


FOREWORD BY KEVIN BALES



Finding Our Way through the Traffick

NAVIGATING THE COMPLEXITIES OF A
CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION AND TRAFFICKING

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CHAPTER 11

HOW DO WE RESEARCH ISSUES AROUND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION THROUGH EFFECTIVE LISTENING?

Glenn Miles

Over the past six years I have helped to facilitate a range of different research projects that have sought to give voice to survivors of sexual exploitation – girls, boys, women, men and transgender. We also conducted research with sex buyers. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child says that children have the right to have their opinions taken into account on things that affect them. This right is not only for children but applies to all.

Quantitative research with lots of statistics is often favored by politicians and journalists because it provides figures of prevalence of something – how much it occurs. But in doing research around issues that are sensitive it is hard to find figures that accurately represent the actual situation due to the hidden nature of the problem. While qualitative research is with smaller numbers, it often provides rich data on the perspectives of real people. Although statistics can be questioned or denied, actual quotes from survivors are often very authentic and provide a powerful way of communicating the seriousness of the situation. It would be difficult to suggest they are invalid if interviews have been conducted rigorously and ethically. Ideally, mixed-method research is used where both methods are used in tandem but research is an expensive process and NGOs have limited funds, most of which is spent on programs.

Often we start programs before we adequately understand the context and the people we are seeking to serve. Spending time listening to them before we start or expand our programs and asking them about how they think we can help them gives value to them and just makes sense.

So what lessons have we learned from doing research with different people, in different locations, and in sometimes risky contexts?

Believing that Listening is Important and Understanding Why it is Important

Listening to people is not only a good way of doing research but it inherently says to the person, 'You are worth listening to.' Let participants know that understanding them will help others to understand their context better and then help practitioners to care for people like them better. Can you see the benefits of sitting down with people and understanding something of their world? Do you understand that people are experts of their own lives?

Treating All People with Dignity and Providing Confidentiality

Everyone is made in the image of God and is therefore inherently valuable. God loves them and so they are deserving of our respect. It is important that it is understood that part of dignity is keeping confidential things that could be used against people in a different context. This includes photographs, audio recordings, videos and transcripts that could identify someone.

Choosing the Correct Timing and the Correct Place

You need to think out when the best time to interview is. This may become a research project in itself! When do people have to 'work'? When do they have time to speak to you? Where can they speak to you where they won't get in trouble and where they won't be overheard? Is there someone you need to ask permission? Will you need to compensate people for the time you have spent with them? Are some locations less dangerous than others?

Providing Safety for the Participants

You need to think about the safety of those you are talking to. Will they get in trouble for talking to you? Do they look scared when you ask them questions? How can you minimize any potential dangers?

Providing Safety for the Researchers

If you are facilitating research, you need to understand that you are responsible for the researchers and translators who are working with you. It is important that they know that you will try your best to eliminate risk that you are aware of but that it will be impossible to take away all risk. Doing this kind of research cannot, by nature, be risk-free.

Conclusion

It may still seem difficult to understand how research could be useful in your context or how you would start. The case study below should help you to understand that you don't need a PhD to do good research and that for most NGOs – if they are convinced of the benefits of doing research – staff can be trained and equipped to do good research that is useful not only for the quality of the program but also for the staff and the reputation of the organization.

Case Study

Researching Sexual Exploitation of Boys and Young Men in Chiang Mai, Thailand

Urban Light¹ is an NGO working to address the sexual exploitation of boys in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The organization was expanding and they wanted to expand their scope of practice. They understood the value of research and asked our research team to help them to research the issue.

The project's success depended on collaboration. The research team was experienced in conducting research but did not know this particular community. However, the NGO outreach staff were experienced social workers who had valuable knowledge from working with this community, even if they did not have formal research experience. Both skill sets were needed.

First, we sat down with the NGO staff and identified and mapped out areas where they were aware that boys were doing 'sex work.' Up to then the focus had been on teenagers working in bars with expatriates but they were also aware of locations where boys were working in the massage and entertainment industries. Each of the locations were checked out to see what was the best time to come and do the interviews, usually when people were getting ready for work but not yet busy.

