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Trauma and coping

A study of women that were trafficked for the purpose of
sexual exploitation in India

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Abstract

Title: *Trauma and coping - a study of women that were trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation in India*

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Key words: Human trafficking, prostitution, sexual exploitation, trauma, coping

This study was conducted in the red-light area of Pune city, India. The target group of the study is sex workers that are victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The purpose of this study was to examine the initial and continuing trauma and its effects, and the coping strategies that these women develop in order to survive. The initial trauma occurs during the trafficking and seasoning process in the brothel. The term continuing trauma refers to violence and psychological trauma that are part of sex workers lives. The main questions answered during this survey regarded how women were trafficked and seasoned, what coping strategies they used during seasoning, how the lives of sex workers are in terms of violence and psychological trauma and what coping strategies are used in order to bear brothel prostitution. I used qualitative research method. I interviewed 15 sex workers, 13 of those interviews were used in this study. The results of my study show that brothel owners use systematic methods of coercion and control in order to break women's resistance so that they will adapt to captivity, believing that they have ceased to exist socially except as sex workers. The institution of trafficking and prostitution has developed to perfection the art of torture. Brothel owners use unpredictable and extreme violence in form of physical and sexual abuse to break women physically and mentally, making them controllable and submissive. While in captivity, unable to escape and under total control of their perpetrators, my respondents experienced prolonged and repeated trauma. Brothel owners methods of brainwashing, indoctrination, physical control and physical and sexual abuse, ultimately lead to a new identity formation among my respondents. The women's former identity was gradually and irrevocably destroyed while a new enslaved identity was built, an identity that included a body that could be controlled, used and violated by others, a new self image of a dehumanized person and a reality that only consists of evil and where nobody can be trusted. Although the amount of violence inflicted on my respondents declined after the seasoning process ended and they had accepted to entertain the customers, the physical and emotional violence was a norm in brothel prostitution. They were trapped in a reality where they were forced to serve innumerable men throughout the day and night, they were depersonalized, who they used to be and where they came from, their history, their family, and their identity, none of that mattered any more. Even though they were not physically forced to serve men as they had been during seasoning, they were doing their part without protest in order to survive and that was having a devastating impact on their self, their individuality and their humanity. Trafficking and brothel prostitution had a devastating impact on my respondents. They suffer psychological, physical and social damage. The only reason they are still alive today is because of their strength, resilience and different ways of coping.

"It is a matter of bitter shame and sorrow and deep humiliation that a number of women have to sell their chastity for men's lust. Man, the law giver, will have to pay a dreadful penalty for the degradation he has imposed upon the so-called weaker sex. When woman freed from man's snares rises to her full height and rebels against man's legislation and institution designed by him, her rebellion, no doubt, non-violent, will be nevertheless effective".

-Mahatma Gandhi

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1 Introduction

Very often we open a newspaper and read about “slavelike conditions” for laborers in some third world countries that are forced to work under inhuman conditions, unacceptable working hours and minimal wage. The term “slavelike” is very interesting. For a collective mind of western culture slavery ended in the nineteenth century. Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation and put a stop to a thriving market in human beings.

In reality, there are more slaves in bondage today than there were slaves shipped across the Atlantic in four centuries during the transatlantic slave trade. Many of these slaves are women and children that were lured, seduced, sold by their families or abducted to be prostituted across the globe. For the victim of human trafficking, with the purpose of sexual exploitation, the life turns into a nightmare of violence, threats, destructiveness, starvation, torture, burns and innumerable counts of rape. All around the world women and children suffer unspeakable acts of barbarity, which leaves them devastated for the rest of their lives.

The business of human trafficking for sexual exploitation is alarmingly efficient and sophisticated. Why? Because it is one of the most profitable illicit enterprises in the world. This global victimization of women and children generates billions of dollars in profit every year. The victims are forced to serve customers over and over again, until they become too old or too sick, then, they are discarded.

A few years back I lived in Malaysia. Several times a month I conducted working related trips to Bangkok. Thailand, a country that brings images of magnificent islands, pristine mountains, natural beauty and warm hospitality, is also a country of extreme ugliness. Everywhere I looked I saw European men strolling hand in hand with teenage Thai girls, young women were soliciting men for massage services, tuk-tuk drivers were offering to take me to a sex bar. It was impossible to avoid sex solicitation and at times, the entire city felt like one huge brothel. The business of selling sex prevails all over the country and it is not only tailored for western foreigners. In Southern Thailand I rented a room in a guesthouse not knowing that it served as a brothel. All the customers were Thai or Malaysian men.

The encounters with the sex industry, that were unavoidable in Thailand, was what first got me “interested” in the topic of prostitution and sex trafficking. In the next few years I read a lot of literature on the subject. The more I got to know, the more heartbreak, sorrow and rage I felt. I forced myself not to look the other way and suddenly it was all I could see. I walked on dodgy backstreets of Phnom Penh and looked into empty eyes of adolescent girls waiting for customers. I visited remote tribal villages in Northern Thailand and the only females there were either small children or older women. I knew that adolescent girls and young women were earning money in Chang Mai. I watched transvestites in Malaysia occupy street corners in every bigger city, they were the ones with the cheapest rates.

Going through the available literature on the subject of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation I felt that there was very little written about trafficking and prostitution from a victims point of view. It was easy to find facts about the trafficking process, targeted groups, causes, recruitment, transport and exploitation of the victims. However, I was mostly interested in the psychological impact of trafficking and prostitution, i.e. the internal ravages that these women experienced. Also, I wanted to know how they survived the trauma of sexual slavery and how they cope with a life in a brothel. More than anything I wanted to speak to the victims of this inhuman trade, the ones that I was observing for years. I wanted to hear their stories, their voices, because they were the ones least heard in the contemporary debate on human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

1.1. The purpose and research questions

This study was conducted in the red-light area of Pune city, India. The target group of the study is sex workers that are victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. As the field of human trafficking and prostitution is large and widespread, I restricted my study to the women in brothels in the red-light area in Pune. Thanks to the organization Saheli Sangh, sex workers own collective, I had access to the area and the brothels, and sex workers that were victims of human trafficking.

The purpose of this study was to examine the initial and continuing trauma and its effects, and the coping strategies that these women develop in order to survive. The initial trauma occurs during the trafficking and seasoning process in the brothel. The term continuing trauma refers to violence and psychological trauma that are part of sex workers lives.

Five main questions were answered during the survey:

How are the women trafficked?

How are the women seasoned?

What coping strategies did the women use during seasoning?

How is the life of a sex worker in terms of violence and psychological trauma?

How are the women coping with the trauma that is part of a sex workers lives?

1.2. Terminology

There are many different terms used in the contemporary debate concerning human trafficking and prostitution. Moreover the same term can have different underlying meaning for different parties. I have chosen to present and clarify the definitions of the most relevant and frequently used expressions in this study and the stand that I have chosen to take.

1.2.1 Human trafficking

The concept of human trafficking refers to the criminal practice of exploiting human beings by treating them like commodities for profit. The term human trafficking in its widest sense includes different forms of sexual exploitation including prostitution, forced labor, slavery and trade in human beings for the removal of organs. Human trafficking can be considered as an umbrella term that covers a process of recruitment, transportation and control. Trafficking can be organized in a variety of ways that involve different actions and outcomes but there are always elements of vulnerability and exploitation (Ebbe, 2008).

In this paper the term human trafficking refers to trafficking of female children and women for the purpose of sexual exploitation within prostitution. The term includes both trafficking from neighboring countries and internal trafficking.

1.2.2 Prostitution

In the contemporary debate regarding trafficking and prostitution there are two main divisions representing different views on the issue of prostitution in general. One discourse is focusing on pointing out distinctions between prostitution and trafficking, viewing prostitution as mutual and voluntary contractual exchange between adults and arguing that prostitution should be legitimized and/or legalized so that it can be considered as a form of paid work. The other discourse places prostitution in the system of gender-based domination, considering it as a practice of violence against women and the multiple violations of her fundamental human rights (Matthews, 2008).

I have chosen to view prostitution and trafficking as two fundamentally interrelated violations of human rights. My opinion is that the appropriate model for understanding prostitution is not the labor model but the violence against women model. In the global sex industry, the brutal and dehumanizing marketplace, women and children are reduced to sexual commodities used by customers and lucrative sex industry entrepreneurs, leaving them physically and psychologically devastated.

1.2.3 Sex worker

There are different terms used for women that are engaged in prostitution; prostitutes, commercial sex workers and sex workers, to name a few. All these terms are charged with underlying meanings making it difficult to take a neutral stand. The term commercial sex worker was universalized by the World Health Organization but it failed in its attempt to find an expression that will not derogate the women. By using the word “commercial” prostitution was put in a different category than other professions. If the term commercial sex worker can be justified than all the other professions would have to have the same prefix; commercial trader, commercial driver etc.

The term sex worker is most frequently used in India. The terms sex work and sex worker have been coined by sex workers themselves. The purpose was to redefine commercial sex work by focusing on its income-generating activity, giving the discourse an employment or labor perspective. The term was a part of the process of trying to end the exclusion of sex workers.

I have chosen to use the term sex work, interchangeably with the term prostitution, in this paper because it is the most frequently used term in India and it is a term that all my respondents were using. At the same time I think it is important to emphasize that I do not consider sex work as an occupational choice for women. In India, sex work at best, is a survival strategy. A possibility of choice exists only when there is a certain amount of freedom and option available in the decision making. For the majority of Indian sex workers the choice is absent, it is either a physical force or socio-economic coercion that lead them to a life in prostitution.

1.2.4 Seasoning

Trafficked girls and women are initiated into prostitution through acute physical and psychological violence. These systematic methods of brainwashing, indoctrination and physical control are called seasoning. Unpredictable and extreme violence is used during the process that will turn the average women into a “willing” prostitute that will comply with the customers’ and brothel owners’ demands.

The initial emotions that the new recruits experience when they are brought to a brothel are confusion, disbelief, disorientation and shock. The seasoning begins while they are in this vulnerable state. The techniques, that have all the components of political torture, will ultimately break the resistance, the woman will believe that she is worthless and that she has ceased to exist socially except as a prostitute. She will have to find a way to adapt to captivity and to endure the psychological and physical toll that the life as a sex worker will take upon her. The terror has made her controllable, her will to resist has been broken (Brown, 2000).

2 Background information

2.1 Human trafficking

The first international agreement on the proper legal definition of trafficking was adopted by United Nations (UN) Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, to which India is a signatory, in November 2000. The *UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* define trafficking as:

“...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or service, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph have been used.” (United Nations, 2000)

However, trafficking in human beings is nothing new. It is ironic that the twentieth century, the century in which the formal abolition of slavery was archived and values based on human rights and fundamental freedoms were re-affirmed, has also been the century in which slavery has re-emerged and where one of the worst and most brazen abuses of human rights still go unchecked (Reilly, 2006). This inhuman trade is thriving in all societies across the globe, in diverse and rapidly changing ways that evades check and elimination. Trafficking is nothing short of slavery for vulnerable individuals that get trapped in situations from which they cannot escape. This trade is a crime against humanity and a gross violation of several human rights, including the very right to life, liberty, human dignity, security, right from torture, cruelty, inhuman or degrading treatment, right to home and family, health care and education and proper employment (Institute of social sciences, 2005). Regardless of international commitments to combat human trafficking, the phenomenon continues to increase, as the disparity between wealth and poverty continues to grow between and within countries (Demir, 2003).

The majority of laws and programs against trafficking focus more on movement portion of the trafficking chain than on exploitation of the victims. But trafficking is not about the movement, it is about slavery. The violently coerced labor of millions of Africans from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries is called slave trade. The same practice today goes under the name trafficking. More focus is on the movement side of the trafficking chain and much less on shutting down present day's plantations, i.e. sex establishments, and rescuing and rehabilitating the victims (Kara, 2009).

2.1.1. Causes of trafficking

There are many underlying causes of this atrocious crime. It fits most of all on poverty but it extends far beyond. Changing socio-economic and political development in the world has had a negative impact on women's lives. In addition to being subordinated economically, politically and socially, Asian women have been increasingly commodified as sexual objects to be bought, sold and exchanged. From villages and cities, thousands of girls and women are forced by grinding poverty and helplessness, by culture and tradition, by familial structures and expectations, by violence and neglect, to work as sex slaves (Ebbe, 2008). Following categories highlight multidimensional issue of trafficking:

Economic:

Increasing and endemic poverty and "feminization of poverty", that is arising from the failure of existing social structures to provide equal and just educational and employment opportunities for women, are the main reason for women and children to fall into the trap of trafficking. This burden of poverty, widespread malnutrition, socio-economic inequality and illiteracy is falling heavily on the shoulders of women. The research shows that the greater the degree of impoverishment, the higher the risk of falling prey to trafficking. The increasing poverty is disproportionately affecting women. 1.3 billion people are poor in the world today, 80 per cent of them are women and their minor dependents (Demir, 2003). Of 850 million illiterate adults in the world, 600 million are women. Of 115 million children across the globe that are not attending school, 70 million are girls. This lack of education for females is a key factor in promoting poverty, spread of HIV virus and vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking (Kara, 2009).

Periodical natural disasters like cyclones, floods, drought and earthquakes bring about in its wake a large number needy, helpless, vulnerable and desperate women and children that are an easy prey for traffickers (Ali, 2005).

The global economic integration that began in the early 1990s led to expanding international trade and foreign investment but its benefits also had a backside. The impacts of globalization, with an increased mobility of labor, loss of traditional income and rural employment, growing inequality between rich and poor and social instability, have also fuelled trafficking, both across borders and from rural to urban areas within a country. As the process of economic globalization unfolded, the supply of potential slaves grew. It became easier to transport them, and, there was a whole spectrum of ways to exploit them as the number of industries increased. Sex slaves are a particularly lucrative business as it takes minimal effort to maintain them and they can provide sexual services thousands of times before being replaced (Ali, 2005; Kara, 2009).

Socio-cultural:

Deep-rooted patriarchal system underlines the gender oppression of women, resulting in discriminatory and negative social attitudes that view girl children as burden and liabilities, less desirable and inferior to boys. Violations of women's reproductive rights, sex selective abortions, female foeticide, female infanticide, high mortality rates among poor women and children due to malnutrition and poor infrastructure are all examples of increased human rights violation against women. Divorce, husband's second marriage, dowry issues and early marriage have all played an important role in pushing women to look for independence and alternative means of survival, making them easy targets for traffickers. The many layers of human rights abuse that women in India suffer are nowhere more evident than in the problems of human trafficking. The young girls and women come from cultures where females are expected to sacrifice themselves for the well being of their families and communities. The human trade and sex industry preys on women's sexual, racial and socio-economic inequality, turning their inequality and vulnerability into immense profit (Kannabiran, 2005; Rajan, 2003).

Rapid social transformations and erosion of social values in the combination with increasing consumerism and materialism have contributed to women being viewed as sex objects and as commodities to be bought and sold. Trafficked women and children are the sex industry's primary casualties but not it's only victims. Through commercial sexual exploitation boys and men adopt and internalize beliefs and attitudes that are teaching them to view female bodies as sexual merchandise. This bolsters gender inequality in all areas of society and its effects can be seen in acts of sexual violence against women and in sexual harassment of women in work places (ibid).

In rural areas the hierarchical caste system can be fundamentally exclusionary, with lower cast people facing economic exploitation, social discrimination and high risk of sexual exploitation. Girls born in lower castes are forced into prostitution by men of higher castes with the explanation that it is their caste occupation (Institute of social sciences, 2005).

2.1.2 The scale of trafficking

The scale of the trafficking phenomenon is difficult to estimate because of the clandestine nature of the operation. *"...The trade is secretive, the women are silenced, the traffickers are dangerous and not many agencies are counting"* (Institute of social sciences, 2005, page 16). Among the most quoted figures are UN estimates that state that 4 million people, many of them children, every year are traded against their will to work in some form of slavery. 30 million women and children, in Asia alone, have been trafficked for sexual exploitation in the last 30 years.

The annual profits generated by the entire human trafficking industry have been estimated to \$9.5 billion by the U.S. State Department. The international Labor Organization (ILO) on the other hand states that sale of human trafficking victims and their exploitation bring in \$31.7 billion annually. Human trafficking is the third most lucrative activity of organized crime groups, following the trafficking of arms and drugs. However, human trafficking is the least punished of these three forms of trafficking. It is very rare for human traffickers to serve time, but when they do, their sentences are much lighter than for traffickers of arms and drugs. Combined trafficking in humans, drugs and weapons has become increasingly popular in war-torn regions, for example in number of African countries, Afghanistan and former Yugoslavia, where young women were trafficked to provide sexual services to peacekeeping troops and foreign workers (Kara, 2009).

With an average net profit of 70 percent, human trafficking for sexual exploitation is one of the most profitable enterprises in the world. Good and easy profit and an endless supply side as well as demand side has been very tempting for both small-time criminals and organized crime groups, resulting in a high level of complexity and coordination of the human trade (ibid).

The human trafficking has become an increasingly important political priority on international and national agenda, resulting in increased policy, law-enforcement and media attention. But the industry still thrives because the profitability is colossal with the minimal risk. Even though sexual slavery is illegal in every country, there is an absence of almost any measurable real risks for traffickers and exploiters due to widespread corruption in law enforcement, border control and legal system that allows traffickers to conduct their business (ibid).

2.2 South Asia

Indian estimates on human trafficking show high degree of discrepancy. Calculations of trafficked persons are generally made with reference to the number of sex workers. The number of women and children in sex work is stated to be around 1 million. Of these, 15 per cent are below 15 years of age, and 25 per cent between 15 and 18 years. Other figures states that there are around 2 million prostitutes in India and 20 per cent of them are minors. Another study estimated that any given time, 20 000 girls are being transported from one part of the country to another. 200 girls and women enter prostitution on a daily basis and 80 per cent of them are coerced into it (Institute of social sciences, 2005).

India is both destination and transit area for trafficking in women and children. Cross-border trafficking represents around 10 per cent of coercive movement, approximately 2.17 per cent of trafficking victims are from Bangladesh and 2.6 per cent are from Nepal (ibid).

Bangladesh, together with Nepal, is a major source country in South Asia. It is estimated that there are between 100 000 and 200 000 young girls and women from Bangladesh in Indian brothels (Ali, 2005). Trafficking from Bangladesh, especially in children, is increasing at an alarming rate. In Bangladesh, poverty, gender discrimination and low status of women and children are underlying causes of trafficking while the driving factors are unemployment, illiteracy and lack of livelihood opportunities. In most cases of trafficking, the traffickers are known persons that are giving victims hope for better job opportunity or marriage. Girls and women willingly follow without knowing the consequences. Bangladeshi women and children are also trafficked to Pakistan while boys are trafficked to Middle East through India. On the other hand there is an alarming number of children and women within the country that is forcefully engaged in prostitution (Gupta, 2002).

Nepali's extreme poverty, that makes recruitment of girls and women easy and profitable, and its economic and political relationship with India, have facilitated trafficking of Nepalese girls and women to brothels in India. Nepal is one of the least developed countries of the world. 45 per cent of the population live below the poverty line. Poverty, high population growth, illiteracy, unemployment and underemployment, poor health, slow economic growth and an agrarian economy characterize the Nepalese society. Trafficking crosses many caste/ethnic groups of Nepal, but most at risk are members of the hill ethnic group and lower castes. The 1,740-mile open border between Nepal and India is making prevention of trafficking almost impossible. Under the 1950 treaty with India there is no immigration control for nationals traveling or migrating between India and Nepal. Thus, the traffickers and their victims can move easily across border. In India's red-light districts there is an increasing demand for virgin Nepalese girls, because of their fair skin and Mongolian features. Studies estimate that there are around 200 000 Nepali girls and women working in brothels across India and 7000 new Nepali end up in India's brothels every year (Human rights watch, 1995).

Nepali and Bangladeshi victims of trafficking are often very young. Approximately one-third of the girls are below the age of 16 and more than half are under 18. Declining of the average age at which the girls are being recruited is connected to the growing incidence of HIV in South Asia. Traffickers seek out younger girls because they are likely to have had fewer sexual partners. This may be true but the medical reality is that young girls run higher chance of being infected with the virus. Because they are so young their bodies are often unable to produce adequate lubrication for sex, so their vaginal tissues easily tear allowing introduction of HIV directly into the bloodstream (Dewey, 2008).

2.3 The Indian context

India plays a central role in the economic, social and political infrastructure of South Asia. It is a land of contrasts where great wealth coexists with grinding poverty, devastating many lives. The roots of prostitution are found in the pre-colonial period in form of religious prostitution or devadasi and tawaif system where young girls were trained in classical music and dance while providing sexual services. Prostitution and red-light areas as we know them today were created during the colonial period with the support of the British army. Many of these red-light areas have survived and today take a form of highly organized and internally regulated brothel systems. There are more than 1000 red-light districts across India, most of them in urban centers. In rural India the sex trade is more informal and unregulated (Gangoli, 2006).

Theoretically Indian women enjoy a number of legal rights and privileges but they are often denied them in practice. National data shows that the proportion of women working for cash ranges from 49 per cent to 10 per cent in different states. Only one of three women can leave the house without permission and there is a high degree of acceptance of domestic violence. 57 per cent of married women think that it is justified to be beaten if they have not fulfilled their duties in the house. Only 50 per cent of the female population in India is literate. Dowry, a practice of giving a substantial amount of money to the family into which a daughter marries, is a part of Indian marriage and is one of the causes for the preference for sons. Even though the dowry system is illegal in India, 15 000 women are murdered annually in the country over dowry disputes (ibid).

Ever since the use of ultra-sound became common in clinics across the country, it is estimated that 500 000 female fetuses are aborted annually. For the last 25 years 12.5 million future females were aborted. These numbers show how unwanted female children are and they give a hint of how girls, the ones that are born, are treated in some families and communities (Kara, 2009).

Caste, poverty, dowry demands and the low status of women within family and community are some of the factors that push women into sex work. The level of sexual repression within society and the degree of control that is exercised over Indian women is closely linked to the extent of prostitution and trafficking (ibid).

Most of the girls and women that are trapped in Indian brothels are victims of human trafficking. They come from the poorest communities, untouchable castes and scheduled tribes and they are exploited and abused for the simple reason that it is easy to exploit them. These girls and women are the poorest and most vulnerable members of largely powerless communities and they are subjected to conditions tantamount to slavery (Institute of social sciences, 2005).

