side.” (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

^{viii} **Additional quotes from study participants on 3.4.3. Escaping domestic violence:**

“They opt for divorce and seek a new partner, hoping to find someone abroad with a better understanding, believing it will free them from abuse and oppression.” (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

Women, especially in poor rural areas, often see marriage as an inevitable milestone in their lives. Witnessing the lives of married women confined within their households, subjected to abuse, and many factors drive their desire for change. When faced with the choice between staying home, getting married, and continuing in that cycle of life versus going far away to work and potentially earning more money, the second option might offer them hope for a different life. (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

Victims of human trafficking often experience significant psychological instability. Upon deeper examination, most cases stem from domestic violence or unstable family circumstances (such as parental divorce, which places immense pressure on them and deprives them of care and attention). Some are coerced, while others are deceived during their departure from home. [...] Almost all trafficking victims (I know) originate from unhappy or dysfunctional families, where there's domestic violence, excessive alcohol consumption by father, ... Being violent and abuse, prompting them to leave home. During their departure, they encounter groups of people who nurture and uplift them, making them feel valued, and so they believe whatever that group says. They envision a new life there, one where they can prove their worth and provide evidence to their parents that they're not worthless. They trust that a much brighter future is waiting for them there.[...] In another case, after marriage, that woman experienced severe physical and emotional abuse by her husband, making her family life incredibly challenging. Unable to endure such circumstances, she sought overseas employment through labour export centres to improve her financial situation and support her family. However, her husband at home shows no concern for her well-being or whatever she works, focusing solely on whether the monthly remittances are enough. It took two years for her to seek help, get rescued, and return home. Upon returning and addressing the issue of human trafficking, it becomes apparent that she was also a victim of domestic violence. (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

When families are in discord, with violence erupting and the wife fleeing, feeling pressure and shame upon return, they often choose to leave. [...] In my opinion, the majority of victims are women. Because of lower self-worth caused by community prejudices and discrimination, limited opportunities, gender inequality, and violence, they see no better for the future... leading them to easily accept traffickers's tactics of false love and promises of a better future. [...] Here, many cases involve repeated husband beatings, which they don't disclose out of fear of shame in the community. When the beatings become unbearable, they head to China, seeking ways to leave. [...] C. is a case from Sinh Phình, Điện Biên, when, as a girl, she was denied education, married at 15, endured abuse from her husband, returned to her parent's home, and then was deceived into a relationship online and sold. S., from the same village, is illiterate, often beaten by her father (witnessing her mother being beaten too), and prohibited from interacting outside. When C. heard the man online inviting her, she shared it with S., who, feeling like a ghost confined at home, decided to follow C. (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

^{ix} Additional quotes from study participants on 4.1.1. Exploitation of Men:

"Men are mainly forced to work, for example, in fishing boats, stone mining mills or mining plantations. [...] During my working process, I only supported one man; this man was sold into the gold field." (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

"Most male victims are deceived into the promised jobs, for example, jobs with relatively high salaries. [...] I approached a few of the men. They went to Taiwan or Malaysia or somewhere for export labour, not human trafficking." (G5, woman, Gov, 45s)

"I only know that some men are called modern enslaved people [...] But I see, for example, that most men are exploited in labour." (N7, woman, 40s, NGO)

"The form of trafficking also differs slightly between men and women. For example, for men, it's primarily labour exploitation [...]. We feel that 14-15-year-old boys are usually trafficked for labour exploitation." (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

We previously did a regional study on trafficking in Southeast Asia. In fact, men's road to trafficking is a bit different; for example, they are victims of modern slavery for labour exploitation. This group is mainly taken onto fishing boats in Southeast Asia and detained there. [...] I think men mainly focus on migration or labour exploitation [...] As for men, actually about illegal migration, I've met a few people like that (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

^x Additional quotes from study participants on 4.1.2. Dual exploitation on Women:

"To serve 20 - 30 people a day can only be done by using stimulants." (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

"Their lives are like hell; every day, they are forced to take drugs to receive 20-30 guests/day, and they are emotionally numb and paralysed [...] They are forced to receive guests without resting and selecting." (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

“They are given stimulants; they cannot escape because they depend on those stimulants, especially those forced to work in prostitution.” (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

^{xi} Even within Vietnam, trafficking victims might face language barriers because Vietnam is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country, with 54 different ethnic groups that speak more than 100 different languages (Sundkvist & Nguyen, 2020). Kinh and Viet (Người Kinh or người Việt) (Nguyễn, 2018) account for the majority of the population with 85.3% as per the Vietnam Population and Housing Census 2019 (Vietnam General statistics office, 2019). While Vietnamese is the official national language (Phan et al., 2014; Tran & Tanemura, 2020), which is also a compulsory subject taught in the Vietnamese educational system (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo MoET, 2018; Hoang, 2020), other languages are commonly used by ethnic groups inside their communities. In this context, it is worthwhile noting that the Vietnamese government pays attention to preserving minority languages and education (Nguyen & Hamid, 2017).

^{xii} Additional quotes for 5.1.1. Labelling and Victim-blaming:

“The community looks at them with different eyes and says things that hurt them very much ...” (N8, woman, 40s, NGO)

“There are many returning women facing prejudice ..., even being blamed..., even being shamed or treated disrespectfully by other people.” (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

“Sexual abuse is a stigma for women, but not for men. Women, especially those who suffered sexual exploitation, therefore, often face social discrimination and prejudices.” (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

It depends on their trafficking experience; if they were brought there for labour/work, it is okay. Men are mainly exploited for labour. It is just an unfortunate incident; there is no problem at all; they can go home to study, work or find another opportunity. As for women, of course, they are often trafficked for the sex trade or forced marriage, so their experiences of being exploited are entirely different, leading to more stigma on them. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO).

