

Survivors of Sex Trafficking: How Could They Revive?

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to identify factors which support survivors of sex trafficking to be resilient after their experience of trafficking. This is a qualitative study using case study approach. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with female sex trafficking survivors. Thematic analysis method was implemented to analyze the data. Result reveals some risk factors which survivors encountered including personal factor, family poverty, family disintegration and dysfunction, negative peer influence and juvenile delinquency, unsupportive community, and public stigma. Resilient survivors could basically overcome those risks and were supported by some personal protective factors, such as belief system, self-efficacy, effective coping skill, and personal motivation. Protective support could also be socially sourced, such as from family, peers, and shelter.

Keywords: resilience, risk factor, protective factor, social support, survivor, sex trafficking

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Introduction

The number of human trafficking cases in Indonesia keeps increasing overtime. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) recorded 8,876 cases by 2017, with 15% of the victims (1,155 people) were children (Setyawan, 2018). Many victims came from various areas in Java, West Kalimantan, Lampung, North Sumatra, and South Sumatra (Saputra, 2017). Malaysia has the highest number of human trade actor for Indonesian victims, accounting for 93.2% of labor exploitation and 89.7% of sexual exploitation cases (Saputra, 2017). It is followed by Saudi

Arabia that is responsible for 2.4% of labor exploitation cases (Saputra, 2017). Overall, it is estimated that 2.6 million Indonesian migrant workers are trafficked to Malaysian industries to work in domestic sector, sex industry, mining industry, agriculture, and fishery sector (Saputra, 2017). Similar condition happens in the Middle East, with almost 1.5 million Indonesian migrant workers, majority of whom is domestic workers, experience exploitation in poor labor environment (Saputra, 2017).

Most victims of human trafficking were females, including underage females (Omelaniuk, 2005; Yakushko, 2009). They are exploited into forced labor overseas, particularly as housemaids, factory laborers, construction workers, and agriculture laborers in oil palm plantation, as well as becoming sex trafficking victims (Richards & Reid, 2015). Human trafficking is a serious crime against humanity, especially when it involves economical and sexual exploitation (McCabe, 2013). Its most difficult forms to distinguish are labor trafficking and sex trafficking because in most cases, victims were recruited for labor purpose, but only after arriving at the destination they found that their job involved prostitution. In such situation, the case is then classified as sex trafficking (Burke, 2013).

Experience of sex trafficking has seriously deleterious effects on victims, particularly trauma (WHO, 2012). The World Health Organization (WHO) delineates the repercussions of sex trafficking experience, based on a quantitative research in Europe in 2006 which documented physical, sexual, and mental symptoms and also stigma in sexually-trafficked females (WHO, 2012). An interesting fact is that not all victims of sexual trafficking fell into maladaptive psychological conditions. A research reported that after repeated and significant exposures to stressor, or even multiple traumatic events, some particular people can quickly rise from problems and be resilient individuals (Sobon, 2014).

Similar finding comes from another study which investigate a phenomenon very much resembling that of sex trafficking. The respondents of the study were 330 Ugandan children who were trafficked to war soldiers. Its data shows that among the female children (48.5%): (1)

90.6% were beaten by soldiers; (2) 87.9% directly witnessed murders; (3) 86.4% were on death threat; (4) 25.8% were raped by armed soldiers; and (5) 88.8% reported frequent domestic problems and violence from their environment after leaving military duty by force. This experience is parallel with that of trafficking victims who are sexually exploited, in term of being trapped in helplessness and expose to repeated trauma. However, after interviews, 27.6% demonstrated good mental health and resilience, which were then defined as resistance against psychopathology and positive adaptation ability (Sobon, 2014).