The promises of jobs and marriage are common techniques used to lure girls away from their homes, but there are also cases of kidnapping and abduction where the victim

sometimes is drugged. Some families sell their children into slavery. Conditions of poverty, desperation or displacement can force a family to sell a girl child as a mean of survival for the rest of the family. Traffickers are good in sniffing out the most desperate and vulnerable families and making job offers for the child. The family will receive a lump sum and hope for the best (ibid).

The traffickers are either employed by brothel owners or they operate more or less independently. The traffickers can be strangers, family members, neighbors, local women returning from urban areas. It is not uncommon to be recruited by a former slave. Many can have a hard time comprehending how a woman, that has gone through the agony of trafficking and prostitution herself, can force another women to the same fate. But the psychology of sexual enslavement is complex and identity changing. The trafficked woman will use every possible adaptive mechanism to survive the life in the brothel. Ultimately she may become an ally of the brothel owner. Fraudulent marriage is common. Sometimes the trafficker goes through the marriage ceremony, sometimes only the promises of marriage is enough to lure the girl from home. Some women have been married for years and then one day they find them self being sold by their husbands (Kara, 2009).

The price that the brothel owner pays for an individual girl depends on her age, beauty, ethnicity, whether she is a virgin and whether she has had children. This purchase price, plus interest, becomes a “debt” that the woman needs to pay off. Medication, food, rent and other expenses are added to the debt and only the brothel owner knows the terms of the debt. Most women don’t know the terms of repayment so it is a process that can stretch on indefinitely. The girls are being burdened with massive amount of debt and given only one way of clearing it, by selling their bodies (Brown, 2000; Human rights watch, 1995).

Brothels vary by size, physical configuration, ethnicity of sex workers and price. The cheapest brothels are containing dark, overcrowded rooms or tiny cubicles, the sanitary conditions are minimal and some don’t have access to running water. Brothels are tightly controlled and the girls are under constant surveillance, making escape virtually impossible. First when the owner is confident that the girl won’t escape is she allowed to leave the brothel together with somebody from the brothel. Years can pass before the girl sees the daylight. When the new girls arrive at the brothel, both physical and psychological means are used to “break them in”, a process called seasoning. Torture, rape and humiliation are tools used by brothel owners to ensure that the girls will service customers submissively and that they would never try to escape (ibid).

“Psychological abuse, threats and intimidation are an integral part of the process and are used exclusively with girls who are purchased as virgins and can therefore be sold for higher prices if their “training” does not include rape. This psychological abuse continues well beyond the first customer, however, with brothel staff using conflicting messages to break down the victim’s resistance and build dependency. A common tactic involves certain brothel staff treating the victim abusively, telling her repeatedly that she is dirty or defiled, for

example, while another-often the brothel owner herself- consoles her and tells her that she is among family. When the psychological approach does not work, the brothel staff resorts to physical abuse, or allows customers to do so. This abuse can include beating, gang rapes and torture with burning cigarettes.” (Human rights watch, 1995, page 42-43).

“In Falkland Road in Mumbai, a former sex slave turned working prostitute named Mallaika told me that sex slaves were tortured and murdered every day. She told me that minors were mercilessly abused when they first arrived and that they were given opium so they would have sex with clients. If they misbehaved, arms were broken. If they tried to escape, they might have their throats cut in front of other slaves, who were subsequently required to clean up the slaughter as a visceral lesson in the fate that awaited them should they try to escape.” (Kara, 2009, page 12).

The time in the brothel is marked by two stages: seasoning and acclimatization. After some time, when they have realized that there are no other options, the girls have conditioned themselves to a life in the brothel. The large proportion of day and night is spent waiting for the customers, often sitting in a line outside of the brothel, trying to attract customers. The girls are forced to serve up to 25 customers a day and they are not allowed to refuse customers or to negotiate the basic terms of sex act, like usage of condom (Brown, 2000).

An increasing number of sex slaves are re-trafficked, regardless if they have escaped from the brothel or if they had paid their debt and were allowed to leave. When women leave the brothel, they are forced back to the same conditions that initiated the first trafficking; poverty, domestic violence and social bias. The women are recruited again, they are deceived, seduced or abducted, or they find life in the society impossible to bear so they return to the brothels hoping for a better deal the second time around (Kara, 2009).

As mentioned before there is a culturally sanctioned practice of prostitution and trafficking in India that goes under the name *devadasi*. The term devadasi is a Sanskrit word that can be broken into *deva* (god) and *dasi* (female slave), literally meaning “a female slave of God”. Devadasis are not allowed to marry any mortal man and their dedication to temple service is considered as constituting a marriage with the deity.

The cult of dedicating girls to temples was prevailing all over India. These slaves of deities were said to be experts in music and dance in medieval period. As centuries passed their services shifted from gods to earthy lords. The women dedicated to the deity as devadasis usually lead a life of prostitutes with a religious sanction.

The devadasi tradition today is almost completely lacking in either religious meaning or ritual. The dedication ceremonies give religious sanction to a family’s decision to prostitute a daughter, who is often initiated into this profession at puberty. More than religious devotion it is the economic considerations that are paramount in most family’s decision to push a daughter into prostitution via the devadasi dedication ceremony. 95 per cent of the girls who become devadasis are born into impoverished scheduled caste families who might

depend on the income generated by sex work. The initiation ceremony is celebrated with a feast which is paid for by an upper caste man who has purchased the right to girl's virginity. The economic benefits for the family are immediate as they receive a lump sum from the girls "first master".

A network of the traffickers operating between the sites of intense devadasi activity and neighbouring urban areas work easily with families interested to move the girls into the cities and red-light areas. Girls from the devadasi system have been estimated to account for 20 per cent of the total number of girls in child prostitution. The devadasi system totally blends into commercial prostitution although there is comparatively lower social stigma for devadasis engaged in prostitution compared to non-devadasi sex workers (Shankar, 1994; Institute of social sciences, 2005).

It is the spread of HIV/AIDS in India that has given sex work a whole new dimension, from being viewed as a small problem in the darkest corner of society to one of the main national concerns. In the 90s HIV diagnosed cases among sex workers skyrocketed. Until then it was believed that the virus was solely a concern for sex workers and truck drivers that were in regular contact with sex workers. But suddenly social classes categorized as "low risk" groups, like housewives, were being infected. India is a country with widespread poverty, illiteracy and poor health and preventing the spread of HIV is a big challenge. Interventions with sex workers are a cornerstone of India's response to HIV pandemic and peer-education model, involving sex workers by training and employing them to promote health, is one of the most common approaches (Cornish & Ghosh, 2007).

Despite the fact that India has numerous laws criminalizing trafficking, it still flourishes within the country. One of the reasons is endemic corruption within police force. Police and other government officials are involved at various points along trafficking route, they are supporting brothel owners, harassing sex workers, receiving bribes, protecting traffickers, giving the crime of trafficking a low priority and punishing victims instead of perpetrators (Institute of social sciences, 2005).

Trafficking in human beings is explicitly prohibited under a wide range of India's laws, including the Indian constitution, specific anti-trafficking acts and the Indian penal code. The two principal laws that address trafficking and prostitution are the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act of 1956 (SITA) and the Immoral Traffic in Persons Prevention Act of 1986 (ITPPA) usually referred to as PITA, an amendment to SITA. Neither laws prohibit prostitution *per se* but commercial sex and soliciting in public places are punishable offences. The PITA is based on the principle that sex work is exploitation. Its goal is to eliminate trafficking and it criminalizes acts by third parties facilitating sex work thus punishing anyone maintaining a brothel, living off earnings of prostitution or procuring or detaining for the sake of prostitution. It also provides for detention in "corrective institution" of sex workers who solicits publicly. The "corrective institutions" are government run homes that have widely been criticized for many shortcomings, including corruption, poor

infrastructure facilities, meager budget, almost nonexistent psychological care and skill building (ibid). This is how a sex worker that was kept in one of these institutions describes the experience:

“The physical conditions in the home were subhuman, the food inadequate and poorly cooked, and the staff there treated the women with indignity. The women were unwilling to accept this without a fight. Twelve women run away, the others decided to go on a spirited- and noisy- protest hunger-strike. To add to the melodrama, they threatened to electrocute themselves if things did not get better...The state authorities confabulated on how they could cope with this extraordinary situation. Ensuring that conditions in the state government welfare home for women should be expeditiously improved does not seem to have been considered as a feasible option, for some unstated reason. Instead, an innovative proposal was made, to shift the women from the welfare home to the women’s ward of jail. It is ironical that conditions in the jail, which are universally acknowledged to be abysmal, were deemed better than those in welfare home, which was established for the rehabilitation of women in special difficulties” (Mander, 2001, page 17-18).

The interpretation of PITA for anti-trafficking intervention mostly results in rescue and rehabilitation operations that end up either criminalizing or victimizing sex workers. That impact on traffickers and brothel owners is minimal is clearly shown by data on the enforcement of PITA. Over 90 per cent of those arrested under the Act are sex workers, majority being arrested for soliciting in public place, while pimps, traffickers, brothel owners and clients only represent 10 per cent of arrests (Institute of social sciences, 2005). It is very clear that the law, whose aim is to protect the women, is being used to punish them. The impact on sex workers, of governmental strategies with focus on criminalization and rehabilitation programs, is a combination of isolation, stigmatization, marginalization and vulnerability to violence due to illegality and un- acceptance of their status and activity.

2.4 The Pune context

The following information is partly based on both interviews and informal colloquies with the staff of Saheli Sangh organization and peer-educators, their annually reports and my own observations in the red-light area. The staff and members of Saheli Sangh were a source of priceless, undocumented knowledge collected through many years of experience in the area and both inside and outside perspective on the situation and issues related to sex work and trafficking. The organization and its staff and members are deeply respected and trusted by sex workers and many brothel owners and with them my presence was accepted, both in the organization, on the streets and in the brothels.

Pune is the second largest city in the Maharashtra state, it is a major industrial city and one of South India’s fastest growing business centers. The population of Pune city is 2 500 000, almost 40 per cent of inhabitants lives in slums. The sex worker community, the so called

red-light district, was estimated to have been established 500 years ago. It is situated in the heart of the city, in the old parts of Pune, in a very busy shopping area. The well known Budhwar Peth is the busiest brothel street, but adjoining lanes all house innumerable brothels. There are approximately 380 brothels in the area, most of them housed in old fashioned buildings made of mud and bricks, many of them in a very bad condition. The brothels with the better standard mostly house Nepalese women where the rates are higher. There are approximately 5000 sex workers staying in the area and additional 1000 women that live outside the district, mostly in the nearby slum-areas, that daily come to the red-light area to conduct their business. There are also around 6000 non brothel based sex workers that mostly operate in lodges around the city.

Budhwar Peth and adjoining lanes feature a very public display of sex for sale at all hours of the day and night. Girls and women in various states of undress occupy the area in front of the brothels, entrance and hallways, attracting customers. This extremely public presence of sex work in the red-light area can seem paradoxical in a country with laws against prostitution. System of brothel prostitution is sustained by carefully maintained arrangements between police and brothel owners. Police receives regular bribes that are a necessary supplement to their low salaries and in return they allow the illegal sex industry to thrive. Police does however conduct regular raids on brothels in search of underage girls (Dewey, 2008).

Many sex workers in the area are victims of the devadasi system. Approximately 35 per cent of the sex workers are Nepalese women. The number of Bangladeshi women is steadily increasing. Saheli Sangh conducted a HIV Sentinel Surveillance in August 2006. 250 sex workers were examined and tested. 126 women were HIV positive (50 per cent). There is a widespread addiction to alcohol in the area (50 per cent) and 99 per cent of women use chewing tobacco. Saheli Sangh estimates that around 95 per cent of sex workers in the area are victims of trafficking. There is a very high demand for minor girls, many of them come from Nepal. There are reports of young girls being "treated" with hormones, both estrogen and testosterone, to promote abnormal breast development and enlargement of genital organs. By doing this the brothel owners boost the business and run smaller chance of getting caught during police raids as the girls can pass as adults. The biggest customer group are lower middle class and middle class men in the age group 20-40. The trend is that younger customers prefer older girls because of their experience and older customers prefer younger girls because of their innocence. The purchase price for the girl ranges between 15 000 and 1 million rupees (2 800 SEK- 180 000 SEK). The interest rate that is added to girls' debt is 12-25 per cent. After the debt is repaid the sex worker keeps 50 per cent of the earnings and the other half goes to the brothel owner. The customers pay between 20 and 500 rupees (4 SEK- 95 SEK) for a single act. Most sex workers have 4 to 5 customers per day. There is an upcoming trend with new girls when they are not immediately taken to the brothels but to secure locations across the city and seasoned there. Many brothel owners hire men whose job is to break the girls down by raping and torturing them.

2.4.1 Saheli Sangh

Saheli is the only sex worker collective in Pune, established in 1998 with the voluntary effort of the women in the area. The journey started with the establishing of the organization called Peoples Health Organization (PHO) in 1991. It is a registered non-profit, non-governmental, apolitical and secular organization whose primary objective is to create awareness about HIV/AIDS and prevention and control of HIV/AIDS among sex workers. PHO was founded in 1982 by Dr. I.S.Guilarda. It started as a small scale pioneer work in Mumbai's red-light district. Today there are branches all over India.

The sex workers collective was formed in 1998 through the initiative from social workers from PHO and peer-educators from the community. Saheli Sangh as a collective has grown over the period of project implementation since 2002 onwards generating a larger network of women in sex work. Today the collective has 500 women as members and has also successfully carried out a democratic election for selecting the management committee in December 2006. The Saheli Sangh board consists of nine members and they have now taken over all the responsibilities. The staff consists of the director of Sangh, Ms. Tejaswi Sevekari, a project manager, a counselor, outreach social workers and an administration cum accountant.

Saheli's aim is to control HIV/AIDS among sex workers through collective efforts. That is done by enhancing and enabling a greater level of self-protection among sex workers through a sense of togetherness, collective action and creation of an identity.

The mission of the collective is to empower woman in sex work through collectivization, to provide health care support and necessary social services and to change the attitude of society towards women in sex work.

Some of collective's current involvements:

-Educating women in sex work in STIs and HIV/AIDS prevention, general health and hygiene and substance addiction.

-Promotion and distribution of condoms to the women, informing them about its usage and teaching women to develop negotiating skills with clients. Distribution of condoms as also conducted in non-brothel based areas of Pune City.

-Providing basic medication and medical counseling. Women are assisted with referral, escort to the clinic or hospital and follow-up.

-Establishing self-help groups (saving groups) for economic growth of the women. Saheli Sangh has networked with Bank of India for opening saving accounts of the women for an initial amount of Rs 100 (17 SKR). 500 women have now opened the savings account. The Sangh provides a letter of recognition to each individual woman for access to the bank savings account). Self-helps groups have initiated internal borrowing with a nominal interest

rate (2 per cent). Women are usually forced to borrow money from the brothel keeper at a very high interest rate (12 to 25 per cent) that makes their debt to the brothel keeper grow, the debt that is already very high, taking them many years to pay back.

Saheli Sangh realized that establishment of savings groups and the loan amount sanctioned from the national bank have limited coverage and substantial impact on lives of the women. The collective decided to mobilize the women to initiate a cooperative bank. Today Saheli Pariwar Cooperative Bank of women in sex work is considered one of the greatest milestones in the life of the Sangh making it possible for women to have their own bank and save money on a regular basis. Rs 1 is collected per day and person and this will eventually lead towards self-sustenance of the organization.

-Facilitating a community kitchen to provide low price nutritious food for the women. Today the kitchen supply meals for working class main-stream community members commuting at the red light area. Through this activity they also achieve their mission of changing the attitudes of the mainstream society toward sex workers. The kitchen also gives alternative job options to the women in sex work.

-The collective has a 24- hour Drop in clinic which provides a secure space and moral support for the women that are in difficult situations. Women with no roof over their head can take a siesta during the day, sick women in need of care and support are sheltered, poor and needy from mainstream society can stay on a temporary basis. But most of all the Drop in clinic is used by women in the area as an oasis where they can retreat, be them self and drop their guard for an hour or two.

-Facilitates Day and Night Crèche for the children of sex workers and children that are orphaned or deserted. It started as a day crèche where women could drop their children off while they were in business. The demand was high for a 24-hour facility. The children of women in sex work are the most vulnerable section of the population as they are often victims of trafficking (second generation trafficking) and as they are abused on regular basis in brothels. Today there are about 25 children staying at the crèche, from one to seven years old. Some are there for longer period of time and some move back and forth between the brothel and the crèche.

-Annually women's meetings are organized where women have the possibility to express themselves through dance and other entertainment activities. These activities provide a total space for the women to articulate their feelings.

There are 15 peer educators. All the peer educators working under the project are having HIV/AIDS prevention related experiences for a minimum period of 2 to 5 years. The senior peers have an experience between 5 to 13 years. The peer educators are also called Tais, which means sisters in Maharati (local language). They receive Rs 1500 (250 SKR) a month for their work. They all have a background as sex workers and some of them still live and work in the area.

When Tais started distributing the condoms in the area in 1991 they didn't receive a warm welcome. Opposite to that, they were regarded with suspicion and treated as troublemakers and a threat to the business. At that time HIV/AIDS was a relatively unknown phenomenon and it took them a long time to convince the brothel keepers and the sex workers of the necessity for condom use and a positive effect for everybody involved. Today Tais are well-known and well respected in the area and trusted both by sex workers and by brothel keepers.

3 Review of the relevant literature

I have done an extensive search for literature, on topics of human trafficking, prostitution and traumatic stress, in both Sweden and India. I am accounting for both international research and for the research that is done on the national and regional level in India. The research that I found relevant to present addresses the issue of trafficking in India with a broader approach, not only focusing on the facts of trafficking but also on the impact of trafficking on the victims' minds and identity. I am also presenting research that explicitly addresses the issue of the extreme and pervasive trauma experienced by victims of sexual exploitation.

The human trafficking has become an increasingly important political priority on international and national agenda, resulting in the rapid rise of research studies on the subject. The issue of human trafficking is becoming increasingly urgent and widespread and there is a need for a deeper understanding. Contemporary studies are spanning through historical, political, legal, humanitarian and socio-economic dimensions and they have been conducted in nearly every major region of the world over the last decade. The majority of the research is having an action-orientated approach with the purpose of counter-trafficking interventions. These studies try to examine the whole process of the trafficking, targeted groups, causes, recruitment, transport, exploitation of the victims and existing legal and policy system. Most of the international research on human trafficking has focused on cross-border trafficking and less on internal trafficking inside particular countries. International and internal trafficking has tended to be studied as though they were two completely separate and distinct phenomena. Most of the focus is also on the supply-side, like the vulnerability factors of the victims, and much less on the demand-side, like the market for trafficked victims and the exploiters (Laczko, 200).

A path-breaking action research was commissioned by the National Human Rights Commission as a response to the alarming rise in human trafficking in India. The country is a source, transit point as well as destination for trafficking in human beings and there was a great need for an empirical study of this complex multi-layered and multidimensional problem. The data was collected by interviewing victims, traffickers, brothel owners, customers, judicial officers, police officers, NGOs, social activists and media personnel. Over 4000 interviews were conducted and qualitative data was gathered from more than 150 case studies on different issues. The research, *Trafficking in women and children in India*, was published in 2005 (Institute of social sciences).

According to the study the exploitation of women and children takes place before, during and after trafficking. These women and children are helpless victims of grave human rights violations. Lure, deceit, compulsion, threat and coercion are used to push them into the

world of prostitution where they are being subjected to physical and emotional harm, sexual assault, economic deprivation and violations of their dignity. Victims are subjected to different kinds of acts of perversion and exploitation while being kept in debt bondage, which is one of many strategies used by exploiters to keep these women and children in constant servitude.

The study mapped the vulnerability factors that contributed and led to a person being trafficked. Economically backward and socially discriminated groups, especially the individuals living below the poverty line and those belonging to the lowest castes are the most vulnerable. The greater the degrees of impoverishment, the higher the risk of falling prey to trafficking. Children form the most vulnerable group. The extreme vulnerability of children and the high demand for them was established in the research by the fact that 23 per cent of women were pushed into prostitution when they were younger than 16 and 22 per cent were in the age group 16-17. The collapse of a social security system is also a big push factor, as is a child marriage. 60 per cent of the trafficked women in the study were also victims of child marriage. The gender discrimination and different kinds of violence against women, the lack of choice regarding a marriage partner and the socialization that teaches women to remain servile and bear injustice silently are contributing factors to vulnerability to become a victim of trafficking.

The data from victims indicates that 50 per cent of traffickers were female. 68 per cent of victims were lured with promises of jobs while 17 per cent were lured by promises of marriage. These numbers indicate that deception is by far the most frequently used method by traffickers to ensnare their victims. The urban areas have the highest demand while supply areas are mostly rural or semi-urban.

In only 11 per cent of cases the traffickers were total strangers. 35 per cent responded that family members and relatives were responsible for trafficking. When further investigation was made to identify the exact relationship it showed that 12 per cent were trafficked by their husbands, 10 per cent by siblings and 13 per cent by parents or in-laws. 50 per cent of traffickers were known to the victims, the link between traffickers and their victims was established through friends, neighbors, employers etc. These numbers clearly exemplify the importance of not only looking at trafficking as a criminal process but as a social phenomenon.

Trafficked persons are subjected to three forms of control: physical confinement, monetary control and different kinds of violence and threats. Violence is used as a means of initiation, intimidation, punishment and control and is an integral part of trafficking process. The circumstances and situations are created to ensure that the trafficked person have little or no control over her body and life. The victims can be isolated, starved, beaten, burned, bound and strangled in order to get them willing to start trading their bodies for money. If the physical abuse and torture is failing and the victim is not co-operating she can be murdered.

Once in the brothel the women are kept under the debt bondage. They are forced to repay the purchase price. It is a form of contract slavery that is extremely profitable. All the profit goes to the brothel owner and women are forced to take loans that are added to their debt with a high interest rate. The women are totally dependent on brothel owners for food, cloths, medicine and other necessities. This form of emotional manipulation together with physical control ensures that the victims are totally powerless, allowing brothel owners to maintain total control over the women.

The women in the study had on an average seven clients per day and they had no say in the matter of who their clients were. They had no choice either regarding the use of condoms.

