

“The child goes back to the trafficking situation”: Consequences of inappropriate assistance procedures during reintegration of child victims of trafficking

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Trafficking poses a direct threat to the victim’s rights, development and well-being, with childhood trafficking experiences having far-reaching effects. Thus, assistance provision measures should target each of the areas as impacted by the child’s trafficking experience. This paper sets out to show the consequences of inappropriate assistance procedures during reintegration in relation to transnational trafficked children. It was a qualitative study and data reported on was collected from 22 trafficking experts (stakeholders) in South Africa. The major consequences of inappropriate reintegration assistance provision identified are re-trafficking, stigmatisation, secondary trauma and victimisation and mistrust in victims. The findings show that if inappropriately handled, reintegration procedures related to assistance provision can have negative implications for trafficked children. This paper shows that there is need for pre- and post-reintegration assistance services and programmes which are trauma-informed, victim-centred, community and culturally sensitive and multidisciplinary in nature.

Keywords: assistance provision; reintegration; transnational child trafficking; victims; social work

INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is a highly organised crime fuelled by various factors, including global demand for cheap labour, globalisation and the adoption of strict immigration policies. Children can be trafficked internally, regionally across country borders and internationally. The actual numbers of children trafficked or rescued is challenging to determine worldwide, including in South Africa. Lack of accurate trafficking statistics has been mentioned in several studies, and is seen to be largely a consequence of lack of standardised data collection systems (Andreatta, 2015), complex bureaucratic identification systems (Gozdziak, 2010), lack of clear definitions when identifying victims (IOM, 2007) and the impact of trauma on victims (Hopper, 2004). Other challenges highlighted in the 2019 US TIP Report are weak privacy protections and susceptibility to intrusion or corruption, “siloes” data, affecting access by others and poor data management practices and systems, leading to inappropriately designed data sets. What remains undisputed is that millions of children are trafficked and exploited worldwide. In support of Manzo’s (2005) argument, the disagreements on the magnitude of child trafficking are a conceptual and socio-political issue which cannot be resolved simply by having or accessing more data.

Children are especially vulnerable to trafficking (National Rapporteur, 2016). They are trafficked for various types of exploitation depending on their developmental age, gender or demands posed by “clients”. However, Blackburn, Taylor and Davis (2010: 109) assert that irrespective of a client’s motivation, “trafficking of virgins and young girls is extremely profitable for the perpetrators.” Trafficked children are exploited sexually, for labour, as domestic servants, and in industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, carpet weaving, construction and fishing. Children migrating alone can lead to them being vulnerable to exploitation because many of them leave home due to hardships and thus take greater risks to complete their journey(s) (Andreatta, 2015). This desperation of migrants (including child migrants) to reach their final destination and fulfil their dreams puts them at greater risk of exploitation from traffickers (Albahari, 2018; Mafu, 2019; UNICEF & World Bank, 2016). It has also been noted that combating trafficking is tougher in countries where exploitation is somewhat legalised, culture-entrenched or normalised and contributes to gross domestic product. Examples include Uzbekistan’s cotton harvesting, Somalian and Syrian government-supported armed groups with children (US TIP Report, 2019), and Thailand’s sex industry (Blackburn et al, 2010).

Protection of child victims of trafficking is one of the core principles in international, regional and national anti-trafficking and child protection policies. However, several studies have highlighted that practical and ethical dilemmas exist when protection and assistance provision is linked to cooperation with authorities with the goal of prosecuting traffickers (Brunovskis & Skilbrei, 2016). While assistance interventions are relatively well-documented in Asia and Europe (Brunovskis, 2016; Delaney & Cotterill,

2005; Pearce, 2011; Wolfensohn, 2004; Yea, 2010, Zimmerman et al, 2006), there is less documented information on counter-trafficking interventions in Africa and South Africa specifically. In the 2018 US TIP Report, inadequate protection for victims of trafficking in South Africa was highlighted and was one of the reasons behind the country being downgraded to the Tier 2 Watchlist. In the recently released 2019 US TIP Report, South Africa remains on the Tier 2 Watchlist, because, despite the significant efforts the government is making, there is no overall difference from those in the previous reporting period.

