

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents findings and analysis related to the factors involved in the reintegration process of the nine case study returnees. Following the conceptual framework presented in chapter two, this chapter first describes the factors affecting the reintegration process of returnees. These factors are health, economic, and legal situation, as well as family and community relationships in the lives of returnees. Then it discusses the indicators of reintegration as defined by returnees, returnees' needs and concerns, and future hopes and plans of returnees. Finally, it discusses how mental health -- specifically the ability to overcome stigmatization -- is a key factor in the reintegration process of returnees. Finally, looking first at the factor of mental health and stigmatization and then at the other factors, the reintegration level of case study returnees is categorized as high, intermediate, or low.

#### **4.2 Factors involved in the reintegration process of selected returnees**

Based on the interviews, there are many factors involved in the reintegration process of returnees. Among these factors are health, economic, legal situation, family relationship, and community relationship. This section discusses how each factor influences the reintegration process of returnees in this research.

##### **4.2.1 Health**

Health, including physical health and especially mental health, is a key concern for returnees. In particular, psychological problems may be multi-faceted and vary between returnees who confront diseases related to uterine infection and cancer. This section discusses the physical and mental health of returnees, including coping with stigmatization and emotional well-being.

### **Physical health**

Most returnees do not have physical health problems except in the case of Somjai and Lumyai. Somjai has reproductive health problems as a result of her trafficking experience. Meanwhile, Lumyai was forced to undergo plastic breast surgery. She said she has been suffering from the surgery and is afraid it might cause cancer. Somjai and Lumyai in particular have had to face both physical and mental health problems.

### **Mental health**

#### *Coping with stigmatization*

Those returnees who face psychological problems often feel isolated and ashamed. Fah said, "I just can not forget what they have done to me and what I had to do there. It was a big shame. I do not think I can forget that...Right now I feel so isolated and alone" (Personal interview, January 12, 2008). Meanwhile, Koy feels like she can not talk to anyone so she often ends up talking to herself, her cat, and her mom who has already passed away: "I have no one to talk to about my experience. My siblings and children do not understand why I came back empty-handed after living abroad for many years. I can only talk to my mom and my cat" (Koy, personal interview, January 20, 2008). Koy also has nightmares in her sleep and is absent-minded.

#### *Emotional well-being*

In terms of mental health, returnees also report suffering from depression. Duang, a very well-mannered returnee, is still in a great amount of pain from being "pooying khai tua" and often feels depressed. Duang, Fah, and Koy say they have low self-esteem because they feel guilty and ashamed about their experience as sex workers abroad. For example, Fah said, "What I did in Italy makes me feel like I am a bad person. I will go to hell" (Personal interview, January 12, 2008).

Some returnees in this study also face alcohol addiction but are in denial of their addiction. Although Somjai and Suai<sup>1</sup> expressed that they have no mental problems, their addiction to alcohol reveals otherwise. Somjai and Suai use it as a way to forget their trafficking experiences. According to Suai's sister, "Suai drinks alcohol everyday. She keeps talking about her bad experience abroad and injustice regarding why those bad people [traffickers] have not been prosecuted yet" (Suai's sister, personal interview, January 12, 2008).

Lastly, repetitive thinking and behavior could be a symptom of psychological instability or a mental disorder. Lumyai thinks and does things repeatedly: "I still remember what I did in the Netherlands..." (Lumyai, personal interview, July 27, 2007). In the case of Somjai, based on the researcher's observations, Somjai repeats herself very often but does not realize it.

#### *Psychological counseling*

Mental health is a complex area that needs to be addressed in order to reintegrate. Time and psychological counseling helps heal wounds. Therefore, returnees who seem to have mental problems but were not properly treated are at risk of being emotionally unstable. Based on the researcher's participant observation, the researcher found that providing a space for returnees to come together to share their experiences is a way to address the isolation that returnees may feel when they return. They have been unable to share their experiences with those around them or to speak with anyone who they feel can understand what happened to them.

#### **4.2.2 Economic situation**

Aside from health problems, economic problems are another concern for returnees during the process of reintegration. This section discusses the economic situation of returnees, particularly employment and income, debt, savings, and

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<sup>1</sup> Suai was forced to undergo an abortion while abroad.

financial assistance. Economic insecurity for returnees puts them at risk for being trafficked again and is a significant obstacle to their reintegration.

*Employment and income*

Seven out of nine returnees in this study have difficulties with permanent employment and adequate income due to their lack of skills and education. Meena and Salee are the two most educated returnees and are the only returnees with a secure job and income. Meena has a diploma from a vocational college and works as a direct salesperson for a big, well-known company and earns at least 10,000 baht a month. Salee is pursuing her bachelor's degree and currently works as a teacher at kindergarten school earning 4,000 baht per month.