The study took a broader approach on the issue, not only stating the facts of trafficking but trying to understand and describe the impact of trafficking on the victims' minds and identity. It states that trafficking is not just geographical relocation for exploitation but a process that demolishes a person. The experience of trafficking and repetitive abuse causes a person's belief system to collapse so that she stops believing in people, making it hard for her to form relationships. The victim learns through the trafficking and seasoning process that she cannot change the outcome, she feels helpless, she withdraws and isolates herself and remains disconnected from the surrounding world. After the initial shock is over, numbness and indifference sets in. It is a method of surviving that becomes destructive. The mind of the victim delinks emotions from tragic events, but those negative emotions always re-merge.

Normalization is another coping mechanism very common in victims of human trafficking. In order to survive they start seeing their new coercive environment as a normal experience. When they comply with brothel owner's agenda they are rewarded or at least not punished. This tool is used by brothel owners to shape women's identity and this, together with a fear for her survivor makes her stop looking at herself as a victim of trafficking. In order to survive she rationalizes her experience as a role she has adopted by choice.

The survey also found that a significant proportion of trafficked women and children develop psychiatric disorders. The most commonly noted disorders are: PTSD, depressive disorder, dissociative disorder and psychotic disorder.

Prostitution, trafficking and traumatic stress (Farley, 2003) is a collection of articles that describe what being prostituted or trafficked is like for the victims. This compilation offers a multicultural and international perspective on the extreme and pervasive trauma experienced by women and children who are sexually exploited by the insidious business of prostitution, sexual slavery and trafficking.

Farley argues that there is very little literature addressing the experience of prostitution for the prostitute, with the focus on internal ravages of these women. Misinformation about

prostitution is widespread because the voices of these women are systematically silenced. Even though prostitution is everywhere, we don't really want to know the details about prostitutes' lives: *"Who can bear to think for too long about a worldwide enterprise that condemns millions of women and children to social death, and often to literal death, for the sexual pleasure and profit of men? The choice to avoid knowing operates at the edges of our consciousness, this is how dissociation is practiced as a social norm"* (Herman, 2003, page 1).

In prostitution the woman is depersonalized. She becomes a tool to use and be used and she is forced to shut down her feelings in order to protect herself. Regardless of if she is physically forced to serve men or if she is doing her part without protest in order to survive, she doesn't stay a whole person. In order to bear the cruelty of prostitution she constructs a self that the brothel owner and clients demand, a self that accommodates verbal abuse, sexual harassment and rape. The longer she stays in this inhuman world the more her real identity will fade and her prostituted self will take over. In the world of trafficking and prostitution the acts perpetrated on these women are systematically attacking and destroying their physical health, their self, their individuality and their humanness. Trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and prostitution industry, which operate in almost every society across the globe, promote and maintain ideology of male dominance and contempt for women by practicing coercive control. Traffickers and brothel owners, as well as some of the customers, are among the world's most skilled practitioners in the art of torture. They use physical violence, sexual assault, economic exploitation, verbal abuse, social isolation, threats, intimidation and captivity in order to emphasize victim's powerlessness, invisibility, hopelessness and worthlessness so that she will accept her role as a prostitute.

Farley accounts for a research that was conducted in nine countries (Canada, Colombia, Germany, Mexico, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, United States and Zambia) with a focus on current and lifetime history of sexual and physical violence among prostitutes. 854 women were interviewed and data showed that prostitution was multitraumatic and physical and emotional violence was a norm for women in prostitution. This is a summary of Farley's findings:

- 65 per cent to 95 per cent of women were sexually assaulted as children.

- 70 per cent to 95 per cent were physically assaulted in prostitution.

- 60 per cent to 75 per cent were raped in prostitution

- 68 per cent met criteria for PTSD. The severity of symptoms was in same range as treatment-seeking combat veterans, battered women and refugees from state-organized torture. The severity of symptoms was strongly connected to the number of different types of lifetime sexual and physical violence.

- almost all women suffered from at least one of the following types of disorders: dissociative, posttraumatic, mood or substance abuse.

Another survey that is presented in the compilation indicates that women experience a range of negative emotions while performing acts with customers including feelings of sadness, anger, anxiety, worthlessness and shame. 73 per cent of women said that they had to push away their true emotions during the act, 52 per cent reported that the act was physically painful, 76 per cent reported emotional pain while being with the customer (Kramer, 2003).

The article *From duty to despair: a brothel prostitution in Cambodia* (Freed, 2003) presents findings from interviews conducted with prostituted women and adolescent girls in Cambodian brothels. The impact of brothel prostitution that the author describes is very similar to what has been reported in other studies of brothel prostitution. The brothel prostitution leaves a devastating impact on the victim, resulting in psychological, physical and social damage. Women suffer from depression, persistent terror, PTSD symptoms, disconnection from self and others and bad health due to physical violence. Even when the women recognized themselves as victims they suffered great amount of shame for being sexually violated and prostituted. The negative social stigma has made these women internalize prevailing social attitudes. Sometimes they would blame themselves for ending up in the brothel, for trusting the wrong person. They would exaggerate their own role in the process of trafficking, being unable to see the connection between their vulnerability and their poor judgment. The women also experience grief for the many losses they have suffered: loss of freedom, family, history, childhood, innocents, virginity, hopes, dreams, faith and the meaning with life. These women reported depression, hopelessness, sense of resignation and despair, lost of safety and trust in people and the world and fear of abuse, violence and diseases.

4 Methodology

The scientific approach that I have chosen to take in this study has been inspired by the phenomenological perspective, which is characterized by openness for the subject's experiences. The role of the researcher and his foreknowledge are put aside, the understanding of the social phenomenon needs to come from the actors' own perspectives. The important reality that we are studying is what our subjects perceive it to be. The focus is on exact descriptions of actors' own experiences (Kvale, 1996).

4.1 Research method and model of data collection

I conducted this study by using qualitative research method. As soon as I had chosen a topic and refined it into research question I knew that quantitative research method would be of no use to me. Quantitative research method allows the researcher to precisely measure variables and test hypotheses. The data is collected in form of numbers and the research is conducted in highly organized, formal and systematic way. The analysis is done by using statistics, tables or charts. While quantitative research method converts different aspects of social life into variables that can be measured with numbers, the qualitative research method traces process and sequences of specific events in certain settings, the meaning that people attach to these events, allowing us to see events from multiple perspectives (Padgett, 1998). As my goal was to pursue a topic of sensitivity and emotional depth I knew that using standardized, close-ended interview would be insensitive, inappropriate and not much informative. I wanted to capture the experiences from those that have lived thru it and the meaning that they have created from those experiences. My goal was to get a deeper understanding and I wanted to do that by capturing my respondents' point of view.

In qualitative research there are three basic models of data collection: observation, interviewing and review of documents or archival materials (Ibid). For my study, interviews were a primary source of data while observations and review of documents were a secondary source. All three techniques are interrelated and occurred simultaneously. During my entire stay at Saheli Sangh I observed, interacted and noted everything that was happening around me; the work that was done in the organization, sex workers that came to the organization requesting help, social workers interaction with the women in the field, the activity inside and outside of brothels and so on. At the same time I went through all the material that was available and relevant for my study.

Kvale (1996) argues that the purpose of a qualitative research interview is to obtain qualitative descriptions of the subjects lived world and his experiences with a respect to interpretation of their meaning, using following quote to illustrate the approach to learn from the interviewee:

“I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand.” (s.125)

I used a semi –structured interview form that consists of line of themes or areas of interest that are connected to the purpose of the study and cover key domains. Every line of theme leads to relevant and open questions that make it possible to create a flexible interview situation. This interview technique allowed me to meet the women in a dialogue, I could change the order and form of questions depending on the answers that were given and stories that were told. Many answers were followed up by more spontaneous stories that were very informative, adding a deeper understanding of the women’s experiences and present situation (Ibid).

The first step toward the interview guide was an investigation of key issues concerning the interviews, namely what, why and how (Ibid). The question *what* forced me to look deeper into the matter that I was investigating, the experiences of the trafficked women with the focus on trauma and its effects, and the coping strategies that make it possible for women to survive and live in brothels. The question *why* helped me formulate a clear purpose of the interview, namely to create a positive interaction so that women would feel free and motivated to tell their experiences and feelings. The question *how* motivated me to learn more about different interview techniques and to always remain alert and open minded.

My goal, when I was writing down interview questions in the interview guide, was that each question would fulfill two purposes. The first one is the relation to the topic of the interview so that each question contributes to the production of the knowledge. The second one is to promote a positive and welcoming interaction so that the women would feel safe to talk freely about their experiences (Ibid). The interview guide that I assembled was based on the purpose of the study, relevant literature, my observations in the organization and area and informal interviews with the staff (see appendix).

Once my first draft of the interview guide was completed I discussed it with my supervisor Mrs. Kumar, concerning cultural understanding from an Indian perspective and making sure that the questions were culturally sensitive. The next step was an in-depth analyze of the entire interview guide with Mrs. Severaki. Mrs. Severaki is the director of the organization, she has worked in the area for many years so she has a great knowledge about the women. We knew that the biggest challenge during interviews would be women’s difficulty to verbalize their thoughts and emotions. Most of the women that we interviewed have no or very little education, they grew up in extremely poor conditions, many were abused. They were never asked how they felt or what they thought, their entire upbringing was a hard struggle for survival. We discussed the best way to ask sensitive and emotional questions and what follow up questions to ask in order to help women verbalize their feelings.

4.2 Literature

I conducted a comprehensive search for literature about human trafficking, prostitution and trauma in general and India and Asia more specifically, in both Sweden and India. Before I left for India I did a literature search in the university library of Gothenburg, national search service LIBRIS, Gothenburg University's database GUNDA and the web. The keywords used in the search were: human trafficking, exploitation of women, prostitution, sex worker, slavery, captivity, trauma, PTSD, sexual abuse and coping.

In India the search for literature was conducted at Aalochana- Center for documentation and research for women in Pune, CCDS- Centre for Communication and Development Studies in Pune and different bookstores. I also took part of documentation at Saheli Sangh and articles from local and national newspapers.

General information about human trafficking for sexual exploitation wasn't hard to find. As it is an issue with increasingly important political priority there is a great amount of research studies on the subject. Literature that describes what being prostituted or trafficked is like for the victim is much harder to find. There is very little literature addressing experiences of these women, especially with the focus on internal ravages, and the literature that is there is often produced in the west and addresses the issue of trafficking and prostitution from a western point of view. Literature that tackles these issues from developing countries point of view is much harder to find. In India majority of reports on trafficking and prostitution are only focusing on prevention of HIV and Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). At the same time human trafficking for sexual exploitation is a problem of tremendous proportions and the lack of literature addressing the experiences of women and children that are sexually exploited by the insidious business of prostitution, sexual slavery and trafficking contributes to the widespread practice of systematically silencing the voices of these women.

4.3 Sampling

I used *purposive sampling* as a method of selecting respondents for this study (Padgett, 1998). I began by setting up criteria that each respondent needed to fulfill. The women had to be victims of human trafficking, their nationality was not important, they had to work in the area but it was not essential if they lived in a brothel or outside the area. Before I started with interviews I decided that it would be best to limit the time frame to 5 years, i.e. the trafficking process took place no later than 5 years ago. But once the interviews started I realized that it was going to be hard to get a fulfilling sample size with that time limit. The reason why I tried to avoid respondents whose trafficking process happened many years ago is that the longer time passes the harder it is to remember details about specific events.

Mrs. Severaki informed the peer-educators and staff about this study and asked them to help us recruit respondents. The peer-educators and the organization's staff have daily contact with many sex workers and most importantly they are respected and trusted by the

women in the area. They were informed about the criteria of respondents and during their every day work in the area they talked with women that they thought could be potential participants. They explained to the women what the study was about, who was conducting it and where. If there was an issue with controlling brothel owner who wouldn't allowed woman to come to the organization, the peer-educators would try to intermediate. My goal was to interview 10 to 15 women. I conducted 15 interviews but only 13 interviews were used in this study. One interview couldn't be used because it was revealed during the interview that the woman was not a victim of human trafficking. Second interview that couldn't be used was interrupted after half an hour, the women was unable to answer my questions.

4.4 Data collection

I believed that it was highly important for me to get a deeper understanding of the red-light area, the organizations work and the issue of human trafficking and prostitution in India before I started conducting interviews. I spend four weeks at Saheli Sangh getting a preunderstanding about the life situation in the area by talking to the staff of Saheli Sangh and following social worker's and peer-educators' in their daily working routine on the streets and in the brothels. I observed how the staff and peer-educators work together, how they divide tasks among each other, how they solve problems, how they conduct meetings, how they discuss the women that they are meeting in the area, brothel owners and the situation in the brothels and area in general. I observed interaction between them and the sex workers that came to the organization. The only way for me to make observations in the area and particularly in the brothels were by following some of the peer-educators on their daily rounds. They were extremely helpful and protective towards me and thanks to them I was able to observe the physical space of a red-light area and brothels and the behavior of the sex workers, their clients and brothel owners. The field studies made it possible to better understand people's behavior and their interaction with their environment, both from an individual, group and cultural point of view (Kvale, 1996). I conducted informal interviews with the staff numerous times, particularly with Ms. Severaki, about the situation in the red-light area, the labor of Saheli Sangh, the challenges working with sex workers, prostitution and human trafficking in India in general and Pune in particular, relevant cultural phenomenon and sex workers overall life situation.

All the interviews with the respondents were carried out at Mrs. Severaki's office at Saheli Sangh. During interviews the women were asked to talk about traumatic experiences and I wanted to be able to provide a private setting without disturbance. It was also easier for the women to get permission to leave the brothel if they said that they were coming to Saheli Sangh. Some women came during lunch hour, using that as an excuse to leave the brothel.

The interviews lasted between an hour and three hours. If the woman had to go back to the brothel before we had finished the interview we booked another appointment. This happened a few times. One respondent was ill and couldn't endure more than half an hour at the time. We met three times. She felt very strongly about telling her story and didn't want her illness to stop her. I made the decision before starting with the interviews that I wouldn't carry through with more than one interview per day because the stories that the women shared were comprehensive and emotionally heavy.

All the interviews were audiotaped after receiving informants' permission for taping. Mrs. Severaki was the translator. Although the translator was essential for my interviews it always feels as a hindrance having to go through a third person to obtain information. It becomes harder to listen to the content and the emotional message of what is being said through hearing not only what is said but also how it is said (ibid). On the other hand I don't think I could have chosen a better translator. Mrs. Severaki has a long experience of talking to the women in the area and she is very well respected and trusted by these women. The only reason why many of the respondents decided to talk to me was because Mrs. Severaki would be present. It would have been very difficult for me to conduct interviews with an interpreter from outside, it would have been much harder, and for some women impossible, to open up and share their life stories.

When the women arrived for the interview they were thoroughly briefed about the study, the purpose, how the interview would be conducted, what questions would be asked, why I was using the audiotape, what I would do with the material, who would have the access to the material, what would be published and confidentiality. It was very important to state that what was being said would never reach the brothels, as this was women's main concern.

Naturally some respondents were easier to interview than others but it was my task to motivate the women and promote their accounts. When the interviews started I was very satisfied with the interview guide. I considered the first few interviews almost as pilot interviews to see if I would succeed in obtaining rich knowledge from the interviewee. I didn't have to make many changes, the questions were clear and simple with topics that easily allowed introduction of new aspects. The experience comes from practice and with every interview I became better in knowing what to ask and how, how to follow women's answers and how to steer the interview so that I could acquire the relevant knowledge.

In the end of the interviews the women were asked about their overall experience of the interview and their emotional state. They were offered to talk with Mrs. Severaki or the counselor if they felt the need. I thanked them profoundly for their participation and gave them a bag of toiletries as a thank you gift. I felt that I wanted to express my gratitude with more than words and I discussed with Mrs. Severaki the best way to do that. She was against monetary contribution but advised me to give them something that would be of use to them.

The taped interviews were as soon as possible transcribed into written text. Getting close to data immediately after interviews gave me a good feedback on my performance as an interviewer and showed me where I needed to make necessary improvement in my interview technique. The statements were transcribed word by word including pauses and emotional expressions together with the notes that I took during and immediately after the interviews.

4.5 Analysis and interpretation of data

For a researcher there is a possibility of using deductive or inductive strategies in the approach of building and testing theory. In an inductive approach the researcher is building the theory from the ground up. Generalization is produced through detailed observations and analyze of series of cases without preconceived hypotheses and theories. Deductive approach on the other hand begins with a theory and researcher focuses on what is relevant for that particular theoretical framework before moving towards concrete empirical evidence (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006).

A strategy that uses both deductive and inductive approach at various points in a study is called abduction (Ibid). In this study I used abduction. I began with detailed observations, realized the concept and that made it possible to develop empirical generalizations and identification of preliminary relationships. The next step was to state relevant theories that helped me focus on the relevant issues and that allowed me to see the connection between theory and empirical evidence.

While I had a more abduct approach during the formation of interview guides, I used inductive approach during data analysis. I began by repeatedly reading all the transcribed interviews. I used open coding, so that the structure and order of different meaning units could become clearer, without me relying on prior concepts to understand the data. Next step was to look for relations between codes or categories that had emerged, and formulating different themes. All the themes were sorted so that I could have a more comprehensible overview of the data (Padgett, 1998)

I used *meaning interpretation* as a method of analysis as my goal was to achieve a more extensive and deeper understanding of the respondents stories (Kvale, 1996). Meaning interpretation goes beyond what was directly said by the respondents and aims to work out structures and relations of meaning that were not immediately apparent in the text.

I represented my results with the most illustrative and relevant quotes, and I linked them to the chosen theories and relevant literature.

4.6 Reliability, validity and generalizability

The principle of *reliability* refers to the consistency of the research findings. It suggests that the same thing is repeated under the identical or very similar conditions giving consistent results (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006). The consistency is hard to obtain in qualitative research compared to the quantitative. Often, it is a process that we are studying, which is not stable over time. Interaction between the researcher and the respondent is very important, meaning that different researcher might get different results. But seeing data collection as an interactive process can be very beneficial as it can illuminate different dimensions of a subject matter.

I strived to attain high reliability by asking multiple similar questions under the same theme and examining the consistency in the answers. I was very careful about asking leading questions. When I used leading questions they were a deliberate part of my interview technique. During transcription of the interviews I randomly chose parts of the interviews that were transcribed one more time in order to examine the reliability of the written text.

There is always a risk of respondents not telling the truth or distorted remembrance, and that affects the reliability. However, during the interviews there was a good, often even intimate atmosphere and most women expressed their strong will to share their stories. Also the women had great confidence in Mrs. Severaki and I believe that the majority, if not all, shared their true stories.

Validity means truthfulness and refers to the bridge between theoretical framework and empirical evidence (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006). Simply put it is a matter of investigating what it is intended to investigate (Kvale, 1996). The qualitative research does not result in numbers, the aim is to obtain high internal validity by detailed and intensive examination of number of cases. I strived to give a detailed account of the women's experiences and how they feel about and understand the events that happened to them, by capturing an inside view. By using qualitative semi-structured interviews I was able to capture the true experiences of the women that I was studying. Gaining a preunderstanding by spending time in the organization and in the district, going thru relevant literature and receiving good assistance from very experienced Mrs. Severaki, helped me formulate valid questions. I have tried to be thorough in my account of the research process by giving clear descriptions, categorizations and analyze so that the reader can obtain a clear picture of the phenomenon that I have studied.

During my research I have worked with a small, purposeful sampling so there is a limitation in *generalizability*. However, Kvale (1996) gives an interesting option to the possibility of generalizing qualitative studies. *Analytical generalization* is about a reasoned judgment, that is, to which extend findings from one study can be used as a guide in another situation. The researcher can claim the generalization by specifying the supportive evidence and by giving explicit arguments and it is up to the reader to take a stand on possibility of generalization.

Following this argument I can claim that the results of this study could apply to other trafficked women that are sold into prostitution in India's brothels.

4.7 Ethical issues

Qualitative research is in many ways a delicate balancing act of learning while avoiding doing any harm. The relationship between the researcher and the respondent, which usually belongs to a vulnerable population, is generally close, dynamic and ongoing and this raises a number of ethical questions (Padgett, 1998). I took the ethical questions into consideration from the very start and I continued doing it to the very end. During the thematizing stage I was thinking a lot about the studies topic and purpose. Although I was focusing on details of sex workers lives, the issue of trafficking and prostitution takes place in a much larger socio-political context. I believe that I as a researcher have a social responsibility and my goal was to do a study that could possibly benefit the women that are victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Every interview started with the oral *informed consent*. I began by telling the women who I was and where I was from. I gave a brief description of the study, the purpose and its procedures. I assured the women that their participation was voluntary and that they have a right to withdraw at any time. I discussed possible risks and benefits if they decided to participate, risk of talking about painful experiences and benefit of helping to spread information about trafficking and prostitution from victims point of view. Next I informed the women about *confidentiality*, the data that they could be identified by will not be reported and most importantly that anything that would say to me will never reach the brothel.

My biggest ethical concern was the women's emotional distress and possibly harmful effect of talking about painful and traumatic life events.

"The ethical principle of beneficence means that the risk of harm to a subject should be the least possible. The sum of potential benefits to a subject and the importance of the knowledge gained should outweigh the risk of harm to the subject and thus warrant a decision to carry out the study." (Kvale, 1996, page 116)

It was my primer responsibility to consider harmful effects of participating in the study but also if it could be beneficial to the women on a personal level and also to the larger group that they represent.

I was very clear about the contents of the interview and the emotional events that we would discuss, so the women that decided to participate, were willing to talk about their traumatic experience. I tried to be as gentle and sensitive as possible during the interviews, allowing women to proceed at their own rate, offering them to stop the interview when they displayed emotional distress. They were offered follow up counseling if they felt the need to

talk further after the interviews. At a few occasions the counseling took place immediately after the interview, women wanted to discuss some personal problems that were brought up during the interview and they talked with Mrs. Severaki .

All the women described the interviews as a positive experience, although they were talking about difficult topics they were grateful for the opportunity to express themselves to a sympathetic listener. They were grateful that somebody wanted to hear their story, something that majority of them had never experienced before. Moreover, they all had hopes that their story would prevent some other girls and women from ending up in the brothel.

5 Theories

5.1 Psychological trauma

Central dimensions to the experience of psychological trauma are helplessness, powerlessness and threat to one's life. Traumatic events overwhelm our ordinary adaptation to life by confronting us with terror and attacking our sense of self and predictability of the world.