That study implies that not all individuals with traumatic stressor and trauma, experience negative mental health effect. Some individuals can break through from their problems and become resilient owing to supportive factors. Spiritual support was proven as an optimal protective factor that enabled them to reach resilience (Klasen, Oettingen, Daniels, & Adam, 2010). This research was then revisited by Crenshaw (2013) who stated that the traumatic experience was a frightening and well-documented event, but unfortunately the victims' journey towards resilience, bravery, and their determination to escape the unfortunate event seemed to be given too little attention. Paying more attention on the negative impact of human trafficking is a common practice. However, attention to how an individual can reach resilience and how post-traumatic growth comes into place in someone is of the same importance and limited explores in previous study (Klasen et al., 2010).

Literature Review

The individual potential to rise up, heal, and grow is what makes people resilient. It's not merely about knowing one's potential, but about how that potential actually brings about resilience in an individual against the challenge they face. Resilience in general is the ability to heal from a crisis and overcome life adversity (Walsh, 2006). It takes much support to actualize individual potential into action and endeavor to become resilient. McCubbin and McCubbin (1993) identify protective and recovery factors as factors working synergistically and alternately to response to crises and challenges which one encounters. Protective factors facilitate adaptation, or the ability to maintain integrity and function, and to fulfill developmental tasks (Black & Lobo,

2008). When a family finds a challenge, recovery factors are required to promote adaptability, or rebound ability, in critical situation. In addition to the severity of stressor, “accumulating” stress can also overburden family’s protective and recovery factors, in which they will rely on what is more feasible to do by the family in the given situation (Black & Lobo, 2008).

Resilient individuals can revive from problems and grow stronger and better at dealing with difficulties. Being resilient involve two phenomena: (1) experiencing problem, which also means being in high risk situation; (2) being able to prevent negative consequences related to the risk, as well as spurring growth. Hawley and De Haan (1996) explain the process of resilience as an interaction between risk factors and protective factors. Protective factors are deemed strong, interacting with risk factors, if they can reduce the negative impacts of the risk. This model also states that resilience is not merely reviving and growing strong, but also having a power that helps someone to withstand their problem and grow into a stronger human-being (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996).

In the context of trafficking, poverty and dysfunctional family relationships are two conditions causing someone to be vulnerable of it. These conditions are constructed upon the structural factors (e.g. family poverty, low education level, child marriage, dowry, domestic violence, marriage problems/widowhood) and psychological factors (i.e. helplessness due to femine and social stigma) of vulnerability. In some trafficking cases of migrant workers, vulnerability due to dysfunctional family relationship is more common in spouseless women. Lack of awareness of human trafficking makes them vulnerable to deception, although knowledge is not the sole protective factor. Awareness-driven risk mitigation is the most important component. Social network, eventually, might be a protective or risk factor, depending on whether it contributes to facilitating safe movement of people or to creating vulnerability through social stigmatization (Ray, 2008).

Stimulation of one’s capacity to rise up against problems depends on the regulation of the vulnerability resulted from risk factors and on the effectivity of protective/recovery factors.

How individuals can arise and heal by taking advantage of their support resource will be discussed in this research. Therefore the objective of this study is to describe factors which support sex trafficking victim to revive from problems and become adaptive in their current life.

Method

Design

This research is a qualitative study using a case study approach. According to Yin (2003) case study is an empirical inquiry investigating a phenomenon in real-life context when boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not well-defined, and uses various sources or multisource of evidence. Case study allow researchers to maintain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, such as one's life cycle, organizational and managerial processes, social environmental change, international relations, and industrial maturity (Yin, 2003).

Data was collected through in-depth interviews. Participants were asked one major question: "how could you revive from your experience of sex trafficking that you went through some time ago?", and subsequent questions were meant to explore and elaborate participants' responses (i.e. semi-structured interview).

Participants

Participants in this research were recruited through informants who knew about participants' experience as a sex trafficking victim.