The other returnees who lack skills or a higher level of education work as farmers or daily laborers. Somjai, Suai, Yen, and Duang returned to their original communities to work as farmers and raise cattle. Although they have job security because they are self-employed, they do not always have enough income:

“It is not rice season yet but I have no money left to pay for my living expenses no matter how much I try to save. I do not know what to do. My aunt told me to go work in a factory in Bangkok. I might go.” (Yen, personal interview, January 12, 2008)

Their income is insecure because of market instability. Although returnees have financial difficulties and selling their cattle can reduce financial problems, some do not want to sell their cattle right now due to low selling prices. Duang said, “I would rather wait until the price [for cows] gets higher to sell my cows” (Personal interview, January 20, 2008).

Although Yen is a farmer, she decided to open a noodle shop to supplement her farming income. She received a 53,000 baht grant from the Bureau of Anti-trafficking in Women and Children. Unfortunately, her business did not earn enough profit so she had to shut down her business. Her business may have failed because of

her lack of business skills. She expressed that she wants to participate in skill-training programs so that she can supplement her farming income through other jobs.

Aside from farming, returnees without a high level of education or skills have no choice but to be employed as daily laborers. Both Lumyai (who finished grade nine) and Fah (who finished grade six) can not return to farming due to family rejection so they resettled in urban areas to work in unsecure, low-income jobs. As for Koy (who finished grade seven), she did not have a place to live in her original farming community so she had to move elsewhere to find work.

Lumyai is a hard-working factory worker who works long hours and overtime, but she only makes around 170 baht a day, which is not enough to pay off her debt or cover her living expenses. Meanwhile, Fah and Koy make low wages as daily laborers in factories. Koy explained, "I work in a bottle-making factory. I work from 8 pm – 8 am and make 2,000 baht per month. I have to pay for housing and have around 500-700 baht left to spend for the whole month. It is not enough for my living expenses but I do not know what else I can do because I do not have much education" (Personal interview, January 20, 2008).

### *Debt*

Two returnees, Duang and Fah have debt that leads to economic insecurity. Before she migrated, Duang took out a 26,000 baht loan from the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives in order to buy fertilizer and pesticides for farming. In order to pay for expenses related to her voluntary migration to Italy (before she was trafficked), Fah mortgaged thirteen rai<sup>2</sup> of her family's land. She has to pay off the 270,000 baht mortgage, otherwise her family will permanently lose this land. Duang and Fah feel pressured to earn more money to pay off their debt.

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<sup>2</sup> One rai equals 1600 square meters.

### *Savings*

Most returnees have no savings, which threatens their economic security. For example, Fah said, “I feel like my life is insecure because I have no savings. So if anything bad happens, such as an accident, I will not know what to do” (Fah, personal interview, January 12, 2008). As for Meena, she did manage to save more than 300,000 baht from her trafficking experience which she sent as remittances to renovate her family’s house and pay for her family’s daily expenses.

### **4.2.3 Legal security**

Aside from health and economic security, legal security is another aspect of reintegration. This section discusses victim identification, complaint procedures, witness protection, and compensation.

#### *Victim Identification*

Returnees were asked to describe the process between their departures from their destination countries and their arrival in Thailand in order to understand the extent to which they were assisted by official authorities abroad and in Thailand. All nine returnees were arrested and deported back by authorities and international organizations in destination countries. Lumyai and Salee, returnees from the Netherlands, stayed in a shelter in the Netherlands for two months before returning to Thailand. They received six hundred Euros in financial assistance from IOM-The Netherlands. Despite having been initially identified as victims of trafficking by the Dutch police, Lumyai and Salee were later identified as sex workers by Dutch immigration authorities. Lumyai and Salee held a Certificate of Identity (CI)<sup>3</sup> as their travel identification, and before leaving the Netherlands, their Certificates were stamped with a red stamp signifying that they voluntarily practiced sex work as opposed to being victims of trafficking<sup>4</sup>. Upon their arrival at the airport in Thailand, Thai immigration authorities did not identify them as official returnees although it is

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<sup>3</sup> A Certificate of Identity is a type of travel identification issued by the Thai embassy to Thai nationals abroad who do not have a Thai passport or had their passports taken away.

<sup>4</sup> A red stamp in a passport or CI signifies that an individual has been a sex worker abroad.

unclear why. Because Lumyai and Salee were not identified as official returnees, they did not receive any government assistance.

The six returnees from Italy (Somjai, Fah, Suai, Yen, Meena, Duang) also stayed in an IOM shelter for 2 months before they were officially sent back to Thailand in 2006. These returnees received legal assistance from the Italian police to prosecute the traffickers, and IOM-Italy provided shelter in Italy and financial assistance to facilitate their return, including air tickets and four hundred Euros for each returnee to use as spending money. Those individuals identified as official returnees are entitled to official Thai government assistance upon their return to Thailand. Unlike Lumyai and Salee, these six returnees received government assistance although the assistance was limited.

As for Koy, she was arrested and put in jail in Germany as an illegal migrant before being deported back to Thailand. She was not identified as an official returnee by the German government, so she did not receive any assistance or services from both the German or Thai government. Because Koy was identified as an “illegal migrant” instead of an official victim of trafficking, her rights as a victim were not protected.