If assistance in the post-trafficking recovery phase is handled inefficiently, it has the potential to further disrupt the child's growth and development (Centre for the Protection of Children's Rights (CPCR), 2006; IOM, 2007; Jobe, 2010). This argument taps into constructions of childhood as significant to the protection of a trafficked child. As members of the caring profession, it is essential that social workers are able to respond professionally to the needs of trafficked children (Oketch, Morreau & Benson, 2011; Warria & Chikadzi, 2018). A recent article by Botha and Warria (2019) argues for research and increased documentation of service provision in order to achieve greater professional insights into victims' standards of care and protection. Unfortunately, South Africa lacks specific literature on reintegration as an assistance process for trafficked children. This article, which emanates from the author's doctoral study, sets out to show the consequences of inappropriate assistance procedures when reintegrating trafficked children, and is aimed at improving care and protection practices for transnational child victims of trafficking. It is divided into three main sections: firstly, there is a brief discussion of reintegration as a key element in trafficking assistance provision. Next, the research methodology is outlined and findings arising from the study are discussed. Lastly, the implications of the findings for social work practice and social development are highlighted.

REINTEGRATION AS VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROVISION

Trafficking poses a direct threat to children's development, health and well-being as childhood trafficking experiences can have far-reaching effects. Transnational trafficking impacts the child's development from spiritual, psychosocial, cognitive and socio-cultural perspectives. Child trafficking is a violation of children's rights, including the right to physical integrity, the right to freedom and security and the right not to be discriminated against. Therefore, assistance provision measures should target each of the areas of development and well-being affected by the child's trafficking experience. Steiner, Kynn, Stylianou and Postmus (2018) recommend the use of an empowerment-based human life-centred approach and community-level interventions when working with adult victims of trafficking that might also be applicable to child victims. When service provision is strengthened victims are served better (Oketch et al, 2011).

According to Schloenhardt and Loong (2011), reintegration of victims of trafficking is often under-represented and absent from counter-trafficking discourses of prevention, protection and prosecution. According to Surtees (2017: 10),

Reintegration is the process of recovery and economic and social inclusion following a trafficking experience. It includes:

- *settlement in a safe and secure environment;*
- *access to a reasonable standard of living;*
- *mental and physical well-being;*
- *opportunities for personal, social and economic development, and*
- *access to social and emotional support.*

Trafficked victims can be reintegrated into various environments (such as home country, in new community in home country or in a new country) based on their unique needs, interests and situations. This paper focuses on reintegration in both community and country of origin.

The investigations must be carried out prior to the child being sent back to the country or home of origin includes family assessment and readiness, community assessment, risk assessments and child readiness. In her study, Brunovskis (2016) identified barriers and access to assistance in Norway and concluded that the system for victim assistance seems least accessible to some victims. The legal right to social assistance in South Africa, similar to Norway, depends on immigration status, which is based on the formal identification (Brunovskis, 2016) and certification of the child as a victim of trafficking. This creates interdependency between individual systems and agencies, but it should be noted that this relationship or partnership may not always work effectively. For example, in US TIP Report (2019: 426) focus on South

Africa, it is reported that frontline officials who are responsible for receiving referrals were unreachable and that the Department of Social Development and the police were sometimes not aware of their duties to certify and refer victims in order for them to receive the necessary care.

The impact of trafficking can be felt by the victim in the short, medium and long term during the three phrases of rescue, healing and recovery and reintegration. It is essential to note that each of these stages that the victim goes through is characterised by different needs, although needs overlap might occur or extend to the next stage. Therefore, different and sometimes specialised types of services offered by various professionals are required (Muraya & Fry, 2015). In light of this, assistance provision and reintegration are not and should not be viewed as a single once-off event, but rather as a long-term process with different stages and phases which require in-depth preparation, support and follow-up services. In addition, this process may not always follow a linear path, and one or more intervention phases might have to be repeated (Delap & Wedge, 2016).

Challenges in assistance provision to child victims of trafficking in South Africa as investigated and reported by Warria (2017) include the safety of victims, complexity of victim's needs, inability by service providers to match lifestyle provided by traffickers and premature return and reintegration. An earlier reintegration study by Surtees (2013a) identified insecurity, lack of working with families and inadequate information as stumbling blocks to reintegration in Mekong. Brunovskis (2016) also reports that victims of trafficking are assigned different administrative statuses, which are fluid - with rights being granted and/ or taken away. When reporting on assistance provision in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sucur-Janjetovic (2019) notes that the individual activities and motivation of social workers can determine the success of social integration as a process within assistance provision. Lam (2019) notes that although rescue by the police and identification and service provision have been acknowledged as best practices and effective strategies, these interventions may actually be harmful if the complexity of counter-trafficking issues, discourse and policy is not understood and considered during the development of interventions.