The outreach staff who were going to be involved in the research were trained in doing good interviewing techniques. They already understood the importance of being open with the boys and not making them feel shameful about the work they were doing, which was often as a result of poverty rather than choice. Role plays were used as a training tool. Some of the staff had never previously talked to the boys about sexual behavior and were embarrassed to do so, so this enabled them to feel more confident. This was a transferrable skill useful in their role as social workers.

The research was then piloted to ensure that all the questions were understood by participants and that the outreach staff knew how to approach the participants, how to request them to be involved, and how to use the surveys. After this, a debriefing was held for the outreach staff to ask how they felt it went and to make any last-minute changes to the survey questions or technique. It was understood, when the questions were being asked, that if a customer came or if they felt uncomfortable for any reason, then the interview could be stopped at any time.

The research was then conducted in the locations identified on the initial maps. After the surveys the participants were asked about other locations we might try to ensure that we had covered all areas. Some of the locations refused to allow any meetings. For others the staff were happy to allow boys to do surveys if the researchers paid for foot massages. For others the research team asked if individuals wanted to meet for coffee or a meal outside work time and provided them with a phone number to call if they did.

¹ www.urban-light.org

After the interview was conducted, the boys were given an information sheet on where they could get follow-up support, information on HIV testing, legal support, and a free lunch at the NGO center.

The data was processed and significant quotes were pulled out. Patterns were noted. The information was put into a PowerPoint presentation that was given at the local university to community NGOs, civic society, academics and journalists. The presentation went well and most people were happy to stay an extra hour for the question time where questions were posed to the research team and the NGO team.

The questions from the community were then used to ensure that the final report contained information that people wanted to know about, including recommendations on potential future work with boys, gender differentials in sexual exploitation and trafficking, and suggestions for future research. The report was then published and hard copies were distributed to participants and others who were unable to attend the primary presentation. The researchers then made the reports available online² and then explored making it available in a peer-reviewed journal.

The process of doing this research enabled the authentic voices of survivors of sex exploitation to be heard by the wider community. As a result, Urban Light's program was changed for the better. It also increased the credibility of the organization, as they understood the boys that they were working with better. Finally, it led to even more research being done. After the success of this research project, we again partnered with Urban Light to research and report on the risks to street children.³ More research is being explored for the future.

Discussion Questions

1. How well do you know the group of people who you are serving?
2. How would spending time listening to them help you to better understand them?
3. What questions would you like to ask, so that you understand them and can serve them better?
4. What do you need to be able to do that in a safe way?
5. How can you capture the voices of survivors and present them accurately?

² Jarrett Davis, Elliot Glotfelty and Glenn Miles, 'Boys for Baht?': *An Exploratory Study on the Vulnerability of Male Entertainment Workers in Chiang Mai, Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Love 146 and Urban Light, 2013).

³ Jarrett Davis, Judith Fiss and Glenn Miles, 'To Help My Parents': *An Exploratory Study on the Hidden Vulnerabilities of Street-Involved Children and Youth in Chiang Mai* (February 2016).

CHAPTER 15

HOW CAN WE EQUIP CHURCHES TO PROTECT REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS FROM ABUSE, EXPLOITATION AND TRAFFICKING?

Glenn Miles

Churches in many parts of Europe, Asia and other parts of the world are welcoming refugees and asylum-seekers into their churches and church halls. Refugees are likely to have had traumatic experiences as both the reason they left their home country and also during the journey. Some may have even been trafficked by people posing as smugglers. As a result, they may be experiencing trauma and they may also be vulnerable to those who might otherwise want to further exploit them. In many parts of the world, refugees leave the terror of their own country only to arrive in another country where they lack legal status, and may find themselves victims of labor abuse or sexual exploitation, or even trafficked or enslaved.¹ According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), ‘refugees, internally displaced individuals and repatriated refugees are very vulnerable to various forms of abuse and exploitation. Among them, women and children are particularly vulnerable.’²

Refugees will likely gravitate towards other refugees from the same religious, cultural and linguistic background where that is possible. In that case, their peers will provide a certain amount of support and protection. However, this is not guaranteed and or may take a period of time. In the early stages of their arrival – especially before they meet other refugees through refugee support agencies – they may be particularly vulnerable to unscrupulous people who may want to take advantage of them and could unknowingly be trafficked into sexual or other vulnerable services.³ Churches can be an important source of support to refugees and asylum-seekers, even if they are not Christian, to help protect them from further abuse, exploitation and possible trafficking.