#### *Complaint procedures*

Returnees are reluctant to file a lawsuit because of fear of reprisal, stigmatization, and complex, lengthy, and costly court procedures. For example, Kiaw<sup>5</sup>, a returnee from Japan who prosecuted her trafficker by herself, won the case but it took almost four years to process. Furthermore, Kiaw has not received any compensation and the traffickers have not yet been punished since the case was taken to the Appeals Court. In the meantime, she has had to move from place to place, changing her daughters' school in order to escape from the threat of traffickers (FFW retreat, field notes, July 28, 2007). As for Meena, she did not file a lawsuit against her

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<sup>5</sup> Kiew is an alias for a returnee, as her real name is being kept confidential. Kiew is not a selected returnee in this research.

trafficker because she believes it was her own decision to migrate and nobody forced her to do. She insists that she is not a trafficking victim even though she admitted that she did not end up doing the job she thought she was going to do. In order to dispel such misconceptions about who is a trafficking victim, a clearer understanding of trafficking needs to be explained to returnees.

On the other hand, Thai returnees want traffickers to be punished in order to eliminate the root cause of trafficking. Therefore, some of the returnees featured in this study are in the process of prosecuting traffickers in court and asking for compensation. Those who have filed a lawsuit include Somjai, Suai, Duang, Lumyai, and Salee.

#### *Witness protection*

Somjai, Suai, and Duang are suing their trafficker, who also happens to be the sister-in-law of Somjai and Duang and the next-door neighbor of Suai. Somjai, Suai, and their families still live in the same village as the trafficker. Somjai and Suai fear reprisal since the trafficker has power in the village and there is no witness protection from the police. Moreover, the investigation process causes them much stress and makes them feel like they are being “re-trafficked” because they must tell their trafficking stories repeatedly:

“I do not want anybody from my village to get lured to her ‘brothel’ like I did. I want to get [the trafficker] in jail but going through an investigation process is so painful. It takes a long, long time and it makes me feel like being trafficked again since I have to tell my story over and over” (Somjai, personal interview, January 12, 2008).

As for Duang, she is afraid of reprisal since the trafficker (her sister-in-law) threatened her to drop the charges against the trafficker. If the charges are not dropped, the trafficker said she will spread rumors about Duang’s trafficking experience and the safety of Duang’s children will be at risk:

“I know I will not drop the charges even though I am very worried about the safety of my two children and



worried that other community members will know. She [the trafficker] is the sister of my husband. I do not understand how she could do this to her family. She destroyed my life.” (Duang, personal interview, January 20, 2008)

#### 4.2.4 Family Relationships

The family relationship is one of the main concerns of returnees in the reintegration process. Successful reintegration at the family level refers to family acceptance and understanding of returnees’ experiences abroad. Five returnees chose to go back to live with their families when they arrived in Thailand while the other four chose to live in a new place of resettlement. Out of nine returnees, three did not share their experiences abroad with their families, while six share of their experiences.

Those returnees who did not share their experiences with their families include Koy, Yen and Meena. Koy was rejected by her family outright for not having returned with much money, so she did not even have the chance to tell her family about her experiences. Koy could not talk about her experiences overseas with other family members, leading to depression and stress:

“My children do not understand why I did not have a lot of money when I returned to Thailand. It is because they do not know what I did when I was in Germany and I do not know how to tell them. So we always have a problem regarding money issues. They do not even want me to stay with them for a long time.” (Koy, personal interview, January 20, 2008)

Meanwhile, due to the difficulties that may arise from telling family members about their trafficking experiences, Yen and Meena decided not to tell their families. They chose to keep all their pain inside in order to maintain good relations with their families. They believe that not everyone will understand their situation. Returnees who do not tell their families about their trafficking experiences can not rely on their families for support, and family members can not provide a safe and protective environment for returnees’ emotional recovery:

“I told my husband that I did not get to work because I had my period. Sometime he teases me, saying, ‘How many times did you have sex’. He told me that he would not have gotten married with me if I was a sex worker” (Yen, personal interview, January 12, 2008).

“I do not think it is necessary to tell my family about my trafficking experience. I can deal with it myself. It is just one of the experiences I have walked through in life” (Meena, personal interview, January 13, 2008).

As for the returnees who did share their experiences with their families, most felt that their relationship with other family members, including their role in the family, changed after their family found out they were forced into sex. In the case of Lumyai, after her family found out about her experience abroad, she was rejected by her family and could not live with their family anymore: “My husband broke up with me right after I came back because he knew what I did in the Netherlands. He did not understand even though I tried to explain that I was a victim of trafficking. He still thought I was a bad person because I worked as a sex worker” (Lumyai, personal interview, July 27, 2008). Family rejection was the main reason preventing Lumyai from successfully reintegrating back into society.

