

The Bijlmer Project

Summary

The Bijlmer Project is involved in the prevention and treatment of victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. The Bijlmer Project operates on both a “grass roots” and academic level. The result is a project that aims to:

- a) Influence sexual behaviour of those who may pay for sex,
- b) Determine the psychological needs of victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation,
- c) Develop a treatment model based on the needs identified through rigorous academic research,
- d) Treat the complex sexual trauma experienced by victims
- e) Establish a centre in Ghana tackling the factors making women vulnerable to such a crime.

Website: www.thebijlmerproject.com
Twitter: @BijlmerProject
Facebook: The Bijlmer Project

Background Information

Human trafficking, although illegal is an extremely profitable enterprise. According to the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, human trafficking is estimated to be the third largest international crime industry and it is believed to generate profits of an estimated \$32 billion (Kara, 2009). A very recent Human Trafficking in Persons report by the UN reports that 27% of all persons trafficked are children (UNODC, 2012). The Netherlands is not insulated from this issue and the Bijlmer, a neighbourhood in Amsterdam known for its multicultural environment, is one such hub in Northern Europe for slave trade.

While the prevalence rates and the economics of this transnational trafficking industry has been well documented (Kara, 2009); there has been restricted focus on investigating the psychosocial needs of sexually exploited trafficked victims and consequently a lack of intervention based programs (i.e. psychosocial services addressing the needs of women and children who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation).

Research findings are indicative of the presence of psychological disorders in the victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, e.g. anxiety, depression and PTSD (Farley et al, 1998), but there is fragmented anecdotal evidence to suggest the type of interventions that are effective in addressing these psychosocial needs. Our project speaks directly to this gap in the literature

by including a comprehensive questionnaire based study to explore the need for psychosocial intervention from the victim's perspective, therefore an 'inside-out' approach. Not only does this project aim to better determine the needs of child and adult victims of sex trafficking, this project will develop a training module for a peer education program for trafficked victims. This is to say we will develop a service aimed at alleviation and treatment of the psychological disorders that ensue following trauma of this nature.

Women and children are bought and sold and used for sex. Trafficking into sex work is a profound human rights violation (UNAIDS, 2012). The physical and psychological impact on the individual is highly significant. Human trafficking and sexual exploitation has implications for the rights of all women and children. The spread of HIV / AIDS and other STDs due to the sexual behavior of those who pay commercial sex workers more money not to use a condom affects everyone. The additional demand for a virgin (for example due to the myth that sex with a virgin cures a person of HIV/AIDS) further enhances the demand for sex trafficking of children.

Yet sexual behavior is learned behavior. Our project educates potential consumers of sexual services by giving voice to women and children who have been trafficked and sexually exploited. Those who pay for sex can be made aware of the implications of their actions. Awareness is key to behavior change.

The Bijlmer Project is original and innovative in its bringing together of academic research, its provision of a psychosocial treatment service and its ability to deliver education aimed at behavior change in those who pay for sex. In so doing we make a contribution to preventing *and* treating the consequences of sex trafficking in women and children.

Stakeholders' Needs and Roles

Webster University is a key stakeholder and benefits from The Bijlmer Project in multiple ways. The project provides internship opportunities for students (undergraduate & postgraduate level) and is building research capacity in the various departments involved in the project, resulting in papers which will be submitted for publication in peer reviewed journals. A key component of Webster University's mission is to generate global thinking in our students; The Bijlmer Project serves as an important medium via which the students are exposed to a multi-cultural environment. Students are already benefiting from specialist inter-disciplinary classes on the issues of child and adult sex trafficking. Dr. Thompson, Head of the Department of Behavioral and Social Sciences at Webster University and Dr. Sheetal Agarwal Shah, Faculty member have

a lead role in the Bijlmer Project, from conceptualisation through to design, implementation and dissemination.

The project's second group of stakeholders are organisations that work at the grass root level, which are critical to the success of The Bijlmer Project. The project is a collaboration between Webster University and CARF (Christian Aid and Resources Foundation). Decisions regarding the implementation of the project are undertaken in consultation with CARF. Furthermore, CARF and its affiliated organizations provide links between the Bijlmer Project and victims of trafficking, enabling the research interviews and intervention to take place. While CARF is well placed to assist the Bijlmer Project, CARF needs the structure and expertise of the professionals involved in the Bijlmer Project to be able to conduct the research and provide the psychological intervention.