“The challenge that needs to be mentioned is the stigma of the community. They (returnees) are discussed a lot; there are many stories told about them [...] Women often hear the stigma that they “work as prostitutes”...” (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

“Community do not accept them [...] They often are blamed and labelled as “prostitutes” (“con phò”)” (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

“When men return, the community only thinks that they are forced to work, but for women, the trafficked girls are definitely prostitutes and nothing else.” (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

“Although community awareness is now better, there is still a certain stigma against victims of human trafficking because they still think that victims of human trafficking are often sexually exploited.” (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

People don't want outsiders to know that their children/family members are victims of trafficking because the community still think that trafficked victims only work for sex, [...] people have prejudices about them, assuming they go there to become a wife for many people or stay in prostitution. So, there will be discrimination. (G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

“They are all labelled, for example, as pleasure seekers and too lazy to work, which is the reason they are bought and sold, so of course, they will be discriminated against” (G7, woman, 50s, Gov)

“When returning to the community, it is easier for men to reintegrate as people think they went there to work. At the same time, women are more likely to be judged by the community as if they had left for many years and ran away with a guy.” (G4, woman, 30s, Gov)

“Similar to the cases of violence against women and sexual assault on children, victims of trafficking are not at fault. However, it seems that somewhere, people still judge the victims. So, returnees fear being labelled that way if they are known as victims.” (G8, woman, 45s, Gov)

Even they will be blamed, supposing that because they wore over-revealing clothes or they suddenly left home, then leading to the trafficking situation [...] When the public still perceives that trafficking women only the cases of the wives of foreign people or sex traders, this creates stigma and discrimination in the community... (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

95% of the survivors are perceived to have departed willingly; they desired to leave and had no intention of returning. So, they faced rejection from the community and discrimination and were deprived of any avenues for involvement. They were stigmatised as morally deficient individuals without dignity and humiliation. (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

When they return to their locality, they have to face the label of a prostitute. People think that when they go abroad because they work as prostitutes, they suffer from sexual diseases, [...] The neighbours whisper and comment that this or that girl is being bought and sold for debauchery [...] Once they have a reputation as prostitutes, reintegrating is challenging. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

xiii Additional quotes for 5.1.2. Isolation and Rejection:

“Not everyone (their spouse or local people) accepts their past as human trafficking victims” (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

“While some other people may accept and sympathise with them, their loved ones do not accept them, always showing discrimination.” (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

“For those who do not have to leave the community, that is a success. Some people are more prejudiced or whose families do not accept them, so they have to leave, which is even more miserable.” (O5, man, 40s, Others)

Many people have to leave their homeland and live elsewhere even though they really want to live with their family. [...] When reintegrating into the community, many factors lead to re-traumatization, such as gossip and prejudice from the community, and many people are not even welcomed by their families. (G4, woman, 30s, Gov)

Because they returned without being welcomed by the community or supported by their families, they felt they would only exist and not belong there even if they returned. [...] Some have to leave the locality and go to another place to live. Their partner or local people, not everyone will accept their past as a human trafficking victim. (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

“Women can feel inferior or discriminated against. Even because of a single word, they must choose to leave their hometown” (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

“She hardly said anything about her past; of course, she worked elsewhere and not at home (her hometown), and her family at that time did not know what her (previous) job was.” (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

“Many returned, hid the story of what happened, and moved to a new area; then, there was stability.” (G8, woman, 45s, Gov)

“When they face discrimination in their surroundings, they will undoubtedly find a way to leave rather than stay there. [...] they also think it is discrimination. So it is difficult for them to integrate.” (G6, women, Gov, 50s)

xiv Additional quotes for 5.1.3. Lost Prospect for Marriage:

“When they return home, they have no money and are discriminated against, rumoured and unable to get married.” (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

She feels the weight of judgmental eyes upon her in her hometown, where opportunities for marriage seem non-existent. [...] Some individuals remain in the community, labelled as victims, which leads to psychological distress. These challenges hinder their ability to pursue the life they desire. (G8, woman, 45s, Gov)

“They find it difficult to approach opportunities, to form a new family... social stigma...” (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

xv Additional quotes for 5.1.4. Diminished self-esteem:

“They think it is their fault for being exploited or deceived, but they don't think they are victims. [...] She has an inferiority complex and is always defensive [...] They blame themselves [...] Because of their guilt, they think they are not valuable and do not deserve to be respected [...] they always think that no one understands them [...] The biggest challenge is whether they can overcome their inferiority complex or not.” (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

“Feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem, ... lead to women being both the largest group of victims and having difficulty integrating into the community. They often experience a sense of psychological detachment, conflict, pain, and loneliness within their community.” (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

“The similarity of returnees is that they do not want to keep in contact with authorities or any stakeholders to address the trafficking case because they fear others knowing they are victims of trafficking. [...] So, returnees fear being labelled that way if they are known as victims [...] When we try to contact returnees to ask whether they need any support, for example, safe shelter or other support, many of them say, “No, no, we now returned, and we are ok, that is enough, the final support/help is that please do not contact to me anymore” [...] After returning, they do not want to be contacted again, they delete their phone number, even refuse the phone calls from us, so it is hard to follow up to support them.” (G8, woman, 45s, Gov)

They have an inferiority complex with their community; they do not integrate, they discriminate against themselves, and they close themselves, and these are challenges. [...] Such statements hurt them very much and caused them to withdraw even further. This is also a significant obstacle for them when integrating into their community. (N8, woman, 40s, NGO)

It will take them a while to regain balance. That means their psychological factors are affected, causing disappointment, guilt, and inferiority towards their family, themselves, and society [...] In the cases I have approached, the most challenging thing to overcome is still their thoughts and guilt. [...] they feel guilty and shy when they go out. (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

“When they return from being trafficked, they will have inferior psychological obstacles.” (G4, woman, 30s, Gov)

“Women often hear the stigma that they “work as prostitutes”, and so their psychological damage is enormous when they return to reintegrate into the community.” (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

“They are afraid of what the community and the neighbours might think and discuss them, saying that they are this and indecent...” (O6, man, 45s, Others)

“The family or community still discriminate against or is curious about them, which can cause them to withdraw and feel an inferiority complex. This makes it difficult for them to reintegrate into society.” (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

“They struggle with psychological barriers and low self-esteem.” (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