Table 1
Participants

	Participant 1	Participant 2
Age	19	27
Sex	Female	Female
Origin	Surabaya city	Kediri city
Marital status	Married (1 child)	Married (1 child)
Duration of victimization	15 years	15 years
Perpetrator	Friend	Mother
Form of trafficking	Sex trafficking	Sex trafficking

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis technique was implemented to analyze the qualitative data. The aim of thematic analysis is to identify themes, which are important or interesting pattern in data, and use these themes to discuss a research or to explain an issue. The researcher used six thematic analysis phases as stated by Braun and Clark (2006), namely:(1) Familiarising yourself with your data; (2) Generating initial codes; (3) Searching for themes; (4) Reviewing themes; (5) Defining and naming themes, and : (6) Producing the report. Themes are generally obtained from interviews (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Braun and Clarke distinguish top-down or theoretical thematic analysis, which is driven by specific research questions, from bottom-up or inductive thematic analysis which is more data-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research used bottom-up thematic analysis or analysis based on participants' data.

Research Ethics

This research aims to explore how survivors could revive from problem they encounter because of their past experience of sex trafficking. Hence, it is important for the researchers to ensure that participants agreed to participate in the research, which they demonstrated by signing a written consent form. Researchers also explained the benefits of the study and the attempt that they take to guarantee the confidentiality of participants' identity and their well-being during data collection. Kelmendi (2015) enlists a number of conditions to be paid

attention to when interviewing survivors of human trafficking, as follows: (1) building rapport with survivors; (2) encouraging survivors to express themselves spontaneously and let out their memory as a story; and (3) extending and clarifying the reported data when survivors tell their story spontaneously and freely (Kelmendi, 2015). Researchers took these suggestions into consideration and provided safety for participants during data collection. As researcher did not want to force survivors to tell many things at one time either, interviews were conducted in several sessions.

Result

This research succeeded in identifying several important themes from survivors of sex trafficking who had risen up and healed themselves from any difficulty caused by their experience of sex trafficking. The identified themes are as follows:

Table 2
Themes, Sub-themes, and Behavioral Description

Theme	Sub-theme	Behavioral Description
Risk factor	Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployment after school graduation/drop-out • Substance addiction • Never coming home • Switching partners • Drug-user • Frequent involvement in brawls • Dropping out of school due to a sense of inferiority
	Family poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor family • Large family size • Extended family refused to help
	Family disintegration and dysfunction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent parent fights • Disharmony between parents and siblings • Indifferent mother • Drug-user sibling • Parents' ignorant of child's experience of trafficking

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separated family • Loss of contact between members of family • Lack of caring in family
	Peer factor and juvenile delinquency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boyfriend asked to have sex at middle school time • Hanging out with drug-users
	Unsupportive community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighborhood supportive of prostitution
	Public stigma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still regarded as “bad” woman by the community • Getting disdained by people around
Personal Protective Support	Belief system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believing that God forgave their sins • The past is only between God and themselves • Starting to perform prayers again • Being grateful • Feeling sinful for hurting parents • Proud of current achievement • Being happy • Wanting to repay parents’ favor • Trying to be a good person • Focus on own and child’s happiness
	Self-efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignoring other’s negative judgment • Reciprocal support and cooperation with husband • Getting back to family • Starting to disclose problems with parents • Seeking help from shelter house • Seeking support from friends
	Effective coping skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignoring other’s negative judgment • Reciprocal support and cooperation with husband • Getting back to family • Starting to disclose problems with parents • Seeking help from shelter house • Seeking support from friends
	Personal motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wanting to rear child well • Quitting drugs for the sake of their child • Wanting to have a good job • Trying not to be dispirited despite being sad • Trying to completely leave the trafficking circle • Wanting independence, to own a house and not live with extended family anymore • Not wanting the same fate falling upon their child • Wanting to be useful for family
Social Protective Support	Family support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Striving together with husband and encouraging each other • Disclosing financial difficulty to mother • Acceptance of their victimization past from

	husband-to-be
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Receiving emotional support from family
Peer support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having respectful friends• Friends (who were also trafficking victim) help• Friend took them to shelter house to get help
Shelter house support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shelter house financed school fees until graduation• Receiving help from shelter

Overall, the emerging theme in this research was that there were risk and protective factors of each individual, which interacted with each other and resulted in a state of resilience. While many studies focusing on risk factors can identify predictors of difficulties, researches on resilience highlight various ways of functioning through the effect of risk and protective factors (Becvar, 2013).