The Bijlmer Project is also connecting with other individuals and organisations, governmental and nongovernmental. Most of these organisations aim to reduce the vulnerability of potential victims of trafficking and are involved in robust advocacy of Human Rights within the European Union. These organisations provide protection and practical support through counselling, spiritual and emotional healing and some also make provision for safe houses and micro projects for victims already in the EU. Our collaboration with these organisations broadens our scope in terms of influencing those who can legislate for change.

Goals and Objectives

1. Gather socio demographic data of the victims interviewed - highlight factors that led to the eventual trafficking and the trafficking syndicate involved.
2. Identify symptoms of psychological disturbance, including but not confined to symptoms of depression, anxiety, PTSD.
3. Highlight the psychosocial needs of victims - an inside out approach versus an outside in approach.
4. Evaluate levels of sexual health awareness, especially relating to HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections.
5. Investigate gaps in the existing 'referral system' towards legal and psychiatric assistance.
6. Identify potential case studies of longitudinal research focusing on the 'role of the mother' in human trafficking.
7. To train women (rescued and rehabilitated) to provide help at grass root level to other victims of sex trafficking.

8. Develop and implement a psychosocial treatment model based on best practices outlined by similar organizations at the community level across the world. It will help provide recommendations to other organizations working in the field.
9. Allow the voices of trafficked and sexually exploited women to be heard and in the mainstream.
10. Allow those who would not ordinarily have access to this information be aware of the issue and its prevalence and relevance.
11. Challenge dominant myths such as “women choose commercial sex work”.
12. Foster change in sexual behavior of those buying sexual services.
13. Ensure that all women and children have basic human rights regardless of their circumstances.
14. Create online and offline communities and inspire communities into action.
15. Create a platform for political action.
16. Provide a resource for those working with this population.
17. Encourage dialogue and discussions.
18. Dissemination of promotional materials and other media tools to spark global interest.
19. Fund raise to ensure sustainability of the project.

Activities

1. **Conducting scientific research in order to investigate the symptoms of trauma (PTSD) and evaluation of areas in need of psychosocial interventions in victims of sex trafficking.** This involves research interviews with 200 women and children as well as statistical analysis of data, generation of a research report and dissemination in the international academic sphere.
2. **Ensuring the voices of victims are heard by those who need to hear them in order to influence sexual behaviour.** Our Facebook page and Twitter presence will share the voices of the participants with a view to changing sexual behaviour in those who pay for sex. **This has never been done before**, and is thus innovative, original and ground-breaking.
3. **Development of a needs based intervention program addressing psychosocial needs.** This involves identification and training of rescued and rehabilitated women (former victims of sex trafficking) to deliver a training module to their peers (including minors).

Desired Outcomes

1. **Investigation of areas in need of psychosocial interventions for victims of sex trafficking - A Victim's Perspective**

- a. 200 women and young people (minors) will be interviewed by our researchers.
- b. The data collected during the research interviews will be written up and published in peer reviewed journal articles and presented at international conferences.

2. Ensuring the voices of victims are heard by those who need to hear them in order to influence sexual behaviour.

- a. Quotes from the women and young people (only with informed consent) will be posted anonymously on our Facebook page, Twitter account and Website.
- b. The Media and Communications Department of Webster University will produce a documentary sharing the lived experience and voices of women and children who have been trafficked and sexually exploited.
- c. Students at Webster University (many of whom visit the Red Light District in Amsterdam) will partake in classes, seminars and conferences where they will learn about the issue and make different informed choices as a consequence. Students will challenge the choices regarding the sexual behaviour of their peers.

3. Development of a training module for peer educators.

- a. Rescued and rehabilitated women will provide help at the grass root level to other victims of sex trafficking. These women will be thoroughly trained to provide a psychosocial intervention model to their peers. Workshops will be conducted for this purpose.
- b. The content of this psychosocial intervention will reflect the results of the research undertaken in phase one of this project, and speak directly to the needs identified. It is likely to include basic counseling skills, sexual health education and direction to treatment, symptom management and appropriate referrals (e.g. legal, psychiatric and social).

Our pilot study is complete and we are in the process of analyzing the data and sharing the voices of the trafficked and sexually exploited victims with those who need to hear them. As such we are demonstrating what is unique and ground-breaking about our project: we are channeling academic research so that it can be accessed by those who would not otherwise have access to the ideas with a view to influencing sexual behavior; we will use our research to inform our treatment model, and as such we are treating the consequences of complex sexual trauma as well as preventing the sexual exploitation of children and women