Very few people return (to the shelter) after they leave; they go back to their hometown and do not even contact the shelter again because they are afraid of their past and the community knowing that. They changed their phone number and address; there are many cases like that. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

In general, according to my assessment, their psychology is that when they return, they don't want anyone to know about their past of being trafficked; they are afraid of being stigmatised. So, in most cases, where we can connect to the local area to send support policies, they do not need it because they do not want everyone to know their story, so the percentage of cases that agree to receive support policies is tiny. (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

“They (victims) shared very little.” (G7, woman, 50s, Gov)

“Initially, working with them was very difficult because they were uncooperative [...] They have an inferiority complex, making it difficult to reintegrate.” (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

“They (victims) often do not want to share. [...] they do not want to open up, do not want to share, even with family members.” (G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

“The top difficulty in supporting victims is getting information from them [...]. They want to keep a lot of information private, so I cannot clarify it to help them.” (G4, woman, 30s, Gov)

At first, it is tough to approach them [...] their first mindset is an inferiority complex about their fate [...] They rarely share what they have gone through, and after they go through such things, they are traumatised. (O6, man, 45s, Others)

^{xvi} **Additional quotes for 5.1.5. Being caught in a vicious cycle :**

If women are victims of human trafficking, when they return, their lives will be over [...] They shared that they only feel valuable when they do that job [...] when they do that job, they are given the price, have some freedom, can show their emotion, and feel they are more valuable, but in those cases, they are extensively psychologically damaged. Even though they know what they are doing is illegal, they do not know what else to do, just what they do. There is only one way, like that, for them... (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

Social prejudice is very heavy for them; when they return home, they are almost empty-handed, while the community often still talks about them ... For them, they feel that life there (trafficking destinations), although they are victims, at least they still have some initiative... (O5, man, 40s, Others)

“Many victims go and return on their own, fending for themselves. As the social community and family still stigmatise them, they may leave and go (there) again, repeating the loop over and over.” (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

After returning, many young women still voluntarily follow the traffickers again to continue working there. They said that because after returning, people discriminated against them. People would say they had lost their virginity because they had gone abroad. And then they had no chance to do business or have a boyfriend. By accepting returning to where they were exploited, at least they felt there was an opportunity for them. (O2, woman, 50s, Others)

“She desires to return there (China) because she still considers herself to be with her husband, whereas she feels discriminated against here.” (G8, woman, 45s, Gov)

Many were not able to reintegrate into the community. This often leads to a mental desire for revenge against those who defrauded them, sometimes resulting in them becoming traffickers themselves. [...] When faced with challenges in integration, the complexities of life, or community stigma, they may become disheartened and even recruit others to join them. (G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

^{xvii} Additional quotes for 5.2.1.1. Access to Health Care:

“Female victims need comprehensive psychological support” (N2, man, 45s, NGO)

In many cases, victims may have already returned with significant trauma, and when they do not receive adequate support, they may leave and end up in the same vicious cycle. [...] Their distinct psychological challenges stem from their experiences and trauma. While their needs may overlap with those facing difficult circumstances or vulnerable individuals, victims of trafficking require intensive interventions to address their specific experiences. [...] In general, they exhibit highly unstable psychological states. (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

Only after psychological recovery can they do their livelihood. If they return without psychological stability and go to work, the possibility of trauma is higher. [...] If the trauma issue has not been resolved, there is still the risk of dropping out when they go to vocational training, or they may still go to China. (O5, man, 40s, Others)

“Reintegration is a journey that requires patience and ingenuity based on an understanding of psychological trauma, and there are not many of these services in Vietnam.” (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

“Psychological support is tough and requires a lot of time. [...] It takes a very long time for them to be able to share their experiences. [...] When they have stable psychological states, they can overcome any other problems. Additional support can then provide further aid.” (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

“People in severe psychological distress need therapy before they are ready to return to the community.” (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

^{xviii} Additional quotes for 5.2.1.2. Sensitivity and Respectful in Approach:

Note that female or male employees can work with male victims, but for female victims, the person working with them must be a female. This is to avoid re-trauma for them if they approach male employees. In the court, the lawyer can be male. However, the psychological and physiological support staff must be female staff. [...] As they face so much trauma, it is essential to let female officers/workers work with them. When working with returned victims in the locality, we also want the support and participation of the local Women's Union working together. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

During the reception, they have to interact with the police or border guards. However, as the police are usually men who interview them, so they do not feel comfortable sharing much information. We collaborated with the Women's Union and the local Department of Labor and Social Affairs to address this issue to ask someone to talk with them. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

“Initially, they were hesitant to share [...]. We made several attempts to approach them through women's associations, village heads, and women in the commune to make them feel comfortable enough to share.” (G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

“We partner with vocational training centres to ensure they understand, empathise, and behave appropriately to avoid psychological trauma for them (returnees - trainees).” (N2, man, 45s, NGO)

Human trafficking victims often experience exceptional psychological issues, making it crucial to provide them with comprehensive psychological support besides regular assistance. Thus, the attitude of local officials (frontline workers) who directly interact with and support these victims is very important. How to ask the right questions, provide reassurance, be gender-sensitive, and ensure that the questions are friendly and not accusatory, or blaming are very important. (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

When I connect with returnees, my biggest concern is not adding to their pain. So, I just give them advice and let them share their stories when they are ready. In some cases, I work with them like I am their relative. [...] I went to a seminar where they talked about using softer language, like saying "trafficked person" instead of "trafficked victim", because using the word "victim" may make them feel their pain. It takes time for them to find their balance again because they are affected by psychological factors such as disappointment, guilt, and guilt towards their family, themselves, and society. (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

In our work, we often use the term "client" to refer to the people we assist. While "victim" is specified in legal regulations, we use "client" in our psychological counselling to illustrate our commitment to protecting vulnerable individuals. That is our ultimate respect and protection for that person. We respect the rights of our clients, and we will do everything possible to safeguard their rights. (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