Risk Factors

We understand the term “resilience” as an individual ability to survive and heal from distressing life adversity (Walsh, 2012). Walsh regards the process of overcoming adversity as an interaction between risk and protective factors of an individual. This study revealed some risk factors from the data, as follow:

[...My dad had long been unemployed. He stayed at home, doing nothing but smoking cigarette. My mother was a janitor in an elementary school, she sometime helped neighbors doing laundry, or became a masseuse. She was the only one working. I honestly pitied her, having to work hard every day, while dad simply asked (for the money)...](Participant 1/145-147)

[...No, my eldest brother, his where about is unknown, heard he was in Doli (localization for prostitution) at that time, now I don't know, (he's) gone, (I) don't know how he's doing...](Participant 1/152-153)

Stigma was another issue emerging as a theme in this research. Our community is not ready to openly accept anything related to sexual activity, such as prostitution and sex trafficking.

[...Both my parents still don't know until now. (I'm) not sure, mom was once suspicious (of the trafficking)...](Participant 1/120)

[...Although, sometimes it's hard to listen to what they said about me. My heart also feels unease. All this time, even now, I'm still regarded as bad by people...](SH1215/201-202)

Personal Protective Factors

Protective support, even when it's situational, could promote healthy adaptation in an individual. The following is some evidences showing protective factor as an important theme:

[....God is always forgiving for His servants, my past is between me and Him. Even if people around me disdain me now, it's up to them, what important is that I try to be kind to them, that's my oath to God...] (Participant 2/242-245)

Self-efficacy and personal motivation emerging as themes in this research were response resulting from internal locus of control.

[...I don't want my child to have a difficult life as mine...](Participant 2/254-255)

[...So far, I'm still trying, thank God if someone calls me successful, it's just enough. Basically, as long as it doesn't hurt anyone and I and my child can be happy, that's my focus. Any problem should be faced with that in mind, that's for me...]
(Participant 2//257-259)

Effective coping skill was an essential component in the process of resilience.

[...I also see the same thing in myself. I am still very bad. But sometimes I have to try, no matter how, not to hurt people around me...] (Participant 2//202-204)

[...But I'm happy enough, proud of my achievement. At least, I can repay my father now, can help carrying the burden of my family. Well, at least I'm not continuously dispirited...](Participant 2//263-265)

Social Protective Factors

This research also found some themes pertaining to protective factors from external sources. Social support that participants received came from: (1) family support; (2) peer support; and (3) shelter house support.

[...My dad always tries to encourage me, especially after my husband dead, maybe he also knows that some things changed in me...] (Participant 2// 248-249)

[...My older sister helped a lot, when I was struggling in Solo, she's the one who looked after me. Well, although it makes my child to be more attached to her than to me, but that's okay. What important is that my child can grow well, I couldn't bear it if he followed my way...] (Participant 2//252-254)

Social support from the environment contributed to one's capability to revive from troubles. Social support in a micro level that was received by survivors is as follow:

[...Trying to find a job there, I still had my husband's house, which I eventually sold, it's a modal for me. I bought a place, turned it into a beauty salon. I was helped by my friends there. I made many new friends there. Actually, I had a taste of a decent life when I was with my husband times ago. So, I socialized with people a lot. Well, although many of them were not "clean" either, many of them were ex- (sex workers). I know my current husband from them...] (Participant 2//221-226)

[...The people are nice as well. (They're) caring for each other, that's why I liked it there, unlike in my house...] (Participant 1//308-309)

Community supports from house shelters are considered a macro-level.