Human beings respond to danger by mobilizing self-defense and going into a state of alert by getting ready for action, either flight or battle. It is an automatic response to threat and changes in arousal, attention, emotion and perception are all normal and adaptive reactions. Psychological trauma arises when our complex system of self-protection is inadequate and neither resistance nor escape is possible. Our self-defense system becomes disorganized and overwhelmed at the moment of trauma and we lose our sense of control, connection and meaning that can result in profound and long-term changes in physiological arousal, cognition, emotion and memory (Herman 1992/97).

The severity of the impact of trauma depends on different factors. The effects are more pervasive if trauma is interpersonal i.e. deliberately inflicted by other persons, repeated and prolonged, unpredictable, multifaceted, undergone in childhood, sadistic or malevolent, extremely violent, caused gross physical injury and perpetrated in attachment relationship i.e. a relationship with a close emotional bond and significant degree of dependency (Allen, 2005).

5.1.1 PTSD

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as the name suggests, is a disorder that develops after traumatic stress. PTSD was introduced in 1980 by American Psychiatric Association after extensive experience in treating Vietnam veterans. Although manifestation of PTSD depends on the type, severity and duration of traumatic events there is also striking cohesion in responses to trauma that justifies the diagnoses. There are three main categories of symptoms: hyperarousal, intrusion and constriction (Herman, 1992/97).

Hyperarousal

After a traumatic experience the victim is in the persistent expectation of danger, remaining highly anxious and on a permanent alert. Chronically hyperaroused people are unable to maintain a level of alert through relaxed attention. Instead they generalize the threat, the world becomes an increasingly unsafe place and they show both intense reaction to specific stimuli associated with the traumatic event and extreme startle response to unexpected stimuli. The continued anticipation of overwhelming threat causes difficulties with attention and concatenation. Sleep disturbance is a common symptom because the increase in arousal persists even during sleep. (Herman, 1992/97; van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996).

Intrusion

People that suffer from PTSD reexperience the traumatic event long after the danger is past. Because the traumatic experiences are not an integrated part of other life events, memories intrude and interrupt victims' lives by spontaneously breaking into consciousness in form of distressing recollections of the event. Flashbacks, images, thoughts, hallucinations and nightmares make it impossible for the victim to resume the normal course of life because the trauma is repeatedly interrupting. The traumatic memories are very easily stimulated, even the smallest reminders can evoke the trauma in a fraction of a second (Allen, 2005; Herman, 1992/97).

Constriction

During traumatic events when the person is totally powerless and any form of resistance is in vain, the self-protective system can shut off the overwhelming stimulation by altering the state of consciousness in order to escape the situation. Although the traumatic event is registered in the awareness, it has been disconnected from its ordinary meaning so that the victim may feel like the event is not really happening to her, like it is a bad dream. She may experience the event from an outsider perspective, like she has left her body and is only watching what is happening, not really feeling it. The feeling of indifference, emotional detachment and passivity all serve the purpose of reducing the pain and terror during acute trauma.

During the moment of total helplessness the numbing of general responsiveness is a survival strategy, but once the danger passes it becomes maladaptive. By blocking intrusive memories and numbing emotional responsiveness the traumatic event is kept out of normal consciousness. The victim cannot recall important aspects of trauma, the feeling of detachment and estrangement is persistent, range of feelings and emotions is limited and there is a sense of foreshortened future.

The victim also avoids thoughts, feelings, activities, places and people in order to stop the recollection of trauma and in order to create some sense of safety and control.

Substance abuse can also be considered as one of the avoidance symptoms. Alcohol and narcotics are used to produce numbing effect and traumatized people run high risk of developing substance dependence (Allen, 2005; Herman, 1992/97).

As time passes hyperarousal and intrusion symptoms can fade and diminish so that numbing predominates. The person lives a life with a constant sense of numbing and disconnection, it becomes a normal state of mind, and she lives her life for the sake of living without really feeling it (Herman, 1992/97). Freud stated that people, in order to function properly, need to be able to define their needs, foresee how to meet them and plan for appropriate action after considering range of options. People suffering from PTSD don't have this capacity because if they allowed themselves to fantasize there is a risk that they will be remained of past trauma. Instead they organize their lives around *not* feeling and *not* considering options (van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996).

To focus solely on PTSD to describe and understand what happens to victims of trauma would severely limit observations of how people react to trauma and it wouldn't do justice the complexity of what actually ails them. Traumatic events shatter psychological structures of the self and the system of attachment and meaning to other individuals and community. The belief system that gives meaning to human experience is breached and the victim is put into state of existential crises when the fundamental feeling of safety is destroyed and the positive value of the self is shattered.

The basic trust and the sense of safety in the world is developed in our early years in the relationship with our caregiver. This basic trust is a platform that we use when we build our faith and relationships with others and develop the feeling of belonging. The feeling of comfort and protection is shattered during the traumatic event, the victim feels utterly abandoned and alone, the feeling of basic trust is lost and a sense of alienation and disconnection develops (Herman, 1992/97).

Traumatic events, where body is invaded, injured and defiled, violate victim's basic bodily integrity. At the moment of trauma victim's point of view counts for nothing and the attack on the body is an attack on victim's autonomy and dignity. The violation of bodily integrity but also the feeling of helplessness and worthlessness, loss of competence and capacity for mastery and indignity suffered in the eyes of another person contribute to strong feelings of shame (ibid).

Many victims of traumatic events also experience feelings of guilt. After the event they review and judge their own conduct and feel responsible for the outcome. The feeling of guilt can also provide an illusion of power and control. It can be easier to bear the thought of being able to prevent or change the outcome than to face the reality of utter helplessness (ibid).

The foundation of personality development is a secure sense of connection and trust with caring people. If traumatic events involve betrayal of important relationships the damage to the victims faith, basic trust, sense of self and community is particularly sever. The betrayal and the breach of trust together with shame, guilt and inferiority can result in withdrawal and avoidance of close relationships. But trauma can also impel victims to seek close relationships desperately. Thus, for the survivors of traumatic events, the capacity for intimacy is compromised by strong contradictory feelings of need and fear (ibid).

5.1.2 Captivity

Prolonged, repeated trauma takes place in captivity, where victim is unable to escape and is under total control of the perpetrator. In the captivity the victim is exposed to prolonged

contact with the perpetrator that ultimately leads to establishment of a special type of relationship. That relationship is built on coercive control and the perpetrator becomes the most powerful person in the victim's life. By systematic use of coercive techniques the psychology of the victim is reshaped. The purpose of these techniques is to establish total control over the victim and that is achieved by methodical, repetitive infliction of psychological trauma. These methods of disempowerment and disconnection leave the victim terrified and helpless, they destroy her identity and her sense of self in relation to others.

Physical violence is the most common method of terror but it doesn't have to be used frequently in order to achieve maximum result. The fear is perpetrators' strongest weapon and the victim is kept in constant state of fear by threats of harm and death, by unpredictable outburst of violence and by enforcement of petty rules. Ultimately the victim will be convinced that resistance is in vain, that the perpetrator holds all the power and that her life depends on winning his lenience through absolute obedience (ibid).

In addition to inflicting fear the perpetrator goal is to destroy the victim's sense of autonomy by controlling her body and bodily functions. Sexual violation, deprivation of food, sleep, exercise, physical abuse and movement control result in physical debilitation, demoralization and shame. This loss of bodily control leaves the victim in a desperate need of solace. Even the smallest indulgence from the perpetrator offers comfort which further undermines the psychological resistance of the victim(ibid).

To achieve complete domination the victims is isolated. Human connection gives the victim emotional support, limiting the perpetrator's power. By being isolated the victim is totally dependent on the perpetrator, not only for basic survival and bodily needs but for emotional sustenance. In absence of human contact the victim will adhere to the only human connection that is allowed, the one with the perpetrator, desperately trying to find humanity in him. In the end the bond of identification will arise, the victim will adopt the captor's point of view while losing her previous belief system. This is called traumatic bonding and it arises from a combination of attachment needs, isolation, imbalance of power and alternation of distress and relief. The perpetrator becomes a protector by both inflicting harm and injury and by being the only one that can spear the victim more harm and allow her to live. The worse the injury to the victim the greater the terror experienced resulting in a stronger need for security and tighter traumatic bonding (Allen, 2005).

Even though the victim has become submissive and compliant the final step in psychological control is archived when the victim has violated her own moral principles and betrayed her basic human attachments. This is the final step of seasoning, when the woman has been subjugated into prostitution. When she realizes that she has been converted, that her inner life has been captured and seized, she will feel strong shame and defeat. For the sake of survival she has abandoned her inner autonomy, moral principles and world view and in order to be able to live on she shuts down her feelings, thoughts and judgment. She enters the state of "robotization" (Herman, 1992/97).

Captivity produces alterations in the victim's identity. *"While the victim of a single acute trauma may feel after the event that she is "not herself", the victim of chronic trauma may feel herself to be changed irrevocably, or she may lose sense that she has any self at all...All the psychological structures of the self- the image of the body, the internalized images of others, and the values and ideas that lend a person a sense of coherence and purpose- have been invaded and systematically broken down "* (Herman, 1992/97, page 86)

While her former identity is irrevocably destroyed a new identity including her enslaved self is being build. This new identity will include a body that can be controlled and violated, an image of a broken person that has been dehumanized, a world full of evil that cannot be trusted, a person that can be lost to others and that can be used of others. Now the main story of her life is the atrocity that she survived, to think of the past or the future is to painful because it reminds her of everything that she has lost. She starts living in an endless present (ibid).

5.1.3 The aspects of the Self and its relation to trauma

Trauma is an assault on the self and three main aspects of self-experience that are directly affected by trauma are: self-worth, self-efficacy and self-continuity. To be able to fully understand traumas impact on the self it is important to look at the most basic aspects of the self, i.e. the distinction between the "I" versus the "me".

The "I" is our subjective self, the self-as-agent, which initiates, organizes, chooses and interprets experience. The "me" is our objective self, self-as-object, the self as seen by itself. It is a social construction that is influenced by our interactions and relationships with others. How we feel about our self depends on how we are view by others, how they respond to us and treat us.

Our self is reflexive, our "I" thinks and feels about itself creating stories about itself- the "me". But the narrative "me" also shapes the narrator "I", which is very important in relation to trauma. To give an example: If we think about ourselves as helpless we will be more helpless.

Our self-worth comes from our "me", i.e. how we think and feel about ourselves. Its foundations are laid in childhood and they depend on various domains of importance and competence and sense of connection and approval from important persons. Trauma, particularly physical and psychological abuse, profoundly undermines our self-worth. But even when the assault on self-worth is direct the victim can claim the responsibility and blame herself. This is the last effort to preserve the sense of control because one of the hardest feelings for "I" to bear is the feeling of helplessness. "Me" has to pay the price for this denial in form of lower self-worth.

Self-efficacy is a feeling of power and influence. The core of trauma is the lack of influence, especially over other persons. To be traumatized is to be overpowered so any kind of trauma will render helplessness. If the abuse is occurring unpredictably the sense of helplessness will increase. This loss of control and predictability is having a devastating impact on self-efficacy.

Our subjective self, the “I”, entails a stable feeling of being myself across time and space, especially during times when we face discontinuity. Self-continuity includes a sense of cohesiveness, integrity, wholeness, identity, individuality and sense of separation and distinctness from others. Trauma undermines self-continuity, tearing the self-apart and leaving the victim broken and vulnerable.

As stated previously, the “me” is to a great extent formed in relationships with others. How we see our self is a reflection of how we are seen by others. Our sense of self also gives a definition to our relationships with others. People that have experienced interpersonal trauma tend to isolate them self by maintaining emotional distance and keeping all interactions on the superficial level. At the same time experienced trauma has evoked attachment needs for security, protection, care giving, closeness and intimacy. This dualism means an inner struggle for the victim. The need for human contact can lead to establishment of relationship but distrust and fear can be pervasive (Allen, 2005).

5.1.4 Dissociation

Dissociation is a common psychological defense in response to the trauma of trafficking and prostitution, whose primary function is to bear and handle the overwhelming fear and pain, by splitting them off from the rest of the self.

“Dissociation permits psychological survival, whether the repeated trauma is slavery, military combat, incest or prostitution. Dissociation is an elaborate escape and avoidance strategy in which overwhelming human cruelty results in fragmentation of the mind into different parts of the self that observe, experience, react, as well as those that do not know about harm” (Ross & Farley & Schwartz, 2003, page 205).

Originally, dissociation was considered as an abnormal process, but today it is regarded as a normal psychological process available to all individuals as a coping mechanism. However, if dissociation is overused, it becomes maladaptive.

Dissociation can take many different forms, from daydreaming to dissociative identity disorder, in which different part of the self are totally amnesic to each other. Different parts of the self are variously present, absent and co-conscious. Dissociation also helps to reduce internal conflict and withstand the denial so that the bad things are ignored and the life can go on (ibid).

5.2 Coping

The term coping refers to altering cognitive and behavioral effort in order to manage specific demands, external and/or internal, that are appraised as challenging or are exceeding the resource that the person possesses. The coping process is changeable and it has two major functions: to manage the problem that is causing stress and to regulate emotional responses to the problem.

The first form of coping is called problem-focused coping and it refers to efforts made to improve the situation that is causing distress by creating changes. That can be done by cognitive problem solving, decision making, information gathering, interpersonal conflict resolution and problem-oriented behavior. People tend to use problem-focused coping when they believe that they can get the resources necessary to manage the problem and that the problem is amenable to resolution or change.

The emotion-focused coping on the other hand is used when the individual feels that problem is not changeable. Here, it is not environment that the person is trying to change, instead cognitive efforts are made to change the meaning of a situation with thought or actions whose goal is to reduce the emotional impact of stress. This can be done by deploying attention from stressful circumstances or changing the meaning or significance of what has happened with the use of cognitive reframing or minimization. Even behavioral efforts, like religion, meditation and use of drugs or alcohol, is a form of emotion-focused coping.

A complex combination of both coping patterns is used when people cope with a stressful encounter, all depending on the conditions that are being faced, our personality and the options that are available to us (Folkman, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1991).

6 Presentation of results and analyses

6.1 Structure of the results and analyses

Both trafficking and seasoning are a process so the most logical approach for me was to use the chronological perspective for the following presentation. I begin with the trafficking process that includes recruitment and transportation, followed by the arrival at the brothel and orientation phase and seasoning process and coping strategies used during seasoning. Next, I describe sex workers lives in the brothel in terms of violence and psychological trauma, followed by coping strategies used to bear with brothel prostitution and PTSD symptoms that women suffer from. This chapter is finished by description of women's attempts to leave brothel prostitution. I have also included an introductory part about the women's background that made the recruitment for sexual exploitation possible.

6.2. Presentation of the respondents

Below I give a short presentation of all the respondents with some facts about their background and present life situation. All the names are feigned and, when necessary, some facts have been changed in order to prevent identification.

Abhitha is in her mid twenties and she comes from a small, remote village in Northern India. She has been in the red-light area for 10 years. She is HIV positive. Abhitha's parents arranged for her to get married with a man twice her age. She was only 14. She was a second wife and everybody mistreated her in the new household. She met a man one day who offered her a good job in Mumbai. She was sold to a brothel soon after arrival to Mumbai.

Eila is a 26 years old woman from Nepal. She has been in the area for 9 years, 7 of them she has been HIV positive. Today she is slowly losing her battle against the virus. She was only 11 when a woman trafficked her to Mumbai with a promise of a good life. She kept her as a housemaid in her household till the day Eila had her first menstruation. Immediately after, she was sold to a brothel.

Deetya is in her mid thirties. She was sold to a brothel by her husband. Today she lives in small rum outside of the area, she comes to the red-light area in the morning and returns home in the evening.

Gabrielle is from a small village close to the Nepalese border. She is 27 years old. She has been in Pune for 4 years, before that she was in a brothel in Mumbai for 4 years. She was

lured with a promise of a good job to Mumbai, drugged on the train and when she came to her senses she was in a brothel.

Iman was born in Bhutan. She is 32 years old and has been in the area for 7 years. She met a man in a bar, he drugged her and took her to a brothel in Pune. Iman drinks every day, it helps her to endure the life in the brothel.

Indira is 25 years old and she has been in Pune for 5 years. She comes from a very poor family. As soon as she reached puberty she was married. Her husband was abusive and after 6 years of marriage she took their two children and escaped. She got a job in a city and one day, on the train on her way back home, a couple approached her and engaged her into a conversation. Next thing she remembers is waking up in a brothel.

Hemal comes from a village close to Pune. She was 13 when she got married, 15 when she was trafficked by a friendly lady on the bus. She has been in the area for 4 years. She was badly abused in the first brothel, where she stayed for 2 years.

Janessa is from a remote, very poor village in Nepal. A couple from Kathmandu approached Janessa's mother with a promise of a good job. Her mother sent her only daughter away, totally unaware of the danger, hoping to receive some money every month. Janessa ended up in a brothel in Mumbai where she was badly abused.

Krishna has been in the area for 5 years. She is 25 years old, from a neighboring state. She was trafficked by a neighbors' relative. In order to bear with the life in the brothel Krishna started to drink alcohol every day. After she repaid her debt her plan was to save some money and buy a place where she could grow old. But, because of her alcohol consumption, she is not managing to save any money.

Najla is in her thirties. She has been in the area for 12 years and she has a 10 years old daughter. She was married at age 15 and she found herself in a "brothel family". Her new husband was a pimp. She was 5 months pregnant when her husband sold her to a brothel in Pune.

Santoshi was 18 years old when she landed in a brothel. Today she is 25. She was trafficked by a neighbor's friend with a promise of a good marriage. She was in a brothel for 4 years before she repaid her dept. Then she started working as a maidservant in another brothel and she stayed there for few years. She met a man that she fell in love with, he took her to Pune, only to sell her once again.

Sapna is 25 years old and she is a devadasi. She comes from a village where the devadasi tradition is very common. She knew that after becoming devadasi she would have to go and work in the city but she didn't know what kind of work. After the ceremony her family told her that it was time to leave. She was brought to a brothel where she was forced to accept customers.

Mini is also a devadasi. She is 25 years old and she comes from a devadasi family. Both her mother and her older sisters are devadasi. She grew up knowing that she would become a devadasi and live in a brothel.

6.3. Causes of trafficking

I traveled to India to meet women that survived one of the worst and most brazen abuse of human rights, the inhuman trade for sexual exploitation. My focus was on the traumatic aspect of trafficking, seasoning and life in a brothel, and coping strategies that these women use in order to survive. I find it relevant to begin this chapter by describing different causes that led to trafficking and life in captivity. It is a backdrop that gives meaning to results that I am presenting,

Human trafficking for sexual exploitation is today a well documented phenomenon, and its causes are mapped and discussed. I will let women's stories illustrate the well known facts about causes leading to sex trafficking. I will begin with poverty, which is regarded as one of the main contributors to trafficking for sexual exploitation. Poverty generates vulnerability and helplessness, the greater the degree of impoverishment, the higher the risk of falling prey for trafficking. Research shows that economically backward and socially discriminated groups, especially the individuals living below the poverty line and those belonging to the lowest casts are the most vulnerable (Institute of Social Sciences, 2005). This is Janessa's story:

"I come from Nepal. My village is very remote, totally surrounded by jungle. It was a very poor village, everybody were struggling to earn money. There was no school nearby, so all the villagers were illiterate. My father drowned in the river during the flood. I was the oldest so I started going to the field with my mother. People from Kathmandu would come to the jungle, looking for herbal medicine and then they would come to our village. They took many girls with them with a promise of a good job. A couple approached my mother and told her that they will take me with them and I will work as a housemaid and earn much money. These people that were coming were actually pimps but we had no idea. They would come to remote, poor villagers, behave very decently and politely. We are simple people, we did not understand that they were cheating us, we were happy, because some girls that have left, have sent money back home, so everybody were convinced that this was a good opportunity. They took me to Kathmandu..."

Janessa belongs to a hill ethnic group. Although trafficking in Nepal crosses many caste/ethnic groups, women and children that are most at risks are members of the hill ethnic groups and lower castes, as they are the most heavily burdened by poverty, socio-economic inequality and illiteracy (Human rights watch, 1995).

Extreme level of gender bias directly contributes to female vulnerability to sex slave traders. Deep-rooted patriarchal system underlines the gender oppression of women, resulting in discriminatory and negative social attitudes that view girl children as burden and liabilities, less desirable and inferior to boys. Dowry issues and early marriage are examples of deep-rooted gender oppression of women:

"I come from an area where droughts are very common, we don't get much rain so most of the people there struggle financially. I never got any love or attention from my family. My father was married to my aunt, when my mother came to visit them, he raped her. Everybody got to know about that and forced him to marry her as well. After my birth my mother was very unhappy because everybody was mistreating her. One day she left. When I reached puberty they arranged a marriage for me. Everybody knew about my family's situation and we were also very poor so they said that it was best to marry me off. But there was no money for dowry. So they set me up with a distant relative. He was very old, had four children, his wife died in childbirth. It looked like I was his daughter. I was very young and I felt that it was very unfair that I should take all that big responsibility for the house and children. He was also abusive." Deetya

For Deetya, the dowry issue played an important role in making her an easy target for traffickers. For Krishna it was the early marriage that started the process that led to a life in a brothel:

"I got married when I reached puberty, my menstruation started on the day of my wedding. Some of my family members picked out the man but my parents were reluctant because of some information that they had on that family. My brother-in-law's first wife was burned to death by that family, it was a well-known story in the village. And my husband was also much older, he was 35. But my extended family pushed, they literally forced me into this marriage, they said that they knew the family and that they will handle it, I didn't need to worry."

Research shows that in India, 60 per cent of trafficked women are victims of child marriage (Institute of Social Sciences, 2005).

I spent over thirty hours listening to the stories of these women, the stories that took me on a journey of exploitation, not only during and after trafficking, but, very often, also before trafficking. The prevalence of domestic violence is alarming and many of the women that I interviewed explained that fleeing from abuse actually delivered them into the hand of traffickers.

"My family life after my marriage wasn't good. My husband was very abusive, he didn't drink but still he got angry very easily. He didn't work anywhere, I was the one earning money. My unemployed husband was beating me daily and after six years I took my children and ran. I got job as a maidservant in the city. One day on the train I met a couple that I started talking to. I told them that because of my family condition I need to work. We were chatting and they gave me coffee and after that I don't remember anything. When I came to my senses I was in a brothel." Indira

Hemal was on a run back to her family, but she never reached the safety of her parent's house:

"In my husband's home there was so much fighting and instability so I decided to run back to my family. My parents were staying in a suburb of Pune, my in-laws were in the village. I had never been to the city so I was worried how I would get to my parents house. In the bus I met a lady, we started talking and she told me, I am also going to Pune, give me the address and I will drop you there. We got off the bus, it was evening and she told me that my parents were far away from here, we will continue next morning. We stayed at a man's house, she said it was her brother. The man was actually a brothel keeper because in the morning they took me to his brothel. The women had sold me to him."