Two other returnees, Fah and Duang, still live with their original families but have a hard time trying to make their family members understand their situation:

“Although my sister understands my situation and is always by my side, my mother and husband do not understand. My mother does not talk to me because we are losing the family’s land that I mortgaged before I migrated. Meanwhile, my husband knows what I did in Italy but it seems like he tries to ignore it. So I can not talk about it in front of him or pretend like it never happened.” (Fah, personal interview, January 12, 2008)

“My husband blames me for working as a sex worker even though I try to explain that I had no choice. I had to do it otherwise they would have beaten me. Although we are not divorced, it seems like we are.” (Duang, personal interview, January 20, 2008)

However, some returnees have adequate family support, which significantly helps them to further reintegrate into society. For example, Somjai's family accepts and understands the situation. They supported her by suing the traffickers on her behalf and encouraged her to live a normal life and regain feelings of dignity:

“There is no reason to be mad at her [Somjai]. It is not her fault. Nobody wants it to happen. We should understand and support them [returnees] in every way we can so they will recover from their bad experience.”  
(Somjai's husband, personal interview, January 12, 2008)

In Suai's case, her family also accepts her and helps her overcome the emotional difficulties associated with her trafficking experiences:

“My sister [Suai] was not a sex worker but she was a victim of trafficking. It is different between these two categories. She was a victim of trafficking in Italy but she is a victim of society in Thailand. People do not understand and gossip about her experience abroad.”  
(Suai's sister, personal interview, January 12, 2008)

#### 4.2.5 Community Relationships<sup>6</sup>

Similar to family relationships, a good community relationship refers to community acceptance, a respected role of returnees within the community, and non-discrimination of returnees. While four out of eight the returnees who were interviewed about community relationships live in communities that know they were trafficked, the other four live in communities that do not know they were trafficked.

Fah, Suai, Salee and Somjai live in communities where other community members know about their trafficking experiences. Fah and Suai did not receive a good response from their communities. Although community members know Fah and Suai were exploited, they still spread rumors and talk behind Fah and Suai's backs.

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<sup>6</sup> Based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight returnees.

Salee was rejected by her community at the beginning of her reintegration process: "The community members gossiped about me all the time. They sometimes even called me "pooying khai tua" when I passed by. I told them that I did not choose to do this but I was lured instead" (Salee, personal interview, January 11, 2008). However, the community's negative reactions against Salee have decreased over time. The community has used the trafficking experience of Salee as a good lesson to prevent trafficking within the community. In this case, the perception of community members toward returnees can be changed based on their understanding about trafficking.

Among these four returnees whose communities know about their trafficking experiences, Somjai seems to be the only one who has retained a good relationship with her community. There is some gossip about her but it is minimal. Somjai shares her trafficking experience with her community in order to prevent other community members from being trafficked by the trafficker who lives in the same district. Sharing her experiences with other community members makes them better understand trafficking and what Somjai has been through.

Although social norms may be a significant obstacle to community acceptance of trafficked returnees, strong family support and individual determination may be able to overcome stigmatization. For example, Somjai and Fah are from the same community, but while Somjai could integrate back into her community, Fah was not able to do so and had to move out by the end. Somjai's family provided a great deal of support and helped convince the community to accept her, and Somjai also exhibits a great deal of individual strength (Somjai's husband, personal interview, January 12, 2008). Unlike Somjai, Fah came from a broken home so did not have as much family support.

Meanwhile, Duang, Koy, Meena and Yen did not share their experiences abroad with others due to stigmatization and shame and because they wanted to maintain good relationships with their communities. Koy stated that she would not be

accepted if the community knew that she was forced to do sex work abroad: “At the time, I wanted someone to talk to about my experience, I didn’t want to talk to anyone in the community. It was very very difficult” (Koy, personal interview, January 20, 2008). For Koy and Meena, their relationships with their communities have not changed.

As for Yen, although she did not tell anyone she was trafficked, there are rumors that she was trafficked, leading community members to be suspicious of her. After a rumor spread that she might have been a sex worker abroad, some community members changed their reaction toward Yen and rejected her instead. This led to economic difficulties for Yen: “I sold noodles in the village I live in but my business was very bad because of what people thought I was doing in Italy. So they did not want to buy my noodles” (Yen, personal interview, January 12, 2008).

#### **4.2.6 Returnee reintegration difficulties**

Based on the individual factors of health, economic, and legal situation, and the social factors of family relationship and community relationship, Salee and Meena seem to have almost no problems with reintegration, Yen has some problems, and the rest of the returnees (Somjai, Koy, Fah, Suai, Duang, and Lumyai) face many different kinds of difficulties in their reintegration processes (See Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1 Returnee reintegration difficulties based on different factors**

Returnee	Health		Economic	Legal	Family Relationship	Community Relationship
	Physical	Mental				
Duang		X	X	X	X	
Fah		X	X		X	X
Koy		X	X		X	
Lumyai	X	X	X	Unknown	X	Unknown
Meena						
Salee						
Somjai	X	X	X	X		
Suai		X	X	X		X
Yen			X			X
	2	6	7	3	4	3

### 4.3 Reintegration assistance

#### 4.3.1 Impact of National Agenda on reintegration assistance

Although Lumyai and Salee, who returned in 2003 before the National Agenda was announced in 2004, were officially identified by the Dutch government as official returnees, the Thai government did not recognize them as such. Therefore, they did not receive any reintegration assistance and services from the Thai government. However, they received health care and financial assistance from the Foundation For Women.