The term "victims" may make some people feel uncomfortable because it can make them feel that they have no right to self-determination or are devalued. So, some people call them survivors, or the support centre often calls them "returnees" to reduce their feelings of guilt. However, in a new project I am working on, we have chosen to use the term "victim" as we believe it accurately conveys the support and assistance these individuals need from their community and society. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

“When they return, if they have children, their children also need help. Some returnees can bring their children with them home.” (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

“Their children born in China may face legal issues with paperwork upon returning to Vietnam, for example, registering Vietnamese citizenship, due to legislation related to dual citizenship not being legally accepted in the law on citizenship.” (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

“They contact us if they have any issues with the paperwork for the children they bring home.” (G8, woman, 45s, Gov)

Essential items and belongings, such as clothes and toothbrushes, are initial support for newly rescued/returned victims. Women are given more attention with provided sanitary pads, etc. [...] When they return, they face more difficulties, especially when they bring their children home without identification papers. This is also a difficulty in the process of supporting victims to return, especially those who accompany mixed-race children. [...] Integrating back into the community requires addressing several issues, including obtaining legal documents such as ID cards, household registration, and birth certificates... (G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

“The support aims at creating opportunities for them, but that is not compulsory, forcing them to stay in their localities to receive the opportunities; they can receive opportunities in other places, such as Hanoi...” (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

“We have a list of about 6-7 different jobs, such as nail salon, hairdressing, bar training, information technology training, etc... Then we let them come and try it out, and they can choose for themselves.” (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

“It is essential for them to have the right to inquire and be informed about what we are doing to them.” (O2, woman, 50s, Others)

Shelter N. typically offers them a reintegration plan and a career orientation program before they leave the shelter. The plan is designed to guide them in making informed decisions and assisting them in returning to their homes. However, the shelter does not impose any overly supportive or grandiose support nor force them to follow a particular path; it is all their right to decide. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

“We connect them with their locality or families, but we have to ask if they agree with that before doing that.” (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

We can follow up the cases up to 24 months or over until the project ends, but the normal process often lasts from 12 to 24 months, depending on each case. After assessing their needs, we can apply interventions, but if they feel ok without interventions and want to stop service, we will follow up for around 12 months.... (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

^{xix} **Additional quotes for 5.2.1.3. Tailored Support for Livelihood:**

First is emergency support, then connecting them to their families, bringing them home, and then long-term support. That means assessing what this person's needs are, what difficulties they have or where they want to work or go to school, what psychological problems they have...[...] Depends on each victim, on their needs and their background to have a support plan for each person [...] Those who already had families and children will need to stay at home and need livelihood support, such as support for raising pigs, raising children, or goats. For male victims, as I said, they have fewer problems, or they don't need any support at all, they just want to go to work. Based on that, we will advise on safe migration and job search so that they can find a more stable and safer job in Vietnam instead of trying to move abroad, for example. Or for young people, 13-15 years old, we will try to convince them to go back to school. In addition, there is also follow-up support after the rescue, which is legal support, making identification documents (e.g., ID cards, household registration), or supporting them when working with authorities, supporting lawyers at trials... [...] One reason they leave is economic poverty, so solving the unemployment and financial problems is still the top goal. Therefore, in our prevention program, there are activities to support livelihood improvement. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

"If they just receive a sum of money, and that's it, it won't solve much of the problem. If they don't have a job locally, they'll leave again and risk being re-trafficked." (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

"There should be an intervention assessment before providing reintegration support [...] Services should be comprehensive, confidential and based on the victim's needs; also, to solve problems in family, community and social relationships" (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

The support must help them reintegrate into the community, support them with a source of livelihood so they do not leave that locality, and solve their life needs. For example, necessities, farming and animal husbandry so they can feed themselves [...] The Women's Union supports them in accessing capital sources and participating in training classes to get job opportunities; supports them in having a home and a place to live ... And provides long-term and later support to help them take care of and stabilise their lives. [...] In addition to shelters and transportation fees..., the Women's Union provides credit to them so they can access resources, such as loans from policy banks, so that they have a source of livelihood to integrate into the community and solve difficulties [...] Because they have just returned and have no mortgage, through the Women's Union sponsoring them, they can easily access funds... Or the Women's Union gives them priority to attend training courses, livestock farming, etc. so they can gain more experience and knowledge. [...] While the initial support is only short-term, the long-term, the most challenging thing is how to help them stabilise their lives in their locality; this problem is extremely difficult. [...] We often survey their actual needs to support capital or support other related difficulties. For example, if they don't have good health and you give them capital to raise livestock and crops, they won't be able to do it. If they do not have agricultural land to grow but support tree varieties, they also do not have land to grow. The Women's Union will survey the actual needs of individuals and other issues such as knowledge, capital, land, etc... Then, depending on each specific case, specific support content will be determined to suit the actual needs. We do not just provide capital funds indiscriminately and leave them to their devices. There are cases where they may not need capital. Some people raise chickens and ducks that keep dying because of technical problems. Here, they may need support for farming techniques. We look at their support needs and provide the necessary assistance based on individual cases. (G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

First, the Women's Union in the commune visits them, shares with them, and then supports them depending on their needs [...] The proposed solutions have also been carefully researched and considered; almost all support programs are pretty extensive. They can even mobilize housing support for some people. When they return home without housing, we mobilize other parties to support building houses for them to settle down, and then support them with jobs, support their children if they have because some can bring their children home [...] I think the issue of reintegration requires a roadmap [...] We must find out what their wishes are... Because some people just want to stay home and take care of their family to make up for the time they have lost; then they have a family, then they live on the job they have, for example, sewing or small business... We can support small businesses with loans at zero interest rates for them to open a grocery store or buy equipment to do their business... It is based on their wishes so that we can have appropriate and timely support programs. (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

"Support must be appropriate for each stage: Initially when first rescued, when returning home, then long-term support, livelihood support...[...] There must be support suitable for each individual." (N8, woman, 40s, NGO)

