

Asia Pacific Region



The United Nations Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific has noted the particular vulnerability of the Asia Pacific region with respect to human trafficking.

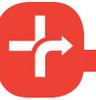
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The Asia Pacific region is seen as the most vulnerable region for trafficking because of its huge population pyramid, growing urbanization, and extensive poverty. Trafficking is a violation of human rights. Victims of trafficking suffer from physical and mental abuse and social stigmatization. They become isolated, losing ties with their former lives and families. At the societal level, trafficking undermines development efforts and raises social and health costs. The ongoing abuses of human rights and the growing social and economic inequality within and between countries has led to an environment in which many women have few choices and resources, and are thus vulnerable to being lured, misled, or forced into being trafficked. Women who are most vulnerable to being trafficked are those aged ten to thirty-five and who are impoverished, uneducated, or from indigenous, ethnic minority, rural, or refugee groups. Such women often lack access to education and meaningful employment opportunities. Harmful cultural and customary practices also perpetuate discriminatory and violent practices that further diminish women's opportunities and lead to further marginalization and commodification.

Poverty is growing in cities around the world at an alarming rate. The city of Manila in the Philippines, where I was born and raised, is one of the fastest in terms of its growth of urban slums or what we call 'squatters' (informal settlers). I did my Community Analysis in Baragay Batasan Hills, the second largest *barangay* (community) in the Philippines in terms of land area and third largest in terms of population which has been home to some 210,700 residents. At least seventy percent are informal settlers. Some of the informal settlers in this community work as bar girls in the bars that we frequently visit as part of our ministry in reaching out to prostituted women in this area. Having a deeper understanding of the needs of people in this community through the 'community mapping' process, I had a better perspective of the needs of the people in this place. It provided me with a new set of eyes that will look at the issue of women getting into prostitution as a result of the lack of education due to limited job opportunities. We have a better idea of what kind of programs to invest in that will appropriately address the felt needs of the people. We have gained a deeper understanding of how to address the needs of the people in the community that will strategically lead us to address the issue of women working in the bars and streets of this particular *barangay*.

One of the main objectives of the survey that I did in this *barangay* was to discover the felt needs of the people in the community. In one of the survey questions, we asked the respondents to answer this question: "What are the three major problems that are the biggest concern for my family?." This question aims to identify the three main concerns of the families in the area. The result shows that poverty (72.3%) is still perceived as the most crucial problem in the community.

Next to the problem of poverty, the respondents perceive that unemployment (61.4%) is something that concerns them. We found out that most of the unemployed are the women that we conducted



the interview with. The third problem was attributed to poor education (48.5%). This survey result affirmed the poor condition of the public school (Batasan National High School) that we have visited. Among the other concerns in the community are drugs and alcohol at 38.6%, crimes at 30.7%, and gangs/fraternity at 20.8%.

These survey results reflected the status of the community and explain why women work in the bars and streets and get into prostitution and exploitation. Poverty, lack of employment, and poor education systems have been the strong drivers behind the exploitation in the urban areas. This calls for a thoughtful practice of ministry to serve the people in this community.

Partnering with a local ministry that has been reaching out to women in prostitution for almost twenty years (Samaritana Transformational Ministries), I co-founded a non-profit organization called MADE IN HOPE (Restoring Hope and Crafting a Future for Exploited Women and Children) that seeks to provide educational and work opportunities for women who have been rescued from the commercial sex trade in the Asia-Pacific. The training center that we have is a seven minute *'jeepney-ride'* from this community. We look forward to reaching out to more women in this *barangay* that will ultimately bring healing, restoration, and 'Shalom' in the lives of the people in this community.