

Combating Human Trafficking

Case Study One

Victim: Karla, a 22-year old female trafficked in Denmark.

Type of Exploitation: forced criminality



Karla's Story:

I thought I was lucky to have been promised the opportunity to work in a smart city centre hotel in another part of the country. I got the job offer through a distant relative who took me to the city and introduced me to a group of 'her' business associates. They were very kind at first and I was excited. I soon realised that things were not actually what was promised. At the beginning, they helped me with some basic training and to apply for a job at the front desk of a hotel. They also made sure I was presentable so that I could go for an interview. With the CV they provided me, complete with references I got the job. The hotel took my address from the CV. It wasn't my real address, but I guess no one from the hotel ever checked. I also provided the hotel with details of a bank account that my wages were paid into. I wasn't able to access that account to get hold of any money, but I guess nobody checked for that either. Who would give their employer a bank account that they can't access? At least the hotel provided meals during my shifts so I didn't go hungry when I was working. I ate as much as I could on every shift.

At work, I followed my orders from the traffickers. I began to change non-commissionable room reservations into ones booked by the traffickers 'fake' travel agency so that the commission could be paid directly into their bank account. However many reservations I changed, the traffickers always wanted more. I started to volunteer to work extra shifts, so I could change more reservations. I knew it was risky so I tried to keep to myself. I didn't go to any staff social functions but volunteered to cover other employees' shifts instead. When colleagues offered me a lift home after work, it was easy to have them drop me off on the street corner where the traffickers always picked me up.

I don't know why I kept doing what I was doing. I felt trapped and had nowhere else to go. I was afraid of what the traffickers might do to me. Their plan was to have me apply for the same job in a bigger and better hotel as soon as one became available so they could make more money on each reservation I changed. It was almost a relief when the hotel discovered what I was doing and called the police. When I was arrested, the police were really only interested in the crime I committed, not my story. They kept me in jail though, as I had no fixed address or any means of support. At least I felt safe from the traffickers there. It was only when the case went to court that my true story came out and with it, the story of several others, like me. It seems that these traffickers had quite a big business going across the city. We were their hidden employees really, working hard for them while employed by the hotels; working hard to cheat the local hotels and feed funds into the traffickers' bank accounts

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Case Study Four

Victims: Estella, 35-years old and Angelica, 22-years, both Filipino

Type of Trafficking: domestic and sexual exploitation



Estella's Story:

I was born in the northern Philippines and I have a diploma in nursing. I left three of my five children in my village three years ago to work in Malaysia as a domestic worker. My two older children also work as domestic servants for some families in our province but their schooling is paid for by their employers so they receive less than \$20 per month. I miss them but am happy that they go to school.

I am very good friends with the younger girl that I am travelling with, Angelica who is 22, because we both now work for the same Saudi prince. We have been on the road, travelling the world for some time now. As I am not allowed to contact my family she has become very close to me. Being quite a bit older than her, I have so far been lucky not to have been sexually abused by the prince but I know that this has not been the case for Angelica. She has told me her story many times – how she began working as a domestic servant in the Philippines and how after a few years was recruited by an agency which sent her to Malaysia to work for Saudi princes. The agent turned out to be a trafficker. When she arrived in Kuala Lumpur her passport and mobile phone were taken from her. She talks about having lost all her sense of her own identity and the links with her beloved family at home. Even worse – she was sold 11 times to different Saudi Arabian employers who took her all over the world with them.

This is what happened to us in London before we were finally saved. The Prince booked an entire floor of a luxury hotel for his family and us 'maids' (as he liked to call us) as he always did. Once we had unpacked the entire luggage of the family I asked for some hours off because I had seen a church near the hotel. I hadn't prayed for so long and was desperate to feel the lovely atmosphere of a church again –away from all my troubles. The Prince was offended with my request and beat me whilst he shouted "After Allah, here I am your God!". I knew he had hurt Angelica before but to now also beat me! This was really enough; I didn't care anymore about anything I just knew I had to get away from him and his bullying family.

The staff at the hotel seemed so nice. They had even made a point of talking to us as if we were guests and not servants. We seemed like real people to them! I took Angelica with me on the day that the family were due to shop in Knightsbridge and went to see the person who seemed to be in charge of room cleaning – 'the housekeeper' - I had worked out that this woman was probably the person in charge of the nice girls who cleaned the bedroom suites. We told her, "We have been forced to work for the Prince and his family! We have been beaten and abused! We can't return home because he has our passports and is controlling our families and children. Please help us!"

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Case Study Five

Victim: Osama, 35- year old Bangladeshi male in the UK

Type of Trafficking: bonded labour



Osama's Story:

I thought things were really looking up for me when I heard from a good friend that a businessman he knew in Scotland was looking for men to work for him in his Highlands hotel. The wages I was earning in Bangladesh hardly covered day-to-day living costs so this promise of a new start in life in the beautiful Highlands of Scotland was so attractive to me and my family. The hotel owner requested a deposit of £18,000 in exchange for a job as a chef and a good salary. I managed to take out a loan from a local money lender and to scrimp and save what I could from my wages. My wife even sold her jewellery and her family lent me some of the savings they had accrued. With my deposit in hand and enough money for a flight to Scotland, I left Bangladesh excited for my future and dreaming of one day building up my own business just like the hotel owner I was to work for.

I was forced to work really long hours at the Stewart Hotel – sometimes starting at 5am and not finishing until after midnight- and on tasks not just as a chef. In the first month of being in Scotland, as well as working in the kitchen I had to paint the hotel, clean some of the bedrooms and I even spent two days cutting and moving logs in the hotel grounds when it was below freezing outside. Arefin barely paid me – sometimes not at all, and I had to live in a broken caravan with four or five other men. There was no water or heating and it was damp as the window was broken. I was terrified working for him. He was like a master and we were like the slaves. He had a terrible temper and would throw plates. Once, when someone was a few minutes late, he threw a pot of hot oil on the floor at our feet. He had control over us. He said he would send us back to Bangladesh. He has important relatives and I was very scared what would happen if we were sent back.

My meagre salary left me struggling to clear my debt at home (a burden that continues even today). The people that I had loaned money from in Bangladesh even threatened to remove one of my kidneys to sell it for cash as a repayment. The whole experience has left me so emotionally scarred, I missed my family so badly all the time I was in Scotland and I feel that I have let them down so badly. I was on anti-depressants and now I have counselling. I don't know if I'll ever get back to normal.