[...I got a grant from a shelter for my school, so does my little sister now. (I was) help looking for a school, basically I had to go to school no matter what, that's their principle. I was also well-taken care of there, just like at home, was given monthly money. I could chat around there; the people were kind. Sometimes, on Sundays there was a training, (we were) asked to tell stories. I actually like it there, but I was there for only three months...](Participant 1/ /302-305)

Discussion

Resilience involves a dynamic process encouraging positive adaptation in the context of significant difficulty (Borge, Motti-stefanidi, & Masten, 2016). In addition to adaptation and problem solving skill, individual strength and resources enable positive healing and growth (Walsh, 2012). Demand and risk are widely seen as factors influencing or increasing stress and

other repercussions of adversity (Fraser, Galinsky, & Richman, 1999). Resilience is supported by protective factors and hampered by risk factors. Protective factors modify or alter responses to repercussion, so an individual or a family can avoid possible negative result. Conversely, risk factor is a condition that increases the probability of negative consequences. Protective and risk factor are not static entities; they change in relation to the given context (Walsh, 2003), which should result in different outcome.

This research identified several risk factors experienced by sex trafficking survivors, namely: (1) personal risk; (2) family poverty; (3) family disintegration and dysfunction; (4) peers and juvenile delinquency; (5) unsupportive community; and (6) public stigma. Personal factors included sense of inferiority, labile emotion, liability to use drugs, tendency to be involved in brawls, and switching partners. Those are the factors increasing individual vulnerability to sex trafficking.

Similar to family poverty, family disintegration and dysfunction also contributed to the risk of adaptation problem and the vulnerability to be a sex trafficking victim. Families with disorganization, disturbance, lack of cohesion, poverty, poor parental skill, and poor adult supervision are likely to put excessive burden on the children (Fitzpatrick, 1997). Some risk factors, such as single or underage, unemployed parent or having a large family size increase the risk of family issue and conflict (Rak & Patterson, 1996 in Fisher, 2003). Being a trafficking victim also gives rise to a new problem. Not all victims are willing to report or disclose their experience to family. It is usually so because they want to avoid shame and negative stigma towards sex workers (Vijayarasa, 2010).

In term of resilience, we do not regard risk factor as a monolithic factor. Rutter (1987) recorded that combination of some risk factors, regardless of their severity, caused impairment in more than half of people exposed to a problem. However, many of them, who dealt with the same risks, could live their lives lovingly and productively (in Walsh, 2012). This research also depicted how survivor had turned into a productive and happy individual, despite having all the

risks mentioned above. A compelling explanation is that there were protective supports in their life which they received from various sources.

A protective factor could be a particular characteristic of an individual, for instance problem solving skill and good temperament management. Also, it might come from a vast range of resources, such as useful family pattern and access to external support. Benzie and Mychasiuk identified and explained nine specific individual protective factors: (a) locus of control, (b) emotional regulation, (c) belief system, (d) self-efficacy, (e) effective coping skill, (f) education, skill, and training, (g) health, (h) temperament, and (i) gender (Benzie & Mychasiuk, 2009). Protective factors protect an individual from being negatively affected by adversity.

Protective factor could be internally or externally sourced (Mandleco & Peery, 2000). Internal protective factors include personal traits, such as humor and flexibility, which could be helpful in solving life problems. Bernard (2004) classifies internal protective factors found in the literature of child development into several categories: (a) sense of purpose; (b) problem solving; (c) autonomy; (d) social skills (in Becvar, 2013). On the other hand, external protective factor is environmental support, including its form of relation, such as support from neighbors, peers, and organization (Gilligan, 2004).

This research revealed several themes related to personal protective factors, as follows: (1) belief system; (2) self-efficacy; (3) effective coping skill; and (4) personal motivation. The finding about belief system supports the idea that it can serve as a protective factor in the process of resilience (Patterson, 2002). Manifestation of belief system through spiritualism has been identified as a factor that increases and cultivates meaningfulness and life goal during an unfortunate period of one's life (Juby & Rycraft, 2004). Believing that God is the foremost power, in addition to believing of having control over one's own life, enables someone to maintain efficacy that they can influence changes in their life (Juby & Rycraft, 2004).