According to the 2019 TIP Report on South Africa, 118 trafficking victims were referred to shelters in seven provinces. It should be noted that this number is inconsistent with the number identified i.e. 260 – of which only 17 chose voluntary return to their communities. As regards social service provision to adult victims of trafficking at shelters in South Africa, Botha and Warria (2019) argue that rights-based approaches must always inform anti-trafficking efforts – with Surtees (2014) advocating that similar approaches be applied to child victims as well. Furthermore, therapeutic jurisprudence is crucial when working with victims (Warria & Chikadzi, 2018) as evidenced by the case of 32 victims reported to have absconded from shelters due to government not acting against alleged traffickers (US TIP Report, 2019: 426).

The needs of child victims of trafficking requiring assistance may be similar, but children are unique and should be treated that way during assistance provision. The timeframe to facilitate assistance provision should not be rigid and restricted, and it should not negatively impact on the next phase of assistance. Best practice in the management of rights violations in trafficking cases requires the adoption of a transformative, multi-level, holistic inter- and multidisciplinary approach that is victim-centred and that places the protection of victims at the forefront. Studies by Harvey et al (2015) and Musto (2010) indicate that due to victims' multiple needs, they can be provided with better services through established and coordinated collaborative partnerships. Indeed, the time invested in preparing, providing assistance and supporting child victims of trafficking is a contributing factor towards long-term healing and successful reintegration.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was applied in the study, and it gave deeper meaning to the participants' narratives (Fouche & Schurink, 2011). For the doctoral study, purposive sampling was applied when selecting the 32 study participants, who included 10 children accessing post-trafficking services. This paper is based on data collected from the 22 key informants (also referred to as stakeholders) interviewed, who included victim empowerment practitioners, researchers, social workers, child protection advocacy officers, an attorney and a detective in a specialised investigative police unit. The selection criteria used included registration with the social work council (for social workers specifically), willingness to be interviewed and availability during the data collection period and working in the trafficking field for at least six months prior to data collection. The multiple viewpoints of the experts enriched the study.

The Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Interviewing Trafficked Women were adopted for the study (Zimmerman & Watts, 2003). Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. Twenty-one of the interviews were conducted face-to-face at the study participant's place of work and one interview was via skype. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants and ethics approval was granted by the University of Johannesburg's Faculty of Humanities Academic Ethics Committee. The author conducted all the interviews, which were all audio-recorded with the participants' permission. In addition, due to the sensitivity of information provided, the author personally transcribed all interviews (verbatim).

Fifty per cent of the stakeholders were from a non-social work background, and thus the author not only had to be knowledgeable in the subject matter, but she also had to master the technical language and familiarise herself with the participants' occupational environments and how trafficking fits in (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). This enabled a sense of symmetry to be achieved in the interview relationship, as it cancelled out the powerful position of expert interviewees.

Data analysis dictates that data be scrutinised using a two-fold approach (Schurink, Fouche & De Vos, 2011). In this study, the first analysis took place in the field during data collection i.e. as data was being gathered, it was being analysed preliminarily. The second analysis happened after completion of data collection using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis in conjunction with previous literature reviewed. The simultaneous data gathering and analysis process in the study lent itself to the construction of a more consistent interpretation of the data. The report by Surtees (2013b) on ethical principles was also subsequently considered when writing up this paper.

Limitation of the study

During data collection, the author noticed that some of the study participants were used to being interviewed and that they had "standardised" viewpoints and agencies' opinions that they wanted to communicate during the interview. Since the author had not prepared for this during the initial interviews, it was challenging to navigate. However, in subsequent interviews the author strove to create a balance whereby certain viewpoints were heard and diplomatically challenged, while maintaining and respecting the secure status of the study participant. Interestingly, the nexus in the author's gentle confrontation and contribution to some of these viewpoints gave way to new insights.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Child trafficking is an area riddled with complexities, especially when it comes to victim assistance. The major consequences identified in this study and which will be discussed next are: re-trafficking, stigmatisation, secondary trauma and victimisation and mistrust in victims.

