

'Whatever they said was for my own benefit. They gave me counselling at the right time. I was very confused, and I had planned to go back to India or somewhere. But they made me understood not to do it.'

Aalia*, Survivor

A virtuous cycle of survivor recovery

Rehabilitation and reintegration of CSE/CSEC victims through sustainable systemic change in Bangladesh

Project overview

This eighteen month project funded by Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS) saw Justice and Care implementing a holistic approach, which was highly successful in its aims of supporting survivors of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) and commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in Bangladesh, and tackling the systemic issues that underpin these crimes. Recognising that newly-repatriated survivors are highly vulnerable and at risk of re-trafficking due to ongoing trauma, precarious social status and poverty, the project, which ran from July 2020-December 2021, succeeded in providing responsive, holistic care to support survivor recovery and deal with crises, empowering them to reintegrate and build new lives.

The project consisted of:

- Repatriation of Bangladeshi survivors of CSE and CSEC from India, working to both expedite individual cases and to build the understanding and capacity of the stakeholders involved to conduct repatriations in a coordinated, efficient and victim-centric way.
- Intensive and consistent aftercare to survivors, including regular follow ups

creating a virtuous cycle of trust, and relevant and timely service provision.

- Provision of activities including psychosocial counselling, health care provision, vocational training programmes and establishment and support of income generation activities.
- Peer-mentoring offered by 'Champion Survivors' who have reached an advanced stage of reintegration and want to work to support other survivors who are at an earlier stage of recovery.
- Adaptive activities to cater to the unprecedented, urgent needs of survivors in light of the Covid pandemic and super-cyclone Amphan, including emergency provision of groceries, hygiene materials and repairs.
- Training for aftercare stakeholders aimed at building their understanding of trauma-informed and victim-centric practice.
- Training for Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) and police in victim identification and a victim-centric approach that prevents re-trafficking.
- Building relationships with key government and law enforcement stakeholders to influence systems level change.

Key achievements

166 survivors repatriated

146 survivors intensively supported with aftercare

200+ previously reintegrated survivors supported during crisis periods in the pandemic

411 aftercare stakeholders trained

497 BGB members trained

382 police trained



Key outcomes

67 victims of trafficking were identified at the border by trained BGB members and referred to Justice and Care, against a baseline of no victim identification by BGB who had not been trained

75% of survivors supported demonstrated improved mental and emotional wellbeing over the course of the project

88% of survivors supported with income generation activities achieved profitability

79 survivors graduated from the intensive aftercare programme, having reached an advanced stage of rehabilitation

Zero incidents of re-trafficking

Systemic change outcomes

- Directly shaping the US TIP report's prioritised recommendations for the country
- Requested by the Government of Bangladesh to draft national victim identification guidelines on their behalf
- Pioneering the use of video conference by law enforcement to record evidence and intelligence from newly repatriated survivors
- Advancing draft bilateral Unified Standard Operating Procedures for repatriation to be ratified by India and Bangladesh

Findings from the independent evaluation

An independent comparative study was conducted by research partner Population Council, aimed at comparing and assessing the impact of three GFEMS-funded prevention and reintegration projects to address CSE of women and children in Bangladesh and India, including the programme run by Justice and Care. As part of this evaluation, interviews were conducted with 49 survivors supported by Justice and Care, as well as key project staff and other relevant stakeholders.

Key evaluation findings

Survivors emphasised that they had **built strong relationships with their aftercare workers**. The consistency and regularity of the support was flagged as hugely beneficial, helping survivors to develop confidence and trust.

Survivors expressed particular **appreciation for the access to psychosocial counselling**, as many were struggling with extreme trauma and a variety of mental health concerns following their repatriation. They reported that the service providers listened patiently and tried to find solutions for their problems, maintained confidentiality, and respected and motivated them. Survivors reflected that the counselling sessions helped them to lead a normal life, overcome fears and suicidal thoughts, control their emotions, and dream about a brighter future.

'Case workers gave us hope for a better life. They assured me that they would be by my side and helped me have a better life here... actually it was not always about the material things that I received from them, rather the friendship that the case workers provided us, the way they sympathised with us and supported us that was what mattered most.'

Vinati*, Survivor

'I liked the counselling service the most because they explained everything with care. After talking to them and hearing what they say, I felt unburdened and that made me feel well. I feel that they are well qualified for providing counselling services. They can explain everything wonderfully.'

Saba*, Survivor

'I was very depressed and totally broken. They provided me counselling support, consoled me. I have gained confidence after their counselling sessions. I have become strong. Now I am very happy and feel very strong.'

Shila*, Survivor

Survivors **benefited from economic empowerment interventions**, including vocational training, job placements and income generating activities, with many highlighting the transformative nature of these initiatives.

'They used to give many trainings, and it was very helpful to do business. I can solve many problems now, they taught us how to start a new business, how to make profit from it.'

Raakhi*, Survivor

A key concern for survivors was how they were perceived within their families and wider communities, with **many facing stigma and struggling to reintegrate** following their period of exploitation. Several survivors spoke about **efforts made by Justice and Care staff to sensitise and convince family and neighbours to treat them with compassion**, although they highlighted that there is more work to be done to overcome the stigma within the wider community.

'They gave orientation to my family and neighbours. They have convinced parents and other people that parents should stand by their daughters.'

Padma*, Survivor

'My family used to support me, but other relatives and neighbours used to talk about me, that is why I never go outside.'

Kareena*, Survivor

The **evaluators endorsed the efficacy of the model followed by Justice and Care**, highlighting the strong focus on a victim-centric approach, and the project's *"adherence to safety, trustworthiness, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, and empowerment, voice and choice"*. They noted that survivors *"enjoyed participating in the intervention activities and appreciated the support received through the projects"* with the majority of survivors reporting improvements in emotional, financial and social wellbeing within the project period.

Key learnings

- Justice and Care's holistic, needs-based, aftercare model has been successful in its aim of creating a virtuous cycle of trust, responding to survivors' needs both proactively and reactively as they arise, leading to stable reintegration and preventing re-trafficking.
- Incorporating peer mentorship has been an innovative and promising approach, embraced by survivors, and with potential for future expansion.
- Individual recovery remains constrained by societal context and prevailing cultural norms that stigmatise survivors of MSHT. Although some progress has been made in sensitising family and community members, there is scope for more work to be done to improve wider community acceptance and support of survivors.

For more information read the full evaluation report at https://knowledgecommons.popcouncil.org/departments_sbsr-pgy/1747/

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