As for Somjai, Fah, Suai, Yen, Meena, and Duang, who were sent back to Thailand two years after the National Agenda was announced, both the Italian and Thai governments recognized them as official returnees. Unlike Lumyai and Salee, these six returnees received government assistance although the assistance was limited. Government officials from the Bureau of Anti-Trafficking in Women and

these six returnees received government assistance although the assistance was limited. Government officials from the Bureau of Anti-Trafficking in Women and Children picked up returnees at the airport and helped them through the immigration process, but they did not offer and facilitate other essential assistance and services such as medical care, counseling, financial aid, legal assistance, reintegration guidelines and reintegration information. This group was told that if they applied for financial assistance they would receive it from the BATWC. Everyone who applied received 50,000-70,000 baht, however, skills training programs were not provided.

According to the National Agenda, returnees have the right to ask for legal compensation from their traffickers, and if they do not ask for it, state agencies would do it on their behalf. However, none of the returnees received any compensation and state agencies did not help them prosecute their traffickers.

#### **4.3.2 Health care assistance**

Assistance with health care, both physical and mental, is provided by state agencies to official returnees. However, returnees must be proactive and seek assistance from state agencies on their own. Returnees, whether official or not, are more likely to receive assistance by approaching NGOs. The two unofficial returnees from the Netherlands (Lumyai and Salee) sought and received psychological support and medical care from FFW. The rest of the returnees, including those who were recognized as official returnees, did not seek or receive any medical assistance from state agencies or NGOs.

#### **4.3.3 Financial assistance**

Seven returnees received financial assistance from the BATWC and FFW. The BATWC provided financial assistance to Somjai, Fah, Suai, Yen, Meena and Duang, Suai, Meena and Duang received 50,000 - 63,000 baht to purchase cows, while Somjai received 50,000 baht to start a water pumping business. Yen received 50,000

baht to set up a small noodle shop in her village but did not receive any business counseling. It is unclear how much financial assistance Fah received and for what purpose. Meanwhile, Salee received a 40,000 baht loan from FFW to help start her own business. Financial assistance may not always facilitate the reintegration process of returnees. For example, Yen invested her financial assistance into a noodle shop which was not successful due to various reasons.

#### **4.3.4 Compensation and legal assistance**

Lumyai and Salee also went through the legal process with the assistance of Dutch organizations. It is unclear whether the returnees wanted to sue the traffickers themselves or whether the organizations filed charges on their behalf. Since the legal process started in the Netherlands, the returnees asked FFW to provide legal assistance, particularly in terms of coordination with Dutch organizations and courts. During the legal process, the returnees faced intimidation by the traffickers but the returnees were afraid to contact the police. After five years of legal battles, the traffickers were convicted and forced to pay sixty thousand baht compensation to each returnee. However, no compensation has been paid yet. The traffickers have filed an appeal to the Supreme Court, which can take years to finish:

“Although the compensation will be useful and helpful for me and my family, I do not think money can compensate all the bad things they have done to me. So it is fine if I do not get money but the traffickers get convicted instead” (Salee, personal interview, January 11, 2008).

It takes a long time to process a case in both the Thai and Dutch judicial systems, which puts the safety of returnees’ at risk and makes the legal procedure expensive because of travel and other related expenses. It is very important to provide care and support for returnees during the legal process, such as witness protection.



#### **4.4 Returnees' common needs and concerns<sup>7</sup>**

As a result of their trafficking experiences, all returnees who return to their home country or community face many complex difficulties during the reintegration process. Government agencies and NGOs have created programs and services to help returnees, however, such assistance has generally not been based on the needs and concerns of the returnees themselves. Returnees' common needs and concerns are divided into the following periods of time after their return: the first three months, three months to six months, and six months to one year. Returnees' common needs and concerns will also be described from most to least frequently mentioned (See Table 4.3).

##### **4.4.1 The first three months**

The first three months is a tough situation for all returnees. One of the most significant concerns upon their return is the issue of stigmatization from their trafficking experiences because doing sex work is not socially accepted in Thailand. Stigmatization can lead to conflicts with and lack of acceptance by family and community members. Due to stigma and shame, some returnees said they were worried they would "go crazy", and others expressed feelings of "being lost" and being a "sinful" person. All reported feeling depressed and stressed during this stage. Returnees emphasized that counseling is both important and necessary.

During the first three months, financial status is a concern, including income and debt. Returnees therefore suggested that financial aid be provided by the government during this time period. In terms of physical health, most returnees need a physical check up, particularly for HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Safety in terms of reprisal from traffickers is also a concern. Lastly,

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<sup>7</sup> Based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight case study returnees.

providing residential care to Thai returnees and access to information related to reintegration are missing from state agency assistance.

#### **4.4.2 Three months to six months**

Although time may have passed, returnees' wounds from trafficking have not passed like time. Most returnees are still worried about the experiences they have gone through, therefore stigmatization remains a key concern. Similarly, family acceptance is needed to reduce stigma. Economic status, employment, and income remains another concern. In terms of legal security, pursuing criminal charges against traffickers who normally have power can lead to reprisals from trafficking networks and returnees dropping the charges during the investigation process. Therefore, witness protection and criminal justice are needed. In addition, money for education for children becomes more essential during this period.