Culture and tradition are sometimes strong push-factors into the dark world of sexual exploitation, and nowhere is it more evident than in the devadasi system. In India today, devadasi system is a culturally sanctioned practice of prostitution and trafficking.

Mini comes from devadasi family, her mother and both her sisters are devadasi. She grew up knowing that she would follow their footsteps and end up as a sex worker in a brothel.

“Both my sisters were telling me, that when I grow up I will work as a sex worker, so I was aware of what I will have to do. All the girls in my village that were devadasi went through the ceremony either in the village or in the brothel, a rich man from a good family would purchased a girl for the first night, she would be with him like with a husband that first night and then she would go to live and work in a brothel. I knew all this when I was growing up. Even though I really didn’t want it, I accepted it because there was no other way to survive, we were very poor. ..It was so common for the girls from my village to work as sex workers in Pune that it was very natural for me when I grew up to come here and start working. Every girl that I knew including my sisters were sex workers, so it was so natural, so normal, I never questioned it, I never asked myself what was the connection between being devadasi and a sex worker, the most normal thing for me was to become a sex worker.”

Sapna on the other hand became devadasi without knowing the consequences:

“I am devadasi. When I was very young one devadasi in my village told my mother, that if she wanted to have blessing for her family from the goddess, she needed to make me a devadasi. It is a very common practice in my village, most of the girls there become devadasi. When they did the ceremony I was very excited, I didn’t have any idea what it all meant. Afterwards my mother said that it was all good, now we were all blessed and we would be happy. I was very happy with the all attention.”

6.4. Transportation process

Available research shows that, although there are cases of kidnapping and abduction where the victim sometimes is drugged, deception is by far the most frequently used method by traffickers to ensnare their victims (Institute of Social Sciences, 2005). The majority of victims are lured with promises of good job opportunities, followed by promises of marriage. For the majority of my respondents deception, with promises of employment or marriage, was the most commonly used technique during the recruitment process.

For Gabrielle, a offered job in the city meant less struggle and better a life for her mother and daughter. A dream of a better life, where every day was not a struggle for survival, led her to the infamous red-light area in Mumbai:

“Because we were so poor I started working in the cotton industry after delivery. There I met two women that kept on asking me why I am struggling so much for little money, they know where I can earn some good money, even just in one month and then I can come back home, that they will take me there. I started thinking about their proposal and I was very curious. I told my mother about it but she told me that hard money is the real money, you cannot get much money for little work, that must be a bad place, they will ask you to do things that you are not supposed to do so don’t even think about it. But I had a hard time watching my mother struggle for survival, I felt that I should take care of her and give her a better life, and to my daughter also, so I decided that I would not tell my mother but that I would go with those ladies. We left my village and travelled for three days

and during the entire journey I was feeling so sleepy, so I think that they gave me something to keep me calm. When I came to my senses I was in the red-light area in Mumbai, the women had sold me there and left.”

Indian females are raised in a culture where they are expected to sacrifice themselves for the wellbeing of their families and communities. It is crucial for an Indian woman to be married at appropriate age, otherwise the entire family will lose honour and respect. For poor families the dowry is a big obstacle for marrying of a daughter, something traffickers easily take advantage off:

“We had a neighbour that we had a good relationship with. She used to get visits from a friend that was wealthy, always giving many gifts and everybody were impressed. She told my brother one day, your sister is getting older, it’s not good that she is here by herself, it is not easy for her to get married but I will help you. She told us that she had a friend who had a good and educated son, she said she would take me there, arrange the marriage and then call my brother to come for the celebration. My brother was a bit worried but our neighbour assured him that it will all work out well so he said yes. She took me straight to a red-light area in a nearby city.” Santoshi

But being married does not mean that the woman doesn’t run the risk of ending up in a brothel. On the contrary, it is not unusual for women to be trafficked by their own husbands. This is what happened to Najla:

“When I was five months pregnant, my husband took me to Pune. There was a big festival here and that’s why we came, but then he took me to a brothel and sold me. I never saw it coming, I didn’t know anything about Pune, all I know is the place I come from. I am an agriculture labourer, I know how to work, eat and sleep, and that’s all.”

Najla’s experience mirrors how deep-rooted patriarchal system and erosion of social values in the combination with increasing consumerism and materialism has contributed to women being viewed as commodities to be bought and sold. Her husband was in need of quick cash so he took her to the human marketplace and bargained a good deal. Her being pregnant didn’t awake pity in him, she was after all caring a female child, something that he regarded as a burden.

Trafficking is not always a single event of transportation. Sometimes it is a prolonged process that can stretch for few years, ultimately leading to slavery in a brothel. Eila was only 11 years old when she met a nice lady that offered to take her away from an alcoholic and abusive father. She promised to keep her in a nice house, she would work as a housemaid and be happy. And for three years she was happy in her new home, she worked hard, but she was safe. One day, everything changed:

“I never saw it coming, I didn’t get any hint that she was going to do this to me because she was good to me, telling me that I would work there for a few years, and return home with good money and nobody would treat me bad then. 2 to 3 months after having my first period, one early morning, the lady told me that she was sending me to one of her relatives because she had to leave for some time. She told me that I would just continue my work, this time in their house and that they would pay me much more than she was. So I came along and she took me to the railway station where we met a couple. She introduced me to them and they took me, telling me that they were now taking me to a very good house. But they took me to the red-light area in

Mumbai. Immediately I started feeling very uncomfortable, I saw the girls with inappropriate clothes, I asked them, what this place is but they said, it has nothing to do with me, I just have to follow them. They took me to a brothel and locked me in a room."

Deetya tells the story of how hard she tried to escape her trafficking attempt, only to find herself, when she thought that she was finally safe, trafficked once again. She left her abusive husband and went back to live with her grandmother. A neighbour that they trusted offered to take her to the city and help her find a job. On the way to the city they stopped at one village and she overheard the man negotiate the price for her with some truck drivers. She realised what was going to happen and she ran. She ended up in another village where a family took pity on her and let her stay with them. They arranged a marriage for her and she thought that, for the first time in her life, she would have a family, support and that she would be happy. Instead she was facing her worst nightmare:

"One day my husband said that we are going to Pune and that he will try to get a job there. I started thinking that finally something good is going to happen to me. He brought me to the red-light area, he sold me, took money and left...As soon as we came to the area I knew where we were, what kind of place this was and what is going to happen. The first thing that came to my mind was that I tried so hard to run away from this kind of life but now it seems as it was my destiny to be here, to become a sex worker."

All of my respondents were unaware that they were being trafficked until they reached the final destination. They were lured with promises of a better life, only to end up in a reality far worse than they could have ever imagined:

"We were so happy during entire journey, dreaming about the good life and a lot of money. The couple told us, that for our own safety, if somebody asked us any questions during the journey, we have to say that they are our relatives and that we are on our way to visit some other relatives. Before we reached Mumbai, the man made a call so there were two cars waiting for us after we arrived. The pills that they gave us had the effect that I could hear everything that was going on around me but my vision was blurred and I couldn't move my mouth. They took us directly to the red light area and I could see the women and so many men, and I was feeling very uncomfortable and I was starting to get afraid."

Although deception is the most commonly used trafficking method, abduction does occur:

"I met a man in a bar, he must have put something in my drink because I don't remember anything. I got back to my senses when we reached Bombay. Then we came to Pune, I don't remember what happened in between, he took me to the red-light area here and sold me." Iman

None of my respondents were in any way abused during the transportation to the brothel, or at least they don't remember any violence or threats. The traumatic events are mostly absent during transportation process, primary for two reasons. Victims were either unaware that they were trafficked or they were drugged, their perception was numbed, so that the reality of what has happened first became clear once they had reached the brothel.

6.5. Arrival at the brothel and the “orientation phase”

The arrival at the brothel and the orientation phase is characterized by confusion, fear and shock. Once the women have reached the brothels, they’ve realised that they are not at the promised destination. Walking thru the red-light area was confusing, it was an unknown world and they struggled to understand what was going on around them.

“It was evening when we reached the red-light area. I saw so many people, so many men. Women were sitting outside every house and I thought, maybe these are the women that work in the movies because they are wearing small clothes and so much make-up.” Hemal

Listening to my respondents descriptions of the time following the arrival in the brothel, I recognised some consistency in the brothel owner’s treatment of new arrivals. I chose to call the women’s first experiences of brothel life the “orientation phase”. This phase started with the arrival at the brothel and stretched until the first physical and/or sexual abuse. This phase lasted everywhere from a few hours to several weeks, but for the majority of my respondents it lasted from three to seven days.

Immediately after arrival, the women are isolated. They are either kept locked in a room, or they are constantly guarded by someone. At this point, the majority of the women don’t know where they are and why they are there, they are trying to rationalize their situation, but for every hour the fear is increasing:

“They took me to a brothel and locked me in a room. I was alone. Through the small hole in the door I could peek out and I saw girls with little cloths on them and heavy make-up, men constantly going in and out. I started feeling very uncomfortable and the more I looked, the more afraid I got... I was very curious looking through that hole. I remembered that I heard stories in my village about places in Mumbai where bad women do their business. I never really understood what that meant. I looked at these women and their cloths and I was thinking that they are bad women. I was thinking that maybe this is that place that they were talking about in my village. But when the night came and they turned on the music I thought that maybe it was a dance bar, something I also heard about.” Eila

Krishna wasn’t totally isolated from other sex workers at the brothel, but they all knew that she was new and that they could be punished for talking to her:

“I wasn’t kept locked but somebody was with me all the time. The other girls talked to me very briefly, the brothel owner never tried to stop us from speaking but I felt that threat was there. In the beginning nobody was telling me what kind of place this was. I was feeling that something was wrong, I never felt comfortable even though nobody was threatening me, I was feeling so lonely and I was thinking, what kind of working place is this, I thought that it was still better working in the farm, even if it was hard, you were with your family.”

Krishna

After some time in isolation and unsureness the women are approached by brothel owners or managers. They explain that they have purchased them and that they have to stay in the brothel and entertain the customers until they have paid of the purchase price:

“For the first two days the brothel keeper has given me good food, new clothes to wear and she has not spoken anything. But I used to observe all the other women in the house, they used to wear make-up and sit outside the

room, men used to enter and discuss the price, so I started sensing that something was wrong, and then I asked the brothel owner what was happening and then she told me, this is the thing and I need my money back.”

Abhitha

Janessa that was trafficked, together with another girl, from Nepal explains:

“They took me and the other girl to a room, told us to get some rest and that they will speak with us tomorrow. We fell asleep. Next morning I realised that the couple that brought us there was gone. The brothel keeper was telling us where we were and what we had to do, they started putting make-up on our faces, we were crying...”

The concept of red-light area and brothel prostitution was totally unfamiliar to Hemal, so even after the brothel owner explained why she was there, she couldn't conceptualize what was happening to her:

“They put me in one room and nobody spoke to me that evening. Next morning the man explained where I was and what I had to do. I started crying and telling him that I need to go to my family, they are very close, but he said, I have spent money on you and I will not allow you to go... Even if the man explained to me that I was in a brothel, I didn't fully understand what it meant. But he told me that I was sold and that was worrying me, I knew it was bad. I was totally unaware of this business. But in my village I heard stories about people being kidnapped and then they would take their organs so I was thinking that they will kill me and take some of my body parts.”

It was at this point in my respondents' stories that the first accounts of psychological trauma were narrated. As the reality of what has happened to them began to sink in, the women experienced helplessness, powerlessness and threat to their lives:

“When I woke up another girl was there and I asked her what this place was and she told me that I will have to work as a sex worker. But I was crying, that is not what they told me, but the girl just said, that it is also what I was told but I had to work in a brothel. She told me not to cry and not to resist, they will beat me and maybe even kill me if I do that. But I cried a lot, I wasn't able to stop myself... I was crying and crying, I was feeling so helpless and I was so afraid, I didn't eat anything in those two days.” Indira

Trauma always renders helplessness because to be traumatized is to be overpowered. The loss of control and predictability and tremendous fear that Indira experienced had a devastating impact on her self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a feeling of power and influence and in the moment of trauma the total loss of control leads to increasing sense of helplessness (Allen, 2005).

A normal human response to danger is mobilisation of self-defence, by going into a state of alert and getting ready for either flight or battle. This automatic response to threat brings changes in arousal, attention, emotion and perception. Psychological trauma arises when neither resistance nor escape is possible. Our self-defence system becomes disorganized and overwhelmed at the moment of trauma and we lose our sense of control, connection and meaning (Herman 1992/97). Once my respondents realised that they were being forced to become sex workers they desperately looked for escape routes:

“When the women told me what I was supposed to do in this bad place I decided that I would rather die than do something bad like that. I started looking for ways to escape, there was one window but it was blocked with

steal. I couldn't run so I thought I should die, but I wouldn't do any bad thing. I just had a feeling that something bad was going to happen but at that time I didn't understand what." Eila

But escape wasn't possible as the women were in a well guarded prison, in a place that has trained to the perfection, the practise of modern slavery for sexual exploitation. The women found themselves totally powerless, the world around them was unsafe and unknown, they were in persistent expectation of danger:

"I didn't eat properly, I couldn't, mentally I didn't feel stable, I never used to get proper sleep because there were so many thoughts in my head, why did I leave my village, why did I leave my daughter...I was restless. I didn't have any dreams because I wasn't sleeping properly, I would fall asleep and then almost immediately wake up again. But I was living in a nightmare and I couldn't wake up from it, there was nowhere to run..."

Gabrielle

It is at this point, when women are in total despair, frightened, helpless and lonely, that the last step of orientation phase begins. Brothel owner uses emotional manipulation, brainwashing and threats, to break down the women:

"They told me that I have to work here only for two months, then I would get good money and go back home. They assured me that it was going to be like that and also told me that if I go somewhere else or to the police they will kill me, if I resist they will beat me. So I accepted...I was crying and crying, I was feeling so helpless and I was so afraid, I didn't eat anything in those two days. The woman was supporting and telling me ok, we won't even keep you for two months, we will let you go after one month. I was thinking how I am going to do all those things. They have threatened that if the police catch anybody that is from out of state they will take them to prison. They told me that was my faith if I try to run." Indira

The brothel owner that bought Deetya from her husband tried to convince her that it was safest for her to stay and work in that brothel:

"When he left the brothel keeper started speaking to me and telling me, your own husband sold you for this small amount, you better stay here and repay your debt and then stay with me, you cannot go back, nobody is going to accept you, if you go back he will sell you next time for much more money and it will take you many years to pay back. I realised that this was going to be my life. The brothel owner convinced me that I need to accept this, that this is my destiny and that if I run I will just suffer even more because he would sell me time and again. I accepted it. When I looked at my life I never got what I wanted, things always went wrong and all the paths were leading to here."

For Deetya the trafficking process started years ago. She managed to escape one trafficking attempt only to find herself marrying a man that would ultimately lead her to a life in a brothel. She felt that she fought for so long, but it was all in vain. Once she was in a brothel, all the strength to fight was gone. Instead she was going to learn how to be a sex worker. She started believing that this was her destiny, a destiny that she could not run away from. It didn't take much effort from the brothel owner to break her will and turn her into an obedient sex worker.

However, the majority of my respondents didn't accept the instructions that were given by the brothel staff that easily. The brothel owner had to use coercive control in order to turn

them into submissive sex workers that would comply with customers' demands. It is a process called seasoning.

6.6. Seasoning

As I have described above, the initial emotions that women experience when they are brought to a brothel are confusion, disbelief, disorientation, fear and shock. Once they have realised where they are and that escape is impossible, they are in the most vulnerable state. It is at this point that the seasoning process begins. Brothel owner uses different techniques that will ultimately break women's resistance, they will adapt to captivity, believing that they have ceased to exist socially except as sex workers.

In my respondents descriptions of the seasoning process I distinguished three main themes. I have chosen to present them as three main elements of seasoning process: violence, captivity and alteration in victim's identity.

6.6.1. Violence

Research shows that brothel owners use unpredictable and extreme violence, very similar to political torture, to break women physically and mentally and make them controllable and submissive (Farley,2003). Violence, in form of physical and sexual abuse, is used as a means of initiation, intimidation, control and punishment, and the terror gets the job done. It won't take long before beating, rape and threats have eliminated the last corner of mental space for woman to exist in, her individuality and humanity is systematically attacked and destroyed, and the only way for her to exist, is if she accept her new identity as a sex worker.

When the first customer was sent to Hemal she was crying and shivering in the corner of the room. He took pity on her and asked her why she was so afraid. She explained that she was sold and forced to be here, that she didn't want this, she wanted to go home. He left her there crying and went to the brothel owner asking to repay her debt. But that is not how business is run in a brothel, he was threatened and chased away, and next day it was time for Hemal to learn her lesson:

"The next day she sends a man to me that was kept in the brothel for this particular job. When he entered, she locked the door from outside. He raped me, he was so forceful and abusive, I was totally broken down, the pain was overwhelming, I couldn't make out what was happening, my mind wasn't with me, it was only pain and more pain. He abused me so badly that they had to rush me to the hospital, I was bleeding badly and I had wounds all over my body. For 10 days they kept me in the hospital and when they brought me back to the brothel they explained to me that from now on it didn't have to be any more pain, I can start working properly...At the hospital the doctor spoke to the brothel keeper and told her that if you have to behave this badly with the girls I will launch a police report. But she probably gave him money because he never called the police."

The extreme level of violence used during the rape was intentional. The brothel owner wanted to make sure that she would never resist again. It is dangerous having girls in the brothel telling customers that they are trafficked and forced to work there. So she sends in a man that is employed to break down the new recruits. It is very common that brothels have men particularly for this purpose. They use different torture techniques to psychologically and physically break down the women; including battering, kicking, verbally abusing, burning, raping and forcing objects inside their victims. This use of extreme violence is to demonstrate the futility of resistance. For Hemal the impact of trauma was so severe that she was too terrified and too physically broken to try to resist:

“The brothel owner and the other girls from the brothel were sitting with me in the hospital and they were constantly telling me, there is no going back, this is your life now, and if you don’t want any more pain you have to cooperate. Even after I came back they kept on telling me the same thing, they were preparing me but I was very afraid. But I also realised that I need to do this, I knew that the next time they would kill me for sure.”

But Hemal wasn’t totally psychologically broken. Although she had realised that she has to entertain customers and that there was no way of running away from this life, she had to feel that she had some control left. The brothel keeper had control over her body but she wouldn’t let her completely control her identity. Hemal tried to establish some sense of integrity and control by protesting and fighting back as much as she could:

“When I returned from the hospital they started sending customers to me. I would tell each and one of them my story, that I was forced. One got really mad and threatened the brothel keeper but then they beat him up and threw him out. I would also say to the consumers, how can you do this, what if it was your sister or mother that was forced to be here. Some of them would go away, some would complain to the brothel keeper, they would say, I have given money for this, and then they would force me. Even physically I was resisting. The brothel keeper would then beat me up. This was very common in the first few months.”

The impact of trauma and its effects are more severe and pervasive if the injury is deliberately inflicted by other persons, repeated, unpredictable, multifaceted, sadistic, extremely violent and has caused gross physical injury (Allen, 2005). Janessa’s account of her first few days in a brothel is a horror story that shows just how evil and inhuman the dark world of sexual exploitation is. It is important to remember that her story is not just a horrifying personal tragedy, but a reality that countless women face every day:

“I hardly had any idea what sex was, I just heard some things about it when I was in Kathmandu. When I realised what they want from me I was crying, refusing, begging them to send me home. Other girls at the brothel were saying to us, you have to accept this otherwise they will kill you. The brothel keeper used a stick and she started beating me. Then they tied me to a bed, both my hand and my feet, my legs were spread apart, I couldn’t move. The brothel keeper had two men whose job was to rape and beat new girls. For a long time one of them was beating me. Then he took a blade and started cutting me around my vagina. Immediately after they were done with me, they did the same thing to the other girl, and they made me watch. They had made her watch what they were doing to me too. She was screaming and telling them, you don’t have to do this to me, I will do whatever you want, but they still did it.”

During this brutal initiation into prostitution, Janessa's body was invaded, injured and defiled. Her basic bodily integrity was violated in the most horrific way. At this moment of trauma her point of view counted for nothing, this attack on her autonomy and dignity left her feeling helpless and worthless, and in desperate fear for her life (Herman 1992/97). While she was being tortured, the girl that she was trafficked with was forced to watch. But the cruelty and brutality doesn't end there, once they are done with Janessa, she is forced to watch her friend go through the same brutality that she just did:

"When I was watching what they were doing to her, even though I was in so much pain, this was even worse, the feeling of helplessness was overwhelming, feeling of fear, and I thought, there is no going back for us now, we are lost, there is no future for us now...I wanted to help her so badly, but there was nothing I could do...I never forgot her suffering...They were screaming at us during the entire time and telling us very bad things, using very abusive language. After they were done, the brothel keeper said to us, if you try to refuse one more time, he won't only use the blade down there, he will cut your entire body in pieces and throw you away."

Janessa suffered tremendous injuries that day, the physical scars took long time to heal and the psychological trauma left her with long-term effects. But what she remembers the most is the friend that she was unable to help. She describes the feeling of helplessness and long after the event she reviewed and judged her own conduct and felt somewhat responsible for the outcome. For victims of traumatic events the feelings of guilt can sometimes provide an illusion of power and control (Herman, 1992/97). Maybe it was easier for Janessa to bear the thought of being able to prevent or change what happened in that room, than to have to face the reality of utter helplessness.

The initiation was so terrifying that all the will to resist was broken:

"For 15 days I was not able to move, the doctor was treating me in the brothel, I was in a very bad condition. This same story happens to every new girl that doesn't listen. This happened the second day. After this I said yes."