Re-trafficking

Children who are returned to their countries of origin without adequate support from and in the country of rescue tend to be extremely vulnerable to being re-trafficked. In response to the question on the possible consequences of the child being repatriated without the necessary intervention, the stakeholders agreed that it was detrimental to the trafficked child's welfare. This was illustrated in their responses as shown in the following extract:

The child will just run back. They will just run away ... a lot of the children run back to where they were being exploited because they know nothing else, which is very well to say why did they go back? It's the only life they know ... so you can't place a child back at home without service. One needs to assess what is the home environment, what was the situation when the child left home ... was the child in some kind of trouble at home, did this child abscond, what were the reasons? And one has to begin a process of service to that family, look at what de-stabilised this family in the first place. To put a child back home, without looking at the history and expect the family to cope is just ridiculous. It's asking the child to run away again. (Stakeholder 7)

It seems counter-productive for victims to be rescued and be returned to the same socio-economically deprived environments that made them leave in the first place, without improvement to these environments. The above quotation introduces the concept of *self-trafficking* i.e. the victim going back to the familiar trafficking situation not out of choice but out of necessity and familiarity. This finding supports child trafficking studies in India by Donger and Bhabha (2018) and in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau by Boiro and Einarsdóttir (2018) on re-trafficking post reintegration This critically points to gaps

in the reintegration efforts, especially assessment of the returnee's environment and the danger that these environments and traffickers pose to returning victims' (Surtees, 2008; 2013a; 2017).

Shame and stigmatisation

In this study, shame was identified as one of the biggest barriers when considering reintegration of victims of trafficking. Trafficked children may face rejection by families and communities and they are most likely to be victimised again for bringing shame and dishonour to their families upon their return. Many stakeholders saw this as a major obstacle, especially when working with child victims who were trafficked for sexual exploitation. This was captured in the following extract:

... it becomes a problem because there will be the issue of stigma, you know, unfortunately ... if you've been trafficked for prostitution, for example, the community does not really accept you as a victim. They take you as a child who is loose or whatever, you know, so you lose some form of value. So that stigma [is] attached [to you]. You find that now the child is not comfortable in the same community. The parents will be struggling with this child in terms of acceptance and so the support is like lacking and then the child goes back to where they were abused or exploited because then the child will be like "what is better?" (Stakeholder 10)

Finding a sense of belonging, especially post-trafficking, is crucial for survivors of trafficking. It is quite evident from the study findings that stigma and prejudice are not caused by people who are strangers to the victims of trafficking, but that stigmatisation is perpetuated by the same people who are supposed to be protecting the child victim of trafficking. This also introduces and contributes to the notion of what victimhood entails.

Discrimination is propagated by the victim's family members, the neighbours and other people in their community. As victims try to move forward with their lives, the past experience of trafficking seems like an albatross around their necks as their families and community members continuously discriminate against and taunt them. Unlike Marion's Albanian study (2012), where the perpetuation of stigma is fostered by a culture where shame and low status of women are cultural norms, the findings in this study show that stigma is attached to lack of remittances and notions of lost family values, family pride and purity and loss of innocence in childhood, especially for female children who are trafficked. This study, therefore, supports Surtees's (2013a) findings that it is crucial to work with the victims' families before, during and post-reintegration.

Secondary trauma and victimisation

Secondary victimisation was identified by study participants as the suffering or harm caused to the victim by the initial crime because of the criminal process, or as a consequence of the lack of assistance provision. This is supported by the extract below from a stakeholder interviewed for the study:

Then you're leaving a child who is in desperate need in a desperate state and what does that do? That is just destructive, the child may end up, if one looks at the kinds of things that happen to people who are trafficked, especially children; the child could end up just dying in desperate circumstances. Otherwise you could look at a child sinking into drug addiction, being trapped permanently in prostitution, being damaged. If the trafficking is for labour, let's say other than commercial sexual exploitation, then the child will lose out on his or her education, the child's future is damaged and destroyed. (Stakeholder 8)

As shown above, both fragmented systems and assistance provision systems that do not perform their duties can potentially (re-)victimise the child victim of trafficking. Secondary traumatisation fails to take into recognition that a trafficked child is a victim of crime whose rights have been violated. It devalues the child victim, because when the child is interrogated, the statements and information (s)he provides are doubted. It is quite evident in the extract above that victimisation fails to acknowledge that promotion of human security is linked to the protection of the child victim's needs (Jorge-Birol, 2008).