¹See the case of the Rohingya people who flee persecution in Myanmar to find themselves enslaved in the fishing industry in Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. See Walden Bellow, ‘Slavery, Genocide, Abuse: The Dark Side of Asia’s “Tiger Economies,”’ in *Foreign Policy in Focus*, June 23, 2015.

²UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *Toolkit to Combat Trafficking in Persons* (New York: United Nations, 2008), 364.

³See, for example, Christa Foster Crawford, ‘Cultural, Economic and Legal Factors Underlying Trafficking in Thailand and Their Impact on Women and Girls from Burma,’ in *Cardozo Journal of Law & Gender*, 12, No. 1 (2009), 822; Anne Wilson, ‘Trafficking Risks for Refugees’ (Presentation for 2011 Interdisciplinary Conference on Human Trafficking, Lincoln, Nebraska, September 29-October 1, 2011).

Refugees and asylum-seekers will be from different cultures and it is impossible to write a guide for all cultures, but we have tried to give some helpful ideas. Some are common sense and others you may have already thought of.

Protecting Refugees and Asylum-Seekers from Harm

There are many things that churches can do to help protect refugees and asylum-seekers from people who would seek to abuse and exploit their positions of vulnerability.

Safeguarding

Many churches will already have policies safeguarding children and vulnerable persons; others may not. Either way, churches need to consider what they can do to ensure that refugee individuals and families feel safe and in a protected environment. Remember that children may initially feel anxious about those whom they perceive to be foreigners, and in many cultures it is not appropriate for people to pick up and hug children other than their parents. Usually it is appropriate only to initiate holding hands or hugging if the child themselves initiates it and if the parents allow it.

Checking Volunteers

People volunteering to help with activities to support refugee/asylum-seekers should have been police checked beforehand to ensure they are safe to work with children and vulnerable adults. Forms will include a declaration that they have not had any criminal convictions involving children or vulnerable people. For very young children, the parents should be around to toilet them. When there are activities for and with children, the same safeguarding measures should be made for all children.

Financial Vulnerability

Remember that refugees can be financially vulnerable and in the time that they are getting asylum they may be legally unable to work. Traffickers may take advantage of this fact to trick them into labor or sexual exploitation. Both young women and men may be vulnerable to being sexually exploited so they may need warning that anything that appears to be 'easy money' could be dangerous and probably isn't what it appears to be. Inform them that no one has the right to keep their passport or identification papers at any time.

While paid work may not be legally permitted, they may be able to volunteer so, when they are ready, you could perhaps help them to do that – for example, in helping a charity shop with deliveries, sorting out clothes or food for a food bank. Volunteering will also help them to get back to working regular hours and the discipline of work, as well as building their self-esteem and confidence to increase their resilience to those who would seek to take

advantage of them. Voluntary organizations need to appreciate that this building of confidence may take some time to achieve.

Listening

As people learn to appreciate you and their English improves, they may trust you enough to talk about what has happened to them, but it is usually not appropriate to probe them to find out as they may not want to or be ready to share some of the painful things they have experienced. When and if they are ready, they may share things. It is always better to listen than to talk. You may find it hard to listen to their painful experiences and you may need to share some of this with an experienced counselor to reduce experiencing vicarious trauma.

Risk Assessment

Most churches will be used to doing a risk assessment in the area that vulnerable people are coming to so that necessary things are done to minimize any problems. For example, make sure that fire instructions and first aid boxes are in plain view and that any dangerous or sharp equipment is locked away. By listening to their stories, as discussed above, you may be able to learn about areas in which they are at risk of abuse or exploitation that may not appear obvious to outsiders. You can also help them learn about the risks of trafficking and exploitation so that they can know the signs and avoid getting themselves or their children into dangerous situations.