Janessa was a virgin. Customers always pay a higher price for virgins and there is always a great demand for virgin girls. So while Janessa was being abused, she wasn't raped. The brothel owner made sure to break her down without losing the premium rate the customer will pay to use Janessa without having to worry about HIV and sexually transmitted diseases. After her wounds have healed, a first customer was sent to her:

"Immediately after I recovered from this incident they send me a customer. They took 3000 rupees (550 SKR) from him because I was a virgin. When they were cutting me and abusing me they didn't rape me. Again they tied my hands and feet and he raped me. It was such a horrific experience, my body was in such a shock, I was in such a horrible state, my body didn't function while he was doing this to me, no control, everything came out of me, I urinated and the other as well, I can never forget this. I felt so horrible, so degraded, so low...I cannot find the words to describe the state I was in... I was bleeding a lot afterwards. They called the doctor again."

Janessa was tied in the same way. She explains how this put her in an unbearably state of anxiety and fear, all the images and feelings of prior torture came back. Then the man came and raped her. The brothel owner was standing in the room, observing. The purpose of rape

is to terrorize, dominate and humiliate the utterly helpless victim (Herman 1992/97). Rape is a violation of the most intimate and personal aspects of the self, as woman's own body is the setting in which atrocities are perpetrated (Freed, 2003) Janessa lost the control over her bodily functions, something that she found humiliating even at the moment of trauma as the rape was a direct attack on her autonomy and dignity. As a response to utter helplessness and violation of bodily integrity, a feeling of shame emerged.

Eila was badly injured by her customers:

"The first costumer, I don't really remember what happened, I think he used some object because it was very, very painful. After he left I realized that I was bleeding severely, I was having bruises and wounds over my entire lower body. The brothel keeper called the doctor and the lady that was cleaning the brothel took me to the toilet and washed me and put clean clothes on me. The doctor treated me but I was suffering for a long time after that, the wounds took long time to heal and I was in pain. Even though my wounds hadn't healed the brothel keeper send another costumer. I felt so helpless at that time, I decided that whatever happens I will tell the customer about my condition, do whatever you want but just kill me afterwards. So I did that. I took my cloths of before he had a chance to touch me and said look at me. He was so shocked when he saw in what condition I was."

After suffering thru a sadistic rape, Eila is traumatized and desperate to avoid the similar situation. When she finds herself with another customer, all the images and feelings of prior assault are overwhelming her. She is totally powerless and knows that any form of resistance is in vain so her self-protective system shuts off the overwhelming terror and fear by altering the state of consciousness in order to escape the situation (Herman 1992/97). The feeling of indifference and emotional detachment that Eila is experiencing, serve the purpose of reducing the pain and terror. She doesn't plead for her life, she asks the man to end her life.

Not all of my respondents were forced to endure sadistic torture and rape. Threats about violence and punishment, and other women's warning stories about beating and even killing, are sometimes enough for women to adapt to the new situation, and act as they are told:

"I still remember my first customer, he was only coming for one purpose and that was to have sex with the new girls. He was trained to do this and he didn't say a single word to me. I had accepted what was happening and I didn't want him to hurt me so that is why I didn't resist. I knew that they beat the girls that resist. I knew resisting wouldn't help me so I let him have a regular intercourse with me and that was it." Gabrielle

6.6.2. Captivity

Seasoning can last anywhere from a few weeks to a several months, sometimes even longer. During this time women are prisoners in the brothel and they must find the way to adapt to captivity. Prolonged, repeated trauma takes place in captivity, as victims are unable to escape and are under total control of their perpetrators. During captivity the brothel owner uses coercive techniques in order to reshape the psychology of the women. The purpose of

these coercive techniques is to establish total control over new-recruiters, and that is achieved by methodical, repetitive infliction of psychological trauma (Herman, 1992/97).

"For almost three years I didn't see any sunlight" Eila

The brothel owners use different methods of disempowerment, leaving victims terrified and helpless. The most common method of terror is physical and sexual violence, as described above. This method however doesn't have to be used frequently in order to archive desired result. In the dark world of brothel prostitution, perpetrators strongest weapon is fear (Herman 192/97):

"Brothel keeper's husband used to beat me but he never raped me. But I watched him rape minors, but he never sexually abused older girls. After my first attempt to run he beat me and he threatened that he would sexually abuse me, and he was telling me about all these horrible thing that he would do to my body." Indira

"The men that were employed to rape and abuse new girls keep on telling me that what the brothel keeper is saying is true, she wouldn't hesitate to kill me. They told me that if I don't earn money it would be so easy to kill me it wouldn't take them more than 5 minutes." Eila

My respondents were kept in constant state of fear by threats of harm and death. They witnessed unpredictable outburst of violence, they watched other girls being sexually abused, and ultimately they were convinced that all the resistance was in vain. They started believing that the brothel owner had all the power and that their life depended on absolute obedience.

"Tremendous fear was there, they were beating us with so many different objects. There was so much terror in the entire house among all the girls, if we made the smallest mistake we knew we were going to be beaten severely." Janessa

In addition to inflicting fear, brothel owners destroy women's sense of autonomy by controlling her body and bodily function (Herman 1992/97). That is achieved by sexual abuse, as described above, but also by movement control and deprivation of food, sleep and exercise. Eila was kept locked in a small room without windows:

"I was there all by myself, the woman that cleans the brothel would come once a day and give me some food, there was no toilet, I used a bin...I tried to talk to her, but she wouldn't answer me, I was going crazy in that room, sick of worrying, I felt so lonely and helpless..."

The loss of bodily control results in physical debilitation that leaves the victim in a desperate need of solace:

"Every day I would wait for woman to come back. Sometimes the brothel owner would come. I was so afraid but they brought me food...I wanted to talk so badly with the woman that was cleaning the brothel. I kept on asking her what is happening to me, and she would only say, you will realise soon."

Even the smallest indulgence from the perpetrator offers comfort to the victim, but that only further undermines her psychological resistance (Herman 1992/97). The brothel owner achieves complete domination by isolating the women. Human connection gives the victim

emotional support, and that can limit brothel owners power. When the women are totally isolated their dependence is ultimate, not only for basic survival and bodily needs but for emotional sustenance.

"The younger girls were kept separate from the older ones. They never allowed us to talk to each other, either brothel owner or manager was always with me. I was so afraid but she just kept telling me, there is nothing to discuss about what happened, just focus on what is going on right now, if you don't follow the rules it will be very bad for you." Gabrielle

In the captivity, when the victim is isolated, she will, in the absence of human contact that can provide emotional support, adhere to the only human connection that is allowed, the one with the brothel owner. She will desperately try to find some humanity in her perpetrator. After some time traumatic bonding will arise from a combination of attachment needs, isolation and alternation of distress and relief. The brothel owner becomes a protector by both inflicting pain and injury and by being the only one that can spare the woman from more harm and allow her to live. The greater the injury and terror experienced, the stronger the need for security, resulting in a tighter bond between the perpetrator and her victim. In the end, a bond of identification arises, the woman will adopt brothel owner's view while losing her previous belief system (Herman 1992/97).

Janessa suffered tremendously after the brutal initiation, when she was severely beaten and cut with a blade. Immediately after the torture she was separated from the girl that had become a friend, she was locked in a room, where she had constant surveillance by either the brothel owner or manager:

"The doctor was a regular, he was coming to the brothel for this purpose, he treated me, he put stitches, gave me injection and strong pain killers. I was kept in the brothel keeper's room and she or another girl were always sitting next to me, telling me, don't even think about not being cooperative, you are young and beautiful and you are going to get more money than you could ever dream of, and then you can go back home after one year. This was the only thing they were repeating in these 15 days. I was so scared, whatever they said I just said yes, yes. But in my mind I was totally broken down, I was only thinking about my family and my village, oh why did I leave my village, but my intension was to help my family so why did I end up here, what is going to happen to me..."

The emotional manipulation was constant:

"I couldn't sleep, I was so restless and frightened. The brothel keeper would get mad and tell me, why are you not sleeping, what is on your mind, are you planning to run away? They were behaving so strangely, at one point they would beat me, threaten me, call me bad names and than they would be nice to me, take care of me... I was never alone during this time, everything that has happened was coming back in front of my eyes, it was so painful and I was so scared. They were really trying to take care of me, touching me, giving me food and drinks, always next to me but I was thinking all the time, if they really care for me why have they done this to me."

Janessa could not understand how a person that has caused her so much harm and pain could at the same time be caring and protective. Brothel owner's alteration of harm and relief was quick and unpredictable, leaving Janessa confused, vulnerable and helpless.

Emotional manipulation was constant and intense, not allowing Janessa to mentally comprehend what was happening:

“The brainwashing was going on constantly, they never gave me any space to think. My only hope was to go home, I believed her promises. But I was feeling so helpless, I couldn’t do anything about my situation... Not only during this time but for a whole year I was constantly thinking about my family. If I refused to eat and they would beat me I would close my eyes and think of them and my village. That made it bearable.”

Janessa deliberately evoked mental images of people she love, of place where she was happy and safe, in order to preserve some sense of connection.

Indiras brothel owner used the fact that they are from the same state to produce a bond of identification between them

“The brothel owner told me I was not alone, all the girls in the brothel as well as her, were from the same state as I was and we spoke the same language, they all went through the same think that I did, they were all kidnapped like I was and that they would support me. But she also told me that if I resist they would for sure beat me and kill me, don’t you dare think about running or resisting, but if I behave like they tell me they will for sure send me back. I was so afraid, thinking what will happen to me and I was feeling guilty as well. Even if she was telling me that all the girls were like me and from my state I still felt tremendously lonely, I never felt that I belong there with them.”

Santoshi was exposed to the same methods of emotional manipulation:

“The brothel owner was behaving very strangely and I was very confused. When she was mad she would hit me, with her hands and a stick, but then sometimes she would be good to me, she would take care of me. I couldn’t understand how she could be so different from one time to another... I was thinking a lot about my family and I was constantly wondering what I was doing here. When I would feel very low the brothel owner was very supportive, she would tell me, see I don’t force you, you work good, I send money to your family all the time, you don’t have to worry about anything. No other girls were nice to me and I didn’t trust anybody. The only support I had was from the brothel owner but at the same time she was causing me pain so I was very confusing.”

In the captivity, the brothel owner has become the most powerful person in Santoshi’s life, she has become the only person that she can trust. The brothel owner uses empty promises of sending money to Santoshi’s family as a mean to get her more submissive and compliant.

The monetary control that goes under the name of debt bondage is a strong argument that brothel owners use during the process of seasoning. They repeat over and over again how much money the woman needs to repay before she is free. This strategy of burdening the trafficked women with massive amounts of debt make them totally powerless, allowing brothel owners to maintain total control over them (Institute of social science, 2005).

I found it very baffling and disturbing that the majority of my respondents accepted the bondage system without protest. Of course they were mad and bitter at relatives, friends or strangers that sold them but they never questioned the fundamental assumption that they, as human beings, could be bought and sold. But if we look at how women are treated in India, the number of legal rights and privileges that they enjoy on the paper, and only there,

how they are regarded in their families and communities, it becomes quite clear how they can accept that they are commodities to be bought and sold. They don't protest for being deprived of their right, because they never knew that they had them.

6.6.3. Alterations in women's identity

Different coercive techniques that brothel owner use during seasoning are systematically invading and breaking down psychological structures of the self, the image of the body, internalized images of others and sense of coherence and purpose. Women's former identity is gradually and irrevocably destroyed and her new enslaved identity is being built. During seasoning the woman's entire world is centred in the brothel, and the brothel owner is systematically working on divorcing her from the patterns of thinking and feeling, that make her resist the idea of being a sex worker. Brothel owner's methods of brainwashing, indoctrination, physical control and physical and sexual abuse will ultimately lead to a new identity formation. The women's new identity will include a body that can be controlled and violated by others, a new self image of a dehumanized person, a reality that only consists of evil and where nobody can be trusted (Herman 1992/97; Brown 2000).

"I felt fear. I only had sex with my husband and now I was to do it with an unknown man, I was afraid, I was thinking what will happen. I was not afraid for my life but I was afraid that he would hurt me, I didn't know what he would do to my body. For few months I was very afraid for myself, having to have sex with so many men, some even drunk, but gradually I learned to live with it, my body was for selling, for earning money and now I had reached a level where my mind is not there anymore, when I am with the costumer I don't feel anything. My body is with the man but not my mind. I have learned that. I learned gradually how to come out of the fear and accept this, so now it has become such a regular thing, very mechanical. I do everything they tell me to do, but it is not me, I have become a robot." Gabrielle

Trafficking and prostitution has depersonalized Gabrielle. In order to protect herself she has learned how to shut down her feelings. She has detached herself from her body and acts that she is being forced to perform. Even though she is doing her part without protest in order to survive, she doesn't stay a whole person. The longer time she stays in the inhuman world of brothel prostitution the more her real identity will fade and her prostituted self will take over (Herman 1992/97).

In all of my respondents' stories, the negative social stigma, emerged as one of the main factors that led to alteration of their identities. They were constantly being brainwashed that once they have landed in a brothel there was no place for them in the normal society. They had to hear over and over again that they would never be accepted back by their families and communities:

"I was asking the other women, why are you doing this and they would tell me, we are also forced into this, we are not doing this of our own choice. The thought of running away was very strong but I was also worried if my family would accept me. Slowly my courage was broken down, I looked at the other girls and thought that it was probably the same for me, that I wouldn't be able to go back, they would never take me back, this is my life

now. It was when I realised that going back to my family wasn't an option anymore that I fully accepted this life. They have done so much for me, what would happen to them if they find out the truth about me." Hemal

The importance of being a respectful and dutiful daughter and how easy it is to be rejected by the family is well illustrated by Najla's story:

"After delivery I didn't have any breast milk. The nutrition wasn't really good and I was also very stressed and worried about the future. At the same time the owner was putting pressure on me to start taking clients but I refused. She stopped giving me money altogether. I tried to get some other job in the area but nobody wanted to give me any. I was so desperate, I wanted my daughter to live. I even went to the police and told them the whole story. They didn't take anything from me, because I didn't have anything but they took money from the brothel owner. I begged them to at least take me to my family and explain the situation to them. So the police did that and told my family that I was forced but that I didn't work as a sex worker, that I only lived in the area but they said no, they said that they don't even know if the child was from my husband, I could have slept with so many men, they told me to go and never come back. I stayed outside the house for 2 days, hoping they would change their minds but they were only shouting bad things at me. I was totally devastated so in the end I told my mother, I didn't let anybody touch my body but still you don't believe me and call me a whore so now I will go and be one. I came straight back to Pune. I felt that this was the only path I could take now that I didn't have any support from my family."

The family's rejection is having a devastating impact on Najla. Her family was concerned with how other people would view them and they didn't want any negative social stigma. They were more willing to sacrifice a daughter than risk social prejudice. The family's betrayal left Najla helpless and degraded and she believed that her future had been taken away from her. After this total abandonment she felt that only place she could go to, the only person she could be, was a sex worker in the red-light area.

Another two factors that I recognised as important in the process of women's identity alteration were self-blame and shame. Some of the respondents blamed themselves for ending up in a brothel:

"I was feeling guilty and I am still feeling guilty because I was willing to earn money and I shared that thought with the people that sold me here, if I had not spoken that I needed more money maybe this wouldn't have happen to me." Indira

Indira is exaggerating her own role in the event that had disastrous consequences, as she is not able to make a connection between her vulnerability at the time of trafficking, which led her to trust the people she just met.

Hemal blames herself for running away from abusive husband as that decision led to her being trafficked:

"I don't have any peace of mind and I never will. I am still so angry at myself for leaving my husband's house that day, I feel so guilty, I should have never made that decision on my own."

Sometimes when victims blame themselves and claim responsibility, it can be the last effort to preserve some sense of control. Trafficking and seasoning are direct assaults on woman's self-worth, i.e. how she thinks and feels about herself. The hardest feeling for our reflexive

self to bear is the feeling of helplessness. By claiming responsibility some sense of control is established but it comes with a price; a lower self-worth. The foundation for the self-worth is laid in childhood. Many of my respondents never experienced a sense of connection and approval from important persons while growing up so that even before they entered the dark world of sexual exploitation they suffered from low self-worth. The trauma that they experienced during physical and psychological abuse in the brothel amplified the undermining of their self-worth. (Allen, 2005).

Even when my respondents were not blaming themselves for the trafficking and regarded themselves as victims, they still suffered from shame:

"I was crying so much during the entire act but it didn't have any effect on the man. I was thinking, how I am going to show my face to my parents after this, I spoiled everything". Abhitha

The shame is generated from internalized social attitudes so even though women understand that they are forced into brothel life and that they are victims, they still suffer a great amount of shame for being sexually violated and prostituted.

After some time my respondents were beaten into submission, they became passive and acceptant of the acts that were being performed on them and for the acts that they were forced to perform. They started believing that that there was no going back for them:

"I totally lost my confidence. Everybody's talk had convinced me that once you have landed in this area you have lost all your respect, the prestige of being a good woman was gone forever. So I started believing that I had spoiled it all now, that there was nothing for me outside these walls, nobody would care, nobody would respect me." Krisha

It is at this point that the final step in psychological control is achieved, the woman has accepted that she has absolutely no alternative but to be a sex worker. She knows that it doesn't matter how she ended up in the brothel prostitution, there is no way back for her to the respectable society as she has been marked out for social death. When the woman accepts that she has been locked into the trade, she is violating her own moral principles and betraying her basic human attachments for the sake of survival. In order to be able to live with her new identity she is forced to shut down her feelings, thoughts and judgment. She enters the state that Herman (1992/97) calls "robotization". For Krisha, only way to do that was by numbing her feelings with alcohol:

"I had decided that I needed to accept this life. The brothel owner explained that I needed to be with these men like I used to be with my husband. I was devastated, I kept on wondering how I was going to manage all this. But I knew that if I was going to be here that I had to find a way to bear with it all. So I started drinking alcohol. Day and night I would drink... When I was under the impact of alcohol I would become very strong, I dared to fight and I would do whatever I felt like. With alcohol I would lose my shame."

Once Krisha realised that she had been converted, that her inner life has been captured and seized and that her body was in somebody else's control, she felt strong shame and defeat.

She had to find a way to live with these feelings, and alcohol provided her with the comfort and strength she needed.

It was very individual when my respondents reached the stage when seasoning process was completed and they accepted the life in the brothel and their new identity as sex workers. For some it took few weeks, for some it was a process that lasted several months. Brown (2000) calls this stage “acclimatisation phase”, when women have realised that there are no other options and they have conditioned themselves to a life in a brothel. After the seasoning process, where women have suffered chronic trauma, they are starting to feel themselves irrevocably changed as their psychological structures of the self have been invaded and systematically broken down. Women’s images of their bodies, their internalized images of others, all the values and ideas that provided them with a sense of coherence and purpose, are shattered and destroyed. Women’s new identity includes the enslaved self with a body that can be controlled and violated in the evil world where nobody can be trusted (Herman 1992/97).

6.7. Coping strategies used during seasoning

The term coping refers to altering cognitive and behavioral efforts in order to manage specific demands. The coping process is changeable and has two major functions: to manage the problem that is causing stress and to regulate emotional responses to the problem (Folkman, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1991). I wasn’t surprised to find that the most common form of coping among my respondents was emotional-focused coping. Problem-focused coping refers to efforts made by individuals to improve the situation that is causing distress by creating changes. Individual believes that the problem is amenable to resolution and that she can get the resources necessary to manage the problem. During seasoning my respondents were isolated, imprisoned in spaces without escape possibilities, abused by men that were physically stronger than them, making resistance impossible. Looking at their conditions and options that were available for them, it is clear that majority of women felt that the problems they were facing were not changeable, so they used emotional-focused coping in order to bear the trauma. However, in some of my respondents’ stories, there were narratives of problem-focused coping. Eila was one of them:

“...The second time when he came to rape me he was very violent and he beat me severely. I kept on thinking I cannot go on like this, I have to die but there was no way to do that. I was kept locked in a room, there was nothing there I could use. When the man came the third time I didn’t resist. The first two times I tried to resist as much as possible, I would hit him, scratch him but I tried not to resist the third time, I wanted to see what was going to happen. It still hurt a lot, he was forceful and the thought of wanting to die was strong at that time as well. But he wasn’t as aggressive as he had been the first two times. He said to me that it seems as I have calm down now and I am being cooperative and willing to work. So I realized that I can handle man like this. I thought that if men can understand my situation and my feelings they will cooperate and won’t hurt me. That has helped me get men to pity me and pay to the brothel keeper without having sex with me. I realized that there are good men that I can use in this way.”

Eila describes how she managed to change the outcome by changing her behavior. Her first response to the sexual abuse has been to fight against it as much as she could. But it was all in vain as the man was much stronger. She was desperate not to relive the same agony again, so much that she was thinking to end her own life, but she was locked in a room without any possibility to commit suicide. She was desperately trying to find a way to ease the suffering that she was forced to endure every day. The only thing that she had control of to some extent was her body. She decided not to struggle during the rape, hoping that that would make the man less aggressive. The man's sudden attitude change gave Eila hope that she still had some chance of controlling what was happening to her. She found a way to behave with customers that enabled her to awaken pity in them:

"I took my clothes off before he had a chance to touch me and said look at me. He was so shocked when he saw in what condition I was. I told him my story, he gave me 500 rs and told me that he won't hurt me, that he wants to be my friend. I was so happy, I felt so relieved. He left without ever touching me."

The emotion-focused coping is used when the individual feels that the problem is not changeable. Instead of trying to change the environment, cognitive efforts are made to change the meaning of a situation with thoughts or actions whose goal is to reduce the emotional impact of trauma. One way of doing that is by changing the meaning of what has happened with the use of cognitive reframing (Ibid):

"If I look back at my life when I was a child, and think about why my life is like this, it is all because of poverty. There was never any money. Why did I get married to a man that was almost my father's age? Because of poverty. Why did my second husband sell me? Because of poverty. And that thought kept me alive. If I can make money I can live on my own terms." Deetya

During her entire life Deetya has been mistreated and betrayed by people around her. Now that she has found herself trapped in a brothel, condemned to sexual exploitation every day, she desperately tries to find a way to rationalise her present situation. She has lived in poverty her whole life, it is because of poverty that she entered both her marriages, it was the only way of survival that ultimately brought her to a life in a brothel. Now trapped there, she puts all her focus on money, knowing that it was the lack of it that led her there, knowing that money will be her only way to escape, knowing what she has to do to earn it. She deploys all of her attention on earning money and that made it possible to bear the brutality of life in the brothel.