#### **4.4.3 Six months to one year**

During the time period of six months to a year after returning, although the issue of stigmatization remains the biggest concern, returnees are more concerned with their economic well-being. Income generation funds (micro-credit programs), loans with no interest, and skill training programs are suggested in order to achieve greater financial security:

“I do not think I can forget what happened to me. I think it will take forever to overcome my trafficking experience. However, I need to live my life and I need to take care of my children. Therefore, skill training programs would help me learn some skills that lead to employment.” (Fah, personal interview, January 12, 2008)

Because the criminal investigation process continues to be a significant concern in this period, returnees would like legal information and assistance from state agencies and NGOs. At this stage, family acceptance also seems to be less important but is still a concern, while education for returnees as well as for their children increases in

importance. Finally, physical health reappears as a concern for Somjai and Suai because they developed symptoms relating to their reproduction health.

**Table 4.2 Returnees' common needs and concerns at different periods upon their return**

<b>First three months</b>	<b>Three months to six months</b>	<b>Six months to one year</b>
1. Stigmatization (8) 2. Family acceptance (7) 3. Community acceptance (5) 4. Financial status (income and debts) (4) 5. HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (4) 6. Life Security--fear of reprisal from traffickers (3) 7. Residential care (1) 8. Access to reintegration information (1)	1. Stigmatization (8) 2. Family acceptance (7) 3. Economic (income and employment) (5) 4. Legal assistance (information, witness protection and criminal justice) (3) 5. Education for children (2)	1. Stigmatization (8) 2. Economic (income, employment, loans and training) (6) 3. Legal assistance (3) 4. Education for children (2) 5. Family acceptance (2) 6. Physical health (2)

#### **4.4.4 Summary of returnees' needs and concerns**

Stigmatization is the most important concern of returnees during all periods of reintegration. According to returnees, this is because the Thai idea of being "pooying khai tua" (woman who sells her body for sex) is not generally accepted, especially in the rural places of origin of the returnees. Furthermore, religion is another factor influencing returnees' thoughts and beliefs. Although the concept of karma is based on the belief that acts committed in previous lives affect the current life and acts committed in this life will affect future lives (Mortland cited in Derks, 1998: 27), returnees believe that they were trafficked because of karma and that being trafficked

will also make their future lives difficult. As Fah mentioned, "It is my karma that pushed me to work as a sex worker. It is my karma that makes me be a bad woman. I will go to hell because I slept with many men." In general, it is hard to overcome stigmatization from sexual exploitation, but it is even harder when social norms and religion reinforce the stigmatization.

Family acceptance plays a bigger role immediately after returnees return home because of physical and emotional support that is needed after a terrible situation. Economic concerns such as a good job and income, no debt, and loans and training, become more important after returnees have reintegrated after a few months.

Using the conceptual framework of this research to analyze returnees' needs and concerns, it can be seen that in the first three months, mental health is the most common concern, followed by family and community relationship, economic situation, physical health (specifically HIV/AIDS and STD's), and legal situation respectively. In the three to six months following their return, mental health and family relationship remained the two most common concerns, followed by economic situation and lastly legal situation. Concerns about community relationship and physical health are not mentioned for this period. Finally, in the period of six months to one year after their return, mental health still remains the most common concern, followed by economic situation, legal situation, family situation, and lastly physical health. Community relationship is not mentioned for this period.

#### **4.5 Returnees' future hopes and plans<sup>8</sup>**

Having a permanent job which can lead to economic security is mentioned by six returnees and is the most common hope of returnees. Although some returnees do not want to work in their place of origin, they want to return there after they have enough savings or when they get older. Five returnees express wanting to be with their family. Only one returnee hopes to live happily with her family like before,

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<sup>8</sup> Based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight selected returnees.

while the others focus more on “just being together”. Normally, returnees do not tell their story to anyone nor expect to share their trafficking experience with others. However, one returnee hopes to share her experiences as a lesson for other people (See Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3 Future hopes and plans of returnees**

	<b>Future Plan</b>	<b>Number of returnees</b>
1.	Get a sustainable career (economic security)	6
2.	Be with family	5
	Want to live happily with family like in the past	1
3.	Get skill training	4
4.	Win lawsuit	4
5.	Have own business	3
6.	Continue education	3
7.	Raise awareness about the dangers of trafficking	1

#### **4.6 Reintegration concept as defined by returnees**

##### **4.6.1 Definition of reintegration**

This section provides a conceptual overview of reintegration based on returnees’ perspectives. It presents the nature of reintegration in different aspects, what factors should be included in reintegration, and why. In order to understand what reintegration means, it is important to look from the perspective of returnees since they are the main stakeholders in the reintegration process. All returnees were asked to define the term “reintegration” based on their own experiences.