Providing General Care for Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

In addition to the above suggestions for protection from abuse and exploitation, there are also many things that churches can do to help refugees and asylum-seekers feel generally safe and cared for.

Children

Although it will likely be alarming at first for young children to go to a school where they cannot speak the language, being with other children in the routine of a school environment will be a good thing in the long term, and it is surprising how quickly particularly young children will pick up their host language. However, teachers, counselors and church workers need to understand that some children may be exceedingly anxious, and this is not because they are being 'naughty' but because they are experiencing trauma. Both children and adults may require counseling from specialists who understand their context of where they have come from and the challenges of their 'escape route.'

Culture

It is usually not appropriate for men to shake women's hands or look at their eyes for any length of time, although women can do so. It is also common for men from Muslim cultures to put their hand over their heart after shaking hands. Often these cultural norms are not problematic after the refugees have been in the country for a while because they become used to the ways of 'foreigners,' but in the early days it is best to err on the side of caution and be conservative. It will be appreciated that you have made the effort to reach out to them. In their home culture, many women may be expected to wear a head covering and they shouldn't feel that they must stop doing this in their host culture if they prefer to continue to do so. They may decide to do this at some point but this shouldn't be because of pressure from you or your community.

Hours of Darkness

People from countries nearer the equator are used to it getting light at around 6-6.30 a.m. and then dark at 6-6.30 p.m. Adjusting to northern countries where there are shorter, darker days in winter and longer, lighter days in summer will take time. They will likely not want to travel much in the dark. Make the most of the summer months and consider adjusting times for events in the winter.

Environment

Consider the location of your church or church hall or other location that you use. Make sure pathways are well lit. Some cultures will find it quite an adjustment for women to go to a strange building on their own or even with their children. If necessary, ensure that men are also invited, especially on the first visit, so that they can ensure it is safe for their family. If you invite families from similar backgrounds, it might also provide an opportunity for peer support. If they meet refugees from their own country, it may be a relief to be able to speak in their own language rather than the constant challenge to speak English.

Encouragement

Make sure that members of the family can be together until they are used to traveling and doing things separately. Remember that they have likely left most of their possessions in their home country, and all they have is each other so they may find it difficult to be apart for some time. Be patient if their language is limited and they are learning English. Encourage them in their efforts.

Food

It is always good to break bread/eat with families. Many countries put a high priority on hospitality, and so if you visit them in their home or they visit you, food is likely to be involved. Even if they have very little, it is usually polite to eat a little of what you are offered, even if you have recently eaten! Also remember that at

some festivals such as Ramadan they will be fasting and unable to eat so it is not a good time to invite them for a meal. If you are providing food, then remember that, for some, the meat they eat may need to be specially prepared so you could offer vegetarian or meat-free food and plenty of fruit. If you offer them leftovers to take home and/or a care package, this is bound to be appreciated and likely to be reciprocated!

Exploring Locality

Providing support family-to-family, woman-to-woman and/or man-to-man, could involve a walking tour of your town especially if they have recently arrived. Helping them locate immigration solicitors, the library, the gym, the adult education school/college, the farmers' market, the supermarket, the parks and schools for the children, mosque, temple, and/or church, etc. will help them adjust to their new home city/town/village. Ask them what else they might like to do, including local 'tourist' sites. They will also likely need help completing the myriad of forms they will be expected to complete.

Faith

Remember that, although you may well hope to introduce the refugees to your faith, this should come out of a period of building relationships with them and gradual discussion. It isn't a race to convert them. Also nobody wants people who come to faith because they feel that they ought to do so to please you. Remember too that they are particularly vulnerable, and pushing them before they are ready might be considered spiritual abuse. However, when you have built a relationship, you might like to get them a Bible in their language. Many translations are available through the Bible Society.