Every returnee usually faces multiple challenges, not just 1 or 2. So, it requires comprehensive solutions to address their needs and solve their difficulties. For example, we provide medical support for someone with health-related issues. Similarly, they should be given legal assistance if they are struggling with legal matters, etc.. So, every case must have access to a wide range of support services to ensure a speedy recovery. They can't recover if only one or two of their needs are met while the rest are ignored. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

We connect relevant parties, provide psychological support, necessities, or work, depending on their needs. [...] For returning children, we support job or vocational training. We have a network of 30 vocational training facilities in H. province to support them access. If they are too young to work, we assist them in finding internship opportunities and receive financial support to cover their living expenses, partly supporting their parents. That is what we have been trying to do in the past seven years to support them. Those are general interventions. [...] Long-term policies are also put in place to support victims, including issues of livelihood and employment. For children, we assist their families in stabilising their livelihoods. Additionally, follow-up period is necessary to monitor the process from 6 months to 1 year. [...] I think there are three levels of intervention: the first is community reintegration, the second is psychological support, and the third is career/livelihood support. [...] They face various challenges. [...] Integration is difficult or easy depending on the purpose of being trafficked. [...] Our process firstly provides psychological support, assess the victim's needs, follow up with consultation to see if their needs are met, and then continue the process with their families. In general, We have many processes to support monitoring and motivating victims to reintegrate into the community. (N2, man, 45s, NGO)

Main supports for them include finance and opportunities. We rescued and brought many back to their localities; if they are still at school, we encourage them to continue studying, even though it is challenging ... [...] The only thing they need from policies is opportunities for education, employment, or living conditions and to develop their livelihood. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

Psychological care can initially support them, then introduce them to job opportunities, and of course, assess to see if that job fits their needs, desires, wishes and capabilities. [...] The essential support for successful reintegration is vocational training and a stable job, which are important. (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

I think foremost, they need psychological treatment, then based on their capability and their needs to provide suitable support, which are based on their angle and perspectives. For example, consider what job they want to do, introduce them to vocational training, and assess their ability to connect with employment opportunities; if they cannot do this, we can connect them with employers ... (O6, man, 45s, Others)

We must help them have a sustainable livelihood so they can have a stable income for life [...] If they return with income and are accepted by the community, this is also the basis that makes it difficult for them to fall into traffickers. [...] Regarding supporting victims, it is necessary to determine the crux of each person's problem, not just help them with a bit of money. For example, suppose the locality can determine this woman's family has economic difficulties. In that case, they will provide financial support, but if people have other problems that are not economic, they must see what they need. And, most importantly, how to create sustainable livelihoods for them to continue their lives. (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

I think it depends on each one's needs. I feel that the one-side-fix-all interventions have failed; there are never many returnees who have the same need, even though they come from the same region. The policies need to be more intersectional because returnees include men, women, and children, who all have different needs. So, there is a need to assess their needs and trauma level, so it requires a more professional system to support returnees. [...] When they return to their local, the needs for livelihood for men and women also differ due to their differences, originating from social construct... (O5, man, 40s, Others)

The services offered have to be in line with / suitable to each individual, for example, considering what is appropriate for children victims, what is ideal for women, ... [...] We will discuss with victims and their families to see if they want to raise the chickens, livestock, or to have sewing machines. We assess whether the need helps improve their finance, their life or support with children's responsibilities, and we will include it in the support policy. [...] Depends on the issues of each case to decide and focus on the suitable services. There are about nine services; we will try to let them optimise access to these services but also consider the match with their need and capability. ... (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

"In some cases, they may find it difficult to resolve their problems or their family's issues and may receive unhelpful support. As a result, they may want to return to their previous situation." (G2, woman, 45s, Gov)

“For successful reintegration, it's essential to undergo vocational training and secure a stable job.” (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

^{xx} Additional quotes for 3.2.1.4. the Long-term Nature of the Healing Process:

“A problem cannot be solved in 3-5 years; it must be solved in the long term.” (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

“I think it will be more difficult for women because [...] The process is not easy for them (women), [...] It is not a short-term process for them.” (G9, woman, 30s, Gov)

“If we support returnees, it must be a long process of support. We must help them eliminate terrible psychological obsessions, often requiring professional psychological support and a long-term support process.” (N5, woman, 45s, NGO)

“I think they need time to recover, both physically and mentally, so they really need time.” (O6, man, 45s, Others)

“I think they cannot escape from their trauma, which lasts forever [...] The vocational training in just six months is never enough for them to find a stable job [...] There should be follow-up support for at least two years.” (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

“Shelter usually has follow-up support for two years to see if they are sustainable, but they are still struggling.” (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

“It needs a whole process to be able to support them fully.” (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

^{xxi} Additional quotes about 5.2.2.1. Raising Awareness to Eliminate Stigma:

Awareness should be raised not only among victims but also among those around them to prevent discrimination. During the three years of working on the project, the effectiveness of campaigns has been relatively high so far. In the past, just as they passed by, just the whispers behind them could significantly affect their mental state. However, through our awareness programs and solutions, surrounding people, especially unions and local authorities, are reaching out and providing support, helping them stabilise their income, health, and stable jobs. (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

“It is important to raise awareness about human trafficking and combat discrimination in local communities so that the community can provide additional support to victims and victims' families.” (N2, man, 45s, NGO)

“Families also require education because they often lack information.” (O2, woman, 50s, Others)

Raise awareness to prevent discrimination against victims. [...] In the past, they were discriminated against upon returning to the community, but now they receive more care and sympathy from their families. (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

“Discrimination now is not as severe as in the past because of mass organisations' effectiveness in awareness raising, resulting in reduced community discrimination.” (G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

^{xxii} Additional quotes for 5.2.3. Peer Networks:

Peer groups (community groups composed of returning and reintegrated victims, forming a network that is not too large). They can voluntarily engage with the community and share experiences. We work with them first to raise community awareness to avoid the risks of being trafficked and second to help victims return on their own ... (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

“We also have capacity-building activities, such as peer groups, to help them overcome difficulties. We equip them with skills or have small talks with them.” (N2, man, 45s, NGO)