Another example of cognitive reframing is given by Hemal that uses the feeling of loneliness as a source of strength that helps her cope with the life in the brothel:

"My first few months in the brothel... even if I have accepted this life the loneliness was very much there. In a strange way that loneliness became my strength. I convinced myself that this would not have happened to me if I had a good family around me and their support. But I don't and I never had and I have to face it alone. That feeling gave me strength to survive".

My respondents tried to deploy attention from the traumatic circumstances that they were enduring by finding an escape route in their minds:

“The only thing that kept me alive and gave me strength was thoughts of going back home. I wasn’t having any emotional support from the other girls, I didn’t dare to say anything because some may go and tell everything to the brothel keeper. I didn’t trust anybody. So I thought of my family, my village, and that kept me alive.”

Gabrielle

Even behavioral efforts are a form of emotional-focused coping:

“I used to lock myself in the room, turn on the music and listen and dance and after I felt bit better I would come out of the room. That was my way of dealing with the pain from inside and loneliness.” Gabrielle

Another example of behavioral efforts as emotional-focused coping is use of alcohol:

“I have decided that I need to accept this life. The brothel owner explained that I needed to be with these men like I used to be with my husband. I was devastated, I kept on wondering how I was going to manage all this. But I knew that if I was going to be here that I had to find a way to bear with it all. So I started drinking alcohol. Day and night I would drink. I was totally drunk when I had my first customer. When I was under the impact of alcohol I would become very strong, I dared to fight and I would do whatever I felt like. With alcohol I would lose my shame.” Krisha

What Krisha describes is a very common way for trafficked women in the brothels to cope with their new lives. Intoxicated they are able to bear the clients and keep away the feelings and thoughts that are too painful. Because alcohol produce so well needed numbing effect, traumatized people run high risk of developing substance dependence. Some brothel owners force new recruits to drink alcohol during seasoning process, making them easier to handle:

“My brothel keeper started teaching me how to drink. In the beginning I was not feeling comfortable doing it but after awhile I started feeling relief from my loneliness when I was drinking.” Santoshi

6.8 Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Available research shows that it is common for the victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation to suffer from depression, PTSD symptoms and disconnection from self and others (Freed, 2003). In Farley’s (2003) survey, 68 per cent of sex workers met criteria for PTSD. Majority of my respondents described typical symptoms of PTSD although none of them had ever been diagnosed with the disorder. The severity of symptoms among my respondents was strongly connected to their experiences during seasoning process. The more severe physical and sexual violence and the longer duration of abuse, the more severe and persistent symptoms were.

My respondents described that they were highly anxious and on a permanent alert and expectation of danger, not only during seasoning, but long time after their brutal initiation into prostitution.

“I couldn’t sleep. If I would fall asleep I would quickly wake up, frightened. There was no peace for me. I was so afraid. I had bad dreams but they were easier to bear than what I was feeling and thinking when I was awake. Everybody told me, just accept, otherwise you will go crazy.” Indira

Sleep disturbance that Indira described is a common symptom of PTSD as the increased arousal persists even during sleep (Herman, 1992/97). The world has become an unsafe place as Indira is not able to protect herself, neither resistance nor escape is possible and she is in constant anticipation of overwhelming threat. She described how she was unable to relax or concentrate, her mind was racing and she felt that she had no control of her thoughts. Indira was chronically hyperaroused as she was unable to maintain a level of alert through relaxed attention.

People that suffer from PTSD reexperience the traumatic events long after the danger has past in form of flashbacks, images, thoughts and nightmares (ibid). Janessa suffered brutal seasoning and she was also forced to watch her friend go thru the same agony. She explains that the images from those days had never left her *"I can still see it in front of me like it happened yesterday, the fear, the pain..."* She describes how the first year the memory of initiation would arise all the time, all the feelings would come back to her and she would face the utter devastation over and over again.

This distressing recollection of traumatic events is called intrusion as painful memories intrude and interrupt victims' lives by spontaneously breaking into consciousness (Allen, 2005; Herman, 1992/97). The traumatic memories are very easily stimulated as the smallest reminder can evoke the trauma in a fraction of a second. As my respondents were forced to stay in the same environment where atrocities on them had been perpetrated, they were constantly being reminded of the traumatic events. They were forced to serve customers in the same rooms where they had been seasoned, men that raped them and abused them were always around seasoning new girls, as a constant reminder of what they had to suffer:

"To this day I see that man in the area, and it always reminds me of what he did to me. It brings me back to all the suffering I had to endure. And I am so mad because he is still there, doing the same business, destroying lives of other young girls" Hemal

Over time, hyperarousal and intrusion symptoms fade and the feeling that predominate person's state of mind is numbing (Herman, 1992/97). Majority of my respondents described how they were now living in a constant sense of numbing and disconnection. They live their lives for the sake of living without really feeling it. They don't want to be reminded of the past trauma, they don't want to think about their everyday life as brothel prostitutes so they organise their lives around not feeling and not considering other options (van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996):

"Even though I feel that my life is in my control I know that you can never know what can happen the next day. Now I am talking to you but I don't know that I will reach my home safely...I don't believe in anything, no God, only destiny. What is in your destiny you cannot run from. I went through such a life, I lost my childhood, I lost my youth and now I am getting older. Pain and tension has long gone, whatever happens I need to face it, I don't have feelings anymore. My childhood wasn't happy, in my youth anybody could do whatever they wanted with me and now the only positive thing is that I have control over my monetary situation. But there is no happiness..." Deetya

Deetya's statement highlights very well the complexity of experienced trauma among trafficked women. All the traumatic events that she has experienced during seasoning and prostitution have shattered psychological structure of her self and her identity. During her entire life she has been used and abused by others and as a result of that she only feels indifference, emotional detachment and passivity. When she lost the fundamental feeling of safety and thrust in goodness of other people she entered a state of existential crises. Her statement *I don't believe in anything* highlights that the system of attachment and meaning to other individuals and community, to the goodness of the world, has been fundamentally shattered.

6.9. Brothel prostitution

6.9.1. Violence

Research shows that trafficking and prostitution is multitraumatic and that physical and emotional violence is a norm for women engaged in brothel prostitution (Farley, 2003). My respondents stories show that amount of violence inflicted on them declined after the seasoning process ended and they had accepted to entertain the customers. However, as long as the women were repaying their debts, a process that usually lasted for a few years, they were under total control and mercy of brothel owners.

"I had no idea if it was day or night. Every day was the same. All the talk was about customers and money. I eat when they gave me food, I sleep when they tell me, but almost always the customers were there, specially for new girls, I had to take so many men every day, almost all the time." Janessa

Brothel owner's economic logic is very simple. The more customers women entertained the greater the income, so they were usually not concerned if the condoms were used, if the customer were drunk or abusive or if the sex worker was sick, tired or unwilling. If the brothel owner felt that she needed to enforce her control she would use punishments, threat and violence.

Gabrielle was never physically abused by her brothel owner as she was obediently doing everything that was requested from her. But she was kept under constant surveillance, locked in a brothel and forced to entertain a never ending stream of customers:

"I stayed at the same brothel for 4 years. The brothel was always locked, for 2 years I was not allowed to leave the brothel and after that the manager always followed me, holding my hand, not leaving me for a moment. In the brothel the windows were always closed, there was no ventilation, it was very hot, it was totally uncomfortable place to live. I got friendly with a few girls but gradually they all left, some were resold, some moved to another brothel after repaying their debt. I never resisted my brothel keeper, I did whatever she told me but I was constantly thinking that I have to run from this place. I was very lonely, I almost never shared my feelings and thought with the other girls. I kept on thinking that if I don't resist the brothel keeper she will let me go. I never knew if it was day or night, costumers would come and go and that was my life. I had between 10 and 15 customers per a day."

If the women were not showing total obedience or if customers were dissatisfied, women were physically punished. Eila was trafficked to a brothel in Mumbai, she survived a brutal seasoning and was then forced to endure three years of constant abuse:

“During my entire stay in Mumbai I was very reluctant to entertain costumers. Almost daily I was beaten, either by the brothel keeper or the man hired by her. Even customers were abusive if I wasn’t entertaining them according to their wish. They would also complain to the brothel keeper and then they would both come back to beat me. This was happening all the time.”

While under debt bondage women had no say in choice of customers. In my respondents stories I could distinguish two types of brothel owners. Some had no restrictions to who was entering the brothel and customers could, to a great extend, behave however they wanted with women. Other tried to protect women from abusive customers and refused very intoxicated man to enter. Once the women had repaid their debts they could refuse customers. Many stated that they avoided men that were under influence of alcohol as they were usually aggressive:

“Even though I drink I don’t entertain customers that are drunk. With them you never know what will happen. And all the other....after some time in this business you develop an eye for those that could be trouble and you avoid them.” Iman

Deetya tells about the abuse and rape but also about a protective brothel owner:

“I have had abusive customers, mostly alcoholic. They also reminded me of my husband. But the brothel owner would help me with that kind of situation and send them away. Today I take a costumer to the brothel and pay the rent but I do get support from the brothel keeper. But I have been raped and beaten. But I have accepted it. I know that things like that are part of my profession and that they will always happen. And when I am with men I don’t feel anything. The physical pain always goes away. I just keep on thinking that whatever he does, I already got the money and will never give it back.”

Deetya’s view on the sexual and physical assaults that she is forced to endure as a sex worker shows just how strongly her identity has altered. In order to survive brothel prostitution she views her body as something that can be controlled and violated. She regards the assaults as something inevitable. As a prostituted woman she lives in alienation where her own person, who she really is, is totally uninteresting. She is a target for others contempt and customers view her as an object that they can purchase, degrade and despise. Some of my respondents had customers with whom they perceived that they were viewed as human beings, but they were very few:

“I never got any support from anybody. After the beatings I had bruises all over my body for months and few customers used to ask what had happened to me. I have been telling each and every customer that I have been forced into this and that I want to go from here but I had never met anybody that was willing to help me. Most of them didn’t want to believe me and they just ignored the bruises, to a few I would tell that I slipped in the bathroom and very few said, no, no, that is impossible, you must have been beaten by somebody. But still they didn’t want to help me.” Indira

That the customers couldn’t be trusted is well illustrated by Santoshi’s statement:

"I have seen girls being poisoned by customers. So whenever a customer would give me food, I would ask him to eat first to make sure it was safe. The life has thought me to be careful and not to trust anybody."

Until brothel owners were convinced that new recruits had totally adopted the idea of a life in a brothel, they lived their lives imprisoned in the brothel. If they were allowed to leave the brothel, they were always accompanied by somebody. Most of my respondents talked about persistent thoughts of running away, but only a few tried. Mostly it was because the brothels were well-guarded prisons with very few escape possibilities. But women were also petrified of getting caught and consequences that they would have to face. They had also been brainwashed to believe that they would face a greater danger outside of a brothel, that they would be trafficked by someone else and end up in a brothel with much worse conditions. They were told that they couldn't trust anybody, that the police wouldn't help them, that they would be imprisoned:

"I tried to run away once. During the daytime I was never alone so there was no opportunity but then one night I managed to get a hold of a key, everybody were sleeping, I opened the gate and started walking but then I felt so terribly afraid, thinking what could happen to me out there, I had no idea where I was, so I decided to go back to the brothel." Santoshi

All of my respondents that tried to run were severely punished. They were beaten until they deserted all the thoughts of running away, until they realised that survival meant staying in the brothel and being obedient:

"I was very angry and devastated, I lost all my faith and hope. Gradually I started interacting with other girls. Thought of running away never left me. Three other girls had a same story like me and we used to plan how to run away. In the meantime the brothel owner moved us to a new brothel and as soon as I entered I thought that maybe it will be possible to run. So we made the plan. They were always brainwashing us and telling us that if we plan to run and go to police they will just send us to a new brothel. The police used to come, have food and drinks with the brothel owners and use girls for free. So I knew that the police would not help us. When we tried to run we were caught and beaten very badly. After that I let go of the thought of running away, I felt that I need to live, I don't want to die and I was sure that they would kill me if I tried again." Indira

Several of my respondents were re-trafficked. Their obedience second and sometimes even third time around determined how much violence they had to suffer. Some of them quickly realised the situation, tried to negotiate better deal with the brothel owner and accepted the new condition without much protest:

"After year and a half another girl from Nepal came to the brothel. She already had experience as a sex worker and when she saw the situation at the brothel and how girls were getting abused on a regular basis she started communicating with me and promising me that she would take me out from that place. We were obedient and when I had been at the brothel for three years the brothel keeper decided that she could trust me and that I wouldn't run away. So one day we were going to the hospital and we had a brothel manager with us in the taxi. She was an older woman and we pushed her out and came to the train station and then that other girl took me to Pune. I think she was here before because she took me to one brothel. After two days she was gone and I have never seen her again. The brothel keeper told me that she sold me for 30000 rs. But those three years in Mumbai taught me how to handle the brothel keepers. So I fought for my right to keep some of my earnings." Eila

Few years later Eila was trafficked by the brothel owner to a brothel in Delhi. Similar to the second re-trafficking she did everything she could to negotiate a better deal for herself in this new brothel. But not once did she question that she could be sold over and over again. She had already adopted the identity of a sex worker and was convinced that there was no place for her in the society. At the same time she never lost her resilience, strength and courage:

"I was in Delhi six to seven months. I had such bad injuries. The brothel owner beat me so badly because I helped two young girls to run away from the brothel. They were so young, only children and they were crying and crying and I felt so bad for them that I decided to help them run away from there. So in the night I stole the keys, opened the door and let them run."

Even though she knew the consequences she would have to face for helping them escape she never hesitated. She felt that it was too late for her, life as a brothel prostitute was her only option, but she was brave enough to save the young girls' lives even though she risked her own. She was so badly punished that she had to fight for her life in the hospital. People around her were convinced that she would never make it, but she did. And now, she sits next to me, proudly telling her story and showing her scars, never regretting her actions:

"I could never be obedient and live by their rules because I never did a single mistake in my life. When I decided to help those girls run away in Delhi I only listened to my heart. But what did I get for that, more beating and pain. But if I had a chance to do the same thing again, I would without hesitation."

Santoshi faced similar destiny as Eila, she was trafficked three times:

"After my brothel owner died one woman from Mumbai that was visiting the brothel where I was cleaning told me, why you work here for 20 rs, I take you to a place in Mumbai where you can earn more. She took me directly to the red-light area and she tried to sell me. But as soon as we entered the area I knew what was happening, so I was prepared and I started fighting and I told the brothel owner, this woman has cheated me, don't give her any money, I stay here and work as a maid but I will not take any customers. So I stayed there for few years. Then I met a man and I started trusting him, he said he would take me to my village and introduce himself as my husband. I was so happy but he brought me to the red-light area here in Pune and sold me. That's how I was forced back into this business. He came back once and took some more money from the brothel owner so there is more money I have to repay. After this I stopped thinking and planning. I can't escape this destiny, if I think about everything that has happened I get physically ill, there is no point. Now I live like this, sometimes I get customers sometimes not but I am managing to survive."

Santoshi experienced betrayal every time she dared to trust somebody and that has severely damaged her faith and basic trust in herself, in others, and in the community. After repeated breach of trust and utter betrayal without any consideration on her life and security she is left with the feeling of distrust and fear. The interpersonal trauma experienced during trafficking resulted in isolation and Santoshi did everything she could to maintain emotional distance and keep all the interaction with the people around her on the superficial level. But the experienced trauma also evoked Santoshi's attachment need for security, protection, care giving, closeness and intimacy. Because of this dualism she fought an inner struggle but the need for human contact was so strong that she let herself establish a new relationship, she let herself trust somebody again, and that is how she found herself re-trafficked not

once, but two times (Allen 2005; Herman, 1992/97). Santoshi as well as a majority of my other respondents expressed that now, in all of their relationships distrust was pervasive, and that they were convinced that nobody could ever be trusted as the people only wanted to take advantage of you:

“People will not help you survive, you have to find strength to do that on your own, people will eat you if they can, and you have to fight, always.” Eila

“How can you trust anybody in this world? Even though my children are my hope I can not be sure that they will look after me. The loneliness has never left me, no matter how hard I tried.” Deetya

6.9.2. Psychological trauma

Similar to the survey presented by Kramer (2003) that states that women experience a range of negative emotions while performing acts with customers, my respondents described feelings of sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness, shame, anxiety and anger.

“I would lay there and feel like I was carrying the weight of a dead body on me. The only thought in my head was why me, and then I would think I cannot live like this, how did I let myself end up in a life like this? Santoshi

“I had accepted it, being with customers...I was having sexual relationship with both my husband so I was used to it, same thing I was doing, same way I was feeling. I kept on thinking, what is this kind of life, why am I living, what is life all about. Physically I was used to all of this but mentally and emotionally I wasn't there, I was lonely, sad, depressed.” Deetya

My respondents were trapped in a reality where they were forced to serve innumerable men throughout day and night, they were depersonalized, who they used to be and where they came from, their history, their family, their identity, none of that mattered any more. Now they only lived to fulfil brothel owners and clients' demands. Even though they were not physically forced to serve men as they had been during seasoning, they were doing their part without protest in order to survive and that was having a devastating impact on their self, their individuality, their humanity. They were forced to create a new identity that accommodates verbal abuse, sexual harassment and rape (Farley, 3003). In order to protect themselves and live as brothel prostitutes women were forced to shut down their feelings:

“ For a few months I was very afraid for myself, having to have sex with so many man, some even drunk, but gradually I learned to live with it, my body was for selling, for earning money and now I have reached a level when my mind is not there anymore, when I am with the costumer I don't feel anything. My body is with the man but not my mind. I have learned that. I learned gradually how to come out of the fear and accept this so, now it has become such a regular thing, very mechanical.” Gabrielle

This emotional shutdown as a mean of survival was narrated by all of my respondents. Herman (1992/97) calls women's shut down of feelings, thoughts and judgment for “state of robotization”. All of my respondents developed different strategies to bear the acts they were forced to perform with customers. Early on in prostitution women would try to ease

emotional pain by thinking about something else while being with customers. Some would think about their families or children, some would focus on money:

"I was trying to think about the money during the act, for money I can buy clothes, I can buy gold, money I can send home, this is what I was trying to think and it might have helped a little bit, but afterwards I always cried. I realized that I could bear for a while, so I needed to make sure that the act was as short as possible, even if I was to get less money I would spend as little time as possible with the customers. This first customer also gave me a good suggestion on how to bear with it all. He said, keep yourself as busy as possible, when you are not working make sure that you do something else, movie, shopping, talk to others, whatever, just keep yourself busy."

The longer the women stayed in this inhuman world of sexual exploitation the more their real identities faded and their prostituted self took over. The strategy to find distraction in their minds while being with customers was abandoned, instead they found a black hole they could escape to, no feelings, no thoughts, no emotions:

"I am totally detached now, I don't feel anything, I don't think anything. Once you do one thing over and over again you stop feeling and I reached that stage now." Deetya

Emotional detachment could also be obtained by use of alcohol. Kremer's (2003) survey shows that 70 per cent of women were using drugs or alcohol in order to numb their feelings so that they could cope with prostitution. Farley (2003) calls women's use of alcohol and drugs for chemical dissociation as it helps them get rid of negative emotions while being with customers:

"Any tension, any problem, drinking is the solution for me. I drink and then I don't feel. I drink and then I don't care what happens. I don't think about my future, I sit and drink, that is all I do." Iman

In order to bear prostitution women have changed their views on their own bodies. In my respondents stories I recognised a mental detachment from their bodies. They all went through a grieving period for the losses that they suffered, innocence, virginity and youth, but now they only considered their body as a mean of survival:

"I don't think of my body anymore. It was sold, my youth was used for others to make money. Now I am using my body to get money for myself and for my children. That is the only difference. One thought that makes it easier to bear being with these men is that now the money is coming to me, not to somebody else. But it is not voluntarily or willingly. I still feel that am I forced to do this, even today. Because where else would I go?" Indira

Women affected with HIV suffer tremendously, consequences of the virus are just as severe physically as they are mentally. HIV positive women find themselves even more oppressed, judged and despised, not only by the outside community but also by other sex workers and brothel owners:

"Since I landed in Pune I have been fighting but HIV has broken me totally. I keep on changing brothels and fighting for my right to keep what I earn but lately I can't keep up. In the brothel that I am staying now everybody knows that I am positive and they are treating me really badly. It is not my fault that I got this disease. I feel I am ready to die. I can fight with everybody but I can't fight with the disease. They treat me so badly, keep my things separated, I can't eat or drink with them, they don't let me sleep on the bed, I have to

sleep on the floor under the bed. It would have been better if I would have died last time I was admitted in hospital. I don't have any strength left." Eila

Eila suffered brutal seasoning, she was re-trafficked and badly abused. She always managed to find strength to keep on fighting, to keep on living. Now, the virus is slowing breaking down her body while the way people are treating her is breaking down her spirit. She faces total isolation and judgment by the women she has considered her alike. Now she doesn't even belong in a brothel, which was the only place in the world where she felt accepted. She experience ultimate rejection and alienation.

Najla experienced severe psychological trauma by being forced to have her newborn child with her while entertaining customers:

"It was a matter of survival, not only mine but my child's. When I was with customers I was feeling so guilty, particularly when they would touch my breast. I would try to explain to them that I was breastfeeding my child, I would beg them, do whatever you want under my waist but please don't touch my breast. It was so hard, when I was with these men I was always thinking of my daughter, if I heard her cry I would start crying as well. Even now when I think about it, it is so hard and it brings all these disturbing emotions. I couldn't be there for my child whenever she needed me, if she would start crying for milk I had to finish with the customer before I could go to her, it was very, very hard."

What Najla mostly remembers from that period are feelings of guilt and fear. Although she knew that she didn't have any other options she felt guilty entertaining customers while her daughter lay in the corner or under the bed. She felt guilt for performing sexual acts with innumerable men and she felt guilt for not being able to satisfy her daughter's basic needs. She felt tremendous fear for her daughter's life. People in the brothel were offering to buy her daughter and she knew that the risk was high of her being kidnapped. Because of the emotional stress she lost her breast milk so her daughter's life depended on the mercy of her customers. If they were willing to give her some money for the milk her daughter would live one more day. She was struggling to bear an identity of a prostitute and a breastfeeding mother at the same time, desperately trying to separate them. Her pleading to customers not to touch her breast is an example of that. She wanted to keep the part of her body that was giving life and comfort to her daughter untouched and unspoiled by customers. While Najla struggled and suffered because she was having her baby girl with her in the brothel, it also gave her strength to bear and to fight, to do everything she possibly could so that they would survive:

"I used to pray to the God every morning, please give me strength to face this life. It is so hard to explain how I was feeling, on one hand I was feeling so helpless that my daughter is with me when I am with the customers but at the same time it was her presents that gave me strength, I never felt any pain when I was with these men, I was not really there, I was with my daughter. If I were alone I would have probably died. I had thoughts about running away or committing suicide but my daughter was my strength and my responsibility."

