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MANY VICTIMS KEEP THEIR SORROW TO THEMSELVES

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A sizeable number of women return on their own and do not come in contact of any organisation for their rehabilitation

A LARGE number of trafficked women are returning to their home country on their own or leaving rehabilitation centres in short periods of repatriation. These are the women who do not want to be known as 'victims' in the society.

Anti-trafficking researchers say many trafficked women have returned home since 2003. Maiti Nepal alone has rescued and rehabilitated some 12,000 women and children since 1993 while NGOs such as ABC Nepal and CWISH have also been facilitating the victims' return. Apart from this, a sizeable num-

ber of women return on their own and do not come in contact of any organisation for their rehabilitation.

Meena Poudel, who holds a PhD from Newcastle University in exploring social rejection experienced by trafficked women in Nepal, says she met more than 20 such returnees within few months. They neither want their association with any organisation working for them nor let others know what hurdles they faced in their past life.

"It is because they want to lead their lives with respect and dignity. For this, they move to another end of the country where nobody knows them," said Poudel. "Many settle in

(re)married life but the relationships do not last long due to sexual and physical violence."

Poudel says the husbands of (re)married trafficked women take earnings from the women and throw them out of their 'new homes'. Thus, they are re-victimised and also deprived of citizenship. Their other hurdles are being homeless and without

resources at disposal.

Maya (name changed) 27, belongs to an ethnic group in Sindhupalchowk district. She could speak and understand only her mother tongue when she was trafficked to India by her so-called boyfriend 12 years

ago. The only thing she can remember is that she was taken to a Tarai zone and does not know which part she crossed the border from.

"Going back to my parents was the worst option for me. My village is small to fulfill my aspirations. I have a footpath shop which helps me recover from my past suffering and trauma,"

TRAFFICKED WOMEN

said HIV-infected Maya, who is living two kids. She admits that nothing is easy for a woman like her giving an example that one of her friends committed suicide when all her efforts went in vain. She says many of her friends work in dance bars and

restaurants here. "Some even tried to return to India but realised that none needed them then."

The scenario is quite different between the returnees from India and those from other countries including Middle East and Western Europe. Researcher Poudel finds returnees from other countries more forward and optimistic in their life and less stigmatised. Once she met a woman who was right back from a European country with a different vision of life.

"The 25-year-old woman wanted to complete her study which had remained when she flew abroad. She is confident to hold a respectable position in a

high-profile organisation," Poudel said. Laxmi Prasad Tripathi, spokesperson for the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, said the ministry has introduced any scheme to ascertain the number of the self-returnees.

Many analysts argue that legalising sex work works. Is it just for the trafficked women? "We were not born to be prostitutes. Legalisation can never become our issue," said Sunita Danuwar, President of AATWIN and member of Shakti Samuha, an organisation set up and managed by survivors of trafficking. Nepal is considered to be one of the source countries of sexually trafficked women in South Asia.