If they willingly and voluntarily decide to participate, let them share their experience so that local people can understand that working far away, with a high income or a better life, may not be as colourful as it seems. Sharing experiences can also help prevent discrimination against people returning to the community. (G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

^{xxiii} Additional quotes from study participants for 5.3.1. Insufficient Funding:

Returnees must fill out forms, wait a long time to receive support money, and then receive just about VND50,000. Meanwhile, the distance from their home to where they can collect money is very far, sometimes costing the transportation ten times the support money. So, who can go there? ... Although the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs has allocated a certain amount of money for each victim, that amount is tiny. I would refer them to NGOs rather than receive that money. I don't want them to travel that much to receive a little money. (O2, woman, 50s, Others)

The policy does offer some support, but the budget is limited. [...] The support is insufficient for the recipients to sustain their livelihood, so they find a way to go again and continue the cycle [...] For example, the support package only provides them with around 2-3 million Vietnamese dong^{xxiii}, barely enough to cover the cost of hosting a family gathering party. After the party, all gone. (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

"The level of support is low, especially the health care package." (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

"The support, considering financial, is still limited; it can only support them at the initial time." (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

I've noticed that the support services provided to individuals are only available during the initial period. The reintegration package offered is quite low, around 1.5 - 2 million VND. I'm not sure if this amount has increased recently, but it seems that this amount of money is only sufficient for a short period. Additionally, the number of vocational training opportunities available is limited. (O5, man, 40s, Others)

I see a lot of problems, first of all, funding; without a project, there is no funding. [...] We lack support facilities such as private rooms for psychological consultation for them. That could be a safe place for them to stay; I want to make a room like that. Actually, we don't have any projects on human trafficking, so communicating with relevant parties in the provinces is very difficult. We don't have funding, so we must rely on community groups. We also want to expand the support services to other locations with the same issue of youth trafficking for forced labour. But we don't have enough resources to do that. (N2, man, 45s, NGO)

"The only difficulty in providing supporting services is the lack of budget/funds..." (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

"To support a comprehensive and adequate for a victim requires a considerable budget/fund/resource in the long term, while government organisations do have not enough resources for that." (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

"After UNICEF's sponsored package ended, the support activities gradually stopped as we realized our limited economic potential." (O6, man, 45s, Others)

"I see that supporting reintegration is costly. Compared to prevention and rescue, it is challenging, expensive, less hopeful, and less effective." (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

^{xxiv} Additional quotes from study participants for 5.3.2. Insufficient Personnel:

One of the major challenges faced is the shortage of human resources to handle tasks, such as communicating with victims and providing them with appropriate support services. [...] The supporters and officials don't seem to have the right skills and are experienced enough to build trust with victims...[...] There aren't enough people to follow up on the cases. [...] no policy exists to assign a manager for each case. [...] I see that even support workers specialising in psychology may lack an understanding of how to help victims of human trafficking if they do not specialise in human trafficking. [...] Finding an NGO or social worker who is truly dedicated to supporting individuals who have experienced trauma is a challenging task. [...] Each case should have a designated responsible person who can refer them to their localities, follow up and assist them according to their specific needs. (O2, woman, 50s, Others)

However, there is a staff shortage after the foreign organisations withdrew their funds. As a result, a support worker has to perform multiple tasks and roles, with fewer training opportunities available. And the mental care officer manager resigned. Therefore, I am concerned about the quality of mental care services now. [...] A social worker has to take on too many job roles. I agree that social workers and psychologists have many overlapping responsibilities, but when they take on too many roles, is it overloaded? [...] State agencies often require staff to attend training while still expecting them to fulfil their regular job duties, making it difficult to concentrate. (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

I see that in Vietnam, there are only a limited number of professional organisations that provide support to victims of human trafficking. These organisations are funded mainly by NGOs or projects. However, social work and social protection centres in the provinces, which are responsible for receiving and working directly with trafficked people, face several challenges, including limited capacity to receive and support victims. [...] The availability of professional psychological support for those in need is not adequate. (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

“There are no professionals with in-depth expertise to provide psychotherapy to victims. They only provide support like emotional assistance and communication without proper professional treatment.” (O6, man, 45s, Others)

Victim support programs have a limited number of personnel, so staff members work on a variety of tasks from A to Z. They engage in activities such as capacity building by developing programs, organizing training sessions, connecting with experts, and setting up communication programs. After that, they collaborate with local officials like the People's Committee, Women's Union at all levels, and relevant authorities. They have a lot of responsibilities and various subjects to care about, not just limited to human trafficking victims. [...] Shelter also offers psychological support, but it is not always possible to provide that support. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

Social workers in Vietnam mostly do their role voluntarily, with support from relevant authorities assigned to do the tasks. Victims find it difficult to integrate because of the lack of people accompanying them throughout the process. People from the Women's Union, local officials, or Ministry of Labour, War, Invalids, and social workers cannot have the same skills and knowledge as professional social workers, so they can only support them partly. [...] Social work services are not always available in the locality, and local officials' knowledge, skills and time are insufficient to provide the necessary support. [...] If professional social work staff are available, they can lead and guide the community and those who support victims, making the way to support victims much more effective. [...] At the commune/village level, officials are very busy, and only one person has to do too many things. [...] While it's not necessary to have someone with expertise in human trafficking, it is essential to have someone who knows the process of providing support. And if there is only one person in the locality to provide support, it will be tough for them. Every officer complains that they have to travel a lot and have to follow all policies for different groups of beneficiaries, of which human trafficking victims are just one group. So, to be able to regularly assess the victim's needs and then visit again is extremely difficult. (O4, woman, 40s, Others)

The grassroots level is where the superiors' work is implemented, but the staff is limited in numbers. For instance, in a higher department, there are many sub-departments, and each sub-department has 5-8 personnel working. However, at the commune level, there is only one person in charge of all tasks, which leads to an excessive workload. As a result, the efficiency of work is not optimal. (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

“Shelter N. in C. city has a small staff and scale and limited training opportunities. One employee is responsible for both staff and managerial roles.” (G4, woman, 30s, Gov)