Trust and the deconstruction of constructed identities

A snapshot approach tends to view trafficked children's violations through a limited child rights violations lens that ignores the complex set of structures, needs, factors, trends, themes, and abuses. The extracts below illustrate how realities within children's lives can be ignored and violated by the very systems that are meant to protect them and their identities:

It's a really difficult situation to get the child. It just makes it a very difficult case and the child would want to go back. You have to build a relationship of trust with the child and understand that the child has come from this background of abuse and they think I'm ok, I'm now going to get help and no help comes. Children just shut down and just turn off. (Stakeholder 4)

Trust becomes a key issue in the construction and deconstruction of an individual's identity. The lack of knowledge and skills to do more to, for and with the rescued victims makes them voluntarily return to their traffickers (Blackburn et al, 2010). Similar to research conducted by Daniel and Knudsen (1995) on refugees and from Hepburn and Simon's (2010) study on trafficking in the US, mistrust and being suspicious play a crucial role in a refugee's survival strategy. Similarly to victims of trafficking, findings from the majority of the stakeholders established that if the trafficked children have been let down the first time, arrested or detained after sharing their story, a greater sense of mistrust develops and their future narratives are adapted to suit different circumstances, especially those linked to survival. An example is illustrated in the following extract:

The child goes back to the trafficking situation. So what we have noticed is that either the pimp will be tougher on the girl or if the girl doesn't go back to the pimp or to the trafficker the girl will go into prostitution. Then when the child is there, it is very difficult to assist because the first assistance that the girl needs, you find that the system has failed the child already, now the child doesn't have trust anymore. So it becomes difficult to win that particular child back to the services. It takes time again to win the trust because [of] the trauma that they have been through. First, when you're working with this victim you need to build trust ... and work with the victim individually, and if that is broken it's very hard to mend it again. (Stakeholder 12)

Based on the above interview extract, one can see how easily mistrust can be an unconscious strategy for survival for trafficked children in the future. Reflecting again on previous refugee research, elements of historical mistrust are reported when refugee and asylum-seekers interact with service providers (Hynes, 2010). This subsequently trickles down to trafficking, as trafficking has been largely reported to be an issue affecting immigrants. Thus the thinking and language of service providers are those traditionally linked to refugees and asylum-seekers and the kind of discourse that contains real potential for non-exploitative opportunities.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The main goal of assistance provision is healing and empowerment so that the children are able to live fulfilling lives and reach their potential. The safe return of child victims of trafficking to their countries or homes of origin should be a voluntary exercise, and it should only be encouraged after a thorough risk assessment has been conducted and a permanency plan has been drawn up in conjunction with the referral organisation in the country of origin and with participation of the victim him/herself. This ensures that continuity of care is prioritised, promoted and provided and the presented consequences can be mitigated somewhat.

Although this study did not set out to research re-trafficking, it is worth mentioning that according to Lee (2011: 79), re-trafficking occurs in situations where there are huge debts still owed to the trafficker or exploiters, where pre-trafficking vulnerabilities still exist, where there is difficulty reintegrating into communities due to the stigma associated with being trafficked, or where difficult choices have to be made by an individual. While repatriation and reintegration programmes are designed to be inclusive, the underlying assumption of stakeholders in this study was that these programmes are shaped by short-term, narrowly focused migration policy concerns and by assumptions of what trafficking victims want rather than what they may actually need. Follow-up studies, which are beyond the scope of this study, need to be done on exploring the post-repatriation experiences of trafficked child victims.

Traffickers tend to control victims by making them perform acts that will lead to their isolation upon return to their families. It was evident that when the victims of trafficking are returned to their communities of origin, they tend to be isolated and are fearful of the negative social stigma attached to their return. During pre-trafficking, traffickers rely on social norms that can be exploited, and, during post-trafficking, on profits from stigma-related activities that are considered taboo, or that the community would scorn. This introduces the notion of transferred shame in connected and collective societies, such as in southern Africa, as highlighted in Tang et al's (2008) study. Victims of trafficking can harbour internalised shame, but at the same time their shame can be brought about by external shame. Internal shame in victims of labour exploitation is patriarchy-linked and denoted by silence, by the victims not wanting to admit weakness or that assistance is needed (Enrile & Ritchie, 2019). External shame is attached to strong family traditions associated with honour; thus, families feeling shamed by the trafficked children's experiences. Since stigma is a strong indicator of individual, family and community acceptance, it is essential that the assistance provided by social workers to both the trafficked child and his or her family prior to any attempts at reunification focuses on family and community acceptance. According to

Tang et al (2008), closeness of the relationship determines the intensity of shame felt. Therefore, although the trafficked child might internalise shame, if those around them reject the shame and stigma, the child has the potential to do the same and recover faster from his/her trafficking experiences.