Meena argued that the term “reintegration”<sup>9</sup> is not appropriate because it implies that returnees do not live in the same society as others and that they therefore have to “re-integrate” into the same society as others. She believes the term also implies that returnees are not part of normal society until they successfully reintegrate. Meena suggested that a more empowering term than “reintegration” be used, such as *karn tam jai hai khem-kaeng*<sup>10</sup> (“make yourself emotionally strong) or *wan nee dee gwa mua wan duai palung jai*<sup>11</sup> (“today can be better than yesterday due to self-determination”).

The relationship between family relationships and strong mental health is debated among returnees. According to Somjai, strong family relationships increase the level of emotional strength, which then leads to strong mental health.<sup>12</sup> Most returnees paid attention to the influence of family during the reintegration process. Being with family, family understanding, and family acceptance seem to be key concerns of returnees’, which shows that the family is a good support system when individuals confront such a horrible situation:

“I do not know exactly what reintegration is but I know it is very important to be with my family while reducing the pain, shame and stigma from my trafficking experience to make myself emotionally strong.” (Salee, personal interview, January 11, 2008)

However, some returnees argue that being with family is not as important as being emotionally strong on an individual:

“For me, reintegration is accepting and rebuilding myself emotionally and being able to live on my own economically. It is fine if family or community do not accept me.” (Suai, discussion group, January 12, 2008)

Meena also expressed the family relationship is not as essential as individual self-esteem and emotional strength. She defined reintegration as:

<sup>9</sup> The Thai term used in this research is การกลับคืนสู่สังคม (karn klub keun su sangkhom).

<sup>10</sup> การทำให้เข้มแข็ง

<sup>11</sup> วันนี้ดีกว่าเมื่อวานด้วยพลังใจ

<sup>12</sup> Somjai, group discussion, January 12, 2008.

“Reintegration is a process of adaptation and rebuilding self-esteem including forgetting the past, starting the new and think positively based on individual level.” (Meena, personal interview, January 13, 2008).

Nonetheless, the importance of emotional strength in general is highlighted by all returnees. For example, Yen expressed, “Emotional strength is very important because if we are not emotionally strong, no matter how much others try to help us, it is still hard. But overall, emotional strength, along with other factors, are important” (discussion group, January 12, 2008).

A permanent job, sufficient income, and having a small business are often suggested as ways to address economic insecurity. Yen pointed out that while family relationships and emotional well-being are clearly important, it is also important to have a secure economic situation, otherwise reintegration will fail or returnees will be at risk to re-migrate. Surprisingly, physical health does not seem as important since most returnees did not mention it.

#### **4.6.2 Indicators of reintegration as defined by returnees**

In order to fill some of the gap in the literature on indicators of reintegration, returnees were asked to describe their opinion on monitoring and evaluating reintegration. According to returnees, indicators of reintegration should include emotional well-being, family acceptance, economic security, and secure housing. Six returnees stated that successful reintegration can be determined from the mental health status of returnees. In particular, the ability to overcome stigmatization could serve as a basis for further reintegration in other areas. For example, Salee said that the most important fact or to look at is mental health because if a returnee is psychologically strong then she can overcome any difficulties (Personal interview, January 11, 2008). However, the researcher notes that it is unclear how to determine “mental health” or “emotional well-being”. Several returnees suggested family

acceptance as an indicator to measure the success of reintegration while others proposed having a permanent job as another indicator.

#### **4.6.3 Overcoming stigmatization as a factor to increase the likelihood of reintegration of trafficked returnees**

Factors that increase the likelihood of reintegration should include mental health (emotional well-being), family acceptance, economic security, and secure housing. Based on the indicators of reintegration suggested by returnees, as well as needs and concerns about reintegration described by returnees, mental health -- particularly stigmatization -- is seen as an important factor in increasing the likelihood of reintegration. Most returnees mentioned that reintegration can be determined from the mental health status of returnees, particularly the ability to overcome stigmatization. Returnees suggested that the ability to overcome stigmatization could serve as a basis for further reintegration in other areas of life. Furthermore, returnees expressed that overcoming stigmatization was their first priority upon their return home as well as throughout the first year after their return. Strong family relationships can also increase the ability of returnees to overcome stigmatization.

#### **4.7 Levels of reintegration of returnees based on the mental health factor of overcoming stigmatization**

This section will evaluate the level of reintegration of returnees based on the mental health factor of overcoming stigmatization. In order to evaluate the level of reintegration, the ability to overcome stigmatization was looked at first as the most important factor, followed by other factors. The level of reintegration of case study returnees can be divided into three levels:

- High level of reintegration
- Intermediate level of reintegration
- Low level of reintegration



#### 4.7.1 High level of reintegration - Salee, Meena

Salee and Meena can cope with all difficulties during reintegration. In Salee's case, she had no economic or health difficulties, and she also had a high level of family support that helped her cope with discrimination from the community as well as helped her to legally prosecute traffickers. As for Meena, her successful reintegration was due mostly to her individual strength and acceptance. She stated, "Reintegration is more about the adaptation of returnees both physically and mentally in order to accept what happened. I think what happened to me in Italy was only one experience out of all the experiences in my lifetime. Even though it was painful, I just try to accept everything and move on" (Personal interview, January 13, 2008). Meena also mentioned that emotional strength is the most important factor for her own reintegration process.