Case Study

Bloom, Linden Church, Swansea, United Kingdom⁴

It all started in September 2015 when I saw the picture of three-year-old Aylan who had drowned and was washed up in Turkey. Along with him, his brother and mother also drowned. The family were from Syria. When I saw the picture, I was filled with such sadness, and imagining how scared I would have to be to risk my sons dying was incomprehensible to me. I knew I had to do something and started volunteering collecting and sorting aid to send to refugee camps.

I was also given the opportunity to visit 'The Jungle' refugee camp in Calais. It was a life-changing trip and I left a bit of my heart there. What I loved most was talking to people and listening to their stories, why they had left their country, what their hopes were for the future. I was hit by an overwhelming

⁴ By Rachel Matthews, Founder of Bloom Project.

sense of us all being human beings and how similar we all were. It doesn't matter where someone is from or what religion they follow – we are all one. The people I met in Calais I think about daily and I wonder what happened to them: did they make it here?

After Calais I went to Dunkirk refugee camp: it was terrible, much worse than The Jungle. Three thousand people living in mud, five toilets which were controlled by mafia, children with no shoes. It was a shock to the senses, the smell, the feel – it all stays with me. But again, the people I met were incredible – so resilient and determined.

During this volunteering I met a man called Ibrahim who had made his way to Swansea from Syria. His wife and two children joined him once he had refugee status which meant the Red Cross would fly them safely. Ibrahim became someone very important to me; we became friends and he taught me so much about Syria and life as a refugee. Our church runs a food bank and he started volunteering. Every week he would tell us about a family he knew of that needed food, so each week Ibrahim would show us where they lived and we delivered food parcels. This really enabled me to meet refugees and asylum-seekers and become friends. I started popping in to see them regularly; we would often have a meal together and I would help with some form-filling or make phone calls for them. I was sad to see the state of the houses/flats they lived in and I felt God saying to me, 'I don't want these people to merely exist, I want them to flourish and bloom.' That became the name of our project, and as we came into contact with more and more people, we discussed setting up a specific refugee and asylum-seeker project. Many people from church expressed interest in helping and it really grew from there.

We are now supporting over sixty people. The main way we do this is relationally. We see this as a two-way thing; we gain just as much as we give by having these people enriching our lives. We support Christians and Muslims and always show respect. It has been a learning curve as some things are different in the Muslim culture but we have never had any problems. Ways in which we support people are helping source household items, delivering food parcels, providing volunteering opportunities, accompanying people to appointments, form-filling, social events, art workshops, and cookery masterclasses where we learn to cook food from all over the world. As Bloom is just starting, things are growing all the time and we greet new opportunities with open arms. A few refugees have started attending church which has been a real blessing. We support people from Syria, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka and Eritrea, to name a few.

Working with refugees and asylum-seekers has really changed my life; my world is suddenly so much bigger and I'm a better person for it. I've shed tears with people, laughed, cooked, walked and painted nails, and I feel honored that I've been given the chance to do this.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the ways in which refugee/asylum-seekers in your community can be at risk of sexual or labor abuse and exploitation? What are some of the risk factors and/or signs of an exploitative situation that you can help them identify and avoid?
2. If a young single woman or man says that they have been offered a well-paid job selling flowers or being a door-to-door salesman, what advice would you give them?
3. How can you build relationships with refugee/asylum-seekers in your community? Consider how you can reach them to be able to support them.
4. Which are the charities and NGOs working in your city that can help you in supporting refugee and asylum-seekers or helping them directly?
5. What would you say from Scripture to a Christian on the care of aliens/foreigners in your congregation complaining about foreigners 'taking our jobs'?
6. Why is listening more important than giving advice?

CHAPTER 33

HOW DO WE EFFECTIVELY BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH MALE BUYERS, PROSTITUTED WOMEN, AND THE CHILDREN OF WOMEN IN A RED-LIGHT AREA?

Glenn Miles

The story of the Message Parlour outreach center is told in the case study that follows.

Case Study

The Message Parlour was founded in 2012 as a safe space in the heart of the red-light area in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The Message Parlour – playing on the words ‘massage parlor’ and ‘ice cream parlor’ – started with one rented cubicle in an area that was mostly occupied by bars of different shapes and sizes. The size of the initial cubicle wasn’t much larger than a home single-car garage with sofa, drinks cabinet, ice-cream chest and a few extra stools.