“I see that the policies cover a broad range of issues; however, there is no implementation monitoring. Therefore, it is important to have a specialist manager who can monitor the policies and support services provided to the human trafficking victims.” (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

Social workers are present at all grassroots levels, but their numbers are minimal. These workers must take on multiple responsibilities as the team size is only 1-2 people. They reach out to vulnerable individuals such as lonely older adults, orphans, and war invalids... so they have too much work/excessive workload. (N1, woman, 40s, NGO)

At the local level, officials may have basic skills and a dedicated approach, but they need more training to effectively address the issue of returnees and prevent the problems of adverse effects. [...] Starting at the grassroots (local/frontline) level is essential. These people are the most important as they are often the first to discover cases of human trafficking promptly. They are also the ones who provide support to victims and accompany them to deal with any consequences that arise. Therefore, investing more in grassroots officials is necessary. (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

The regulations stand as they are; however, when it comes to human resources, there is a shortage of personnel within the state systems to, for instance, provide comprehensive support post-victimization, such as rehabilitation assistance, community integration, cultural guidance, and vocational training, is a significant challenge. [...] Also, this raises the question of who will oversee and administer support for these cases (case manager), given that officials from the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids, and Social Affairs are already burdened with multiple responsibilities. Their duties are not only aiding victims of human trafficking but also assisting individuals facing poverty, elderly citizens, and more. They do not have the expertise of social workers and do not have the skills and knowledge of case management. So, there is a need for fundamental changes in how victims are supported. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

^{xxv} Additional quotes from study participants for 5.4.2. Mobilising Community Support: Engaging Stakeholders and Service Providers

We contact relevant parties and collaborate with authorities and organizations from all parties involved. Local social organizations are especially important, as they are the official support system for victims in their place of residence. We also work with localities to provide support for victims, such as assistance with livelihoods and jobs for their reintegration into the community. [...] We work closely with local authorities to detect, intervene, and support victims before, during, and after they experience health or life-threatening problems. Furthermore, we coordinate with local governments to further explore if there are any other policies or support programs available to assist the victim's family. We maintain close communication with local government officials since they are the ones who directly support the victims and their families. We continue to follow up with the family after providing support. Generally, the process takes various steps and requires working with related stakeholders to ensure they reintegrate well into the community. (N2, man, 45s, NGO)

Reintegrating returnees takes a village—no one person, unit, or industry can do it alone. Supporting victims is costly and requires many people's help. [...] Stakeholders often work independently and lack a prepared plan, which can lead to victims being referred in a circle and left feeling uncomfortable. (O6, man, 45s, Others)

Human trafficking is also a major concern for the State. We have been working closely with authorities such as border guards and police agencies at the department and provincial levels for a long time. This has resulted in building a trusting relationship, enabling us to cooperate and support each other effectively and efficiently. Coordination and cooperation to bring back the victims are very convenient. Once the victims are back, we take them to work with the police so that they can report the incident. Then, we take them back to their local area and work with the schools to ensure they can continue their education. Overall, our work is very facilitated. (N3, woman, 35s, NGO)

We connect returnees with relevant parties to support them flexibly. One of the difficulties we faced years ago was the lack of a good support network; most of the information we had was mainly from the local police. However, the network has improved now and become more seasoned, and connections have become more flexible. The support process for victims of human trafficking or gender-based violence has also become more professional and clearer, and relevant parties are now more aware of their roles. Previously, only the police were involved; they rescued and brought the victims home. But now, with the participation of the Women's Union, Farmers' Union, Youth Union, and other parties, all are aware of their role in supporting the return of trafficked people. This makes a difference and makes it easier for those working directly with trafficked people. (N5, woman, 50s, NGO)

The advantage of having multiple agencies working together in different fields is that they can collaborate in meetings to establish recommendations and solutions for practical projects. When these solutions are implemented in local communities, there is support from the localities to implement them. This support is a significant advantage. (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

We felt comfortable working with the police officers. They were humane and highly cooperative, especially in cases of trafficking. They were very supportive and helpful when we needed to help victims with the necessary paperwork, referrals to their localities, or other legal requirements. (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

“The support of relevant stakeholders in receiving victims is advantageous to our work.” (G4, woman, 30s, Gov)

Many developmental organizations have community projects, such as free vocational training for young people or vocational training for women in difficult circumstances. However, they often lack a coordinator to connect these resources with people. (O5, man, 40s, Others)

“The process of supporting returnees should have more precise guidelines on how to cooperate to provide support effectively.” (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

“Currently, foreign organizations are collaborating more effectively with other groups to combat trafficking, an improvement from the past when only women's unions or social welfare organizations were involved.” (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

The programs managed by the state are effective, but they lack depth despite being comprehensive, so I suggest combining them with various projects. Usually, foreign projects bring in researched experiences and support from multiple sources to directly benefit the recipients. By implementing a project, we can focus on a specific group of beneficiaries and provide them with more attention and seamless support. These projects offer direct and in-depth support to recipients for 2-3 years, enough time to become mentally and economically stable and orient them towards sustainable development. I like connecting such projects to provide beneficial support to returnees. (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

Previously, when I still worked in that shelter, the shelter had a sufficient budget, funded by foreign organisations, to hire a separate psychological supervisor with good professional skills. The mental care officer manager had excellent skills, knowledge, and qualifications then. The mental care support workers who worked under the manager may or may not have had psychological qualifications but received workshops and training in mental care/psychology. They could also consult the manager in complex cases. (N6, woman, 30s, NGO)

“Usually, funding from foreign countries or NGOs will be more flexible than the budget from foundations or social protection centres...” (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

During the previous phase, NGOs actively participated in supporting the comprehensive and sustainable reintegration of victims and returnees. This was a great advantage as the state budget alone was not enough to cover all the costs. The participation of NGOs helped to support many of the costs, and as a result, we were able to undertake effective activities during that time. I believe we worked effectively during that period and had many successful reintegration cases. [...] Without the assistance of NGOs, in my province, it would be impossible to provide care for victims to continue their high school education. (G2, woman, 45s, Gov)