Salee can cope with the stigmatization associated with sex work due to her individual attitude and self-esteem. Salee said, "I can not do anything with the past. There is no point to feel sad and make the present bad because of the past. So I try to move on" (Personal interview, January 11, 2008). She also has a positive social environment due to family support. Her family understands the difference between sexual exploitation and sex work. After Salee was initially rejected by her community, her family further helped her by increasing the community's awareness about trafficking, which led to increased community acceptance. Her family explained to community members that she was lured abroad into forced sex work and warned others to be careful about trafficking.

Meena has been able to overcome stigmatization because she has individually developed her self-esteem and positive attitude. She said, "I accept what happened and am not attached to the past" (personal interview, January 13, 2008). Meena also stated the importance of motivating herself to move on from her individual stigmatization. Meanwhile, Meena did not have to deal with any social stigmatization because she did not tell her family or community that she was trafficked.

Interestingly, not sharing her experiences with others contributed positively to her reintegration process. However, it is possible that hiding her past experiences from others, especially from her family, could lead to emotional distance. Other than overcoming stigmatization, Meena's secure job and income also contributes to her high level of reintegration.

#### **4.7.2 Intermediate level of reintegration - Yen, Somjai**

Yen said she can cope with stigmatization associated with sex work. She said this is because she is still young and was trafficked for a very short period of time. It appears that Yen has been able to overcome individual stigmatization without the support of others. However, Yen still faces a great deal of social stigmatization. She feels guilty for not telling her husband the truth and fears that he will not accept her if he finds out about her forced sex work. Her community has also spread negative rumors about her experience abroad.

Family support played a key role in Somjai's ability to overcome both individual and social stigmatization. Somjai's husband told her not to blame herself because the trafficker, not Somjai herself, is guilty. Other than that, her children understand the circumstances of her trafficking and stand by her side so that she can get past her trafficking experience. Meanwhile, the sympathy of community members helped Somjai become emotionally stronger. Although s has been able to overcome stigmatization, she still faces many other obstacles in reintegration including physical health, economic, and legal problems. The case of Somjai shows that although mental health may be a significant factor in reintegration, it does not completely determine a high level of reintegration.

#### **4.7.3 Low level of reintegration - Lumyai, Suai, Fah, Duang, Koy**

The five other returnees (Lumyai, Suai, Fah, Duang, Koy) faced more difficulties with reintegration than Salee, Meena, Yen, and Somjai. Lumyai, Suai,

Fah, Duang, and Koy each have problems in three to four main areas of reintegration so they have not been able to successfully reintegrate. However, they all face difficulties with their mental health, economic situation, and either family or community relationships. Lastly, Lumyai is especially concerned with her physical health because of her forced plastic breast surgery.

Upon their return home, Lumyai, Suai, Fah, Duang, Koy have faced a great deal of individual and social stigma and shame. Individually, they all felt insecure, had low-self esteem, and had negative attitudes towards themselves. All are still dealing with a significant amount of emotional pain, which can affect many areas of their reintegration processes. Those who told others about their experiences (Suai, Fah), have been rejected and discriminated against by their families and communities. Those who did not share their experiences with others (Duang and Koy) do not face social stigmatization, but they face other major problems in their reintegration such as economic, legal, and family relationship problems.

**Table 4.4 Levels of returnee reintegration based on ability to overcome mental health factor of stigmatization**

Levels	Returnees	Health		Economic	Legal	Family relationship	Community relationship
		Physical	mental				
High Level	Meena						
	Salee						
Intermediate Level	Yen			X			X
	Somjai	X		X	X		
Low Level	Duang		X	X	X	X	
	Fah		X	X		X	X
	Koy		X	X		X	
	Lumyai	X	X	X	Unknown	X	Unknown
	Suai		X	X	X		X

#### 4.8 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the factors involved in the reintegration of the nine case study returnees. There are many different levels and areas of reintegration. At the individual level, health (including physical and mental), economic, and legal factors have been discussed. At the social level, the family relationship and the community relationship have also been examined. Salee and Meena appear to have almost no problems in these five areas of reintegration, while Yen has problems in some areas. Somjai, Koy, Fah, Suai, Duang, and Lumyai difficulties in many areas of their reintegration processes.

According to returnees, key indicators of reintegration should include mental health and emotional well-being, family acceptance, economic security, and secure housing. Overcoming stigmatization was found to be a major factor that increases the likelihood of reintegration. Stigmatization is the most significant concern of returnees during all periods of reintegration up to a year after their return. Returnees may be able to overcome stigmatization on an individual basis and/or with the help of strong family acceptance and support. If returnees are in good mental health then they can overcome any difficulties.

The level of reintegration of case study returnees was evaluated with importance first given to the mental health factor of overcoming stigmatization before looking at other factors. Meena and Salee have a high level of reintegration; Yen and Somjai have an intermediate level of reintegration; and Lumyai, Suai, Fah, Duang, Koy have a low level of reintegration.