We felt that it was really important to have a place in the red-light area itself rather than ‘commuting’ in and out. That way we could build relationships with neighboring bars and people who were regulars.

Before we even started, an expatriate woman Wendy contacted me because she knew God had called her to work with us. Her focus for the first year was praying over the center and the area, and encouraging visiting individuals and church groups to do the same.

The Message Parlour was open six days a week from one in the afternoon until nine in the evening. Although it would have been great to have had somewhere that was open 24 hours a day, we didn’t have the resources for that but we felt that these hours were a good time to connect with women and male entertainment workers before their work got busy. The focus was on relationship. The center was bright and colorful and, most of all, welcoming.

The vision statement was ‘The Message Parlour’s hope is to see people be heard and treated with respect and dignity, for relationships to be restored, and for exploitation to be eradicated.’

One of the expatriate volunteers, Trapper, was painting the interior before it was opened. He saw a young woman and invited her to help him paint. At the end of the day when he paid her for a day’s wages, she began weeping. When he asked her why, she said that that morning her dog had eaten some eggs off of a market stall and the stall owner had confiscated the dog until she had the

money to pay her back. She was seeking a client for sex and then had been asked to help paint the center. So even before it was opened, God was using it.

The four main objectives of the Message Parlour was to provide a space:

1. For anyone (e.g. entertainment workers, street children, transgender, and sex buyers), knowing they will be treated with dignity and respected as people with inherent value.
2. From which different partner NGOs can reach out to people (e.g. entertainment workers, street kids, transgender, and sex buyers) in the local community.
3. Where people can learn about the issues around sexual exploitation – both the demand and supply side.
4. For those from faith communities to pray and worship.

People were also welcome to come and enjoy an ice cream and soda drink!

All the staff and those who wanted to be involved in outreach were expected to sign our child/vulnerable persons protection policy to ensure the protection and respect of children and vulnerable people. There was weekly training and prayer for those who came.

The Message Parlour distributed roses to women on Valentine's Day, and at Christmas made care packages for women working the area. We also sung Christmas carols in the red-light area, competing with the throbbing sounds of dance music, handing out Christmas drinks and cookies.

Fiona, an artist, worked with the local street children and produced wonderful pieces of art that brightened up the center and made it more child-friendly. There was also information available on the walls about other NGOs that could provide different types of support.

After a year or so, we realized that it was a particularly popular place for young street children, so we managed to rent the cubicle next door and called it MP2. It had a short fence along the front, and only children and children's workers were allowed in this safe space. We had videos, books, toys and coloring materials. Sometimes artists would come and work with the children. Other times they would enjoy being read to. There was always fresh water to hand.

With increasing concern for the issue of human trafficking, the Message Parlour became a focus for some churches and individuals to come and pray for and in the area. We believe that praying really made a difference to what was going on in the area.

A direct consequence was that one girl self-rescued by coming to the Message Parlour to seek help. We were able to get her to a safe house, and involve the police who then arrested the perpetrator who went to jail.

At the same time, one of the expatriate male workers, Josh, was working with some expatriate men in the area, building up their self-esteem and providing an alternative way for them to behave rather than purchasing commercial sex. Josh also built relationships with the bar owners.

One evening a week, the Message Parlour would host 'GLUE Ministries' which reached out to expatriate sex buyers, building relationships with them in

the hope of challenging them to explore alternative ways of fulfilling their need for intimate relationships.

After two years, due to multiple factors, we had to close the center down but the idea continues to be in our hearts and minds, and we encourage others to do something similar.

Discussion Questions

1. Would a drop-in center work in your area? Why? Why not?
2. What are the advantages about being in the area compared with coming in from outside?
3. How could a center like this network and collaborate with local churches? What are the challenges of doing this?
4. What are the risks to staff working in a situation like this, and how can they be minimized?
5. How could you measure the difference you are making in a project like this?