Many foreign organizations are interested in supporting victims of human trafficking in Vietnam and providing material support to them. (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

Countries have become increasingly concerned about the issue of human trafficking. As a result, many organizations, such as the UK, the US, the British Council, and the United Nations,... have launched anti-trafficking projects. I see there has been a surge in international MBN prevention projects that are investing in Vietnam. These initiatives have brought about certain innovations and have contributed to the process of preventing and minimizing problems. (N4, man, 40s, NGO)

“N. Shelter is often sponsored by various projects, and project packages are beneficial for victims, providing significant support and addressing their needs. We can find the most suitable support package for them.” (G4, woman, 30s, Gov)

“Currently, there is a network of units and organizations in counter-trafficking. It also has very professional activities, but they operate separately so it cannot connect different resources, cannot increase efficiency.” (N7, woman, 35s, NGO)

In addition to the support provided by shelters, localities, and agencies, The Women's Union also provides assistance to victims. We offer credit facilities so that victims can borrow capital from policy banks to fund their livelihood activities and integrate into the community. Furthermore, for those who are homeless or living in substandard housing, the Women's Union has programs to support houses for people in distress. (G6, woman, 50s, Gov)

I believe that coordination between the government, NGOs, and international organizations is essential to making the most of all available resources to support each case. Unfortunately, in our country, there is still a weakness in this regard: the government tends to operate independently, as do NGOs and international organizations. (O2, woman, 50s, Others)

As a case manager, my responsibility is to work closely with related stakeholders and build a strong network to provide support to victims. After their time at the shelter, I refer them to vocational training centres or the Women's Union in their locality to help them reintegrate. I collaborate with other stakeholders to provide access to services in their respective localities. I also work with NGOs and vocational training centres to connect victims with their services. By establishing a strong network of related stakeholders, we make the process smoother and more effective. Clear guidelines on the procedure and roles of each party are crucial to ensure smooth cooperation and understanding of all parties involved. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

Support workers can provide effective solutions to the problems faced by victims if they work closely and diligently. However, they sometimes tend to rush through the work, thus providing only preliminary support to the victim. Whether victims can access resources or not ultimately depends on them. While it may not be possible to intervene in terms of budget and administration as per regulations, if support workers approach the problem more humanely and conscientiously, connecting available resources can be easy. Support workers have access to a list of many support programs. The real challenge is whether they are willing to connect those outside resources. Many developmental organizations have community projects, such as free vocational training for young people or vocational training for women in difficult circumstances. However, they often lack a coordinator to connect these resources with people. If local officials, such as those working in social security, child support, women's support, and the Youth Union, had better information and understanding about their role, the effectiveness of support would be much better. (O5, man, 40s, Others)

In my opinion, there should be an officer dedicated solely to victim support and case management at the provincial/local level. [...] It is essential to have an officer dedicated to monitoring cases related to human trafficking to ensure that the process is not just a formality. For projects to operate effectively, there should always be a project officer responsible for overseeing the case manager, directly connecting with victims to support their reintegration, understanding the family context and situation, knowing the current situation of the victims, and how to contact them. This person should have a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of victims, the conditions to help reintegrate victims, and how to connect with the locality. If the officer lacks enthusiasm in their work, they cannot work effectively. (G2, woman, 45s, Gov)

“Support workers should empathise with victims by putting themselves in their shoes to better understand their situation.” (G5, woman, 50s, Gov)

Our advantage in assisting victims lies in the local officers, who establish close connections with victims. They possess excellent coordination skills, know how to approach victims effectively, and have a strong rapport with victims. Victims feel at ease sharing their experiences with us when they understand the project.... (N8, woman, 40s, NGO)

They (victims) need to be explained and provided with information so that they can feel more secure [...] Support officials/workers are better prepared now than they were before. They've had specialized training and have adopted case management policies. When I worked with staff from M. ten years ago, hardly anyone knew how to help returnees. But now, they have had specialized training and know what to do. Back in 2005, when I worked with I. organisation, nobody even talked about case management. But now, it's a huge improvement. (O2, woman, 50s, Others)

They (returnees) often feel self-conscious and hesitant to seek support, but women's union officials can effectively connect and so deliver support to them. [...] The support officers, especially from the local level because are the ones who directly work with victims. (O1, woman, 35s, Others)

^{xxvi} Additional quotes on 3.5.2. Gender equality policies provide education and employment opportunities:

“I don't know how it was 10 years ago because I was too young back then, but I've heard from reports that there has been improvement. Women now have access to more social services than before.” (G1, woman, 30s, Gov)

“When women are given the opportunity to take control of their economic and personal lives, it can help prevent the risk of human trafficking.” (N8, woman, 40s, NGO)

When it comes to empowering women, there are various forms of empowerment: economic empowerment, political empowerment, social empowerment, cultural empowerment, and educational empowerment. From both an individual and a community perspective, elevating all of these aspects is crucial. The essence of empowerment is to instil confidence and autonomy in women so they can confidently participate in and enjoy the benefits of development. For example, why does the government have policies to support or waive tuition fees for students from poor regions, especially in areas categorized as poor and extremely poor? It's also about creating conditions to enhance educational empowerment so that women, first and foremost, can lift themselves up and then contribute back to the community. That is from an individual level. On a macro level, women's participation in decision-making positions and roles in policymaking sensitive to gender issues helps reduce gender power imbalances, which are the root cause of human trafficking; so, it can help reduce human trafficking. (O3, woman, 50s, Others)

That is obvious. When women are empowered, they become stronger and more proactive in their lives. By changing their opportunities and positions in their own lives, they gain access to information and more choices, rather than just having one option of doing something under someone else's direction. [...] Previously, they only had limited job choices, such as being a maid or a labourer, because they felt that their abilities and qualifications only allowed them to do those jobs. Enhancing their capacity has helped them see themselves and their opportunities differently, which is a significant improvement. (N5, woman, 50s, NGO) - The participant confirmed, responded to the question: "Whether women's empowerment contributes to reducing human trafficking".