In most African communities, there are cultural and family-related values that speak to the maintenance of honour, especially in the eyes of the immediate community. However, the author is of the opinion that the shame is brought about by the fact that the families would be bitter, angry and disappointed by the lack of earnings or social or academic/vocational upliftment that they had expected from the children. This is a key finding, because the children being reintegrated would be returning empty-handed, yet the families had long-term expectations of monetary or other rewards after facilitating or *allowing* their children to be trafficked - i.e. improving household livelihood through children. Vocational training and sustainable livelihoods should be one of the goals of recovery/assistance provision and especially in instances where the child is in his/her late teens and is not able to access or chooses not to pursue formal education. Social workers should assess the income-generating activities with the child's participation (Botha & Warri, 2019; Steiner et al, 2018; Surtees, 2012; 2017), and monitor the training, entrepreneurship and job placements as well as prepare the children for these new settings and experiences and align them with the service needs of the areas to which they will be returned. Poverty and other socio-economic issues that caused the child to be trafficked call for households to be economically strengthened and for material support to be made available prior to reintegration. This should be done in a harmonised manner and in a way that does not create dependency for those families or rivalry with other impoverished families (Delap & Wedge, 2016; Warri, 2018). This finding builds on debates on livelihood framework and child protection. It is a challenge to attempt to eradicate child trafficking in poverty-stricken areas without simultaneously addressing broader issues linked to development, norms and culture.

The process of recovery and healing does not end at the point at which the child victim is physically (re)integrated. Because the child is still vulnerable, follow-up services are essential, and monitoring of the placement is crucial to ensure the children do not end up being re-victimised and that unexplored and unresolved traumatic memories surfacing in times of stress can be contained. This research supports findings by Hynes (2010) that vulnerability does not end when the trafficked child is rescued, but events such as accessing services, negotiating assistance provision, limited developmental opportunities and lack of trust in the children's narratives can all maintain or increase the initial vulnerability. Furthermore, findings from Van Liempt and Bilger's (2012) research are also applicable in this discussion, since the lives of vulnerable migrants, including reintegrated trafficked children, have a tendency to be shaped and influenced by institutional frameworks that ought to be reviewed from time to time. It is recommended that the complex interaction between trafficking, development and counter-trafficking initiatives and policies be acknowledged. Furthermore, there is need for better policy consistency between policies to combat trafficking and those that promote development (Danailova-Trainor & Laczko, 2010) and conform with international best principles informing responsive policy amendments (Schloenhardt & Loong, 2011).

Trafficked persons generally live in fear and in environments that are loaded with suspicions. Part of the fear and changing storylines and narratives stem from their trafficking experiences and from the intensive interrogation by professionals from different multidisciplinary teams. In addition, lack of consultation when reintegration plans are being made could further fuel mistrust. Due to possible distortions in their thought processes as a consequence of trafficking, trafficked victims tend to think that they are not believed and trusted, although in certain instances this might be true. This finding supports Rigby and Whyte's (2013) findings that changing narratives can be a sign of the complexities of the children's lives and journeys undertaken, and the children's views of the trafficking experiences and events. In the latter, the lack of trust in children's trafficking narratives prevents rapid proactive identification and it can impact follow-up services once the children are reintegrated. Practitioners should therefore note that there is greater disclosure of information in instances where trafficked children feel safe and can trust, and they (service providers) ought to work towards providing such safe spaces.

In support of ECPAT's (2017) study, the present study has found that the repatriation of children to their countries of origin requires thorough assessment, preparation and collaboration with key agencies and service providers in both countries. If at any stage during assistance provision it is determined that repatriation will not be in the child's best interest, this process should be halted (Delap & Wedge, 2016), because the safety of the children once in their community and country of origin could be compromised.

CONCLUSION

Case referrals and the management of child trafficking need significant improvement, as there are glaring gaps in the South African system. Accountability in this aspect of care is missing and thus many children are falling through these gaps again. It is recommended that a cross-border monitoring mechanism be established. Furthermore, it is important that service providers acknowledge barriers to reintegration, which may manifest directly or indirectly - e.g. victims who might not want to return home, risk and child readiness assessments not being thoroughly done and scarcity of resources (including information). These concerns should not be overlooked but considered during assistance provision.

Trafficked children who leave or are rescued from trafficking situations can be understood as starting another unknown journey of healing where they confront past injustices and traumatic experiences during their recovery. The provision of appropriate assistance even during reintegration plays an integral role in helping children heal. Service fragmentation causes further vulnerability to children, as they become powerless and tend to feel hopeless and worthless when they are being processed through dysfunctional child protection and social services systems. This paper has shown that there is need for comprehensive return and reintegration services and programmes that are trauma-informed, victim-centred, development-focused and culturally sensitive in nature.

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