The thought of committing suicide was narrated by majority of my respondents. The ones that had children described how it was the feeling of obligation and responsibility that prevented them from ending their own lives:

"I gone to extend of thinking and planning to end my life but in the end I couldn't do it and it was because of my daughter. My parents tried their best to help me start my family life which I wasn't able to fulfill. I let down the hopes that they had for me. They did their best for me but there was no guarantee that they would take the same care of my daughter. That is the reason I decided to keep on living." Abhitha

Half of my respondents didn't see a reason for staying alive. There was no joy in the lives they were living in the brothel, they had to face sexual encounters over and over again, they were verbally abused, harassed and sometimes physically abused. But they also believed that there was no end to their suffering, there was no return for them to their families, they could never get rid of the shame and guilt they felt, so they used different techniques in hope to end their lives. Deetya explains:

"I got the feeling of wanting to commit suicide when I went back home for the first time. My hopes of a better life crashed fast and I tried to end my life few times but something always came in between. I tried to drown myself in a well but people saw and took me out. Next time I wanted to jump into that water I saw snake and went back. Once in the brothel I tried to drink some chemicals but the brothel keeper was alert and she stopped me. I was never left alone in the brothel and it was impossible to try to do something."

Krishna attempted suicide three times:

"I tried to kill myself by cutting my veins three times but the brothel keeper managed to help me. She beat me after that."

It wasn't uncommon for women in the brothel to give advice to each other on different ways to commit suicide:

"I tried to kill myself. Somebody told me that if you crush the light bulb and mix it with rice and eat it you will die. So I did that but nothing happened. Then I collected poison that we had in the house for rats but before I took that my inner voice told me, you didn't die the first time, you are not suppose to die like this, that is up to God to decide, you need to face this so you can see your family again. After that I decided never to try this again and to bear with whatever came my way." Santoshi

Just like Santoshi Eila saw her failed suicide attempt as a sign from God that it wasn't her time to die, that she had to continue living regardless of her life situation:

"Once I tried to drown myself in the water but the water was not so deep so I survived. So I thought, God is willing to bear with me and let me live so I will do that, and after that I never thought of ending my own life, my end is written in my destiny. I am very sure that when I die and reach haven I will be very happy there."

Suicide is a permanent exit from brothel prostitution. All of my respondents talked about their desperate need for at least a temporary relief from painful emotions that they had to live with every day. Some found it in self-mutilation. They would deliberately harm themselves in order to express the pain they felt inside and the act would provide them with temporary relief from feelings like anxiety, depersonalization, hopelessness and desperation:

"I use to physically hurt myself but I don't do that anymore. I had all these feelings inside of me, they were too hard to bear. I would hurt myself to ease the pain. Now I don't feel anything. I am used to this life and I don't feel a need to hurt myself. I am totally detached now, I don't feel anything." Deetya

Self-mutilation is deliberate, direct, nonsuicidal destruction of one's body tissue and it can be expressed in several different ways like skin-cutting, burning, hair-pulling, needle-sticking, interference with wound healing and bone breaking. It is a morbid form of self-help as it provides rapid but temporary relief from distressing emotions and thoughts. It is important to understand self-mutilation as a complex coping behaviour as it helps individuals to manage their emotions. The skin becomes a battlefield where internal chaos is displayed and demonstrated (Strong, 2000). Deetya explains how the physical pain that she was inflicting on herself became insufficient. In order to bear the pain of brothel prostitution she developed a chronic disconnectedness, where the feeling of detachment from her own body and everything that surrounded her, was prevailing. This psychological defence is called dissociation and it is a common response to the trauma of trafficking and prostitution (Ross & Farley & Schwartz, 2003). Deetya has slipped into a chronic state of numbness and emptiness and this extreme psychological measure has enabled her to escape an otherwise inescapable horror. She now feels depersonalized and she has become a dispassionate and detached observer rather than an anguished participant. Dissociation has helped her to reduce internal conflicts so that her life can go on.

6.9.3. Coping

As described above, brothel prostitution is having a devastating impact on my respondents. They suffer psychological, physical and social damage. The only reason they are still alive today is because of their strength, resilience and different ways of coping. Even in the face of extremely traumatic experiences they found the way to cope with the life they couldn't escape.

In the everyday life they did everything they could to survive. Some of their behaviour may be questioned by outsiders, adding to their negative social stigma, but if viewed in its right context it can be interpreted as different coping strategies used by women to enhance their survival. Majority of women's time is spent flirtatiously seeking out customers in front of the brothels. They do it so they won't be punished by brothel owners and they focus their minds on bringing in more income so that they can repay their debt more quickly.

"I also learned how to keep myself busy. If I am sad or lonely, I talk to the other girls or entertain myself, go out, watch a movie and have as many customers as possible, and earn more money." Abhitha

Abhitha describes how she had periods of depression and hopelessness, when she was unable to sleep and eat as she was overwhelmed by feelings of resignation and despair. She is grateful that there were girls from her village in the brothel that became her friends and gave her advices on how to ease the pain from inside. So when ever Abhitha felt that she was sinking into the dark hole of depression and desperation she would take action to keep her mind focused on something else.

Women also consciously try to elicit pity or love from their customers so they would treat them better. All of my respondents talked about regular customers from whom they sometimes received monetary contributions, gifts, advices, or anything else that would make their lives a bit easier to bear.

Eila describes how she found the strength in the fact that her experiences were not unique, there were many other women like her that suffered the same fate:

"I have learned to observe the girls around me, with their different stories, going through so much abuse and I have realized that I am not alone. We are all having the same problems and some even more than me. That has also given me strength, to know that I am not alone."

Eila is making cognitive efforts to change the meaning of her situation. Thinking about the fact that she is not alone reduces the emotional stress she is feeling in the brothel.

My respondents used cognitive reframing to minimize the personal significance of brothel prostitution by focusing on their families' hardship and poverty (Folkman, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1991). They were able to change the overall meaning of being a sex worker when they saw themselves as being in the position to help their families survive. Helping their families gave meaning to their personal sacrifice:

"My family is so poor, my family doesn't have a house, they don't have a roof, how are they going to survive? I realized that I had to earn more money and the only way for me to do that is to entertain the customers. I still don't feel for doing this but I don't have any other option. My parent condition is my only concern and that is where my focus is. I don't think of myself, only my parents." Krishna

"Everything I do I do for my daughter, that gives me strength and peace inside. Sometimes I think about my childhood, the extreme poverty we have suffered, and I don't want my family to suffer, and now I am supporting them, that gives me strength. When thoughts about rape and abuse come I find strength thinking about them that I have helped." Abhitha

Finding a meaning to their personal sacrifice decreased the negative impact of being a sex worker. Women felt that their suffering hasn't been in vain, that something good has come from the personal hell they had to endure. My respondents that had been rejected by their families struggled to find a meaning with the lives they were living. They felt worthless, damaged, utterly alone and without a future. Some of them used alcohol in order to cope.

All of my respondents that had children, regardless if they had contact with them or not, stated that it were the thought of their children that gave them strength to keep on living. They did everything they could to secure their future, sending money so they could go to school, saving money to their daughter's dowry, doing everything to prevent them from ending up in a red-light area.

Sapna and Mini are devadasi, they were tricked to believe that as devadasi they would live a good and blessed life, that they were special. Once in the brothel they realized what kind of life awaited them. Now, several years later, they still find comfort in the thought that they

were chosen by Goddess, that they are special, and that thought gives them strength to cope with brothel prostitution:

“People were telling me that I was blessed, that I was going to have a good life because I was devadasi, I will not get married because I was married to Goddess, and when I get older I will go to work in the city. Everybody always told me that I was a blessed child and that I had to accept the life that Goddess gave me. This is still very strong in me, it’s the reason I am alive, whatever is given to me I must endure.” Sapna

Available research shows that normalization is a very common coping mechanism among victim of sexual exploitation (Institute of social sciences, 2005). My respondents’ stories confirm that. In order to survive they start seeing the coercive environment as a normal experience, looking less at themselves as victims of trafficking but rather something they were destined to do.

6.10 Leaving brothel prostitution

The majority of my respondents returned to their families after their debts were repaid. All of them returned shortly after to the brothel prostitution. I will describe main reasons for their returns back to the life they had so desperately tried to run away from. It shows just how devastating the impact has been of all the traumatic events they have survived. It will also show how important it is to understand the cultural context in which trafficking and prostitution occurs.

Eila was only 11 years old when she ran away from home because of constant abuse. Several years later, after being trafficked three times, she returns to her village:

“But nobody wanted to accept me back, not even my parents. Everybody was blaming me for going to Bombay and becoming a sex worker. Under no condition were they going to take me back. Then I said to myself that I don’t need them, I will not accept them either and the life that has been given to me by God I will accept. That life I will fight out until the end.”

I have described earlier the process in the brothel where the women’s former identity is gradually and irrevocably destroyed and a new enslaved identity is build. In the end women start believing that there are absolutely no other alternatives but to be sex workers. They become convinced that there is no way back for them to the respectable society as they have violated their own moral principles and betrayed their basic human attachments for the sake of survival. But a small amount of hope never leaves them, the separation from their families have been very hard to bear, regardless if they came from an abusive home situation. They miss their extended family, friends and community, they miss a sense of belonging. So once they are free to leave the brothel, they gather all the courage they have and return back to their families. Many experience same rejection as Eila, as their families refuse to recognize their victimization. Women are blamed although they have been sexually violated and they now face social death. Family rejection is a way of avoiding a negative

social stigma for the rest of family members. For Eila this had a devastating impact. It was the last confirmation that there was no life for her outside brothel prostitution.

Gabrielle was accepted back by her mother but the rest of community would not allow her to live a normal life:

“My mother was not convinced with my story and she begged me to tell her the truth. So I told her and she cried so much, it was so painful for her to listen to my story. But she didn’t reject me, she accepted me back. She told me that now we will work hard but that I would never have to go back. So I started living. But nobody believed my story and everybody thought that I was working as a sex worker, my cloths and behaviour had changed and they were convinced that I was sold. It was very hard for me, everybody were harassing me and telling me that I should make myself available, they were calling me names and using abusive language. So in the end I told my mother that I couldn’t stay, that I couldn’t take it anymore. My mother was asking why but I told her that they would never accept me but that she needed to have her community.”

All Gabrielle wanted was to put the past behind her and resume her life. But she faced total alienation and exclusion from the rest of community. They didn’t allow her to take on her old identity, she couldn’t escape the roll of sex worker. She could deal with harassment, abusive language and degradation in the red-light area, but she could not face it in her own village. There it became painfully clear what she had become and what she had lost. She felt utterly alone. In the red-light area she was surrounded by women like her, there nobody judged her. Moreover, she wanted to spare her mother and daughter the negative social stigma. So she returned to the only place where she felt that she belonged, to the work that she felt she mastered, leaving behind her the last piece of hope for a better life:

“Why I came back? I had never done anything else, I didn’t know anything else, this was the only thing on my mind, I needed to go and do this again, I am used to it now. This is where I belong.”

Following quote by Indira illustrates well how successful the machinery of trafficking and prostitution is in irrevocably changing the psychology of its victims making sure they are forever trapped in the inhuman world of sexual exploitation:

“I never told my family that I am a sex worker. For one month I stayed with my brother and then I decided to come back to Pune and my old life. My mother-in-law asked me to come back and start living with my husband again. But the feeling of guilt is so strong inside of me now, I have slept with so many men and I don’t deserve or belong to a family life now, I am in the different world now, I have lost all my respect, there is no going back for me anymore.”

Although Indira was forced to become a sex worker the feeling of shame is strong. She has internalized negative social attitudes towards sex workers and she feels damaged and degraded, unworthy any other kind of life. Trafficking and brothel prostitution have stripped her of her identity, her freedom and her dignity. She has been pushed to the margins of the society, she has been forced to violate social norms and codes and now she believes that she is immoral, socially degenerated woman that doesn’t belong, or deserve to be in the normal society.

My respondents' thoughts about the future were anxiety-ridden. The older they get, the harder will it be to attract customers. One day they will lose their income. They try to save as much money as they can, hoping to be able to purchase a small plot of land that will at least be a guaranty for having a roof over their heads when they are old. But the thoughts about the future, just as the thoughts about the past, are too hard to bear, so the women try to avoid them as much as they can, living in an endless present, taking one day at the time:

"Sometimes the thoughts about the past come, even though I don't want them too, I have had a hard life, so many bad things, it is not easy to forget. I don't think about the future, there is nothing there, my brain is not working when it comes to that, I can't think about another life. I don't have anything, I would love to go back to my family but how can I do that, I don't have any husband to show them, I have nothing." Santoshi

"I don't believe in anything, no God, only destiny. What is in your destiny you cannot run away from. I went through such a life, I lost my childhood, I lost my youth and now I am getting older. Pain and tension are long gone, whatever happens I need to face it, I don't have feelings anymore. My childhood wasn't happy, in my youth anybody could do whatever they wanted with me and now the only positive thing is that I have control over my monetary situation. But there is no happiness..." Deetya

7 Summary and discussion

The purpose of this study has been to examine initial and continuing trauma and its effects, and coping strategies that women use in order to survive. The initial trauma occurs during the trafficking and seasoning process in the brothel. The term continuing trauma refers to violence and psychological trauma experienced in brothel prostitution. The main questions answered during this survey regarded how women were trafficked and seasoned, what coping strategies they used during seasoning, how the lives of sex workers are in terms of violence and psychological trauma and what coping strategies are used in order to bear brothel prostitution.

My respondents have been forced by grinding poverty and helplessness, by culture and tradition, by social and familial structures and expectations, by violence and neglect into the inhuman world of sexual exploitation. They are some of millions of South Asian women that are economically, socially and politically subordinated. They were viewed as sex objects and commodities to be bought, sold and used and they survived one of the worst and most abominable violations of human rights. A promise of a better life, in form of a work opportunity or marriage, delivered them into the hands of traffickers that sold them to a brothel. Few experiences in the world can be as bad as being a young female in an Indian brothel. My respondents narrated stories of sadistic exploitation and described how they were initiated into brothel prostitution through acute physical and psychological violence.

The results of my study show that brothel owners use systematic methods of coercion and control in order to break women's resistance so that they will adapt to captivity, believing that they have ceased to exist socially except as sex workers. When the women first arrived at the brothel they were totally disoriented and their initial emotions were confusion, disbelief and shock. The seasoning process began while they were in this vulnerable state. The harm perpetrated against these women is in no way accidental. The institution of trafficking and prostitution has developed to perfection the art of torture. Brothel owners use unpredictable and extreme violence in form of physical and sexual abuse to break women physically and mentally, making them controllable and submissive. Farley (2003) states that traffickers, brothel owners, as well as some of the customers are among the world's most skilled practitioners in the art of torture as they promote and maintain an ideology of male dominance and contempt for women by practicing coercive control.

While in captivity, unable to escape and under total control of their perpetrators, my respondents experienced prolonged and repeated trauma. Brothel owners used coercive techniques in order to reshape the psychology of the victims and establish total control. Methodical, repetitive infliction of psychological trauma in form of physical and sexual abuse, threats of harm and death, control over the women's bodies and bodily functions, left the victims in a desperate need of solace. Even the smallest indulgence from the brothel owners offered comfort to the women but that only further undermined their psychological resistance (Herman 1992/97). Brothel owners methods of brainwashing, indoctrination,

physical control and physical and sexual abuse, ultimately lead to a new identity formation among my respondents. The women's former identity was gradually and irrevocably destroyed while a new enslaved identity was built, an identity that included a body that could be controlled, used and violated by others, a new self image of a dehumanized person and a reality that only consists of evil and where nobody can be trusted. My respondents were convinced that there was no way back for them to the respectable society as they had been marked out for social death. Brown (2000) calls this stage the "acclimatisation phase", when the women have realised that there are no other options and they have conditioned themselves to a life in a brothel.

Although the amount of violence inflicted on my respondents declined after the seasoning process ended and they had accepted to entertain the customers, the physical and emotional violence was a norm in brothel prostitution, something that Farley also emphasize in her survey (2003). While my respondents were repaying their debts they were under the total control and mercy of brothel owners. If the women were not showing total obedience or if customers were dissatisfied, women were physically punished. They were trapped in a reality where they were forced to serve innumerable men throughout the day and night, they were depersonalized, who they used to be and where they came from, their history, their family, and their identity, none of that mattered any more. Even though they were not physically forced to serve men as they had been during seasoning, they were doing their part without protest in order to survive and that was having a devastating impact on their self, their individuality and their humanity. In order to protect themselves and live as brothel prostitutes women were forced to shut down their feelings. Several of my respondents attempted suicide and some used self-mutilation as relief from distressing emotions and thoughts. The majority of my respondents described typical symptoms of PTSD and the severity of symptoms was strongly connected to their experiences during seasoning process.

My respondents showed different ways of coping with the acute trauma that was constantly present during seasoning. Looking at the conditions and options that were available for them, it is clear that the majority of the women felt that the problems they were facing were not changeable, so they used emotional-focused coping in order to bear the trauma. Without possibility to change what was happening to them they made cognitive efforts to reduce the emotional impact of trauma. Some used cognitive reframing in order to change the meaning of what was happening, some deployed attention from the traumatic circumstances that they were enduring by finding an escape route in their minds and some used alcohol to detach from the experience of sexual exploitation. Alcohol addiction functions both as a way to survive the exploitation and violence and as a barrier to escape prostitution as all the earnings are spent on alcohol.

Life as a brothel prostitute is having a devastating impact on my respondents. They suffer psychological, physical and social damage. The only reason they are still alive today is because of their strength, resilience and different ways of coping. Because they now have

some freedom and control over their own lives they tend to use more problem-focused coping. One example of that is when they consciously try to elicit pity or love from their customers so that they would treat them better. My respondents used cognitive reframing to minimize the personal significance of brothel prostitution by focusing on their families' hardship and poverty. They were able to change the overall meaning of being a sex worker when they saw themselves as being in the position to help their families survive. Helping their families gave meaning to their personal sacrifice and made life in the brothel easier to bear.

When my respondents narrated their actions, thoughts and feelings, once they were finally free to leave the brothel, it became painfully clear how devastating the impact of all the traumatic experiences they survived had been. Although they were in control of their own bodies again, the chains of sexual exploitation were not automatically broken. The machinery of trafficking and prostitution has irrevocably changed the psychology of my respondents making sure they are forever trapped in the inhuman world of sexual exploitation.

My respondents return to the brothel prostitution can appear voluntary, but make no mistake, the voluntarism has been absent from the day they were trafficked, and it will continue to be until we realize that at present, the harm of trafficking and prostitution is culturally, socially and politically invisible. The human trafficking is now such an important political priority on the international and national agenda and there is a rapid rise of research studies on the subject. But the literature that addresses the experience of trafficking and prostitution from the point of view of those that are the real authorities on the subject, the women themselves, is just a small drop in the sea of contemporary research on human trafficking. There is little understanding and knowledge about the brutal and systematical terror that is inflicted on the victims of trafficking for the sexual exploitation and there is a widespread ignorance and misinformation about the consequences of brothel prostitution. To be able to help the victims of this atrocious crime we need to have in-depth knowledge on how the institution of trafficking and sexual exploitation is constructed and promoted and the effects that it has on its victims. Only with that knowledge can we provide adequate psychosocial intervention to address the trauma and rebuild the victims' self-esteem, trust and cohesive sense of identity. Only when the trauma is addressed in a culturally appropriate way, can the self-blame and shame be reduced and women can realistically understand their victimization and the power dynamics within their families, social networks and communities that have produced their vulnerability, making them easy targets for traffickers.

7.1 Suggestion for the additional studies in the field of human trafficking for sexual exploitation

It is remarkable how often the customers are absent in the contemporary debate on the trafficking and prostitution. It is almost like sex trade only involves the vulnerable victims and criminal elements. But trafficking and prostitution wouldn't exist without demand so it is important to widen the perspective of the debate and gather knowledge on who is buying these women and why, and what they think about the coercive environment that is there for their satisfaction.

Nearly all brothel owners have been sex workers themselves. They were able to leave prostitution by making a conscious decision to profit from the sale of other vulnerable women. I think it would be very interesting to learn more about the complex psychological process they went through when they learned to protect one's own self-interest regardless of the harm inflicted on others.

A study that explores how some sex workers have managed to leave brothel prostitution is essential for providing adequate assistance for the women that leave prostitution. We need to learn how they were able to address the ravages of trauma and reconstruct their life stories and identities, and how they found their place in the society again.

Evaluation of NGOs working methods with sex workers is needed. We need to know how much knowledge NGO workers have regarding psychological consequences of trafficking and prostitution. That knowledge is essential in their work with sex workers as they would be able to better understand women's patterns of thinking and behaving.

Interview guide

Background information

How old are you?
Where are you from?
How long have you been living in this area?
Can you tell me about your background, i.e. your life before you came here?

Transportation and arrival at the brothel

Have you been trafficked/ brought to work here?
How old were you when you were trafficked?
How were you brought to the brothel?
When did you realize for the first time that you were being trafficked?
What happened when you arrived at the brothel for the first time?
What was the brothel owner telling you?
What were you thinking and feeling about what was happening to you?

Seasoning

How long were you in the brothel before you had your first customer?
What happened in the time between your arrival at the brothel and your first customer?
Where were they keeping you?
Were you physically and sexually abused?
What happened when you had your first customer?
What were you feeling and thinking during this time?
Did you get any support during this time?
Where did you find strength to endure what was happening to you?
When did you accept brothel owner's demands?
What were you thinking and feeling then?

Brothel prostitution

How has your life been since you became a sex worker?
How have you been treated by your brothel owner?
Have you had violent customers?
Have you tried to escape?
What are your feelings and thoughts about the life you are living?
What do you do to make your life easier?
When you feel sad and alone, what do you do to make yourself feel better?
Do you have anybody to turn to for the emotional support?
Have you tried to commit suicide?
Do you drink alcohol?
What gives you strength?

Leaving brothel prostitution

Have you returned back to your family?

What happened when you returned?

Why did you come back to the brothel?

What do you think about your future?

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