Self-efficacy and personal motivation identified as themes in this research were the results of internal locus of control. It is known that the term “locus of control” is used to describe whether someone is internal or external-oriented towards life force. Externally-controlled individuals perceive life as if an external power directs their fate. They might see other people in the community as the determiner of their life. It is the community that labels them and decides if and how much support they will receive. Hence, they might lack of initiative to make change, owing to the lack of empowerment. On the contrary, individuals with internal locus of control could see a problem as a state, but believe that there are available options for them to get out of that state. They believe that they have control over their own fate (Juby & Rycraft, 2004). Although one participant was initially unsure of their success in overcoming problems, but she demonstrated belief and desire to have a better life, shown by her endeavor in supporting her spouse as much as she could. There was also a strong vision of not wanting their child to have the same life as theirs; bringing them into awareness that sooner or later they needed to have a better and meaningful life.

A resilient adult is characterized by their personality traits and the coping mechanism that they use to adapt to adverse situations. A matured adult tends to demonstrate a high level of spirituality, acceptance of own self and others, and adaptability to environmental changes (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1988). Further, people with a strong sense of purpose and positive view of life seem to have larger capacity to overcome life challenges compared to less optimistic people (Simon, Murphy, & Smith, 2005).

The condition in sex trafficking survivors’ family seemed to get better after their crisis. Although not all members of the family reunited, those who did started to have positive attitudes after going through crisis together. Family cohesion then increased the family’s confidence that problems were understandable, manageable, and meaning, and the level of reorganization and self-adjustment rose after the crisis as well (McCubbin, Balling, Possin, Frierdich, & Bryne, 2002). During a crisis, members of a family attract each other and move on

to provide and receive support as one of the most important healing factor in resilience (Black & Lobo, 2008).

Further, social support occurs on micro and macro level. This research revealed that support was received by survivors from family, peers, and shelter houses. On micro-environmental level, social support, including relation with family and peers, is associated with resilience (Herman et al., 2011). It was important for survivors to manage their problems well because they had had their own family and children. Ability to develop attachment with offspring, build a stabile family, and build a secure relation with parents, good child-rearing skill, and absence of depression or substance abuse in mother which are associated with behavioral problems, will help a family to reach well-being (Herman et al., 2011). On macro level, community factors (such as good quality schools, community service, sport and artistic opportunities), cultural factors, spirituality and religion, and minimum exposure of violence, contribute to resilience (Herman et al., 2011).

Conclusion

The sex trafficking survivors' journey of reviving from adversity and becoming an adaptive individual was inseparable from the risk factors they faced, such as personal risks, family poverty, family disintegration and dysfunction, negative peer influence and juvenile delinquency, unsupportive community and public stigma. Resilient individuals, however, could overcome those risks and receive protective supports from themselves (personal), such as belief system, self-efficacy, effective coping skill, and personal motivation. Protective support was also received from social sources, for instance family, friends, and shelter house.

The strength of this research is that it collected a number of themes describing risk factors, personal and social protective factors in survivors which contributed to their journey to resilience after an experience of sex trafficking. Collecting data from sex trafficking survivors is not easy, especially because researchers have to be careful not to retraumatize them with

questions during interview. Although they expressed consent to participate in this research, they still seemed uncomfortable when telling their feelings about their trafficking experience. Meanwhile, the limitation of current study is the lack of initial information about participants. This is because researchers were worried that collecting data about their victimization experience could give negative impression. Researchers also found difficulties in distinguishing similar terms, such as sexual exploitation, sex trafficking, and sexual harassment. Such lack of clear distinction is experienced by the majority of sex trafficking researchers.

This research can contribute in designing psychological intervention for survivors. Intervention can target individuals, families, and community. Based on the description on risk factors, protective support, and social support, psychological professional should aim to empower survivors and their family or to increase social support for the survivors. By knowing how those factors affect survivors, it will help therapist to special-tailor a psychological intervention program for survivors. For future researches, it has become increasingly important to carry out investigation on the effectivity of clinical intervention developed to empower survivors and family and to increase community involvement in supporting mental health of survivors.

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